

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101-Shemona Esrei

Lesson 10-Mahotah Shel Shemona Esrei-The Essence Of Shemona Esrei

Source 1

עומדים לפני המלך—Standing Before The King

בכדי לישב עניין זה נבקש להעלות קושי אחר בהבנת מהות התפילה. הנה חילוק בסיסי יש בין הברכות שבסדר יומו של אדם מישראל ובין תפילת העמידה. בו האחרונה נחשב הוא עומד לפני המלך, מה שאין כן בשאר ברכות. ואינו מובן, אם במא שפונה האדם אל בוראו ואומר: "ברוך אתה", נחשב כעומד לפניו ומדבר עמו, הן גם בשאר ברכות הנוסח זהה, ומאי שנא. ובנוסף אחר: אם איןנו עומדים לפני המלך בשאר ברכות, כיצד אומר לו 'ברוך אתה'. אלא שבאמת ראת פשיטה שככל רגע ורגע מיימי היי עומדים האדם לפני בוראו, אשר עיניו משוטטות בכל הארץ, והמיד יכול לפנזה אליו באופן ישיר.

Translation: In order to clarify, let me raise an additional difficulty as concerns the proper understanding of the nature of prayer. There is a basic difference between the Brachos that a Jewish person recites during the course of the day and those that he says during Shemona Esrei. Concerning the Brachos said during Shemona Esrei, he is to see himself as "standing before the King," a state of mind he is not required to attain when he recites the other Brachos during the day. It cannot be that because he says: Baruch Ata, he is now "standing before the King," and speaking to Him since the wording of all the Brachos follow that pattern. In other words, if he is not to view himself as "standing before the King," in other Brachos, then why does he say the words: "Baruch Ata?" The answer is that all times, we are standing before our Creator whose attention is always focused on the world and we can turn to Him at any time.

אמנם מהוורתא דמילתא היא, שכאשר אדם או עניין נעמדים "לפני המלך" פירושו של הדבר הוא שהוא עניין ניגש אל מלכותו של הקב"ה ומקש להעמיד את עצמו כשייך אליה. במהלך שעות היום הרגילות של האדם אין הוא רואה את עצמו בנוגע ישירות במלכותו ית', שהרי בעולם נפרד הוא כי. וזה גופא הוא רצונו של מקום, שיחיה האדם בעולם נפרד, עולם העשייה, וייחיה האדם זה שנותל אחריות על שלומו של העולם וונגשונו, וכאד"ר שהושם בגין לעבדה ולשמירה, ולקיים "מלאו את הארץ וכבשו ורדו וגנו". לעומת זאת, רגע התפילה בהם עומדים האדם "לפני המלך", הרי הוא משנה את צורת הסתכלותו על החיים האנושיים שלו עצם, ואת כל כולה של המציאות עלי חד רואה באספקטoria של המלך גופה. ומבחן כיצד הכל נוגע לניגלו מלכוותו וקיום ייועדה.

Translation: Nevertheless, the correct interpretation is that when a person or a matter "stands before the King," that matter touches upon the throne of G-d and the person is looking to place himself as worthy to be near G-d's throne. During the course of the day, he does not view himself as being near G-d's throne because his daily activities are taking place in a different world and that is G-d's wish; that man live in his separate world, the world of creativity and that the person take responsibility on keeping peace and prosperity in his world as the Torah says: man was placed in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it, and to fulfill the obligation to populate the world and to gain control over the world. Despite that reality, the moments when we engage in prayer, man "stands before the King." At that moment he changes his view

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

of his circumstances. He sees everything about his universe through the prism of the King Himself and understands how everything is centered on revealing G-d's sovereignty and fulfilling his mission

והם הם דברי חז"ל שצורך לשים לבו למעלה, ותרגמה הרמב"ם (תפילה ה, ד): "שיהיה לבו פניו למעלה כאילו הוא עומד בשמי", ובודאי שאין זה דמיון בלבד אלא בהTOR עצה כיitz להסיח דעת מענייני העולם המפריעים את ריבונו כוונתו, אלא לשים עצמו כ'עומד בשמי' פירושו שישים את עצמו כעומד בתוך מציאות שונה, לא כמצב הרגnil שאדם רואה את עצמו שתוֹל בענייני הארץ, אלא להחליפ את מיקומו ולהציב את מציאותו בתוך עולם מושגיים ממשיים.

Translation: That is what our Sages had in mind when they instructed us to direct our hearts upward. The Rambam explains (Tefila 5, 4) May his heart be directed upward as if he is standing in heaven. That is not only an image by way of suggestion as to how to change your focus away from your worldly concerns which interfere with your ability to concentrate but to place himself "standing before the King." That he see himself standing in a different dimension, not his ordinary circumstances in which he sees himself involved in his worldly activities but to change his outlook towards the concerns of heaven.

Source 2

Prayer As An Encounter With G-d

בית המדרש הווירטואלי (M.B.M.V) שליד ישיבת הר עציון
"עוֹוּ וְעַנוּוָה" – מבוא להגותו של הרב סולובייצ'יק, מאת הרב ראובן ציגלר – התפילה במפגש
ובקנין עצמי

מקובלים ופילוסופים כאחד תמהו על האפשרות של השפעת התפירות על אל אינסופי ובכל-יודע, והונגים רבים ביקשו להבין מדוע הקב"ה מקבל תפירות מסוימות ואינו שועה לאחריות. אף על פי כן, בדיוני העמוקים ומרובבי-הפנים בנושא התפילה, נמנע הרב סולובייצ'יק מלעסוק בשאלות אלה. הרב העדייף להתמקד, בתמיד, לצד האנושי של המשוואה ולא לצד האלוקי. מה, שואל הרב, אופיו המדויק של מעשה התפילה? מהם הלבוי הנפש הפנימיים הדרושים לה? מה השפעותיה על האדם המתפלל? במילים אחרות, מה משמעות ותפקידה של התפילה עבור האדם?

Translation: Both mystics and philosophers are surprised that Jews believe that it is possible that their prayers can influence a G-d who is eternal and all-knowing. Many scholars want to understand why G-d accepts some prayers but does not accept others. Despite these questions, in his deep study and multifaceted examination of Tefila, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, z'l, refused to deal with these issues. R. Soloveitchik, as always, preferred to deal with the human side of Jewish prayer and not the Godly side. R. Soloveitchik asked what is the essence of the act of praying? In other words, what is the meaning and the role of Tefila in a person's life?

הרבות מציע מספר תשובות לשאלת אחרונה זו, ובכלל תשובה מהוות מוקד של מאמר אחר:

א. התפילה היא מפגש עם ה' (איש האמונה הבוגר);

שמונה עשרה-תפלה שחרית-101 Tefila 101

- ב. התפילה היא אמצעי בידי האדם למצוא ולעצב את אישיותו ("גאולה, תפילה, תלמוד תורה");
- ג. התפילה היא צורה של קרבנה עצמית לה' ("רعيונות על התפילה").

Translation: R. Soloveitchik suggest several answers to this last question and each answer comes from a source that presents a different focus:

- A. Tefila is in the form of a rendezvous with G-d (Ish Emunah Ha'Boded);
- B. Tefila is the process by which man can discover and assert his humanity;
- C. Tefila is a form of an individual offering to G-d.

התפילה במשמעות

ח'ז"ל עוסקים בשאלת האם יש צורך בכוונה בעת קיום מצווה על מנת שייצא אדם ידי חוכבתה ("מצוות צריכות כוונה"), או שמא דהיינו מעשה המצווה בלבד ללא כוונה לקיים את דבר ה'? לנכני תפילה, אומר הרב, אין מחלוקת – לבסוףعلماء אין תפילה ללא כוונה. זאת מכיוון שמושג הכוונה ביחס לתפילה אינו דומה למושג הכוונה במצוות אחרות, כי הכוונה בתפילה אינה תוספת היזונית אלא עצם התפילה ממש" (איש האמונה הבודד, עמ' 34 הערכה 26). וליתר דיוק, בעוד שמשמעות הכוונה במצוות אחרות אינה אלא "שהמקים את המצווה מתכוון לפועל על פיו רצון ה'" (שם; כוונה זו מכונה "כוונה לצאת"), הכוונה המגדירה את התפילה שונה בהכללות:

כיצד היא הכוונה? שיפנה את לבו מכל המחשבות ויראה עצמו עצמו כאשר הוא עומד לפני השכינה (רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ד, טז)

Translation: *Tefila As a Rendezvous With G-d*-Our Sages deal with the issue as to whether a person needs to intend to perform a mitzvah in order to fulfill that Mitzvah or is it enough to simply perform the act without intending to fulfill a directive from G-d. Concerning Tefila, R. Soloveitchik said there is no disagreement. The reason being that the concept of intent concerning performing the Mitzvah of Tefila is unlike the concept of intent as concerns other Mitzvot. Concerning Tefila, intention is not an external factor but is part of the essence of the Mitzvah (Ish Emunah Ha'BoBoded, p. 34 footnote 26). More precisely, inasmuch as the meaning of intent as concerns other Mitzvos is only that he is performing the Mitzvah to fulfill the desire of G-d, the type of intent needed concerning Tefila is characterized differently in its purpose:

How is intent accomplished during Tefila? That he turns his heart away from all other thoughts and sees himself standing before the Shechina (Rambam Hilchos Tefila 4, 15);

כחד לתייארו של הרמב"ם, הרבה כותב שהתפילה במשמעותה היא מפגש עם ה':

התפילה היא ביסודה תחושתו של האדם שהוא נמצא במצב בוראו והוא פונה אליו. להתפלל – משמעו אחד בלבד: לעמוד לפני ה' (איש האמונה הבודד, עמ' 34).

Translation: In response to the Rambam's explanation, R. Soloveitchik wrote that Tefila in its essence is a rendezvous with G-d; Tefila is in its foundation the feeling of the person that he finds himself in the presence of His Creator and he turns to Him. To pray-its meaning is singular-to stand before G-d (Ish Emunah Ha'BoBoded, p. 34).

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

החלק המרכז וhaarok biyter batpila haumida hoa haksha: shelosh berachot hareshonot meshabhot at ha', shelosh acharonot mabtavot ha'beracha todah, shelosh ushera berachot ha'amzuyot kolilot bikkashot masognim shonim. Af ul pi can, hatafkid ha'merchi Shel mafgesha batpila ainu kiblat ha'muna hambochesh ma' lehfezrotinu, ala yizirat achova, ou kahila, bin bein adam v'halelokim:

Translation: The central part and lengthiest part of Shemona Esrei is the section that includes requests: in the first three Brachos, we praise G-d and the last three Brachos we exhibit gratitude while the middle thirteen portray a variety of concerns. Nevertheless, the central purpose of the encounter with G-d is not to receive a response to our requests; it is the creation of fraternity, a community between man and G-d.

התקבלותה של התפילה היא בבחינת תקווה, חזון, משאלת, בקשה, אך לא חוק בלי עבור או הנחת יסוד. בסיסה של התפילה איננה ההכרה באפקטיביות שלה, אלא האמונה כי באמצעותה אנו מגיעים לקירבה אינטימית עם הא-להים, וכן נולדת הקהילה המופלאה החובקת את האדם הסופי ואת בוראו. מושימתה היסודית של התפילה איננה נבחנת בתוצאותיה המעשיות אלא ביכולתה לייצר את האחווה המטפיסית שחבריה הם א-להים ואדם (עובדת שבלב, עמ' 51).

Translation: The acceptance of our prayers must be viewed in the sense of hope, looking forward and answering our requests but it is not a rule set in stone or a basic rule. The basis of Tefila is not to be measured by an objective standard but as having faith that through our expressions we reach an intimate closeness to G-d and so is born an exceptional community that envelopes man and His creator. The basic mission of Tefila is not to be judged by its practical results but in its ability to create a metaphysical fraternity whose members are G-d and man. (Avodah Sh'B'Lev p. 51)

עם זאת, מפגש התפילה חסר ואין מצחה את ערכו אלא אם כן הוא מלאה, או שקדם לו, מחייבות לאורח חיים אלוקי. הרב טוון שאין ספק כי "כל פנישה עם האלוהים, אם עליה לנ AOL את האדם, חייבת להתבהר ולהתמשם בשורת מוסר נורמטיבית" (איש האמונה הבודד, עמ' 37). הרב מבאר רעיון זה בקטעה עצמתית:

Translation: With all that, the rendezvous that is to take place during Tefila is incomplete and has no value unless it includes or before, the person must be committed to a life devoted to fulfilling G-d's commandments. R. Soloveitchik argues that no doubt that "every encounter with G-d, if it is to free man, must clearly and practically be from a man who is committed to following G-d's commandments."

מי זה היוצאי לפגישה בדו-שיח של תפילה עם האלוהים? ודאי, האדם המוכן לטהר את עצמו מכל פגם וחטא. כל סוג של עול, שחיתות, אכזריות וכו' מחליל את עצם מהותה של הרפתקה התפילה, משום שהוא כולה את האדם בתוך עולם קטן ומכוער אשר בו אין האלוהים רוצה להיבנים. אם האדם מתרגען לפגוש את האלוהים בתפילה, חייב הוא לטהר את עצמו מכל דבר החוצה בינו ובין ה'. מעולם לא ראתה ההלכה את התפילה כמחווה נפרדת ומאנית, שהאדם יכול לעסוק בה בלי שיאחד אותה עם מכלול חייו... לעולם מבשתה התפילה את הרשותה המוסרית (איש האמונה הבודד, עמ' 39–40)

Translation: Who is worthy of opening a dialogue through Tefila with G-d? Certainly, only a person who is ready to cleanse himself from all defects and sin, from all evil behavior, immorality, evil acts, etc. If not he destroys the essence of the adventure that Tefila can be because it confines a person in a small and disgusting world into which G-d does not wish to enter. If a person desires to encounter G-d through Tefila, he must

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

cleanse himself from anything that could create a barrier between himself and G-d. Never did Halacha see Tefila as a distinct and magical act, that a person could engage in with no regard to how he lives his life . . . Tefila is always linked with the need for repentance.

Source 3

כל עצמותי תאמרנה מאה אורי ארליך p. 205-206

ג. התפילה כמעמד דיאלוגי

בשלב זה נוכל לגש את המשמעות הנובעת מהעמדת עולם היחסים הבין-
אישיים כרגע שמחוץ התפילה מוצבו על פיו. את המאמץ לעצב את התפילה על
דרך המפגש הבין-אישי יש להבין כביטוי לתפיסה התפילה כמעמד של דיאלוג
בין האדם לאלוהי, מעמד של 'אני-אתה', אם להשתמש במונח שהרבה להשתמש
בו מרטין בובר.²

Translation: At this stage, we can approach the meaning of the wording that flows from the links between the human gestures as performed during Shemona Esrei. In an effort to present Shemona Esrei as a meeting between humans we need to understand what it means to participate in a dialogue between man and G-d; a situation of "I and Thou" if I can borrow a phrase made popular by Martin Buber.

המושג 'דיאלוג' לקויה מתחום הפילוסופיה האקזיסטנציאלית והדרתית של העת החדשה, והוא מושג יסוד במחשבתם של הוגים יהודים כדוגמת פרנץ רוזנבויג, בובר, חסל, סולובייצ'יק ואחרים.³ על יסורו מושג זה מאפיין שלום ורונברג טיפוס של תפילה שהוא מכנה אותו תפילה דיאלוגית, וזאת לצד כמה סוגים נוספים:
התפילה התאורגית – תפילה זו בעירה באה לפעול ולהשפייע על העולמות הפלוניים. התפילה היא צורך גבורה; התפילה המיסטית – תפילה העיקרית להעלות את המתפלל לעולמות רוחניים עליונים; שני סוגים אלו רוחו למדיי בימי הביניים בהשפעת הקבלה. אולם במחקר של הדור האחורי מושם ונשக בקבוקם (המצומצם באמנו) של יסודות אלו בספרות חז"ל – גם בתלמודים ובמדרשים ולא רק בספרות ההיכרות;⁴ הסוג השלישי הוא: התפילה הירידקטית. תפילה זו בעירה באה למד ולהנן את המתפלל. התפילה צורך הדיות; הסוג הרוביעי הוא, כאמור, התפילה הדיאלוגית. זו באה בעיקר לממש ולהציג את השיח החדרי בין האדם לאל.

Translation: The concept of "dialogue" is borrowed from the existential and religious philosophers of the modern era. It is a foundational thought in the thinking of Jewish philosophers such as Franz Rosensweig, Buber, Heschel, Soloveitchik and others. On the basis of this concept, Rosenberg (S. Rosenberg in his article about Tefila) characterizes as one model of prayer, prayer in the form of a dialogue. That model is in addition to several characterizations of prayer-theoretical prayer-this type of prayer is essentially meant to influence the heavens; prayer that is necessary for the heavens. Mystical prayer-its primary role is to raise the person praying to upper spiritual levels; these two types of prayer were popular during the middle ages due to the influence of Kabbalah. Nevertheless, in the scholarly world of the recent past, emphasis (less and less) has been placed on their existence as part of the basic concepts in Rabbinic literature; also in the two Talmudim and the Midrashim and not just in Heichalot literature; the third type: didactic prayer-the goal of this type of prayer is as a teaching tool to educate the one praying. Prayer is necessary for the layman. The fourth type is as noted above; prayer as dialogue. Its purpose is to place into action and to emphasize the dialogue that takes place between man and G-d.

שְׁמוֹנָה עֲשֶׂרֶת-תְּפִלָּת שְׁחָרִית-101

מהם המאפיינים של תפילה ויאלוגיה? אף שמדובר בתפילה באשר הוא כולל הכרה ביחס מסוים בין שתגביישות הנפרדות, האדם והאל, הרו' שבטיבוט התפילה האחרים הידועה ממנה בעקירה לצד אחד ולכיוון אחד. בתפילה הדיאלוגית נבנית מערכת יחסים ¹ שווינטיאן, ככיקול, בין האדם הראלי ובין האל שנוכחותו ראלית לא פחות. האדם ניגש לאלהיו' במלוא אונשוותו והאל מוגן במלוא חכונותו הפרסונליות. העמד שנוצר משך לא רק יחס מעין-בן-איש מצד האדם העומד וմדבר, אלא גם יחס מעין-בן-איש מצד האל השמע ומאיין. והוא אפוא מעמד שיש בוurd, והוא מחייב תודעת נוכחות, אינטימיות ואינדרו-ויזואליות שכבדותין אי

Translation: What are the characteristics of prayer as dialogue? It is prayer that requires recognition that two entities are involved, man and G-d. The other forms of prayer are one sided-man speaking to G-d. Viewing prayer as a dialogue creates a view that two equals are interacting, if possible, between man who is real and G-d whose presence is no less real. Man approaches G-d with his complete humanness and G-d exhibits His persona. The encounter that results reflects not only a human type interaction from the side of man who stands and speaks but also as a human-like response from G-d's side who pays attention and listens. This is an encounter that involves reciprocity and a conscious closeness, intimacy, individuality, that without them it is not possible to conduct a dialogue.

אפשר לקיים דיאלוג המUNDER מוביל לחוויה דתית אינטנסיבית, אך זו אינה חרוגה ממסגרת החוויה הנפשית המוכרת מהי היום יום (להבדיל מהחויה המיסטית). כנובון קיים ניסיון להשפיע על האל, אך הוא מוגבל למסגרת שבין ה'אני' ל'אותה' (לעומת השפעה התאורוגית). ב-בגדי

Translation: The encounter results in intensive gesturing but no less than is common in every day gestures a person performs (as opposed to being mystically based). As can be expected, it is an attempt to influence G-d but it is limited by the I-Thou relationship (despite the theoretical influence).

מערכת המכוחות הנדרונה לאן מספקת את הכלים הלא ורכליים למעמד הדיאלוגי. המחוות בונות את המסגרת לפגישה בין המתפלל ובין ישות פרטונלית, ואר-יוזרת את הדינמיקה של פגישה כזו: פתייה הפגיש**ה** בנסיבות מסוימות, נימה זו במקלכה ושוב **התגבורת** להמהה עם סיומה. גם האינטימיות והאנדרוידואליות שבפגישה הבין-אישית, שהן תנאי להדדיות, מושגות באמצעות המחוות. בניית המעמד באנלוגיה לעולם הבין-איש, שה'אני' וה'אהה' בו הם מציאות ראלית, מחייבת הראליות של **האני**-המתפלל ושל **האהה**-האל במעמד התפילה. הראליות האנושית באה לזר ביטוי בהיעדר חרינה מיסתית מה'אני' האנושי, והראליות של האל באה לזר ביטוי בתפיסתו כמלך בשור ודם.

Translation: The system of gestures being discussed here provides the non-verbal tools to implement prayer as dialogue. The gestures create a framework for the encounter between man who is praying and the other entity, and even creates the dynamics for that encounter; the encounter begins with a certain amount of tension which turns into calmness as it continues and then closes in suspense. Also the intimacy and the individuality that occurs in human interaction that is a condition of fraternity, are carried forward by the gestures. The construction of the encounter put the “I and Thou” in human terms and are real give life to to the reality that both “I” the one praying and the “Thou” are real during prayer. That it becomes like a human encounter comes about without any mystical elements from the human side and the reality of the Thou comes to fruition by being seen as a human king.

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

בלשונו הפיוטית של סולובייצ'יק : 6

'Prayer, we said, is a dialogue, not a monologue. A dialogue exists when one person addresses another, even if the other is temporarily silent.... We have the assurance that he is 'shomea tefilla'.... Dialogue means communication, engagement and interaction. When we pray, God emerges out of his transcendence and forms a companionship with us' .(78) (סולובייצ'יק, תפילה,

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

Supplement To Lesson 10- מהותה של שמונה עשרה-The Essence Of Shemonah Esrei

Professor Moshe Sokolow-Educating for Prayer, Utilizing the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (the Rav); Curricular and Instructional Guidelines

p. 61

Prayer, according to the Rav, is a dialogue between man and God. Here are some of his poignant observations on the nature of that dialogue:

In prayer ... we have a dialogue which is reciprocal and bilateral. Man climbs the mountain toward God while He descends, figuratively, from the mountain top. Two hands embrace, as in a handshake. "And the Lord came down upon Mt. Sinai, on the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up" (Exodus 19:20)... In prayer both God and man move...

Prayer, we said, is a dialogue, not a monologue. A dialogue exists when one person addresses another, even if the other is temporarily silent. In prophecy, God speaks and man is silent; in prayer, there is the reverse situation. We have the assurance that He is a *shome'a Tefillah* [He hears our prayers], even if He does not accede to our wishes. He is not necessarily a *mekabbel Tefillah* [responsive to our specific requests]...

p. 22

In prayer we do not seek a response to a particular request as much as we desire fellowship with God. Prayer is not a means for wheedling some benefit from God. Despite our prayer: *utekabbel berahamim uberatzon et tefillatenu* [accept our prayer with compassion and pleasure], it is our persistent hope that this may be fulfilled, but it is not our primary motivation.

Our sages felt that the acceptance of our prayers is beyond our understanding and is governed by unknowable considerations. We do not really understand why some prayers are accepted and others rejected. Nevertheless, prayer in the sense of petition does play a central role in our *Shemoneh Esreh*...

Dialogue means communication, engagement, and interaction. When we pray, God emerges out of His transcendence and forms a companionship with us; the Infinite and the finite meet and the vast chasm is bridged (*Dialogue*, 77-78).²⁶

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

p. 61

Enduring Values

In *The Lonely Man of Faith*, the Rav stipulates that “Adam II” requires a community to promote his redemption. The relationship between man and God in this community, which the Rav labels “covenantal,”⁶¹ is characterized by their proximity and even equality. As he writes there:

We meet God in the covenantal community as a comrade and fellow member. Of course, even within the framework of this community, God appears as the leader, teacher, and shepherd. Yet the leader is an integral part of the community, the teacher is inseparable from his pupils, and the shepherd never leaves his flock... The covenant draws God into the society of men of faith (30).

In this lesson, we shall see that the historical dialogue between God and Moshe, as well as the ongoing dialogue between God and ourselves, epitomizes a form of what we have called “complementarity,”⁶² an idea that constitutes an indispensable principle of the prayer relationship between Man and God.

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

Second Supplement To Lesson 10- מהותה של שמונה עשרה-The Essence Of Shemonah Esrei

I condensed a short review of approaches to prayer that I found on the internet. It summarizes the approaches of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, mystics, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, R. Yehuda HaLevi as expressed in the Curari and Abraham Heschel.

Shiur #30: Prayer (Part I)

Prayer's Function

Rav Itamar Eldar

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Is Tefila As A Mitzvah?

The Ramban has reservations about including prayer in the fixed framework of the commandments. He argues that it is inconceivable that prayer, which reflects man's need to beseech God for deliverance, should be regarded as an obligatory *mitzva*. Thus, we are dealing not with an obligation, but with an act of grace on the part of God, in that He gives man the opportunity to turn to Him and receive a response:

Rather, without a doubt, the whole matter of prayer is not an obligation whatsoever, but rather it is part of the Creator's loving-kindness toward us, that He hears and answers whenever we cry out to Him. (Ramban, comment to *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, positive commandment no. 5).

Yeshayahu Leibowitz took the Rambam's position [that Tefila is a Mitzvah] to an uncompromising extreme. According to him, prayer inasmuch as it is a commandment, is no different than the commandments regarding *terumot* and *ma'asrot*, the bringing of *bikkurim*, or wearing *tzitzit*. It is one of the Torah's *mitzvot*, and when a person fulfills it, he expresses his acceptance of God's lordship and authority three times a day, day after day.

Prayer, according to Leibowitz, is not a more spiritual experience than any other *mitzva*, and its purpose is not to provide man with his needs.

Prayer is not an attempt to bring the Creator to intervene in the order of Creation that He Himself established. Anyone who does not understand that the world of the Holy One, blessed be He, continues as usual, according to the natural order established by Him, and that prayer does not mean that one is asking God to change that order for one's personal benefit, but that it is rather a means of communing

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

with God through His service regardless of what transpires in the natural world – anyone who does not understand this has never in his life offered a prayer of one who believes in God. (Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Sichot al Arot Ve-al Ha-Rambam*, pp. 58-60)

It should be noted Leibowitz is driven to understand prayer in this manner because of a theological difficulty regarding change effected in God. Prayer, in its simple sense, is based on the assumption that God changes in response to man's actions and prayers, and that the world is governed in light of these actions and prayers. Leibowitz, like other philosophers, was not prepared to accept this argument, and this led him to his understanding.

And prayer is not about you. It has nothing to do with your own particular circumstances - psychological or spiritual. Rich or poor, happy or sad, we all are obliged to the same prayer set. "Human needs ... spiritual, ethical or otherwise, are irrelevant to the prayer moment". He points out that "The same shemoneh esreh ... are recited by the bridegroom before his wedding ceremony, by the widower returning from the funeral of his wife, and the father who has just buried his only son. Recitation of the identical set of psalms is the daily duty of the person enjoying the beauties and bounty of this world, and the one whose world has collapsed." The prescribed prayers are recited by those who truly need them, and the same set is required of those who do not.

By praying, you acknowledge "the overriding claim of the mitzvot and the halakha over and above any and all other human concerns." This requires no "intense, personal experiences or investigating different conceptions of God" but instead you live according to the "Halakhic tradition. Judaism is essentially a communal disciplined practice", including the practice of prayer.

"His point in bringing this example", in pointing out this jarring juxtaposition, "is to show that nothing happens to the individual as a result of the experience of prayer. Prayer is not a transforming experience. The worshiper remains the same", in a situation "exactly what it was the evening before. His sole achievement consists of the great religious effort invested in this day." Period.

Also, if you didn't "get anything" out of saying your prayers, well, Leibowitz would say that you weren't supposed to, so don't feel bad about it. You WERE supposed to say the prayers, and you did, so you did what was expected; you fulfilled your obligation as a Jew. And that's not an insignificant thing.

Prayer As A Mystical Experience

The ultimate goal is that prior to prayer one must bare oneself of the materiality that makes him finite and enter into the nothingness that is infinite. That is, a person must direct himself exclusively to the Creator, and to nothing whatsoever of his own self.

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

According to this approach, prayer is an opening through which a person can ascend to the celestial worlds, which are over and beyond any individual or even communal petition. The experience is one of communion and the intensity is that of intimacy that strips itself of all materiality and definition. According to those who advocate this approach, a person must raise himself above materiality, and prayer is meant to serve him as a jumping board.

The View Of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik

According to Rav Soloveitchik, the key to avoiding alienation from a person's true needs is awareness of his suffering. A suffering person is essentially a person who cries out for his true needs (spiritual and material). Suffering is the feeling that allows a person to understand his needs, that is to say, to know himself. According to Rav Soloveitchik, "I suffer, therefore I am."

There are then two stages to man's quest for self-knowledge: 1) Awareness of and sensitivity to his own suffering. 2) A renewed understanding of his true needs and the desire to satisfy them.

According to Rav Soloveitchik, both are provided by prayer. Prayer has two dimensions:

- 1) A cry – awareness and expression of the suffering person.
- 2) Ordered prayer – a structured, cognitive process, by which a person slowly clarifies his own needs (with the help of the text of the prayer) until he reaches a full understanding of them

To pray means to distinguish, to evaluate, to understand; in other words, to seek understanding.

It should be noted that Rav Soloveitchik himself writes that prayer does not always bring a person to understand his own needs, and that sometimes God's help is needed.

Rav Soloveitchik would respond that a person is not necessarily aware of his true needs and troubles. Prayer provides him with the tools to discover those dormant and unconscious needs, and therefore the accepted text must be retained.

Rabbi Yehuda Ha'Levi

A person looks forward to the approach of the time to pray, because while it lasts he resembles the spiritual beings, and is removed from merely animal existence. Those three times of daily prayer are the fruit of his day and night, and the Sabbath is the fruit of the week, because it has been appointed to establish the connection with the Divine Spirit and to serve God in joy, not in sadness. All this stands in the same relation to the soul as food to the human body. Prayer is for his soul what nourishment is for his body.

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

During prayer, the pious man "resembles the spiritual beings, and is removed from merely animal existence." The role of prayer, as understood by Rihal, is to detach man from the material world and elevate him to the level of angels. Moreover, Rihal asserts that the more time that has passed since a person last engaged in prayer, the more his soul is darkened by coming into contact with worldly matters. Prayer serves as a "nature reserve" or a "greenhouse" in which a person cuts himself off from his surroundings and "connects with the Divine Spirit."

From this perspective, prayer seems to resemble a theology class, through which a person learns the correct outlook and proper doctrine concerning God and the way that He conducts the world.

While it is true that Rihal focuses not on the petition itself, but on the outlook that grows out of the prayer, this rational prayer, in which, as Rav Soloveitchik would put it, the pious man "distinguishes, evaluates and understands," is very far from the mystical prayer advocated by the school of the Maggid. We are not dealing with a mystical experience that is beyond words and definitions, but with an educational and declaratory act by which the pious man learns and declares the correct and appropriate creed.

Rihal would go even further. Prayer does not come to provide man with his physical needs or even his psychological needs, but rather to educate him towards correct beliefs and doctrines. Therefore, one should not deviate from the accepted text, but should rather make the effort to understand and identify with its contents.

The View Of Abraham Heschel

One of the crucial tasks of religion, Heschel therefore insists, is to struggle against the anesthetizing effects of our over-familiarization with life and reality, and to instill in us a sense of "perpetual surprise," a willingness to encounter the world again and again as if for the first time. The fact that the sense of wonder can be so difficult to maintain renders the need for regular worship all the more urgent.

Heschel contends, in other words, that "all worship and ritual are essentially attempts to remove our callousness to the mystery of our own existence and pursuits," and that "the main function of observance is in keeping us spiritually perceptive."

The aspiration and task of prayer, for example, is thus "not to know but to be known to Him, to expose ourselves to Him rather than Him to us; not to judge and to assert but to listen and to be judged by Him." More generally, Heschel writes, "God-awareness is not an act of God being known to man; it is the awareness of man's being known by God. In thinking about Him we are thought by Him." The consequence of all this, Heschel insists, is that in moments of "radical insight ... we realize that the question we ask is a question we are being asked; that man's question about God is God's question of man."

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

Since, for Heschel, “genuine prayer is an act in which man surpasses himself,” it makes sense that he would offer a spirited defense of fixed liturgy—again, not just because it aids the inarticulate, but also because it forces us to hold up our concerns to the mirror of God’s will, and thus to purify our aspirations. In other words, prayer teaches human beings what to value, what to care and strive for.

We do not know what to pray for. It is the liturgy that teaches us what to pray for. It is through the words of the liturgy that we discover what moves us unawares, what is urgent in our lives, what in us is related to the ultimate.” Reading closely, we discern two crucial notions—first, that, as a rule, we do not know ourselves; we are ignorant of what concerns us most deeply. And second, that in our innermost depths, we are already connected to God, that the ultimate does stir something within us. Prayer in general, then, and liturgy in particular, remind us of our true selves, and help to elicit our hunger for and attachment to God. That deeper, more authentic self is, of course, inherently self-transcending.

Prayer comes to pass,” Heschel writes, “in a complete turning of the heart toward God, toward His goodness and power. It is the momentary disregard of our personal concerns, the absence of self-centered thoughts, which constitute the art of prayer.”

It is perhaps not surprising that thinkers who focus on the necessity of self-transcendence in the spiritual life tend to be less than enthusiastic about the merits of petitionary prayer, which is, after all—on the surface at least—self-interested prayer. Although impetratory prayer may give voice to a deep sense of dependence on God, may even serve to remind human beings of their profound neediness and vulnerability before God, it is nevertheless their own neediness and vulnerability of which they are made conscious through such prayer. In other words, whatever virtues it may possess, petitionary prayer is not yet “self-forgetful” prayer. Although it may puncture idolatrous illusions of self-sufficiency, in its ordinary forms impetratory prayer does not fully refocus human attention on God rather than—in Underhillian terms, we might say, to the exclusion of—humanity. There must, therefore, be more elevated forms of prayer than petition.

Indeed, both Heschel and Underhill seek to direct our attention elsewhere. According to Underhill, petitionary prayer is inherently selfish, and is thus, in her eyes, something to be overcome as the soul grows in purity. Like any form of self-preoccupation, it must be transcended in what she alternatively calls “self-giving,” “self-donation,” or “selfabandonment.” For Underhill petitionary prayer is at once an affront to God and an abasement of human beings:

Real prayer, Underhill insists, is self-transcending in that it focuses on God, rather than on what God might (or ought) do for me. “Adoration,” she writes, “and not repentance, nor petition, nor even intercession, ought to be the governing characteristic, the attitude towards God in which we approach prayer.” Spiritual love, Underhill reminds us, is the “least self-seeking type . . . of human love.”

שמונה עשרה-תפלה شهرית-101 Tefila 101

Whereas Underhill asserts that petition lies on a low rung of the spiritual ladder, Heschel employs a different approach, insisting that, at heart, petitionary prayer is not what it seems—that is, it is not really petition at all, but rather a subtle form of praise.

The focus of prayer is not the self.... Prayer comes to pass in a complete turning of the heart toward God, toward His goodness and power. It is the momentary disregard of our personal concerns, the absence of self-centered thoughts, which constitute the act of prayer. Feeling becomes prayer in the moment in which we forget ourselves and become aware of God. When we analyze the consciousness of a supplicant, we discover that it is not concentrated upon his own interests, but on something beyond the self. The thought of personal need is absent, and the thought of divine grace alone is present in his mind. Thus, in beseeching Him for bread, there is one instant, at least, in which our mind is directed neither to our hunger nor to food, but to His mercy. This instant is prayer.

Heir of a tradition that places the Amidah prayer, with its manifold petitions, at the heart of the worship service, Heschel cannot simply reject petition as something to be outgrown or overcome. Instead, he redirects the reader's attention away from liturgy and toward phenomenology; away from the words, that is, and toward the deeper experiences of the person at prayer. Even in reciting words of request, Heschel insists, the supplicant transcends himself and focuses his attention entirely on God. Seen from this perspective, then, what appears at first glance to be selfcenteredness is, in fact, a subtle form of God-centeredness.