

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

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PARSHAS EIKEV

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

VA'ANI TEFILLAH

CONTENTS

Part I. A Life of Tefillah - 1

Part II. A Man of Tefillah - 4

Part III. A Day of Tefillah - 6

Part I. A Life of Tefillah

The Missing Mitzvah

Now, before we embark on our subject, we are going to ask a *kashya*, a question. Why is it that in the Torah, there is no explicit commandment for *tefillah*? Shouldn't it be mentioned in the Torah somewhere?

So you'll say it is. You'll tell me that in this week's *parsha* when Hakadosh Baruch Hu is describing the obligations of a Jew — to listen to His commandments, to study them, to love Him — so included in the list is *וְלִעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם*, to serve Him with all of our hearts (Devarim 10:12). And the *Chachomim* (Ta'anis 2a) say *איזו היא עבודה שכלל* — what does it mean to serve Hashem with all of your being? *ה' אומר זו תפלה* — It's talking about davening.

But the truth is that those words could mean more than one thing — and they do — and so it seems to be a very vague way of commanding us in *tefillah*. After all, such an important mitzvah, shouldn't it be specified clearly? I think it's a good question. Among the biggest obligations of a Jew, a servant of Hashem, is *tefillah*! It takes up a big part of our day! So why couldn't it have been included in the *Aseres Hadibros* or at least in the *taryag mitzvos* openly?

Introducing Dovid

And I'll say one answer, maybe more. But in order to introduce the answer we'll have to first study one of the great personalities in our history.

Dovid Hamelech, we know, was a shepherd as a boy; he was the sheepherder for the family. He went out sometimes for weeks in the wilderness with his flocks. In the daytime he was watching his sheep, and at night he slept in the meadows under the stars with his sheep. And so he was unknown, a nobody.

And then what happened? He was plucked out from behind the sheep. *כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אֲנִי לְקַחְתִּיךָ מִן הַנֶּחֱלָה מֵאַחֲרֵי הַצֹּאן* — So said Hashem, "I took you from the meadow from behind the sheep, *עַל עַמִּי עַל* לְהִיּוֹת נֶגִיד *עַל* יִשְׂרָאֵל — to be a leader over My people" (Shmuel II 7:8). Suddenly, he became a king. Ooh, a surprise! Nobody expected that.

Even his own father didn't imagine such a thing. You remember the story? Shmuel Hanavi came to the house of Yishai and he had a horn full of oil to anoint one of Yishai's sons as the king. He didn't know which one. So Yishai trotted out first his oldest son — he was most proud of him, his *bechor* — and Shmuel looked at him and he said, "Oh, yes, that's the one." So you'd think it was settled.

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But Hashem said, “Nothing doing. That’s not the one. **בִּי הָאֵדָם יִרְאֶה לְעֵינָיִם** – You look with your eyes, **וְהִיא יִרְאֶה לְלִבָּב** – but Hashem looks into the heart (ibid. 16:7). He’s a fine young man but that’s not the young man I want.”

Even Mo’asu Habonim

Then Yishai brought in another son. No, not him. Another one, another one. And all of his sons were brought in and were rejected by Shmuel Hanavi.

But Shmuel knew that he was sent for a purpose, so he said to Yishai, “You have no more sons?”

“Yes, I have a son, a young son.” Yishai didn’t even think of him as a candidate for this greatness. It never occurred to anybody that he should call in Dovid, that maybe he’s the one. No, they didn’t think about him; a little shepherd boy. He’s somewhere out in the fields, lying in the grass with his harp and he is singing songs.

So Shmuel said, “Bring him to me.”

That’s what it means **לְקַחְתִּיךָ מִן הַנֶּחֱלָה מֵאַחֲרֵי הַצֹּאן** – I took him from behind the sheep. Dovid was brought in and suddenly Shmuel Hanavi takes out the oil and pours it on his head and he says, “You are anointed the Melech Yisroel. You’re the king, the anointed one.”

An Honor Earned

Now, we must say that there was something in Dovid that made him worthy of an honor like that. After all, he’s being chosen by Hashem! Dovid wasn’t chosen in the old European procedure of anointing kings, with the stiletto. Our king, Dovid Hamelech, was chosen by Hashem, and therefore you have to say it was the best choice and that there was the best reason for it. And it pays to know what it was.

Now, it could be that Hakadosh Baruch Hu foresaw that he would do great things for his people; yes, I’m sure that’s part of it. But there must have been something in his past that had earned him this great honor from Hashem. Such a reward, to be anointed king of the Am Yisroel, there must have been a special reason.

Now, I am sure Dovid was a very fine young man. He was a *gomel chasadim*, he did favors for everybody. I am sure he honored his father and his mother, too.

He loved to learn Torah. He kept the mitzvos very carefully. He did everything. But what do we know that Dovid spent time on more than anything else? What was his service of Hashem that took up all of his mind all the time? What was he distinguished for?

The Original Jewish Musician

The answer is that Dovid was distinguished for his communion with Hashem, his Tehillim. Dovid lay on the field and he spoke to Hakadosh Baruch Hu as long as he could. Sometimes he played his harp and sang songs. But it was always to Hashem.

Not like today, when you find “Jewish” music that has no connection at all to Hakadosh Baruch Hu; just wildness, empty words. If you’re going to sing things that are meaningless, if you’re going to sing without thinking anything, that’s worse than a waste of time. It’s insanity. No. For Dovid it was all *tefillah*; it was all speaking with Hashem.

All day long – in the middle of the night, too; when he got up and he couldn’t fall back asleep, he didn’t take out a newspaper. There are people like that. They get up in the middle of the night for something and they can’t fall asleep, so they take out a newspaper, they take some peanuts and for forty-five minutes they’re munching away, wasting their lives.

Dovid wasn’t like that. No. He spoke to Hashem. Picture that. Dovid Hamelech is sitting alone in the field, in the middle of the night – it’s past midnight, it’s 3:00 in the morning and Dovid is sitting with his harp and saying Tehillim to Hashem. By day, by night, all the time, he was speaking to his best Friend, his Confidant, his Helper.

A Different Kind of Davening

Now, pay attention and I’ll explain it to you. *Tefillah* doesn’t mean to *daven*; *davening* is nothing – it means just to say words and *shoin*. No. *Tefillah* means to speak to Hashem always; to ask Him, to rely on Him, to confide in Him, to thank Him, to beg Him, to cry to Him.

Now, if you can do that in Shemoneh Esrei too, why not? But in very many cases it’s only by rote, by habit, and you’re not even thinking. You’re in Africa on

a safari or you're in the office already; you're thinking about the first meeting of the day, what you're going to say.

And even among the better ones, those who are thinking and they're laboring on the words, the *peirush hamilos*, in very many cases you have to know that they don't feel the words. To advance from *saying* the words to *feeling* the words — to have the feeling that you're talking to Someone — there's a great deal of work to be done.

How the Great Ones Prayed

And that's why it's very important to speak to Hashem outside of *davening*, outside of the shul. And to speak in Yiddish or English or whatever language you're most comfortable with. Of course, you must say certain minimum things in *lashon kodesh* in order to fulfill the national requirements, because we know from experience that when people let go of this and begin praying in English or in the language of the nation around them, it's the first step toward assimilation. But privately, a person should pray to Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the language that he understands. Anyone who cannot speak *lashon kodesh* should not be satisfied with *tefillos* in *lashon kodesh*.

The great men weren't ashamed to pray in Yiddish. The Chofetz Chaim knew *lashon kodesh* perfectly and he prayed in Yiddish. People heard him praying many times in Yiddish. And other great men, same thing. They spoke directly to Hakadosh Baruch Hu in Yiddish because they felt that was a genuine expression. You don't speak Yiddish, so speak English — whatever is more real to you.

Mama Lashon

Did I tell the story about the maternity ward in Russia, about the three languages? In Russia there were three strata of society amongst Jews. The multitudes all spoke Yiddish. But there were people, the well-to-do, who had an affectation of speaking Russian. And the extremely wealthy had French governesses and their children were taught French.

So the story is told that one of the wealthy-class women was in the maternity ward and her time was approaching. As she felt the onset of her pains, so she

wanted her physician's attention. But he was standing at the end of the hall chatting with a whole group of doctors. He wasn't paying any attention to her.

As the pains began she called out in French, "Mon D-i-e-u" — I won't say the word; it means "my Hashem." But the doctor ignored her. He continued chatting.

But soon her pains became more frequent and stronger, so she cried out in Russian: "My G-o-d," but in Russian.

The doctors still ignored her.

And after it started to become really serious, she cried out in plain Yiddish, "מיין גאט."

So the doctor excused himself and hurried over to her bed. Because now he knew she meant it; she was calling out in her *mama lashon*. Now it's genuine; now it's serious.

Constant Contact

So, in our *tefillah* we live with affectations; we say words, *brachos*, phrases, but it's very far away from us. No; that's not *וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם*. To "serve Hashem with all your mind" means that it fills your entire mind. It's not a thing that you do as a mitzvah one time a day or three times or even ten times; it's a way of life. So how can you expect the Torah to describe it as a regular mitzvah in the sense of something you do and now you're finished, you're *pattur*? No. It's your life! *Tefillah* means a state of existence; a frame of mind to be always in contact with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The life of a servant of Hashem is always to be speaking or thinking to Hashem. It means that you're expected to be in contact with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. When you wake up, you thank Him for waking you up, until it's time to sleep and you're asking Him for a peaceful night. All day long, you're in contact with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That's how Dovid lived and that's how he grew great behind the sheep. Because it was all the time; it took over his mind, his being. It was actually *וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם*.

Part II. A Man of Tefillah

A Man of Many Accomplishments

Now, Dovid, you have to know, was a man of many accomplishments. He was great in battle, a war hero. You know that Dovid conquered all of Eretz Canaan? From Yehoshua's time until then they didn't complete the *kibush*, but under Dovid's rule they finally gained mastery over the entire land. And not only did he conquer Eretz Canaan but even the surrounding nations were afraid of him and sent tribute to him every year.

Dovid is also the one who was responsible for the institution of the Beis Hamikdash. You know, we are accustomed to the idea that there should be a Beis Hamikdash, but without Dovid Hamelech who would have thought of it? Shiloh was a small house without even a roof; old curtains of the Mishkan covered the Shiloh roof. And after Churban Shiloh, it was a tent all the time! The *aron Hashem* was in a tent and nobody thought to change it.

Dovid was the one who said, "Can I allow Hakadosh Baruch Hu's dwelling to be less splendid than the palace of the king?" And so he got very busy and he began to accumulate all the materials for the Beis Hamikdash. Together with the advice of Gad Hachozeh and Nasan Hanavi he worked years and years, bringing the lumber, collecting precious metals, lining up all the artisans. And so the Beis Hamikdash that stood for so many years — Bayis Rishon and Bayis Sheni — it's a result of Dovid Hamelech!

The Greatest Greatness

And so Dovid was a man of great accomplishments! Conquering the land, planning for the Mikdash; he did other great things too — he learned Torah; he was tremendous in *limud haTorah* — but still, when we want to consider what was the central pillar of this man's perfection, we should pay attention to his own words, how he described himself: וְאָנִי תַפִּילָּהּ – "I am a man of tefillah," he said (Tehillim 109:4).

It means, after so many years of this *avodah sh'baleiv* it became so natural to him and he became so specialized in this, that he was able to say, "I am prayer." Not, "I'm mispallel. I daven." Not even, "I daven

very much." No. To *daven* is only the beginning. Dovid *davened* so much and so often that the result was, "I am an *ish tefillah*, a man of prayer." It means that his whole being, his essence, was about communicating with Hashem. And that became his greatness! To him that was the pinnacle of his career, the central pillar around which he achieved everything else.

Now, why should that be so? We won't say *davening* is not important, but that it should be the central theme of his greatness, the way he describes himself? And the truth is it's not only Dovid; our *Chachomim* say about tefillah that it's דְּבָרִים הָעוֹמְדִים בְּרֹאשׁוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם – *the highest thing in the world* (Brachos 6b; see Rashi). Why is it the highest thing?

The Mitzvah of Many Mitzvos

And the answer is that from a life of *tefillah*, all good things develop. It's a mitzvah that is capable of changing your entire personality. It's not just you *davened* and finished. It encompasses so many things, so many of the greatest *mitzvos* of the mind, the *mitzvos* that make a person who he really is.

When a person talks to Hashem it means he believes in Him; he has *emunah*. And the more he talks, the more *emunah* he has. Of course, you're satisfied with the way you've been *davening* since you were four years old — you're not interested, you're half asleep and you're talking to the *siddur* and that's all — so that's how you'll *daven* when you're eighty-four and ninety-four. But if you're talking to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and you know that He's standing right in front of you and listening intently to your words, so as time goes on, you acquire a clarity of feeling, an awareness of the Presence of Hashem. That's a very big success, to gain *deiah*, a feeling that Hashem is right in front of you. It transforms everything you do.

Learning Chovos Halevavos During Davening

But not only *emunah*, belief. It's *bitachon* too. You're relying on Him. Otherwise, what's the point of asking? And the more you ask, the more you rely and the more *bitachon* you have. It means that *tefillah* is Shaar Habitachon in the Chovos Halevavos. Absolutely! If you know how to *daven*, it's much better than Shaar Habitachon, because every second you're declaring

that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in charge of every detail of your life. You're *living* Shaar Habitachon!

Tefillah includes *ahavas Hashem* too. When you start talking to Hashem about everything, how much you need from Him and how much He helped you in the past — you're thanking Him constantly — you begin to realize how much He gives you and how much you rely on Him. There are hundreds and hundreds of details, and the more you speak in *tefillah* you'll love Him more and more; so it's Shaar Ahavas Hashem too.

It's also humility to Hashem; you're *nichna* because you're asking and thanking. That's Shaar Hakeniah, the Gate of Humility. And therefore, so much is happening to your mind when you *daven*. It's the whole *sefer Chovos Halevavos*, all the great *middos* and *maalos* that a Jew is expected to acquire in this world. It's so all-inclusive that it is given the name *וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לְבָבְכֶם* by the Torah. That's what it means to become an *ish tefillah*.

A Full-Day Program

Now, to be transformed like that, it has to be like Dovid did it; it has to be *always, constantly* talking to Hashem. If you want to at least try to walk in the footsteps of that great man, so you can't be lazy about it; you have to make it a program for life like he did.

Now, someone might say, "How could it be? What's there to talk to Him so much about?" Some people think that even three times a day is a drag, it's too much. But *all day*?! How is it possible?

And so we'll divide *tefillah* right now into two categories. And you'll see that just by means of these two forms of *tefillah*, it's very, very much, enough for a lifetime.

The Ask

Number one is speaking to Hashem to ask for help. A very important function! And it's an endless endeavor because whatever you do, you have to ask beforehand. Dovid, before he led the flocks out to the fields, he asked that he should be successful, that he shouldn't encounter any lions. When he was walking in the fields, he asked. When he was sitting under a tree in the meadow watching the sheep, he asked.

When he was in danger, of course he asked.

You know, when Dovid went to battle he was already experienced. Dovid knew how to chop off heads. He used to walk into battle with his mace and smash right and left. He was very practiced and he wasn't a weakling either. But it was always done as if he was nothing. Only Hashem could help him. And as he ran out to the battle he was praying to Hashem.

Now, if it was me, I'd be praying too. But I'd be hugging the rear helm praying with all my heart, hoping the battle will be finished before I get there. Dovid, however, he was *לְבוּ בְּלֵב הָאֲרִיָּה* (Shmuel II 17:10). He had no fear. And still, no matter. He knew he couldn't take a step without asking.

Dovid said, *כִּי בְּךָ אֶרְצֶנָּה* – *with You I charge against the troop of the enemy* (Tehillim 18:30). Now, Dovid would charge the phalanx anyhow; he was that type who could face a battalion all alone. But he said, "No, it's *with You* I'm charging the enemy." A remarkable thing! As he was running into the midst of the battle and swinging his axe, he was praying to Hashem. "Help me, Hashem, I shouldn't fall. *וְלֹא מֵעַדוֹ קִרְסָלִי* – *My ankles shouldn't slip*" (*ibid.* 37). Sometimes, even a *gibbor* slips. Oh, once you fall down, *chas v'shalom* what's going to happen to you. So he was always asking.

When he saw a wall, *אֶרְלֵג שׁוֹר*, he made a running jump and he sailed over the wall to surprise the enemies, to come down with his battle axe on their heads. But it was *בְּאֵלֵקִי* – *with Hashem* (*ibid.* 30)! While he was jumping over the wall, flying in the air, he was talking to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Help me, Hashem!" Of course, he was handling the battle axe too, chopping skulls, no question about it. But it was only *בְּאֵלֵקִי*, with the Name of Hashem on his lips.

The Never-Ending Ask

You remember when he escaped into the town of Avimelech the Plishti, and he was in a bind? He was trying to escape Shaul but he went from the frying pan to the fire because Avimelech wanted him dead. So later, when he related the story, he said, *דִּרְשָׁתִּי אֶת ה'* – *I sought the help of Hashem* (Tehillim 34:5). That's the first thing! Don't think he wandered in town and he was just lost, thinking what to do. No. Always it

was *הִרְשָׁתִי* – I asked Hashem for help. He had ideas, stratagems, but that wasn't enough. He asked.

And he wouldn't let up. He was encouraging himself constantly. “*אֹמַר לְה' מַחְסִי וּמְצֻדָּתִי*” – I will say to Hashem, “You are my protection, You are my fortress” (*ibid.* 91:2). What does it mean, “I will say”? It should be: “You, Hashem, are my protection,” and finished. No, it doesn't say that. *אֹמַר לְה'* – “I have to say to Hashem, always, You, Hashem are my protection.” Not merely I will declare the principle that He's my Savior and my Protector; I will say to Him constantly, “You are my Protector, Hashem. Be my fortress.” Before I do anything I have to remember that I can't accomplish without His help.

The Thank

And so Dovid always fulfilled the first half of *tefillah* – everything, big and small, was preceded by *tefillah*. To ask and ask and ask, all the time, for everything. But he never neglected the second part of *tefillah*, either: *Hodaah*, to thank Hashem. That's also an endless function. *כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהִנְשָׁמָה בְּקִרְבִּי* – As long as I'm alive, *מִוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ* – I give my thanks to You (*Birchos Hashachar*). Every minute, he thanked Hashem. Every time he asked, he thanked. When he was successful, he didn't say, “It was me.” He remembered the One he had turned to for help.

That's why when he contrived that simple expedient of acting insane in front of Avimelech and it saved his life, he thanked Hashem. You remember that story, *בְּשָׁנוֹתָיו אֶת טַעְמוֹ לִפְנֵי אֲבִימֶלֶךְ* – when he was brought before the King Avimelech and he acted like a lunatic, *וַיִּגְרָשֶׁהוּ* – and Avimelech not only didn't punish Dovid but he even drove him out (*Tehillim* 34:1). He was happy to get rid of him. He said *חָסֵר לִי מִשְׁגָּעִים אֲנֹכִי* – “Do I lack my own lunatics that I need even more?” (*Shmuel I* 21:16) and he drove him out of the city. That's all Dovid wanted! *וַיֵּלֶךְ* – And Dovid went free.

The Never-Ending Thank

Now, when Dovid saw that this simple stratagem that he had thought of saved his life, he didn't give himself credit and say, “I did a smart thing.” That's not called an *ish tefillah*. The “man of prayer” says, “Why

did it occur to me to do that? Only because Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave me the idea. He answered my prayers.”

You know, many times, even cunning people fall into great danger and lose their lives because they didn't think of such simple things. Like the woman in the subway who never made it home. A true story. It was crowded and a man put the point of a knife against her side and said, “Come off the car with me at the next stop.” And she panicked; she was afraid, so she foolishly went with him. If she had fainted on the spot, she would have saved her life. A very simple expedient. She had to fall down, that's all. She would have saved her life. She didn't think about it.

And so Dovid, when he was rescued by this very simple expedient of acting like a lunatic, he said, “Ah! Hakadosh Baruch Hu, I am so grateful to You for sending this thought into my mind.” Not only when a great miracle happens, when Hashem sends a *malach* or some other miraculous rescue. Even the right thought, even the most simple idea, Dovid said, “Thank You, Hashem. I know it comes from You.”

The Two Steps of Prayer

And that's only because he was always asking; if you ask and ask, you'll never overlook the Giver. And therefore, as a result, it was *תָּמִיד תְּהִלָּתוֹ בִּפִּי* – always Hashem's praise is in my mouth (*Tehillim* 34:2). Even in the most ordinary events; if he went to the bathroom successfully, *אֲבָרְכָה אֶת ה' בְּכָל עֵת* (*ibid.*)! If he walked successfully up the palace steps, *הוֹדוּ לְה' בִּי טוֹב* (*ibid.* 118:1)! Because he asked for help at the bottom of the steps, that's why he was able to thank when he arrived at the top.

And therefore, all the ordinary events of life, the most simple things that the non-thinkers, the non-daveners, never think about, Dovid said, “*בְּה' תִּתְהַלֵּל*” – I give credit to You, Hashem” (*Tehillim* 34:3). “I'll always ask You for everything and thank You for everything, and that's my greatest success in life.”

Part III. A Day of Tefillah

Meshuga for Tefillah

Now, we may think that all of this talk is excessive for people like ourselves. You won't say it out loud

maybe — at least while I'm talking, while you're still here you won't say it — but in your heart it could be you're thinking that this is already going overboard. To speak to Hashem day and night, always, it seems, you'll excuse me for saying it, but it seems *meshuga*.

And so we have to know that every person who looks at a great man will think that the great man is too extreme. That's always the rule. Like the Navi Hoshea said, *מְשֻׁגָּע אִישׁ הָרוּחַ* – *a man of spirit is insane to other people* (9:7). You know why he looks “insane”? Because the other person doesn't understand him. In order to appreciate a great man, you have to understand that he is great and that you cannot measure him by your yardstick.

Emulating Dovid

And therefore, although there is a great deal of work to be done if a person wants to live according to Dovid Hamelech, the first thing is to *want* it. Don't think Dovid was overdoing it, that he was extreme. He *was* — but that's how he succeeded at making himself extremely great! By living according to the mitzvah of *tefillah* in the sense that it's described in our *parsha*, *וְלָעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לְבָבְכֶם*, he made himself into such a great personality that he was worthy of that title, *וְאֲנִי תְּפִלָּה*. And that's how we should want to live too, according to the way of our great king.

Now, as you hear this, we're not blaming anybody. Certainly I cannot say that I've fulfilled it. But at least by coming together and speaking about it, we can try to adjust our lives; we can train ourselves to a certain extent — even to a great extent — to be like Dovid.

Big and Small, Before and After

And so we go back to the *yesod* that we said before that there are two important aspects of *tefillah* that we can utilize for this. Two parts: before and after. *Asking* before everything you do, big and small, and *thanking* afterward, big and small. Because nothing is small if it doesn't go well.

Even if you're going out shopping for a pair of shoes, it's proper to pray that you should get the right kind. You know, if they don't fit well, if they're too small, then you're going to have a great deal of discomfort and maybe you won't be able to wear

them after a while. Sometimes the wrong shoes can bring on headaches; it can cause someone to have trouble in his legs, complications that are far removed from the site of the shoes. And so it pays to *daven* to Hashem for good shoes. And when you leave the store, thank Him that He helped you. And if you couldn't find the right pair, thank Him that he saved you from a headache.

That's an important lesson — we should never stop appealing to Hashem. There's no area in which we could feel that we can do it alone without Hashem's help. “No, it's not necessary to bother Him. I'll take care of it myself.” Never say such a thing.

You Never Know

The truth is anytime you leave your house you have to get busy *davening*. It's a nice Jewish street; nobody is here except civilized people — it doesn't matter. You cannot know what's going to happen. The Gemara says that. *אָדָם יוֹצֵא לְשׁוּק יְהִי רוֹמָהּ בְּעֵינָיו בְּמֵי שְׁנַמְסָר לְסִדְרֵיוֹט* – *As soon as you walk out on the sidewalk in front of your house, you have to imagine a policeman is putting a heavy hand on your shoulder, “You're under arrest!”* (Shabbos 32a).

And don't say, “How could it happen? I'm an innocent fellow.” Ho, ho, I don't want to tell you what could happen. It could happen literally.

There was once a *frum shochet*, and he was busy against the *chofshim*, the irreligious. So, they hired a gentile woman with a baby to come over in the street and shout, “What should I do with your baby?”

“What are you talking about?” he said. He didn't know it was a setup. “A crazy woman,” he thought.

She kept on shouting and a crowd came. They were taking the woman's side, pointing, yelling, and finally a policeman came and arrested him. They brought him to jail. A true story.

Street Smarts

And the Gemara says you have to think that way. You walk out of your door, anything can happen. Now, why do you think the Gemara is telling you this? Just to give you nerves? It's so that you should *daven*. But not only because of a policeman. The policeman is

only a *mashal*. It means that all kinds of troubles are brewing outside.

If you walk in the street, somebody — not from America; I don't want to say which country — walks by and coughs into your face a whole mouthful of germs mixed with saliva into your face. It's in a very fine form, a spray. It's a *sakanah* on the street.

And so as you walk out the door, instead of kissing the *mezuzah* without any thought at all, like a robot, stop and say a *tefillah*. “Oy, Ribono Shel Olam, it's a dangerous world out there. Please protect me!”

The Best Health Insurance Plan

The Gemara says, *לְעוֹלָם יִבְקֶשׂ אָדָם רַחֲמִים שְׁלֵא יִחָלָה* – A man should ask for Hashem's mercy not to become sick (*ibid.*). And when should he do it? *Lolam*. Always, always, always.

Sickness is always lurking in every nook and cranny of the body. All around us, germs are floating in the air. Accidents are happening all the time. We are in the midst of a cauldron of peril, and illness is one of the most frequent things that happen, *chas v'shalom*. And so the *Chachomim* are giving us a piece of very sound advice: Ask Hashem not to become ill. “Please Hashem, protect me. Protect me, Hashem! Oh please protect me, Hashem!”

And no matter how much you'll say it, it's not enough. Don't be stingy with words; don't limit it to Shemoneh Esrei. During the day, a few times every day, talk to Hashem about that. It's better even than getting health insurance. I'm not against health insurance, by the way. You should have health insurance too. But say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, “Ribono Shel Olam, please help me.”

Sometimes, you feel a twinge in your brain — who knows what it might be, *chas v'sholom*? Oy vey! What was that? Ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu, “Ribono Shel Olam, don't let it be anything, please.” Always pray you should be well, your wife should be well, your children should be well. Pray for them! We should never be lazy to utilize the *eitzah* of the Gemara.

The Model for Living

Now, when the Gemara tells us this *eitzah*, we should understand that it's a model for very many

things. Ask for everything! You're crossing the street? Absolutely, ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu for help. Oh, you think you are a wise man, that you'll look both ways and you're on your merry way? So here's a fellow driving his car. He's in a hurry and he's turning the corner on two wheels; he's not interested in what color the light is and he's not asking you for permission.

When you're crossing a street, it's worth saying a *tefillah*. Of course, you should first look both ways; look both ways, but never forget the One Who's getting you across safely.

If you're crossing at night, you have to ask even more. Especially you black hat people; you're wearing a black suit and a black hat, he can't see you. You're invisible to them. It's a good idea, by the way, to open up your jacket when you cross so that they should see a white shirt while you're crossing. And when you get to the other side safely, it's worth saying a *hodaah*. Don't think it's a joke. Ask and thank, ask and thank.

Unsafe Travels

Not only the street; the sidewalk too. Who knows? The world is full of *sakanos*; all life is dangerous. I was walking down Ocean Avenue once. I heard a tremendous noise right behind me. I turned around and a huge branch fell down from a tree just behind my back with a resounding thwack. If I had been there just one second earlier I wouldn't be here to tell the story. I still thank Hashem every time I pass by there. It was years ago, but whenever I pass by on Ocean Avenue I say *בְּרוּךְ שְׁמִעָה לִי נִס בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה* without Hashem's Name. I thank Him.

So why shouldn't you ask every block? And when you arrive at the corner safely, “Thank You! *Hodu laShem ki tov*! Thank You Hashem for keeping me safe all the way from Avenue S to Avenue R.” And then right away you ask again, “Hashem, please bring me across safely.” And when you get to the other side, use the other half of the *tefillah*: *hodaah*. “I thank You, Hashem, that I crossed successfully.” Not once a day. Every time you get to the sidewalk safely, “Oh Hashem! Thank You! Thank You, thank You, thank You!”

Somebody will look at you like a *meshugena*? We can't blame them. They can't help it. To look at someone who's trying to become great, who's trying

to walk in the footsteps of Dovid Hamelech, so it looks extreme to a regular Jew. Anyhow, nobody has to hear – only Hashem. You can say it under your breath for that.

When you get into a car, surely. I think every time you start driving your car nowadays, it's very important to be *mispallel* that Hashem should protect you. Not only on the highway; even in the city, it's not so simple. People are speeding on the road, there are drunken drivers, accidents can happen *chas v'shalom*, and it's a very big mistake not to ask for help from Hashem. And then, when you arrive – gratitude. That's the rule for successful living; anything you do in life should have two parts. The *hakdamah* should be a *tefillah* that you should succeed, and after you finish, a *hodaah* that Hashem helped you.

The Best Torah Mate

Let's say you want to learn a *sugya* in the Gemara. Before you start the *sugya*, say, “Ribono Shel Olam, give me *siyata d'Shmaya* that I should understand what I am learning.”

I know a man who did that. When he began learning the day's *sugya*, he asked for *siyata d'Shmaya* that he should succeed in understanding the following *sugya* in the Gemara. He had a good head, by the way, and it wasn't the first time he learned it. Nevertheless, each time he appealed to Hashem for help.

Sometimes, you get twisted in a small thing and you can't go ahead. Later you find how silly you were that you stumbled because of a small little thing. Ask Hashem to help you with the *sugya*. It happens; He'll push a good *sefer* into your hands – just the right place when you need to find a *pshat* in a difficult Tosfos.

You can't understand a piece of Rashi, so ask Him. He can make your eye fall on the right place in the *meforshim*. Or maybe your mind will open up and you'll have a flash of the truth. That's a *matanah* from Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

And then when you finish the *sugya*, say, “**בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' לְמַדְּנִי חֻקֶּיךָ** – I thank You, Hashem, for teaching me Your laws” (Tehillim 119:12).

Living With Tefillah

So, anything you do – let's say you're a businessman, a salesman, and you are waiting in the waiting room for the big man who owns the business to let you come in. You have to speak to him and ask him to order your material. So, while you are waiting, say, “Ribono Shel Olam, help me succeed with this man. He should buy my merchandise.”

And if you come out with a good order, don't forget about it! Don't be so selfish. Thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu that He helped you.

And that's how you should live all day long. **וְאֵי תִפְּלָה** – My whole being is tefillah. You're sitting down to eat breakfast, “Oh Hashem, watch over me I shouldn't choke on my food. My food should digest well.”

You finished eating, “Thank You Hashem for that. Now I need You to help me catch the train on time.”

You're peeling potatoes for supper or you're baking a cake? Don't rely on your recipe book or your talented hands. Ask. Ask and ask! And everything with *hodaah* afterwards.

Through the Night

All the way till the end of the day – and then at night, too. That's why every night in Maariv, when we come to *Hashkiveinu*, make sure to put in *kavanah*. **וְהַסֵּר מִמֶּנּוּ יָגוֹן וְאַנְחָה** – Remove from us all sorrow and sadness. You're asking that the nighttime should pass by quietly, nothing should happen during the night.

So this man, he's thinking, “What can happen at night already? I'm just going to sleep.”

Anything can happen at night, *chas v'shalom*. A fire, *chas v'shalom*. Oooh, a fire, a fire engine, a siren at night. Ay yah yay! You ran out of your bed in your pajamas in the street, and the house is being flooded with water *chas v'shalom*; everything is ruined. Firemen come with axes and smash the doors and the windows; they make a *churban* of the house. And sometimes people don't escape with their lives.

Baruch Hashem, it didn't happen last night, it didn't happen the night before or the night before. Did you think about that? Did you thank Hashem even

once for that? Every morning! Every morning give thanks for that!

Dovid's Life Program

And therefore, everything we undertake in life should begin with *tefillah* and end with *hodaah*. That's the life-program of a Jew: וְאָנִי תַפִּלָּה. "As much as possible, I'll make myself into a man of prayer. I'll do it always until it changes who I am."

And don't be ashamed that people will consider you who-knows-what; they'll say you're a *chunyak*. So don't let them hear that you're praying. Women shouldn't let their husbands hear that they're praying on the side, and men shouldn't let their wives hear. *Chaveirim* shouldn't let the others hear about it in the yeshiva. They might ridicule you. But whatever you do, don't stop the program. Because it's the great mitzvah of וְלַעֲבֹד בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ, the mitzvah that changes you from the inside out.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let's Get Practical

Become an Ish Tefillah

In this week's *parsha*, the Torah expresses the mitzvah of *tefillah* as "serving Hashem with all of your heart," which means that *davening* is much more than merely showing up in shul and reading the words in the Siddur; it is a program for life.

This week, *bli neder*, at least once a day, I will ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu in my own language to help me with something I previously took for granted. And afterward, I will thank Him for giving me success in that area.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

108 – For What to Pray | **864** – Seven Objectives of Tefillah
893 – Tehillim 34 | **962** – Urgency of Tefillah
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Q&A WITH RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

שאלות ותשובות עם ראב"ד זצ"ל



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QUESTION

Are Jews permitted to join the military forces of a country other than Israel?

ANSWER

Now, I would suggest that they shouldn't join any military force, even in Israel. And in order to avoid military service there, it's better to leave the country.

Because first of all, it's a *sakanah*. It's a *sakanah* to your life. And it doesn't pay to get killed for nothing! When you go out in a *milchamah*, a battle where the *Chachmei HaTorah* command you to go out and fight, then you're sacrificing your life for *k'vod Shamayim*. But if you're going out in a war because of what others tell you, *baal habatim* – even Orthodox *baal habatim*, but they're *baal habatim* – so it means you're giving the greatest donation that you have for something that might be nothing at all. It's too much to donate. Your life is too precious.

And secondly, it's a very great spiritual danger! Hashem *yeracheim*! Hashem should be מִפְּרַעְצָת, and they shouldn't be able to do anything against the *frum* boys. It might be necessary that all the *frum* Jews leave Eretz Yisroel, *chas v'shalom*. But that the boys should go into the army?! *Chas v'shalom*! It would be impossible for us to exist. And the *reshaim* know that. They want to take our boys into the army and they want to do whatever they want with them in order to turn out new products – Israelis.

And some other country, it's out of the question. Certainly nobody should put himself into a situation where it's first of all a *sakanah* for the body and also a great *sakanah* for the *neshamah*.

October 1988