

הודו ליהוה כי לעולם חסדו

^{NKJ} **Psalm 136:1** Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures* forever.

This verse, along with the following two verses (Ps. 136:2&3) are passages that are collectively referred to as *Hodu l' Adonai*. In these passages, YHVH is addressed three different ways as the psalmist sings praises of thanksgiving for what He has done for His people from the time of creation to when they reached Mt. Sinai. It's a beautiful passage and a beautiful song that has become part of the liturgy for numerous events within Judaism including the Waving of the Lulavim at Sukkot, the Sabbath evening service, and even some Jewish weddings.

What does it mean to give thanks? How do we know we have actually thanked God for the things He does for us. Does the ancient Hebrew concept of thanks match what we're accustomed to in 21st century America?

For the next few minutes, I'm going to discuss this concept of being thankful based on the meaning of the Hebrew word, *Yadah*.

Yadah (יָדָה - Strong's 3034), along with *Todah*, one of its derivatives, is the most common word found in the Tnakh¹ for our English words *thank*, *thanks*, and *thanksgiving*. It's a word that carries multiple meanings, but of the 114 times it's used in the scripture, it's translated *give thanks* or *thank* 39 times. *Todah* (תּוֹדָה - Strong's 8426) is used in the sense of *thanksgiving* 24 out of 32 times.

Yadah is a root word that means "to throw out the hand". In other words, it signifies an outstretched arm. Though it's a root word, it's obviously similar to the Hebrew word *yad* (יָד - Strong's 3027) which means *hand*.

In many cases where *yadah* is translated as *thanks*, it appears in a verse that also includes the Hebrew word *hallel* (הַלֵּל - Strong's 1984) or *zamar* (זָמַר - Strong's 2167) which is usually translated praise, as in this verse –

^{NKJ} **2 Samuel 22:50** Therefore I will give thanks (*yadah*) to You, O LORD, among the Gentiles, And sing praises (*zamar*) to Your name.

In this song of praise, David declared the many times YHVH stepped in and defeated or delivered him from his enemies. He concluded the song by saying he will give thanks to YHVH *among the Gentiles*. In other words, in the presence of the Gentiles, David wanted to thank God openly and declare His works to everyone!

This sequence of giving thanks to God and singing praises to Him is quite common, especially in the writings of King David. It's a form of Hebrew poetry called *Parallelism* where a thought or idea is expressed two different ways. Thus, to the Hebrew mind, *giving thanks* is much the same as *offering praise*.

In addition to *yadah* meaning *thanks* or *thanksgiving*, the word can itself mean *praise*.

¹ The Jewish term for the Old Testament

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NKJ Psalm 9:1 I will praise (*yadah*) You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works.

NKJ Psalm 44:8 In God we boast all day long, And praise (*yadah*) Your name forever.
Selah

In both these cases, the thought is that praising God implies telling someone about Him. Again, this is quite common in the Psalms. To the Hebrews, praising God was an open expression of faith.

With this in mind, let's look at the first place we find the word *yadah* in scripture. It's found in the passages pertaining to the birth of the twelve sons of Jacob. As you'll recall, Leah was given to Jacob as a wife by deceit. He had grown to love Laben's younger daughter Rachael, and had entered into a contract with Laben for her hand in marriage, but on the night the marriage was to be consummated, Laben slipped Leah into the tent instead of Rachael. Leah hoped she could gain Jacob's love by giving him children, and on the birth of her fourth son, she said –

ESV Genesis 29:35 And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

In this verse the word praise is *yadah*, and the name of the child is *Yahudah* (יהודה – Strong's 3063). The birth of this child was apparently a cause for praise, and as was the case of the previous three children, their name would tell a little bit about them. We'll discuss Judah more a little later on, but as we can see, *yadah* can also imply praise to God and is translated as such in numerous passages.

Since *yadah* is a verb, it implies action. Our actions, or more precisely, our body language tells a lot about what we're thinking. One of the main components of body language is what we do with our hands. As shown earlier, the word *yadah* means *outstretched hand*. It also means to *give thanks* and to *praise*. The scriptures give a number of examples of praising, thanking, and blessing God with outstretched hands.

NKJ Psalm 63:1 O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You . . .³ Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You. ⁴ Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.

NKJ Psalm 141:2 Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

NKJ Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks (*yede – outstretched hands*) before his God, as was his custom since early days.

NKJ Psalm 134:1 Behold, bless the LORD, All you servants of the LORD, Who by night stand in the house of the LORD! ² Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD. ³ The LORD who made heaven and earth Bless you from Zion!

Though blessing YHVH with outstretched hands may seem 'pentecostal' to some, it appears to be quite Biblical. David praised God with outstretched hands when things were good and when things were bad, but when he was happy, he praised God with joy in his heart.

ESV Psalm 9:1 I will give thanks (*yadah*) to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. ² I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

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^{ESV} **Psalm 71:22-23** I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. ²³ My lips will shout for joy, when I sing praises to you; my soul also, which you have redeemed.

Perhaps we can get a better understanding of *yadah* by looking at the example of little children. Messiah Yeshua admonished His followers to be like little children –

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:3-4** "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

So let's consider the example of little children. Many of us have had little children who, when given a gift, have had to be coaxed to say "thank you". Though we welcome the thought, we know the reluctant thanks didn't really come from the child's heart. On the other hand, when the child runs up to us with outstretched arms after receiving a gift, we know the gift is really appreciated, even if the child forgets to say thanks.

A child's body language says a lot about their attitude. The other day one of my granddaughters spent the evening with us and during dinner, she refused to eat something on her plate. I told her that she would have to eat it before she could get up from the table. Though my wife and the girl's sister went out to the garden after dinner, my other granddaughter sat and fussed about having to eat the one slice of carrot. I just sat quietly at the table reading the paper and confirming to her that she would have to eat the carrot before joining her sister. About 20 minutes passed, and as I was reading, I saw her hand slowly reach toward the plate. It seemed like it took nearly a minute, but she took the carrot, and ate it.

Of course, I was overjoyed that this little battle ended peaceably, but what really thrilled me is when, after helping her down from the table, she reached out her little hands for me to pick her up so she could give me a hug.

We would never want our grandchildren to deny us that statement of love, but do we deny the YHWH the same thrill?

What my granddaughter did included two aspects of *yadah*, *thanks* (for sticking with her) and *confession*. Anytime we wrong another person, or when we wrong God, it's the natural tendency – especially with children – to want to restore the relationship. God provided a means to restore a relationship with Him through one of the sacrifices described in Leviticus –

^{ESV} **Leviticus 5:1** "If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity; . . . ⁵ when he realizes his guilt in any of these and confesses (*yadah*) the sin he has committed, ⁶ he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, (and) –

^{ESV} **Leviticus 5:10** . . . he shall be forgiven.

In this passage, YHWH shows that confession (*yadah*) of the sin is required for there to be restoration. In my granddaughter's case, her confession was her hand slowly moving to the carrot and putting it in her mouth. The restoration was when she reached out her hands, I picked her up, and she gave me a big hug

There's a similar example in the scriptures. In the time of Ezra, after some of the Jewish people along with some from the northern tribes had returned to the land along, many of the people as well as some of the priests began to marry non-Israelites. This grieved Ezra greatly and he fell on his knees in prayer to God –

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^{ESV} **Ezra 9:4-6** Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. ⁵ And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands (*kaph* – *palm of the hand*) to the LORD my God, ⁶ saying: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.

According to chapter 10, verse 1, Ezra's prayer was a confession (*yadah*) of Judah's guilt. Shortly after asking God's forgiveness, the people and Ezra came to a resolution and corrected the problem. Though the story ends there, we can assume YHVH was pleased in their repentance.

So outstretched hands is an expression of *yadah* – thanksgiving and confession. It's a shame that we Americans have no problem waving our hands in excitement because another person has scored a touchdown or hit a home run, but when the God of Israel destroys our enemies, we sing and praise him with hands crossed or in our pockets. Hmhmhmhmhmhmhm.

Finally, I want to discuss Judah's role in praise and thanksgiving. As mentioned earlier, Judah's (*Yahudah*) named means praise . . . *yadah*. To the observant Jew, life is about bringing thanksgiving and praise to YHVH. Various books of thanksgiving and praise have been written to guide the worshipper in their prayers and praise. The Siddur is the book of Jewish liturgy. It's packed full of praises for the weekdays and the Sabbath just as its counterpart, the Machzor, does for the yearly festivals.

Observant Jews begin their day reciting a morning prayer called the Modeh Ani –

"I gratefully thank you Oh living and eternal King, for you have restored my soul within me with compassion. Abundant is your faithfulness".

This prayer is taken from a very well known passage, though most only know it because of the song.

^{ESV} **Lamentations 3:22-23** The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

In addition, many Jews recite the Amidah prayer two, and sometimes three times a day. The "Birkat Hodaah", the 18th benediction, begins by saying –

"We give thanks to you that you are the Lord our God and the God of our fathers forever and ever."

It's interesting that, beginning with King David and continuing for 3000 years, the Jewish people have been known for their prayers of thanksgiving and praise. Thus it would seem logical that God might have a special role for them in regards to praise.

We all know how easy it is to acknowledge God's deliverance once we've gone through a trial and have been delivered from it, be it sickness, a financial problem, a relationship problem, or maybe a state of depression. Once it's over, it's easy to say 'Praise Yah!' But what about praising Yah at the beginning of a trial; before you've been delivered? There's an example in scripture that helps us to understand how God works and the effectiveness of praise.²

After the Kingdom of Israel was split, the great-grandson of Judah's King Rehoboam became king. His name was *Jehoshaphat*, a name that means *YHVH will judge*. Jehoshaphat was a good king, teaching the ways of YHVH throughout Judah, and as such, he and his kingdom became quite strong and prosperous, even to the point that the Philistines brought tribute to

² This conclusion was drawn from the book "*Let Judah Go Up First*" by Dr. Roy Blizzard

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Judah. But Jehoshaphat made one big mistake. He made an alliance with the wicked King Ahab of Israel, and as a result YHVH presented him with a problem. The kings of the nations east of the Jordan united in an attempt to overthrow Judah. Though Judah had a well equipped army, they were no match for the army amassed against them. Jehoshaphat called a fast and the entire nation bowed in worship to God. On the day of battle, Jehoshaphat gathered the Levites and placed them in front of the army of Judah with instructions to sing praises to Yahweh as they advanced toward the enemy.

^{NKJ} **2 Chronicles 20:21-22** ²¹ And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise (yadah) the LORD, For His mercy endures forever." ²² Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.

As a result of the confession and praise, Judah's enemies were defeated. Judah didn't even have to raise a sword. Now let's connect this event with an event that happened nearly 300 years earlier.

Shortly after Joshua died, there was still a lot of work to be done in regards to ridding the land of the pagan Canaanites. Without a human leader to consult, the Israelites went directly to God and asked –

^{NKJ} **Judges 1:1** . . . "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?"

God replied "Judah shall go up!" (vs. 2). According to YHVH, Judah would be the first to go up for the battle. Judah would be the one to lead the armies of Israel. Why would that be? As mentioned before, Yehudah (Judah) comes from the word *yadah* - praise. Maybe what God was saying is that "Praise should go up before the battle". When the people of God praise Him openly, with joyful hearts and enthusiasm, He fights their battles for them. Since God doesn't change³ we can count on Him being willing to fight our battles as well.

In conclusion, *Yadah* means to *give thanks*, but not necessarily in a private way, but openly and boldly – with outstretched hands. We thank God by confessing our faults to Him and praising Him for what He has done on our behalf.

Three thousand years ago, Israel, our ancestors, turned away from Him, but He promised to draw us back. The prophet Isaiah makes it so clear how our reaction to that call should be –

^{ESV} **Isaiah 12:1** You will say in that day: "I will give thanks (*yadah*) to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. ² "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."

As our people begin to answer God's call, let our hearts be filled with thanksgiving and praise.

Shalom Alecheim

³ Malachi 3:6