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## Bilvavi Part 2 - Chapter 13 Essence of Prayer

### **The Ultimate State of *Tefillah* is "Pour out your Heart as Water in the Presence of Hashem"**

In the previous chapter, we discussed the principle of *tefillah*, and explained that it not merely a detail of our *avodah*. We find in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that just as Torah is equal to all the 613 *mitzvos*, so it is with *tefillah*. In other words, each of the 613 *mitzvos* and each aspect of *avodah* must be preceded by *tefillah*.

We will now consider how one's *tefillah* should be expressed. It says in the *pasuk*, "The pauper speaks with supplication" (*Mishlei* 18:23). In fact, there are many forms of *tefillah*, as we find in *Chazal* (*Devarim Rabbah* 2:1) that there are ten terms used to describe prayer.

When we speak of *tefillah* that should exist continually throughout the day, it can certainly not always be expressed as supplication. There is some degree of supplication, but one cannot sustain all day the sense of (*Eichah* 2:19) "Pour out your heart as water in the presence of Hashem." There are particular moments, particular times, in which Hashem grants one the privilege to have his heart "opened" and then he can be in the state of "Pour out your heart as water in the presence of Hashem." He is "in front" of Hashem and pours out his heart before Him. But (except for the precious few) one cannot live in this lofty state all day.

Therefore, the most clear and practical way is to address Hashem all day directly, speaking to Him naturally, as it were. It says (*Shemos* 20:21), "Wherever I will [allow you to] mention My name, I will come to you and bless you." When one says to Hashem "You," Hashem comes. The "mention of Hashem's name" means that a person really wants to speak to Hashem, and when that is one's inner, true will, Hashem will certainly come to Him!

When Hashem is present next to a person, it must be as the *Mesillas Yesharim* says, "as a man speaks to his friend." It will be as if one is requesting from his family, "Please bring me that object," or "Could you do that for me?" And in this way, one must speak clearly to Hashem, and ask Him, "I wish to learn; help me to understand the subject. I wish to pray; help me to pray properly; I am going to walk on a city street; protect me from seeing

something forbidden." For these aspects, and for other issues that trouble a person, he should speak to his Creator.

During one's time of solitude (as the Ramchal writes in *Derech Etz Chaim* that one must fix for himself a time each day for solitude and contemplation) or at certain specially blessed moments, one should try to pour out all of his feelings before the Creator, and then he will be in the state of "Pour out your heart like water." But throughout the day, one should speak to Him as if speaking to a friend, literally. Just as there is a chair and table here, so too, and more so, is Hashem here! Just as one speaks to his family members and is certain that they hear him, so must it be with Hashem.

### **"I will Walk before Hashem in the Land of the Living"**

One of the ten terms of *tefillah* is "crying out," as it says (*Eichah* 2:18), "Their heart cried out to Hashem."

We will first consider a worldly example. When does a person cry out? There are two cases: The first is when a person attempts to speak with a friend. If he sees that the friend is ignoring him and is not interested, he finally loses patience and starts screaming. He is not shouting to him, but at him - so the person should pay attention to him and treat him properly. This is one form of shouting that we find among people.

The second kind of shouting is when someone is on one side of the street and he sees a friend walking on the other side. He needs him badly, and he knows that if he doesn't yell, his friend will go on the bus and go far away, and he will not be able to reach him and get from him what he wants. He loudly screams out the person's name, and says, "Wait a minute, I need you!" In other words, such a shout comes from the fact that one knows that his friend won't hear him if he speaks softly. Therefore, he must shout to him loudly.

Now we will consider: when we speak to Hashem, what kind of shouting might we be doing? It's simple and clear that the first kind, where one shouts because someone isn't listening or paying attention, cannot apply to Hashem. It says, "For You listen to the prayer of each mouth." Hashem listens to every Jew. The *sefarim* explain that each prayer is answered, but it isn't always seen in the open. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Hashem listens to the prayer of every individual of the Jewish people. There is no need to shout so that He will listen. Hashem always listens, and when He sees that it is good for a person to have his request filled, he will be answered, but when He sees that it is not in the person's best interests, he will not be answered. But we may not mention the concept of shouting at Hashem! This would be a lack of *emunah* and of understanding what the Creator is!

This all relates to the first kind of shouting. What about the second kind? That was where a person is distant, and you shout because you might miss the opportunity to reach him. If you speak quietly, he won't hear. Yet the *gemara* (*Berachos* 31a) learns from the prayer of Chanah many fundamental laws concerning prayer, and one of them is "and her voice was not heard" (*Shmuel I* 1:13) - "from here we learn that it is forbidden to raise the voice in prayer."

This law of prayer in silence applies specifically to the *Shemoneh Esreh*. However, during the

other parts of the prayer, there is no specific prohibition against raising one's voice and praying aloud.

We must consider, then, what is the basic difference between the prayer of *Shemoneh Esreh* and the other parts of the prayer? Why is there this law of praying in silence specifically there, while one may raise his voice during other parts of the prayer?

The simplest explanation (without getting into deep concepts) is that *Shemoneh Esreh* is recited "as a man speaks to his friend." When a person is in the state of "in front of Hashem," he is right with the Creator, and there is no need to shout.

When one is in the state of "Hashem is in the Heavens, and I am on the earth," he senses deep down that Hashem is far, and if He is far, I naturally need to shout. But when one senses that Hashem is right nearby, just as when he speaks to his family members, he does not need a loudspeaker, and he does not need to raise his voice, so too, when he speaks to Hashem, it is calm and gentle.

With the people of Nineveh, it says (*Yonah* 3:8), "And they called out to G-d with force." The Kotzker rebbe said that such is the way of the people of Nineveh, lowly people, who think they need to shout with force so that Hashem will hear them. A Jew, who is pure and sensitive, knows that he can live in the state of "before the presence of Hashem." He speaks to Hashem not with shouts and not with force, but as one speaks to a friend.

A person who lives with Hashem throughout the entire day lives in a state of "I have placed Hashem before me always." He is aware that "no place is void of Him," that Hashem is everywhere, and so, deep in his soul, he senses that Hashem is nearby.

If a person feels that he needs to shout, he may be certain that he still lacks the sense that Hashem is nearby! When speaking to a relative outside of the country, even if there is a good connection, since one senses that he is speaking with someone far away, there is a tendency to speak loudly. The sense of the distance between the speaker and the listener makes a person raise his voice and even shout.

The more one is able to sense that Hashem is really nearby, the more he will speak in the way of "as a man speaks to his friend" and in the manner of (*Kohelles* 9:17) "the words of the wise are heard when gentle." But if he needs to shout, there must be a lack of inner awareness of Hashem's closeness.

Certainly, one does not at first sense that he is talking to a friend. This requires tremendous effort and only after a while, will one see its effect. All we are doing here is presenting the path of advancement. One starts with the feeling that Hashem is not that close (unless he already has the privilege to sense that, but for one not as pure, there is this process), and goes to level after level, feeling more and more that one is really speaking to the Creator and that He is present.

This is the aspiration and the goal - to live with Hashem here in this world. "I will walk before Hashem in the land of the living" (*Tehillim* 116:9). When a person has the privilege to cleave to Hashem, as it says (*Devarim* 4:4), "And you, who cleave to Hashem, are all alive today," then even this world changes to become for him a "land of the living," and he will "walk for

Hashem in the land of the living," even here in this world.

## **Prayer is a Vessel for Holding the Faith in Divine Providence**

*Tefillah* is a complete means for sustaining a person from beginning to end, every step of the way. One must, then, strive to ask from Hashem concerning every detail.

Once, a person with torn shoes went in to see the Chazon Ish. When the Chazon Ish asked why he doesn't buy new shoes, the person answered that he doesn't have the money. The Chazon Ish asked him, "Did you already ask Hashem for the money to buy shoes?" "No," answered the man, "I am ashamed to ask Him for shoes; it's not dignified." The Chazon Ish told him, "You should know that your behavior doesn't stem from a fear of the holiness, but from a fear due to shame! There is a lack in your relationship with the Creator! If you would really feel that Hashem is your Father and that He is here, you would not be ashamed! When you were a child and your shoes tore, you weren't ashamed to ask your father to buy you a new pair, unless you knew that your father didn't have money and that his financial situation was very difficult. But if you knew he was wealthy and that he lacked no money, would you have been ashamed even for a moment to ask him for shoes? Certainly not! And so" the Chazon Ish concluded, "'Can the hand of Hashem be limited?' (*Bemidbar* 11:23) Certainly, Hashem does not lack anything!"

When a person has the merit to feel that Hashem is near him, he will pray for each detail of his life, even for the smallest ones. Why is this? The depth of the matter is: Who made the shoes? Did they tear on their own? Why don't you have money to buy new shoes? This all comes from precise Divine Providence! A person bought these shoes, and had them for a year. As long as they were needed, they did not tear. The moment the Divinely ordained time for their use was completed, Hashem tore them! It turns out, then, that the One Who tore them was the Creator Himself!

Concerning the Bais HaMikdash (the Temple), we find in the *gemara* (*Bava Kamma* 60b), "'When a fire goes out and finds thorns' - when it goes on its own - 'the one who lit the fire shall pay'- Hashem said, 'I must pay for the fire I lit. I lit a fire in Zion, as it says (*Eichah* 4:11), "And He lit a fire in Zion and consumed its foundations," and I will rebuild it with fire, as it says (*Yirmeyahu* 15:20), "I will be to it a wall of fire around it and for honor I will be in it.'"" When one recognizes that it was Hashem Who destroyed the Bais HaMikdash, he turns to the One Who destroyed it and asks Him to rebuild it.

This is true not only with the most important thing - the Bais HaMikdash - but with every detail in life. If one applies this idea and understands that when his shoes tear, it is from Hashem, and it is in the same category as "He ignited a fire in Zion," then in a deep sense, "I will rebuild it with fire." He goes to Hashem for his needs, because he understands that there is no other address at which to seek. If Reuven broke something, he must pay for it, but if one understands that the address for everything is simply Hashem, and only He causes each detail, it is clear without any doubt that there is no address toward which to turn and seek things.

The sense that one must only ask for big things and not small ones comes from a lack of appreciation of Divine Providence. That is to say, the *tefillah* and the awareness of Divine

Providence are interdependent. When a person recognizes Divine Providence, the aspect of *tefillah* naturally becomes stronger, and in this way, he grows "from strength to strength." The more one does pray for each detail, the more this prayer will instill in his midst the *emunah* in detailed Divine Providence.

*Chazal* have said, "Words that come from the heart enter the heart." The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that they enter the heart from where they came! They can certainly enter other hearts, but if words come from the heart and don't enter the heart of the one who said them, they cannot enter the heart of one who hears them! If the one who speaks is not himself a receptacle for his own words, there will be no receptacle for the listeners, because he needs to deliver to them even the receptacle for his words. How is this? If he himself strives with all his might to receive the words he says, the words come with their receptacle, and he automatically transmits that to the listeners, as well.

When a person prays, and his words come out from the heart, those words must return to his own heart! His *emunah* must strengthen through the force of *tefillah*!

If a person is working on acquiring the belief in Divine Providence, and he prays for this, the *tefillah* itself will in turn instill in him this belief more deeply. If one really wants Hashem to accept his *tefillah*, he must be able to receive the words himself.

This can be understood through the example brought before: A person enters a store and asks for a bottle to drink. When the storekeeper hands it to him, he pulls back his hand and the bottle falls to the ground.

*Tefillah*, as we said, is a "hand," a receptacle. We have a lot of requests from Him, and we are not always answered. One of the reasons is that the *tefillah* itself must have a receptacle.

If a person is receiving *emunah* through his *tefillah*, the *tefillah* is a receptacle of *emunah*, and then, he has a receptacle for all he needs: livelihood, other blessings, success, etc. But if the *tefillah* is only for a detail, and one seeks only shoes or a livelihood, but he does not form a receptacle for the *tefillah*, it is not a real *tefillah*! And if so, it cannot accomplish! If the *tefillah* is in order to fulfill a request, but it does not instill in the person a greater *emunah* in Divine Providence, the inner essence of the *tefillah* is lacking.

### **One Drop Joins with Another**

Here we must add a simple point. To help understand, we will use the known example in the incident of Rabbi Akiva with the water that wore away at the rock, of which the *sefarim hakedoshim* spoke at length.

If one would examine each drop on its own, one would not notice any effect with his eyes. Only after tens, hundreds, and thousands of drops, the significant effect of the drops becomes apparent.

So, too, in our *avodah*, both in general, and specifically in the area of *tefillah* we're now discussing, there is the principle of one drop after another, until they join and "wear away at the rock." *Tefillah* must place in the heart of each person the belief in Divine Providence, but

one cannot examine his heart each day and say, "A moment before *tefillah*, I felt like such and such, and now, after the *tefillah*, do I feel more *emunah*?"

There is no tool in existence that can measure this! What then? The *tefillah* must be done in a way of strengthening the principles of *emunah* in a person, but one will only be able to check its influence after a long period of time, as with water wearing away at a rock. But when a person engages in *tefillah*, he must approach it as a way of instilling *emunah* in his midst.

This is a basic introduction to the entire process of *tefillah*. When a person speaks to Hashem, this is an unparalleled opportunity. If one recognizes this, and he knows that such is the real value of *tefillah*, it will naturally be carried out with joy and inspiration.

May Hashem help us to continue and clarify the matter, and may we have the merit to truly cleave to Him always.

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