

Daily Thoughts on Tefilla



**Created for SAR High School by Rabbi Jeremy Spierer,
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שנת תשס"ט-תש"ע

General Guidelines

1. The goal of this booklet is to provide meaningful thoughts on the daily davening. Some units deal with understanding the words and structure of davening; others deal with halacha.

2. Making these thoughts meaningful probably involves making their presentation brief – literally a minute long. Some of these units can be presented in a minute in their current form. Other units cannot. Please review each day's unit with an eye to select the sections you think are most meaningful or those with whom you identify most – *and can be presented in a minute*. In some cases, I put some sections in parentheses, suggesting that they be omitted in presentation.

3. The pages are marked by the day on the calendar. Please stick to those days, so every minyan covers the same topic daily. If you skip a day, please proceed with the marked schedule.

4. The main books I reference, besides the שולחן ערוך are:
 - ר' יששכר יעקבסון, זצ"ל by נתיב בינה. His comprehensive, five volume work can be found in our Beit Midrash (הוצאת "סיני", תל אביב, תשמ"ג).
 - A Guide to Jewish Prayer by Rabbi Isaiah Wohlgemuth, זצ"ל. Rabbi Wohlgemuth pioneered a tefillah class in the Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts.
 - תפילה כהלכתה מאת ר' יצחק יעקב פוקס, ירושלים, תשמ"ט
 - The new Koren Siddur with introduction, translation, and commentary by Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, Koren Publishers, Jerusalem, 2009. I found his translation and commentary accessible and relevant to our students.

5. Please provide feedback on which units “worked” better than others, or any other comments or suggestions.

Day 1: Transformative power of tefilla
September 9, 2009

1. General introduction – we will be devoting a minute a day to better understand the tefilla – what the words mean, why we say them, and some halachot.

2. One of the reasons we're doing this goes to the heart of some of the big questions about tefilla: Why do we pray? If Hashem knows what we want, then why do we need to tell Him? Furthermore, if Hashem already knows what's good for us and for the world, what does praying accomplish?

3. One of the answers to these questions is that tefilla is for our benefit, not Hashem's. Just like Hashem didn't need the korbanot brought on the mizbeach – he wasn't hungry – Hashem doesn't “need” our tefillot. The purpose of davening (and korbanot) is to improve ourselves, transform ourselves into different people than we would have been if we didn't daven.

4. (Rabbi Yehuda Halevy, the 11th Century poet and author of ספר הכוזרי wrote that prayer is to the soul what food is to the body. If we didn't eat, or didn't eat well, our bodies would suffer; if we don't pray, or don't focus on tefilla, our souls will not be the same; we will be different people. A person can live without music, art, laughter, love...but his life will not be as full. A person can survive physically without tefilla, but his/her life will not be the same (Saks, introduction, 17)).

5. We conclude with two points:
 - “Daven” is a Yiddish word. The Hebrew word for pray is להתפלל. It means to judge yourself, to examine yourself – what you need, what you believe, what your strengths and weaknesses are. In some languages, the word for “pray” and “ask” are the same, but not in Hebrew; it's not the asking that's the key, but it's how the tefilla changes the person asking.
 - We wish everyone that just as our learning together this year will make us better people and Jews, our davening together and our focus on תפילה will make us better people and Jews.

לדוד ה' אורי
Day 2 – 9/10/09

1. **Halacha**

- It is customary to say לדוד ה' אורי twice a day from the first day of Elul through Succot. We say it once at the end of שחרית and once at the end of מעריב.¹
- For שחרית, we say it after shofar blowing, though some say it immediately before shofar, so the call of the shofar to do teshuva is the last thing we hear on the way out to our day.
- לדוד is the 27th perek of תהילים. Traditionally, the first word “לדוד” means that דוד המלך was the actual author of the perek.²

2. **Why do we say it?**

- According to the midrash, the first words of the perek relate to this time of year:
 - i. ה' אורי – Hashem is my light, referring to Rosh Hashana, the Day of Judgment. In Tanach, light can be a metaphor for arriving at a final judgment, when a case has been clarified.³ Of course, light – as opposed to darkness – has positive connotations. We pray that our judgment is a good one.
 - ii. ישעי – Hashem is my salvation, referring to the salvation on Yom Kippur, coming from the forgiving of our sins.
 - iii. כי יצפני בסוכו ביום רעה – He will keep me safe in his pavilion (סוכה) on the day of trouble. The image דוד chooses for safety, סוכה, is a reference to the holiday of סוכות.
- Hashem’s name is mentioned 13 times, a reference to the יג מידות רחמים which we invoke from Elul through Yom Kippur and the שלש רגלים.

Sources: Saks, גתיב בינה, חלק ה', עמ' 20, פירוש דעת מקרא, ספר תהילים (כרך א'), עמ' ט (הקדמה), 192.

¹ This represents an Ashkenazi custom. Some shuls say לדוד after מנחה. Some ספרדי communities say לדוד every שחרית after עלינו or every מעריב at the beginning.

² It can also mean that the perek was written about דוד or for דוד – see פירוש דעת מקרא.

³ והוציא כאור צדק ומשפט כצהרים (תהילים לז:)

Pre-Rosh Hashana: לדוד ה' אורי (continued)
Day 3 – 9/11/09

1. Transition: Yesterday we spoke about hints that לדוד belongs to this time of year – either individual words or the 13 times Hashem's name is mentioned? Today we're going to look at the perek itself – what is the main message?

2. Understanding the words

- The perek is about a person, probably דוד himself, surrounded by troubles and enemies. You will hear references to war: אויבי (my enemies), מחנה (war camp), and מלחמה. דוד המלך states that what saves him from his troubles – and דוד had many - is his deep faith in Hashem and his prayers. A person who believes in Hashem will be saved – either from the situation itself, and/or from the fear of the situation.
- David uses two words for fear “אפחד” and “אירא.” Some explain יראה as the fear of the known, and פחד as the fear of the unknown (מלבים).
- For this time of year – we also think about our past - the known things we have done and the unknown – and we also think of our future – the things we want to accomplish, the situations we will face. The message דוד המלך gives us is that believing in Hashem will go along way in facing whatever comes our way.

Sources: נתיב בינה, חלק ה', עמ' 25.

Pre-Rosh Hashana: לדוד ה' אורי (continued)

Day 4 – 9/14/09

1. Transition: Yesterday we spoke about the main message of לדוד ה' אורי. Today we are going to focus on a famous pasuk or two.

2. Understanding the words

- ... כל ימי חי... דוד – אחת שאלתי מאת ה' אותה אבקש שבתי בבית ה' – דוד says that he has one request from Hashem. The truth is that in this perek alone, דוד offers many requests. It means that this is דוד's main desire; all other requests relate to this one desire: to dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of his life and to visit the Mikdash daily. ר' שמשון רפאל הירש points out that no one visits the Mikdash daily, not even כוהנים. דוד המלך is asking that he bring the closeness to Hashem that a person might feel in the Mikdash to all places and all parts of his life. Every place will feel like the house of Hashem. The idea for this time of year is that our intense tefillot in Elul through the chagim will leave a lasting impression on our lives, that our lives this year will be changed by our work the next month.
- 'קוה אל ה' חזק ויאמץ לבך וקוה אל ה' – Hope in Hashem, Be Strong and of good courage, and hope in Hashem. Why the double language?
 - i. The Gemara learns from here that if a person's tefillot are not answered the first time, he/she should daven again and again. The message:
 1. Davening takes hard work; we can always daven harder (i.e. Schvartze Wolf)

Sources: 28, 25-24 עמ' ה', חלק ה', נתיב בינה, חלק ה', עמ' 24, 25, Saks, 192.

Note:

- 1. Judge if you have time for both pesukim or only one. Better to keep to the minute, and leave it for class.**
- 2. Another פירוש for the last pasuk, is that if the person has true faith in Hashem (the first “קוה”), then that person is transformed; he/she will always turn to Hashem (the second “קוה”).**

Pre-Rosh Hashana: סליחות
Day 5 – 9/15/09

1. What are סליחות?
 - Religious poems we say throughout the year. The ones said before Rosh Hashana are calls for תשובה.

2. **Understanding the structure / Halacha** - Why are סליחות longer on some days than others? When and why do we stand? Why do we say אשרי in the beginning and תחנון in the end, if we will say them later anyway?

סליחות form a kind of עשרה, and are thus arranged accordingly:

- Many people stand the whole time, just like we stand for עשרה.

- Taking מנחה as an example, just like we say אשרי and a short kaddish – חצי קדיש – before עשרה, that's what we do before סליחות.

- Just like עשרה begins with שבח, praising Hashem, we start סליחות by reciting pesukim praising Hashem – this is the first paragraph of selichot.

- Just like the long, middle section of עשרה is בקשה, requests, the largest part of סליחות are poems of בקשה. The cornerstone of this section is reciting the מידות רחמים ה', ה'... י"ג מידות רחמים. The last time we say the מידות י"ג is the end of this section.

- The י"ג מידות are so holy and form such a central part of the section, that...
 - They are introduced by a separate paragraph – קל מלך יושב
 - The חזן calls us to say them
 - The ציבור says them together out loud. If a person is davening alone, he/she does not say the מידות י"ג.

- Finally, just as עשרה is followed by תחנון and the קדיש תתקבל - the קדיש with the special line asking Hashem to accept our prayers - סליחות are followed by prayers of תחנון – תחנון itself and other tefillot like שמע קולנו and עננו ה' עננו. There is no section of מודים like there is in עשרה. Perhaps we leave this for Yom Kippur.

Sources: A Guide to Jewish Prayer, 308-316.

Pre-Rosh Hashana: סליחות (continued)
Day 6 – 9/16/09

1. Transition: Yesterday, we explained the structure of סליחות. Today, we'll focus on some of the more well-known lines.

2. Understanding the words
 - The chazzan ends the first paragraph (“the שבה section”) with the following line: הנשמה לך והגוף שלך חוסה על עמלך. Before approaching Hashem we acknowledge his greatness and power: Our bodies and souls are His. Since we are totally dependent on Him, we ask that he have mercy on us. “חוסה” means to have mercy, and “עמלך” is a reference to Jews, literally, “those borne by Hashem” the way a mother takes care of a child.

 - In the introductory paragraph to the י"ג מידות (in the "בקשה" section), we say: קל הורית לנו לומר שלש עשרה וזכור לנו היום ברית שלש עשרה. We almost demand from Hashem: since he taught us the “secret of the 13,” to say the י"ג מידות in times of intense תשובה, we demand that Hashem listen to these tefillot. The “us” is really Moshe Rabbeinu; Hashem taught Moshe these pesukim while pleading for forgiveness for בני ישראל, after the חטא העגל. The Midrash says that Hashem promised Moshe that if the Jewish people would say these tefillot sincerely, they would be answered. We ask Hashem to honor that pledge. (a possible analogy: students demanding from teachers that they follow the school handbook?)

 - Finally, in the שמע קולנו (in the "תחנון" section), we ask Hashem not to forget us when we are old – אל תליכנו לעת זקנה ככלות כוחנו אל תעזבנו. At this point, some think of the older or sick people in their lives, those that don't have much strength as we do to daven.

Note: You may only have time to say two of the three points.

סליחות ערב ראש השנה: Pre-Rosh Hashana:
Day 7 — 9/17/09

1. Transition / Halacha

- We have been talking about סליחות. Tomorrow, for ערב ראש השנה, the סליחות are the longest. Specifically, the middle “בקשה” section is much longer, as we say the י"ג מידות more times than we do perhaps any time of the year.
- As an analogy, we can think of ראש השנה as a kind of final. (The truth is that it is a final of sorts.) As the final gets closer, our preparation and in some cases, desperation, get more intense. We have only one more day to ראש השנה, where we and the world as a whole are judged. We may have time to “hand in corrections” between ראש השנה and יום כפור and “raise our grade,” but always better to get it right the first time.
- Since, as we mentioned, we can only say the י"ג מידות with a minyan, it is very important that we daven selichot in shul on ערב ראש השנה, to benefit from the full impact of the tefilla, aside from the other things going on in shul, like התרת גדרים.

צום גדליה
Day 8 – 9/21/09

Suggestion: Say this דבר הלכה before mincha when it is most relevant. Also, the davening for שחרית will be extremely long.

1. **Halacha:**

- In our silent עשרה עשרה, everyone, including the חזן will insert the special tefilla for a public fast day – עננו in the beracha of שמע קולנו. We add the tefilla, but end the beracha like we always do with the words “ברוך אתה ה' שומע” תפילה.” In other words, we are adding a tefilla, not a new beracha.
- When the חזן repeats the עשרה עשרה, he will insert עננו after the beracha “גואל ישראל” and end the tefilla with a new phrase: ברוך אתה ה' העונה בעת צרה – who answers us in times of distress. In other words, in the repetition of עשרה עשרה, there will be 20 berachot, instead of the usual 19.⁴

Why the difference?

- The גמרא (תענית יג:) says that an individual fasting does not have the authority to add another beracha to his/her עשרה עשרה. This implies that a congregation fasting does have that authority. Therefore, when the חזן repeats the עשרה עשרה, representing the whole congregation, we have the authority of a צבור to add this beracha.
2. Who says עננו in the silent עשרה עשרה – everyone who is still fasting, since the tefilla reads, “Answer us on the day of *our* fasting.” (That’s also why the Ashkenazi custom is that an individual does not say עננו in the morning because it is unclear whether he/she will complete the fast. The חזן can say עננו in the morning because the chances are good that at least 10 will complete the fast.)
 3. You do not have to repeat the עשרה עשרה if you forget עננו. (You can add the tefilla in נצור if you have not taken three steps back.)
 4. Even if one is not fasting, the custom is to say “שים שלום” instead of “שלום רב.” That’s because we will read the Torah at mincha, and only “שים שלום” refers to the Torah – “תורת חיים ואהבת חסד.”⁵
 5. The חזן will say ברכת כוהנים.

Please remind everyone to give tzedakah at mincha.

⁴ The appropriate place is after גואל ישראל – recalling the juxtaposition of “ה' צורי וגואלי” – the last verse in תהלים כ' – and “יענקל ביום צרה” – the first verse in תהלים ט.

⁵ In Israel, Ashkenazi custom is to say “שים שלום” during מנחה שבת for this reason. That is not the practice in חוץ לארץ.

עשרת ימי תשובה - Changes in davening
Day 9 – 9/22/09

1. **Halacha**

Reminders for changes in the davening during the rest of ימי תשובה:

- During Shemoneh Esreh – The changes that focus on “life” / “חיים” - זכרנו in the first beracha, מי כמוך in the second, מודים וכתוב לחיים, and בספר חיים in שים שלום – and the changes that focus on Hashem as the king - המלך in the third, המשפט in השיבה שופטינו in המלך המשפט.
- The only change that requires a person to repeat the shemoneh esreh is המלך הקדוש.⁶
- After Shemoneh Esreh, during שחרית and מנחה, we say אבינו מלכנו with special inserts focusing on the book of life. For example, instead of asking for פרנסה (livelihood), we ask to be written in the book of livelihood – בספר פרנסה.
- In short, the changes remind us of two factors: Hashem in our king and that we can influence whether we are inscribed in the book of life.
- Everyone is encouraged to take on extra practices during this week – whether it’s davening more, concentrating more, or coming earlier than we usually do.

⁶ The changes involving “מלך” are written in the Gemara – ברכות יב: - while the other changes are not. ד"ה והלכתא כוותיה דרבא, תופסות ברכות יב:, records the debate if one needs to repeat the shemoneh esreh for those changes not mentioned in the Gemara. Regarding the “מלך” changes, the Gemara does not distinguish between המלך הקדוש and המשפט. רבינו יונה suggests that even if one forgets to say המשפט, one has still said the word מלך – and does not have to repeat shemoneh esreh. רמ"א follows the pesak of רבינו יונה.

אבינו מלכנו: עשרת ימי תשובה
Day 10 – 9/23/09

1. **Transition:** Yesterday we mentioned אבינו מלכנו as one of the additions in davening this week.
2. אבינו מלכנו in its earliest form is attributed to רבי עקיבא. In our current version, we have 44 sentences / pleas, all starting with the words “אבינו מלכנו.” We say the first 14 to ourselves, the next nine responsively with the חזן, and then the last 21 again to ourselves. Sometimes on יום כפור, the congregation says all 44 together with the חזן.
3. **Understanding the words**
 - The words “אבינו מלכנו” refer to two roles Hashem plays in our lives: He is our king and our father. The first role focuses on judgment, the second on mercy. We put the אבינו before the מלכנו, indicating that we want Hashem’s fatherly compassion to temper His royal judgment.
 - In the first section of 14, we find a lot of pleas for help against our enemies. Many of the verbs: בטל and הפר (cancel), סתום (close), מנע (prevent), כלה (destroy) call for the removal of things that cause harm: our enemies, their plans, and even their words. We also ask Hashem to take away our sins – we find the words מחק and מחה (erase). In the last 21, we find more positive requests – for Hashem to act and bestow blessing. The most common verb in that section is “עשה” – to act.
4. **Halacha**
 - A person can say אבינו מלכנו without a מנין.
 - In shul, it is customary to open the ארון during this tefilla and for everyone to stand.

Sources: כג"מ: תפילה כהלכתה, Saks, 138-139.

תפילות יום כפור: Pre-Yom Kippur Day 11 – 9/24/09

1. Halacha

A couple of unique aspects to the davening of Yom Kippur:

- There are six aliyot, not the usual five for Yom Tov and seven for Shabbat. This highlights Yom Kippur's unique status among the ימים טובים.
- There are five tefillot, instead of the usual four. We have the usual מעריב followed by מנחה, מוסף, שחרית, Yom Kippur is unique because it has a fifth concluding tefilla called נעילה.

2. Understanding the words

- The word נעילה means to seal or lock.
 - The simple meaning is that this is the last tefilla before the end of the day when the “gates are closed” and the judgments are sealed. In this tefilla, instead of asking for Hashem to inscribe us – כתבנו – in the book of life, we ask Hashem to seal us – התמנו – in the book of life.
 - Some have suggested that the role of נעילה, more than any other prayer, is to form a closeness with Hashem. After spending the day praying and fasting, we are in a unique position to cement our relationship with Hashem. As a result we should view this time as if we are locked - נעול - in a room only with Hashem, talking only to Him.⁷

⁷ I heard this idea about the purpose of נעילה from Rav Yehuda Amital, Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Har Etzion. I heard this image of a locked room from Rav Dovid Miller, Rosh Yeshiva at the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim.

ערב יום כפור
Day 12: 9/25/09

1. Halacha

Some tefilla reminders for Sunday, ערב יום כפור:

- Remember to catch the last selichot of this season; if you come late, you will miss it. As ערב יום כפור is a kind of holiday, the selichot are the shortest of this season.
- Also because it is a holiday, we do not say תחנון or למנצה.
- We omit מזמור לתודה, since that tefilla corresponds to the קרבן תודה, the thanksgiving offering. That korban included the eating of meat and 40 loaves of bread and matza within one day and night. If we would bring a קרבן תודה on ערב יום כפור, we would be limiting the amount of eating time, since the fast starts before the night. Since we wouldn't bring the קרבן תודה on ערב יום כפור, we don't say the corresponding מזמור לתודה either.
- There is a special tefilla before כל נדרי, called תפילה זכה, the pure prayer. In that tefilla we do two things: examine how we used our bodies and minds over the year and publically grant forgiveness for those who may have wronged us. It is a powerful tefilla; some congregations say part of it our loud. We encourage everyone to come a couple of minutes early to say as much as this tefilla as possible.
- Also, just as we prepare for exams, particularly finals... we need to prepare for Yom Kippur, by looking over the tefillot in Hebrew and English, trying to understand them and find meaning in them.

Sources: שו"ע או"ח, נא:ט, ומשנה ברורה שם.

מוצאי יום כפור
Day 13 – 9/29/09

1. Halacha/ Hashkafa

- There is a practice to begin tefilla five minutes early the morning after Yom Kippur, indicating our enthusiasm to begin on the right track.

- Whether we did that or not, the idea is that on Yom Kippur we talked to Hashem about the “ideal us” – what our ideal day looks like as Jews serving Hashem. The trick to realize some of our ideals is to put as many of them into practice immediately. The other trick is to start small – have small goals and implement them right away.

- As the month of תשרי is dominated by חגים, we do not say תחנון for the rest of this month. We start only after יום כפור because the days between ראש השנה and יום כפור are precisely days for more tefillot of תחנון, pleading.

סוכת דוד הנופלת Pre-Succot
Day 14 – 9/30/09

1. Understanding the words

- In the end of ברכת המזון, we add special tefillot for the הגים.
- A phrase we add on Succot is: הרהמן הוא יקים לנו את סוכת דוד הנופלת. Hashem, the merciful, will lift up David's falling Succah.
- What is דוד המלך's succah? Why say "falling" in the present tense, if דוד המלך lived around 3,000 years ago?
- The phrase is in the present because it is an exact quote from one of the last pesukim in ספר עמוס, one of תרי עשר. We see two things:
 - i. Our חכמים looked to תנ"ך in forming tefillot, and
 - ii. They often preserved the words of the pasuk.
- When נביא עמוס was living – 8th century BCE – the succah of David was in fact falling. What is this succah?
 - i. Some say it is the kingdom of David. עמוס predicted a time when both kingdoms would collapse, but ultimately the kingdom of David would survive.

Normally, David's kingdom is called a house – בית דוד. However, since it would collapse, עמוס uses the image of a temporary succah.

- ii. Others say the סוכת דוד is the Beit Hamikdash. Surprisingly, we call it the succah of David and not the succah of Shlomo, even though Shlomo built it. However, while Shlomo built it, David planned for it, set the groundwork to build it, and yearned to build it. Therefore the Beit Hamikdash is called his succah, not Shlomo's.

So, as we sit in our סוכות, we think of a time when the Beit Hamikdash and the kingdom of David will be restored, and we will be celebrating the שלש רגלים in ירושלים.

Sources: עמוס ט:יא, רש"י ומלבים שם.

Pre-Succot
Day 15 – 10/1/09

Some tefilla reminders over Succot:

- We do not bring our מינים ד' to shul on the first day of Succot, since it is Shabbat
- Every day of סוכות has תפילת מוסף, since there were מוספים, special קורבנות, for each day.
- The שחרית שמונה עשרה depends: For Yom tov – the next two “Shabbat and Sunday”’s – every שמונה עשרה is the special one for שלש רגלים. For חול המועד – Monday through Friday, the שחרית, מנחה, מעריב שמונה עשרה for יעלה ויבוא is the regular weekday one with the addition of יעלה ויבוא.
- If you forget יעלה ויבוא in שמונה עשרה: If you realize before uprooting your feet, start again from רצה; if you have uprooted your feet, you need to repeat the שמונה עשרה.
- For תפילין, you will notice that there are different customs whether to wear tefillin on חול המועד. Whatever the custom, הלל, תפילין are removed.
- We say a full הלל every day.

Post-Succot – משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם
Day 16 – 10/12/09

1. Halacha

Since we began saying משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם on Shabbat – שמיני עצרת – let's review some halachot regarding that addition.

When considering these halachot, it's important to remember:

1. משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם is not a request; it is a statement of praise: G-d makes the wind blow and the rain fall. That's why it is in the first section of שמונה עשרה, the שבח section.
2. While the phrase has its place in the beracha, it may be said at any point in the beracha.

Therefore:

- If instead of saying משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם, you said הרוח ומוריד הטל, you don't need to repeat anything, since you have praised Hashem.
- If you skipped the phrase entirely,
 - i. You can say it anywhere in the beracha.
 - ii. If you have already started the conclusion of the beracha, “ונאמן אתה,” you can still insert the words משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם, but then start with the words “ונאמן” because you want to keep the conclusion intact.
 - iii. If you have finished the beracha “מחיה המתים” but have not said the words “אתה קדוש”, you can just insert the words and continue with אתה קדוש.
 - iv. However, once you have started the words “אתה קדוש”, you must start at the beginning of שמונה עשרה.
- If you are not sure if you said it or not:
 - i. If during the summer you say, “מוריד הטל”, then chances are that you said that, and you're fine.
 - ii. If during the summer, you say nothing, then chances are you said nothing, and you have to repeat שמונה עשרה. This applies for the first thirty days.

מודה אני
Day 17 – 10/13/09

1. **Transition** – After the long stretch of חגים, our challenge is to apply that intensity on a daily level. Today, we start from the beginning: מודה אני, the first tefilla printed in most siddurim.

2. **Halachot:**
 - There is no שם ה' in the tefilla, so it can be said before נטילת ידים, even if your hands are dirty. For the gentlemen – if your head is not yet covered and you don't have a head covering readily available, it can be said even without a head covering.
 - If a person says מודה אני and falls back asleep, he/she may say it again.
 - If a person says מודה אני, hits the snooze button, and remains in bed *awake*, he/she should not say it again.

3. **Explanation of words:**
 - The first idea: “I thank you, living and eternal king (מלך חי וקים) for giving me back my soul in mercy (שהחזרת בי נשמתי בחמלה).” That's the end of the first idea, so we should pause after the word “חמלה.”
 - The second idea: “Your faithfulness is great (רבה אמונתך).” This “faithfulness” may relate to:
 - i. Our faith in Hashem that he will revive the dead, just like He revives us each morning.⁸
 - ii. Hashem's faith in us. Hashem trusts us to use our souls well, to conduct ourselves honorably.

If we say “חמלה רבה” – “great mercy” – we leave that last word “אמונתך” stranded (The words of מודה אני are based on the words in ג:כג, “אויב רבה אמונתך”, “חדשים לבקרים, רבה אמונתך”)

4. **Hashkafa:**

Day in and day out we start our days by affirming several things:

 1. Being alive is a gift.
 2. Hashem trusts us, and is trustworthy.
 3. We are prepared to use the day wisely.
 4. We need to thank people for what they give us.

Sources: שם, שו"ע, או"ח, א: א, משנה ברורה שם, ס"ק ח, תפילה כהלכתה, ט:א-ג והערות שם. Saks, 4-5.

⁸ The Gemara says that “sleep is 1/60 of death (Yerushalmi, Berachot 1a).”

תפילה בכניסה לבית הכנסת: מה טובו

Day 18 – 10/14/09

1. Transition: We mentioned yesterday that the siddur begins with a tefilla we say at home – the מודה אני. The next tefillot printed in our Artscroll siddurim are the berachot for תפילין and ציצית. Bear in mind that today, men wear תפילין only during tefilla, but in earlier times, men wore תפילין all day; tefillin was not connected to davening. This might be the reason that the berachot for תפילין and ציצית are printed with the other tefillot said at home, because men put their תפילין on at home.
2. Many siddurim proceed to those tefillot said when entering a shul. The first of those: מה טובו.

3. Source

One of the first siddurim we have is the סידור of רב עמרם גאון (9th Century Babylonia, now Iraq). Rav Amram Gaon wrote the siddur, responding to a request from the Jews of Barcelona to organize the tefillot in one work. In this סידור, as well as in the סידור attributed to Rashi, we find the instruction to say מה טובו upon entering the shul in the morning, as well as instructions on which פסוקים to say when leaving the shul.

4. Explanation of the words/tefilla

There are several strange elements to מה טובו:

- It is composed of five different pesukim, each from a different perek in Tanach.
- While the last four come from תהילים, the source of many of our tefillot, the first comes from ספר במדבר.
- Finally, this pasuk in במדבר comes from the words of בלעם, “How goodly are your tents (אהליך), Yaakov [the Jewish people], your dwelling places (משכנותיך) Israel (במדבר כד:ה).” בלעם had intended to curse the Jewish people, but instead Hashem turned his words into a blessing.

Many have learned the interpretation Rashi cites that Bilam was praising the modesty of the Jewish people, noting that the doors to their tents faced away from each other to protect people's privacy. The Gemara in סנהדרין קה: understands “tents and dwelling places” as referring to our בתי כנסת and בתי מדרש. That's why we begin with this Pasuk; it is the praise of a person approaching a shul, and saying – how good are Jewish בתי מדרש and shuls.

מה טובו (continued)

Day 19: 10/15/09

1. Transition: Yesterday we spoke about מה טובו, leaving with the mystery of why we chose a pasuk from one of our enemies, בלעם. Today, we will look at the four other pesukim, because they are there to help us overcome some of the difficulties we have with tefilla.

2. Explanation of words

In SAR, the abbreviation “RPT” – right place and right time – conjure images of community service, detention... We can also use the abbreviation to appreciate the feelings some of us have when entering a shul:

- The first: what am I doing here? This is not the place I want to be at this hour in the morning. Furthermore, who am I to come to such a place? How did I spend my day yesterday, last night? Am I worthy to enter a shul; am I being a hypocrite for entering a shul?

The pasuk in תהילים says, “As for me, in Your great loving-kindness, I will come into your house (ואני ברוב חסדך אבוא ביתך). We are allowed to come in because Hashem invites us in, encourages us to come in and participate.

- Is this a good time? The pasuk in tehillim says, “As for me, may my prayer come to you, Lord, at a time of favor (ואני תפילתי לך ה' עת רצון).”
- Note that three out of the four pesukim from tehillim start with the word “ואני” – “as for me.” The “me” in us can be an obstacle to davening – the way we can be preoccupied with our own lives. While we may legitimately be preoccupied with our lives, we don’t stop to consider what’s beyond the “me” – other human beings and Hashem.

3. Hashkafa

Thus, מה טובו, helps us prepare psychologically for תפילה: we are invited to come and helped to think beyond ourselves.

Some suggest that this is why we use the words of בלעם to open מה טובו. If בלעם, preoccupied with his hatred for the Jewish people and his own greed, could proclaim the greatness of our tents, surely we can bridge the gap between our preoccupations and our tefillot.

(I did not find explicit sources why we don’t say מה טובו today – maybe because the tefilla is not mentioned in the Gemara.⁹)

Sources: Rabbi Abe Katz, www.beureihatefila.com, Dr. Reuven Kimelman, *The Hidden Poetry of the Jewish Prayerbok* (Audio CD version), Our Learning Company, LLC.

⁹ The מהרש"ל refused to say the first pasuk because it came from בלעם.

ואהבת לרעך כמוך
Day 20 – 10/16/09

1. Transition: To end this section on what to say when entering a shul, I would like to mention one practice that is not done regularly, but if it were, could possibly change our world.
2. **Halacha** – The מגן אברהם, the 17th Century commentator on the או"ח section of שו"ע, directs every Jew before davening to accept the mitzvah of כמוך, to love every Jew.
3. **Hashkafa**
What is the connection between loving every Jew and davening?
 - Some point to mystical factors – if a Jew focus on loving all Jews, his/her tefilla will be offered as if it is the tefilla of all Jews, thereby more likely to be accepted.
 - Others point to the deep connection between our relationship with Hashem and מצוות בין אדם למקום and our relationship with people and מצוות בין אדם לחבירו.
 - Either way, this custom reinforces the idea that the סידור was organized and our tefillot structured to shape feelings and beliefs, to transform us.

Imagine if all of us focused on this mitzvah before every davening....

Sources: מגן אברהם, או"ח, סימן מו, ס"ק א, ספר נתיב בינה, חלק א', עמ' 146. הוא מצטט ספר "שערי ציון" שמביא מנהגי האר"י.

ראש חודש מרחשון (Rosh Chodesh) Day 21 – 10/19/09

Recommendation: Use the time before מוסף, when the boys are removing their tefillin, to say this תורה דבר.

1. Understanding the words

Like every שמונה עשרה of מוסף, the first three and last three berachot are identical to every other שמונה עשרה. It's the middle seventh beracha that has tefillot unique to the day. What is in the special beracha for ראש חודש?

- Since ראש חודש is a new beginning, we ask Hashem for forgiveness for our wrongdoings and for a new start. That's why the beracha starts: ראשי חדשים – You have given New Moons to Your people as a time of atonement for all their offspring.
- Since we refer to the קורבנות we would have brought for ראש חודש, we ask Hashem to rebuild the בית המקדש so that we can restore the ראש חודש service. מזבח חדש בציון תכין – May you establish a new altar in Zion (Yerushalayim). והביאנו לציון עירך ברנה...ושם נעשה לפניך את קרבנות חובותנו Yerushalayim with song...there we will prepare for You our obligatory offerings [for Rosh Chodesh]
- Then we cite the pesukim from the Torah describing the קורבנות of ראש חודש. These are the same pesukim we read in the morning Torah reading.
- Finally we ask Hashem to bless the new month. We use six phrases of blessing, the first one “לטובה לברכה”, etc. When we hear each phrase during חזרת הש"ץ, we answer אמן as a צבור.

Source: Saks, 744-751.

ברכות השחר
Day 22 – 10/20/09

1. Transition:

We finished discussing מה טובו, the tefilla said when entering a shul. We move now to a new section, the tefillot recited *in shul*, starting with ברכות השחר.

Defintion/source

2. ברכות השחר could be translated “berachot of the morning/day,” or “berachot of the morning service.”

3. Originally, as recorded in the גמרא in ברכות ס: , these were the “berachot of the morning.” People said them at home when they woke in the morning – specifically when they experienced the action that the beracha described. For example, when they opened their eyes, they said “פוקח עורים” – He who gives sight to the blind; when they washed their hands they said “על נטילת ידים”; when they got dressed they said “מלביש” – He who clothes the naked; when they straightened their backs, they said, “זוקף כפופים” – He who raises those who are bowed down.”

The implication is that Jews said these berachot in whatever order they experienced the actions described in the berachot.

4. Today, a more accurate translation might be “berachot of the morning service.” While some of these berachot, like אשר יצר and על נטילת ידים are said routinely at home, most of these berachot have been incorporated into our morning tefilla, so that we say them only in shul. Two reasons for moving them to the shul:

- a. Many people are unfamiliar with the words of all of the berachot.
- b. Saying them in shul ensures that they are said after people have washed their hands properly in the morning.

5. Halacha / Minhag

Many people say אשר יצר, על נטילת ידים, and maybe ברכות התורה at home; then the קהילה, like ours, starts with שיר קהילות. Some ברכות start with מזמור שיר and ברוך שאמר, and all the berachot are said at home. There are some individuals, that no matter where the congregation starts, they say all the ברכות השחר in shul, including על נטילת ידים – where we will pick up tomorrow.

מקורות: ברכות ס, שולחן ערוך, או"ח, מו:א-ב:

(א) כשיעור (ב) משנתו, (ג) יאמר: אלהי [א] נשמה; כשישמע קול התרנגול, יברך: הנותן (ד) לשכוי בינה...
(ב) עכשיו, מפני שאין הידים נקיות ו גם מפני עמי הארצות שאינם יודעים אותם, (יא) נהגו לסדרם בבהכ"נ

נטילת ידים
Day 23 – 10/21/09

1. Transition

As we mentioned, we move now to the berachot recited first in shul, ברכות השחר. Interestingly, some siddurim, like the siddurim in school, print the berachot על נטילת ידים and אשר יצר – two berachot many say at home.

2. Halacha/Explanation of words

- To clarify, when a person gets up in the morning, after מודה אני, he/she should wash their hands immediately – three times on each hand. Regarding the beracha, however, while many say the beracha at home, others say it in shul with the rest of ברכות השחר.
- What do the words נטילת ידים mean?
 - “Lifting of the hands” (for example “ותשאנני רוח” translated as “ונטלתנני” (רוחא). Halacha: After we wash our hands, we lift them in the air, preventing water that may have touched our arms to flow back on our newly cleaned hands.
 - Others say the word “נטילה” refers to the Aramaic word “נטלא” or “washing utensil” (See שמות מ:לא on ת"י). Thus the translation would be “on the washing of the hands with a utensil.” This reflects the halacha that ideally we keep all the halachot applying to washing our hands before eating bread: using a כלי, a רביעית – several ounces of water. (בדיעבד, the lack of a כלי or רביעית are not מעכב the washing or the beracha.) – (ראש ברכות ט:כג), אבודרהם – נטלא – (רבינו ירוהם בב"י)

3. Explanation / Hashkafa

- Source for the beracha – ברכות ס: , mentioned with the other ברכות השחר
- Why do we wash our hands in the morning?
 - i. There are several reasons given – for today, we’ll suffice with one: to purify the hands from a רעה רעה, a mystical impurity associated with sleep. (We mentioned re: מודה אני the association between sleep and death.)

Taking this reason, we can understand:

- We try to wash immediately, not to touch our faces before washing.
- Why three times; if we were dealing with physical dirt, one would suffice.
- Why we lift our hands. In case water from our impure hands spill onto our arms, we lift our hands, preventing this water from spilling back on our hands.

Sources: טור שו"ע, סי' ד' וב"י שם, נתיב בינה 155-156.

על נטילת ידים (continued)
Day 24 – 10/22/09

1. **Transition** – Yesterday we spoke about washing our hands because of the mystical "רוח רעה." Today we look two other opinions in the Rishonim and see how they affect what we do.

2. **Explanation/Hashkafa**

- (ברכות ט:כג) – ראש (ברכות ט:כג) – we wash our hands to cleanse them (physically) before davening; our hands may have unknowingly become dirty over the night. (This approach focuses on the pasuk, – ארחץ בנקיון כפי ואסבבה את מזבחך ה' – תהלים כו:ו. See ברכות טו.)
- (תשובות) – רשב"א (תשובות) – in the morning, we are a "בריה חדשה" – we are reborn. By washing our hands, we imitate the כוהנים in the מקדש: just as they sanctified their day by washing their hands, we sanctify our day, dedicating it to Hashem's work. (This is also in R. Hirsch's siddur.)

3. **Halacha**

- We have an additional reason for lifting our hands after we wash – elevating our hands symbolizes dedicating our day to an elevated purpose.
- We understand now why some wait to say the beracha of נטילה ידים until they get to shul. According to the Rosh, since the washing relates to davening, we should say the beracha together with davening.¹⁰
- If it relates to davening, we understand why some people wash their hands with a cup before davening mincha and maariv as well.
- Falling asleep in class for more than 20 minutes – do we need to wash? According to the above reasons, no; according to רוח רעה, maybe yes. We wash without a beracha.

4. **Hashkafa** (if there's time)

We need to approach tefilla with clean hands – not just physically but also morally. The pasuk in תהלים refers to נקיון כפי. This also underscores the assumption that our tefilla accompanies and leads to positive behavior.

Sources: משנה ברורה, ד:א, באור הלכה, ואפילו לא עשה צרכיו, ערוך השולחן או"ח, ד:א-ז, נתיב 156 עמ' בינה, R. Wohlgenuth, 27-30.

¹⁰ The ערוך השולחן cites the Rosh seemingly contradicting himself, calling for the beracha in the morning in one's house. In general, the ערוך השולחן feels that both the Rosh and the Rashba focus on pre-davening preparation. Rashba mentions בריה חדשה to explain why we wash only before שהריה.

אשר יצר
Day 25 – 10/23/09

1. **Transition:** The past two days, we have focused on על נטילת ידים, the reasons and some of the halachot. Today, we continue with the second of ברכות השחר, אשר יצר. Like אשר יצר, על נטילת ידים is said routinely at home, as well as when we leave the bathroom. However, our חכמים felt it important to include it in the שחרית service as well.

2. **Explanation of words**

Today, we will talk about the words and what they have to do with going to the bathroom. Then we can figure out why it is included in every morning service.

- The beracha begins praising Hashem for forming human beings with wisdom (אשר יצר את האדם בחכמה).
- The end of a beracha is usually connected to the theme in the opening. This beracha ends praising Hashem for His wondrous deeds – מפליא לעשות – פלא, a wonder. Thus, this beracha is about the wonder of the human body.
- In particular, this beracha focuses on the following:
 - Hashem created our bodies with holes (נקבים) and hollow organs (חלולים).
 - If any of the hollow organs, like the heart, stomach, or intestines would be ruptured (שאם יפתח אחד מהם), or if any of the holes, like the mouth, nostrils, (or rectum) would be blocked, we would be in trouble, perhaps suffering fatal illness. Literally: “it would be impossible to survive and stand before you” – לפניך אי אפשר להתקיים ולעמוד –
 - Some commentaries extend this thought to all aspects of our body – “the smallest variation in the human genome can cause potentially fatal illness (Saks, 4).”

Hashkafa

3. Why does the Gemara associate this beracha specifically with going to the bathroom? The שולחן ערוך suggests that excretion is a bodily function controlled by both נקבים, openings, and חלולים, hollow organs. Also, when we go to the bathroom we are reminded of our bodies; we are not as conscious of our breathing, moving our muscles...
4. Why did our sages include this beracha in every morning service? As we mentioned with על נטילת ידים, when we wake up we are considered reborn. So we thank Hashem for our “new” bodies. If someone gives you a gift, especially a wondrous one, you need to thank them.

Sources: ברכות ס: , שו"ע או"ח, ד:א ומשנה ברורה ס"ק ג, שם, ו:א ומשנה ברורה ס"ק א, נתיב בינה, עמ' 156-157, Saks, 4.

Day 26: אשר יצר (continued)

10/26/09

1. **Transition:** Last week, we translated most the beracha of אשר יצר. Today we are going to focus on the last line as it contains important messages.
2. **Understanding the words**
 - The beracha ends praising Hashem as the “רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות”¹¹, the healer of the flesh who does wondrous deeds”¹¹
 - As we mentioned yesterday, we associate this beracha with the body’s wondrous ability to rid itself of waste. Since this function allows us to be healthy, we thank Hashem for “healing the flesh;” the efficiency of this function is such that we call it a wonder, a פלא – ומפליא לעשות.
 - רמ"א, Rabbi Moshe Isserles, understands the last line differently. The wonder refers to the way our physical bodies house our purely spiritual souls. The beracha mentions Hashem’s healing abilities, because if we are not healthy, we cannot discharge our spiritual responsibilities either.

3. **Hashkafa**

These two understandings teach us important lessons:

- Why do we talk about such a physical aspect of our bodies in shul? (My kid’s kindergarten teachers would call this “bathroom talk.”) Why did our חכמים make excretion one of the first things we talk about when praying to G-d? By saying this beracha, we proclaim that it is not just the spirit, the נשמה, which is holy; the body is also holy. Our physical lives can be filled with spirituality (Saks, 4).
- Keeping healthy is important, even a religious act. We can’t learn, daven, and fulfill other mitzvot unless we are healthy. We thank Hashem for keeping us healthy, and we have to do our part.

A biographical note: Rabbi Moshe Isserles lived in 17th century Poland. He was one of our greatest scholars, mastering Gemara, Halacha, and Kabbala – sought after by all the great scholars of his time for his halachic opinion. The Rema is a major source of Ashkenazi minhag and Halacha. The Rema’s synagogue in Cracow, still stands today (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Isserles.html>).

Sources: שו"ע ורמ"א, ו:א, Saks, 4.

¹¹ Our ending is the combination of the three opinions in ברכות ס: regarding the ending: “מאי חתיים? אמר רב: רופא חולים. אמר שמואל...רופא כל בשר, רב ששת אמר מפליא לעשות. א"ר פפא הילכך נמרינהו לתרוייהו רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות.” The שו"ע cites the version, “רופא כל חולי בשר.”

Day 27: אשר יצר (continued)

10/27/09

1. Transition: we have spoken about why אשר יצר begins our davening. Today we will focus on the halachot of אשר יצר throughout the day.
2. **Halacha – “FAQ”’s**
 - When do I say אשר יצר? – every time you go to the bathroom.
 - What if I go to the bathroom to talk to my friends or make a phone call...?
No, you do not need to say it. But assuming you use the bathroom for what it is intended, PLEASE SAY אשר יצר. Note the signs hanging outside each bathroom. (If you see someone talking to themselves after the bathroom, congratulate them on saying אשר יצר.)
 - Do you need to wash your hands to say אשר יצר? Ideally, yes, but if there is no water – the sink’s broken, you are on a טיול – you say אשר יצר even without washing your hands, since the beracha is on the function of excretion. (Your hands should be clean though.)
 - When to say אשר יצר for the first time each day? As we mentioned, many say אשר יצר at home after they do נטילת ידיים and go to the bathroom in the morning. Some wait until getting to shul, beginning their תפילה with על נטילת ידיים and אשר יצר. If you’ve said it at home, don’t say it in shul.
 - If you forget to say אשר יצר during the day, can you say it any time you remember? Yes. However, if you have since gone to the bathroom, you need not say it more than once.
 - If I get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, do I say אשר יצר? You can, but some say rely on the אשר יצר they will say in the morning.

3. **Hashkafa**

Some people may think we’re crazy to say a beracha every time we leave the bathroom.

- Please remember why we say it – to thank Hashem for forming our bodies to care of itself so that we can live comfortably. Anytime we are sick with stomach or intestine issues, we know we can’t take these things for granted.
- It’s not just the bathroom – it’s for the miraculous ways our bodies work. Our חכמים picked going to the bathroom, maybe because we couldn’t make a beracha every time we breathed or blinked or moved a muscle.
- Repetition – remember the layups, vocabulary drills. By saying this beracha repeatedly with כוונה, we become people who thank G-d and others for what they do for us.

Sources: שו"ע או"ח, ו"ב, ז:א-ד ומשנה ברורה ס"ק ה-ו, ספר תפילה כהלכתה, כ:כ.

Day 28: אלקי נשמה

10/28/09

1. **Transition** – After focusing on our bodies with the ברכות of אשר יצר and נטילת ידיים, we turn to our souls with the next tefilla: אלקי, נשמה.
2. **Source**: In the time of the Gemara, people said this tefilla upon waking, similar to the way we say “מודה אני לפניך.” In fact, this tefilla contains the words, “מודה אני לפניך.” Our חכמים incorporated the tefilla into ברכות השחר.
3. Some say אלקי נשמה after אשר יצר; others say it after ברכות התורה. Our Artscroll siddurim in school print it after ברכות התורה, though they mention the custom to say it after אשר יצר.
4. **Structure / Hashkafa**: Why say it after אשר יצר – because it forms a unit. We get up each morning as if reborn: we wash our hands, symbolic of this rebirth and our dedicating the day to a holy purpose. Then we thank Hashem for our bodies (אשר יצר) and then for our souls (אלקי נשמה).¹²
5. **Understanding the words**
 - Thanking Hashem for our souls is what the first line is about: “My G-d” (אלקי), “the soul you placed within me is pure. You created it, You formed it, You breathed it into me” (אתה בראתה, אתה יצרתה, אתה נפחתה בי).
 - It’s important that we pause after the word “אלקי.” If we don’t, the prayer sounds like “אלקי נשמה,” “My G-d [the] soul.”
 - As we mentioned when discussing אשר יצר, the closing of a beracha usually reflects the theme of the opening. We end the beracha praising Hashem for “restoring souls to lifeless bodies” – המחזיר נשמות לפגרים מתים. Thus, just like in the opening of the beracha, we praise Hashem returning our souls to us every morning.
 - (On a different level, this closing refers to תחיית המתים, the belief that Hashem will revive the dead in the end of days. The middle of the beracha reads, “One day You will take it away from me and restore it to me in the time to come” (ואתה עתיד לטלה ממני ולהחזירה בי לעתיד לבא). The future – עתיד – can refer to the next morning or to the end of days.)

6. **Hashkafa**

By saying this tefilla every day, we become grateful, intent on spending their days wisely. The remaining sentence reads, “As long as the soul is within me, I will thank You” – כל זמן שהנשמה בקרבי מודה אני לפניך

Sources: ברכות ס, Saks, 6.

¹² Another indication that it follows אשר יצר is the lack of a פתיחה – “ברוך אתה ה'”.

Day 29: Rules of Berachot – ברוך אתה ה' 10/29/09

1. Transition: ברכות השחר, as the name indicates, is a section of berachot. We have discussed על נטילת ידיים, אשר יצר, and אלקי נשמה. We will soon move on to ברכות התורה and the 15 berachot with which we start davening – אשר נתן לשכוי – בינה... When you think about it, though, almost all of davening centers around berachot – ברוך שאמר, ברכות, ישתבה, שמע, and the whole שמונה עשרה.

Before discussing why ברכות are the formula of choice, let's simply translate the words appearing in every beracha.

2. Understanding the words:

- “ברוך” – What present can you give the friend who has everything? With what can we bless Hashem who lacks nothing?
 - Some offer that we bless Hashem that He enjoy the recognition and respect of the world.
 - Others say that we are not blessing Hashem, but rather acknowledging that He is the source of blessing, of abundance. The Hebrew word for pools is ברכות (*bereichot*), conjuring images of overflowing waters. Thus “ברוך” means “the source of abundance.”
- “אתה ה” – We take this formula for granted, but this is a matter of debate. Rav felt we should include the word “אתה,” while Shmuel disagreed (Yerushalmi Berachot). What is the big deal with saying “אתה?” Some have pointed to the apparent chutzpah in referring to the Creator of the World, King of Kings, in second person, “you.” There are some families where you can't say “you” or “him/her” when speaking to a parent. קל והומר regarding Hashem.

The answer is that Hashem invites us to get closer. Hashem is our king, but also our father – אבינו מלכנו. The words we say tens of times a day – “ברוך אתה ה” teaches us that we need balance. We strive to get close to Hashem, but always remember that some distance is appropriate as well. He is “אתה” but also “ה.”

Again, we have another example where tefilla, even two words, is there to guide us in our beliefs and relationship with Hashem.

Sources: (פרק ט', ה"א): סב, ירולמי ברכות, A Guide to Jewish Prayer, 24-25.

Day 30: Rules of Berachot (continued)

10/30/09

1. Transition – Yesterday, we spoke about the importance of the words “ברוך אתה ה'.” Strangely, some berachot have this formula while others do not. Even among the few berachot that we have seen, על נטילת ידים and אשר יצר start with “ברוך אתה ה'” but אלקי נשמה does not. (We would be tempted to say what my 8 year old son has begun saying, “It’s so random.”) What is the system?

Halacha

2. Generally, berachot start with "ברוך אתה ה'". A ברכה ארוכה, literally a long beracha, starts *and ends* with “ברוך אתה ה'.” “Long” does not refer to the length but rather the content; a ברכה ארוכה expresses more than one idea. A ברכה קצרה, a “short beracha” expresses a single idea, requiring only to start the beracha with “ברוך אתה ה'.”
3. For example, על נטילת ידים focuses on one idea: the mitzvah of washing our hands; it’s a ברכה קצרה. Therefore it starts but does not end with “ברוך אתה ה'.” אשר יצר, on the other hand, focuses on several ideas: the composition of our bodies, Hashem’s wisdom, and the miracle of our health; it is a ברכה ארוכה. Therefore, it starts *and ends* with “ברוך אתה ה'.” The ending needs to bring the “long” beracha full circle. The words surrounding the last ברוך אתה ה' need to deal with the same theme as the words in the beracha’s opening. So, even though the beracha contains many ideas, the opening and closing unite the beracha under one theme.
4. What about אלקי נשמה? It contains several themes: gratitude, revival of the dead, and the purity of our souls. Why does it not begin with “ברוך אתה ה'”? To explain this, many Rishonim refer to another type of beracha, a ברכה סמוכה לחברתה, a beracha placed adjacent to another. When a second beracha stands next to the first, it takes the opening of the first, particularly if the two berachot form a unit. To think about this visually, picture the President walking in a room with an associate. Only the president needs an introduction.

We see this idea of a ברכה סמוכה לחברתה all the time, but we don’t realize it.

- (In benching, the first beracha opens with “ברוך אתה ה'...הזן את העולם כולו” and ends with “ברוך אתה ה' הזן את הכל” a typical ברכה ארוכה with an ending that reflects the opening. The two berachot that are placed next to it – “ברוך אתה ה' בונה ברחמי ירושלים” and “ברוך אתה ה' על הארץ ועל המזון” do not start with a “ברוך אתה ה'.” They start with “נודה” and “רחם נא.” They are ברכות הסמוכות לחברתה, berachot placed next the first, forming one unit of benching.¹³)

¹³ In benching, the first beracha opens with “ברוך אתה ה'...הזן את העולם כולו” and ends with “ברוך אתה ה' הזן את הכל” a typical ברכה ארוכה with an ending that reflects the opening. The two berachot that are placed next to it – “ברוך אתה ה' בונה ברחמי ירושלים” and “ברוך אתה ה' על הארץ ועל המזון” do not start with a “ברוך אתה ה'.” They start with “נודה” and “רחם נא.” They are ברכות הסמוכות לחברתה, berachot placed next the first, forming one unit of benching.¹³)

- Same with נשמה, אלקי: it is placed next to אשר יצר, borrowing its opening ברוך אתה ה'. After all, there also can be seen as one unit: gratitude for the body and the soul.

(Hashkafa

5. We have engaged in this technical discussion to demonstrate that *it is not random*. These words were not strewn together haphazardly. There is absolutely a system; we just need to uncover it.)

Note: This may be too long. To get the דבר תורה to the minute, I would leave out the example about benching. While it demonstrates הסמוכה לחברתה clearly, it can also be left for a separate “תפילה יומי” on benching. Another answer given to the lack of ברוך אתה ה' (תוספות ברכות יד, מו.) הודאה is that it is purely an expression of אלקי נשמה ה' in

Sources: אינצקלופדיה תלמודית, חלק ד, עמ, רצא-רצה (ערך "ברכות"), עמ' שסג-שסה (ערך "ברכות (השחר")

Day 31: ברכות התורה

11/2/09

1. Transition: We have discussed some of the different formulae for Berachot. When it comes to ברכות התורה, we find another well-known formula: אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וציונו, as we praise Hashem for making us *kadosh*, commanding us to perform His מצוות. This is the standard formula for a ברכת המצוה, the beracha said immediately before performing a mitzvah. The words “אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וציונו” are always followed by words describing the mitzvah act. Like “לישב בסוכה,” “לשמוע קול שופר” or “להדליק נר של חנוכה.”
2. Understanding the words. Now we come to ברכת התורה, “אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וציונו,” לעסוק בדברי תורה, to engage in the words of the Torah. Two points:
 - Since the beracha has the formula of a ברכת המצוה, it means that learning Torah is a מצוה, a commandment. It's not just something nice to do; it's something we are commanded to do daily.
 - As we mentioned, the words that follow “וציונו” refer to the act we are commanded to do. The שולחן ערוך writes that we should say “על דברי תורה,” on the words of Torah, indicating the mitzvah to learn the words of Torah. The משנה ברורה, the Chofetz Chaim's commentary on the שולחן ערוך, mentions the Ashkenazi version, “לעסוק בדברי תורה” – to engage in the words of the Torah. (The word “עסקים” is the Modern Hebrew word for business.) “To engage” seems more encompassing than just learning. Torah should dominate our lives.
3. Halacha. This idea of “Torah domination” explains some of the halachot about ברכת התורה, which we will see tomorrow.

ברכות התורה - continued
Day 32: 11/3/09

Transition: We mentioned yesterday that the words “לעסוק בדברי תורה” mean that Torah should “dominate” our lives. This helps explain the following halachot:

- Why aren't we saying ברכות התורה all day? Normally, when you say a ברכת המצוה and then take a break from the mitzvah, you need to make the beracha again. For example, if you make the beracha “לישב בסוכה” before sitting in the succah for lunch, then take a break, the next time you enter the succah to eat, you would make another beracha. However, if you make ברכת התורה during davening, then go to breakfast, you do not have to make a beracha before Tanach class. The idea is we never take a break from Torah; the Torah “dominates” our day. First, the command to learn continues all day, whenever we are free. Second, we are always “engaged” in the words of Torah. Eating, talking to our friends, our parents going to work... all of this is part of Torah.

- If I study for my Gemara test at night, do I need to make another beracha, since the Jewish-halachic day begins again at night? No. The beracha in the morning covers us continuously as long as we are physically able to learn. Once we go to sleep at night we cannot physically learn, and must make a new beracha when we get up.

Sources: שו"ע או"ח, מז, ה ומשנה ברורה שם, ס"ק ח, תוספות ברכות יא: ד"ה שכבר נפטר

Day 33: ברכות התורה (continued)

11/4/09

1. Transition: We spoke yesterday about some of the unique halachot of ברכות התורה. Today we take note of perhaps the strangest aspect of this המצוה – there are two of them for one mitzvah.
2. We discussed the first beracha yesterday: לעסוק בדברי תורה. This beracha is attached to a tefilla, “הערב נא” which as its own “ברוך אתה ה” ending; then there is a second beracha “אשר בחר בנו”¹⁴

Why so many berachot for so one mitzvah?¹⁵

3. Understanding the words:

- הערב נא – please make the words of Torah sweet, not a burden
 - We also ask for understanding: we should not only learn Torah but be “יודעי שמך,” knowers of Hashem’s name. In some versions we also pray that are learning will be “לשמה,” for its own sake. In other words, our thoughts matter when we do this mitzvah. The Torah should not be just another subject on our transcript; we try to develop our learning as part of our service of Hashem.¹⁶
 - We conclude this paragraph, “המלמד תורה לעמו ישראל.” Hashem himself taught and continues to teach the Jewish people Torah. We ask Hashem for help in understanding the Torah, particularly תורה שבעל פה – Gemara.¹⁷
 - The second beracha praises and thanks Hashem for choosing us as His nation, giving us His Torah – אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את תורתו – תנ”ך, תורה שבכתב.
4. Why are there so many berachot? (First, we have two main subjects – Gemara, תורה שבעל פה, and Tanach, תורה שבכתב.) More fundamentally, there is a lot to talk about when it comes to the mitzvah of תלמוד תורה. On one hand, it is a mitzvah like all others, so we make a beracha before it as we do before all other mitzvot – that’s the first beracha. At the same time, learning Torah is like all other mitzvot. It matters how we do it; we may need help understanding it – that’s the paragraph “הערב נא.” Not least, it makes us who we are; it is the means by which Hashem separated us from the nations. Accordingly the beracha for the mitzvah must be

¹⁴ Tosafot (מו: ד"ה כל הברכות כולן) views ברכת התורה as two berachot; Rambam (הל' תפילה, ז"י) views them as three. The מקרא, משנה, גמרא associates the number three with אבודרהם.

¹⁵ The simplest answer is that there are three opinions in the gemara, and we combine all three. The question is why not include just one?

¹⁶ Some explain the reference to Hashem’s name according to the statement that the letters of the Torah comprise the names of Hashem. Also, of the sources of ברכת התורה מדאורייתא is כי שם ה' אקרא הבו גודל לאלקינו.

¹⁷ Maybe in a similar light, the ערוך השולחן asks why the second beracha, a ברכה קצרה, has an ending. He suggests that originally there were two berachot that were joined: one on the historical giving of the Torah (נתן) and one on Hashem’s continuous giving of the Torah (נותן).

accompanied by a ברכת הודאה. That's the second beracha – אשר בחר בנו - where we both express our gratitude and acknowledge our awesome responsibility.

Sources: נתיב בינה, 157-158, עולם התפילות, נ-נד, שו"ע או"ח, מז:יב, משנה ברורה, ס"ק כז.

Motivation: Why do we get a separate GPA for לימודי קודש?

Day 34: ברכות התורה (continued)

11/05/09

1. Transition: Some frequently asked halachot and a fact about ברכות התורה.
2. Halacha
 - Am I allowed to learn before saying ברכות התורה? No.
 - What if I am looking over my Parsha notes on the bus Monday morning and am not speaking any of the words? The שולחן ערוך says that thinking Torah does not require a beracha. However, if you think you may get into a discussion or recite the pesukim, better to say ברכות התורה first.
 - What if I forget to say ברכות התורה and start davening?
 - i. If you are before ברכו, stop and say ברכות התורה.
 - ii. If you are right before שמע, you can have in mind to fulfill saying ברכות התורה with the "אהבה רבה / אהבת עולם (ספרדים)" which focuses on learning Torah.
 - iii. If davening is over, you don't have to say it. As mentioned, the ברכה before שמע focuses on learning Torah and be considered your ברכות התורה – even if you don't intend it to. However, if you rely on *אהבה רבה*, you should learn a little immediately after davening.¹⁸
 - I take a nap when I get home and wake up when it's dark. Do I need to say ברכת התורה? Yes
 - I take a nap during the day, do I need to say ברכת התורה? No.
3. A fact: whether a mitzvah is מדאורייתא or מדרבנן, the requirement to say a beracha before the mitzvah is מדרבנן – EXCEPT benching, and according to many ברכות התורה. Another reason why is EXTREMELY important to say ברכות התורה when you start davening.

Sources: שו"ע או"ח, סימן מ', ספר תפילה כהלכתה, עמ' קסח-קעד.

Note: I did not add that women are obligated as well to say ברכות התורה (מוז'יד, ערוך) (השולחן, מז:כה). If you do not think that is obvious for the students, please include that in the halachot.

¹⁸ Another interesting Halacha: if you come to shul and are immediately given an aliyah, since you already said "אשר בחר בנו" in your aliyah, you don't need to say it again when you say ברכת התורה – just say the first beracha, then skip ברכת כוהנים to ברכת כוהנים.

לימוד אחר ברכות התורה: Day 35

11/6/09

1. (Transition: We have just finished discussing some of the meaning and halachot of ברכות התורה. In light of that discussion, we can understand the paragraphs after ברכות התורה.)

Halacha

2. Why do we say ברכת כוהנים – we are not the chazzan and we may not be כוהנים. We have just identified the first beracha of ברכות התורה as being a ברכת המצוה. The usual procedure is that we say a ברכת המצוה, proceeding immediately to the מצוה without delay. Therefore, we follow ברכות התורה immediately with learning Torah. The three paragraphs after ברכות התורה are three paragraphs of Torah study.¹⁹
3. Learning Torah can mean learning any Torah source. Why did our חכמים choose these paragraphs²⁰?

The Gemara in Kiddushin (ל.) calls for a person to divide his/her learning in three parts: מקרא (Tanach), משנה, and גמרא. Thus, these three paragraphs represent these three areas:

- במדבר comprise of three pesukim in ברכת כוהנים.
- מסכת פאה is the first mishna in אלו דברים שאין להם שיעור
- אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהם is a combination of the second mishna in , with some variation. מסכת שבת קכו. in ברייתא פאה

Thus, after making the beracha on Torah, we learn a section from each of the three main areas of Torah.

With time remaining...

4. We can still ask: of all the sections in Tanach, Mishna, and Gemara, why pick these? Because all of these relate somehow to learning Torah.
 - ברכת כוהנים
 - According to some, the pesukim call for Hashem to bless us with wealth (first pasuk), successful Torah study (second pasuk), and successful prayers (third pasuk)
 - (ש"ס in מסכתות 60, corresponding to the ברכת כוהנים) has 60 letters, corresponding to the 60 מסכתות

¹⁹ If we didn't learn right after ברכת התורה, the beracha would still "work" all day. This is another unusual aspect of ברכת התורה due to the encompassing nature of the mitzvah. Since we are מצוה all day, there is no halachic היסח הדעת. Still, it is better to learn right after the ברכת המצוה. The need to learn right after davening exists only if one relies on the אהבה רבה. See: מז: יז-יט

²⁰ These specific selections can be found with some variation in the Rishonim – "שכבר" – נפטר, רמב"ם, הלכות תפילה ז:יא)

²¹ All 3 "בבות" were combined, as well as סנהדרין/מכות.

- שיעור ends with learning Torah which has no maximum limit.
- פירותיהם ends with the phrase “כנגד כולם”

Sources: 158-161, נתיב בינה, The Guide to Jewish Prayer, 41-42.

Day 36: לימוד אחר ברכות התורה

11/9/09

1. Transition: We mentioned yesterday that our חכמים inserted a “study session” after ברכות התורה so that we can engage in Torah study immediately following the beracha. The study session consists of passages from the Torah, Mishna, and Gemara related to Torah study.

Understanding the words

2. The Mishna, the first one in פאה מסכת identifies mitzvot that have no fixed measure. The first set have no *minimum* measure:
 - פאה is the mitzvah to leave a section of our fields for the poor. While the חכמים set a minimum standard, one can leave the smallest section and still fulfill the mitzvah.
 - The same is true for בכורים, bringing the first fruits of Eretz Yisrael – the מינים.
 - ולא יראו פני, “שלש רגלים” refers to appearing in Yerushalayim on the “ריקם,” you may not appear empty-handed to the courtyard of the Beit Hamikdash. While the חכמים set a minimum standard for an acceptable sacrifice, the Torah merely says to bring what you can afford.

For the last two, the phrase “אין להם שיעור” refer to the lack of maximum measure.

- גמילות חסדים – while there is no limit to the chessed we can do with our bodies – ביקור חולים, for example – there is a limit to tzedakah giving – 20%.
 - תלמוד תורה, learning Torah, also has not maximum measure. The pasuk in “והגית בו יומם ולילה,” יהושע calls for learning all day.
3. The Gemara section cites 10 mitzvot whose reward comes both in this world in עולם הבא. The term “אוכל פירותיהם” and “קרן קיימת” refer to these rewards. For some of these, like כבוד אב ואם, the Torah writes specifically that we will be rewarded with a long life. Regarding the others, the list is dominated by מצוות בין אדם לחבירו, hospitality to strangers, visiting the sick, helping the needy bride, attending to the dead (הלוית המת), and bringing peace between people. The reward for doing these mitzvot may be the pleasant quality of life that comes from people caring for each other. The mitzvot that are not בין אדם לחבירו relate to either davening or learning: coming early to the Beit Midrash in the morning and evening, devotion to tefilla (עיון תפילה), and learning Torah.

Thus, our חכמים chose these sections, charging us each morning with גמילות חסדים, עבודה, תורה, וגמילות חסדים.

Sources: 160-161, גתים בינה, The Guide to Jewish Prayer, 45-47, Saks, 10.

Day 37: "ברכות השחר"

11/10/09

1. Transition/Review – After ברכות התורה, there are two customs about what to say next. Some proceed to the 15 ברכות, called “ברכות השחר”, while others say “אלקי, נשמה.”
2. (Hashkafa - The difference lies in where you want to place “אלקי, נשמה.” According to the first custom, we attach it to “אשר יצר,” thanking Hashem for our bodies (אשר יצר) and then our souls (אלקי, נשמה).²² Then we proceed to ברכות התורה and from there to ברכות השחר.

According to the second custom, we want to attach the berachot on the Torah to the beracha on our bodies (אשר יצר), conveying that we elevate our bodies through observing Torah and Mitzvot. Therefore we leave אלקי נשמה for after ברכות התורה, and only then proceed to ברכות השחר.)

3. Either way, the next main section consists of 15 berachot. While all the berachot of the morning, starting from נטלת ידיים, can be called ברכות השחר, when people say “ברכות השחר,” they often refer to these 15.

4. Halacha

For the basic halachot:

- Ashkenazim say these berachot standing, though Sepharadim stand or sit, depending on their מנהג.
- Anyone who *can* say these berachot should, even if they answer אמן to the chazan’s beracha. Normally, listening to a chazan’s beracha and intending to fulfill that obligation, exempts someone from saying the beracha himself, according to the principle of שומע כעונה – hearing it is like saying it. In this case, we do not rely on that principle. Everyone, if they can, should say these berachot of thanks themselves. That’s why in some congregations you may find a chazan under bar mitzvah reciting these berachot, since we assume everyone will be saying them anyway.
- The chazan reciting the berachot out loud serves two purposes:
 - Allowing everyone to answer אמן.
 - Enabling someone who cannot say the berachot to listen to the chazan’s beracha. Today, since these berachot are available readily in our siddurim, it is rare that someone *cannot* say them. However, when we discuss the halachot of someone staying up all night, we will encounter some cases.

Sources: בתיב בינה, עמ' 158 (למעלה) ושו"ע ו:ד, ומו:ב, ומשנה ברורה שם.

²² We had mentioned that this attachment explains why “אלקי, נשמה” requires no “ברוך אתה ה'” because it is a אשר יצר – attached to הסמוכה לחברתה.

Day 38: "ברכות השחר" (continued)

אשר נתן לשכוי בינה

11/11/09

1. Transition: We discussed the basic halachot of saying these 15 berachot in shul. Today we'll focus on their purpose.
2. **Understanding the words / the structure**
 - We can classify all the berachot as ברכות הודאה, berachot of thanks. Accordingly, we just find the familiar "ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם" without the addition "אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו" reserved for המצוות.
 - We can divide the 15 into two groups:
 - i. The larger group of 11, thanking Hashem for activities we can do.
 - ii. Three berachot, thanking Hashem for who we are – free Jews.²³
These are the שלא עשני גוי, עבד, אשה
 - It is not surprising that in Sepharadi siddurim, the two groups are printed separately, one after the other. The three שלא עשני berachot are said at the end, after עוטר ישראל בתפארה.
 - The Ashkenazi custom is surprising: to say the first of the 11 – אשר נתן בינה – then the three שלא עשני's, then the remainder of the first group. Why this order? To understand this, we need to understand the first beracha.
3. The word שכוי has two meanings:
 - A rooster – We thank Hashem for giving the rooster the wisdom to distinguish day from night. It is the rooster's calling alerting us to daybreak.
 - The heart²⁴ – We are thanking Hashem for giving the human heart the understanding to tell day from night. (Today, we may associate heart with emotion, but earlier sources associate the heart with intellect.)
4. Either way, we start by thanking Hashem for our minds, our ability to understand things. This ability anchors our daily activities, also enabling us to appreciate Hashem's gifts. It is for the same reason that we start the בקשה / request section of עשרה with the prayer for understanding, "אתה חונן לאדם דעת." (Some say that this also the reason the ברכות שמע קריאת שמע start with a beracha on light, "יוצר אור," as light symbolizes understanding.)

Sources: עמ' 163-164, נתיב בינה,

²³ These two groups have two sources. The first forms part of a larger list of berachot in ברכות ס: . The second group forms a unit described in a ברייתא in מג: .

²⁴ The beracha is based on the pasuk in לוי: לח: לו "מי נתן לשכוי בינה," איוב לח: לו. The Targum translates שכוי as תרנגול. This is the understanding of the גמרא ברכות ס: ; see also Rashi, ד"ה לשכוי, Rosh, ברכות ט: כב, translates שכוי as heart.

Day 39: "ברכות השחר" (continued)

שלא עשני גוי, עבד, אשה

11/12/09

1. Transition: Yesterday, we saw easily that there are two types of berachot in ברכות השחר: those thanking Hashem for what we can do – like understand things – and those thanking Hashem for who we are. We focus today on this second group.²⁵
2. Understanding the words
 - שלא עשני גוי, שלא עשני עבד, שלא עשני אשה – This group stands out also for its negative formulation – what we are not. If we are not “גוים” and “עבדים” we are free Jews. (We’re leaving the last beracha for now.) Why not just say one beracha, “שעשני ישראל”?²⁶
 - A couple of points.
 - i. To clarify the meaning of the words: From the context, as well as from other ברייתות, it’s clear that “גוי” means “non-Jew,” as opposed to “nation,” the more common translation of the word in Tanach.²⁷ The word “עבד” refers to a עבד כנעני, a non-Jewish slave, as an עבד עברי retains the status of any other Jew.
 - ii. As a result, the progression from גוי to עבד to אשה represents an upward progression toward mitzvah obligation. The non-Jew must keep seven mitzvot; the עבד כנעני is commanded in more mitzvot, but lacks the קדושה of a Jew; a Jewish woman is commanded in yet more mitzvot and possesses that קדושה. Thus a Jewish male thanks Hashem for being commanded in the maximum amount of mitzvot. This might be one reason our חכמים did not combine these three berachot into one “שעשני ישראל” – to highlight this progression.²⁸
 - iii. (Another reason might be to allude to pesukim in the Torah. For example, שלא עשני עבד recalls how Hashem took us out of מצרים מבית עבדים.)

²⁵ The division between these groups becomes clearer looking at the tenses of the berachot. The first group is all in the present, relating to all mankind. Hashem gives all mankind the ability to understand, to get dressed, to walk, etc. The second group, the one we’ll discuss today, focuses on how Hashem made us individually – made us in the past.

²⁶ The Gemara מנחות reads, “שעשני ישראל,” but the תוספתא reads “שלא עשני גוי.” Many feel that the Gemara originally retained the version “שלא עשני גוי,” but was censored. Rabbi Wohlgemuth offers that “שעשני ישראל” suggests conceit, as “ישראל” can be understood as “warrior of God.”

²⁷ Some versions read “שלא עשני נכרי” but that is not our practice.

²⁸ The תוספתא ברכות ו:כג has a different version, but highlights the theme of חיוב מצוות explicitly, “שלא עשני גוי, שלא עשני אשה, שלא עשני בור... אין אשה חייבת במצוות”

3. **Hashkafa**: All three berachot convey the same messages: our identities are bound in our lifestyle, the mitzvot; this lifestyle can be challenging, but it is a gift to thank Hashem for, not a burden.

Sources: 164-166 ,נתיב בינה, A Guide to Jewish Prayer, 56-62.

שעשני כרצונו: Day 40

11/13/09

1. How do we understand שעשני כרצונו?
2. There are a lot of articles and discussion on this beracha. This “sound-bite” hopes to give some historical facts and understanding of our custom at SAR.
 - שעשני כרצונו is not recorded in the Gemara with the other berachot (שלא עשני) (גוי, עבד, אשה); it simply was not necessary, as women did not say these berachot. While women are obligated to daven עשרה עשרה once or twice a day, it seems clear that women did not recite these blessings of ברכות השחר in the time of the Gemara.
 - שעשני כרצונו was created sometime in the period of the Rishonim when women took more tefillot upon themselves, and a female version of שלא עשני אשה was needed. Between the 12th and 15th centuries we find several versions. The one most adopted by Orthodox circles is the one found in the טור שולחן ערוך – שעשני כרצונו.²⁹
 - In our modern world, we face several challenges:
 - How to understand שעשני כרצונו?
 - Furthermore, women not only say ברכות השחר, but they come to shul. How can men with any sensitivity say “שלא עשני אשה” in the presence of women?
 - Can we change the men’s beracha to make it “שעשני כרצונו”?
 - For the purpose of this discussion - the traditional Orthodox view precludes changing berachot as an option. The Gemara states that a person who changes the formula of a beracha does not fulfill his/her obligation.³⁰
 - שעשני כרצונו has been interpreted differently throughout the ages - from acknowledging the difference in מצוות חיוב to a celebration of women’s role in the world and in Judaism. The meaning of the words is shaped by the person making the beracha.
 - How can a man say "שלא עשני אשה" in front of a woman? In Orthodox circles, we find several suggestions.

²⁹ This seems to have been the practice in parts of Spain. At this time in Spain, we also find the feminizing of the other berachot – שלא עשני אמה/שפחה – שלא עשני גויה, שלא עשני אשה. In Provence, we find “שעשני אשה”; in parts of Germany we find a different pattern altogether – שלא עשני בהמה.

³⁰ Rabbi Daniel Sperber presents the view that “it is permissible to make changes provided one does not alter the overall content and the overall structure of the beracha or prayer.” There are also stylistic reasons for the negative formulation, “שלא עשני אשה.” (See Dr. Wolowelsky’s discussion).

- We avoid the situation by starting the minyan with pesukei d'zimra. Anyway, there are many minyanim that say ברכות השחר quietly, just like ברכות התורה. So we can make that practice uniform.
- We say ברכות השחר, but men and women say their respective berachot silently. That has been suggested, but not widely adopted³¹.
- We say ברכות השחר and both men and women say their berachot out loud, putting שלא עשני אשה on par with שעשני כרצונו.

Sources:

1. **Feldman, Emanuel**, "Who Has Not Made Me A Woman: An Articulate Berakha". Tradition, 29:4, 1995, 69-74.
2. Sperber, Daniel. "Our Dialogue with God: Tradition and Innovation," Transcript from JOFA's 10th Anniversary International Conference, 2000. See <http://www.jofa.org/pdf/uploaded/1302-SSAF4754.pdf>
3. Tabory, Joseph. "The Benedictions of Self-identity and the Changing Status of Women and of Orthodoxy," Kenishta, [Bar Ilan University Press](http://www.barilan.edu.il/), 1, 2001, 107-138. See <http://www.jofa.org/pdf/uploaded/517-DJMB5131.pdf>.
4. Wolowelsky, Joel B. Women, Jewish Law, and Modernity. Ktav Publishing House, 1997, pp. 75-84.
5. **Wolowelsky, Joel B**, "Who Has Not Made Me A Woman: A Quiet Berakha". Tradition, 29:4, 1995, 61-68.

³¹ This is Dr. Wolowelsky's suggestion. Aside from in his book, Dr. Wolowelsky writes his suggestion in an article in Tradition 29(4). The vehement disagreement by Rabbi Emanuel Feldman, the editor of Tradition, is printed in the same issue.

Day 41: "ברכות השחר" (continued)

11/16/09

1. Transition: Today we return to the berachot thanking Hashem for the things we do, focusing on understanding the words we say every day.
2. Understanding the words
 - פוקה עורים: literally, gives sight to the blind. This refers to all of us opening our eyes in the morning, blessed with a sense of sight.
 - מלביש ערומים: clothes the naked, blesses us with clothes.
 - מתיר אסורים: literally, sets captives free. Who are these captives? From the Gemara, it seems the beracha refers to the way we sleep, our bodies constricted. We thank Hashem for the ability to stretch our muscles and bones.
 - זוקף כפופים – raises those who are bent – we can stand up straight.
 - רוקע הארץ על המים – who spreads the earth above the waters, providing a solid surface for man – We can pull our legs over the bed onto the floor.

To sum up: when we get up in the morning we can see, stretch our muscles, get out of bed, stand up straight, and get dressed.

3. Halacha

What if we can't do these things? For example does a blind person make the beracha, "פוקה עורים?" If we are sick and literally can't get out of bed, do we say "רוקע הארץ על המים." What if a person can't stretch his/her muscles – do they say "מתיר אסורים?"

- שו"ע – yes, but without the words "ה' אלקינו מלך העולם."
- רמ"א, the Ashkenazi minhag – yes, the regular beracha with "שם ומלכות."

The berachot form a unit, thanking Hashem for providing the needs of all mankind. The berachot are written in the plural, present tense; Hashem does these for mankind every day. We are not focusing on individuals.

Sources: Translations from Saks, 28, שו"ע מו:ה,

Day 42: Rosh Chodesh (ראש חודש כסלו)
11/17/09

Recommendation: Use the time before מוסף, when the boys are removing their tefillin, to say this דבר תורה.

1. Transition: Last Rosh Chodesh, we spoke about the seventh beracha in the Musaf שמונה עשרה where we ask Hashem to bless the month.

2. **Understanding the words**

- There are six phrases of two words each, corresponding to the six months from Rosh Hashana until Nisan, the first month of the year according to Chumash.
- What do we want for our upcoming month:
 - i. טובה וברכה – good and blessing
 - ii. ששון ושמחה – joy and gladness
 - iii. ישועה ונחמה – salvation and comfort
 - iv. פרנסה וכלכלה – financial support
 - v. חיים ושלווה – life and peace
 - vi. מחילת חטא וסליחת עון – forgiveness for our sins

We find material and spiritual blessings.

- What about the seventh phrase “ולכפרת פשע”, another expression for atonement for our transgressions?
 - i. We add this phrase during leap years, when we have two Adars. Since there are seven months between Tishrei and Nisan, we add a seventh phrase.
 - ii. Why this particular phrase? It may be a request for forgiveness if we made a mistake declaring the year a leap year. As a result, we say this phrase through the second month of Adar; that is the month added because of the בית דין’s decision.

This year is not a leap year, so we do not add this phrase. Next year, however, is.

Source: Saks, 744-751.

Day 43: "ברכות השחר" (continued)
11/18/09

1. **Transition:** Yesterday, we saw that we open the day thanking Hashem for providing man with basic abilities: to see, get out of bed, stretch, etc. Why not make one beracha, “Who provides for all our needs?”
2. **Understanding the words**
 - First, there is a beracha, “שעשה לי כל צרכי” – who has provided me with all I need.

This ברכה goes against the pattern we established yesterday, for this beracha addresses the individual – “לי;” it is also in the past tense.

- The Gemara associates this beracha with a person putting on his/her shoes. Why do shoes represent “all our needs?” Some suggest a historical explanation. People did not wear shoes regularly.³² Shoes were the last things people bought, after attending to all other physical needs. Thus after we thank Hashem for providing human beings with their basic needs, the individual turns to Hashem, saying, “I truly have everything I need to go out into the world. A person 2000 years ago thanking Hashem for shoes is like a person today thanking Hashem “for everything.”
- Back to our question: why not summarize all the berachot under one general “שעשה לנו כל צרכינו” – perhaps to sensitize us to all the steps going into our getting out of the house. We don’t usually think about these things until encountering people who can’t, or until we can’t do them ourselves.
- After finishing all the “in-house” activities, we proceed to “המכין מצעדי גבר” – makes the steps of man firm, i.e. we can walk; again, something we cannot take for granted.

Sources: 168-169 עמ' בינה עמ'.

³² We find Gemarot encouraging Torah scholars to wear shoes.

Day 44: "ברכות השחר" (continued)

11/19/09

1. Transition / Motivation: You may have noticed the custom of some to wear a special outer belt, only during davening. What is the source of that מנהג? The next beracha in ברכות השחר, alludes to that practice. "אזור ישראל בגבורה" – who girds Israel with strength.

2. Understanding the words

- To "gird" can mean to put on a belt. In Tanach, a belt was associated with power because it contained weapons. In fact, according to the Gemara, a person would say this beracha upon putting on his/her belt in the morning.
- We have seen this kind of beracha before – thanking Hashem when we get up, when we put on our shoes, when we walk, etc. However, for the non-soldiers among us, why is putting on a belt so significant? Furthermore, this beracha breaks the pattern with which we have been operating – ברכות השחר are general berachot, relating to all mankind. This beracha, however, relates only to Jews – בגבורה אזור ישראל – and to Jewish strength. What makes a belt Jewish?
- Some suggest that this beracha, as well as the next, refers to Jewish modesty. There is a Halacha that during tefilla not only do we cover the bottom part of our bodies, but that we wear an additional belt to split between our hearts and the bottom half of our bodies. We accomplish this with pants, but some wear a special belt, the *gartel*. Either way, the belt represents our modesty.³³
- The next beracha – עוטר ישראל בתפארה – who crowns Israel with glory – also refers to a specific Jewish brand of "crowning." Some say this refers to the Jewish custom of covering our heads.³⁴

Thus, these two berachot, like the others, form a unit of thanks for our daily routine. However, these two berachot isolate distinctly Jewish routines. Non-Jews also wear belts and wear caps, but not necessarily for the specific reasons of modesty.

Source: נתיב בינה 169-170

³³ Others reference the pasuk in ירמיהו יג:י, "כי אשר ידבק האזור אל מתני איש כן הדבקתי אלי את כל בית ישראל", "ירמיהו יג:י". Thus, this beracha could be using this belt reference to highlight the close connection between Hashem and the Jewish people.

³⁴ Both הלכות of wearing a belt and covering our heads during שמונה עשרה are found in the same סימן צ"א in שו"ע אור"ח.

Day 45: "ברכות השחר" (continued)

11/20/09

1. Transition / Motivation – How many of us wake up in the morning tired? We can all appreciate the beracha, thanking Hashem “הנותן ליעף כח” – who gives strength to the weary. Yet the שולחן ערוך discourages the saying of this beracha. Sepharadim following the שולחן ערוך do not include this beracha in their siddurim. רמ"א cites the Ashkenazi custom to say this beracha. What is the source of this dispute?
2. How do we relate to berachot composed after the time of the Gemara? This beracha, הנותן ליעף כח, was written in the Middle Ages. The author of the שולחן ערוך, R. Yosef Karo, felt that berachot written after the Gemara should not be included in our official tefillot. R. Moshe Isserles apparently felt that this beracha carried sufficient weight to merit inclusion in the siddur.³⁵
3. Why was this beracha composed? Some suggest that it was meant to give strength to the Jews of Ashkenaz – Germany and Northern France – suffering hardships, including martyrdom, during the Crusades. Other tefillot commemorating these hardships have been added to the Ashkenazi tefilla, like אב הרחמים that we say on Shabbat after יקום פורקן and before מוסף. It is not surprising that the רמ"א, documenting Ashkenazi customs, records this beracha.
4. Hashkafa / Understanding the structure of the siddur

This beracha and the אב הרחמים illustrate how Jewish history has shaped our siddur. Over the year, we are focusing on the tefillot shared by all Jews; in fact, the tefillot were composed partly to unify all Jews under one prayer service. However, almost every age and Jewish community has added something to its tefilla - words, berachot, tefillot, or melodies.

Sources: שו"ע או"ח, מו:; A Guide to Jewish Prayer, 52; Saks, Introduction, 18.

³⁵ Rabbi Wohlgenuth records how Rabbi Soloveitchik would skip this beracha when he was chazan. See A Guide to Jewish Prayer, 52.

Day 46: "ברכות השחר" (continued)

המעביר שנה מעיני ותנומה מעפעפי

11/23/09

1. Transition / Understanding the words

המעביר – אחרון אחרון חביב – We come to the last of the berachot, perhaps the strangest – שנה מעיני ותנומה מעפעפי – who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids. The Gemara records that people used to say this beracha after washing their faces in the morning.

2. Why is this beracha so strange? (Understanding the words / structure)

- It is the only beracha after which we do **not** answer אמן upon hearing it from the chazan, because it does not end with the word “מעפעפי.” The beracha continues for another paragraph, ending with the words “ברוך אתה ה' הגומל חסדים טובים לעמו ישראל” – who bestows loving-kindness on His people Israel.” We answer אמן only after the word “ישראל.”
 - All the berachot are one line, focusing on one topic; this one is a ברכה ארוכה, discussing many topics, ending with its own “ברוך אתה ה'.” We ask Hashem to save us to keep us in the world of Torah and mitzvot, to save us from circumstances that lead to sin, and to help us find favor in others' eyes.
 - The beginning phrase – who removes sleep from our eyes – seems to have nothing to do with these topics, other than the repetition of the word “eyes”³⁶
3. This beracha seems to follow the transition we tracked before – from Hashem's gifts to us as members of mankind to Hashem's gifts to us as members of the Jewish people. After acknowledging our ability to get out of the house, like every other human being on the planet, we pray for the strength to successfully live our day as Jews. God has given a mission to all mankind, but he has given us a special mission as Jews. When we wash our faces in the morning, facing the new day, we daven that Hashem's “חסדים” allow us to serve Him with dignity.

Sources: A Guide to Jewish Prayer, 52-55; Saks, 31-32.

³⁶ The opening “מעיני...עפעפי”, formulated in the singular, also makes this beracha unique. Rabbi Wohlgemuth suggests that the מסדרי הסידור did not want to veer from the singular formulation serving as the source of the beracha, “(תהלים קלב:ד) אם אתן שנת לעיני לעפעפי תנומה.” The rest of the beracha reverts to the plural formulation.

Day 47: "ברכות השחר" (conclusion)

11/24/09

1. Transition: We conclude our discussion of ברכות השחר with several halachot:
2. **Halacha**
 - Many קהילות, like ours, begin the tefilla with these ברכות. What if we come late to davening, when the צבור is in the middle or even past פסוקי דזמרה? As we will discuss, depending on when the person comes, he/she will need to say ברכות התורה, אלקי נשמה, על נטילת ידים, and then begin פסוקי דזמרה with ברוך שאמר.
 - Should we go back later and say the 15 berachot?
 - i. ABSOLUTELY! (That's why we've spent so much time on them.)
 - When should we say them?
 - i. Sometime after שמונה עשרה.
 - How long do we have to say them?

Ideally, until the end of the fourth hour of the day, usually around 10:00AM. If not, until midday. But better to say before leaving shul so we don't forget.
3. **Halacha**: מלביש ערומים
 - When we buy a new article of clothing - one that we do not buy regularly and that gives us joy – we say “שהחיינו” at the time of purchase, and “מלביש ערומים” when we wear it. If we put on the piece of clothing in the morning, we can have that piece of clothing in mind when saying “מלביש ערומים.”

Thus, even though we say these berachot as members of mankind, we can tailor them to our personal circumstances.

Sources: תפילה כהלכתה ג:ט, ט:סז, שו"ע או"ח, סי' רכג:ד ומשנה ברורה ס"ק יח

Day 48: Thanksgiving **11/25/09**

1. **Transition:** While Thanksgiving is not a Jewish holiday, “thanking” is something we do every day, several times a day. It seems fitting, as we leave for our Thanksgiving break, to focus on one of these daily tefillot of thanks: מודים.

2. **Understanding the words**
 - The shresh ה.ג.י can mean three things: to bow, to confess, and to thank. In this beracha we do all three.

 - We bow in the beginning and end of the beracha.

 - We start by confessing our faith – מודים אנחנו לך שאתה הוא ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו לעולם ועד... We acknowledge our belief that Hashem is our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, and we thank Hashem for being our G-d and source of strength.

 - We proceed to thank Hashem for the daily miracles of life – “...for our lives entrusted in your hands (חיינו המסורים בידך), for our souls placed in Your charge (ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך), and for Your miracles (נסידך) which are with us every day, and for your wonders and favors (נפלאותיך וטובותיך) at all times, evening, morning, and midday (ערב ובוקר וצהרים).

Notice that the prayer calls daily phenomena “miracles,” a reminder that the laws of nature, that our daily lives can be seen as miracles. We see miracles in the every day, so we have a daily requirement of thanks.

Source: Saks, 128-129.

Day 49: Tefilla of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi Monday, 11/30/09

1. Transition – With the words, “ברוך אתה ה' הגומל חסדים טובים לעמו ישראל”, we concluded the ברכות השחר, the berachot of the morning. פסוקי דזמרה, the preparatory tefilla before Shema and Shemoneh Esreh, starts at ברוך שאמר. What comes in between? It is our custom to say several paragraphs, the first, a small prayer, starting with the words “יהי רצון”, ending with “בן שאינו בן ברית”. The Gemara refers to this prayer as the prayer of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, since he inserted this tefilla at the end of his Shemoneh Esreh. ³⁷

Motivation:

- Where does the importance of good friends appear in our tefilla?

2. Understanding the words

- In a nutshell, we ask Hashem to protect us from the negative aspects of our surroundings.
 1. Bad attitudes - עזי פנים ועזות פנים – from arrogant people and arrogance itself
 2. Bad people – “אדם רע” and even “חבר רע.” This could be a person who acts like our friend, but really does not have our interests at heart. “שכן רע” is a bad neighbor.
 3. Bad circumstances – פגע רע – a misfortune, and שטן המשחית – a destructive שטן. The word “שטן” does not necessarily mean Satan. In the Tanach, שטן can be used to describe an enemy, or anything that gets us off course.³⁸ The paragraph ends with a prayer against involvement in a difficult court case, whether with a Jew – a בן ברית, “a member of G-d’s covenant” or not.

Once we understand the words, we understand why we need to pause after the word “להשחית.” Many people say “משטן המשחית מדין קשה” as one phrase, but they refer to two different subjects.

3. Why is the tefilla here?

- Why was this tefilla transplanted here? It seems to have a similar purpose to the last of the ברכות השחר. The point is we embark on our day with a general tefilla that we face all the days’ challenges and interact with people, effectively and with dignity.³⁹

Sources: 172-171, בתיב בינה, A Guide to Jewish Prayer, 62-64, Saks, 31.

³⁷ ברכות טז: Rabbi Wohlgemuth speculates that Rebbe’s authorship explains the reference to דין, since he was the נשיא of the סנהדרין. The שטן המשחית... refers to the Romans.

³⁸ See Bemidbar 22:22, “[לבלעם] ויתיצב מלאך ה' בדרך לשטן לו [לבלעם].”

³⁹ Rebbe’s tefilla was in לשון רבים, while this tefilla is in לשון יחיד. Some manuscripts preserve the לשון רבים, but we have the לשון יחיד. The סי' מו, טור writes that this is an appropriate time for someone to add his/her particular prayers for the day.

Day 50: פרשת העקידה
Tuesday, 12/1/09

1. **Transition:** After the חזן finishes with the words “בין שאינו בן ברית,” we skip to the paragraph “לעולם יהא אדם,” waiting for the חזן to say the words “פעמים בכל יום שמע “...ישראל.” However, there is a tefilla in between that many do not say; it is often printed in a small font. What is this tefilla?

2. In this tefilla, we find the pesukim in ספר בראשית, telling the story of עקידת יצחק, when Avraham was asked to bring Yitzchak to הר המוריה, presumably to sacrifice him. These pesukim are bracketed by an introductory and concluding paragraph, asking Hashem to remember the faith of the avot and to treat their children favorably. Why is this tefilla printed in the siddur, and why here?

Understanding tefilla/ Hashkafa

3. This tefilla indicates that the חכמים organized the siddur, not just to provide a prayer service, but to also shape our beliefs and elicit emotion.

- Someone who says these pesukim reminds himself of:
 - The greatness of our ancestors – this gives us pride, and
 - Avraham and Yitzchak’s willingness to serve Hashem at all costs – this gives us inspiration at the start of our day.

4. **Why don’t we say this tefilla today?**

- First, many do, particularly since the עקידה has mystical significance
- During the week, people are rushing to get to work.

5. Take away point / **Hashkafa** - Even if we don’t say it, we can appreciate that we need to set time in the day to reflect about our beliefs and עבודת ה', or else it doesn’t happen.

Sources: שולחן ערוך, או"ח, א:ד-ה ומשנה ברורה שם, ס"ק יב, יג

Day 51: לעולם...שמע
Wednesday, 12/2/09

1. Transition / Motivating Questions:

Anyone coming into shul after berachot will suddenly hear the tzibbur say the pasuk, שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד.

- Why do we say shema at this point in davening?
- What is the meaning of the preceding paragraphs ending with אשרינו מה טוב חלקינו?

2. Historical answer/ **Understanding the words**

- There was a decree in 5th Century Persia forbidding Jews to say Shema. One of the dominant religions, Zoroastrianism, believed in separate gods of good and evil. Proclaiming the unity of the one god during shema (ה' אחד) was the highest insult. As a result of this decree, the Jews said Shema secretly at home. When the king died unexpectedly, the Jews viewed his death as miracle, instituting an additional reciting of shema.
- Now, we can understand the words:
 - i. לעולם יהא אדם ירא שמים בסתר ובגלוי – A person should always be God-fearing privately and publically.
 - ii. ודובר אמת בלבבו – acknowledging the truth and speaking it in his heart

These lines refer to the times Jews had to say Shema privately, yearning to say it publically.

- iii. Now that we can say shema out loud, we proclaim, “אשרינו מה טוב חלקינו” – Happy are we, how good is our portion
- iv. How lovely our fate, how beautiful is our heritage – ומה נעים גורלנו ומה יפה ירושתנו
- v. Happy are we who, early and late, say shema twice a day – ערב ובקר ואומרים פעמים בכל יום

At this point, every person in shul says “שמע” out loud and ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו quietly as we do when we say shema later.

This blessing, appropriate for times of persecution, makes sense in light of the historical reason above. For tomorrow, the questions that remain: why here in davening? Why do we insist on saying it?

Sources: A Guide to Jewish Prayer, 64-67, Saks, 34-39

Day 52: Shema Thursday, 12/3/09

1. Transition – Yesterday, we spoke about the historical reason for the “mini-Shema” after ברכות השחר. Today we will speak about the halachic purpose it serves.

2. Why is this Shema placed specifically here? – Halacha.

Reason 1: To provide a place to say שמע if we are running late.

- To fulfill our obligation to say שמע in the morning – “בקומך” – we have to say it while people are getting up, namely within the first three hours of the day.
 - If we are unsure if we will get to שמע on time, we stop to say the entire Shema – all three paragraphs - at this time. We still say all paragraphs of shema before שמונה עשרה, because shema serves another purpose there.
 - If we know we will get to שמע before שמונה עשרה before the fourth hour of the day, the שמע here serves the historical purpose we discussed yesterday. We say the first pasuk and ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו, remembering the time we could not say Shema.
3. The paragraphs before – לעולם, לפיכך - also serve a halachic purpose. If there is someone in the minyan mourning the loss of a parent, he/she will say a קדיש דרבנן, the Rabbis Kaddish, before מזמור שיר. This kaddish is said in shul when we finish learning a section of תורה שבעל פה. For such a learning to qualify for a kaddish, some say that it has to contain two parts: הלכה – laws – and אגדה, non halachic topics.. The paragraph רבי ישמעאל אומר discusses laws. These paragraphs from “לעולם יהא אדם...” provide the non-halachic learning to allow us to say kaddish.

Take away: two halachic purposes for this section of davening – to allow us to say shema if we’re running late, and to allow us to say a kaddish after רבי ישמעאל אומר.

Sources: A Guide to Jewish Prayer, pp. 71-74.

Day 53: Praying for our health (in honor of the David Cooper Memorial Girls Basketball Tournament)
Friday, 12/5/09

1. Transition / Motivation

Since yesterday, we have been hosting several girls' basketball teams participating in our David Cooper Memorial Basketball Tournament. In their honor, as well as all among us who exercise and take care of our bodies, I ask the question, "Where does the siddur discuss the importance of taking care of our bodies?"

2. We have already discussed several examples where we highlight the strong connection between body and soul.

- אשר יצר is a beracha devoted entirely to thanking Hashem for our wondrous, amazingly intricate bodies.
- אשר יצר is followed immediately by נשמה אלקי, where we thank Hashem for restoring our souls. Juxtaposing these two tefillot highlight the connection between body and soul; we need to protect and strengthen our bodies so we can serve Hashem and cultivate our spiritual side.

3. Here are some new examples, the first we say daily and the second monthly:

- Our רפואה שלמה dedicated one beracha in shemoneh esreh for a רפואה שלמה. In this tefilla, there are two phrases which seem to mean the same thing: רפואה שלמה and רפואה שלמה; in both, we ask Hashem to heal us. Some interpret the double reference to our bodies and souls. We ask both for physical and emotional/spiritual health.
 - On the Shabbat before a Rosh Chodesh – שבת מברכים – we say a special tefilla before announcing the time of new moon. Starting with the words, יהי רצון מלפניך, we ask Hashem for blessings in all parts of our life – physical and spiritual. Among these requests is one for a life of חילוי עצמות, literally the "strengthening of our bones." Rabbi Saks, in his new siddur, translates "חילוי עצמות" as "physical health."⁴⁰ Placing this request among more spiritual matters such as יראת שמים and אהבת תורה, highlights that our spiritual lives are bound with our physical health.
4. **Hashkafa** – As we have pointed out before, the ultimate purpose of tefilla is not to ask for what we want, but rather to change ourselves through our daily tefilla. While we certainly pray for health because we want a רפואה שלמה, we also become more sensitive to others, to our bodies, and to Hashem's role in healing.

Sources: 317 עמ' רסב-רסג, נתיב בינה, עמ' 317, Saks siddur, pp. 526-7.

⁴⁰ See עמ' 212, 262-3, ברוך שאמר, for other interpretations both for the root ח.ל.ז and for the phrase חילוי עצמות.

Day 54: ...לפיכך אנחנו חייבים להודות לך
Monday, 12/7/09

1. Transition – Last week we mentioned the need to say אגדה, a non-halalchic piece of learning, so we can say רבי ישמעאל אומר after רבנן קדיש דרבנן. That's why we say the paragraphs לעולם יהא אדם, אבל אנחנו, אשרינו. What do these paragraphs mean?

2. Understanding the words

- You'll notice several patterns of the number "7" – At the beginning of the paragraph we find seven short rhetorical questions, all starting with the word, מה אנו, מה חיינו, מה חסדנו, מה צדקותינו, מה ישועתנו, מה כוחנו, מה "מה", "what." "מה" גברותינו. "What are we, our lives, our חסד, our righteousness, and our strength... compared to Hashem?"
- Since relative to Hashem we are nothing, we ask another rhetorical question: "מה נאמר לפניך", what can we tell Hashem; how can we speak to him?" We find several words that mean "nothing" – בלי, לא, אין, and especially the word "הבל." "הבל" means "futile," but it also means breath. Compared to Hashem all our accomplishments are fleeting like a breath. (We say this tefilla during נעילה on Yom Kippur as well.)
- אבל אנחנו עמך בני בריתך בני אברהם... זרע יצחק... עדת יעקב
Despite our own personal insignificance, we ask Hashem to remember our חסד – we are the children of יעקב, יצחק, אברהם. It is because of Hashem's relationship to our forefathers that we have a chance to relate to the creator of the world.
- When we realize that unlike any other people in the world, we have a connection to G-d, we have to thank Him. In this last paragraph we find seven verbs which mean to praise or thank. We can overcome our seven-fold feeling of lowliness when we think about our connection to Hashem.
- This last paragraph also has two "אשרינו"s like the word "אשרי." We are fortunate to be a part of the Jewish nation, able to recognize Hashem twice a day through the saying of "שמע."

3. It is at this point where we all say together as a צבור – שמע and שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.

Sources: A Guide to Jewish Prayer, 74-76; Saks, 35-38.

Day 55: קרבנות
Tuesday, 12/8/09

1. Transition: After this “שמע” and the beracha - “מקדש את שמך ברבים” – we often go to the paragraph “רבי ישמעאל אומר.” What is printed in between, and if we had even just another minute, what should we say?

2. This is the section of קרבנות. The siddur prints פסוקים from the תורה describing the daily service in the המקדש, from beginning to end: from the כוהנים washing their hands in the כiyor (basin), to the clearing of the ashes from the מזבח, to the first קרבן of the day – the קרבן תמיד, the קטורת, and the laws of the all the types of קרבנות.

3. One of the sources for saying קרבנות is a מדרש cited also in the (תענית כז:), as a conversation between Hashem and Avraham. Hashem promises Avraham that his children will inherit the land of Israel because of the korbanot. Furthermore, even when they can not bring korbanot, they can read and learn about the korbanot, and Hashem will accept their learning as if they brought the korbanot.

4. If you have even one minute, the most important paragraph to say is the one describing the קרבן תמיד – the same one we read on ראש חודש. רמ"א even cites a מנהג where the צבור would say that paragraph out loud together. If we have even another 30 seconds, we can say even one of the משניות of the section beginning with the words: איזהו מקומן של זבחים. This section is a פרק of משניות taken from the מסכת dealing with קרבנות, קרבנות זבחים. Some read the first mishna on Sunday, the second on Monday...

5. Why don't we say more of קרבנות? Again, it is usually a technical issue of time, but if one can say פרשת התמיד that is preferable.

Sources: נתיב בינה, 177-178, שו"ע או"ח, סימן מח.

Day 56: קרבנות (continued)
Wednesday, 12/9/09

1. Transition: what is so significant about רבי ישמעאל that we skip to it?

2. Reasons for saying this paragraph:

- רבי ישמעאל אומר is a ברייתא appearing at the beginning of the ספרא, the book of מדרשים which learns halachot from the pesukim in ספר ויקרא. Since ספר ויקרא is the source of the laws of קרבנות, and we just finished saying קרבנות, it makes sense to include this paragraph.
- Why not suffice with just pesukim from ויקרא; why include a ברייתא? The goal is to include learning about קרבנות from the Torah, Mishna, and Gemara. Like we said yesterday, if we have even a minute to say קרבנות, we should say the pesukim about the קרבן תמיד, one mishna from the section “איזהו מקומן של זבחים,” and the ברייתא of רבי ישמעאל אומר. Then we will have covered the three basic sections of learning: Torah, mishna, and gemara.⁴¹
- We did this cycle after ברכת כוהנים reading פסוקים from התורה, one mishna and one ברייתא starting with the words “אלו דברים.” This is a second cycle of תורה, גמרא, משנה, גמרא. Just by

Take away:

1. We need a Gemara dealing with korbanot, so we pick רבי ישמעאל, the opening ברייתא in a book of מדרשים about קרבנות. The truth is that the paragraph has little to do directly with קרבנות, so there must be an additional reason, which we will discuss tomorrow.

2. Shul is a place of learning.

⁴¹ One reason offered for picking פרק איזהו מקומן מסיני, מחלוקת, “משנה ברורה למשה מסיני” (טור, ס' נ').

Day 57: רבי ישמעאל אומר (continued)
Thursday 12/10/09

1. Transition: We mentioned yesterday that רבי ישמעאל ends a cycle of learning in shul: פסוקים in the Torah, משניות, and the ברייתא of רבי ישמעאל representing גמרא – all related to korbanot. Why do we pick this particular piece to represent גמרא? Why not any other גמרא about korbanot?

2. **Understanding the words**

- רבי ישמעאל was the great תנא and כוהן גדול, כוהן אלישע, בן אלישע – according to Gemara, redeemed at a young age from a Roman prison after the destruction of the second בית המקדש and later martyred as one of the הרוגי מלכות.
- Here he list 13 rules by which the הלכות were able to derive from the words of the Torah. That's why this paragraph is so key – it is the link between the words of the Torah and halacha – the link between תורה שבכתב and תורה שבעל פה. We regularly encounter these rules, like קל וחומר, גזירה שוה, and בנין אב when we learn Gemara.
- For now, we'll translate the part the חזן says to conclude the paragraph:
 - (כתובים) – There are sometimes two pesukim זה את זה – that contradict each other – that seem to teach the opposite idea or halacha.
 - עד שיבא הכתוב השלישי ויכריע ביניהם – until a third pasuk comes to resolve the contradiction.
 - At this point, the ברייתא has concluded. Since we have just concluded learning about korbanot, we say a prayer both for the speedy rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash in our days (שיבנה בית המקדש במהרה בימינו) and that we be among those learning Torah (ותן חלקינו בתורתך).

Day 58: מה עוז צור
Friday 12/11/09

1. Transition: As we light the first Chanukah candles tonight, we are going to spend the next couple of days discussing a *piyut*, or religious poem, we say after candle lighting – *Maoz tzur*. (Saying *מה עוז צור* is an Ashkenazi custom.) Many sing the song, but don't understand the words.

2. We don't know much about the author of this *piyut*, other than he lived in the Middle Ages and his name was *Mordechai*. We know this because the first letters of each stanza form the word *מרדכי*.⁴²

3. In the version in most siddurim, there are six stanzas. Some families sing all six stanzas following candle lighting, while others sing only the first stanza, the one starting with the words “*מעוז צור ישועתי*.” In this first stanza, the author calls for the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash* and the rededication of the *mizbeach*. This reminds us of the *השמונאים* who rededicated the *Beit Hamikdash* following their victory over the Syrian-Greeks. The author, living in the middle of a hard exile, may be invoking the events of Chanukah, calling on Hashem to perform a similar miracle, defeat our enemies, and rebuild the *Beit Hamikdash*.

4. Understanding the words

- *מעוז צור ישועתי* – *מעוז צור* means “rock of my salvation.” *מעוז* can be associated with strength or protection. This is how the author refers to Hashem – as a mighty rock and source of protection. It is worthy to give praise to such a protector – *לְבָנָה לְשִׁבְחָה*.
- The next verse calls on this mighty protector to restore the *Beit Hamikdash* so we can bring offerings of thanksgiving. The words describing the *Beit Hamikdash* are “*בֵּית תְּפִילָתִי*” – my house of prayer⁴³ – and the offering mentioned is the *קרבת תודה*, the thanksgiving offering described in the Torah.
- For *Beit Hamikdash* to be rebuilt our enemies need to be destroyed. The phrase describing our enemies is “*צַר הַמְּנַבֵּחַ*.” “*צַר*” is an enemy, and “*מְנַבֵּחַ*” means loud or barking⁴⁴. The phrase used for destruction is “*מִטְבַּח*”, from the *שׁוֹרֵשׁ ט.ב.ה*, to slaughter. So the verse reads, “*לְעֵת תְּכִין מִטְבַּח מִצַּר הַמְּנַבֵּחַ*” – when you have prepared the slaughter for the loud-mouthed enemy.⁴⁵
- When our enemies are defeated and the *Beit Hamikdash* is rebuilt, we will complete the dedication of the *mizbeach* with a song of praise. Thus the verse reads, “*אֲזַאגְמֹר בְּשִׁיר מְזִמֹּר הַנּוֹכַח הַמְּזַבֵּחַ*” – then I will complete (with song and psalm) the dedication of the *mizbeach*.

⁴² Rabbi Saks identifies the author as someone from 13th Century Germany.

⁴³ Yeshayau uses this phrase to describe the *Beit Hamikdash* in *נ.ו.ז*. Many of the phrases in this stanza borrow their language from Yeshayau.

⁴⁴ The *שׁוֹרֵשׁ* is used in Tanach for barking – see *ישעיהו נ.ו.ז*. Here, barking probably refers to a blaspheming enemy

⁴⁵ Rabbi Saks translates, “...When you silence the loud-mouthed foe.

Sources: 371-372 ג' , חלק ג' , נתיב בינה, Saks siddur, 898-899; The Complete Artscroll Siddur, 782-783.

תפילות בימי חנוכה: Day 59 Monday, December 14, 2009

1. **Halacha** – Throughout Chanukah, we commemorate the chag with special tefillot and halachot:

על הנסים

- In שמונה עשרה and in benching, we add על הנסים in the beracha reserved for thanks – in שמונה עשרה, in the beracha of מודים, and in benching, in the beracha לך נודה – we thank you.
- If you forget to add על הנסים in either:
 - If you haven't said שם ה' at the end of the beracha, you can still say על הנסים.
 - If you have already said “ברוך אתה ה'”, you do not have to go back.⁴⁶
 - In benching, you can insert a special tefilla in the section of הרחמן's, recalling the miracle of Chanukah, and then continue with על הנסים from the words מתתיהו בימי מתתיהו. Many siddurim print this הרחמן before the last הרחמן הוא יזכנו לימות המשיח – הרחמן הוא יזכנו לימות המשיח.
- **Understanding the words** – The word “פורקן” means redemption. (Similarly, we say the tefilla on Shabbat, יקום פורקן מן שמיא, “May redemption arise from Heaven.”)

קריאת התורה

- We read every day from פרשת נשא about the gifts the נשיאים donated to the משכן at the משכן's dedication. First, the חנוכה המשכן evokes images of the חשונאים rededicating the בית המקדש on the 25th day of כסלו. Moreover, there is a specific connection between the משכן and חנוכה: the work for the mishkan was completed on the 25th day of כסלו. (The dedication was postponed until the first day of ניסן.)
- As there is no מוסף, we read the regular three aliyot of a weekday. (When מוסף is added to a special weekday like ראש חודש or חול המועד, we read four aliyot.)

הלל ולמנצה

- We say a full הלל every day as the miracle of the oil continued daily.
- We skip למנצה. On such a joyous day, it is inappropriate to recite this solemn chapter of tehillim, particularly the words, “יענך ה' ביום צרה” – may Hashem answer you on a day of distress.

Sources: משנה ברורה, סי' תרפב, סי' ק-ג, סי' תרפג, סי' ק א', וסי' תרפד, סי' ק א', Saks siddur, pp. 130, 172,

⁴⁶ The משנה ברורה says we do not have to repeat שמונה עשרה because Chanukah is not a Biblical holiday. Some suggest saying על הנסים in בצור.

Day 60: מה עוז צור (continued)

Tuesday 12/15/09

1. Transition: We mentioned on Friday that the poem מעוז צור has six stanzas. Surprisingly, only the fifth deals directly with the miracle of Chanukah. The others deal with similar events in our history where Hashem saves the Jewish people. Today we will explain the second and third stanzas dealing with the events surrounding our exodus from two exiles, מצרים and בבל.

2. Understanding the words

- In the second stanza, the first two verses describe the hardships we suffered in Egypt. Instead of the word מצרים, the author chooses the word “עגלה”- calf; that’s how the *navi* Yirmiyahu calls מצרים (מו:כ).⁴⁷ The author chooses three phrases to describe the intense suffering: “רעות שבעה נפשי” – my soul has been filled with troubles, “ביגון כחי כלה” – my strength was spent (כחי כלה) with sorrow (יגון), and “חיי מררו בקושי” – they embittered my life with hardship. This is a clear reference to the pasuk in Shemot, “וימררו את חייהם” (א:יד).
- The last two verses refers to the redemption: ובידו הגדולה הוציא את הסגולה – with his mighty hand, Hashem took out the Jewish people, called the “עם סגולה” (שמות יט:ה), or treasured nation. Pharaoh’s army and followers⁴⁸ sank to the bottom of the sea like a rock – ירדו כאבן במצולה.
- The third stanza picks up where the second leaves off. Even after we arrived at Eretz Yisrael following the redemption from מצרים, we still found no rest. The phrase describing Israel is דביר קדשו וגם שם לא.⁴⁹ דביר קדשו הביאני וגם שם לא שקטתי.
- ובא נוגש והגלני – an oppressor, namely the Babylonians, exiled us from Israel were the first to exile us. The true reason for our exile was our sins; the author refers to the idol worship – כי זרים עבדתי – we served strange gods.
- We suffered greatly, literally we drank poison wine – יין רעל מסכתי – and we almost perished completely – כמעט שעברתי.
- קץ בבל זרובבל, לקץ שבעים נושעתי – We were delivered when the Babylonian Empire fell after 70 years⁵⁰, and זרובבל, among other leaders, led us back to Israel

Notice that the last verse always has an internal rhyme:

- אז אגמור, בשיר מזמור
- חיל פרעה, וכל זרעו
- קץ בבל, זרובבל

Sources: 372-373, חלק ג', Saks siddur, 900-901.

⁴⁷The word עגלה completes the rhyme.

⁴⁸ Saks translates “זרעו” as followers, not offspring.

⁴⁹ דביר in Tanach refers to the קודש הקדשים where the Aron was stored.

⁵⁰ According to Yirmiyahu’s prophecy – ירמיהו כה:יב-יג – Persia overtook Babylonia, and the Jews began returning under Persian rule.

Day 61: מה עזי צור (continued)
Wednesday 12/16/09

1. **Transition** – The fourth and fifth stanzas of מעוז צור describe the miracles of פורים and then הנוכה. (For the sake of time, you may want to focus only on the fifth stanza dealing with Chanukah and the “hashkafa” message)

2. **Understanding the words**

- כרות קומת ברוש ביקש אגגי בן המדתא – This verse refers to Haman, but not directly by name. He is called “בן המתדתא”, the son of Hamedata, and “אגגי,” referring to the Amalek king in the times of שאול המלך.⁵¹ Haman cut – כרות – a tall tree on which to hang Mordechai. ברוש is translated as either a cypress or fir tree.
- ונהיית לו לפח ולמקוש – this tree became a trap, as Haman was eventually hung on the same tree. As a result, “וגאותו נשבתה,” his arrogance was brought to an end.
- The stanza spells this out explicitly – ראש ימיני נשאת – you promoted Mordechai from שבט בנימין⁵², blotted out Haman’s name, and hung his children on a tree – על – העץ תלית.
- The fifth stanza deals directly with Chanukah. The Syrian Greeks are called יונים, “Greeks,” as they wanted to spread Greek culture, and the השמונאים are called השמנים. Even those who don’t say these stanzas during candle lighting might be familiar with the song taken from these words, “יונים נקבצו עלי אזי בימי השמנים”
- The יונים make holes in the walls surrounding the Beit Hamikdash and defiled the oil – ופוצו חומות מגדלי וטמאו כל השמנים –
- That last undefiled flask of oil is referred to in the next line – ומנותר קנקנים נעשה נס – לשושנים. לשושנים” or beloved ones, is a reference to the Jewish people.⁵³
- בני בינה) or “חבמים” or “men of insight” – Our שיר וררנים established an eight day holiday of song and other praises, possibly referring to the Hallel and על הנסים we say on Chanukah.

3. **Hashkafa**: Chanukah was not an isolated event; it represents a chain of events in our history where Hashem redeemed and protected us. מעוז צור ends with a stanza asking Hashem to speed the days until the final redemption.

Sources: 373-374, חלק ג', נתיב בינה, Saks siddur, 900-901.

⁵¹ See אסתר ג:א, “אחר הדברים האלה גדל המלך אחשרורש את המן האגגי וינשאהו”

⁵² See אסתר ב:ה, “מרדכי... איש ימיני”

⁵³ See שיר השירים ב:ב, and also the Gemara which reinterprets the word שושנים to read שושנים, those who learn, referring to the merit of Torah study which helped bring the miracle of Chanukah (שבת ל:)

חנוכה וראש חודש
Thursday 12/17/09

1. **Halacha**

- On special weekdays like ראש חודש when we say תפילת מוסף, we read four aliyot from the Torah. Normally on ראש חודש we take the section from פרשת פינחס dealing with the מוסף sacrifices daily, on Shabbat, and on Rosh Chodesh, dividing those pesukim among four aliyot.
- When Chanukah and Rosh Chodesh intersect during the week, we condense the regular Rosh Chodesh reading into three aliyot, so we can devote the fourth aliyah to Chanukah. Ideally, we take out two sifrei Torah – from the first, we read three aliyot from פרשת פינחס for Rosh Chodesh, and from the second we read one aliyah from פרשת נשא for Chanukah.
- Rosh Chodesh takes precedence over Chanukah as it is more frequent (תדיר) throughout the year than the days of Chanukah.
- We say חצי קדיש after the fourth aliyah.

- Normally we do not say מוסף on Chanukah. As the chag is not mentioned in the Torah, it calls for no additional korbanot, hence calling for no extra שמונה עשרה to commemorate those korbanot. On the days Chanukah intersects with Rosh Chodesh, however, we add מוסף to commemorate the added korbanot of Rosh Chodesh.

- (The addition of a shemoneh esreh explains why we said a full kadish after הלל today. In general, every שמונה עשרה must be followed by a full kadish. By “full” we mean containing the additional line “תתקבל צלותהון,” “may Hashem accept our prayers [of the Shemoneh Esreh].” Normally we say this kadish at the end of davening before עלינו to cover the morning שמונה עשרה. But when davening has two shemoneh esreh’s, like it does today, we need two full kadish’s. While we leave the last one before עלינו to cover the second mussaf שמונה עשרה, we still need one to cover the schacharit שמונה עשרה. That was the full kadish we said after הלל instead of the half kaddish we said yesterday when we it wasn’t Rosh Chodesh.

Sources: סימן תרפ"ד, סעיף ג'.

Day 63: מזמור שיר חנוכה הבית לדוד
Monday, 12/21/09

1. **Transition:** On each day of Chanukah we added a perek of tehillim after the שיר ברוך שאמר and ברכות השחר to the siddur between ברוך שאמר and ברכות השחר. Fairly recently (17th century), some communities added this perek to the siddur between ברכות השחר and ברוך שאמר. That is our practice as well.
2. **Background:** We have two sources in Chazal for using this perek in tefilla:
 - The mishna says that the לויים would recite this perek when someone brought the בכורים, the first fruits, to the Beit Hamikdash (ביכורים ג:ד).
 - Another source relates this perek to the service in the mikdash on Chanukah (מסכת סופרים יח:ג), which is why we say it on Chanukah as well.⁵⁴ This source probably understands the words “חנוכה הבית” as the dedication of the Beit Hamikdash.

We will explain some of the words, attempting to understand why the לויים said this perek at those times, and why we say it daily at this point in the tefilla.

3. **Understanding the words/Hashkafa**

- I praise you, Hashem – literally I raise you up, from the word להרים – because you have raised me up. דליתני might come from the word, דלי, a pail raising water from the bottom of a well. By saving him, the author, דוד המלך, says, that Hashem has prevented his enemies from rejoicing.⁵⁵
- To convey this salvation, the second verse uses the word ותרפאני – you have healed me, and חייתני, you have spared me from death. For death, דוד המלך uses the words שאול, which can mean a grave or hell, and בור, a deep pit.
- At the end of the psalm, דוד המלך recites the actual tefilla he said when he was in danger. There, too he talks about dying:
 - “What gain would there be if I died and went down to the grave. Can dust thank You? Can it declare Your truth?” – מה בצע בדמי ברדתי אל שחת היודך עפר היגיד אמתך

In short, we have the testimony of a person praising Hashem for saving him from a life-threatening situation. It’s no surprise that the חשמונאים would want to say it upon being saved from the Greek Empire. We, on the other hand, would hope that we never find ourselves in these situations; why would we say this perek *daily*? Perhaps as we have testified in the ברכות השחר, we owe Hashem for the constant functioning of our bodies

⁵⁴ עמוס חכם, in his פירוש דעת מקרא, suggests that either לויים said this perek during the days of Chanukah, or that the חשמונאים said this perek during their dedication. חכם favors the second explanation.

⁵⁵ I am assuming that “מזמור שיר חנוכה הבית לדוד” means that דוד המלך authored this psalm. There are other interpretations as well. See עמ' ט, קס.

and souls. In this sense, we owe Hashem our praise and gratitude for our lives every second of the day.

Sources: עמ' קס-קסו, ("דעת מקרא"), עמוס חכם, פירושו על ספר תהילים; Saks, pp. 58-60.

Day 64: מזמור שיר חנוכת הבית לדוד (continued)

Tuesday, 12/22/09

1. Transition: Yesterday, we connected שיר מזמור to השחר ברכות, to the realization that we owe Hashem for our lives every second of the day. How many of us think about that when we are healthy?

Understanding the words/Hashkafa

- דוד המלך, too, comments: “When I felt secure” – ואני אמרתי בשלוי בל אמוט לעולם – means peace and security – “I said, ‘I shall never be shaken.’”
- However, once he found himself in a life-threatening situation, he realized, “Hashem, when you have favored me (ברצונך), you made me stand firm as a mountain (להררי) comes from the word (הר). But when you hid your face (הסתרת), I was terrified (הייתי נבהל).” The time of danger made דוד המלך realize Hashem’s presence even in times of peace.

Perhaps this is a call to us to pay attention to the ברכות השחר, which affirm that it is Hashem that helps us open our eyes in the morning (פוקח עורים), and even to go to the bathroom (אשר יצר...). This might also explain why a person bringing his בכורים might say this מזמור. Precisely at a time of prosperity, symbolized by the first fruits, a Jew acknowledges that Hashem is the source of his prosperity.

2. How does שיר מזמור connect to the next section of tefilla, פסוקי דזמרה, a section of continuous praise to Hashem?
 - At the end of the מזמור, the author exclaims:
 - i. You have turned my sorrow into dancing – הפכת מספדי למחול לי
 - ii. You have removed my sackcloth (שקי) and clothed me with joy (ותאזרני שמחה)
 - iii. So that my soul may sing to you – למען יזמרך כבוד – here כבוד is a reference to the soul, ולא ידום – it will not be silent.
 - iv. ה' אלקי לעולם אוֹדך - Hashem, my god, I will thank You forever

דוד המלך does not stop with thanking Hashem for this particular salvation. This episode has taught him that Hashem was and is always protecting him. Similarly, פסוקי דזמרה represents our daily praise of Hashem. When we realize that Hashem is always protecting us, we will not stop praising him with the many perakim of תהילים in the פסוקי דזמרה.

Sources: עמ' קס-קסו, ("דעת מקרא"), עמוס חכם, פירושו על ספר תהילים; Saks, pp. 58-60.

Day 65: זמני תפילה/ Day before vacation
Wednesday, 12/23/09

1. **Transition:** For the past two days we have explained מזמור שיר הנוכת הבית לדוד as a reminder to praise Hashem for the salvations he brings us every second. What if we don't feel that particular salvation at that moment?

2. **Hashkafa.** As we have mentioned, tefilla benefits us, not Hashem.⁵⁶ Hashem doesn't need our praises; we need to be reminded to praise Him. In that sense, we can view tefilla and the siddur as an educational tool, a daily lesson.

We can view the times of tefilla in a similar light. If we waited to daven until we felt inspired, or we felt in trouble, or saved, we would be depriving ourselves of these daily lessons and the chance to connect to Hashem. By davening first thing in the morning, in the middle of our day, and at the last thing at night, we affirm our trust in Hashem and his role in our lives throughout the day.

3. **Halacaha.** Before we leave for vacation, let's review the times of the davening:

- קריאת שמע – to recite all three paragraphs of shema within the first three hours of the day – approximately 9:35AM.
- שחרית – finish shemoneh esreh before the fourth hour of the day. During our vacation: approximately 10:20 AM. (If not, one can daven shemoneh esreh until midday, הצות – between 11:55AM and 12:01 PM.)
- מנחה – The earliest time to daven mincha is shortly after midday, approximately 12:25 PM. The last time to daven mincha is שקיעה, sundown, approximately 4:30PM.
- מעריב – as close to צאת הכוכבים as possible, about 5:10PM, until הצות הלילה, approximately 11:55PM. (בדיעבד, one may daven maariv until the next morning.)
- Finally, remember that this coming Sunday is עשרה בטבת, the fast day commemorating the siege on Jerusalem.

Sources: ספר תפילה כהלכתה, עמ' יב-טו, ופרק ג: זמני תפילה.

⁵⁶ Feel free to reference our *yom iyun* lecture with Mr. Charles Harary.

