living a life of exile and hardship. Thousands of our brethren forfeited their Judaism this way. Unfortunately, those Jews lived “for naught.” However, the myriads of acheinu Bnei Yisrael who gave up their lives al kiddush Hashem proved thereby that their emunah was indeed כלכלבלע שלוש.

As we said, the refrain that is common to all of the above expressions of hoda’ah, and was originally added to each one of them, was originally added to each one of them.

After quoting the aforementioned five expressions of hoda’ah, the Gemara concludes by saying, Rav Pappa said: We say them all (Sotah 40a). Therefore, our present-day version of this communal prayer includes, with slight textual variations, all five of these expressions of hoda’ah. And since this consensus consists of various expressions of hoda’ah which were composed by different rabbanan, as set forth in the Gemara, it is commonly known as Modim d’Rabbanan.

We conclude with HaKadosh Baruch Hu, the God of Thanksgiving, because, as we explained earlier, He instilled in us the entire concept of thanksgiving.

In the opinion of the Vilna Gaon, this should conclude with the full berachah. However, we follow the opinion of Shutchan Orach (Orach Chaim 127) that it should end with only Modim d’Rabbanan. The difference of these two opinions is based on a dispute among the Rishonim, and therefore, in practice, as it is a safek berachah, we conclude with only Modim d’Rabbanan.

A D’var Torah on Purim

On Purim, in our prayers, we add the piece ה’ה as our hoda’ah for the nissim that occurred at that time. A brief synopsis of the historical events surrounding Purim is included there, and it ends with the death of Haman: They hanged him and his sons on a tree. This “tree” gives us no rest; it is mentioned in the Megillah several times. Let us try to find its underlying significance in the story of Purim.
They forfeited their lives at kiddush shel zechut. However, lakhos al kiddush shel zechut.

But to all of them, said the Gemara, R. Papai said: We see this communal expressions of hoda'ah in the Gemara, it is

The tree on which Haman was hanged was actually a gallows, and it is described in the Megillah as being fifty amos high (Esther 7:9), which was the Persian custom for executions of important people.

According to the Megillah, only Haman died by hanging, and his execution took place approximately on the sixteenth of Nissan. His sons, however, were killed by the sword in the capital city of Shushan one year later on the thirteenth of Adar, when the Jews rose up and killed their enemies. And on the next day, the fourteenth of Adar, in accordance with the request of Esther, the bodies of the ten sons of Haman were hanged from the tree (see Esther 9:6-14). Our Chachamim make a point of telling us that their dead bodies were hanged on the same tree, one underneath the other, together with the body of Haman (see Targum, Megillas Esther 9:14; Megillah 16b). This, despite the fact that Haman had died nearly one year earlier! We even mention this tree on Chanukah in Maoz Tzur. It remains for us to understand why our Chachamim placed such importance on this tree.

I would like to suggest that it has its origin in the statement: קַמַּן מִן דְּבָרָיו, Where does Haman appear in the Torah (Chullin 139b). And the answer given there is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu asked Adam HaRishon after he had eaten of the eitz hadaas, when he realized that he was naked, קַמַּן מִן דְּבָרָיו. Did you eat of the tree which I commanded you not to eat? (Bereishis 3:11). Taken simply, this means that in this narrative, the letters of קַמַּן מִן דְּבָרָיו are identical with קַמַּן מִן דְּבָרָיו, and this is the source of קַמַּן מִן דְּבָרָיו. It is obvious, however, that this statement of our Chachamim has a much deeper meaning.

The most heinous crime imaginable is genocide, the murder of an entire class or race of people — men, women, and children. And the most egregious form of genocide is when it is practiced against Klal Yisraei, as was attempted by Haman. This is the most profound aveirah that anyone could ever contemplate, as was done by Hitler, in his “Final Solution of the Jewish Problem.”

And conversely, the smallest, slightest aveirah — which is almost no aveirah — is that which was done when Adam and Chavah ate of the eitz hadaas. In enticing them to eat of the forbidden tree, the serpent told them that if they would eat it, they would “become like God”: והיתו ויביאו לנו עץ ידיעת טוב ורע, And you will be like God, knowing good and bad (ibid. v. 5). The desire of Adam and Chavah to eat the fruit of this tree was not one of simple animal lust — as sensual aveiros usually are — but rather, it was a desire to raise themselves up toward the level of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Nevertheless, it was an aveirah because Hakadosh Baruch Hu forbade them to eat the fruit of this tree, and they did not use their moral freedom of choice to decide to abide by the will of God. Rather, they succumbed to the appeal which the
fruit had to their senses — albeit a lofty appeal. We may therefore conclude that this was the most exalted form of an aveirah ever committed.

The yetzer hara, in the form of the nachash, wanted to entice Adam and Chavah to “become like God.” And when they succumbed to this desire, they committed the first aveirah. All other aveiros of the human race are the result of this aveirah, because once one violates the will of God and experiences the “sweet taste” of sin, he has the desire to continue to do so. Consequently, Adam and Chavah, after their chelt, had the continuing desire for aveiros, and this was inherited by the human race.

The desire for the most idealistic aveirah — to become like HaKadosh Baruch Hu — which was committed by Adam and Chavah, escalated in their offspring, step by step, until it eventually reached the worst of all sins, that which was contemplated by Haman: “To destroy, to slay, and to exterminate all the Jews (Esther 3:13). The worst aveirah has its origin in the slightest aveirah. And this is what our Chazal meant when they said, And they hanged him and his sons on the gallows (Esther 9:25), symbolically conveys the idea that the wickedness of Haman and his sons is attributable to the “tree.” With this thought, we can readily understand the importance of this berachah which is so prominent in the story of Purim.

The third and final berachah of the last part of Shemoneh Esrei is שם שלום. It is called ברכה הרה by our Chachamim — although the Priestly Blessing is recited in the Shemoneh Esrei only in the chazzan’s repetition — for the reason that we will explain.

The mitzvas asei of Bircas Kohanim is: וברך אותם ברך כהנים. May Hashem speak to Moshe, saying, Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying: So shall you bless the Children of Israel, say to them (Bamidbar 6:22-23). This mitzvah blesses the Jewish people with the following three pesukim: וברך אותם ברך כהנים. May Hashem bless you and safeguard you (ibid. v. 24); וברך אותם ברך כהנים. May Hashem cause His face to shine toward you, and give you grace (v. 25); וברך אותם ברך כהנים. May Hashem lift up His face toward you and grant you peace (v. 26). And the Torah continues: וברך אותם ברך כהנים. May Hashem place My Name upon the Children of Israel and I shall bless them (ibid. v. 27). This means that the Kohanim do not “bless” the people; rather, they are commanded to express their wish that HaKadosh Baruch Hu may bestow His blessings of וברך orbs on His people. And when they do so, HaKadosh Baruch Hu promises that He will bless the Jewish people שם שלום.