

Take a Bow (Part Two)

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The following is based on a teaching of Rabbeinu Yehudah ben Yakar, one of the teachers of Ramban (Nachmanides).

We bow down four times in Shemonah Esrai. We bow at the beginning and end of Avot, the first blessing, and at the beginning and end of Modim, the penultimate blessing. One point to consider is, why specifically at these points? Another: Why do our Sages particularly stress the severity of **failing** to bow in Modim?

Rabbeinu Yehudah ben Yakar dismisses the suggestion that the word "*modim*" itself implies bowing. Firstly, "*modim*" is mentioned in a few other instances, none of which are "bowing points." Secondly, the blessing of Avot, in which we do bow, makes no reference to bowing or thanksgiving.

Rabbeinu Yehudah ben Yakar directs us to a Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 56:2). On the verse (Genesis 24:5), "We will bow and we will return," Rebbe Yitzchak says, "Everything is in the merit of bowing down."

1. Avraham Avinu returned safely from the Akeidah.
2. We were redeemed from Egypt. "The people believed...and bowed down" (Exodus 4:31).
3. The Torah was given. "They bowed from a distance" (ibid. 24:1).
4. The prophetess Chanah conceived Shmuel the Prophet. "There they bowed to God" (1 Samuel 1:28).
5. The exiles will be gathered. "It will come to pass on that day that He will sound the great shofar...and they will bow to God on the holy mountain in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 27:13).
6. The Beit HaMikdash was (and will be) built. "Bow down to His holy mountain" (Psalms 99:9).
7. The Resurrection of the dead will take place. "Come! We

will bow...before God our Maker" (ibid. 95:6)

And from the end of Chapter 31 in *Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer*, "Everything was formed only in the merit of bowing, as it says (Psalms 99:5), "Glorify the Lord, our God, and bow to His footstool."

We bow at the beginning of Avot because we mention Avraham Avinu and because it is "his" blessing, as indicated by its signature, "*Magen Avraham*." The bow at the end is due to the mention of redemption (*meivee goel*) specifically the one from Egypt, but also the future one, mentioned immediately prior to the end (*moshia*). We need God to hear our prayer now in our miniature Temple (the synagogue) and in the future when we pray in the Beit HaMikdash.

(To be continued.)