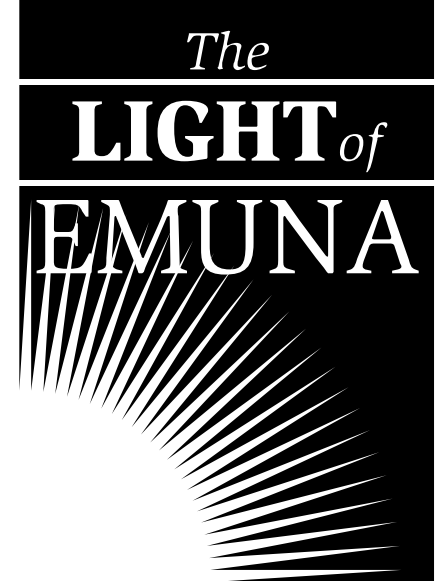


פרשת ואתחנן – שבת נחמו



Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's "Ohr Ha'Emuna"

This week's adaptation is dedicated in honor of:
the Bar Mitzvah of our cousin, Shmuel Tashman, this Shabbos
and my Mother's Birthday on Sunday
מזל טוב!!! - Happy Birthday!!!

"וּאֶתְחַנֵּן אֶל ד' בַּעַת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר" (ג, כג)

"I pleaded with Hashem at that time, saying"

Although there are ten forms of *tefilla*, the one that most engenders closeness is pleading (תְּחִינָה). Shlomo Hamelech said, "And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication (הִתְחַנַּנְתִּי) before Hashem, be close to Hashem our G-d."¹ Two other *tzaddikim* prayed with תְּחִינָה: Dovid Hamelech and Moshe Rabbeinu - Dovid, as it says, "Be gracious to me (הֲנִי), Hashem, according to Your kindness"² and Moshe in our *pasuk*. Where did Moshe learn to utilize this form of prayer - from Hashem Himself. When Moshe asked Hashem to show him His glory, Hashem responded, "And I will favor (וְחַנּוּתִי) who I wish to favor (אֲהַרְגֶנּוּ)."³ Moshe made a *kal v'chomer* - had the terminology of "חַנּוּן" not been so treasured by Hashem, Hashem would not have begun with it. Therefore, Moshe too commenced with it. (מִדְרַשׁ תְּנַאִים)

"וּאֶתְחַנֵּן אֶל ד'" (ג, כג)

"I pleaded with Hashem"

Praying to the Creator is an inner need of the soul. There is nothing that draws one close and connects a person to Hashem like prayer. Three times each day we receive absolution from all obligations, from everything that troubles us and weighs on us, from everything that we still have to do - it is our personal time with Hashem.

¹ והיו דברי אלה אשר הִתְחַנַּנְתִּי לפני ד' קרובים אל ד' אלוקים (מלכים א ח,נט)

² חַנּוּ אלוקים כחסדך (תהילים נא, ג)

³ חַנּוּתִי את אשר אֲהַרְגֶנּוּ (שמות לג, יט)

When we reach *shemona esrei*, we press a button and immediately ascend to the highest realms - as close to Hashem as possible.

For our prayers to be accepted, we must believe in their power. We must know that we are important and precious to Hashem and our prayers pierce the heavens, shake all of the worlds and are capable of changing the course of nature and nullifying decrees. We must constantly reinforce this knowledge. If we don't believe it, we must ask Hashem to help us believe. Say it in a loud voice, over and over, until it penetrates the heart, until we feel it.

Tefilla is not only from a *siddur*. *Tefilla* is also a cry of the heart. This is our secret weapon, the most formidable weapon, the most efficient and the most sophisticated. We must scream on the inside all day long - for all of the pain, for all of the deficiencies, for all of the desires - and - for all of the love, for all of the gratitude, for all of the joy. We cannot always weep aloud. The Kotzker Rebbe taught that when a person has something to shriek about but is unable to, that is the greatest cry of all.

Tefilla is like a longbow. Just as a longbow - the more one pulls back on it, the more force the arrow has and the greater the distance it travels - so too with *tefilla*. When a person's soul envelopes him and his heart is pressed and squeezed - his prayers burst from his heart with

great vigor and ascend higher and higher.

To Hashem there is no such thing as hopelessness. The *Gemara*⁴ tells us the following story: Chizkiyahu Hamelech became seriously ill. Yeshayahu Hanavi visited him and ordered him to write a will because he prophesized that the king was destined to die from the illness. Chizkiyahu asked why he was to be so punished and Yeshayahu answered that it was due to his failure to marry. Chizkiyahu explained that he foresaw with *ruach hakodesh* that his descendants were evil and he thought it better to abstain from marriage and having children. Yeshayahu retorted that it is improper to delve into Hashem's mysteries – we must do as we are commanded and Hashem will do as he sees fit. Chizkiyahu, wishing to correct his transgression, asked Yeshayahu for his daughter's hand in marriage but Yeshayahu countered that it was too late, the decree was already declared. Chizkiyahu responded by telling him to take his prophecy and leave – “I have the following tradition from my father's house, even if a sharp sword is placed on one's neck – never despair of mercy.”⁵

And so, Chizkiyahu began to *daven* from the depths of his heart and said, “Master of the World! Behold, the Shunamite woman merely built one small wall for Elisha Hanavi, [as lodging] when he passed through, and was rewarded with the revival of her son – my father's grandfather, Shlomo Hamelech, who plated the holy Sanctuary in silver and gold when he built the Beis Hamikdash for Your honor, how much more so must his merit be rewarded with my recuperation. Remember that I conducted myself wholeheartedly.” He began to weep before Hashem with tears. At that moment, Hashem accepted his prayers and added fifteen years to his life.

Tefilla must be done only with supplication [i.e. pleading, entreaty] – like a child who cries to his

father for what he needs. Nothing is owed to me, everything is an undeserved gift. If Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid Hamelech *davened* this way, it is certainly appropriate for us.

One day, a Jew who lived in Radin, visited the Chofetz Chaim's house to request that the *tzaddik daven* for him in an area in which he needed salvation. The Chofetz Chaim asked him whether he himself had yet *davened* for the matter. The man responded that indeed he had. The Chofetz Chaim asked the man to bring him the *Tehillim* from which he *davened*. The man returned a short while later with the *Tehillim*. The Chofetz Chaim took the *sefer* from him, flipped through the pages and asked the man if that was what he called prayer. The Chofetz Chaim proceeded to take down a *Tehillim* from the shelf and showed the man yellow pages, stained with tears, like a sponge of tears. The Chofetz Chaim said, “this was my mother's *Tehillim* ... look at the pages ... look at the tears ... that is called *davening*.”

Tefilla is the service of the heart – via *tefilla* a person draws near to his Creator and his soul is cleansed and purified. When a person prays to Hashem, he proves that he wholeheartedly believes that no one besides Hashem can help and Hashem must help because without Him – everything is impossible.

One must not insist on anything in prayer other than being close to Hashem. One should not insist on a particular thing. As soon as a person insists on something specific, he is inspiring judgment and pressing timeframes – often leading to detrimental results. We must implore Hashem to help us do His will – “To do Your will, Hashem, I desired, and Your Torah within my innards.”⁶ That is what we must plead for – to be close to Hashem. “One thing I ask of Hashem, that I seek – that I may dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life.”⁷ It does not matter where I dwell, at the Kotel or at home –

⁴ ברכות י' :

⁵ כך מקובלני מבית אבא, אפילו חרב חדה מונחת על צוארו של אדם אל יתייאש מן הרחמים.

⁶ לעשות רצונך אלוקי חפצתי, ותורתך בתוך מעי (תהילים מ, ט)

⁷ אחת שאלתי מאת ד' אותה אבקש, שבתי בבית ד' כל ימי חיי (שם כז, ד)

anywhere can be the house of Hashem.

"וידעת היום והשבת אל לבבך כי ד' הוא האלקים
בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת אין עוד" (ד, לט)
**"And you shall know this day and
consider it in your heart - that Hashem is
G-d in heaven above, and upon the earth
below; there is none else."**

Every second in this world causes us to forget Hashem. We regard this world highly. We need homes, we need income, we need this and that. True, we need these things – but we also need to remember that Hashem created the world for us to nullify it, so that we consider the everlasting – connect to the eternal element of things rather than their materialistic elements. A table exists so that I may learn Torah on it. It is an allusion to believe that it has more substance than that. When we say that there is no world, we mean that nothing of it will remain. None of the external beauty survives. What endures is what we do for Heaven's sake. We reverse the roles. We pay attention to the Formica and not the significance of the table. We focus on the seeds on the cake rather than the fact that the cake enables us to better serve Hashem.

"You have been shown, in order to know that Hashem is G-d, there is none else besides Him."⁸ You have been shown! Not heard - seen! This revelation was never provided to another nation! So, how can you still get confused and think that there is something besides Me?! On the day the Torah was given, Hashem tore open the heavens and showed the Jewish people that there were seven skies above them and He said to the Jewish people, 'see that there is no other with Me' – as it says, 'you have been shown, in order to know that Hashem is G-d, there is none else besides Him.'" (דברים רבה כה"י)

It is not sufficient to know – we must transmit it from the brain to the heart. The *pasuk* says, "You shall know this day and consider it in your

heart." A Jew must always please Hashem, constantly yearn. We must accustom ourselves to love the eternal, not the transitory. When we realize that all passions are temporary, we must ask ourselves whether they are worth pursuing. We must seek the inner value of things. The inner value is the longing for Hashem. We must ache for Hashem. We need *tefilla* and we need Torah – but they must create a craving for Hashem. They must travel from the brain to the heart. Of primary importance is for the heart to burn for Hashem. When a person commits sins, G-d forbid, he asks for forgiveness and proceeds with his life – that is superficial - he acts merely to prevent the retribution of the attribute of judgment – because he knows that there is judgment in the world. But, we must do *teshuva* with our hearts, we must cry – "Hashem, I do not want to be this way."

To instill this in our hearts, we must take steps. We must prolong our *davening*, we must do *hisbodedus*, we can occasionally awaken at midnight for *tikkun chatzos*, or we can delay breakfast and fast for a few hours. If a person does not restrict himself, he cannot achieve. If a person does not implement changes, he accomplishes nothing. We must feel shame, at a minimum – for the shame will break the heart and ultimately free us from our desires.

"It is forbidden for a person to rely exclusively on his own judgment and wisdom. Rather, our main perfection is to extend to the heart the knowledge that we must 'know this day and consider it in your heart' – we must expand it into our hearts. I heard from our Rebbe [Rebbe Nachman] zt"l: the nations of the world also have knowledge and wisdom – but it is without heart. Therefore, when we merit certain knowledge, we must draw it into our hearts and introspect well as to whether our actions are well received as per our new wisdom and we must endeavor to now serve Hashem with *mitzvos*, actions and holy service in a way in which our actions will exceed our wisdom – for actions are most crucial. Consequently, the more one knows and recognizes Hashem's greatness – the more such knowledge will be drawn into the heart and body

⁸ אתה הראת לדעת כי ד' הוא האלוקים, אין עוד מלבדו (ד, לה)

to perform good deeds and holy service with simplicity and with no guile.” (ליקו"ה יום הכיפורים ב, ג)

We must pierce the depths of our hearts with the realization that Hashem is G-d in the heavens above and upon the earth below, there is none else. When we receive income or any other favor, we receive it only from Hashem. We cannot serve Hashem completely if we rely on others – if we seek favors or honor from them. In such a situation, when we feel that we need others, we act to find favor in the eyes of humans and not for the sake of giving gratification to Hashem. This can cause a bit of a quandary because at times we need favors from people. Even many great *tzaddikim* received their livelihood by the generosity of others. But, we must discern the fact that everything is truly from Hashem. Whatever we have is only from

Hashem. If something does not reach us by means of one person, it will arrive via another – Hashem has many messengers.

We ask that our livelihood not be dependent on people.⁹ We ask that we not err to think that we are receiving from flesh and blood. Rather, we wish to comprehend that even when receiving a favor from a friend, it really comes from Hashem. We must acknowledge and thank for every kindness but we must still remember the higher truth – that there is no alternate reality other than Hashem. The highest level is to not require others at all - to not care if someone talks about us, to not seek honor, money or smiles from others, to know that everything is from Hashem – both kindnesses and judgment – when we have pain and when we have tranquility. Everything is Hashem.

תפילה

Master of the World! Help me be Your Jew not only a *Shulchan Aruch* Jew.

Help me, Father, to learn to live with You. That I constantly expand the time I spend thinking of You, remembering You, longing for You, talking to You. To always guard our bond.

Have mercy on me Father and help me change the way I eat, the way I daven, the way I walk down the street.

Help me to, at least, be ashamed when I reveal how attached I am to this world, to every new idea, beauty, shiny things. When will I understand that I can achieve greater vitality from my connection to You?

Help me, Father, to remember that I am not alone. You are always with me. Every time I hear something that worries me or something stressful happens – to remember that I can lift my head to You and ask for Your help, Your salvation - again and again, all day, at every moment that I remember. This is what calms me the most and helps the most.

When I need something from someone, rather than press, nag, remind, beg – simply raise my head to You and request of You. Then, as I've seen so many times in life, things work out much more expeditiously.

When I do not feel anything, when everything dries up, when I have no zest to learn or *daven*, or to speak with You – help me, Father, that I talk to You about this very matter. You are the address for all that occurs and all that happens to me. I have no other address.

Bring me close to You, Father, so that things will be so good for me because I am with You, so sweet, so that I desire nothing else in this world, only You.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

Dov

Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha'Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai Shlita and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha'Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha'Emuna* is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material and is not even aware of its existence. Any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*.

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