

THE PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM ROADMAP TO PRAYER PROJECT

The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson 1

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Preface

The topic of Prayer is a very sought after but elusive topic. On a personal level, Prayer seems to be an unpredictable experience. Sometimes we feel moved by our prayer while other times we don't. Even when one seeks that emotional attachment during prayer, one doesn't necessarily accomplish that feat. For those who are not satisfied with Prayer by rote, it is still very difficult to foretell which Prayer of the day will be the most satisfying and gratifying. A good reason for this phenomenon is that since Prayer is a very lofty ideal, the Evil inclination is bent on distracting us in myriad of ways. Nonetheless, Prayer can be harnessed as an experience in true growth in our Service of *Hashem* (*Avodas Hashem*), as we learn how to deal with it better and better each day. It would therefore be quite presumptuous to endeavor to prepare the ultimate roadmap to prayer that would be the answer to the age-old difficulty in finding the key to fervent prayer. Rather, this work, *be'ezras Hashem* (with G-d's help), should serve as a useful tool in helping us pray effectively.

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The goal of this monumental undertaking is to clarify the centrality of Prayer in the life of a Jew and to give everyone, from young adults to older individuals, from beginners to the 'seasoned veterans', a focus and goal in their prayers bringing their attention to many ideas that they may have never given thought to. A brief synopsis and background of How and Why we pray a specific Prayer will be delineated before each section of prayer with an emphasis on what we should focus on in each particular prayer. There will be *Halachos* with a special "Women's section" where the *Halacha* differs for women. Additionally, as part of the program we hope to print Stickers that one can place inside their *Siddur* im (prayer books) to help us focus on *Tefilla* and to assist all of us in addressing their Creator.

Today, with all of the modern technology that has been introduced into our lifestyle, we have never ending pressures to meet deadlines and to be out and on our way ON-TIME, more than ever before. Our responsibilities are such that the luxury of time to concentrate on our prayers is a prize that very few individuals can afford to indulge in.

Our Sages have developed an incredibly logical plan for Prayer that is virtually the same day in and day out, practically every day of the year. As our great Rebbe, Harav Hagaon Aryeh Leib Berenbaum *of blessed memory* (ז"ל) in whose memory we have dedicated this work, taught his beloved talmidim,

“To be the most sophisticated is to be the most simple.” So too our Sages prepared a most sophisticated plan for *Tefilla*, but presented it in a most simple manner.

To this end, we now present to you The Roadmap for Prayer: An Attachment of the Soul.

It is our hope that the various approaches implemented in this program will serve as an indispensable tool in our *Avodas Hashem* by bettering our insight and providing direction to where we are heading with our daily Prayers.

Introduction

The Purpose of Prayer

Why should we pray to *Hashem* for our personal needs? If we were meritorious and deserving, wouldn't we have received it anyway? *Hashem* showers us with kindnesses all the time even though we don't pray for it. Why then should we pray for something that *Hashem* obviously didn't want us to have?

Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv *of blessed memory*. (ז"ל) the *Alter* from Kelm explains that *Tefilla* in itself is Serving G-d (*Avodas Hashem*). Through *Tefilla* we show that we recognize that it is G-d who is “in charge”. Through *Tefilla* we gain merit to “deserve” His Divine assistance as we become more “in-touch” with *Hashem* through this recognition.

Va'ani Tefillasi lecha Hashem eis ratzone! (As for me, may my Prayer to You G-d be at an opportune time). This verse can be interpreted that when praying to

¹ *Psalms* 69:14

G-d it is in itself an opportune time when we can become closer and closer with our Creator.. This is true especially for *Tzaddikim* who sometimes merit having something yet they only receive it through prayer. Our Sages teach us that the reason for this is because *Hashem* enjoys listening to the prayers of *Tzaddikim*. Hence we see that the benefit of prayer is prayer itself. Of course, it is also true that through prayer we can gain merit to receive gifts from *Hashem* for things which otherwise we may not have merited.

However, we must be careful not to fool ourselves that with periodic sincerity in Prayer we have already achieved the ultimate recognition of *Hashem*. We need to reinforce our awareness of *Hashem* through constant prayer, just as we physically were created with a need to eat several times each day. There are too many distractions that dull our recognition of *Hashem* to be satisfied with just occasional sincerity in prayer. Without exercises in the Service of prayer (*avodah* of *Tefilla*), we can easily lose our close ties with *Hashem*.

Prayer – *Tefilla*

The most common terminology for prayer in Hebrew is the word *Tefilla*. This word has multiple meanings as we will explain. In fact, when we pray in the Hebrew language, each verse that is uttered in Hebrew can have multiple connotations. This is one of the reasons it is advantageous to pray in the Hebrew language.

One explanation of the word *Tefilla* is based on the verse in Genesis 30: 8:

Vatomer Rachael naftulei Elokim niftalti im achosi gam yocholti vatikra shemo Naftaly

And Rachael said I have prayed to G-d and my prayer has been accepted like my sister's prayers; and she named him Naftaly. (Rashi based on the interpretation of Onkeles²)

According to this interpretation the word ***naftulei*** is from the word ***Tefilla***.

Rashi offers another interpretation that the word ***naftulei*** means to bond or attach. Hence the word *Tefilla* carries the meaning of bonding or attaching.

² Early Talmudic-era translator of the Torah to Aramaic

All mankind in their own way is seeking that ultimate attachment and tie with their Creator. Why does man have such a drive to connect with a higher force that cannot be seen nor experienced like any other physical THING in life?

We find the answer right in the beginning of Creation.

A Divine Soul: A Breath of Life

The Torah states in Genesis³ that:

G-d formed Man of dust from the ground and He blew into his nostrils the *soul of life* and Man became a *living being*.

*Onkelos*⁴ explains the term *living being* to mean the unique ability to speak intelligently. According to the Maharal⁵, it is specifically this unique quality of Man that must be utilized for Prayer.

Evidently, the uniqueness of Man to express concepts and thoughts through speaking is cultivated best in Prayer. If people would realize that our entire existence is just a manifestation of *Hashem's* will, and would internalize this concept, people would live their lives much differently.

From this point in Creation and on, all of mankind has been innately driven by a force to seek back that attachment with their Creator.

Since all of mankind received a soul from their Creator, “*He blew into his nostrils the soul of life*”, they all have this quality. Our Sages explain this to mean that just like when one blows a breath into something, he blows from within himself, similarly, when G-d blew a soul into man, he blew a G-dly soul into man. Therefore, the G-d given soul always yearns to be connected with its initial source, G-d, just like a magnet is drawn towards another. This soul is referred to as the “*candle of G-d*” (*neir Hashem*).⁶ The flame of a candle is always striving upwards swaying back and forth, like the nature of a Jew to sway back and forth during Prayer.⁷

³ Genesis/*Bereishis* 2: 7

⁴ Early Talmudic-era translator of the Torah to Aramaic

⁵ *Nesivos Olam*

⁶ Proverbs/*Mishley* 20:27

*Kole haneshama tehallel kob, Hallelukob*⁷ (Let my entire soul Praise G-d, *Hallelukob*). With these words, King David seals his book of Psalms.

The words of the *Yalkut Shimoni* add much meaning to this ending. The *Yalkut* interprets the Hebrew word *Neshamah* (Soul) as *Neshimab* (Breath). For each *breath of life* let's Praise G-d. It is G-d's imparted *breath of life* that is our very *soul*. Let us Praise Him for giving us this gift. Let every breath we take, remind us of His greatness and show our indebtedness to Him. As the *Alsbich* explains, the soul recognizes that its sole purpose in residing in a physical body is only to give praise to Him, otherwise it should have remained in the spiritual spheres. *Hallelukob!*

Repetitive Prayers

We generally pray the same prayer every single day, three times a day. Wouldn't it have been better for each individual to devise a different heartfelt prayer each time one davens? After all, repetitive *Tefilla* can become burdensome and difficult.

The **Rambam** in the beginning of Hilchos *Tefilla*, as well as the Abudraham write that originally, before the Men of the Great Assembly standardized the *Amidah Tefilla* as we have *She'mone Esrei* today, every individual prayed a personal *Tefilla* each and every day. After the first Temple (*Beis Hamikdash*) was destroyed and the Children of Israel were dispersed amongst the nations of the world, we became less and less familiar with our native tongue of Hebrew, and it became more and more difficult for everyone to express prayers (*tefilos*) in clear and concise words.

Therefore, they instituted a specific format and text for *Tefilla* in Hebrew which enabled everyone to familiarize themselves with the text (*nusach*) and to pray (*daven*) a wholesome prayer (*Tefilla*).

In fact, the *Chafetz Chaim* OBM⁹ (ז"ל)¹⁰ takes note that it truly is more difficult to pray fervently when reciting the standard prayer thrice daily. He therefore suggests that each individual compose a short prayer for himself, in addition to

⁷ My Prayer – Elie Munk pg. 7

⁸ 150:6

⁹ Of Blessed Memory

¹⁰ Hebrew for OBM

the standard required prayers, and beseech G-d with sincere devotion while reciting those **additional** prayers.

Admitting to a Higher Power – Hashem

The Ramban¹¹ states that the ultimate purpose for Creation was for Man to proclaim to the Creator, *Hashem*, WE ARE YOUR CREATIONS!

This is an astounding statement. Our only purpose in creation is to “pray” i.e. proclaim to G-d - We fully recognize that You, *Hashem*, created us and direct every aspect of our lives.

This bears semblance to the previous explanation from the *Alter from Kelm* that Prayer in itself is a form of Service of *Hashem*. The more we recognize *Hashem*'s single-handed ability to grant wisdom, to give us understanding, to teach us Torah and accept our repentance and grant us forgiveness, to redeem us etc. etc. the greater our attachment to Him. This follows the interpretation of the Hebrew word *Tefilla* or *Tafeil* - a bond or attachment.

The word *Tefilla* has yet another meaning. It comes from the root word “*Paleil*” which means *to judge, to assess, and to clarify*. A court of law is called “*Pelilim*” (Exodus 21:22). An individual that prays is called a “*Mispalleil*” the reflexive tense of the word “*Paleil*”. Hence, with prayer, we are expected to take a long hard look at ourselves to examine why we feel that *Hashem* should grant us our wishes. We must be our own judges to assess that we live up to what we are praying for, so that we don't bother *Hashem*, so to speak, with frivolous requests. In this sense, Prayer takes on another one of its Hebrew meanings “to judge”. *Tefilla* should force us to set goals and ambitions in Service of *Hashem* which should be our only reason in seeking health and happiness etc.

The Many Facets of Prayer

Tefilla is the Hebrew term for Prayer in general. In this category, there are different types of prayer in which we engage. They are¹²:

☞ Praise (*Shevach*)

¹¹ End of *Parshas Bo*

¹² Based on introduction of the *Siddur Maggid Tzedeck*

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☞ Gratitude (*Hodo'ah*)

☞ Supplications for Atonement (*Techinah*)

☞ Requests and Pleas for Personal Needs (*Bakashah*)

The common denominator is that all these prayers are communications and interactions between Man and his Creator.

In all the morning prayers up until the *Amidah She'mone Esrei* and its first three blessings, we are praying to G-d by way of Praise.

The last three blessings are prayers of Gratitude and Praise.

The middle section of the *Amidah She'mone Esrei* is where we pray by way of Supplications and personal Requests and Pleas; all in the form of blessings of Praise.

Hence, all of Prayer is a form of Praise to G-d, even those that are for personal matters. This follows the meaning of Prayer as Man's bonding with his Creator and in introspection and self-judgment when standing before G-d wrapped in Prayer.

Practical Advice

How do we cultivate this fundamental concept of Prayer into our daily prayers? How do we infuse our souls with a burning desire and feeling to proclaim to G-d that we are His creations?

One must obviously make an effort to be more aware to whom one is praying¹³. Praying to an invisible Being is in itself a statement that one believes in G-d and His ability to answer our prayers. So the first thing is to be consciously aware that one is standing in Prayer before G-d, the Creator of the entire universe.

Next time you enter into *shul* to daven:

¹³ See, The Art of Jewish Prayer Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner ז"ל, Judaica Press 1991

- ☞ Take a moment to reflect and review the words of the Ramban that our entire purpose of existence is to proclaim to G-d that we are His creations!
- ☞ Be your own Judge! Reflect on how you can justify your requests for health, happiness etc. etc.

Pesukei De'zimra - Verses in Song

The Gemora states in Berachos 32a that one must preface one's requests to *Hashem* with praise, which is why we begin *She'mone Esrei* with praise to *Hashem*. Likewise, we begin our daily prayers with *Pesukei de'zimra*¹⁴, a collection of verses of praise to *Hashem* as an introduction for our subsequent requests in prayer.

Alternatively, we gain closeness to *Hashem* through praising Him which helps to lead us into the main parts of prayer lifting us from level to level. In *Kabalistic* literature *Pesukei De'zimra* is explained to mean *Verses of Cutting*, which helps us in cutting away the evil forces and disturbances which interfere with our prayer.

Recall the encounter that our forefather Jacob (*Yaakov Avinu*) had with the angel of Esau (*Malach shel Eisav*). After doing battle with this angel, Jacob finally overtakes him and doesn't let him go. The *Malach* begs for Jacob to let him go; "for dawn has risen"¹⁵. What does the angel of Esau need to do so urgently at dawn? Rashi comments that at dawn was the *Malach's* turn to sing praise to *Hashem*. In fact, this was his most significant role as being a *Malach*, to have the opportunity and privilege to sing praises to *Hashem*.

Perek Shira is a collection of Praises that each creature sings to *Hashem*. In fact we say by davening that all of creation sings out to *Hashem* a praise "Who is like You *Hashem*?"

This concept of singing praises to *Hashem* is the basis of King David's book of Psalms (*Tehillim*). It is his book that the nation of Israel sings to *Hashem* from generation to generation in times of joy, need or sorrow. *Le'David Mizmor (Of King David, a praise), Chesed Ashira Mishpat ashira; lecha Hashem azameira* ¹⁶(Of kindness and

¹⁴ Tur Simon 51

¹⁵ Genesis/Bereishis 32:27

¹⁶ Psalms101:1

justice I will sing to You Hashem). The Gemora in *Berachos*¹⁷ understands that this verse refers to King David's personal songs of praise to *Hashem* regardless whether he was in a circumstance of kindness or in a circumstance of harsh judgment. It is in fact the song of the Jewish Nation's inner soul, *Borchi nafshi es Hashem vechol krovaye es sheim kodsho*¹⁸; My Soul praises *Hashem*, and all my insides His Holy Name.

Fervent Prayer and Praying Fervently

There are two types of Prayer. One type of prayer is the standardized text of *She'mone Esrei* set forth by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah*. The power of *Tefilla* is built-in to the standardized text and the *Tefilla* is potent on its own. With a minimum concentration these *Tefilos* rise up to *Shomayim* (Heaven) where *Hashem* readily accepts them.

Another type of prayer is the personal prayer of an individual that one composes on his own to express a personal plea to *Hashem*. The nature of such *Tefilla* is usually a heartfelt and sincere *Tefilla* as it comes from the depth of one's aching heart. Such a *Tefilla* is also readily accepted by the Almighty as long as it is sincere. If such prayer were insincere, it would be promptly rejected.

The *Meshech Chochma* uses this to explain the terminology of our forefather Jacob (*Yaakov Avinu*) where he expresses how he took a portion from the Amorites with "*my sword and my bow*". The Targum Onkelos to that verse interprets this allegorically. *My sword* refers to the power of "prayer" and *my bow* refers to the power of an "entreaty". It was through Jacob's power of Prayer that he overcame the Amorite nation. Explains the *Meshech Chochma*, there is an intrinsic difference between a *sword* and a *bow*. A sword is razor sharp and it cuts through the opponent without much effort. On the other hand, the *bow* is the force behind the arrow. The tighter one pulls on the bow the more force goes into the arrow, the deeper the arrow penetrates. So too with prayer. When using the Prayer set forth by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* it is like the *sword*. With almost no effort it cuts through all barriers and pierces the heavens. On the other hand, a personal entreaty requires much concentration and effort for it to accomplish its goal, much like the *bow and arrow*. Both get the job done, one with greater effort than the other.

¹⁷ *Daf* 60b

¹⁸ *Ibid* 103:1

There was once a young lad, a total ignoramus, who could not daven a single prayer from the Siddur. One Yom Kippur he came to shul and was determined to pray to G-d. He stared at the Siddur but he wasn't able to utter a sound. Finally, he glanced at the letters on the page and cried out to G-d, "Please Hashem, take these letters and make a prayer out them, for I cannot decipher them but You surely can!"

Prayer with Devotion

One can never overlook the significance of devotion in Prayer. Although one can fulfill one's obligation to pray even without concentrating on one's prayer, nevertheless, one must endeavor to pray with concentration (*kavanah*) simply because one is praying to the A-lmighty. As the Rosh in his classic work *Orchos Chaim* on ethics writes; "If your son would beg you for something that he really wants but he wouldn't pay attention when talking to you, wouldn't you get angry with him?" Obviously then one must make every effort to concentrate on Prayer since although technically one may fulfill his obligation in Prayer, still it's possible that his Prayer may anger *Hashem*.

In the book **Twersky on Prayer**, Rabbi Twersky discusses the issue of *Kavanah* (concentration) and attention during Prayer. Many times when one concentrates on not allowing one's thoughts to wander during prayer, it becomes even more difficult to remain focused as many more distractions tend to disturb one's concentration. Rabbi Twersky then suggests taking control of one's thoughts by focusing on the Prayer rather than focusing on trying to block out distracting thoughts. He compares this with someone that is drowning and is tossed a rope to save him. Despite any exhaustion and anxiety he may be experiencing, he will grasp that life-saving rope with all his energy and concentration. Even if he were to see a million dollars floating by at a distance, he would never be tempted to let go of the rope and reach for the money. This is the power of being focused on one's prayer. This is what the Hebrew word *Kavanah* connotes. The word comes from the root *kavein* – to aim. When one aims at something, his whole focus converges on his target. Everything else wanes away.

Rav Shimshon Pinkus OBM (ז"ל) suggests that in order for one to focus better on prayer, a useful tool is to study the *Siddur* and learn its meanings and its laws.

This is in fact the advice the Rambam¹⁹ recommends for dealing with sinful thoughts. He states that one must use his concentration to review Torah thoughts

¹⁹ Laws of Forbidden Relations / *Hilchos Isurei Bi'ah* 22:21

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all the time. A mind that is filled with Torah thoughts will not easily become distracted to think of other thoughts. It is only a mind that is devoid of Torah thoughts has room for other thoughts to enter.

Likewise, if when praying, one consumes all his energy on his thoughts about the Prayer itself, he will not easily become distracted by other mundane thoughts. This can be accomplished by gaining understanding of the prayer itself and by paying close attention to its meaning. This can even be accomplished just by focusing on the correct pronunciation of each word or even by just gazing at the letters of each word in the *Siddur* (Prayer Book). This alone can draw one's attention to the prayer, leaving no room in one's mind open to entertain any other thoughts. Like the archer taking aim at his target so too we can take aim with our prayers to reach *Hashem*.

Questions:

1. If *Hashem* knows all our needs and He knows what we deserve, what point is there then to pray to *Hashem*?
2. What meaning do we learn for the word “*Tefilla*” from Rachael’s naming of *Naftaly*?
3. What physical connection does Man have with His Creator? Which Hebrew words capture this idea?
4. What does the Rambam write about the need to create a uniform format for Prayer and when it took place?
5. How does the Ramban sum up Man’s purpose in creation?
6. What is the meaning of the word *Mispalleil* and why is it in the reflexive tense?
7. What is the purpose of reciting *Pesukei De’zimra* at the beginning of our daily prayers?
8. What benefit do we gain by praying the *She’mone Esrei* instituted by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* (sword)?
9. What is the best method to remain focused on one’s prayers?

Answers:

1. Prayer is not just a means to get that which we desire, rather it is a goal in itself as it brings us closer and closer to *Hashem*, and it is in itself a service to *Hashem* (*Avodas Hashem*).
2. The word *Naftaly* is like the word *Tefilla* and it takes on the meaning of bonding and attaching.
3. The connection we have with *Hashem* is the “Breath of Life” which He blew into Man. “Breath” is called *Neshimah* in Hebrew. Neshama is the word for “soul”.
4. The Rambam writes that after the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* (the Holy Temple) the Jews who were exiled were less and less familiar with Hebrew and had a difficult time in expressing themselves in Prayer. Therefore, the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* instituted a uniform text for prayer that everyone can familiarize themselves with.
5. The Ramban writes that Man’s purpose in creation is to recognize *Hashem* and proclaim that we are His creations.
6. The meaning of the word is to Judge. Here it means to Judge oneself in justifying a request from *Hashem* for something which he is requesting in his *Tefilla*.
7. The reason it was added to our daily prayer is because it is necessary to preface our requests by praising *Hashem* first as we do by *She’none Esrei*. It also serves as a preparation for us to lead us into prayer so that we can better focus our attention.
8. The words of *She’none Esrei* have been empowered by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* with an inherent power to fulfill its mission. It is like a sword that cuts through other materials with little effort.
9. It is best to concentrate on the meaning of the prayer itself or even just focusing on pronouncing the words and looking at the text itself inside the *Siddur* (Prayer Book).