

# **Anthology of Sources, Comments & Notes**

## S T R A T E G I E S

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עם כל זה ודאי שכל אחד לפי שכלו והשגתו מחוייב לשית  
עצות בנפשו ולבקש תחבולות מלחמת מצוה, להמלט  
מבלבול המחשבות אשר לא טהורים שתתחונן דעתו עליו  
לעבודת התפלה כראוי.

Rav Chaim Voloshin, *Nefesh HaCha'yim*, Sec. 2, end  
of ch. 12

When all is said and done, each person, according  
to his own intellect and level, must seek the proper  
tactics and find the [available] strategies to wage  
the Mitzvah war, to flee the confusion of impure  
thoughts, to calm his mind to perform the prayers  
properly.

### AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE:

Rav Cha'yim Voloshin is right! We must use every available tactic,  
tool and technique to improve the way we pray. Prayer is soul work. To  
do this "soul work" properly we must search through the thousands of  
years of our tradition to find those ideas that can be used practically to  
enhance and improve our spiritual, God connection during *Tefilah*.

And that is the purpose of this collection of quotations, notes,  
comments and questions. Peruse, study well and pull from the following  
those ideas that you can use to pray better.

Almost every quotation appears in the Hebrew original followed by  
an English translation. Those who are able to read and understand the  
Hebrew text will find nuance and meaning that is impossible to replicate  
in the translation. Those who find the Hebrew difficult will discover that  
the English translation is readable and interpretable. Together with the  
notes and comments, the ideas found in the *Mishnah Torah* of the  
Rambam, the *Shulchan Aruch*, the writings of the Maharal of Prague, the  
*Shenay Luchot HaBrit* and others will inspire you and assist you to prayer  
better and to greatly enhance the spiritual experience of your *Tefilah*.

# TACTICS

## I. The Proper Preparation for Prayer

### introductory note

What other reasons are there for singling the *Shemonah Esray* out as the prayer par excellence?

The word, "prayer," in Hebrew is *Tefilah* (תפילה). Throughout this sourcebook, the words, "prayer" and *Tefilah*, refer to the *Shemonah Esray*. This is the way the word *Tefilah* is used throughout the Talmudic literature. The Talmudic Rabbis (*Chazal* – חז"ל) considered the *Shemonah Esray* the quintessential prayer for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that it contains all three forms of prayer (praise, request and thanks).

### the place of prayer

#### A. PURITY OF PLACE – *TAHARAT HAMAKOM*

רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ד הלכה ח

טהרת מקום התפלה כיצד? לא יתפלל במקום הטנופת, ולא במרחץ, ולא בבית הכסא, ולא באשפה, ולא במקום שאינו בחזקת טהרה עד שיבדקנו. כללו של דבר כל מקום שאין קורין בו קריאת שמע אין מתפללין בו. וכשם שמרחיקין מצואה וממי רגלים וריח רע ומן המת ומראיית הערוה לקריאת שמע, כך מרחיקין לתפלה.

How does cleanliness of the place of prayer affect the experience of prayer?

Rambam, *Mishnah Torah, Laws of Prayer and Nesi'at Kapa'yim*, 4:8

Cleanliness of the place where prayers are recited: How [is this done]? One may not pray in a place where there is filth, or in a bath-house, or where there is a toilet, or in a garbage dump, or in any place where there is no presumption that it is clean, unless it is checked. The rule is: Wherever the *Shema* is not read, there *Tefilah* (i.e. the *Shemonah Esray*) is not recited. Just as we move away from feces, urine, a foul odor, a corpse, and nakedness to read the *Shema*, so, too, we move away for *Tefilah*.

Why does the Rambam give so many examples of unclean places?

How does the Rambam define the word, *Taharah* – טהרה?

What is the connection between the *Shema* and the *Shemonah Esray*? Why should the Halacha of *Shemonah Esray* be based on that of the *Shema*?

רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ז הלכה ט

המתפלל ומצא צואה במקומו, הואיל וחטא מפני שלא בדק עד שלא התפלל, חוזר ומתפלל במקום טהור. היה עומד בתפלה ומצא צואה כנגדו, אם יכול להלך לפניו כדי שיזרקנה לאחוריו ארבע אמות יהלך, ואם לאו יסלקנה לצדדין. ואם אינו יכול, יפסיק. גדולי החכמים לא היו מתפללים בבית שיש בו שכר ולא בבית שיש בו מוריס בעת עפושו מפני שריחו רע אף על פי שהמקום טהור.

While this might not be a problem in our modern synagogues, are there circumstances where these laws might apply?

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Laws of Prayer and Nesi'at Kapa'yim, 4:9

A person, who prayed and then found feces where he prayed, inasmuch as he committed a sin by not examining the place praying, must pray again in a clean place. If a person, while standing and praying, finds feces in front of him and by walking forward can leave it four cubits behind him, he should do so. If this is impossible, he should move away from it sideways. If he cannot do this he must interrupt the *Tefilah*. The great sages did not recite prayers in a house where there was beer or strong sauce that had turned bad, because of its offensive odor, even though the premises might otherwise be clean.

Why are we not allowed to pray where there is an offensive odor, "even though the premises might otherwise be clean"?

How does the example of beer or "strong sauce" change our understanding of the word, "*Taharah* – טהרה"?

## B. THE PLACE OF PRAYER

### Praying in a Low Place

רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ה הלכה ו

תקון המקום כיצד? יעמוד במקום נמוך ויחזיר פניו לכותל. ...

Basically, one has to stand on the floor and not above it while praying. Why?

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Laws of Prayer and Nesi'at Kapa'yim, ch. 5:6

Choosing and preparing the place of worship. How [is this done]? He should stand in a low place and turn his face to the wall. ...

Does this Halacha apply to the *Chazzan*? If yes, then how do you explain where the *Chazzan* stands in our synagogues? If not, then why not? See the next quotation:

רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ה הלכה ז

לא יעמוד במקום גבוה שלשה טפחים או יותר ויתפלל. ולא על גבי מטה, ולא על גבי ספסל ולא על גבי כסא. היה בנין גבוה, אם יש בו ארבע אמות על ארבע אמות שהוא שיעור הבית, הרי הוא כעליה ומותר להתפלל בו. וכן אם היה מוקף מחיצות מכל רוחותיו, אע"פ שאין בו ארבע אמות על ארבע אמות, מותר להתפלל בו מפני שאין גבהו ניכר שהרי

חלק רשות לעצמו. (השגת הראב"ד/ לא יעמוד במקום גבוה כו' עד שהרי חלק רשות לעצמו. כתב הראב"ד ז"ל, אמר אברהם, ובכלל זה אם יכול לירד למטה ולהתפלל ירד למטה ויתפלל.)

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Laws of Prayer and Nesi'at Kapa'yim, 5:7

What does the beginning of Halacha 7 add to what appears in Halacha 6?

If you can pray on the second floor of a building, can you pray on the 32<sup>nd</sup> floor? On the 102<sup>nd</sup> floor? Why?

One must not stand on a place three hand-breadths or more high [above the floor of the room] or on a bed, stool or chair and pray. A lofty structure, provided that it is four cubits by four cubits [in area], which is the [Halachic minimum] size of a house, is regarded as a second floor, and it is permitted to pray there. So, too, if it was enclosed on all sides by partitions, even though its area was less than four cubits by four cubits, it is permitted to pray there, for the height of such a structure is not noticed, it is considered part of a *Reshut* (separate domain). (Ra'avad's comment: From "One must not stand" to "part of a *Reshut*": The Ra'avad wrote: In general, if he can descend [to floor or ground level] to pray, he should go down and pray.)

How do the Rambam and the Ra'avad disagree?  
What would the Ra'avad say about praying on the 32<sup>nd</sup> or 102<sup>nd</sup> floor of a building?

מהר"ל מפראג, ספר נתיבות עולם א, נתיב העבודה, פרק ו

משלימות העבודה הזאת שיהיה מכיר ויודע כי הוא יתברך עילתו, והעלול מקבל מן העלה עד כי נפשו תולה בעלה - הוא השם יתברך - וממנו יתברך חיותו וכל אשר צריך אליו. ולפיכך אמרו בפרק קמא דברכות (שם י' ע"ב): אמר רב יוסי בר חנינא משום רב אליעזר בן יעקב, אל יעמוד אדם במקום גבוה ויתפלל, שנאמר, "ממעמקים קראתיך ה' " (תהלים קל:א), וכתבי, "תפלה לעני כי יעטוף" וגו' (תהלים קב:א). ואף על גב שהכתוב הזה נאמר על עומק הלב, כלומר, שישפיל דעתו ומחשבתו מלפני השם יתברך, לא עומק המקום, מכל מקום אי אפשר דבר זה משום צד כאשר יש לאדם גובה מקום שאין לו גובה הדעת גם כן. . . . ואף אם אין לו גבהות הדעת מכל מקום האדם צריך שיהיה לו מלפני השם יתברך השפלות. ולכך לא יעמוד במקום גבוה ויתפלל כי התפלה היא שהאדם הוא העלול והשם יתברך הוא העלה, והעלה יש לו מעלה וגבהות, והעלול הוא תחת העלה. ולכך אין שייך גבהות כאן כלל. וזה שמביא ראיה עוד דכתיב, "תפלה לעני כי יעטוף" (תהלים קב:א) וגו', כי העני הוא השפל והוא המקבל ולא שייך אל המקבל מן האחר גבהות כי הוא מקבל מן אשר עליו:

Why do Rabbi Yosi bar Chaninah and Rabbi Eliezer ben Ya'akov quote two verses?

Are the verses quoted by the Talmudic Rabbis about praying in a low place?

Maharal of Prague, Netivot Olam, vol. 1, Netiv Ha'Avodah, ch. 6

The Maharal frequently speaks of God as the "Giver" or "Cause" and of us as the "Receivers" of the "Result." What does this mean?

The perfection of the worship [of God] requires that one recognize and know that God is the "One who gives" (in Hebrew, *Ilah* - עילה, which also means the "cause") and the "one who receives" (namely, you and me) receives from the One who gives to the point that his soul is dependent upon

How does the Maharal explain that the verses in the Talmudic quote do not speak about praying in a low place, but the Rabbis understand them in that way?

the One who gives, i.e., God. From Him, one receives his very life and everything he needs. Therefore, they (the Talmudic Rabbis) said in the first chapter of *Berachot* (10b): Rabbi Yosi bar Chaninah quoted Rabbi Eliezer ben Ya'akov, "A person should not stand in a high place and pray, as it says, 'Out of the depths I called to You, God' (*Tehilim* 130:1), and it is written, 'A prayer of the poor person as he wraps' etc." (*Tehilim* 102:1). Even though this text is discussing the depth of heart (feeling) - meaning that one should humble one's ideas and thoughts before God – and not the depth of place, nevertheless, it is totally impossible for a person who stands in a high place not to have high sense of self as well. ... Even if one does not have high sense of self, one still has to be humble before God. Thus, one should not stand in a high place and pray, for pray is when the individual is the receiver and God is the giver. This (idea) also stems from the other proof text, "A prayer of the poor person as he wraps" etc. (*Tehilim* 102:1), for a poor person is humble and (always) receives and a high sense of self is not appropriate for one who is always receiving.

What is meant by having a "high sense of self"? Is this arrogance? If so, why doesn't the Maharal use the Hebrew word for arrogance?

### C. PRAYING FACING TOWARD JERUSALEM

#### תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ל עמוד א

תנו רבנן: סומא ומי שאינו יכול לכוין את הרוחות, יכוין לבו כנגד אביו שבשמים, שנאמר, "והתפללו אל ה'" (מלכים א' ח:מד). היה עומד בחוץ לארץ, יכוין את לבו כנגד ארץ ישראל שנאמר, "והתפללו אליך דרך ארצם" (מלכים א' ח:מח); היה עומד בארץ ישראל, יכוין את לבו כנגד ירושלים, שנאמר, "והתפללו אל ה' דרך העיר אשר בחרת" (מלכים א' ח:מד); היה עומד בירושלים, יכוין את לבו כנגד בית המקדש, שנאמר, "והתפללו אל הבית הזה" (דברי הימים ב' ו:לב); היה עומד בבית המקדש, יכוין את לבו כנגד בית קדשי הקדשים, שנאמר, "והתפללו אל המקום הזה" (מלכים א' ח:לה); היה עומד בבית קדשי הקדשים, יכוין את לבו כנגד בית הכפורת; היה עומד אחורי בית הכפורת, יראה עצמו כאילו לפני הכפורת. נמצא: עומד במזרח, מחזיר פניו למערב; במערב, מחזיר פניו למזרח; בדרום, מחזיר פניו לצפון; בצפון, מחזיר פניו לדרום. נמצאו כל ישראל מכוונים את לבם למקום אחד. אמר רבי אבין: ואיתימא רבי אבינא: מאי קראה? "כמגדל דויד צוארך בנוי לתלפיות" (שיר השירים ד:ד), תל שכל פיות פונים בו.

What is the *Beit HaKaporeh*?  
What was the *Kaporeh*?  
See: *Shemot* 25:17-22

#### Bavli, Berachot 30a:

The Rabbis taught: A blind person or whoever cannot determine directions should direct his heart to his Father in heaven, as it says, "They will pray

Why would someone be saying the *Shemonah Esray* in the Holy of Holies?  
And who is allowed to go into the Holy of Holies anyway?

to God" (*Melachim I 8:44*). If one is standing outside of *Eretz Yisra'el*, he should direct his heart to *Eretz Yisra'el*, as it says, "They will pray to You via their land" (*Melachim I 8:48*). If one is standing in *Eretz Yisra'el*, then he directs his heart to Jerusalem, as it says, "They will pray to God via the city You have chosen" (*Melachim I 8:44*). If one is standing in Jerusalem, then he should direct his heart to the *Beit HaMikdash*, as it says, "They will pray toward this house" (*Divray Ha'Yamim II 6:32*). If one was standing in the *Beit HaMikdash*, he should direct his heart to the Holy of Holies (*Beit Kodesh HaKodashim*), as it says, "They will pray toward this place" (*Melachim I 8:35*). If one is standing inside the Holy of Holies, he should direct his heart toward the *Beit HaKaporet*. If one was standing behind the *Beit HaKaporet*, he should think of himself as standing in front of the *Beit HaKaporet*. Thus: If you are standing in the east, turn to face the west. In the west, turn to face the east. In the south, turn to face the north. In the north, turn to face the south. Rabbi Avin said – and some say [it was] Rabbi Avinah: What is the scriptural source? "Your neck is like Tower of David, built like *Talpi'ot*" (*Shir HaShirim 4:4*). A *Tel* (hill) that all the *Pi'ot* (mouths) turn toward.

Of all the things in the Holy of Holies, why did the Talmudic Rabbis choose to have us face the *Beit HaKaporet*? And just what was in the Holy of Holies?  
See *Shemot 25:22*

רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ה הלכה ו

... וצריך לפתוח חלונות או פתחים כנגד ירושלים כדי להתפלל כנגדו, שנאמר "וכוין פתיחן ליה בעיליתיה" וגו' (דניאל ו:יא).

When praying in your synagogue, in which direction do you face?

Why does the Rambam bring a proof-text from the Book of Daniel?

Rambam, *Mishnah Torah*, Laws of Prayer and *Nesi'at Kapa'yim*, ch. 5:6

... Windows or doors facing Jerusalem should be opened so he should stand facing them, as it says, "His windows were open in his upper chamber towards Jerusalem" (Daniel 6:11).

In your synagogue, are there windows in the wall facing Jerusalem?

D. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SYNAGOGUE

מהר"ל מפראג, ספר נתיבות עולם א - נתיב העבודה - פרק ה

What question is the *Gemara* asking on what Rav Chisdah said?

משלימות עבודה הזאת שם (ברכות ח.): "אמר רבי חסדא: לעולם יכנס אדם שני פתחים. שני פתחים סלקא דעתך? אלא, אימא שיעור שני פתחים ואחר כך יתפלל."

What would Rav Chisdah say about a synagogue with only one entry doorway?

ופירוש זה שאם יכנס שיעור פתח אחד, ואין הפתח האחד מורה רק על הסלוק מבחוץ בלבד, דהיינו שהוא מסלק עצמו מכל עסקי העולם, ואין זה התייחדות לגמרי עם השם יתברך; שצריך אל זה שני דברים: (1) האחד הסלוק מכל הדברים, (2) והשני להתייחד עם השם יתברך אשר הוא מתפלל לפניו. ואין זה בלא זה. שאם אין מסלק עצמו מכל הדברים שהם בחוץ, אף שהוא פונה להשם יתברך ומתפלל לפניו, מכל מקום יש כאן עירוב המחשבה והוא מעכב הדביקות עם השם יתברך. ואם מסלק עצמו מכל הדברים שהם בחוץ עדיין צריך שיתחבר עם השם יתברך. ולפיכך צריך שיכנוס שיעור שני פתחים. הכניסה בפתח האחת היא הסתלקות מבחוץ, והכניסה בשנית היא לפנים להתייחד עם השם יתברך, כי בפתח השנית אין כאן סלוק מבחוץ רק כניסה בפנים. והפתח הראשון אינו רק הסילוק מבחוץ. ולפיכך אלו שני פתחים הם סלוק מבחוץ וכניסה בפנים לגמרי, ודבר זה מבואר.

Maharal of Prague, *Netivot Olam*, vol. 1, *Netiv Ha'Avodah*, ch. 5

The *Gemara's* question is basically rhetorical. Our question is: Just what is Rav Chisdah saying?

Part of the perfection of the worship [of God is as] quoted: "Rabbi Chisdah said: A person should always enter two doors [of the synagogue]. You think only two doors? Rather, [enter] the distance of two doorways and then pray."

Doesn't the *Gemara's* answer turns Rav Chisdah's statement from a practical one into an abstract, theoretical one?

Why is it important to leave one's worldly affairs, the "outside," behind when entering the synagogue to pray?

The explanation of this is that if a person only enters the distance of one doorway, then this distance (of one doorway) only indicates leaving behind that which is outside, meaning that the person leaves behind all worldly affairs [upon entering the synagogue]. But this is not being completely alone with God, which requires two things: First, the leaving behind of all things (i.e., worldly affairs), and second, to be alone with God as one prays before Him. And there is not one without the other. For if one removes himself from all of his affairs [in the] outside [world], even if one turns to God and prays before Him, one's thought are still jumbled and this prevents proper "attachment" (*Devaykut* – דביקות) to God. So, if one removes oneself from all the things outside, he still has to come together with God. Therefore, one has to enter "two doorways." Entering the first doorway removes the "outside." Entering the second doorway is to be alone with God, for the second doorway is not leaving the outside behind, it is only entering [further] inside. And the first doorway is only the removal of the "outside." Therefore, the two doorways are the removal of the "outside" and the total entrance into the "inside." This idea is now explained.

The Maharal uses several terms to describe what happens when a person enters the "second doorway:" (a) To be alone with God. (b) To achieve *Devaykut* – attachment to God. (c) To come together (*Lehitcheber* – להתחבר) with God. Can you define each one? How are the terms different from one another? And why use different terms to begin with?



HaRav Yitzchak Hutner, *Pachad Yitzchak, Rosh HaShanah*, Essay 5

### B

According to Rav Hutner, what is the difference between the Mitzvah of prayer and all the other 612 Mitzvo?

We find that our sages [in the Talmud] stated that Torah versus prayer is like eternal life versus temporal existence (*Shabbat* 10b). Rashi explains that prayer refers to temporal existence because one prays for temporal needs, such as food and medicine (Rashi, *Shabbat* 10b, s.v. חיי עולם). This is strange for two reasons: 1. we also pray concerning eternal life, for instance, [we pray for] knowledge, repentance, and success in Torah study. 2. The contradistinction between eternal life and temporal existence is not limited to the comparison of Torah to prayer. Rather all *Mitzvot*, according to this explanation, are included [conceptually] in eternal life, except for prayer.

“Temporal” means “of this world” as opposed to eternal, which refers to the World to Come.

### C

The Maharal draws points out a Halachic distinction between walking to the synagogue and walking to the *Sukkah*. What is that distinction?

To understand the explication of these ideas, we must begin with the words of the Maharal of Prague. [The Maharal] explains the *Gemara* (*Sotah* 22a) that states that one who walks to a synagogue far from his house received reward for every step, even though there is a synagogue closer to his home. [The Maharal] wrote in this regard that whoever has two *Sukkot* and goes to the farther one does not receive reward for traveling to the farther *Sukkah*. The explanation of this idea is expressed by the Maharal with utmost brevity:

מפני שהשם יתברך מצוי בבית הכנסת ולכן דווקא בבית הכנסת אמרו כן כי ההולך לבית הכנסת נמשך הוא אחרי השם יתברך.

Since God, may He be blessed, is found in the synagogue, thus they said specifically regarding the synagogue that whoever walks to the synagogue is following after (i.e. seeking) God. (*Netivot Olam*, vol. 1, *Netiv Ha'Avodah*, ch. 5)

Isn't God found in the *Sukkah* as well? For the answer, continue reading...

These short words do not suffice for us as an explanation of this *Gemara*. Rather, they are built on the foundation of the difference between the concept of “closeness to God - קרבת אלקים” in the worship of God, in general and the concept of “closeness to God - קרבת אלקים” in the service of prayer, in particular.

In this paragraph Rav Hutner makes a crucial point: There is a significant difference between prayer and the other active *Mitzvot* (מצוות עשה). What is the difference?

While the experience of “closeness to God - **קרבת אלקים**” in worship, in general, is generated by the performance of *Mitzvot*, the *Mitzvah* of prayer is fulfilled by creating the experience of “closeness to God - **קרבת אלקים**” We see this in some of the laws concerning prayer: for in certain circumstances, so long as you have not moved your feet (עוקר רגליו) [at the end of the *Shemonah Esray*], you are still considered to be in the middle of prayer (*Berachot* 29b). The *Poskim* describe this as “still standing before the King” (*Mishnah Berurah*, Section 122, note 5). It is surely clear that after your mouth has ceased to recite the *Shemonah Esray* the *Mitzvah* is finished, yet you are “still standing before the King.” A similar situation is not possible with other *Mitzvot*. This is what we explained above: The “closeness to God - **קרבת אלקים**” of all other *Mitzvot* is hidden, as opposed to prayer which is intrinsically an act of coming closer to God. Thus, a special action is required - moving one’s feet - to cancel the state of “closeness to God - **קרבת אלקים**” which has been created by reciting the “*Shemonah Esray*. This is what our sages called “taking leave of the Rav/Master” (*Berachot* 34a, *Yoma* 53b).

Rav Hutner keeps using the phrase, “closeness to God - **קרבת אלקים**.” What does this phrase mean?

Rav Hutner proves his point by quoting a Halacha. What is the Halacha? And how does it demonstrate that the *Mitzvah* of prayer is different?

## D

So what is so special about a synagogue?

From all of that which was said above, we can come to a conceptualization of the sanctity of the synagogue. The concept is not limited to the idea of the synagogue as a special place for performing the *Mitzvah* of prayer. Rather, the concept includes the idea of the synagogue as a special place to stand before the King, as a place which exists [solely] for “closeness to God - **קרבת אלקים**.”

Now we have arrived at the essential difference between going to a *Sukkah* and going to the synagogue. The *Ritvah* (*Sukkah* 25a) comments that someone who comes to the Temple for the holiday (עולה רגל) is considered to be involved in performing a *Mitzvah* and not just preparing for a *Mitzvah* (הכשר מצווה). Even though the essence of the *Mitzvah* is to be in the Temple, we see that going there is part of the *Mitzvah* because going for the purpose of coming close [to God] is also an integral part of the actual experience of “closeness to God - **קרבת אלקים**.” Wherever that is the point of the *Mitzvah*, then the “walking” is part and parcel of the performance of and not the preparation for the *Mitzvah*.

Up until this point, Rav Hutner was comparing walking to the *Sukkah* with walking to the synagogue. Now, he seems to have shifted gears and is talking about the Temple. Why? What does this have to do with the synagogue?

E. PRAYING IN THE SAME PLACE - מקום קבוע

Note: The following set of sources is a quotation from the *Shulchan Aruch* accompanied by two notations from the *Mishnah Berurah*.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים, סימן צ סעיף יט

יקבע מקום לתפלתו, שלא ישנהו אם לא לצורך. ואין די במה שיקבע לו בית הכנסת להתפלל, אלא גם בבית הכנסת שקבוע בה צריך שיהיה לו מקום קבוע.

*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 90:19*

One should have a [set] place where one prays, that one should not change unless it is necessary. It is not sufficient for one to select a [specific] synagogue to pray in, but inside that [selected] synagogue, one should also have a set place.

Where is the most appropriate place to have a "set place" for prayer?

Why doesn't the *Shulchan Aruch* use the term *Cha'yav* – חייב to indicate a Halachic obligation?

משנה ברורה, שולחן ערוך אורח חיים, סימן צ ס"ק נט

"יקבע מקום." שכן מצינו באברהם אבינו שקבע מקום לתפלתו, כדכתיב, "וישכם אברהם בבוקר אל המקום אשר עמד שם את פני ד' " וגו'. (בראשית יט:כז). וגם כשמתפלל בביתו יקבע מקום שלא יבללוהו בני הבית:

*Mishnah Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 90:19, note 59*

"One should have a fixed place." For we find that Avraham *Avinu* set a [specific] place for his prayers, as it is written, "Avraham rose early in the morning [and went] to the place where he stood before the Lord, etc." (*Berayshit 19:27*).

When one prays at home he should also have a set place so that the members of the household will not disturb him.

Aside from quoting the Biblical source of the idea, what important detail does the *Mishnah Berurah* add?

Did Avraham *Avinu* really have a set place (מקום קבוע) for prayer? What is the *Peshat* in the quoted verse?

משנה ברורה, שולחן ערוך אורח חיים, סימן צ ס"ק ס

"מקום קבוע." ותוך ד' אמות חשוב מקום אחד, דאי אפשר לצמצם:

*Mishnah Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 90:19, note 60*

"A fixed place." Within four cubits is considered the same place, as one cannot be too restrictive.

And just what or how much is a "cubit"?

Why should anywhere within "four cubits" be considered one's set place for prayer? And what should one do if someone else is sitting in your set seat?

מהר"ל מפראג, ספר נתיבות עולם א - נתיב העבודה -  
פרק ד

Maharal of Prague, *Netivot Olam*, vol. 1, *Netiv Ha'Avodah*, ch. 4

Note: The following quotations are selected portions of a much longer chapter devoted to the subject of having a set place for prayer (מקום קבוע).

The Maharal indicates that by praying just anywhere, even in the synagogue where one usually prays, lacks proper *Devaykut*, attachment to God. The word he uses to describe this is "*Mikreh* – מקרה." We have translated this word as "unintentional." However the word also implies something that happens by chance or by accident.

Look carefully at the language of the *Gemara*. Can you tell from the phrasing if it is indeed a Halachic obligation to have a set place for prayer?

ספר נתיבות עולם א - נתיב העבודה - פרק ד  
משלימות התפלה שלא תהא תפלתו במקרה קרה, כי התפלה הוא הדביקות בו יתברך שהאדם מתדבק בתפלתו בו יתברך, ואם הדביקות הזו היא במקרה בלבד אינו נחשב דביקות כלל, כי כל מקרה הוא לזמן ולשעה ואינו תמידי אבל דבר שאינו מקרי הוא תמידי, לכך ראוי שיהיה הדביקות הזו שלא במקרה כלל. ועל זה באה האזהרה שיקבע מקום לתפלתו.

Part of the perfection of prayer is that one's prayer should not be "unintentional," for prayer is attachment (*Devaykut* – דביקות) to God, [namely] when a person attaches himself to Him through prayer. If this attachment occurs unintentionally, by chance, then it is not considered to be "attachment" at all, because chance implies [that something] is for a short period of time and not lasting. Something that is not by chance, not unintentional, is lasting. Therefore, it is appropriate that "attachment" should not be at all by chance. For this reason the instruction is given to have a set place for prayer.

ובפרק קמא דברכות (ו:), אמר רבי חלבו אמר רב הונא: כל הקובע מקום לתפלתו אל-הי אברהם בעזרו; וכשמת אומרים עליו, "אי חסיד! אי עניו! מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו." ואברהם מנא לן דקבע מקום? דכתיב, "וישכם אברהם בבוקר אל המקום אשר עמד שם את פני ה' (בראשית יט:כז). ואין עמידה אלא תפלה, שנאמר, "ויעמוד פנחס ויפלל" (תהלים קו:ל).

עוד שם (ברכות ז:), אמר ר' יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחאי: כל הקובע מקום לתפלתו אויביו נופלים תחתיו, שנאמר, "ושמתי מקום לעמי ישראל ונטעתיו ושכן תחתיו ולא יוסיפו בני עולה לענותו כאשר בראשונה" (שמואל ב' ז:ז).

In the first chapter of *Berachot* (6b): Rabbi Chelbo quoted Rav Huna: The God of Avraham will help whoever sets a fixed place for his prayers. When he passes away, they will say about him, "What a pious person (*Chasid* – חסיד)! What a humble person! He was a student of Avraham *Avinu*." And how do we know that Avraham had a set place [to pray]? It is written, "Avraham rose early in the

Why is attachment (*Devaykut* – דביקות) to God so important in prayer?

Why is "unintentional" or "chance" prayer lacking in such *Devaykut* – דביקות to God?

Is there anything else about the statements by Rabbi Chelbo and Rabbi Yochanan that indicate whether or not they are Halachic statements?

What does the difference in "reward" for having a set place for prayer tell me about Rabbi Chelbo's concept of a set place as opposed to that of Rabbi Yochanan?

What does the quote from *Shmu'el* II 7:10 have to do with having a set place for prayer?

What does having a set place for prayer say about a person's relationship with God?

The middle section of this paragraph is a bit muddled and confusing. Basically, the Maharal is saying that it is physically impossible for two objects (or humans) to occupy the same space. Thus, when a person is in his set place for prayer he is alone with God. It is their special meeting place!

morning [and went] to the place where he stood before the Lord" (*Berayshit* 19:27). And "standing" means prayer, as it says, "Pinchas stood and prayed" (*Tehilim* 106:30).

Also there (*Berachot* 7b): Rabbi Yochanan quoted Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: One's enemies will fall before whoever sets a fixed place for his prayers, as it says, "I will establish a home for My people Israel and plant them firmly, so that they shall dwell secure and shall tremble no more. Evil men shall not oppress them any more as in the past" (*Shmu'el* II 7:10).

וכדי שידע האדם המדרגה העליונה הזאת כאשר הוא קובע מקום לתפלתו, יש לך לדעת ולהבין דברי חז"ל העמוקים, כי מצד המקום שהוא קובע, מקום מיוחד לתפלתו, מורה שיש לו מקום אצל השם יתברך.

So that a person should know what a high level [is attained] when one sets a fixed place for prayer, you should know and understand the deep words of the Rabbis (חז"ל), that by setting a fixed place, a special place for one's prayers, this indicates that one has a place with God.

וזה הקובע מקום לתפלתו יש לו נטיעה ודבוק אצל השם יתברך לגמרי, אז הוא יתברך חזקו ותקפו וה' צורו אשר יחסה בו. . . . ויותר עמוק מזה, כי במה שהמקום מיוחד אל הדבר שהוא מקום לו, ואי אפשר שיהיה מקום אחד מיוחד לשני דברים, כאשר ידוע מענין המקום שלא יכלול דבר אחר עמו, שכל דבר יש לו מקום מיוחד, כמו שאמרו חז"ל (אבות ד:ג) "אין לך דבר שאין לו מקום", כלומר שצריך שיהיה לכל דבר מקום מיוחד שהוא מקומו, וכאשר הוא קובע מקום לתפלתו, השם יתברך הוא מקומו המיוחד לו ואין אחר נכנס במקומו המיוחד לו ולכך הוא יתברך בעזרו.

The one who sets a fixed place for his prayers is firmly planted and totally attached to God. Then God greatly strengthens him; God is his rock that protects him. . . . And deeper yet: The fact that a place is dedicated to one thing means that that is its place. It is impossible for two things to occupy the same place [simultaneously], as is known about places, that one place cannot hold something and something else at the same time. Everything has its own place, as our Rabbis said, "There is no thing that does not have its place" (*Avot* 4:3), meaning, that it must have a special place that is its place. So, when one sets a fixed place for prayer, this becomes God's special place with him, and no one else can enter that special place. That is why God helps him.

Which words in the quotation from *Shmu'el* II imply a set place for prayer or for anything else for that matter?

What does it mean "that one has a place with God"?

Why should God protect the person who is "firmly" attached to Him?

This paragraph closes the Maharal's chapter on setting a fixed place for prayer (מקום קבוע).

From the last words of the quote it is evident that the Maharal draws the deepest meaning of the *Gemara* quotations from Kabbalah. He understands that the praise heaped upon the one with a set place for prayer – “What a pious person (*Chasid* – חסיד)! What a humble person! “He was a student of Avraham” is really a veiled reference to the spiritual *Middot* (characteristics or forces) of Avraham *Avinu* and Moshe *Rabbenu*.

ודבר זה עוד עמוק מפני שעל ידי קביעות המקום הוא מתדבק למעלה. ולכך אמר, “כשמת אומרים עליו, ‘אי חסיד! אי עניו! מתלמידי אברהם.’” כי אלו שתי מדות הם העליונות על כל, שעל ידי אלו שתי מדות מתדבק לגמרי עם השם יתברך, כאשר התבאר בנתיב הענוה עיין שם. וכאשר קובע מקום לתפלתו, מדריגתו גם כן דבר זה, שהוא מתדבק לגמרי עם השם יתברך. וראוי שיהיה נקרא שיש לו אלו שתי מדות אשר הן העליונות על הכל, ולומר “הי חסיד! הי עניו!” ויש לך להבין מה שאמר “אי חסיד.” והכל הוא מבואר למי שיש בו חכמה ודעת:

And this idea is even deeper, for by setting a fixed place [for prayer] one attaches himself above. This is why it says, “When he passes away, they will say about him, ‘What a pious person (*Chasid* – חסיד)! What a humble person! He was a student of Avraham,’ ” for these two characteristics (*Middot* – מדות) are above all [others]. Through these two characteristics one totally attaches oneself to God, as explained in the [chapter,] “The Path of Humility.” (See there!) When a person sets a fixed place for his prayers, then he achieves this level, where he totally attaches himself to God. Thus, it is appropriate that he should be called by these two characteristics, which are above all [others]: “What a pious person (*Chasid* – חסיד)! What a humble person!” You should understand why it says, “What a pious person (*Chasid* – חסיד)!” Everything is now explained for one who has wisdom and knowledge.

To live a life with a set place for prayer is to achieve the spiritual levels of Avraham *Avinu*, namely *Chesed* (loving kindness) and of Moshe, who was the great humble one (*Anav* – עניו). In Kabbalistic terms, the spiritual characteristics of both Avraham and Moshe are “right side,” the side of love and *Chesed*. Thus, such a person expresses their deepest love for God by setting a fixed place for prayer, and God, in turn, showers His love upon that person and protects him.

#### F. SITTING NEXT TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE

ר' ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, חלק ב', ענייני תפילה, עמ' עט:

הט': “שכן.” כשהיו שכני האדם – רצוני לומר, היושבים אצלו – מתפללים בכוונה, יקל עליו לכוין לבו גם הוא. אך כשהיו יושבין אצלו אנשי לצון, מתפללים שלא בכוונה, יקשה עליו לכוין. ועל זה נאמר, אוי לרשע ואיו לשכנו.

Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horwitz, *Shnay Luchot HaBrit*, Sec. 2, Prayer, p. 79b

Have you ever experienced what Rabbi Horwitz is talking about?

9. “Neighbor.” When a person's neighbors – I mean those sitting next to him – pray with *Kavanah*, this makes it easier for one to have proper *Kavanah* as well. However, if those sitting next to him are not serious and are not praying with *Kavanah*, then it is hard for one to have *Kavanah*. About this [situation] it is said, “Woe to the evil one and woe to his neighbor.”

What is *Kavanah* in prayer?  
The answer to this question is not an easy one, for *Kavanah* is a very complex idea. However, in simple terms what does *Kavanah* mean in this context?

## G. A SUMMARY NOTE:

The first step in preparing to pray is to select the appropriate place for prayer. The guiding rule in this regard is that the environment in which prayer takes place greatly influences the act and experience of prayer. The place must be clean and free of foul odors.

In Jewish prayer a person stands before God, Himself. Thus, it is necessary to be exceedingly humble. To stand in a high place, which implies a certain arrogance, is the opposite of creating an environment where one can pour out one's prayers from the depths of the heart.

The Temple in Jerusalem is the meeting place between man and God. Aside from all of its other functions, the Temple is *Sha'ar HaShama'yim*, the gateway to heaven. To face Jerusalem and the Temple during prayer is to send one's prayer directly to God.

As opposed to the European cathedrals that were built to instill awe and to intimidate the parishioners who attend services there, a Halachic synagogue is a place where God and man meet in the most intimate way. Indeed, each person is expected to have their special place – seat – where they and they alone encounter God face to face.

Even those who sit next to us in the synagogue determine the nature of the prayer experience.

For most of us, these issues are second nature. No one would consider praying in a filthy place or in an arrogant manner. Nevertheless, it is important to consciously make an effort to prepare the place of prayer so that it has a positive, contributing effect of our prayers.

## proper clothing

### A. WHAT MUST BE COVERED?

#### רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ד, הלכה ז

Sort out the Halacha:  
What is the basic,  
guiding rule regarding  
what parts of the body  
must be covered for  
praying (i.e., saying the  
*Shemonah Esray*)?  
What must be done  
*LeChatchilah* –  
לכתחילה?  
What is permitted  
*BeDi'eved* –  
בדיעבד?

כיסוי הערוה כיצד? אף על פי שכסה ערותו כדרך שמכסין לקריאת שמע, לא יתפלל עד שיכסה את לבו. ואם לא כסה לבו או שנאנס ואין לו במה יכסה, הואיל וכסה ערותו והתפלל יצא. ולכתחלה לא יעשה.

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Tefilah & Nesi'at Kapa'yim, 4:7

How is one to cover the body? Even though one has covered the lower, private area of the body, as one does for the reading of the *Shema*, one should not pray until the heart is also covered. If one does not cover it or is unable to do so, having nothing with which to cover it, and one prays, he has fulfilled his duty, since the lower part of his body is covered. But he should not do so (i.e., pray with the heart uncovered) deliberately.

Why must the lower, private parts of the body be covered during prayer?  
Why must the heart be covered?  
Why is there a difference between reciting the *Shema* and saying *Shemonah Esray*?

Please read Rashi and Rabbenu Yonah's comments together.

רש"י מסכת ברכות דף כה עמוד א

"אבל לתפלה." צריך הוא להראות את עצמו כעומד לפני המלך ולעמוד באימה; אבל קריאת שמע אינו מדבר לפני המלך.

According to Rashi the heart must be covered during *Shemonah Esray* because there is a basic difference between *Shema* and *Shemonah Esray*. What is the difference?

Rashi, Berachot 25a, s.v. אבל תפילה

"However, regarding *Tefilah*." He must present himself as if he is standing before the king; to stand in fear, But the reading of the Shema is not [considered to be] speaking before the King.

Don't we say the *Shema* while standing or sitting before God, the King? So what is the basis for what Rashi is saying?

Rabbenu Yonah makes no reference to the *Shema*. Does he argue with Rashi?

רבינו יונה על הר"ף, ברכות כה.

מפני שהלב הוא האבר הנכבד שבכולם, אמרו שיהיה מכוסה.

Rabbenu Yonah, on the Rif, Berachot 25a

Since the heart is the most honored organ among them all (in the body), they said it must be covered.

Exactly what is Rabbenu Yonah worried about happening if the heart is "uncovered"?

B. PROPER DRESS

רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ה הלכה ה

תקון המלבושים כיצד? מתקן מלבושיו תחלה, ומציין עצמו ומהדר, שנאמר "השתחוו לה' בהדרת קדש" (תהלים צו:ט). ולא יעמוד בתפלה באפונדתו; ולא בראש מגולה; ולא ברגלים מגולות, אם דרך אנשי המקום שלא יעמדו בפני הגדולים אלא בבתי הרגלים. ובכל מקום לא יאחוז תפילין בידו וספר תורה בזרועו ויתפלל, מפני שלבו טרוד בהן. ולא יאחוז כלים ומעות בידו, אבל מתפלל הוא ולולב בידו בימות החג מפני שהוא מצות היום. . . . דרך כל החכמים ותלמידיהם שלא יתפללו אלא כשהן עטופים.

What constitutes proper dress for prayer?

What items are not allowed to be worn while praying? Why? Is there one reason for all of the prohibitions? Or is there a different reason for each one?

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Tefilah & Nesi'at Kapa'yim, 5:5

What is considered proper dress? First, (before praying) one should dress properly, dressing oneself nicely, as it says, "Bow to God in the beauty of holiness" (Psalms 96:9). One should not stand in prayer wearing a money belt, nor bareheaded, nor barefoot, where the custom is to stand in the presence of important people wearing shoes. And one should never pray holding *Tefilin* in one's hand or carrying a *Sefer Torah* in one's arms, for the mind would then be preoccupied with them. [Do not pray] while holding vessels or money. One can pray while holding a *Lulav* and *Etrog* on *Yom Tov* for this is the Mitzvah of the day. . . . It is the

What are you allowed to do when the custom is to appear before important people barefoot?

Why is it permitted to hold a *Lulav* and *Etrog* on the *Yom Tov* of *Sukkot*, but not a *Sefer Torah*?



Notice that a *Talit* is practice of all the sages and their disciples to only considered proper dress pray when they are wrapped in the *Talit*. for *Tefilah*.

### C. A SUMMARY NOTE

There are two basic considerations regarding proper dress for *Tefilah*. The first is to cover specific areas of the body. This includes covering the places of *Ervah* – ערוה (private places) and also the heart, as a sign of humility.

The second is to dress properly. This includes not only clean and neat attire, but also requires us to dress as if we are standing before an important person.

Another aspect of dressing properly is the prohibition against holding anything in our hands that might distract us. This includes everyday objects, sacred ones and even small children.

And finally, the Rambam highly recommends wearing a *Talit* while praying. This alludes to the verse quoted above on page 3-4 (Maharal of Prague, *Netivot Olam*, vol. 1, *Netiv Ha'Avodah*, ch. 6), "A prayer of the poor person as he wraps' etc. - תפלה לעני" ( *Tehilim* 102:1). While our clothes must be fitting to be worn before the King of Kings, we wrap ourselves in the *Talit* to remind us and Him that we come before Him as a poor, humble person.

## preparing the body to pray – טהרת הגוף

### A. PURITY OF THE HANDS

#### רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ד

הלכה ב: טהרת ידיים כיצד? רוחץ ידיו במים עד הפרק ואחר כך יתפלל. היה מהלך בדרך והגיע זמן תפלה ולא היה לו מים, אם היה בינו ובין המים ארבעה מילין - שהם שמונת אלפים אמה - הולך עד מקום המים ורוחץ ואחר כך יתפלל. היה בינו ובין המים יותר על כן, מקנח ידיו בצרור או בעפר או בקורה ומתפלל.

הלכה ג: במה דברים אמורים? לפניו. אבל אם היה מקום המים לאחוריו, אין מחייבין אותו לחזור לאחוריו אלא עד מיל. אבל אם עבר מן המים יותר, אינו חייב לחזור, אלא מקנח ידיו ומתפלל.

במה דברים אמורים שאינו מטהר לתפלה אלא ידיו בלבד? בשאר תפלות, חוץ מתפלת שחרית. אבל שחרית רוחץ פניו ידיו ורגליו ואחר כך יתפלל. ואם היה רחוק מן המים מקנח ידיו בלבד ואחר כך יתפלל.

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Tefilah & Nesi'at Kapa'yim, ch. 4

2. What is considered purity of the hands? He should wash his hands with water up to the wrist

Is "purity" of the hands synonymous with "cleanliness"?

*Hilchot* 2 and 3 in chapter 4 of the Rambam's Laws of Prayer have to be read together, for *Halacha* 3 explains *Halacha* 2.

Let's summarize what the Rambam says: What is the obligation regarding washing up before *Davening Shacharit*? And before *Minchah* and *Ma'ariv*? What is the difference between washing for *Shacharit* as opposed to washing for *Minchah* and *Ma'ariv*?

and then pray. If a person was traveling on the road and the time for prayer arrived and he has no water, if there is water within a distance of four miles – which are 8000 cubits - he should proceed to where there is water, wash his hands and then pray. If the distance between him and the water exceeds that limit, he should wipe his hands on a clod, or with loose earth, or on a wood beam and then pray.

3. When does this rule apply? [Only if place of the water is] in front [of the traveler]. But if it is behind him, he is only obliged to retrace his steps a mile. If he has passed more [than this distance from] water, he is not obliged to go back, but wipes his hands and prays.

When does this rule apply that one only purifies the hands for prayers? For all prayers except the morning prayers. However, for the morning prayers, he should first wash his face, his hands and his feet, and then the pray. If he is far from water, then he can wipe his only his hands and then pray.

*BeDi'eved* – בדיעבד it is permitted to rub one's hands on wood or in dirt. How does this contribute to either purity of cleanliness?

## B. SUMMARY NOTE

The concept of purity of hands goes beyond the idea of cleanliness. Obviously, the Rambam requires that we be clean – at least our face, hands and feet – before we pray in the morning. However, the washing of the hands in general is also a symbolic act. As we prepare ourselves to pray, we wash off the outside world, all of our worldly concerns, and turn to focus completely on the *Tefilah* and on God.

## II. Coordinating the Body During Prayer

### the feet

#### A. THE "THREE STEPS"

##### שלחן ערוך, אורח חיים, סימן קכג, סעיף א

The *Beit Yosef* gives 4 reasons for taking three steps back:

1. To remember that the Jews distanced themselves three miles from Mt. Sinai as God revealed Himself on the mountain (מהר"י אבוהב)
2. To recall that Moshe *Rabbenu* entered the darkness the cloud, and the fog (ענן), חושך, ענן) (וערפל) as he climbed Mt. Sinai to be with God.
3. When standing before God during the *Shemonah Esray* a person is in a holy place. He therefore steps back out of the holy spot and into his mundane world. (שבלי) (הלקט)
4. To recall the way the priests stepped around the altar while offering the daily sacrifices. (רב) (האי גאון)

כורע ופוסע ג' פסיעות לאחרי, בכריעה אחת. ואחר שפסע ג' פסיעות בעודו כורע, קודם שיזקוף, כשיאמר "עושה שלום במרומי", הופך פניו לצד שמאלו; וכשיאמר "הוא יעשה שלום עלינו", הופך פניו לצד ימינו; ואחר כך ישתחוה לפניו, כעבד הנפטר מרבו.

##### Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim, sec. 123, no. 1

[At the conclusion of the *Shemonah Esray*,] one should bow and take three steps backwards with a single bow (i.e., while still bowing). After taking the three steps, while still bowing, before he stands erect, he should turn his face to his left while he says, "He, who makes peace in heaven - עושה שלום"; while he says, "He will make peace for us - עושה שלום עלינו", he should turn his face to his right. Then he should bow to the front of him like a slave who is taking leave of his master.

##### משנה ברורה על השלחן ערוך, אורח חיים, סימן קכג, סעיף א, סעיף קטן ב

"ג' פסיעות." עיין בבית יוסף כמה טעמים. ועוד כתבו טעם משום דאמרו חז"ל דבזכות ג' פסיעות שרץ נבוכדנצר לכבוד השם יתברך זכה להחריב בית המקדש, ולכן אנו פוסעים ג' פסיעות ומתפללין שיבנה בית המקדש.

"Three steps." See the *Beit Yosef*, where several reasons are given. In addition, they wrote that the reason is because the Sages, of blessed memory, said that Nevuchadnetzar ran three steps to honor *HaShem*, thus accruing the merit to destroy the *Beit HaMikdash*. Therefore, we step [back] three steps and pray that the *Beit HaMikdash* should be built.

Between the *Beit Yosef* and the *Mishnah Berurah*, we have five reasons for taking three steps back at the end of *Shemonah Esray*. Each is highly symbolic. What idea lies behind each of the reasons?

##### רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ה הלכה יא

ולמה נותן שלום לשמאלו תחלה? מפני ששמאלו הוא ימין שכנגד פניו. כלומר, כשהוא עומד לפני המלך נותן שלום לימין המלך ואחר כך לשמאל המלך, וקבעו שיפטר מן התפלה כמו שנפטרין מלפני המלך.

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Tefilah & Nesi'at Kapa'yim, 5:11

According to the Rambam, why do we bow to our left side first?

See the essay: "Playing Peek-A-Boo with God: Differentiating between Knowledge and Experience"

And why does one say, "Goodbye" [to God at the end of the *Shemonah Esray* by bowing] first to the left? Because his left is the right of the one opposite, facing him, meaning that when one stands before the king, he [bows] "Goodbye," to the right of the king and then to the left of the king. And they decreed that finishing the prayer (*Shemonah Esray*) is like leaving the king.

If God's right side is opposite our left side, then we must be standing "face to face" with God during *Shemonah Esray*. What does this mean?

NOTE: The following quotation from the *Shulchan Aruch* is followed by selected quotes from the *Mishnah Berurah*

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן קכג

ב. במקום שכלו ג' פסיעות יעמוד, (ו) ולא יחזור (ח) למקומו עד שיגיע שליח ציבור (ט) לקדושה, (י) ולפחות עד שיתחיל שליח צבור להתפלל בקול רם. הגה: והשליח ציבור יעמוד כדי הילוך ד' אמות, קודם שיחזור למקומו להתפלל בקול רם (תשובות הרשב"א ס' תל"ו); וכן יחיד המתפלל יעמוד במקום שכלו פסיעותיו כשיעור זה, קודם שיחזור למקומו (ב"י בשם רבינו ירוחם וירושלמי). יחיד שמתפלל בצבור וסיים תפלתו קודם לשליח ציבור, אסור להחזיר פניו לצבור עד שיסיים שליח ציבור תפלתו (בית יוסף בשם שבולי הלקט).

ג. כשפוסע, עוקר רגל שמאל תחלה; ושיעור פסיעות אלו, לכל הפחות, הוא (יד) כדי שיתן גודל בצד עקב. (ולכתחילה (טז) לא יפסיע פסיעות גסות יותר מזה. בית יוסף שם אורחות חיים ודעת עצמו, לפי הטעם שכתב בית יוסף לג' פסיעות בשם רב האי).

משנה ברורה, שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן קכג

(ו) "יעמוד." ויכוין רגליו כמו בתפלה כשאומר "עושה שלום," מפני שמטה עצמו לצד שכינה:  
(ח) "למקומו." . . . וכתב המגן אברהם דלפי מה שהביא בבית יוסף דיש אומרים דבעינן ששה פסיעות דהיינו ג' לאחוריו וג' בשובו למקומו אם כן על כרחך צריך לחזור למקומו בג' פסיעות לפניו. . . .  
(ט) "לקדושה." ואם האריך בתפלתו ובעת שפסע הגיע הש"ץ לקדושה יכול לחזור תיכף למקומו לומר קדושה. . . .  
(י) "ולפחות" וכו'. . . . אך בזמן כשאומרים פיוטים בודאי יש להקל ולחזור תיכף כשמתחיל הש"ץ י"ח:  
(יד) "כדי שיתן" וכו'. וכמו פסיעות הכהנים בשעת עבודה שהיו מהלכין עקב בצד גודל. . . .  
(טז) "לא יפסיע" וכו'. דתפילות כנגד תמידים תקנום ובעינן דומיא דכהנים בעבודתן, ולכן לא יפסע פסיעות גסות יותר. ועוד דמיחזי כרץ מלפני המלך. וכן פסקו הבית חדש ודרך החיים:

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim sec. 123

2. One should stand (6) where the three steps back ended. One should not go back to his place (7) (where one said *Shemonah Esray*) until the *Chazzan*

Why should you have to wait for the *Chazzan* to begin the *Kedushah* of the repetition of the *Shemonah Esray*?

See the comments of the *Mishnah Berurah* (no.s 14 & 16 below)

“An individual who is praying. . .” is understood to refer to someone praying by himself without a *Minyan*.

Why is the length of the step of such importance?

Remember, according to the Rambam one is saying, “Goodbye,” to the *Shechinah* after taking the three steps back.

Why did the *Kohanim* walk with such small steps in the Beit HaMikdash?

reaches (9) *Kedushah* (in the repetition of the *Amidah*) (10) or at least until the *Chazzan* begins to pray out loud (i.e., the beginning of the repetition of the *Amidah*).

A Note: The *Chazzan* should wait as long as it takes to walk four cubits before returning to his place to pray out loud (the repetition of the *Amidah*). (*Teshuvot HaRashba* no. 436) An individual who is praying should also wait this amount of time where he stopped taking the steps. (*Beit Yosef* quoting Rabbenu Yerucham and the Talmud Yerushalmi) An individual who is praying with a congregation and has ended his prayers before the *Chazzan* should not turn to face the congregation until the *Chazzan* has completed his prayers. (*Beit Yosef* quoting the *Shibbolay HaLeket*)

3. When one steps [back,] one should move the left foot first. The length of these steps should be minimally (14) to place the big toe next to the heel.

(Initially – *LeChatchilah* – לכתחילה, (16) one should not take a bigger step than this. *Beit Yosef* quoting the *Orchot Cha'yim* and his own opinion, according to the reason the *Beit Yosef* gives for the three steps in the name of Rav Hai.)

*Mishnah Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim*  
sec. 123

(6) “One should stand” with one’s feet together as when saying the *Shemonah Esray* when saying, “He who makes peace - עושה שלום,” because one is bowing toward the *Shechinah*.

(8) “To his place.” . . . The *Magen Avraham* writes that the *Beit Yosef* quotes those who say that one needs [to take] 6 steps. That is three steps back and three steps forward back to one’s place. Therefore, one is certainly required to return to one’s place by taking three steps forward . . .

(9) “*Kedushah*.” If one prolongs the saying of the *Shemonah Esray* and while taking his steps backwards the *Chazzan* arrives at *Kedushah*, one is permitted to return immediately to one’s place to recite *Kedushah*. . . .

(10) “At least.” . . . However, when *Pi'yutim* (for instance on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur) are said, one may certainly be lenient and return to one’s place immediately when the *Chazzan* begin the repetition of the *Shemonah Esray*.

(14) “To place.” Just like the way the *Kohanim* stepped (walked) during the Temple service, i.e., with the big toe next to the heel. . . .

(16) “One should not take a bigger step.” For the prayers were established in parallel to the daily sacrifices [in the Temple.] And we require that they be similar to the way the *Kohanim* [behaved] during the Temple service. Therefore one should not take

What does this Halacha say about the connection between one’s “silent” *Shemonah Esray* and the repetition by the *Chazzan*?

And what is so important about *Kedushah* anyway?

How many reasons can you give for not turning around to face the congregation after you have finished your *Shemonah Esray*?

Why is it important to recite the *Kedushah* back where you said *Shemonah Esray*?

And during which part of the *Avodah* did they walk that way?

Notice that the Rama and the *Mishnah Berurah* turn what is a suggestion by the *Shulchan Aruch* into a *Psak Halacha*.

bigger, grosser steps. In addition, it looks as if one is running away from the King. This is the decision of the *Ba'yit Chadash* and the *Derech HaCha'yim*.

#### B. A SUMMARY NOTE

Who would have thought that there is such importance to the way we step back after *Shemonah Esray* and how we do it?!

There is another custom that is worth mentioning here, for it sheds further light on the Halacha of the "three steps." (See Rama, *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim* 95:1 & *Mishnah Berurah* ad. Loc. Note 3) Some have the custom of taking three steps back and then three steps forward at the *beginning* of the *Shemonah Esray* as well. When combined with what we do at the end of the *Shemonah Esray* and the statement by the Rambam, we can come to the following conclusion: To take the steps back before reciting the *Shemonah Esray* is to leave our world, our plane of existence. We then take three steps forward, thus ascending to God's world, to a higher spiritual plane of existence. It is here, in God's world that we encounter Him and address Him face to face. When we finish, we take three steps back, out of His world. However, we do not rush back to our own world. We linger at the door, so to speak. We recite one last prayer, the *Yehi Ratzon* – יהי רצון, asking that the Temple be rebuilt. The Temple was the place where every Jew entered God's world to visit with Him. Finally, we take three steps forward when we are required to function once again in our world, to recite the *Kedushah* which expresses our longing to be with God again and to experience His ineffable holiness.

#### C. FEET TOGETHER

##### שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צה סעיף א

יכוין רגליו זה אצל זה בכיוון, כאלו אינם אלא א', להדמות למלאכים דכתיב בהן: ורגליהם רגל ישרה (יחזקאל א:ז): כלומר: רגליהם נראים כרגל אחד.

##### Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim sec. 95, Halacha 1

Why are we supposed to look like the angels?

One should place one's feet exactly one next to the other, to be like the angels, about whom it is written, "Their legs are one straight leg" (*Yechezkel* 1:7), meaning, their legs look like one leg.

And why did the angels' legs "look like one leg"?

NOTE: The following is selected portions from the Maharal of Prague. The English translation is not a literal one. Rather, it reflects the ideas of the Maharal while trying to be an accurate reflection of his Hebrew text.

מהר"ל מפראג, ספר נתיבות עולם א, נתיב העבודה, פרק ו

ואמר ר' יוסי בר חנינא משום רבי אליעזר בן יעקב (ברכות י:): המתפלל צריך שיכוין את רגליו שנאמר "ורגליהן רגל ישרה" (יחזקאל א:ז). . . .

אבל האדם יכיר שאין לו דבר מעצמו כלל. ולפיכך אמר צריך שיכוין רגליו, כי השוואת הרגלים מורה על ענין זה שהאדם בעצמו כאלו אין יכול לפעול דבר, כי התחלת הכל הם הרגלים שמוליכים אותו אל אשר רצונו שם לעשות מה שירצה. . . .

אבל יש לך לדעת כי דבר זה שיש לו לכוין רגליו הוא דבר מופלג ועמוק בסוד העבודה הזאת. ובירושלמי (ברכות פ"א) יש מחלוקת רבי לוי ור' סימון. חד אמר כמלאכי השרת שנאמר "ורגליהם רגל ישרה". וחד אמר ככהנים, פירוש שהיו הולכים הכהנים כאשר עובדים בקרבנות עקב בצד גודל שנאמר "ולא תעלה במעלות על מזבחי אשר לא תגלה ערותך עליו" (שמות כ:כב).

כבר התבאר כי העבודה הזאת שהאדם הוא העלול מקבל מן העלה. והעלול הוא נכנס לגמרי תחת רשות העלה, ועל זה אמר שצריך שיכוין האדם רגליו כי הרגלים הם התפשטות עצמו אשר התפשט את עצמו כאלו הוא יוצא מן העלה כאשר יש לו התפשטות מה, כי מצד שהוא עלול אין לו התפשטות עצמו כלל לחוץ, וחלוק הרגלים הוא התפשטות במה, וזה הסרה מן העלה.

ולכך החיות הנושאת כסא הכבוד רגליהם רגל ישרה כי מפני שהם נושאות כסא כבודו אין להם התפשטות כלל לסור מן העלה כי ההתפשטות הוא הסרה והסתלקות מן העלה והוא ברשות עצמו, אבל כאשר רגליהם רגל ישרה בזה הם תחת רשות העלה לגמרי. . . .

ולמאן דאמר ככהנים, פירוש הכהנים בעבודתם היו הולכים עקב בצד גודל גם כן לטעם הזה, כי על ידי התפשטות עצמו של אדם נגלה הערוה, כי האדם הוא בעל ערוה כאשר יש לו התפשטות עצמו ובזה בודאי מסתלק מן העלה, וצריך אל האדם שיהיה נכנס תחת העלה לגמרי בתפלתו כי התפלה הוא במחשבה ובדבור ואינו על ידי מעשה הגוף, אבל מכל מקום התפלה הוא לאדם שהוא בעל גוף.

ופליגי בזה כי למאן דאמר כמלאכי השרת סבר כי מאחר שהתפלה היא לדבור השכלי שאין בו גוף, ראוי שיהיה האדם בתפלתו דומה למלאכים שנאמר בהם רגליהם רגל ישרה, כי המלאכים בודאי נכנסין תחת רשות העלה לגמרי עד כי רגליהם רגל ישרה, כי השוואת רגלים הוא כניסה לגמרי תחת רשות העלה כאשר אין כאן התפשטות עצמו.

ולמאן דאמר ככהנים אף כי התפלה היא בדבור ובמחשבה מכל מקום הוא לאדם, והאדם אי אפשר שיכנס תחת העלה לגמרי כי אין זה מענין הגוף והגשם כאשר אין האדם שכלי רק גשמי שיהיה לגמרי תחת רשות העלה, כי הגשם נבדל מן העלה ולכך יש לו להיות דומה אל הכהנים שהיו הולכים עקב בצד גודל, ולא היה כאן התפשטות עד שיהיה נמצא חלוק ערוה אשר הוא מצד הגוף, ויש לך להבין ענין זה מחלוקת החכמים מאוד.

It is interesting to note that the disagreement between Rabbi Levi and Rabbi Simon does *not* appear in the Talmud Bavli. Apparently, the editors of the Bavli disagreed totally with the opinion that we should be like *Kohanim* when standing with our feet together.

The word, שכלי, in medieval and renaissance Jewish philosophical literature always means spiritual. Only in modern Hebrew usage does שכלי refer to intelligence.

Once again we encounter the Maharal's usage of the words, עילה and עלול. And once again we have translated these words as "receiver" and "Giver" respectively. This is in keeping with the Maharal's opening comment. We, mere mortals, are on the receiving end from God, the "Giver." Everything that we have ultimately is from Him.

Maharal of Prague, *Netivot Olam, Netiv Ha'Avodah*,  
vol. 1, chap. 6

The Maharal's opening comment prepares us for his remarks that follow. The freedom of movement of the feet indicates our ability to do what we desire as opposed to what God wants of us.

The Maharal uses the Hebrew word **התפשטות**, which is translated here as "personal independence" and "to roam freely." The gist of what the Maharal is trying to express is that the feet represent an individual's freedom of movement, which indicates freedom of will or choice. Certainly, we as human beings, have such freedom. However, the Maharal is teaching us that during prayer, we must give up this personal freedom. Instead, we must show that we are like completely helpless slaves standing before the all-powerful, yet beneficent, master. This is what the angels are after all.

And Rabbi Yosi bar Chaninah quoted Rabbi Eliezer ben Ya'akov saying, "One who prays should set his feet together, as it says, 'Their legs are one straight leg' (*Yechezkel* 1:7)." (*Berachot* 10b) . . .

Rather a person must recognize that nothing comes from his own efforts. Therefore, he (Rabbi Eliezer ben Ya'akov) said that should set his feet together, for placing the feet exactly next to each other indicates that it is as if a person cannot function at all. Indeed, the beginning of all things (i.e., action) is that the feet lead the person to where he wants to go to do what he desires. . . .

However, you should know that this idea of placing the feet together is an abstract and deep secret of this *Avodah* (service of God). In the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Berachot* ch. 1), there is a disagreement between Rabbi Levi and Rabbi Simon. One says that [we must be] like the angels, as it says, "Their legs are one straight leg" (*Yechezkel* 1:7). And one says that [we must be] like the *Kohanim*. The explanation is that when offering the sacrifices the *Kohanim* would walk by placing the big toe next to the heel, as it says, "Do not climb up steps to my altar so you do not reveal your nakedness upon it" (*Shemot* 20:22).

It has already been explained regarding this *Avodah* that a person is the "receiver" (העילול), receiving from the "Giver" (העילה). The receiver falls completely under the authority of the "Giver." This is why it is said that a person must place his feet one next to the other, for the feet represent one's personal independence, allowing one to roam freely, as if one has left the authority of the "Giver" of his own accord. For when one is the "receiver" one has no authority to roam freely. The feet indicate this independence, which is the removal of the "Giver" (and His authority).

For this reason, the *Cha'iyot* who support [God's] Throne of Glory have their feet together as one straight leg. Since they support the Throne of Glory, they have no independence whatsoever to leave the "Giver", for such independence would be the removal of the "Giver" and leaving Him, indicating that they were their own person. Thus, when their feet are together as one they are under the total control of the "Giver" (העילה). . . .

And the one who says [we must be] like the *Kohanim*. The explanation is that when offering the

Before we approach God in prayer - *Shemonah Esray* – we recite the *Shema*. This recitation is fulfillment of the Mitzvah to accept the yoke of heaven. To use the Maharal's terms, we identify ourselves as the "receiver" (העילול) and accept God as the total "Giver" (העילה). We must do this before praying because to pray implies that we acknowledge God's total rule over the entire world, including ourselves.



And this is what we must become during the saying of the *Shemonah Esray*.

The one who says we must be like *Kohanim* thinks that our physicality prevents us from being totally subservient to God. Even though we stand with our feet together, we are really like *Kohanim* who are totally dedicated to God but retain their humanness.

It is interesting to note that the Halacha rejects the idea of *Kohanim* and requires us to stand like angels while saying the *Shemonah Esray*.

sacrifices, the *Kohanim* would walk by placing the big toe next to the heel, for the same reason. By roaming freely, a person reveals his "nakedness," for a person is "naked" when he acts independently, thus removing himself from the "Giver." In prayer, it is crucial that a person be under the total control of the "Giver", for prayer involves thought and speech without any bodily movement, nevertheless, the person who prays has a body [that he must control].

[In summary,] they are arguing as follows: The one who says, "like angels," is of the opinion that since prayer is spiritual speech without use of the body, it is appropriate that a praying person be like an angel, as it says, "Their legs are one straight leg" (*Yechezkel* 1:7), for the angels certainly accepted the complete control of the "Giver" to the point that they legs became as one. Placing the feet together symbolizes accepting the complete control of the "Giver" without any independence.

The one who says, "like *Kohanim*," is of the opinion that even though prayer uses thought and speech, it is impossible for a person to totally accept the control of the "Giver." This is because of one's body, one's physicality. A person is not [purely] spiritual. [One is too] physical to completely accept the control of the "Giver." The physicality separates one from "Giver." Thus, one must be like the *Kohanim* who would walk by placing the big toe next to the heel and not be so independent that they revealed their "nakedness" resulting from their physicality. You should make every effort to understand this disagreement by the Sages.

In the paragraph to the left, the word, nakedness, means our physical humanness.

#### D. A SUMMARY NOTE:

The Halacha of standing with our feet together and its connection to the angels fits nicely with the idea expressed in our previous summary note.

If we ascend to God's world when saying *Shemonah Esray*, then we must function as all other creatures do in this higher realm. Here, the model for proper behavior, which indicates the proper attitude, is that of the angels. When in God's world, one is totally under His control and authority. There is no personal freedom. You are the "receiver" (עלול) and He is the "Giver" (עילה) in every which way. Thus, like the angels who are completely subservient to His Will and are totally dedicated to doing His bidding, we also stand with our feet together as if they were one.

## the hands

### A. WHAT DO I DO WITH MY HANDS?

רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ה, הלכה ד

תקון הגוף כיצד? כשהוא עומד בתפלה צריך לכוין את רגליו זו בצד זו. ונותן עיניו למטה כאילו הוא מביט לארץ, ויהיה לבו פנוי למעלה כאילו הוא עומד בשמים. ומניח ידיו על לבו כפותין הימנית על השמאלית. ועומד כעבד לפני רבו באימה ביראה ופחד, ולא יניח ידיו על חלציו.

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Tefilah & Nesi'at Kapa'yim, 5:4

What is correct posture? When standing in prayer, one should place one's feet next to each other. The eyes should be lowered as if one were looking towards the ground; while the heart should be uplifted as if one were in heaven. He should place his hands clasped over the heart, the right over the left. One should stand like a servant before his master, in awe, fear and dread and he should not place his hands on his hips.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צה, סעיף ג

מניח ידו על (ו) לבו כפותין, (פירוש כקשורין) הימנית על השמאלית, ועומד כעבד לפני רבו, באימה, ביראה ובפחד, לא יניח ידיו על חלציו, מפני שהוא דרך יוהרא.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 95:3

He should place his hands clasped (meaning as if they were tied) over the heart, (6) the right over the left. One should stand like a servant before his master, in awe, fear and dread and he should not place his hands on his hips because it is arrogant [posture].

משנה ברורה, שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צה, סעיף ג, סעיף קטן ו

"לבו." במקום שנוהגין לעמוד כן לפני המלך כשמדברים עמו ושואלים מאתו צרכיהם. והכל כמנהג המקום. ובספר עשרה מאמרות כתב בשם האר"י, שיניחו זרועותם על לבם ימנית על שמאלית. עיין שם. ובשם הרב משה קורדובירו, שיכוף האגודל בתוך פיסת היד:

According to the Rambam, what do you do with your hands during *Shemonah Esray*?

Just what is the proper body language of a servant standing before the master? What does this mean regarding shoulders and chest and how the head is held?

According to the *Mishnah Berurah*, are we *obliged* to stand with right hand over left hand over the heart?

If the hands have to be right on top of left on top of your heart, how do you hold a *Siddur*? Should you be holding a *Siddur* during *Shemonah Esray*? And if not, how do you know what words to say?

The author of the *Shulchan Aruch* basically quotes the Rambam word for word, except for a couple words that he adds. What are those words and how do they assist us in understanding the Rambam's Halacha?

Mishnah Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim  
95:3, note 6

According to the "Ari,"  
how are we to stand?

"His heart." [This applies] where it is the custom to stand like this before the king when talking to him and asking him for one's needs. [It] all depends on the local custom.

And why does Rav  
Cordovero demand that  
we hide our thumbs?

In the work *Asarah Ma'amarot*, [the author] writes, quoting the "Ari" (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria) that one should place his arms over his heart, the right arm over the left arm (See there). [He writes] quoting Rabbi Moshe Cordovero that one should bend the thumb inside the palm of his hand.

B. A SUMMARY NOTE:

In Kabbalah, different parts of the body are assigned different *Sefirot*. (There are 10 *Sefirot*. They are the tools, spiritual forces that God uses to function within the created world.) The right arm and hand are identified with the *Sefirah* of *Chesed*, love and kindness. The left arm and hand symbolize the *Sefirah* of *Gevurah* or *Pachad*, the forces of discipline, law and punishment. The heart is the seat of *Tiferet*, harmonious beauty and truth, which is the ever-changing combination or *Chesed* and *Gevurah*.

By placing the right hand (or arm) over the left hand (or arm) the *Chesed* becomes dominant, controlling the *Gevurah*, thus limiting the application of law and punishment in favor of boundless love. By then placing both hands (or both arms) over the heart, *Chesed* and *Gevurah* combine to create *Emet*, truth.

At the same time, by pulling the extremities together and standing with the feet together, one's body becomes a *Kav Yashar*, a straight line representing the shortest distance between our created world and God, Himself. Thus, we symbolize by our very posture a oneness and unity that mirrors His oneness, which assists us in sending our prayers directly to God.

C. KEEP THE HANDS ABOVE THE WAIST

The following short *Dvar Torah* offers further insight into the Rambam's statement that the hands should be clasped over the heart, specifically above the waist. While this *Dvar Torah* does not deal directly with the issue at hand, it is indeed relevant. It is based on an essay by Becca Henteleff, "The Mystery of Enosh" (*Bikurim*, Midreshet Lindenbaum: Jerusalem, 1993, pp. 57-65).

WE ARE ALL CENTAURS!

וְלֶשֶׁת גַּם הוּא יֵלֵד בֶּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ אֶנוֹשׁ אִזְ הוֹחֵל לִקְרֹא בְשֵׁם ה': (בראשית ד:כו)

And to Seth a son was also born. He called his name Enosh. Then it was begun to call in the name of God. (Genesis 4:26)

ו. "ולשת גם הוא יולד בן ויקרא את שמו אנוש." בעון קומי אבא כהן ברדלא, "אדם שת אנוש ושתק?" אמר, "עד כאן בצלם ובדמות, מכאן ואילך נתקלקלו הדורות ונבראו קינטורין. ארבעה דברים נשתנו בימי אנוש בן שת: ההרים נעשו טרשים, והתחיל המת מרחיש, ונעשו פניהן כקופות, ונעשו חולין למזיקין." אמר רבי יצחק, "הן הן שגרמו לעצמן להיות חולין למזיקין. מה בין דגחין לצלמא, למאן דגחין לבר נש?"  
ז. "אז הוחל לקרא בשם ה'." אמר רב סימון: בשלשה מקומות נאמר בלשון הזה לשון מרד: "אז הוחל לקרוא בשם ה'." "ויהי כי החל האדם" (בראשית ו:א). "הוא החל להיות גבור בארץ" (בראשית י:ח).

(בראשית רבה פרשה כג)

6. "Seth also bore a son and he called his name Enosh." They came before Abba Kohen Bardela and asked, "Adam, Seth, Enosh and then nothing?" He said to them, "Up to this point, man was created in God's image and likeness; from here on the generations were spoiled and they were created as centaurs. Four things changed in the days of Enosh: The mountains became rocky, the dead began to decay, their faces became like monkeys, and they became lower than the demons (destructive forces)." Rav Yitzchak said, "They brought this on themselves to be lower than the demons. What is the difference between bowing to idols and bowing to a man?"

7. "Then he (Enosh) began to call in the name of God." Rav Shimon said, "In three places, this language is used to indicate rebellion: "Then it was *begun* to call in the name of God." "It was when man *began*" (Genesis 6:1). "He *began* to become great on the earth" (ibid. 10:8).

(Berayshit Rabbah 23)

Exactly who came to Abba Kohen Bardela is not important. What is significant is their question. "We noticed that Adam's lineage ends with Enosh at the end of chapter four. Why?" they asked. Abba Kohen Bardela gives a startling answer. Until Enosh, all humans were created in the image of God (בצלם ובדמות). After Enosh they are all centaurs.

Centaurs?! Centaurs are Greek mythological creatures that are human from the head to the waist and from the waist down they are horses. Surely, Abba Kohen Bardela did not intend that his answer be taken literally. Rather, the difference between the people before Enosh and those after Enosh is equivalent to the difference between humans and centaurs, meaning creature that are half human and half animal.

Until Enosh, human experience and behavior reflected the fact that people were created in God's image. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve lived purely spiritual lives, to the extent that they were unaware of their own physical bodies. Even after they were banished from the Garden, their lives were on a high spiritual plane. Even Cain, who murders his brother, converses freely with God.

Enosh marks a significant change. Only two generations removed from Adam, Enosh is the beginning of a long descent from a life of spirit and keen awareness of God to a life of dominated by physicality with a dearth of spirituality.

"Four things changed in the days of Enosh." Only one change was brought about by people. First they suddenly realized that the hilly paths were stony. The earth was no longer comfortable to walk on. The physical reality began intruding on the spirituality.

Death removes a person's presence from society. However, until Enosh no one was concerned with the aftermath of death. The second change was the awareness of the stench of death. The body was no longer viewed as the clothing, the vessel for the spirit. Now the body became nothing more than food for the maggots.

The third change affected how they perceived themselves and others. The animal aspect of their very existence was now reflected in their faces. They looked at each other and saw

monkey faces. Monkeys look like people. Monkeys can even act like people. But monkeys are not people. They do not live spiritual lives touched by God's presence.

The final step is the worst. David *HaMelech* writes in *Tehilim*, "You have made him slightly less than the angels - וְתַחֲסֶרְהוּ מֵעֵט מַאֲלָהִים (8:6). Human beings are almost angels. While humans cannot be exactly like angels, devoting themselves totally to the service of God, humans are innately spiritual beings, who have the potential to dedicate themselves to serve God (עבודת ה'). The fourth change that occurred after Enosh is the beginning of idol worship. At this stage in human history, idol worship is an act of rebellion against God. It also signals the fact that mankind gave up. They gave up trying to rise above their animal existence to achieve a life of spirit. As Rav Yitzchak said, the end result was total self-delusion. The false spirituality of idols replaces the true spirituality that results from encountering God. Certainly, humans brought upon themselves this last and final step in their descent to becoming centaurs, half human and half animal.

So Adam's lineage ends with Enosh. Enosh marks the beginning of the descent to a life characterized by dominant physicality as opposed to a life of spirituality and connection to God. Abba Kohen Bardela's choice of metaphor is good one. From the waist up we are humans. Humans are by their very nature reflective of God's own "shape and form." We are meant to lives that reflect the divine. However, from the waist down we are like horses, animals, devoid of spirituality, and worshiping false gods. What better way is there to describe the inner struggle of mankind throughout all of human history?

#### D. A SUMMARY NOTE

Since prayer is by definition a spiritual activity – soul-work – then we must distance ourselves from that animal part of us. As "centaurs," our animal half is below the waist, all the more reason to keep our hands above our waist when we pray. The hands are the only parts of the body that can be placed above the waist or below it. The hands symbolize creative and productive action. Thus it is only proper that we associate our hands with our spiritual, enlightened selves as opposed to our animal side.

This idea also helps to explain the following Halacha.

### separate the upper and lower halves of the body

#### שלחן ערוך, אורח חיים סימן צא, סעיף ב

צריך לאזור אזור בשעת התפלה, אפילו יש לו אבנט, שאין לבו רואה את הערוה, משום "הכון" (עמוס ד:יב). אבל שאר ברכות מותר לברך בלא חגורה, מאחר שיש לו מכנסים. הגה: ואין לבו רואה את הערוה (ר"ן פרק קמא דשבת, והרא"ש פרק הרואה והגהות מיימוני פ"ה מהלכות תפלה).

The portion of the verse quoted from עמוס is  
הכֹּון לְקִרְאת אֱלֹהֵיךָ  
יִשְׂרָאֵל

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 91:2

What are we to use to separate the two halves of our "centaur" body?

One is required to wear a belt while praying, even if he has a waistband (on his pants), because his heart should not "see" his private parts. [This is] because of "Prepare [to meet your God, Yisra'el]" (Amos 4:12). However, it is permitted to say the other blessings without [wearing] a belt, because he has trousers on.

What do *Chassidim* use to fulfill this obligation?

What does it mean that our heart should not "see" our private parts?

Note: And his heart cannot "see" his private parts.. (Ran, first chapter of *Shabbat*; Rosh, chapter "HaRo'eh;" *Hagahot Maimoni'yot*, chapter 5 of *Hilchot Tefilah*)

And what role does the heart play in prayer?

## genuflection and bowing during prayer

### A. WHEN DO WE BOW?

רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ה, הלכה י'

כריעה כיצד? המתפלל כורע חמש כריעות בכל תפלה ותפלה: בברכה ראשונה בתחלה ובסוף, ובהודיה בתחלה ובסוף. וכשגומר התפלה כורע ופוסע שלש פסיעות לאחוריו, וכשהוא כורע נותן שלום משמאל עצמו ואחר כך מימין עצמו ואח"כ מגביה ראשו מן הכריעה. וכשהוא כורע בארבע הכריעות כורע בברוך וכשהוא זוקף בזקף בשם. במה דברים אמורים, בהדיוט. אבל כהן גדול כורע בתחילת כל ברכה ובסוף כל ברכה. והמלך כיון ששחה בראשונה אינו מגביה ראשו עד שגומר כל תפלתו.

Do you know the proper way to bow while saying the *Shemonah Esray*? Of course you do. So, *why* do we bow during the *Shemonah Esray*?

While the Rambam does not offer an explanation as to why we bow during *Shemonah Esray*, it is possible to relate these genuflections to two separate concepts: "Submission – הכנעה"

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Laws of Tefilah and Nesi'at Kapa'yim 5:10

How is one to bow? The worshiper bows five times in every [*Amidah*] prayer: At the beginning and at the end of the first blessing; at the beginning and the end of the "thanksgiving" blessing; and when concluding the *Shemonah Esray*. At the conclusion, one bows and takes three steps back. While still bowing, one says "Goodbye," first to one's left and then to one's right, and then raising one's head from bowing. When bowing the first four times, one bows when saying, *Baruch* – ברוך, and resumes the erect posture [when saying God's] name. This rule applies to most people. On the other hand, the high priest bows at the beginning and end of every blessing. The king bows his head at the beginning of the [*Amidah*] and does not raise it until he has finished his prayer.

What is the "thanksgiving" blessing? Is that the last *Berachah* in the *Shemonah Esray*? If not, then why are we bowing there instead of at the beginning and the end of the very last *Berachah*?

We must indicate physically that we submit ourselves to God, that we are the servants standing before the master.

"*Hitbatlut* – התבטלות"  
We bow before God to symbolize that we are really like nothing before him, as if we do not even exist when in His presence.

## B. HOW LOW SHOULD WE BOW?

רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ה, הלכה יב

כל הכריעות האלו צריך שיכרע בהן עד שיתפקקו כל חליות שבשדרה ויעשה עצמו כקשת. ואם שחה מעט וציער עצמו ונראה ככורע בכל כחו אינו חושש.

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Laws of Laws of Tefilah and Nesi'at Kapa'yim 5:12

In all these genuflections, one should bow till all the vertebrae of the spinal column become prominent, and one's body assumes the shape of a bow. If however one bowed slightly and made an effort which caused him pain, and it is evident that one is bowing as low as one can, he need not be apprehensive [as to whether he had fulfilled his duty].

It is interesting to note that the Rambam takes into account infirmities that sometimes prevent a person from functioning according to the letter of the law.

What is the bottom limit for bowing during *Shemonah Esray*? And why shouldn't we bow that low?

שלחן ערוך, אורח חיים, סימן קיג, סעיף ה

ולא ישחה כל כך עד שיהיה פיו כנגד חגור של מכנסים. . . .

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim, 113:5

One should not bend (11) so much that his mouth is opposite the belt of his trousers. . . .

Can you give another reason based on the *Dvar Torah* – "We Are All Centaurs!" – that appears above?

משנה ברורה, שלחן ערוך, אורח חיים, סימן קיג, סעיף ה, סעיף קטן יא

"כל כך." דמיחזי כיוהרא ששוחה יותר משיעור שחיה:

Mishnah Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim, 113:5, note 11

(11) "So much." For this would appear very arrogant, since it involves bowing more than is required.

## C. "SHUCKLING" (SWAYING) DURING SHEMONAH ESRAY

NOTE: The first opinion approves of and recommends that one "Shuckle" (sway) while saying the *Shemonah Esray*.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צה, סעיף ג

This quote from the *Shulchan Aruch* should be familiar. It was discussed previously in connection to the question of what do we do with our hands during *Shemonah Esray*. Here, the quote serves as background to the quote from the *Mishnah Berurah* that follows immediately:

מניח ידו על לבו כפותין, (פירוש כקשורין) הימנית על השמאלית, ועומד כעבד לפני רבו, (ז) באימה, ביראה ובפחד, לא יניח ידיו על חלציו, מפני שהוא דרך יוהרא.

*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 95:3*

He should place clasped (meaning as if they were tied) over the heart, the right over the left. One should stand like a servant before his master, (7) in awe, fear and dread and he should not place his hands on his hips because it is arrogant [posture].

משנה ברורה, שלחן ערוך, אורח חיים, סימן צה, סעיף קטן ז

"באימה." ויש להתנווע בשעת תפלה משום "כל עצמותי תאמרנה ד' מי כמוך." (תהלים לה:י) [פרי חדש בשם כמה פוסקים, וכן הסכים במגן גבורים]:

According to the *Mishnah Berurah*, why is it appropriate to "Shuckle" while praying?

*Mishnah Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim, 95:3, note 7*

"In awe." One can sway during the *Shemonah Esray*, because [it is stated,] "All my bones will say, 'God, who is comparable to You?' " (*Tehilim 35:10*) [*Pri Chadash* quoting several Poskim. *Magen Giborim* also agrees.]

NOTE: The second opinion is that one should not move at all while saying *Shemonah Esray*, except for the halachically mandated genuflections.

רבי ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, חלק ב, ענייני תפילה, עמ' עט, ד"ה ה'ה' נוע

ה': נוע. המתנווע בתפלתו גורם ביטול כוונתו. והעמידה בלי התנוועות כלל עוזר על הכוונה. ומה שאמר, "כל עצמותי תאמרנה" וכו' היינו בשירות ותשבחות וברכות קריאת שמע ותלמוד תורה. אבל לא בתפילה. ואם יש מי שאומר כן גם בתפילה, נראה לי שאין לחוש לדבריו, כי הנסיון מוכיח שהעמידה בלי נענוע בתפילה גורם לכיון הלב. וראה בעיניך הישאל אדם שאלות ממלך בשר ודם וגופו מתנווע כנוע עצי היער מפני הרוח?

Notice that Rav Horwitz speaks rather definitively. There are no "ifs" ands" or "buts," one should definitely not sway during *Shemonah Esray*?

Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horwitz, *Shenay Luchot HaBrit*, vol. 2, "Issues in Prayer," p. 79

5. Movement. One who moves while praying (*Shemonah Esray*) voids his *Kavanah*. Standing

Which words or phrase in the *Mishnah Berurah* teach us that it is not an obligation to "Shuckle"?



When is "Shuckling" appropriate, according to Rav Horwitz?

without any movement assists [in achieving] *Kavanah*. The [verse] that says, "All my bones will say, 'God, who is comparable to You?' " (*Tehilim* 35:10) is applicable to singing [God's] praises, saying *Berachot*, reciting the *Shema*, and while studying Torah, but not during prayer (i.e., *Shemonah Esray*). If there is someone who says it is also applicable to *Shemonah Esray*, it seems to me that we should not pay attention [to what he says], for experience proves that standing without movement during prayer (i.e., *Shemonah Esray*) causes the heart to have *Kavanah*. And look with your own eyes, does someone presenting his petition before an earthly king move like a tree in the forest moves because of the wind?

What are the two proofs used by Rav Horwitz to make his case?

Are you convinced?

*Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Satmar, pp. 118-195. Quoted in Louis Jacobs, Jewish Ethics, Philosophy and Mysticism, "On Prayer," Behrman House: New York, 1969*

According to the Ba'al Shem Tov, there seems to be a hierarchy, stage one and stage two. Can you define the different stages?

Similarly, when a man falls from his lofty stage while praying, he should still say the words with as much concentration as he can muster and he can then try hard to return to his earlier lofty stage. This can happen frequently. At first a man should attach himself to the words themselves and later he can put his soul into the words. At first he should move his body with all his might in order that the soul might shine forth. As the Zohar says, "When an ember in the fire does not burn one must poke it and it will then come alight." After this, he will be able to worship in thought alone without any bodily movements. (Page 161)

According to the Ba'al Shem Tov, why should a person "Shuckle"?

Evidently, the Ba'al Shem Tov agrees that prayer, specifically, *Shemonah Esray*, is soul-work.

It is sometimes possible to pray only with the soul, that is, in thought alone, the body standing still, in order that the body might not become weak through too much effort. It is sometimes possible for a man to pray in love and fear with a heart greatly on fire without any bodily movements, so that it seems to others that he is uttering the words without any attachment to God. It is possible for man to do this if he is greatly attached to God and he is then able to serve God with the soul alone in great and powerful love. This is a superior form of worship and can proceed more speedily and with greater attachment to God than the type of prayer which makes an external impression on the limbs

It seems that the Ba'al Shem Tov views *Tefilah* as a stepping stone to something else. What is that something else?

The "shells" are called *Kelipot* – קליפות in Hebrew. The word refers to the spiritual forces of evil.

of the body. The *shells* have no means of grasping the type of prayer that is only internal. (Page 164)

## moving the lips and making sounds

### רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ה, הלכה ט

השוויית הקול כיצד? לא יגביה קולו בתפלתו, ולא יתפלל בלבו, אלא מחתך הדברים בשפתיו ומשמיע לאזניו בלחש. ולא ישמיע קולו אלא אם כן היה חולה או שאינו יכול לכוין את לבו עד שישמיע קולו הרי זה מותר, ובלבד שלא יהא בציבור כדי שלא תטרף דעתן מקולו.

Once again, we must ask for a definition of *Kavanah*. In the light of these sources, what is *Kavanah*? And why does hearing one's own voice while saying *Shemonah Esray* indicate a lack of *Kavanah*?

Why must a person be careful not to raise their voice during *Shemonah Esray* while praying with a congregation?

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Laws of Tefilah and Nesi'at Kapa'yim 5:9

How should one modulate the voice? The voice should not be raised during prayer nor should one pray in thought alone. Rather, the words should be pronounced with the lips, but softly, audible to the one's ears. One should not permit one's voice to be heard unless one is sick or is unable to have heartfelt *Kavanah* without raising his voice, then it is permissible, so long as one is not [praying] with a congregation so as not to disturb them with his voice.

Here, too, the Halacha makes allowances for people who are in some way or another unable to keep to the letter of the law. However, the *BeDi'eved* – בדיעבד – permission is very limited.

### רבי ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, חלק ב, ענייני תפילה, עמ' עט, ד"ה ה' קול

הו': קול. המנמך קולו מאוד בתפילתו גורם לכוין הלב, והמגביה קולו אינו מכוין. ומה שאמרו שמי שאינו יכול לכוין שמוותר לו להגביה קולו כדי לכוין. דע, כי האיש ההוא כשיגביה קולו יכוין, אבל אינו מתפלל בכוונה. וכך הוא אמיתית הדבר, הנענוע בתפילה והגבהת הקול יעזרו למי שלבו בל עמו, שלא יטעה בתפילתו. אבל אינו מתפלל בכוונה כראוי, אלא שאם לא היה מתנועע ומגביה קולו היה טועה בתפילתו ולא היה יודע היכן הוא. אבל המדבר על לבו כחנה, רק שפתיו נעות וקולו לא ישמע וגופו לא יתנועע.

ובספר הזוהר, פרשת ויגש: מאן דצלי צלותא וקם קמי מאריה, לא איצטרך ליה למשמע קליה בצלותיה. . . ומדאמר, "למשמע קליה", משמע אפילו הוא עצמו לא ישמע קולו.

Why does Rav Horwitz connect the issue of raising one's voice in prayer to moving while praying?

Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horwitz, Shenay Luchot HaBrit, vol. 2, "Issues in Prayer," p. 79

6. Voice. Lowering one's voice very much in one's prayer (i.e., *Shemonah Esray*) causes heartfelt *Kavanah*, while the one who raises his voice has no

According to Rav Horwitz, when is it appropriate to raise one's voice even a little bit during *Shemonah Esray*?

Rav Horwitz proves from the Zohar that one should say *Shemonah Esray* without being able to hear one's voice at all! How can you do that?

It is intriguing to note that rather than explaining the initial quote from the *Gemara*, the Maharal offers us another quote that he does explain. Then why bring the first quote?

*Kavanah*. What they (*Chazal*) said that it is permitted is for one who cannot concentrate to raise his voice to have *Kavanah*. Know that when such a person raises his voice he will concentrate, but will not pray with *Kavanah*. This is the truth of the matter: Movement during prayer and raising the voice assist a person whose heart is not with him so he will not make a mistake in his prayers. However, he is not praying with the appropriate *Kavanah*. Rather, if he did not move and raise his voice he would err while praying and not know where his is [in the prayers]. On the other hand, someone who speaks with his heart like Chana, his lips only move and his voice is not heard and his body does not move.

In the *Zohar, Parashat Va'Yikash*: "Whoever says his prayer (*Shemonah Esray*) and stands before his Master does not have to hear his voice in prayer. . . . And since it says, "to hear his voice," it means that even he himself should not hear his voice.

מהר"ל מפראג, ספר נתיבות עולם א, נתיב העבודה, פרק ב

ובפרק אין עומדין (ברכות ל"א ע"א): אמר רב המנונא: כמה הלכתא גבורתא איכא למשמע מהני קראי דחנה. "וחנה היא מדברת על לבה," מכאן למתפלל שצריך שיכוין. "רק שפתייה נעות," מכאן למתפלל שצריך שיחתוך בשפתיו. "וקולה לא ישמע," מכאן למתפלל שלא ישמע קולו בתפלתו. עד כאן.

הרי כי לא חייבו חכמים רק לחתוך בשפתיו בלבד, הוא הדבור, מן הטעם אשר התבאר למעלה כי התפלה היא לאדם במה שהוא חי מדבר. אבל לא ישמע קולו. ובגמרא תניא: "המשמיע קולו בתפלתו הרי זה מקטני אמנה. המגביה קולו בתפלתו הרי זה מנביאי השקר" (ברכות כד:). ואף כי רש"י ז"ל פירש המשמיע קולו בתפלתו מראה כאלו אין השם יתברך שומע תפלתו כאשר תפלתו הוא בלחש. אבל לפי האמת פירושו כי התפלה הוא שמאמין בו יתברך שיעשה בקשתו. והאמונה בו יתברך הוא דבק במדריגה העליונה הנעלמת. וזהו עיקר האמונה, כי המאמין בו יתברך אמונתו מגיע עד המדרגה הנעלמת. . . . והאמונה השלימה שהוא מתדבק באמונתו יתברך עד המדריגה העליונה הנעלמת. וזה שמשמיע קולו בתפלתו אין מגיע אל המדריגה העליונה הנעלמת, כי המשמיע קול הוא נשמע ונגלה וכל דבר שהוא נגלה אינו דבק במדריגה העליונה, כי העליון הוא נסתר. ודבר זה ידוע למבינים. ולפיכך הוא מקטני אמנה.

והמגביה קולו בתפלתו הוא מנביאי שקר, אשר הם דבקים בכוחות הטומאה אשר אין להם מעלה הנעלמת וההסתר כלל, והם נקראים כוחות חיצונות ולפיכך המגביה קולו בתפלתו שהוא גלוי עוד יותר הוא מנביאי השקר כי הגבהת קול הוא יותר נגלה. ודי בזה למביני מדע:

Who is Chana? And why should we pray like her?

The Maharal opens with a quote from the *Gemara* that partially answers the above question.

It is worthwhile to open up *Shemu'el*, chapter I, and read the story of Chana one more time, this time taking careful note of how the Sages interpret the text.

To describe someone to be of little faith or a false prophet is fair evidence of rather strong disapproval, wouldn't you say?

All that is *Tameh* (ritually unclean) is part of the "outside – *Chitzoni* – חיצוני" earthly, material aspect of the revealed world.

Maharal of Prague, *Netivot Olam, Netiv Ha'Avodah*, ch. 2

In the chapter, *Ayn Omdin* (*Berachot* 31a), Rav Hamnunah said: Many very important *Halachot* can be derived from the verses about Chana. "Chana spoke from her heart" (*Shemu'el* I, 1:13). From here [we learn] that one who prays must have *Kavanah*. "Only her lips moved." From here [we learn] that one who prays must move his lips. "And her voice was not heard." From here [we learn] that one who prays should not have his voice heard while praying. End quote.

The Sages only obligated [us] to move our lips, which is speech, for the reason that was explained above: People pray because they are categorized as living speaking beings. But one should not raise one's voice. In the *Gemara* it is taught: "Whoever raises his voice in his prayer is of little faith. Whoever raises his voice in his prayer is one of the false prophets" (*Berachot* 24b). Even though Rashi explains that the one who raises his voice in his prayers indicates that it is as if God cannot hear his prayers when he whispers them. Nevertheless, the true explanation is that prayer is [based on the idea] that one believes that He will do what we ask of Him. The belief in Him is to be attached to a very elevated level that is hidden. This is one of the principles of faith: The one who believes in Him achieves a hidden level. . . . Complete faith is [achieved] when one attaches oneself to Him through faith to the point of the very elevated, hidden level. The one who raises his voice in his prayer does not achieve this very elevated hidden level, for in raising his voice he is heard [out loud] and is revealed and anything that is revealed is not attached to the very elevated level. The elevated [level] is hidden. This is known to those who understand. That is why he [who raises his voice] is of little faith.

"Whoever raises his voice in his prayer is one of the false prophets," because they (i.e., the false prophets) are attached to the forces of *Tum'ah* (literally, ritual uncleanliness, i.e., evil) that have no elevated state or are not at all hidden. They are called the "outside forces." Thus, one who raises his voice in prayer is even more revealed, [just like] the false prophets; for raising the voice is even

The "science" the Maharal refers to in his closing remarks here is the "science" of Kabbalah. For this reason, the Maharal purposely writes in a way that is difficult to understand.

Prayer has the potential to raise a person spiritually to the point that they encounter God. To do so means to rise to a very high spiritual state or level. As with almost all things spiritual, this Godly level is "hidden" from the earthly, material world. We attach ourselves to this hidden, elevated spiritual level when we pray with great *Kavanah*.

To say the *Shemonah Esray* out loud, even in a whisper, is to remain in the revealed, material world, which prevents us from rising to a hidden, spiritual state so we may encounter God.

more revealed. This is sufficient for those who understand "science."

#### A SUMMARY NOTE

So the lips have to move while we hear nothing, for we cannot raise our voices to the point that the person next to us might hear what we are saying as we recite the *Shemonah Esray*. How do you do that?

The truth is that we all know how to do that. We all know how to sing to ourselves in our heads without uttering a sound. Indeed, the *Shemonah Esray* should be sung. In Kabbalah, song is the highest level of expression. Thus, the best way to say the *Shemonah Esray* is to move the lips, mouthing the words while listening carefully to what we are singing or saying inside our heads. As Rav Horwitz, the author of the *Shenay Luchot HaBrit*, would say: Experience shows that this is indeed a powerful tool for praying with *Kavanah*.

### closing the eyes while praying

Note: The quote from the *Shulchan Aruch* provides the context for the relevant quote from the *Mishnah Berurah* that follows.

How can you fulfill this obligation if you are in a large synagogue where the wall - any wall - can be 10 or 20 feet away?

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צ, סעיף כא

צריך (סג) שלא יהא דבר חוצץ בינו ובין הקיר. ודבר קבוע כגון ארון ותיבה אינם חוצצים.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim, 90:21

[When one prays,] it is required (63) that there should be nothing that stands between himself and the wall. Something permanent, like a cabinet or a chest, is not considered something that stands [between him and the wall].

משנה ברורה, שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צ, סעיף קטן סג

"שלא יהא דבר חוצץ." שנאמר, "ויסב חזקיהו פניו אל הקיר ויתפלל" (ישעיהו לח:ב). ומכל מקום אין זה אלא למצוה מן המובחר. ולית ביה איסורא כשצריך לכך מצד דוחק המקום . . . ומכל מקום יעצים עיניו או יתפלל מתוך הסידור ולא יביט לחוץ כדי שלא יבוא לידי ביטול כונה על ידי דבר החוצץ שלפניו:

How does the *Mishnah Berurah* answer the above question?

Mishnah Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 90, note 63

"There should be nothing that stands between." For it says, "Chizki'yahu turned his face to the wall and prayed" (*Yeshu'yahu* 38:2). Nevertheless, this is

Here, is the point: You should pray with your eyes closed.

only [required] for the best fulfillment of the Mitzvah. There is no prohibition regarding this when there is a very cramped area . . . nevertheless, he should close his eyes or pray from a Siddur, without looking outside [of the Siddur], so that he will not come to destroy his *Kavanah* as a result of the interposing object in front of him.

Notice that praying from the *Siddur* is an *alternative* option to praying with the eyes closed.

NOTE: Here too, the *Shulchan Aruch* provides the context for the relevant quote from the *Mishnah Berurah*.

שלחן ערוך, אורח חיים סימן צא, סעיף ב

We have discussed this Halacha above.

צריך לאזור אזור בשעת התפלה, אפילו יש לו אבנט, שאין לבו רואה את הערוה, (ו) משום "הכּוֹן" (עמוס ד:ב).

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 91:2

One is required to wear a belt while praying, even if he has a waistband (on his pants), because his heart should not "see" his private parts. [This is] (6) because of "Prepare [to meet your God, Yisra'el]" (*Amos* 4:12).

משנה ברורה, שלחן ערוך, אורח חיים סימן צא, סעיף קטן ו

"משום הכּוֹן לקראת וגו'." איתא בזוהר, ואתחנן, מאן דקאים בצלותא בעי לכסויי רישיה ועינוי בגין דלא יסתכל בשכינתא. [והיינו בטלית של מצוה. וכן נוהגין כהיום לכסות ראש עד עינים בטלית מצוה בשעת תפלת י"ח. פרי מגדים] מאן דפקח עינוי בשעת צלותיה מקדים עליה מלאך המוות וכו'.

Can you explain the *Zohar's* statement using the ideas of the Maharal of Prague regarding hidden levels and the revealed, material world?

Mishnah Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 91, note 6

"Because of "Prepare to meet." It is [stated] in the *Zohar, Va'Etchanan*: "One who stands in prayer is required to cover his head and eyes so he will not look at the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence). (That is [he should cover them] with the Mitzvah *Talit*. And this is the custom today, to cover the head up to the eyes with the Mitzvah *Talit* when saying the *Shemonah Esray. Pri Megadim*.) One who opens his eyes during prayer (i.e., *Shemonah Esray*) brings the angel of death upon himself earlier, etc."

Do you pray *Shemonah Esray* with a *Talit*? With a *Talit* over your head?

Note: The quote from the *Shulchan Aruch* provides the context for the relevant quote from the *Mishnah Berurah* that follows.

We will return to this intriguing set of ideas later.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צה, סעיף ב

צריך שיכוף ראשו מעט, שיהיו עיניו (ה) למטה לארץ, ויחשוב כאילו עומד בבית המקדש, ובלבו יכוין למעלה לשמים.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 95:2

One is required to bend his head slightly, so that his eyes are (5) [facing] downwards to the ground. He should think as if he is standing in the *Beit HaMikdash* and direct his thoughts upwards to Heaven.

משנה ברורה, שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צה, סעיף קטן ה

"למטה לארץ." ואותן המגביהים ראשיהם ועיניהם למעלה כמביטים על הגג, המלאכים מלעיגים עליהם [ספר חסידים סימן י"ח]. . . כתבו האחרונים שכל מי שאינו עוצם עיניו בשעת תפילת י"ח אינו זוכה לראות פני שכינה בצאת נפשו, אך אם מתפלל בסידור ועיניו פקוחות כדי לראות בו לית לן בה.

What an odd thing to say, that the angels make fun of someone who prays while looking up. Why do they do that?

Mishnah Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 95, note 5

"Downwards to the ground." Those who lift their heads and eyes upwards as if they are looking at the roof, the angels mock them. [*Sefer Chasidim*, sec. 18] . . . The *Acharonim* write that whoever does not close his eyes when while saying the *Shemonah Esray* will not merit seeing the face of the *Shechinah* when his soul departs. However, if one prays from a *Siddur* and his eyes are open so that he can see [what is written] in it, we do not hold it against him.

According to the *Acharonim*, what is preferable, to pray with the eyes closed or to look into the *Siddur*? On which words in the *Mishnah Berurah* text did you base your answer?

Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Satmar, pp. 118-195. Quoted in Louis Jacobs, Jewish Ethics, Philosophy and Mysticism, "On Prayer," Behrman House: New York, 1969

Again the Ba'al Shem Tov offers us a hierarchy. What is the lower stage? And what is the higher spiritual stage?

When a man is at a low spiritual stage it is better for him to pray from the prayer book when, as a result of seeing the words in print, he will be able to pray with great concentration. But when a man is attached to the world above he is then better

Why is it important to pray with the eyes closed?

advised to close his eyes so that nothing he sees will distract him from his attachment to the world above.

#### A SUMMARY NOTE

The key to praying with one's eyes closed is memorization. It is important to memorize the *Shemonah Esray*. Aside from the practical value of being able to say the *Shemonah Esray* when no *Siddur* is available (when catching a last minute *Minchah* at work, for instance), the ability to say the *Shemonah Esray* with the eyes closed is another powerful tool for enhancing one's *Kavanah*. By the way, the easiest way to memorize the *Shemonah Esray* is by singing the words!

### a final word on coordinating the body during prayer

While prayer in general and the *Shemonah Esray*, in particular, are "soul work" and not a physical activity, it is evident from all of the above sources that the body does have a significant role to play in prayer. What I do with my body during prayer provides part of the necessary environment for *Tefilah*, as well as assists in achieving proper *Kavanah*.

It is also evident from all of the above that the placement of the body, the posture and body language have great meaning. The various parts of the body and how they are placed during prayer are not just symbolic, but actually contribute to the *Tefilah* through the spiritual forces they represent.

In summary, we can now describe the proper posture during *Shemonah Esray*. Once a person takes the three steps backwards and then steps forward to start the *Shemonah Esray*, the feet must be aligned side by side. The right hand is placed over the left hand which it is resting lightly above the heart. The shoulders should be relaxed, softening any arrogant stance in favor of body language indicating submission and subservience. The head should be bowed slightly, with the eyes pointing downward. The eyes should be closed. Now the individual is ready to start the *Shemonah Esray*. After genuflecting, this posture should be maintained throughout the *Shemonah Esray*. It aids one's *Kavanah* to stand as still as possible without moving. At the very end, just before taking the three steps backwards, the head should be lowered and the body bowed slightly. The three steps are taken back. Then the body is bowed first to the left (God's right), then to the left, and finally straight ahead. The proper upright posture for the *Shemonah Esray* is resumed. The final *Yehi Ratzon* – יהי רצון – is said. Three steps are taken forward just before the *Chazzan* begins *Kedushah*.

The conscious attempt to assume this posture and body language sets the stage for a deeper, more heartfelt *Kavanah*, and a more vital *Tefilah* experience.



### III. Having the Proper *Kavanah*

Kavanah is not simply defined. It is a complex idea and there are many factors that contribute to proper *Kavanah*. This section explores many of those factors.

#### SOBRIETY DURING PRAYER

NOTE: The following three Halachot have a common theme, i.e. sobriety during the saying of the Shemonah Esray.

##### רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ד

יז. שכור אל יתפלל מפני שאין לו כוונה. ואם התפלל תפלתו תועבה. לפיכך חוזר ומתפלל כשיתרוקן משכרותו. שתוי אל יתפלל. ואם התפלל תפלתו תפלה. אי זה שכור? זה שאינו יכול לדבר לפני המלך. שתוי יכול לדבר בפני המלך ואינו משתבש. אף על פי כן הואיל ושתה רביעית יין לא יתפלל עד שיסיר יינו מעליו.

יח. וכן אין עומדין להתפלל לא מתוך שחוק, ולא מתוך קלות ראש, ולא מתוך שיחה, ולא מתוך מריבה, ולא מתוך כעס. אלא מתוך דברי תורה, ולא מתוך דין והלכה אף על פי שהם דברי תורה, כדי שלא יהא לבו טרוד בהלכה. אלא מתוך דברי תורה שאין בה עיון, כגון הלכות פסוקות.

יט. . . . היה מהלך במקום סכנה, כגון מקום גדודי חיות ולסטים, והגיע זמן תפלה מתפלל ברכה אחת, וזו היא: "צרכי עמך ישראל מרובים ודעתם קצרה. יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו שתתן לכל אחד ואחד כדי פרנסתו, ולכל גויה וגויה די מחסורה, והטוב בעיניך עשה. ברוך אתה ה' שומע תפלה." ומתפלל אותה בדרך כשהוא מהלך. ואם יכול לעמוד, עומד. וכשהוא מגיע לשוב ותתקורר דעתו חוזר ומתפלל תפלה כתקנתה, תשעה עשר ברכות.

Where would one find the halכות פסוקות? Is that an appropriate way to prepare to pray?

##### Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Laws of Tefilah and Nesi'ut Kapa'yim ch. 4

What is the difference between someone who is intoxicated and someone who just had something intoxicating to drink? What criteria does the Rambam use? Why?

17. An intoxicated person must not pray, because he cannot have *Kavanah*. If he prays, his prayer is an abomination. He must therefore pray again after he has recovered his intoxication. A person who has had something intoxicating to drink should not pray. If he prays, his prayer is regarded as prayer. What is an intoxicated person? He is one who is unable to speak in the presence of a king. A person who has had something intoxicating to drink is able to speak before the king without error.

- Nevertheless, if one drank a *Revi'it* of wine, one is not to pray until he is rid of the effect of the wine.
- Why should a person refrain from saying *Shemonah Esray* after doing any of the things on the Rambam's list? Are these bad things to do? If not, then why not pray after engaging in one of these things?
18. So too, one should not stand up to pray (*Shemonah Esray*) after indulging in laughter, frivolity, idle talk, quarrelling or outburst of anger. Rather, only after the study of Torah, and not of legal discussions so as not to be distracted and think about the Halacha [while praying], even though this is Torah study. Instead [he should pray] only after the study of Torah that does not require profound reflection, for instance, established *Halachot*.
- When was the last time you were out in the jungle filled with wild beasts and had to say *Shemonah Esray*?
19. . . . If a person is traveling in a dangerous place, for example, where there are wild beasts or robbers, he should recite one blessing as follows: "The needs of Israel, Your people, are many, and their concentration is short. May it be Your will, God, our Lord, to give every one enough for his maintenance and provide every creature with it requirements. Do what is good in Your eyes. Blessed are You, God, who hears the prayer." He recites this prayer, walking. If he is able to stand in one place, he should do so. When he arrives in a populated area and his mind is calm, he should repeat the *Shemonah Esray* properly.
- How much is a *Revi'it* of wine? Is a *Revi'it* of wine intoxicating? Have you ever had a *Revi'it* of wine? When?
- Why is it inappropriate to think about Torah ideas when praying?
- What is the point of this Halacha? And how does it connect with the previous *Halachot*?

#### A SUMMARY NOTE

As is evident from these three *Halachot*, sobriety is more than not being intoxicated. In this context, sobriety implies clarity of mind, uninvolved in other thoughts, issues or actions that have nothing to do with prayer. It is necessary to clear one's mind before praying, thus allowing one's conscious mind to concentrate fully on the prayers. *Tefilah* is a serious business and it therefore requires mental readiness along with physical preparation.

### a torah lifestyle as preparation for prayer

רבי ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, חלק ב, עניני תפילה, עמ' עט, ד"ה מצאתי

מצאתי כתוב בספר דרך חיים, דף ס"ו, וזה לשונו: "יש עוד י' דברים שעוזרים על הכוונה והפכם גורמים בטולה. ואלו הן: תורה. חידוש. צורך. לשון. נוע. קול. הכנה. נכנס. שכן. זמן." והנני מבאר אחד לאחד.

הראשון, והוא הגורם הגדול שבכולם, תורה. דע כי כשירבה האדם העסק בתורה ובמצוות, הנה בסבת זה

ובאמצעותו יקרב אל האלקים ויתדבק אליו ותהיה יראתו ואהבתו תקועה בלבו. ואז כשיקום להתפלל לא יקשה עליו כלל להתחנן ולכוין לבו. אבל יקל עליו מאד, כי תכף ומיד ימצא השם יתברך במחשבתו, כיון שהוא מוכן לכך.

Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horwitz, Shenay Luchot HaBrit,  
vol. 2, "Issues in Prayer," p. 79

I found [the following] written in the book, *Derech Cha'yim*, page 66, and here is what it says: "There are another 10 things that assist *Kavanah*, while their opposites cause the voiding [of *Kavanah*]. They are: Torah, something new, need, language, movement, voice, preparation, the neighbors, and time." Now I will explain them one at a time.

The first, which is the greatest cause of all, is Torah. Know that when a person is greatly involved in Torah and *Mitzvot*, that is the reason and means whereby one comes close to God and attaches oneself to Him (*Devaykut* – דביקות), the love for and fear of Him becoming established firmly in one's heart. Then, when a person rises to pray it is not at all difficult to petition Him and have heartfelt *Kavanah*. Rather, it is very easy, for immediately one will find God in one's thoughts, since one is prepared for this.

So why is a life of Torah and *Mitzvot* the best preparation for praying? What reason does Rav Horwitz give? Can you offer a couple more reasons of your own?

What are the four things that result from a life of Torah and *Mitzvot* that Rav Horwitz lists?

How is your *Kavanah* in prayer affected by a Torah and *Mitzvot* lifestyle?

## in which language should I address God

רבי ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, חלק ב, ענייני תפילה, עמ' עט, ד"ה הד' לשון

הד'. לשון. כשיתפלל אדם בלשון שרגיל בו, רצוני לומר שמשתמש בו כל יום לכל צרכיו, יקל עליו לכוין. וכשמתפלל בלשון אחר, אף על פי שיבין מה שיאמר, לא יקל עליו כל כך. הלא תראה בט' באב, אפילו המבינים היטב בלשון הקודש מתפעלים יותר בקינה אחת בלע"ז. לפעמים שאומר אותה יותר מעשרה בלשון הקודש. ולכן מי שיוכל להרגיל עצמו לדבר בלשון הקודש עם ריעיו יעשה וישכיל עשו.

Read Rav Horwitz's statement very carefully. You thought he was going to suggest that you pray in your mother-tongue (English). So, what language does he actually suggest for prayer?

Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horwitz, Shenay Luchot HaBrit,  
vol. 2, "Issues in Prayer," p. 79

4. Language. When a person prays in a language that he is used to, I mean [the language] one uses every day for all one's needs, it is easy to have *Kavanah*. And when one prays in a different language, even though one understands what he is saying, it is not as easy [to have *Kavanah*]. Take

Is it permitted to pray in another language other than Hebrew?  
What portions of the prayers *must* be said in Hebrew?

Tisha B'Av as an example. Even those who understand Hebrew well are moved more by one *Kinah* in a language other than Hebrew. Sometime, they say it more often than ten [*Kinot*] in Hebrew. Therefore, whoever can should practice speaking Hebrew with his friends. He should do so and be wiser for it.

What does the Hebrew version of the prayers have that is missing in any translation of the Hebrew?

## how quickly should I pray?

### A. TAKING ONE'S TIME TO SAY SHEMONAH ESRAY

רבי ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, חלק ב, ענייני תפילה, עמ' עט, ד"ה הי' זמן

הי' זמן. כשישהא אדם בתפילתו שיעור לא מעט מהזמן כדי שיוכל לומר שאלה שאלה לבדה לאט, יוכל לכוין. אך כשלא יהיה לו זמן כשיעור הזה או שהוא אינו מדבר במתון, אלא בחפזון, לא יוכל לכוין. ואי לאו דמסתפינא הייתי אומר שהשיעור מהזמן ששוהין בתפילת הציבור בזמנינו אינו מספיק לשיוכל איש לכוין, והלואי שישפיק לומר מלות התפילה ולקרונה קריאה שלמה.

Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horwitz, *Shenay Luchot HaBrit*, vol. 2, "Issues in Prayer," p. 79

What is considered a moderate or proper speed for saying the prayers in general and the *Shemonah Esey*, in particular?

How can you tell if you are praying too fast?

10. Time. When a person takes the time to say each *Berachah* [of *Shemonah Esey*] slowly then he can have *Kavanah*. However, if he does not take the time or does not say [the prayer] at a moderate speed, but in haste, he cannot have *Kavanah*. If I were not afraid, I would say that nowadays the amount of time it takes the congregation to pray is not enough to allow a person to have *Kavanah*, let alone to say all of the words and to say the prayers properly.

### B. LENGTHENING THE SHEMONAH ESRAY AND THE ISSUE OF IYUN TEFILAH

NOTE: In several places, the *Gemara* combines the issue of lengthening one's saying of the *Shemonah Esey* with the problem of *Iyun Tefilah*. As we shall see, the interpretation of *Iyun Tefilah* determines how we are to understand what the *Gemara* is saying about lengthening one's saying of the *Shemonah Esey*.

At this point a few words about Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horwitz, the holy *Shelah*, are in order. Rabbi Hrowitz lived from the mid 1500's until 1630. He was born in Prague and served as a Rabbi and Rabbinical judge in various cities in Poland and Germany, as well as his hometown. He spent the last years of his life living in *Eretz Yisra'el*. He was buried in Tiberias, not far from the grave of the Rambam. His magnum opus is the monumental work, *Shenay Luchot HaBrit*, the first letters of title forming the word, *Shelah*, which became Rabbi Horwitz's nickname.

Even after almost 400 years, some things do not change. 400 years ago, Rabbi Horwitz complained about how fast the *Minyan* in *Shul* prayed!

בבא בתרא דף קסד:

אמר רב עמרם אמר רב, "שלש עבירות אין אדם ניצול מהן בכל יום: הרהור עבירה, ועיון תפלה, ולשון הרע."

Baba Batra 164b

The question is what exactly is *Iyun Tefilah*? The answer is not a simple one.

Rav Amram quoted Rav saying, "There are three sins that no person is free of every day: The thought of sin, *Iyun Tefilah*, and gossip (*Lashon HaRa*)."

רשב"ם, בבא בתרא דף קסד:

"עיון תפלה." יש מפרשין שלאחר שהתפלל דן בלבו שישלם לו הקב"ה שכרו ויעשה הקב"ה צרכיו וישמע תפלתו לפי שהתפלל בכוונה.

The *יש מפרשים* the Rashbam is referring to is his grandfather, Rashi. See below.

Rashbam, Baba Batra 164b

"*Iyun Tefilah*." There are those who explain that after praying, a person secretly concludes that God will pay him a reward, fulfill his needs and hear his prayers because he prayed with *Kavanah*.

Why does a person expect that his prayers will be answered positively? Because he prayed with *Kavanah*? But how does he know that he prayed with *Kavanah*?

תוספות, בבא בתרא דף קסד:

עיון תפלה. הוא רע כשמהרהר בתפלתו, כדאמרינן בברכות (דף נה.), "המעין בתפלתו בא לידי כאב לב." כדאמרינן התם, "אלו דברים המזכירים עונותיו של אדם: קיר נטוי ועיון תפלה." והשתא הוי דומיא דהרהור עבירה ולשון הרע שאינו מצוה.

אבל אינו נראה. דלמה אינו ניצול בכל יום? הרבה בני אדם אינם מצפים מתי יבא תפלתם, שאינם מכוונים כל כך שיצפו תפלתם. ונראה לרבי דעיון תפלה שהוא רע שאינם מכוונים תפלתם, כדאמרינן, (שבת קכז.) באלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהם כו', "ועיון תפלה." ומזה אין אדם ניצול בכל יום, שאין שום אדם יכול לכונן בתפלתו היטב? והכי אמר בירושלמי (ברכות פרק היה קורא הלכה י) אמר ר' מתניה, "מחזקנא טיבותא לרישא דכי מטי למודים כרע מגרמיה."

Tosafot, Baba Batra 164b

"*Iyun Tefilah*." This person is bad because he has thought about his *Tefilah*, as it says in *Berachot* (55a), "One who looks closely at his *Tefilah* ( *המעין* ) (*בתפלתו*) experiences heartfelt pain," as it says there, "These are the things that remind [God] of a person's sins: A slanting wall, and *Iyun Tefilah*." Thus, it (*Iyun Tefilah*) is similar to the thought of sin and gossip (*Lashon HaRa*) that are certainly not a *Mitzvah*.

How do a slanting or leaning wall and *Iyun Tefilah* remind God of one's sins? How is walking next to a wall that is about to fall over similar to *Iyun Tefilah*? The answer is false expectations. If you expect God to save you then He will check your record to see if you deserve to be saved!

Why does Tosafot reject Rashbam's interpretation of *Iyun Tefilah*?

So what is *Iyun Tefilah*?

The *Penay Moshe* adds to Rav Matanyah's statement: "Because I was busy thinking about Torah." Ok, so Rav Matanyah was thinking about Torah, not a bad thing in and of itself, while praying and his body continued to pray by itself. So Tosafot, what's the point?

However, this does not seem right. Why is a person not free of this every day? Many people are not waiting for their prayers [to be answered positively] because [they realize] they did not have *Kavanah* to the point that they should expect their prayers [to be answered]. It seems to "Rabbi" that *Iyun Tefilah* is bad simply because they did not pray with *Kavanah*, as they said (*Shabbat* 127a) regarding those things that a person reaps the dividends in this world [while the principal is saved for the World to Come], "and *Iyun Tefilah*." And this is something that a person cannot be free of every day, for no one can have proper *Kavanah* in prayer? And this is what it says in the *Yerushalmi* (*Berachot* chapter *Hayah Koray*, Halacha 4), "Rav Matanyah said, 'I compliment myself, for when I arrived at *Modim* (מודים), my body bowed all by itself.' "

Why does Tosafot quote the *Gemara* in *Shabbat* that seems to indicate that *Iyun Tefilah* is a good thing?

The Ramban does the same and explains why. Read on!

#### חידושי הרמב"ן, בבא בתרא דף קסד:

ועיון תפילה. יש מפרשים אימתי תבא תפילתו, כי היא דאמרין (ברכות נ"ה א'), "תוחלת ממושכה מחלה לב" זה עיון תפלה, וכדאמרין, שלשה דברים מזכירין עונותיו של אדם. הרב ר' שמואל ז"ל: ואינו מחוור, שכמה בני אדם ניצולין מזה כל הימים, והיאך אמרו אין אדם ניצול מהם בכל יום? ועוד שאין זו עבירה, אע"פ שמזכרת עונות. אלא הכי פירושא, שמתפלל ואינו מעיין בתפלתו ומתכוין בה, וכל המתפלל בלא כונה עבירה היא בידו, ודאמרין בפ' מפנין (קכ"ז א') שלשה דברים אדם אוכל פירותיהן בעולם הזה והקורן קיימת לו לעולם הבא. . . עיון תפלה. היינו נמי שמעיין ומתכוין בתפלתו. וכדאמרין נמי בפ' כל כתבי הקודש (ק"ח ב') תיתי לי דקיימת עיון תפלה. והיינו שאין אחד מאלף נצול מעבירה זו בכל יום שאינם מעיינים בתפלה. ובירושלמי במסכת ברכות: א"ר חייא, "רובה מן יומי לא כוונת אלא חד זמן אתי למיכוונה והרהרית בלבי ואמרית מאן עאל לקמי מלכא קדמי ארקביניה או ריש גלותא." שמואל אמר, "אנא מנית אפרוחיא." ר' בון בר' חייא אמר, "אנא מנית דמוסא." א"ר מתניה, "אנא מחזיק טיבו לרישי כד מטי מודים כרע מן גרמיה." אלמא, בכיוצא בזה אמרו אין אדם נצול מעיון תפלה ואפילו חסידים.

#### Ramban, Baba Batra 164b

"*Iyun Tefilah*." Some explain [this to mean,] "When will my prayers be answered?" as it says, (*Berachot* 55a) "Hope deferred sickens the heart" (*Mishlay* 13:12) is *Iyun Tefilah*, as they said: Three things remind [God] about a person's sins. The Rabbi, Rav Shmu'el, of blessed memory [said,] this is not clear, for many people are [indeed] free of this every day, so how could they say that no one is free of this

The Ramban seems to be repeating what Tosafot said. Is he? What does he add to Tosafot's question?

Does Ramban define *Iyun Tefilah* the same way Tosafot does?

Notice that Ramban also quotes the *Gemara* in *Shabbat* and actually explains its relevance to the discussion.

Notice that the Ramban also quotes the *Yerushalmi*. However, he makes his point clearly. Even greatly pious people have trouble concentrating on their prayers!

every day? And furthermore, this is no sin, even though it might remind [God] of one's sins.

Rather, this is the explanation: People pray without *Iyun Tefilah* and have *Kavanah*. And whoever prays without *Kavanah* commits a sin. And what they said in the chapter *Mefanin* (*Shabbat* 127a): There are three things that a person receives the dividends in This World while the principal is saved for the World to Come ... *Iyun Tefilah*. This means that one looks carefully (שמעיין) [at his prayers] and has *Kavanah* while praying. As it says as well in the chapter *Kol Kitvoay* (ibid. 118b): I [have reward] coming to me because I fulfilled *Iyun Tefilah*. Thus, there is not one person in a thousand that is free of this sin every day if they do not have *Iyun Tefilah* (meaning *Kavanah*). And in the *Yerushalmi*, *Berachot*: Rav Chiyah said, "Most of my life I had no *Kavanah*, except for once when I had *Kavanah* and thought in my heart and said when will I enter before the King, before a nobleman or before the Exilarch." Shmu'el said, "I counted chicks." Rav Bon son of Rav Chi'yah said, "I counted the rows [of stone] on a building." Rav Matanyah said, "I compliment myself, for when I arrived at *Modim* – מודים, my body bowed by itself." We see that this is what they meant that no one is free of *Iyun Tefilah*, even very pious people.

According to the Ramban, how many kinds of *Iyun Tefilah* are there?

And how would he define each one?

NOTE: Up to this point, the sources deal with *Iyun Tefilah*. The following quotations combine the issues of lengthening one's prayers and *Iyun Tefilah*.

### ברכות דף לב:

We have divided the quotation from *Gemara Berachot* into three paragraphs so you will not lose the train of thought here. There is a statement, followed by a lengthy question, which is then answered in the last paragraph.

אמר רבי חנין אמר רבי חנינא: כל המאריך בתפלתו אין תפלתו חוזרת ריקם. מנא לן? ממשה רבינו שנאמר, (דברים ט:כו) "ואתפלל אל ה'", וכתוב בתריה, "וישמע ה' אלי גם בפעם ההיא."

איני? והא אמר רבי חייא בר אבא אמר רבי יוחנן: כל המאריך בתפלתו ומעיין בה, סוף בא לידי כאב לב, שנאמר: (משלי יג:יב) "תוחלת ממשכה מחלה לב." מאי תקנתיה? יעסוק בתורה, שנאמר (משלי יג:יב) "ועץ חיים תאוה באה." ואין עץ חיים אלא תורה, שנאמר, (משלי ג:יח) "עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה."

לא קשיא, הא דמאריך ומעיין בה, הא דמאריך ולא מעיין בה. אמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא: אם ראה אדם שהתפלל ולא נענה יחזור ויתפלל, שנאמר, (תהלים כז:יד) "קוה אל ה' חזק ויאמץ לבך וקוה אל ה'."

Berachot 32b

What does Rabbi Chanin mean when he says, "his prayers do not return empty"?

Cut through all the quotes and summarize the *Gemara's* question in one sentence!

How would Tosafot and Ramban explain the final answer of the *Gemara*?

Rabbi Chanin quoted Rabbi Chaninah: Whoever lengthens his *Tefilah*, his prayers do not return empty. How do we know [this]? From Moshe *Rabbenu*, as it says, (*Devarim* 9: 26) "I prayed to God," and it says afterwards, "God heard me this time as well."

Is it so? Didn't Rabbi Chi'yah bar Abba quote Rabbi Yochanan saying: Whoever lengthens his *Tefilah* and looks closely at it (ומעיין בה) will in the end come to heartfelt pain, as it says, "Hope deferred sickens the heart" (*Mishlay* 13:12). What is the solution [to the pain]? Learn Torah, as it says, (*ibid.*) "But desire realized is a tree of life." The tree of life is Torah, as it says, (*ibid.* 3:18) "It is a tree of life for those who hold on to it."

It is not a question. This refers to one who lengthens [his prayers] and looks closely at it (ומעיין בה), and this refers to one who lengthens [his prayers] and does *not* look closely at it (ולא מעיין בה). Rabbi Chamah quotes Rabbi Chaninah saying: If a person sees that he prays and is not answered, he should go and pray again, as it says, (*Tehilim* 27:14) "Place your hope in God; be strong! He will strengthen your heart, and place your hope in God."

רש"י, ברכות דף לב:

"ומעיין בה." מצפה שתעשה בקשתו על ידי הארכתו, סוף שאינה נעשית ונמצאת תוחלת ממושכת חנם, והיא כאב לב כשאדם מצפה ואין תאותו באה.

Rashi, Berachot 32b

"Looks closely at it (ומעיין בה)." He expects that He (God) will fulfill his request because he lengthened [his prayers]. In the end it does not happen because "Hope deferred sickens the heart." This is the heartfelt pain [that a person feels] when he expects [to be answered] but his desire does not materialize.

Why does *Jyun Tefilah* lead to "heartfelt pain"? See Rashi below who answers this question.

Notice that our Sages refuse to leave someone in the lurch. True, it is not good to expect God to answer your prayers, but if you did and He does not answer, then what do you do? There is always hope! Pray again and again for the same thing!

A SUMMARY NOTE

If you read the sources carefully, then you certainly realize that there is a distinct argument between Rashi and Rashbam on one side against Tosafot and Ramban on the other side. Their disagreement exists on two levels. The first level is the definition of *Jyun Tefilah*. The second level is the correct interpretation of the sources.



According to Rashi and Rashbam, to engage in *Iyun Tefilah* is wrong because a person makes a gross theological error. Just because one is good – in this case, because one takes extra time to say the *Shemonah Esray* carefully – does not mean that one will automatically receive that which one is asking from God. We do not live in a world of reward and punishment. Rather, we live in a world of free choice. If we received a reward or a positive answer to our prayers every time we are good, then there would be no free choice. Why do evil, when doing good brings with it immediate reward?

This interpretation is substantiated by the *Gemara* text, especially the quote from *Berachot* 32b. Up to the last statement by Rabbi Chamah quoting Rabbi Chaninah, the *Gemara* could be interpreted easily according to the definition of Tosafot and Ramban. However, the statement by Rabbi Chamah quoting Rabbi Chaninah can only be understood if *Iyun Tefilah* means the expectation of a positive answer to one's prayers.

Ramban and Tosafot define *Iyun Tefilah* as lack of *Kavanah*. They point to the *Yerushalmi Berachot* as proof that even great Sages admit to not having proper *Kavanah* while they prayed. Proper *Kavanah* is hard to come by, even if a person lengthens one's *Shemonah Esray*. Even that does not guarantee real, deep *Kavanah*.

And despite Rashi and Rashbam's quote from the end of the *Sugya* in *Berachot*, the other *Gemarot* do not support their explanation. Since when is it a sin to have such false expectations? And how can the *Gemara* say that everyone has these false expectations every day? And what does the *Gemara* in *Shabbat* mean when it says that *Iyun Tefilah* is such a good thing that one reaps the benefits in This World while saving the principal merit for the World to Come?

Would you care to decide which side is correct conceptually and which side interprets the *Gemarot* correctly? It is alright if you decide not to decide. However, we do see one thing clearly: Whatever *Iyun Tefilah* is, lengthening one's saying of *Shemonah Esray* does not automatically mean that one has prayed in a better manner. Rather, lengthening the saying of *Shemonah Esray* is a tool. If it assists one to achieve greater *Kavanah* then it is certainly the proper thing to do.

How do you lengthen the saying of the *Shemonah Esray*? The Maharal of Prague says definitely not by saying the words very slowly. The words of the *Shemonah Esray* are not like taffy, they are not meant to be stretched out. Rather, if one pours one's heart into the saying of the words, sings them with great joy and pronounces them clearly and carefully, one's *Shemonah Esray* will be longer than those who do not do this. In this way, the lengthening of *Shemonah Esray* becomes another tool for achieving *Kavanah*.

## saying the words clearly

הרב ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, ירושלים, תשנ"ג,  
כרך ה, עמוד שיט, "עשרה הלולים" ד.ה. ישמע חכם

וכל היוצא מפיק יהיה בשפה ברורה, כי חס ושלום באות אחת תוכל להחריב את העולם, על כן ראה שלא תבוא לידי טעות, ודקדק בכל תיבה ותיבה, ונענע שפתיך להדגיש הדיבור שלא תטעה, כאילו אתה מונה מעות.

Rav Yesha'yahu Horwitz, *Shenay Luchot HaBrit, Asarah Hilulim*, s.v. ישמע חכם, translation from Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Ethics, Philosophy & Mysticism*, Behrman House: New York, p. 147

Rav Horwitz has a decidedly Kabbalistic point of view. Despite the hyperbole, it is very important to say all the words of the *Tefilah* carefully.

Let all the words of prayer emerge with clarity from your mouth for, God forbid, you can destroy the world by means of [a mistake in] one letter. See therefore that you make no mistakes and take care over every word. Let your words express the words distinctly so that you commit no errors, as if you were counting coins.

## mental preparation for prayer

רבי ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, חלק ב, ענייני תפילה, עמ' עט, ד"ה הז' הכנה

הז' הכנה. שיעשה הכנה ללבו לכוין. וכיצד מכינים את הלב? קודם שיקום להתפלל, ישב מעט בטל ודומם, ויסיר מחשבותיו מלבו ויתחיל לחשוב בגדולת מי שאמר והיה העולם ובנפלאותיו וגבורותיו וחסדיו אשר עשה לעמו. ויחשוב בטובות ובחסדים שגמלו הגומל לחייבים טובות. . . ויחשוב שעתה הוא רוצה לקום אל המלך להתחנן לו ולבקש מלפניו שאלותיו ובקשותיו. . . . ואחר כל זה יקום ויתפלל. וזה שאמרו חז"ל: אין עומדים להתפלל אלא מתוך כובד ראש. חסידים הראשונים היו שוהים שעה אחת ומתפללים כדי שיכוננו את לבם לאביהם שבשמים.

How literally should we take the phrase "an hour – שעה אחת –"?

According to Rav Horwitz, what must we do to put ourselves into the proper frame of mind for prayer?

Do you think about these things before saying *Shemonah Esray*? Do you pay attention to what you say in *Pesukay D'Zimrah* – פסוקי דזמרה? Could the purpose of *Pesukay D'Zimrah* – פסוקי דזמרה be what Rav Horwitz is talking about?

Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horwitz, *Shenay Luchot HaBrit*, vol. 2, "Issues in Prayer," p. 79

7. Preparation. One should prepare one's heart for [prayer] with *Kavanah*. How do you prepare the heart? Before standing to pray, sit quietly, do nothing, for a short while. Remove all other thoughts from your heart. Begin to think about the greatness of the Creator, his wonders and great feats and kindnesses that He performed for His people. Think about the goodness and kindness that He, who does goodness for those who deserve it, did for you. . . . Think that now you wish to stand before the King, to petition Him and to ask of Him all that you desire and request. . . . Afterwards, stand and pray [*Shemonah Esray*]. This is what our Sages said, "Only stand for *Tefilah* with seriousness." The first pious ones would wait an hour before praying so they could direct their hearts to their Father in heaven.

What are Rav Horwitz's sources for his idea?

A SUMMARY NOTE: Ask any athlete involved in serious competition how he or she prepares mentally for the race during the moments before it begins. This is what Rav Horwitz is talking about. It is also recommended to try some of the athlete's methods for mental preparation as well!

## pray with chutzpah!

How would you translate *Azut* – עזות into English if not as *Chutzpah*?

Take note: Rav Nachman of Bratzlav was a particularly intense person.

The greater your estimate of God's power and greatness, the smaller you are going to feel in comparison. And the smaller you feel standing before God, the more difficult it is to speak to him. So, chin up! Have the *Chutzpah* to say what you feel!

### ליקוטי מוהר"ן מהדורא קמא סימן ל אות ח

כי גם התפלה היא על ידי עזות, כי אי אפשר לעמד להתפלל לפני השם יתברך כי אם על ידי עזות. כי כל אחד לפום מה דמשער בלביה את גדולת הבורא יתברך שמו, כמו שכתוב (משלי לא:כג): "נודע בשערים בעלה," כל חד לפום מה דמשער בלביה (זהר וירא ק"ג:ג). וכל אחד לפי ערכו שמשער בלבו את גדולת הבורא יתברך שמו, איך אפשר לו לעמד ולהתפלל לפניו? ובפרט התפלה שהיא פלאות, דהיינו שדוד המערכות. שהמערכות מחייבין כך, וכל כוכב ומזל קבוע על משמרתו ומערכה שלו, כפי מה שסדרם הבורא יתברך שמו, שיהיו קבועים ומסודרים כך וכך, והוא בא בתפלתו ורוצה לסלק המערכות ולעשות פלאות. על כן בשעת התפלה צריך לסלק את הבושה, כמו שכתוב (תהלים כ"ב): "בך בטחו אבותינו וכו' בטחו ולא בושו". כי על ידי הבושה שמתבייש מאתו יתברך, אי אפשר להתפלל, כי אם על ידי עזות כנאמר לעיל:

### Rav Nachman of Bratzlav, *Likutay Moharan*, *Mahadurah Kama*, sec. 30, letter ח

For *Tefilah* as well must be with *Chutzpah* (*Azut* – עזות). Indeed, it is impossible to stand before God without *Chutzpah*, which [depends upon] how each person assesses in his heart the Creator's greatness, as it is written, (*Mishlay* 31:23) "Her husband is known in the gateways" each person according to what they estimate in their heart (*Zohar*, *Va'Yayra* 103b). And as each person estimates in his heart the greatness of the Creator, [then asks himself] how can he stand and pray before Him, especially since *Tefilah* is wondrous and the "robbing of the systems"? All the systems and processes of nature are set. Every star and constellation is fixed in its path [in the sky], just as the Creator fixed them to be set and ordered in such and such a manner. Then he comes along with his *Tefilah* and wishes to push all of these systems and processes aside and do wonders! Therefore, during prayer one must remove all embarrassment, as is written, (*Tehilim* 22:5-6) "Our forefather trusted in You, . . . trusted without shame." Indeed, it is impossible to pray when embarrassed before Him, rather [one must pray] with *Chutzpah*, as we said above.

Is the word, *Azut* – עזות, related to the word, *Oz* – עוז, strength? If so, then what is Rav Nachman talking about?

So what exactly is שידוד - מערכות - the "robbing of the systems"? How does Rav Nachman answer this question?

## praying with total sincerity (אמת)

ליקוטי מוהר"ן מהדורא קמא סימן קיב

והעקר, שבתפלתו ותחנתו ובקשתו, אף על פי שאי אפשר לו לדבר שום דבור בתפלה ותחנונים מגודל החשך והבלבול המסבב אותו מאד מאד מכל צד, אף על פי כן, על כל פנים יראה לדבר הדבור באמת, באיזה מדרגה נמוכה שהוא. כגון למשל, שיאמר: "ה' הושיעה", באמת. אף על פי שאינו יכול לדבר בהתלהבות והתעוררות כראוי, אף על פי כן יאמר הדבור באמת, כפי מה שהוא. ועל ידי הדבור האמת, יזכה לראות הפתחים שבתוך החשך, ועל ידי זה יזכה לצאת מחשך לאור, ולהתפלל כראוי, וכנאמר לעיל.

Rav Nachman of Bratzlav was a particularly intense person. His view of life was highly emotional and spiritual. Thus, he saw life as full of great darkness and confusion that surrounded him totally on every side. From that perspective, it was indeed difficult to talk to God.

Is your life similar? Is it full of great darkness and confusion? Hopefully not. But can you see why it might be difficult to pray?

Rav Nachman of Bratzlav, *Likutay Moharan, Mahadurah Kama*, sec. 112

The essence is that his *Tefilah*, his petition and his request, even though it is impossible for him to say anything in prayer and petition because of the great darkness and confusion that surrounds him totally on every side, nevertheless, even so, he should see that he speaks with total sincerity (אמת), no matter how low a level he is on. For instance, he should say, "God saves – ה' הושיעה" with total sincerity. Even if he cannot speak with proper enthusiasm (*Hitlahavut* – התלהבות) or with spiritual arousal (*Hitorerut* – התעוררות), even so, he must speak with total sincerity (אמת) as best he can. By speaking with total sincerity (אמת) he will merit to see the exits from the darkness, thereby meriting to exit from the darkness into the light and to pray properly, as said above.

No matter how one feels, one's *Kavanah* can only be helped by finding at least one statement in the *Tefilah* and saying it with complete sincerity regarding its meaning and its truth.

## praying with love (אהבה) and awe (יראה)

*Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Satmar*, pp. 118-195. Quoted in Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Ethics, Philosophy and Mysticism*, "On Prayer," Behrman House: New York, 1969, pp. 162-163

Since *Kavanah* is greatly dependent upon one's emotional state, prayer requires one to be very in touch with one's emotions.

A man may offer his prayers in a miserable frame of mind because his melancholia has gotten the better of him and he imagines that he is praying in a state of great fear of God. Similarly, a man may imagine that he is praying in a state of great love of

Can you accurately judge your emotional state? Can you tell if you are feeling true love for God or something else?

Why is fear (awe – יראה) the gateway to God? To God's love?

Why should prayer with joy be more acceptable to God than prayer expressed out of pain or sadness?  
How do you pray in joy while experiencing great pain or sadness?

God and it is only really due to the fact that he feels sanguine (cheerful) at the time. However, if a man is in the state of loving God and, as a result, shame falls upon him and he desires to glorify God and to control his passions for God's sake, then it is good. For only the man who worships in fear and love is called a worshiper of God.

Fear in this context means that dread suddenly falls upon him, not that he tries to work himself up into a state of fear, for this would be "the ascent of the female waters." But true fear is when terror and dread fall upon him suddenly and because of this dread he does not know where he is and his thoughts are pure so that tears flow of themselves. But if it is otherwise, even if he imagines that he loves God, it is nothing at all. For fear is the gateway to God. Fear is the gateway to God's love. If he is not even in the gate, which is fear, how can he possibly be in love? One in the state we have mentioned is not even a worshiper and he is certainly not at the stage at which fear can fall upon him. He does not worship at all in a manner fitting for a Jew for he only worships in a routine way. He imagines that he worships God with joy, but it is in reality only the joy of hilarity. He should return to God with all his heart and with all his soul.

Prayer with great joy is certainly more acceptable to God than prayer in misery and with weeping. The Baal Shem Tov gave the following illustration. When a poor man requests something of the king with weeping the king only gives him some small thing. But when a prince presents with joy a carefully composed praise of the king and asks for something incidentally, the king grants him whatever he asks, even if it is a great thing, as befits men of rank.

Here is Louis Jacobs' comment on this quote:

"This is a very important and interesting section. The real fear of God is something God gives to man. Any artificial whipping up of the emotions is "phony." In the language of the Kabbalah it is called "the ascent of the female waters" i.e. an ascent from man to God instead of the "descent of male waters" from God to man. The female is to be wooed by the male, not the other way round. A man who is simply miserable because of his physical needs is not in fear of God nor is the man who simply feels happy in himself a lover of God. Hasidism, a movement which stressed the emotions, always had to be on its guard against an artificial sentimentality."  
(p. 163)

### achieving *kavanah* in stages

Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Satmar, pp. 118-195. Quoted in Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Ethics, Philosophy and Mysticism*, "On Prayer," Behrman House: New York, 1969, pp. 161 & 162

It sometimes happens that a man can only worship in the state of smallness of soul, namely, he does not enter at all into the higher worlds but thinks only that God's glory fills the whole world and that

God is near to him. At such moments man becomes like a child whose mind has only a little maturity. Nevertheless, although his worship is in a state of spiritual immaturity, he worships with great attachment to God.

Even if one does not experience a great spiritual moment during *Tefilah*, nevertheless, it is still possible to pray with great attachment (*Devaykut* – דביקות).

What is the difference between “keeps them in being” and “sustains them all”?

At first a man should pray in fear for this is the gateway to God. He should say to himself: “To whom do I wish to attach myself? To Him, who by His word created all the worlds, who keeps them in being and sustains them all.” He should reflect on God’s greatness and exaltedness. Afterwards he can be in the upper worlds.

Why are such thoughts the first step to entering the upper spiritual worlds?

It is essential that man progresses from stage to stage in his prayers. He should not spend all his strength at the beginning of his prayers but should begin gradually until he achieves the stage of great attachment to God in the middle of his prayers. When this happens he can utter the words of his prayers very speedily. Even if he is unable to pray to God with great attachment at the beginning, he should nevertheless utter the words with great concentration and he should try to become stronger little by little until God helps him to pray with great attachment.

Think of a trained athlete running a long race. Don’t they do something similar? If you don’t know, go find an athlete and ask!

## removing improper thoughts

### A. THE HALACHA

NOTE: These two *Halachot* are brought together, for they form a unit.

#### רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפיים, פרק ד, הלכות טו - טז

כוונת הלב כיצד? כל תפלה שאינה בכוונה אינה תפלה. ואם התפלל בלא כוונה, חוזר ומתפלל בכוונה. מצא דעתו משובשת ולבו טרוד, אסור לו להתפלל עד שתתיישב דעתו. לפיכך הבא מן הדרך והוא עיף או מיצר, אסור לו להתפלל עד שתתיישב דעתו. אמרו חכמים, ישהה שלשה ימים עד שינוח ותתקדר דעתו ואחר כך יתפלל.

כיצד היא הכוונה? שיפנה את לבו מכל המחשבות, ויראה עצמו כאלו הוא עומד לפני השכינה. לפיכך צריך לישוב מעט קודם התפלה כדי לכון את לבו ואחר כך יתפלל בנחת ובתחנונים. ולא יעשה תפלתו כמי שהיה נושא משאוי ומשליכו והולך לו. לפיכך צריך לישוב מעט אחר התפלה ואחר כך יפטר. חסידים הראשונים היו שוהין שעה אחת

Look at the difference in the opening phrases of each Halacha in the Rambam:  
כוונת הלב כיצד?  
כיצד היא הכוונה?  
Aren’t they saying the same thing? So why did the Rambam change the order around?

קודם תפלה ושעה אחת לאחר תפלה ומאריכין בתפלה שעה.

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Laws of Prayer and Nesi'at Kapa'yim, 4:15-16

While the *Halachot* of *Kavanah* presented by the Rambam are not exactly the rules we abide by today, they illustrate very well the serious need for real *Kavanah*.

What are the rules of heartfelt *Kavanah*? Any *Tefilah* [said] without *Kavanah* is not *Tefilah*. If one prayed without *Kavanah*, one must say the prayer again. If a person finds that his thoughts are confused and his heart is distracted, it is prohibited for him to pray until he has recovered his mental composure. Therefore, it is forbidden for one returning from a journey or one who is very weary or distressed to pray until his mind is composed. The Sages said that he should wait three days until he is rested and his mind is calm, and then he should pray.

We have translated כוונת הלב as “heartfelt *Kavanah*” as opposed to the more literal “direction or concentration of the heart” because *Kavanah* is more than direction or concentration.

How can a “heart” be distracted? Doesn't the Rambam mean the mind? Could it be that *Kavanah* has more to do with the emotion and spirit than with the intellect?

Does the Rambam define *Kavanah* conceptually? If not, then how does he define *Kavanah*?

What is *Kavanah*? The heart should be freed from all thoughts (other than prayer) and one should think of himself as standing before the *Shechinah*. Therefore, he should sit awhile before praying so as to have heartfelt *Kavanah*, and then pray quietly, with petitions. He should not make his *Tefilah* like a burden that he is carrying, which he throws down and then walks away. Thus, he should also sit awhile after the *Tefilah*, and then leave. The first pious ones would wait an hour before praying and an hour after the praying, and take an hour in prayer.

#### שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צח, סעיף א

המתפלל צריך שיכוין בלבו פירוש המלות שמוציא בשפתיו. ויחשוב כאלו שכינה כנגדו. ויסיר כל המחשבות הטורדות אותו עד שתשאר מחשבתו וכוונתו זכה בתפלתו. ויחשוב כאלו היה מדבר לפני מלך בשר ודם, היה מסדר דבריו ומכוין בהם יפה לבל ישל, קל וחומר לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקב"ה שהוא חוקר כל המחשבות. וכך היו עושים חסידים ואנשי מעשה, שהיו מתבודדים ומכוונו בתפלתם עד שהיו מגיעים להתפשטות הגשמות ולהתגברות כח השכלי, עד שהיו מגיעים קרוב למעלת הנבואה.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim, 98:1

The one who prays must wholeheartedly concentrate on the meaning of the words which he utters with his lips. He must imagine that he stands in the presence of God. He should remove all other thoughts [from his mind], until his consciousness and concentration are completely absorbed with his prayer. He must imagine that if he were speaking

To achieve the experience of prayer one has to remove every intruding thought and stimulus from the conscious mind, to the point that all that remains is the content of the prayers. This is “*Kavanah*” (literally “concentration”) in its purist form.

While this state of pure concentration of the conscious mind on the prayer is not easy to attain, it is truly the equivalent of prophecy. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik once wrote that prayer and prophecy are really the same thing. The only difference is who picks up the phone and calls, so to speak. When God talks to me, it is prophecy. When I talk to God, it is prayer. The experience can be the same, or almost so, as the *Shulchan Aruch* points put.

before an earthly king, he would carefully compose his words and concentrate on them so as not to falter, all the more so [when speaking] before the King of all kings, the "Holy One, blessed be He", who sees to the very heart of all thoughts. This was the practice of the early pious people and men of good deeds. They would meditate in solitude and concentrate on their prayers until they achieved a transcendent spiritual state wherein their soul overpowered their body, thus approaching a state of prophecy.

Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Satmar, pp. 118-195. Quoted in Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Ethics, Philosophy and Mysticism*, "On Prayer," Behrman House: New York, 1969, p. 164

The Baal Shem Tov commented on the saying of the *Zohar* that a man is judged in each heavenly palace and that he is driven out of the palace. He explained it to mean that the words of the prayers are the heavenly palaces for in them thought dwells. When a man prays he proceeds from letter to letter and word to word and if he is unworthy he is driven away, that is to say, an extraneous thought is thrown to him and he is then automatically outside.

The *Shulchan Aruch* mentions the *Chasidim Rishonim* (not the followers of the Baal Shem Tov, but extremely pious people who lived in Mishnaic times) who used a technique called *Hitbodidut* - התבודדות, a form of solitary meditation, to achieve this heightened state of concentration.

And you thought that an extraneous thought that popped into your head during *Shemonah Esray* was just a loss of concentration. The Baal Shem Tov says otherwise!

#### A SUMMARY NOTE

The issue of removing improper, non-prayer thoughts from one's conscious mind during *Shemonah Esray* is integral to the very idea of *Kavanah*. The essence of *Kavanah* is the complete absorption of the mind with the content of the prayers and with God, the focus of the prayers. All the other ideas we have presented and will present are tools for achieving this state of total concentration and mental absorption.

There is no doubt that the human mind is capable of doing this. Just think of a devoted football fan watching his favorite team on TV on a Sunday afternoon. The whole house could burn down around him and he would not notice.

It is not easy to achieve such a high level of *Kavanah*. However, the tools are there for the taking. It is just a matter of strong will and desire combined with the right know-how.

#### B. TACTICS FOR REMOVING IMPROPER THOUGHTS

NOTE: The following sources detail a variety of suggested tools and techniques for removing unwanted, foreign thoughts that impinge on our consciousness during *Shemonah Esray*.



שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צח, סעיף א

ואם תבא לו מחשבה אחרת בתוך התפלה, (ב) ישתוק עד שתתבטל המחשבה. וצריך שיחשוב בדברים המכניעים הלב ומכוונים אותו לאביו שבשמים, ולא יחשוב בדברים שיש בהם קלות ראש. הגה: ויחשוב קודם התפלה מרוממות האל, יתעלה, ובשפלות האדם, ויסיר כל תענוגי האדם מלבו (הר"י ריש פרק אין עומדין). ואסור לאדם לנשק בניו הקטנים בבית הכנסת, כדי לקבוע בלבו שאין אהבה כאהבת המקום (בנימין זאב סי' קס"ג, ואגודה פ' כיצד מברכין).

This is the continuation of the quotation from the *Shulchan Aruch* in the previous section.

Suggestion #1: Stop saying *Shemonah Esray* and reflect on God.

*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim 98:1*

If a foreign thought comes to one during prayer, (2) he should be silent until the thought has ceased. One must reflect on matters that subdue the heart and direct it towards one's father in Heaven and should not think of matters which involve lightheadedness.

Suggestion #2: Think lofty thoughts

Note: Before praying, one should think of the loftiness of God, may He be exalted, and the lowness of man and remove [the thought of] all human pleasure from his heart. (*HaRi* beginning of chapter *Ayn Omdin*). It is forbidden for one to kiss one's small children in the synagogue, so that he will resolve in his heart that no love compares with the love of God. (*Binyamin Zev* sec. 163 and the *Agudah*, chapter *Kaytzad Mevarchim*)

According to the Rama, where do the foreign thoughts come from?

Should we be kissing anyone in Shul?

משנה ברורה, שולחן ערוך אורח חיים, סימן צח סעיף קטן ב

"ישתוק וכו'". ובספר הגן כתב לבטל מחשבה רעה בשעת התפילה יאמר שלש פעמים פי פי [הוא ראשי תיבות פלטי יוסף דהם התגברו על יצר לבם וכדאיתא בסנהדרין דף כ"א ע"ב]. ואחר כך ירוק שלש פעמים, ולא ירוק לגמרי רק בדרך נחת. והלשון תהא בין שפתים בשעת הרקיקה, ובודאי תלך המחשבה. וכתב המגן אברהם על זה ואין נראה לי לעשות זה בתוך תפילת י"ח, דהוי הפסק. ומי יודע אם רפואה בדוקה היא. ובספר אליהו רבה הביא בשם קיצור שני לוחות הברית, וזה לשונו: סגולה להעביר מחשבת חוץ שקודם תפילה יעביר שלש פעמים יד ימינו על מצחו, ויאמר בכל פעם, "לב טהור ברא לי אלקים ורוח נכון חדש בקרבי". וכן אם בא לו מחשבת חוץ בתוך התפילה ישתוק מעט ויעביר ימינו על מצחו ויהרהר פסוק הנזכר לעיל. עד כאן לשונו:

Have you ever seen anyone go "Fee, fee" or "Foo, foo"?

Would you consider "spitting" in Shul?

*Mishnah Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim sec. 98, note 2*

"He should be silent" etc. In the *Sefer Ha-Gan*, [the author] writes that to void a bad thought during the *Tefilah*, one should say, "Fee, fee," three times. [This is the acronym for Palti and Yosef, who prevailed over the inclination of their hearts, as stated in Sanhedrin 19b and 20a.] After that, he

Suggestion #3: Chase the thoughts away by saying "Fee, fee," and spitting.

Suggestion #4: Wipe the thoughts away by wiping your forehead.

should spit three times. He should not spit fully, but in a gentle manner, with the tongue in between the lips while he spits and the thought will definitely go away. The *Magen Avraham* writes about this that it seems to him inappropriate to do so in the middle of the *Shemonah Esray*, for it is an interruption and who knows whether it is a tested cure. In the *Eliyahu Rabbah*, [the author] quotes the abridged *Shenay Luchot HaBrit*: "A remedy for removing an extraneous thought before one prays: One should pass his right hand over his forehead three times and say each time, "Create for me, God, a pure heart, and an upright spirit renew inside me" (*Tehilim* 51:12). Likewise, if an extraneous thought comes to him in the middle of the prayer, he should be silent for a moment and then pass his right hand over his forehead and think the aforementioned verse." End quote.

Why should wiping your forehead be a remedy for foreign thoughts? How does it work?

Rav Cha'yim Voloshin used Kabbalah as one of the foundations for his book, *Nefesh HaCha'yim*. Thus, he views *Tefilah* as a highly powerful spiritual process whereby the uttering of the words causes giant waves of spiritual power to ripple through the spiritual worlds. In doing so, these words effect many *Tikkunim* (literally repairs), good changes within the spiritual worlds.

הרב חיים וולז'ין, ספר נפש החיים, שער ב, פרק יג

אלא העיקר בעבודת התפלה, שבעת שהאדם מוציא מפיו כל תיבה מהתפלה, יצייר לו אז במחשבתו אותו התיבה באותיותיה כצורתה ולכוין להוסיף על ידה כח הקדושה שיעשה פרי למעלה להרבות קדושתם ואורם (כמו שכתבתי לעיל בפרק י'). שלכן נקראת התפלה דברים העומדים ברומו של עולם, שכל תיבה בצורתה ממש היא העולה למעלה מעלה כל אחת למקורה ושרשה לפעול פעולות ותקונים נפלאים.

והיא סגולה נפלאה בדוק ומנוסה למרגילים עצמם בזה לבטל ולהסיר מעליו בזה כל מחשבות ההבלים הטורדות ומניעות טהרת המחשבה והכוונה. וכל אשר יוסיף הרגלו בזה יתוסף לו טהרה במחשבתו בתפלה. והיא כוונה פשוטית.

הגהה: והגם שהלכה פסוקה בש"ס שתפלה נאמרת בכל לשון, היינו לצאת ידי מצות תפלה, כמו שנתבאר לעיל סוף שער א', שבכל המצות, ואפילו מצות תפלה שנקראת עבודה שבלב. עם כל זה, עיקרון לעכובא הוא חלק המעשי שבהן. אמנם למצוה מן המובחר ודאי צריך לצרף גם טוהר המחשבה וכוונה שלימה. ולפי גודל טוהר הכוונה כן תגדל מעשה המצוה, ובפרט עבודת הלב שבתפלה. עם כי מי שהתפלל בכל לשון יצא ידי חובתו, אבל אין ערוך למי שמתפלל בלשון הקודש באלו התיבות דווקא העומדים ברומו של עולם, ומדבק כל כוחותיו בהם:

Rav Cha'yim Voloshin, *Nefesh HaCha'yim*, *Sha'ar 2*, chapter 13

Suggestion #5: Visualization

Indeed, the essence of the service of *Tefilah* is that when a person speaks each word of the *Tefilah*, he should imagine in his mind that word, [visualizing] the letters and [the word's] form, and using this to concentrate and to add the force of holiness that

Clinical psychologists have indicated that visualization is a commonly used technique for increasing concentration.

In his note, Rav Cha'yim Voloshin teaches us an important lesson. There is a significant difference between performing a Mitzvah just to fulfill one's obligation and attempting to perform a Mitzvah in the best way possible. It is the difference between receiving a grade of C on an exam and receiving a grade of A. While both are passing grades, no one wants just a C. Everyone wants an A. That should be our attitude toward Mitzvah observance as well.

will bear fruit above, to increase their sanctity and light. (As I wrote above in chapter 10.) This is why *Tefilah* is called words that stand in the most exalted place in the world, for the very shape of each word ascends higher and higher to its source and root to function and do wondrous *Tikkun*.

And this is a wonderful, tried and true remedy for those who use it to void and rid themselves of vain thoughts that bother and prevent the purity of thought and *Kavanah*. The more one continues to use this [remedy], the more he will increase the purity of his thought in prayer. And this is simple *Kavanah*.

A Note: Even though it is a decided law in the *Gemara* that the *Tefilah* can be said in any language, to fulfill one's basic obligation in the Mitzvah of prayer – as explained at the end of *Sha'ar 1* – that [this is true] regarding all *Mitzvot*, even in the Mitzvah of prayer, which is called the service of the heart. Nevertheless, the factor that prevents [fulfillment of the Mitzvah] is the act [of Mitzvah] itself. However for the best performance of the Mitzvah, it is necessary to include [in the performance] purity of thought and complete *Kavanah*. According to the greatness of the *Kavanah*, so, too, will the act of Mitzvah increase, especially the service of the heart, *Tefilah*. Certainly one who prays in any language fulfills his obligation, but there is no limit to the value of one who prays in Hebrew with specifically those words that stand in the most exalted place in the world, as he attaches his spiritual strength to them.

#### ליקוטי מוהר"ן מהדורא תנינא סימן קכב

לענין המחשבות זרות שבתפלה. וכבר ידוע, שכל מחשבה ומחשבה היא קומה שלמה כמובא. ואמר שכשהאדם עומד ומתפלל כסדר ואינו משגיח על המחשבות זרות, ועל ידי זה הוא מנצח אותם ומעבירם ממנו (וכמבאר במקום אחר, שאין צריך להסתכל עליהם כלל, רק לילך כסדר בתפלתו ולבלי להביט לאחוריו כלל, ועל ידי זה ממילא יסתלקו), אזי בדרך הלוכו בתפלתו הוא מפיל אותם, לזה חותך יד, ולזה חותך רגל, וכיוצא בזה בשאר האיברים. פרוש, כמו למשל בענין מלחמה, כשצריך לילך ולעבר בין הרבה רוצחים ואורבים, וכשהוא גבור ועבר ביניהם, אזי בדרך הלוכו הוא מפיל אותם, כי לזה חותך יד בדרך הלוכו ומפילו, ולזה חותך רגל וכו', וכיוצא בזה כן הוא ממש בענין התפלה.

Rav Nachman of Bratzlav, *Likutay Moharan*,  
*Mahadurah Taninah*, sec. 122

Regarding foreign thoughts while praying. It is well known that each and every thought is a complete "body," as is discussed [in other books]. And it is said that when a person stands and follows the order of the prayer and pays no attention to the foreign thoughts, by doing so, he is victorious over them and removes them from himself. (This is explained elsewhere, that it is

Suggestion #6: Fight your way through the foreign thoughts

So how are we to fight our way past the foreign thoughts during *Shemonah Esray*?

Just remember that Rav Nachman thinks of soldiers fighting with swords and spears, not with guns.

unnecessary to look at them, only to follow the order of the prayers and not look behind at all, and by doing so they leave by themselves.) So, as he moves through his *Tefilah* he knocks them (i.e., the foreign thoughts) down. He chops the hand off of this one and the leg off of this one, acting similarly with the other body parts. The explanation is that it is just like war. When he (a soldier) has to pass among the murderers and those waiting in ambush, he is courageous and passes by chopping a hand off of this one and a leg off of this one, knocking them down as he passes. The same applies to *Tefilah*.

What metaphor does he use for the foreign thoughts? Why?

A *Retzitzah* (רציצא) is an *Efro'ach*. Here the pun is on the Hebrew translation of the Aramaic. A *Retzitzah* is Aramaic is an *Efro'ach* in Hebrew, which comes from the same root as the word, *Yifrach*, "will flourish" that appears in the quotation from *Tehilim*.

ליקוטי מוה"ר"ן מהדורא קמא סימן כו

רציצא דמיית בבעותיה, היכא נפיק רוחא? ואמר להו בהיינו דעאל.  
רציצא זה אפרוח. זה בחינת צדיק, בחינת (תהלים עב:ז): "יפרח בימיו צדיק." ששאלו אותו, הצדיק שממית את עצמו ומוסר את נפשו בצלותיה ובעותיה. באיזה מן המקומות מן התפילה צריך לו למסור את נפשו ביותר? והשיב להם, "היכא דעאל," היינו איך שיש לו להעלות ניצוצי הקדושה, היינו איך שנכנסים בו מחשבות זרות, וצריך להעלותם כידוע, שם צריך לו למסור נפשו.

"Be'Utay." Here the pun works off the Aramaic text. In the *Gemara* text, "his egg" appears as *Be'Utay*, which also means, in other contexts, "his petitions" as in petitional prayers.

Rav Nachman of Bratzlav, Likutay MoHaran, Mahadurah Kamma, section 26

When a chick dies in its shell, how does its soul depart? He said to them, "The [same] way it enters."

A *Retzitzah* (רציצא) is an *Efro'ach*, a chick. This refers to the *Tzaddik*, in the sense of "A *Tzaddik* will flourish in his days" (*Tehilim* 72:7). They asked him, [in the *Gemara*,] A *Tzaddik* who "kills" himself and gives up his soul in his prayers and petitions (*Be'Utay*), in which parts of the prayer must he give up his soul the most? He answered them, "*Haykha De'A'al* - היכא דעאל" meaning when he can elevate the sparks of holiness, the *Nitzotzot HaKedushah*, meaning when foreign thoughts enter him (i.e. his mind) and it is necessary to elevate them as is known. That is when he must give up his soul.

Suggestion #7: Use the moment of the foreign thoughts to have the greatest *Kavanah*.

"Elevate the sparks." Here the pun is again on the Aramaic text. In Aramaic, *A'al* means to go in, while in Hebrew it becomes the word which means "to rise."

C. A SUMMARY NOTE

The problem of foreign thoughts during *Shemonah Esray* is integrally linked to *Kavanah* because this phenomenon is so very common and it is one of the greatest hindrances to *Kavanah*. The problem is not a new one. As long as people have been saying *Shemonah Esray* or just praying, they have been plagued with foreign thoughts as their minds wander off, away from their prayers.

An analysis of these suggestions and their efficacy is discussed in the essay, "Removing Improper Thought in Prayer" (included in the essay section of this anthology). Another source for a very interesting discussion of this issue from a Chasidic perspective is found in Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, Schocken Books: New York, 1978, chapter 9, "The Elevation of 'Strange Thoughts'," pp. 104-120. During the first generations of the Chasidic movement, the Chasidic Rebbes taught the technique of taking the foreign thoughts, attaching to them a specific Kabbalistic meaning and the sending the combination heavenward. By the third generation of Chasidim, the technique was hardly used because most people did not know enough Kabbalah to make it work.

In the last source quoted above, Rav Nachman alludes to this technique but suggests another idea. According to the Chasidim (Rav Nachman included) the foreign thought does not emanate from the individual's mind. Rather, it has been placed in the person's consciousness by the *Yetzer HaRa* to confound and interrupt the person's prayer. Since it is most difficult to Kabbalistically "reform" the foreign thought by finding the correct spiritual channel to use to send it heavenward, Rav Nachman suggests that the occasion of the foreign thought be used to pray with the greatest intensity, to literally devote one's entire being to the act of praying. This defeats the *Yetzer HaRa* and significantly improves the nature of one's prayer.

## add something new to the *tefilah*

### A. THE IDEA

רבי ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, חלק ב, ענייני תפילה, עמ' עט, ד"ה הב' חידוש

הב'. חידוש. רצוני לומר שיחדש דברי תחנונים ושאלות ובקשות בקצת ברכות התפילה, אם לא בכולם. והחידושים הם יגרמו לו לכוון לבו. ואם אינו מחדש דבר בתפילתו, יקשה עליו לכיון, כדתנן פרק תפילת השחר: "העושה תפילתו קבע אין תפילתו תחנונים" (ברכות כח:). ומפרשי רבה ורב יוסף דהיינו כל שאינו יכול לחדש בה דבר בקשה. והיינו לשון קבע, כהיות כן אתמול, כן מחר. (שם כט:). עד כאן. והטעם בזה, כי אז הטבע אומר והולך רגילתו. אך החידושים אי אפשר לאומרן אם לא ישם אליה לב. וזה לשון ספר החסידים בסימן קנ"ה: וכשתתפלל תוסיף על כל ברכה וברכה מעניינה לצרכך, כי ביותר הם מכוונים את הלב. ואם לא תוכל להוסיף בכולם לפי שהקהל יסיימו קודם, תוסיף באחת או בשתיים כדי שלא תצטרך למהר בברכה אחרת. עד כאן לשונו.

Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horwitz, *Shenay Luchot HaBrit*, vol. 2, "Issues in Prayer," p. 79

2. Something new. By this I mean that one should [add] some new petitions, questions and requests in some of the *Berachot* of the *Tefilah*, if not in all of them. These new things (requests, etc.) will cause one to have heartfelt *Kavanah*. And if one does not add something new in his *Tefilah*, then it makes it more difficult to have *Kavanah*, as it is taught in the

What are the problems inherent in praying by rote, in a routine way? What does this have to do with *Kavanah*?

See the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim* sec. 112 – It is forbidden to add one's own thoughts into the first 3 and the last 3 *Berachot* of *Shemonah Esray*.

Why does Rav Horwitz emphasize new requests and petitions? Why does he not suggest new praise for God?

Do you have enough going on in your life and in the world around you to ask for something different each day of the week, week after week?

Mishnah in chapter *Tefilat HaShachar*: "One, who makes his *Tefilah* routine (קבע), does not make his *Tefilah* into petitions" (*Berachot* 28b). Rabbah and Rav Yosef explained that this is when one cannot add a new request [to his *Tefilah*]. This is what "routine" (קבע) means, i.e., just like yesterday, so the same tomorrow (*Berachot* 29b). End quote. The reason is that it becomes his natural habit to say [the *Tefilah*] in just this way. However, when there is something new it is impossible not to pay attention to it. This is what [the author] of the *Sefer Chasidim* [writes] in sec. 155: When one prays, one should add what you need to each and every *Berachah*, for this helps greatly with *Kavanah*. And if you cannot add to every *Berachah* because the congregation will finish before you, then add to one or two [of the *Berachot*] so you will not have to rush through a different *Berachah*. End quote.

Look at *Berachot* 29b: Is the explanation offered by Rabbah and Rav Yosef the only one offered for the line, "One, who makes his *Tefilah* routine (קבע), does not make his *Tefilah* into petitions"?

## B. THE HALACHA

### שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן קיט

אם רצה להוסיף בכל ברכה מהאמצעית, מעין הברכה, מוסיף. כיצד, היה לו חולה מבקש עליו רחמים בברכת רפאנו; היה צריך פרנסה, מבקש עליה בברכת השנים. הגה: וכשהוא מוסיף, יתחיל בברכה ואחר כך מוסיף, אבל לא יוסיף ואח"כ יתחיל הברכה (טור סי' תקס"ז); ובשומע תפלה יכול לשאול כל צרכיו, שהיא כוללת כל הבקשות.

*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim* sec. 119

If one wants to add something that fits the theme of the *Berachah* to one of middle *Berachot*, one is [allowed] to add. How [should one do this]? If one knows of a sick person, one asks for *Rachamim* (a combination of God's compassion, sensitivity, love and help) [for that person] in the *Berachah* of *Refa'aynu* – רפאנו. If one needs financial help, one is to ask for it in the *Berachah* of *Birkat HaShanim* – ברכת השנים. Note: When he does add [to a *Berachah*], he should first begin the *Berachah* and then add. But he should not say the addition and then begin the *Berachah*. (*Tur* sec. 567); One can ask for all of one's needs in the *Berachah* of *Shomay'a Tefilah* – שומע תפילה, which [is a general *Berachah*] containing all petitions.

This is an important Halacha. Adding a "new" request to the middle *Berachot* of *Shemonah Esray* is a very powerful tool to increase one's *Kavanah*.

What can you do if you wanted to add something in a particular *Berachah* but forgot?

C. A SUMMARY NOTE:

Adding something new to the *Shemonah Esray* is not as easy as it sounds. Rarely are our lives so tumultuous that something “new” comes up between *Shacharit* and *Minchah*. Nevertheless, if you put your heart and soul into the *Berachah* that includes your own new, personal message to God, you will find that it positively affects the *Kavanah* of the entire *Shemonah Esray*.

## feel the need to pray

רבי ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, חלק ב, עניני תפילה, עמ' עט, ד"ה הג' צורך

When is the last time you were aboard a sailing ship in a giant storm?  
Can you think of a different scenario that might really involve you or a family member?

הג'. צורך. כשיהיה צורך גדול לאדם לדבר מה ומתפלל על ככה יכוין לבו היטב, ובפרט כשיהיה הצורך גדול מאד, כגון בנו הנוטה למות או הוא עצמו שהכביד עליו החולי או שהוא בלב ימים והים הולך וסוער והאניה חשבה להשבר, אז יתפלל ויתחנן בכל לבו, ויוריד דמעות על ככה וישפוך את נפשו לפני ה'. אך כשלא יהיה האדם צריך למה שהוא שואל בתפילתו, יקשה עלי לכוין לבו. . . . סוף דבר, כפי רוב צורך האדם למה ששואל בתפילתו ירבה כוונתו, ולפי מעוט הצורך ימעט כוונתו. . . .

Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horwitz, *Shenay Luchot HaBrit*, vol. 2, "Issues in Prayer," p. 79

Rav Horwitz makes it sound as if one should only pray for “a very great need.” Why does he give us that impression?  
What about praying for “small” needs?

3. Need. When a person has a great need for something and prays for it, then he will have much *Kavanah*, especially if it a very great need. For instance, if his child is dying or he suffering from some illness or if he is at sea and there is a great storm and the ship feels like it will sink, then one should pray and petition [God] with all one's heart, and shed tears and pour out his heart before God. However, if a person has no great need for what he asks for in his prayers, then it makes it more difficult to have *Kavanah*. . . . The bottom line is that the greater the need for what the person is asking in his *Tefilah*, then the greater the *Kavanah*. The less the need, then the *Kavanah* is less.

Is the greatness or need judged by the greatness of the thing we are praying for or is it dependent on how much we really need that for which we are praying?

## a person should be ready to die in prayer

*Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Satmar*, pp. 118-195. Quoted in Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Ethics, Philosophy and Mysticism*,

"On Prayer," Behrman House: New York, 1969, p. 160

Why would one even expect to literally die while praying?  
Can you think of a biblical example of people who encountered God and feared they were going to die?

A man should think to himself before he recites his prayers that he is ready to die through great concentration (i.e. *Kavanah*) during the prayers. There are some men who have so powerful a concentration in their prayers that if nature were left to itself they would die as soon as they uttered two or three words in God's presence. If a man thinks of this he will say to himself: "Why should I have some ulterior motive or any pride when reciting this prayer?" since he is ready to die after uttering two or three words. And in truth it is a kindness of God that he is given the strength to complete his prayers and remain alive.

#### A SUMMARY NOTE:

It is very hard to accept the Ba'al Shem Tov's words literally. The whole point of praying is to live another day to receive God's goodness. However, I would humbly suggest that the Ba'al Shem Tov is reminding us that to pray is to encounter God. And to "meet" God is very scary! Remember that *Am Yisra'el* immediately after God spoke the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai asked Moshe *Rabbenu* to bring them God's future messages, because if God continued to talk directly to them they would die. Thus, the point here is that we make a valiant attempt to actually "meet" God during prayer, and if we succeed it will literally take our breath away!

### "eyes down – heart up"

NOTE: We examined this Halacha from the Rambam earlier in reference to how to hold one's hands. Now we will peruse the beginning of the Halacha.

רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק ה, הלכה ד

תקון הגוף כיצד? כשהוא עומד בתפלה צריך לכוין את רגליו זו בצד זו. ונותן עיניו למטה כאילו הוא מביט לארץ, ויהיה לבו פנוי למעלה כאילו הוא עומד בשמים. ומניח ידיו על לבו כפותין הימנית על השמאלית. ועומד כעבד לפני רבו באימה ביראה ופחד, ולא יניח ידיו על חלציו.

Rambam, Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Tefilah & Nesi'at Kapa'yim, 5:4

What is correct posture? When standing in prayer, one should place one's feet next to each other. The eyes should be lowered as if one were looking towards the ground; while the heart should be



Ask a friend to assume the posture and body language described by the Rambam and then take a good look at them. How would you interpret such posture?

Notice what the Sages did when they sat around together!

This *Gemara* from *Yevamot* is the source for the Rambam's Halacha quoted above.

Go back to the Rambam's Halacha. Which of the two reasons does he quote? Why does he put the emphasis on that opinion and reason?

uplifted as if one were in heaven. He should place his hands clasped over the heart, the right over the left. One should stand like a servant before his master, in awe, fear and dread and he should not place his hands on his hips.

מהר"ל מפראג, ספר נתיבות עולם א, נתיב העבודה, פרק ו

ובפרק מצות חליצה (יבמות ק"ה ע"ב): ר' חייא ור' שמעון בר רבי הוו יתבי. פתח חד מנייהו ואמר, "המתפלל צריך שיתן את עיניו למטה, שנאמר, 'והיה עיני ולבי שם כל הימים' (מלכים א ט:ג)." וחד אמר, "המתפלל צריך שיכוין לבו למעלה, שנאמר, 'נשא לבבינו אל כפים אל אל בשמים' (איכא ג:מא)." אדהכי אתא רבי ישמעאל בר' יוסי לגבייהו. אמר להו, "במאי עסקיתו?" אמרו ליה, "בתפלה." אמר להו, "כך אמר אבא, 'המתפלל צריך שיתן עיניו למטה ולבו למעלה' כדי שיתקיימו שני מקראות הללו.

וביאור זה כדכתיב "והיו עיני ולבי שם כל הימים," יש לאדם לחשוב עצמו כאלו הוא לפני השם יתברך וכעבד שהוא עומד לפני רבו. ואידך סבירא ליה שיש לו לכוון לבו למעלה אל השם יתברך וכאלו הוא משתוקק ומתאוה אל השם יתברך, ולפיכך יכוין לבו למעלה. ומתרץ שיקיים שניהם שיתן עיניו למטה ולבו למעלה. כי התפלה מה שהאדם הוא העלול וצריך אל עלתו, וידוע כי מצד שהוא עלול יש להיות עיניו למטה וכמו העבד שהוא עומד לפני רבו שעניו למטה. אמנם מפני שהאדם נתלה בעלה צריך שיהיה לבו למעלה אל העלה לכך יהיה לבו למעלה.

Maharal of Prague, *Netivot Olam*, vol. 1, *Netiv Ha'Avodah*, ch. 6

In the chapter *Mitzvat Chalitzah* (*Yevamot* 105b): Rabbi Chi'yah and Rabbi Shimon, son of Rabbi (Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi*) were sitting together. One of them began by saying, "One who prays should do so with his eyes lowered, as it says, 'My eyes and heart shall be there for all time' (*Melachim* I 9:3)." The other one said, "The one who prays should focus his heart upwards, as it says, 'We will lift our hearts with our hands to God in heaven' (*Aychah* 3:41)." By and by, Rabbi Yishma'el, son of Rabbi Yosi, came to them. He said, "What are you talking about?" They said, "Prayer." He said to them, "This is what my father says: One who prays should lower his eyes and focus his heart upwards, thus fulfilling the meaning of both verses."

The explanation of this is that it is written, "My eyes and heart shall be there for all time." A person must think of themselves as standing before God, just like a servant stands before the master. The other one thinks that one should focus the heart upwards to God as if he yearns and desires

How can one's heart be "uplifted"?

Once again, we encounter the Maharal's terminology: We identify ourselves as the "receiver" (העלול) and accept God as the total "Giver" (העילה).

The verse from *Melachim* reads:  
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלָיו שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶת תְּפִלָּתְךָ וְאֶת תַּחֲנֻנֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הִתְחַנַּנְתָּהּ לְפָנַי הַקְדַּשְׁתִּי אֶת הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בָּנִיתָ לְשׁוֹם שְׁמִי שָׁם עַד עוֹלָם וְהָיוּ עֵינֵי וְלִבִּי שָׁם כָּל הַיָּמִים:

"God said to him (King Solomon): I have heard the prayer and the petition that have you have offered Me. I sanctify this house that you have built and I set My name there forever. My eyes and heart shall be there for all time" (*Melachim* I 9:3)  
So who sets the precedent of lowering the eyes downwards during prayer?

Does the Maharal's explanation of the second opinion – “eyes up” – fit the words used by the Rambam to explain the second opinion?  
Is there a disagreement between the two as to how to interpret the *Gemara*?

[to be with] God, therefore focusing the heart upwards. And the answer is that one should do both, lower his eyes and focus his heart upwards. Indeed, *Tefilah* is based on the idea that the person is the “receiver” (עלול) who needs the “Giver” (עילה). It is well-known that from the perspective of the “receiver” one should lower the eyes, just like a servant who stands before his master with his eyes lowered. However, since a person is dependent upon the “Giver” his heart must be focused upwards to the “Giver,” thus [in prayer] his heart must be focused upwards.

ר' חיים מוולוז'ין, ספר נפש החיים, שער ב, פרק יד

הגהה: כמו שכתב רבינו יונה ז"ל, פרק "אין עומדין" (ברכות כ"ה:): בעניין המתפלל צריך שיתן עיניו למטה ולבו למעלה. זה לשונו הקדוש שם: "כלומר, שיחשוב בלבו כאלו עומד בשמים ויסיר מלבו כל תענוגי עולם הזה וכל הנאות הגוף. כענין שאמרו הקדמונים כשתרצה לכוון פשוט גופך מעל נשמתך. ולאחר שיגיע לזו המחשבה יחשוב גם כן כאלו הוא עומד בבית המקדש, שהוא למטה מפני שעל ידי זה תהיה תפלתו רצויה יותר לפני המקום. מפי מורי הרב, נטריה רחמנא וברכיה." עד כאן לשון רבנו יונה.

Rabbenu Yonah gives a different interpretation of the *Gemara* from *Yevamot* based on his teacher, the Ramban.

Rav Cha'yim Voloshin, *Nefesh HaCha'yim*, Sec. 2, end of chapter 14

Rabbenu Yonah suggests using visualization. Close your eyes. Focus your heart upwards. In other words, visualize yourself standing in heaven before God. Use your imagination to make it work!  
Then, visualize yourself standing *inside* the Beit HaMikdash. Your eyes are lowered because you are the *Kohen Gadol* standing in the *Kodesh HaKodashim*.

Note: Just as Rabbenu Yonah, of blessed memory, wrote in chapter "*Ayn Omdin*" (*Berachot* 25b) concerning that one praying should cast his eyes downward and his heart upward (these being his holy words): Meaning, he should imagine in his heart that he is standing in heaven, and he should remove from his heart [all thought of] all worldly delights and all physical pleasures, as our elders said, "If you want to have *Kavanah* strip your body away from your soul. After you arrive at this thought, you should also imagine that you are standing in the Beit HaMikdash which is below, since by [doing] this, his prayer will be more desirable before God. From my teacher and master (the Ramban), may God protect him and bless him." End quotation from Rabbenu Yonah.

NOW say the Shemonah Esray!!

If you try seriously to use this technique, it will serve you as a very powerful tool for achieving *Kavanah*.

## pray like a day-old baby

NOTE: The following selection from the *Shulchan Aruch* serves as the context for the quotation from the *Mishnah Berurah*.

### שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צח, סעיף א

המתפלל צריך שיכוין (א) בלבו פירוש המלות שמוציא בשפתיו. ויחשוב כאלו שכונה כנגדו.

*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Cha'yim, 98:1*

The one who prays must wholeheartedly concentrate (1) on the meaning of the words which he utters with his lips. He must imagine that he stands in the presence of God.

### שולחן ערוך אורח חיים, משנה ברורה סימן צח, סעיף קטן א

"פירוש המילות." ואל יכוין האדם בשמות ויחודים, רק יתפלל כפשוטו, להבין הדברים בכונת הלב, אם לא מי שהוא בא בסוד ד' ויודע לכוין ביה בלבא ורעותא ודחילו. דאי לאו הכי, חס ושלום, מקלקל בזה הרבה. עיין מגן אברהם בשם הזוהר. ובתשובת רב שלמה לוריא, סימן צ"ח, כתב באורך והעיד על הרב רבנו שמשון שאמר אחרי שלמד סתרי הקבלה שהוא מתפלל כתינוק בן יומו.

"The meaning of the words." A person should not have in mind the Divine names and prayers for His unity (יחודים), but should merely pray simply, understanding the words with heartfelt *Kavanah*, unless he is someone who has entered into the secrets of God and knows how to concentrate in his heart and soul with the fear [of Him]. Otherwise, Heaven forbid, one will cause grave damage See the Magen Avraham, who cites the *Zohar*. In the responsa of the Rabbi Shlomo Luria, Sec.98, he writes [about this] at length and testifies about Rav Shimshon, who said, that after studying the secrets of Kabbalah, that he prayed like a day-old baby.

The *Shulchan Aruch* reminds us that we must pray with wholehearted *Kavanah*.

The *Mishnah Berurah* begins by recommending that we do not pray using the Kabbalistic *Kavanot*. Unless you are a practicing Kabbalist, this technique can be harmful. Rather, pray like a day-old baby! How does a day-old pray?

- (a) A baby is always serious about crying. They do not fool around and cry for fun.
- (b) A baby only cries if it really needs something.
- (c) A baby's needs are always important.

The *Kivun Shaymot Ve'Yichudim* - כיוון שמות ויחודים mentioned by the *Mishnah Berurah* refer to Kabbalistic techniques for achieving *Kavanah*.

- (d) A baby's crying is simple, unadorned with complicated, unnecessary frills.
- (e) A baby continues to cry until someone comes and gives him or her what is needed.
- (f) A baby is always happy and thankful to have its cry answered.

## the total removal of self while praying

הרב ישעיהו הורביץ, שני לוחות הברית, ירושלים, תשנ"ג,  
כרך ה, עמוד שיט, "עשרה הילולים" ד.ה. יען וביען

יען וביען כי התפילה היא עבודה שבלב, נתעורר באיזה ענין דרך שער השמים היא העולה. ראשית דבר קודם שיתפלל, תחשוב, מה אני, דל ונבזה, כלי מלא בושה וכלימה, בא לבקש ממלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא? הלא יראו ויבהלו מפניו בני מעלה. אם לא ברוב חסדיו שהוא מתנהג עם בריותיו, שאינו מואס בתפילת צבור מלהיות לשמוע תפילה. אל יקדים לשונך ללבך. קודם שיצא הדיבור מפיך, חשוב פירוש ביאורו, ושתזכיר השם תתמלא רתת ורעה וחלחלה.

What does it mean not to "allow your tongue to anticipate your heart"?

Rav Yesha'yahu Horwitz, *Shenay Luchot HaBrit, Asarah Hilulim*, s.v. יען וביען, translation from Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Ethics, Philosophy & Mysticism*, Behrman House: New York, p. 147

How do you acquire the proper attitude for prayer?

How do you see yourself vis-à-vis God?

Why does Rav Horwitz talk about being filled with trembling, dread and fear?

Since prayer is the service of the heart let us stir ourselves to know which is the gate of Heaven through which prayer ascends. First of all, think to yourself before you pray: "Who am I, a poor miserable vessel full of shame and confusion, that I should come to offer supplication to the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, before whom the angels tremble, if not by virtue of His great love which He shows to His creatures in that He does not despise communal prayer and that he hearkens unto prayer." Do not allow your tongue to anticipate your heart. Before any word of prayer escapes your lips think of its meaning. When you mention God's name be filled with trembling, dread and fear.

NOTE: While Rav Horwitz speaks of feeling small and full of shame and confusion when standing in *Tefilah* before the "King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He," Rav Cha'yim Voloshin talks of total removal of self from the *Tefilah*. The following selections from the *Nefesh HaCha'yim* present Rav Cha'yim's ideas. Rav Cha'yim Voloshin devotes the whole second section (שער ב') of his work to *Tefilah*. The quotations that follow present the essence of his major thesis concerning the nature of *Tefilah*.

ר' חיים מוולוז'ין, ספר נפש החיים, שער ב, פרקים י' - יד  
Rav Cha'yim Voloshin, Nefesh HaCha'yim, Sec. 2,  
chapters 10 – 14

NOTE: The page numbers at the end of the selections refer to the edition of the *Nefesh HaCha'yim*, edited by Yisachar Dov Rubin, Bnei Brak, 5749

פרק י

והמשכיל יבין מדעתו שלא לחנם הוצרכו לתיקון תחנה קטנה ותפלה קצרה כזו ק"כ זקנים ומהם כמה נביאים. אלא שהמה השיגו ברוח קדשם והשגת נבואתם העליונה ונהירא להו שבילין דכל סדרי בראשית ופרקי המרכבה. לזאת יסדו ותקנו מטבע ברכות והתפלות באלו התיבות דוקא. מאשר ראו והשיגו איזה דרך ישכון אורה של כל תיבה פרטית מהם אשר היא נצרכת מאד לתיקון רבוי עולמות וכחות עליונים וסדור המרכבה. וכמאמרם ז"ל (עיין שבת קטז: מנחות סד.) "העבודה צורך גבוה."

The operative phrase here is:  
"העבודה צורך גבוה"  
"[God on] high requires the worship"  
This does not imply that God "requires" our prayers because He is lacking something. Rather, the implication is that the prayers serve God, strengthening the spiritual worlds that connect Him to us and us to Him.

What do Rav Cha'yim's comments teach you about *saying* the words of the *Shemonah Esray*?

Chapter 10

Those who know will understand by themselves that it was necessary that 120 elders (sages), among them a number of prophets, authored this little "petition" or this short prayer (i.e. the *Shemonah Esray*). Through their holy spirit (רוח הקודש) and their high-level prophecy, the pathways through the secrets of Creation (מעשה בראשית) and the *Merkavah* (מעשה המרכבה) were clear to them and on that basis they established the text of all the *Berachot* and prayers. They used those words specifically, for they understood which path that the light produced by each word takes to its resting [place in the spiritual worlds]; since [the light] is very necessary for the repair (תיקון) of many [spiritual] worlds and the forces on high and the order of the *Merkavah* (i.e. God's Throne of Glory). This is what they said, "[God on] high requires the worship (העבודה)." (See *Shabbat* 116b, *Menachot* 64a). (p. 120)

According to Rav Cha'yim Voloshin, why is it so crucial to remember that the 120 Men of the Great Assembly composed all of the *Berachot* and the *Shemonah Esray*?

NOTE: Rav Cha'yim views prayer as exclusively spiritual, to the extent that the purpose of prayer is also exclusively spiritual. Thus, there is supreme importance in the fact that prophecy was used in the composition of the *Shemonah Esray*. This ensured that the words would have the appropriate, positive, healing spiritual effect (i.e. the proper *Tikkun* – תיקון) in the spiritual worlds. This basic approach is the foundation of all that Rav Cha'yim says about *Tefilah*.

פרק יא

ומה שכתוב, "לפני חילו" (יואל ב:יא), רמז זה העיקר הגדול של ענין התפלה. שכלל כוונתה הוא לכוין רק להוסיף כח בקדושה. שכמו שהאיש מאנשי החיל משליך כל ענייניו וצרכי עצמו מנגד, ומוסר נפשו ברצונו רק על כבוד המלך שישגיג הכתר מלוכה של אותה המדינה ותנשא מלכותו. כן ראוי מאד להאדם הישר לשום כל כוונתו וטוהר מחשבתו בתפלתו רק להוסיף תת כח בהעולמות הקדושים. ולעורר בקולו הקול העליון ואמשכא מניה ברכאן ונהירו לכלא (להמשיך ממנו ברכות ואור לכל), להעביר רוח הטומאה מן העולם ויתוקן עולם במלכותו יתברך שמו, ולא על ענייניו וצרכי עצמו כלל.

Where else have we seen a similar metaphor – that praying is like being a soldier?

We have put the Hebrew translation of the Aramaic quotations into smaller type.

Chapter 11

And what was quoted "[God put His voice] before His army" (*Yo'el* 2:11) hints at this great principle of prayer, the rule concerning *Kavanah*: To concentrate only on adding strength to the *Kedushah* (i.e. the spiritual worlds). Just as a soldier casts aside all of his personal concerns and needs, willingly giving his all for the glory of the king, so, too, should a correct person direct all of his concentration and purity of his thought during prayer only for the purpose giving strength to the holy worlds and with his voice to awaken the voice on high, to draw from it blessing and light for all, to remove the stench of impurity from the world, and to repair the universe through His kingship (may His name be blessed), [all this performed] without any [reference] to his own concerns or needs. (p. 122)

Is this the way you pray? Should it be?

What is the purpose of prayer?

Count how many positive effects are achieved through *Tefilah* with *Kavanah*...

At the end of this paragraph, Rav Cha'yim introduces the issue of praying without reference to one's own needs.

ותפלות נגד תמידין תקנום (ברכות כו:), שהיו עולות כליל לאישים כולה לגבוה סלקא, ולא היה בהם חלק הדיוט כלל. ואף דהלכתא גמירא לה בש"ס (סנהדרין ח.) שהיחיד רשאי לחדש דבר בתפלתו על צרכי עצמו וצערו בכל ברכה לפי עניינה, גם בזה צריך שלא תהא תכלית כוונתו על צערו. ולא זו הדרך הנכונה לישרים בלבותם.

Rav Cha'yim's point is a very important one: If the *Shemonah Esray* is the replacement for the daily, public sacrifice, then it should reflect the purpose of that sacrifice, meaning that, like the sacrifice, the *Shemonah Esray* should be dedicated exclusively to God.

Even though Rav Cha'yim wishes that we ignore the Halacha from the *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin*, he would not deny its validity.

The prayers were established to parallel the daily sacrifices (*Berachot* 26b) which were burnt totally, given totally to [God on] high, man having no part in them whatsoever.

Even though it is an accepted law in the *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 8a), that an individual is permitted to add something new to his prayer concerning his personal needs and pains, into any *Berachah* according to its theme, the purpose of his *Kavanah* should not be his pain. This is not the path that the hearts of the correct ones should take.

Could there be a hierarchy of different levels in prayer according to Rav Cha'yim?

Needless to say, Rav Cha'yim is very concerned about a person praying for his own needs. Why?

Here's a hint, take another look at the content of the *Shemonah Esray*!

וגם היחיד על צערו, אף אם אין חילול השם בדבר, יש מקום גם כן לבקש לפניו יתברך על גודל הצער של מעלה בזמן שהאדם שרוי בצער למטה. כמאמרם ז"ל במשנה פרק ו' דסנהדרין (מו.): אמר רבי מאיר, "בזמן שהאדם מצטער שכינה מה הלשון אומרת? 'קלני מראשי קלני מזרועי.'"

An individual, as well - even if there is no *Chilul HaShem* involved - can also request from Him, may He be blessed, concerning the great pain experienced on high when man is in pain below. This is like their statement in the Mishnah in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Sanhedrin (46a), "Rabbi Me'ir said: When a person is in pain, what does the *Shechinah* say? My head pains me! My arm pains me!" (pp. 123-124)

NOTE: Rav Cha'yim is making a number of subtle points here. The first is a simple reading of the *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin*. Whatever "pains" you, meaning whatever you lack that upsets you and distresses you causing you to pray is also upsetting and distressing to God. When God says, "I am with him in distress – עמו אנכי בצרה" (*Tehilim* 91:15), He really means it.

However, the second point is well worth remembering as well. If God empathizes with my pain, then He does so with the pain of every living creature. Thus, God's "pain" is far greater than my own pain. All the more reason to pray to lessen God's pain, so to speak.

This leads us to the third point: If we pray to reduce God's distress, then perhaps He will do so by removing my personal pain and distress.

### פרק יב

ואם בענין תפלת היחיד על צערו, צריך שתהא כוונתו רק צורך גבוה לבד. כל שכן במטבע ברכות התפלה הקבועה וסדורה מאנשי הכנסיה הקדושים. ודאי ראוי שלא לכוין בהם כלל צורך עצמו הנראה ממשוטים. אלא צורך גבוה לבד. להמשיך תוספת רבוי ברכה וקדושה להעולמות מצד התחברותו יתברך שמו אליהם.

Despite the comments above, Rav Cha'yim urges us to forget the simple meaning of the words of petition in the *Shemonah Esray* and just concentrate on strengthening our connection with God.

Rav Cha'yim reminds us that the *Shemonah Esray* is a string of *Berachot*.

So what is the purpose of saying a *Berachah*?

Hint: What does Rav Cha'yim ask of us at the end of this paragraph?

### Chapter 12

And regarding the prayer of an individual concerning his pain, he must direct his *Kavanah* only towards the needs of [God] on high, then certainly, when reciting the words of the *Berachot* of the *Tefilah* (i.e. *Shemonah Esray*) set out by the holy *Anshay Knesset HaGedolah*, it is proper not to concentrate on his own needs as reflected in the simple meaning [of the words], rather he should [concentrate only on the] needs of [God] on high, to draw additional and extended blessing and sanctity [down] to the [spiritual] worlds, [emanating] from His connection with them.

These words by Rav Cha'yim are the words quoted as the strategy at the very beginning of this collection.

עם כל זה, ודאי שכל אחד לפי שכלו והשגתו מחוייב לשית עצות בנפשו ולבקש תחבולות מלחמת מצוה, להמלט מבלבול המחשבות אשר לא טהורים שתתחונן דעתו עליו לעבודת התפלה כראוי. כי עבודת התפלה היא לנו עתה במקום עבודת הקרבן שהיה תלוי כולו במחשבתו של הכהן. שבמחשבתו היה יכול לפגול. ועל ידי קדושת מחשבתו היה הקרבן מתעלה לריח ניחוח לפניו יתברך שמו:

When all is said and done, each person, according to own intellect and level, must seek the proper tactics and find the [available] strategies to wage the Mitzvah war, to flee the confusion of impure thoughts, to calm his mind to perform the prayers properly. For us now, the prayers are the replacement for the sacrifices, which were totally dependant upon the thoughts of the priest. With incorrect thoughts he could make the sacrifice *Pigul*, while through his holy thoughts the sacrifices rose as a sweet smell before Him, may His name be blessed. (p.128)

#### פרק יד

אמנם ביאור הכתוב הנזכר לעיל בתחלת דברינו, "ולעבדו כו' ובכל נפשכם", שעבודת התפלה השלימה צריכה שתהיה עם הנפש, הוא ענין גדול ליודעים ומבינים קצת. וכאשר יתמיד האדם תפלתו בזאת המדרגה שיתבאר, אם ירצה השם, יתוסף לו טהרה על טהרתו.

Prayer, in general, and *Tefilah* (i.e., *Shemonah Esray*), in particular, is soul work!

#### Chapter 14

However, the explanation of the text [which we quoted] at the beginning of our discussion, "to serve him... with all our souls – **ולעבדו ... ובכל נפשכם**" is that the perfect service of prayer must be [performed] with the soul. This is a great principle to those who know and understand a little. When a person will consistently pray on this level, as we will explain, then he will add purity to his purity. (p.130)

Just remember that you and I are all priests! We are a kingdom of priests. Therefore, we must pray as priests, just like priests offering the daily sacrifice.

Crucial to understanding Rav Cha'yim's point is the idea that our soul expresses itself through speech. Now think how important speech is in Judaism!

Notice the emphasis on speech...

והענין שעבודת התפלה היא במקום עבודת הקרבן, וכמו שענין הקרבן היה להעלות נפש הבהמה למעלה. ולכן עיקר הכפרה היה תלוי בזריקת הדם, הוא הנפש. וכן הקטרת האימורים, עיקרם היה לכוונת העלאת הנפש. כן עיקר ענין התפלה הוא. להעלות ולמסור ולדבק נפשו למעלה. כי כח הדבור של האדם נקרא נפש כמו שכתוב, "ויהי האדם לנפש חיה" (בראשית ב:ז), ותרגם אונקלוס, "לרוח ממללא". וכן נראה לעין שבכל דבור שהאדם מוציא מפיו יוצא מפיו רוח והבל הלב. והדבור הוא עיקר נפש האדם שזה יתרון האדם מן הבהמה. אם כן, כל תיבה היוצאת מפי האדם היא כח וחלק מנפשו:

What are the purposes of the various parts of the sacrificial service?

Why does Rav Cha'yim mention these different parts of the process of offering the daily sacrifice?



This quotation contains a crucial point.

What is the simple *Peshat* of the verse from *Berayshit* (2:7)?

How does Onkelos's translation change the *Peshat*?

So what is the relationship between being a "living being" and being "a talking spirit"?

This is based on the idea that the service of prayer is the replacement for the sacrificial service. Just as the purpose of a sacrifice was to raise the soul of the animal to above, and the essence of atonement was dependant upon the sprinkling of the blood, which is the soul, and the essence of the burning of the entrails was to raise the soul, so, too, the essence of prayer is to raise, offer and attach one's soul above. Man's ability to speak is called the soul, as it is written, "Man became a living being" (*Berayshit* 2:7), which Onkelos translates as "a talking spirit." It is plain to see that with everything a person says the spirit and breath of the heart exits from his mouth, speech being the essence of a person's soul, for this is man's advantage over the animals. If so, every word a person says is from the power and part of his soul. (p.131)

For the uninitiated, *Peshat* means the explicit meaning of a Biblical or Rabbinic text.

NOTE: If speech defines the spiritual essence of our being as humans, then it is only appropriate that speech be the medium for our reaching out to God through the spiritual worlds. Remember that God does the same. He created the world by using speech and He initiates prophecy to communicate with us.

Rav Cha'yim uses language similar to the *Shulchan Arukh Orach Cha'yim* sec.98, which he refers to elsewhere.

לזאת בעת עומדו להתפלל לפני קונו יתברך שמו יפשיט גופו מעל נפשו. היינו שיסיר כל רעיוני ההבלים הבאים מכחות הגוף שנחקקו ונתדבקו בנפשו. שלא תהיה עבודת תפלתו רק בהנפש ורעותא עלאה דיליה.

For this, when one stands in prayer before his Creator, may His name be blessed, he should strip his body away from his soul by removing all the silly thoughts coming from his physicality, invading and clinging to his soul. Thus, his prayer will be purely soulful and the fulfillment of the divine will. (pp. 132-133)

ובדברו כל תיבה, שהיא כח וחלק מנפשו, ידביק בה רעותיה מאד, ליתן ולשפוך בה נפשו ממש לגמרי. ולהדביקה בשורש העליון של תיבות התפלה העומדים ברומו של עולם. וכמו שכתוב בזוהר ויקהל הנזכר בהגה"ה: "ובעוד דפומיה ושפוותיה מרחשן, לביה יכוין רעותיה, יסתלק לעילא לעילא ליחדא כלא ברזא דרזין דתמן תקיעו דכל רעותין ומחשבתין ברזא דקיימא באין סוף. (ובעוד שפיו ושפתיו נעות יכוון לבו ורצונו יעלה למעלה למעלה, ליחד הכל בסוד הסודות ששמה נתקעים כל הרצונות והמחשבות בסוד אין סוף.)

Rav Cha'yim quotes the *Zohar* repeatedly throughout the *Nefesh HaCha'yim*. The Hebrew translation here is by Rav Yisachar Dov Rubin.

And as one says each word, which is powered by and is a part of his soul, one should attach his will

The highest spiritual level, the level closest to God Himself is *Retzon HaShem* – רצון 'ה, God's will. Rav Cha'yim was certainly aware of the statement in *Pirkay Avot* (2:4):  
הוא היה אומר, "עשה רצונו כרצונך כדי שיעשה רצונך כרצונו."

to it, to give it and pour into it (each word) literally and totally his soul, to attach [one's soul] to the divine root of every word of the prayer, which reaches to the very highest [spiritual] levels in the world, as it says in the *Zohar, Va'Yak'hel* (213b) (mentioned in the note), "While his mouth and lips move, his heart should direct his will, he should rise higher and higher, to unite all in the secret of secrets, for it is there that all thoughts and desires are rooted in the secret residing in the Infinite (*Ayn Sof* – אין סוף)." (p.133)

Rabban Gamliel, son of Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi* used to say, "Make His will like your will so that He will make your will like His will." This seemingly innocuous statement takes on greater importance when interpreted as the *Zohar* does. The highest possible spiritual level is attained when a person can match his will with God's will. Indeed, this is what is meant to happen every time you perform a Mitzvah... if you have 100% complete *Kavanah*. And that is exactly what Rav Cha'yim Voloshin is talking about regarding *Tefilah*.

The very words of *Tefilah* have their root in prophecy. Therefore, they are the perfect tools to use to attain the highest spiritual levels. Prayer is soul work and the ultimate service of the soul is to remove oneself and one's concerns totally from the prayer experience, concentrating instead on serving the words of prayer to God on the silver platter of one's soul. This is how the *Shemonah Esray* becomes a spiritual staircase that we use to ascend to encounter God Himself.

## "BRINGING something home from heaven"

NOTE: Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev accepts Rav Cha'yim Voloshin's basic thesis and then goes one step further:

הרב לוי יצחק מברדיטשוב, ספר קדושת לוי, שיר השירים ד"ה אל תראוני

אל תראוני שאני שחרחור' כו'. ונבאר קודם מאמר חז"ל (ראש השנה יח.): "שנים ירדו למטה אחת. זה ירד וזה לא ירד. זה נענה וזה לא נענה. זה התפלל תפלה שלימה וזה לא התפלל תפלה שלימה." ומלת שלימה אינו מובן. הוי ליה למימר זה התפלל תפלה טובה כו'. אמנם יבואר והוא שאנו רואין שיש צדיקים שפועלין בתפילתן מה שרוצים ויש צדיקים שאינם פועלים. הענין הוא כך: שזה הצדיק הגדול כאשר בא לחצר גינת ביתן המלך מלכו של עולם ומיישב עצמו שבא לפני המלך נשתכח מאתו מה שהיה לו לבקש בעסקי העולם הזה ואינו מבקש, רק שיהיה דבוק תמיד בהמלך, כי מה ערב עליו כי אם היותו עובד הבורא ולהיות עבד המלך ושוכח כל עסקיו. לא כן הצדיקים שאינם

Rav Levi Yitzchak describes two kinds of *Tzaddik*. How would you define these two types?  
Does he show a preference for one type of *Tzaddik* over the other? Why?

What irksome problem that bothered Rav Cha'yim is dealt with by Rav Levi Yitzchak?

במדריגה זו. אף על פי שעומדים לפני המלך זוכר בקשתו מה שהוא חפץ לבקש. ולהכי זה הצדיק כשבא לפני המלך אינו זוכר הבקשה מעסקי העולם הזה שהוא חפץ לבקש לכן אינו פועל. והצדיק הקטן ממנו שזוכר בעת עמדו לפני המלך בקשתו ומבקש מאתו הבקשה לכן פועל. והצדיק הראשון שאינו זוכר בקשתו להביא השפע לעולם הזה נקרא לא התפלל תפילה שלימה, שאין בו שלימיות שאינו מביא את השפע, רק חושב עסקי העולם הבא להיות עובד הבורא. וזה שחשב גם בקשתו להביא השפע גם לעולם הזה נקרא תפלה שלימה, כי יש בתפילתו שלימיות שמביא שפע גם לעולם הזה.

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, *Kedushat Levi, Shir HaShirim*, s.v. אל תראוני

According to Rav Levi Yitzchak you must follow Rav Cha'yim Voloshin's instructions to get to "heaven," to encounter God. However, once you get there, do not forget why you came. And why do you come to heaven, according to Rav Levi Yitzchak?

First, we will explain a quotation from our Rabbis, of blessed memory: "Two descended... This one descended, this one did not descend; this one was answered and this one was not answered; this one prayed a perfect/complete prayer and this one did not pray a perfect/complete prayer." (*Rosh Hashanah* 18a) It is not comprehensible. It should have said, "This one prayed a good prayer..." However, it can be explained: We see that there are *Tzaddikim* who accomplish what they desire with their prayers and there are *Tzaddikim* who do not accomplish.

The idea is this: This great *Tzaddik*, when he comes to the garden-court of the King of the universe's palace, realizing that he has come before the King he forgets what This Worldly matters he had to ask about, and [thus] does not ask. He only remains always attached to the King, for what is most pleasant for him if only to serve the Creator and to be a servant of the King. [Consequently,] he forgets all of his business.

Not so the *Tzaddikim* who are not on this level. Even though he (such a *Tzaddik*) stands before the King, he remembers his request, what he desires to ask about. Therefore, when the [first kind of] *Tzaddik* comes before the King and forgets his request concerning the This Worldly matters he had to ask about, he does not accomplish [anything]. The *Tzaddik* smaller than him, who remembers as he stands before the King his request and [actually] makes his request, he accomplishes.

The first *Tzaddik*, who does not remember his request [and does not] draw the *Shefa* (Divine effluence) into This World, is described as [one who did not pray] a perfect/complete prayer. It has no perfection because he does not draw the *Shefa*; he only thinks of matters of the World to Come, to

We have translated the Hebrew word, שלימה, as both perfect and complete because it has both connotations.

*Shefa* – Divine effluence or flow – is that Divine goodness that God sends earthward to positively affect what is happening in the created world.

be a servant of the Creator. The one, who also thought of his request, to draw the *Shefa* into This World, is described as [one who prayed] a perfect/complete prayer, because his prayer has perfection in his drawing the *Shefa* also into This World.

What does Rav Levi Yitzchak teach us about how we are to pray? What kind of "Tzaddik" are we to become when we pray? The very idea of prayer as "soul work" really has two meanings. First, it takes a great deal of work to raise one's soul to the point of actually encountering God during a moment of prayer. However, Rav Levi Yitzchak teaches us that the second kind of "soul work" is also of great significance. Do not forget why we are trying so hard to meet God! Remember to ask God for what you need and especially for what *Am Yisra'el* needs. It is the combination of these two aspects of "soul work" that make our *Tefilah* so unique.

## a final word

The best way to summarize this collection is to repeat what we said in the beginning. Use each quotation as a tool, a technique to improve your *Kavanah* and to thereby make your prayer a more spiritual experience.

Our intention is not that you adopt every single idea presented here. Rather, it is important to first try those things that make sense to you and fit your personal outlook. Remember that prayer is a serious business and the use of these tools and techniques must be applied in a serious manner.

At the same time, you are encouraged to experiment. Try something new. Use it for a while until it becomes comfortable. Test it to see if it works for you.

Be creative. Certainly some of what is presented here should encourage you to think about adapting this tool or using a variation of another.

All in all, the effort is more than worthwhile. We spend a good deal of our time praying. It is up to us to achieve the most powerful and meaningful *Tefilah* experience possible.