

Insights in Prayer – Avraham Weinroth

Dedication

“Many women have performed valiantly, but you exceed them all”

This book is dedicated to the elevation of the soul of my mother, my teacher;

The dearest of people, the crown of my head;

The noblest soul, good-hearted and wise;

Her ways were noble and gentle;

Her heart was infinitely broad;

Who feared Heaven and whose prayer was plentiful

Dreizel Weinroth of blessed memory

(Daughter of Rav Aryeh Aftergut and Esther Zissa nee Shtrual

of blessed memories)

Her heartfelt prayers pierced the heavens

Preface and Dedication

Prayer Was Established by the Patriarchs

Prayer is an entire Torah in itself and requires study – in-depth study. The act of prayer is repeated so often, yet its meaning is so easy to forget. I, too, would probably have continued praying without understanding the essence of the matter and I wouldn't have been drawn to the topic except that I was searching for a lacuna to fill, in honor of my father, Rabbi Moshe Aharon son of Rabbi Mordechai Eliezer Weinroth of blessed memory.

When I was a child my father met a man who told him that when the Rebbe of Satmar, Rabbi Yo'el Teitelbaum, arrived in Israel in the middle of the last century, he asked a young boy at the train station if he knew how to say in Hebrew an "*erlicher yid*" (a faithful Jew). The boy knew the translation of "religious" and also "ultra-Orthodox" but did not know how to say in Hebrew "a faithful Jew." So the boy answered, to the satisfaction of the Satmar Rebbe, that, "There is no such thing as '*erlicher yid*' in Hebrew."

When I heard this conversation I looked at the speaker and my heart cried out, "Look at my father! He is a living example of a faithful Jew in Hebrew!"

One's faithfulness to HASHEM shows itself in every single step of his life, and it is most clearly expressed during prayer. "Great is Your faithfulness" (Eicha 3:23) -- at least three times every day a person's faith is clearly recognized, in the morning, afternoon and evening prayers. My father, who was truly a faithful Jew, used to pray with tremendous intensity and with every fiber of his being. My father prayed like someone counting coins, every single letter and word was important to him.

My father never missed the very early morning *minyan*., He would often cite the verse, "We will walk to the house of HASHEM with feeling," (Psalms 55:15), and say that the Hebrew word "feeling" (*beregesh*) is spelled *bet, resh, gimel, shin* which is an acronym for the inclement weather – hail (*barad*), wind (*ruach*), rain (*geshem*) and snow (*sheleg*). He said this and lived by it.

My father also embodied the plain meaning of the verse, in his emotional expression during prayer. He embodied the verse, "All my limbs will say, 'Who is like You, HASHEM?'" (Tehillim 35:10). My father would pray with tremendous devotion and would often be covered in tears by the time he finished praying.

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My father stood for many of the prayers and for the entire Yom Kippur service, even in his old age.

Yet my father took ill and passed away, and this living portrait is no longer with us.

I sought a topic to write about in his memory and found nothing more appropriate than prayer.

"But as for me, when I was on my way from Paddan, Rachel died to me on the road in the land of Canaan," (Bereishis 48:7).

As I wrote those words my dear mother fell ill, the crown of my head, Dreizel Weinroth, daughter of Rabbi Aryeh Aftergut.

My mother would pray constantly, pray for us. She would beseech and entreat. Her prayers were the prayers of the poor person, as will be explained later. My mother was so goodhearted and sympathetic to the pain of others. She was insightful and truly knew how to pray and what blessings to give us. I dedicate the chapters to women's prayer and prayers for the ill to my mother. It was not long afterwards that I gave a *shiur*, and this time on the essence of the *kaddish* prayer. The loss of my mother is tremendously painful and I miss her prayers and her blessings. Several chapters in this book were written and signed with tears.

This book is dedicated in great sorrow to my father and mother of blessed memories.

My parents were so worthy of having a book on prayer dedicated to them.

With my whole heart I pray both that the words I have written are worthy, and that I, poor of deeds, was worthy to write them in their memory.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Three times each day a Jew stands before his Creator and prays, from his childhood until his old age. Why? What purpose does prayer serve?

In-Depth Prayer

Prayer is defined as serving HASHEM with one's heart. The Torah source for the obligation of prayer is the verse, "To love HASHEM, your God, and to serve Him, with all your hearts and all your souls," (Devarim 10:12).

The Talmud (Ta'anis 2a) explains: What kind of service is done with the heart? The verse must refer to prayer.

The essential part of the liturgy, according to the Rabbis of the Talmud, is the standing prayer, known as *Tefillas Amida* (lit. "Standing Prayer") or *Shemoneh Esrei* (lit. "Eighteen"). During that prayer one must view himself as if he is standing before a king, before his Creator.

Glancing superficially at the wording of the *Shemoneh Esrei* it appears that it is primarily about asking HASHEM for our human needs.

How does a person serve HASHEM through prayer if it means asking for things that he himself needs? In prayer a person asks HASHEM for livelihood and success, a life-partner and marital harmony, children, a healthy long life, national redemption, rainfall – in short, every aspect necessary for an enjoyable life. It seems that in prayer a person focuses primarily on himself and his needs. Prayer seems to be totally egocentric, yet it is called "serving HASHEM." How can this be?

The purpose of prayer cannot be to give HASHEM information about one's human needs. We believe that the Creator of the universe already knows even the smallest details and needs of every individual. HASHEM is aware of the troubled soul that longs for salvation and He is aware of everything that transpires even in the most private of settings. He knows what is in one's soul, mind and heart. Why should we need to state these matters to HASHEM during prayer if He already knows everything?

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Furthermore, HASHEM is the ultimate cause and reason for everything that happens in our world. Every adversity or difficulty that a person goes through comes ultimately from HASHEM. For example, HASHEM does not need a patient or his friends to ask for health in order to know about the sickness, since the illness itself came through Divine Providence in the first place.

If so, what need or purpose is there for a person to plead with HASHEM about every trouble or event that happens to him?

Nor could we suggest that prayer is laying out one's requests before HASHEM.

If a person deserves to be saved, through his deeds or a Divine calculations of reward and punishment, then HASHEM will certainly save him, since HASHEM is trusted to repay people for their good deeds. Why should we pray for something which we deserve anyway?

Conversely, if the person does not deserve to be saved according to HASHEM's calculation of reward and punishment, how does prayer help?

Does praying imply that HASHEM veers from the principles of reward and punishment simply because someone entreated Him in prayer to do so?

That would make a mockery of this principle which is the foundation of our faith, as Rambam states (11th Principle of Faith):

I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be He, rewards those who observe His mitzvos and punishes those who transgress them.

We could suggest that perhaps prayer itself is a form of repentance and contains a dimension of purification. When someone stands before HASHEM in prayer and makes requests he expresses his strong belief in HASHEM, which in and of itself brings the person closer to HASHEM.

The idea of prayer as a form of personal improvement is attributed to the Baal Shem Tov, who used to say: If you are exactly the same person after prayer as you were before, what was the point of praying?

This is why one who prays is called in Hebrew a *mispalel*, which is the reflexive form, meaning "to plead with oneself," rather than the active form *mepalel*, meaning "to plead." When praying one acts to change oneself.

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For this reason the Talmud (Berachos 32b) states that "If one prayed and was not answered he should pray again." If the prayer was not answered at first, it is a sign that the person did not do enough. This is similar to the Talmudic dictum (Megillah 6b) that "If someone says he worked hard but did not succeed - do not believe him." If someone wasn't successful in their prayer it is a sign that he didn't try hard enough. If his prayers were not answered it is a sign that he did not change himself enough during his prayers. Therefore he should pray again and further improve himself.

However, this does not explain prayer for someone else. How does it help to pray for someone else who is ill? Would it make sense that one person prays and improves himself while another person, who remains as he was, is cured?

Another question along similar lines - what is the purpose of the *kaddish* prayer recited on behalf of someone who has passed away? How can one person's prayer help or change another who is no longer in this world?

Furthermore, we believe that poverty, illness or any other kind of trial or tribulation is not by chance, but is the will of HASHEM. So how can we ask HASHEM to undo what His Providence has decreed? Are we asking HASHEM to change His will in favor of ours?

Additionally, we believe with all our hearts that HASHEM wants to do what is best for all creatures and that everything He does is for good. So illness and pain must have some benefit to the person, based on a Divine calculation or plan which is beyond human understanding. How can a human ask HASHEM to change what has been decreed for his own good?

The problem becomes even more acute when we look at the words of the Rabbis and find that people must pray even for things which are necessary for the very existence of the world.

The Torah (Bereishis 2:5) states, "And all plants of the field were not yet on the earth and all the grass of the field had not yet sprouted because Lord HASHEM had not yet brought rain on the earth, and there was no man to work the land."

Rashi (ad. loc.) based on the Talmud (Chullin 60b) explains that when the creation of the earth was completed on the sixth day the plants had not yet sprouted and didn't do so until after the creation of mankind. Yet the Torah states that grasses and plants were already created on the third day of creation. The Rabbis explained that the grass had not yet appeared above the surface of the earth and was waiting there until the sixth day. Why? "For

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HASHEM, the Lord, had not yet brought rain upon the earth.” And why had He not yet caused it to rain? Because there was not yet anyone to work the ground and to recognize the benefit of the rain. When Adam came, and realized that rain was necessary, he prayed for rain which fell, allowing the trees and grasses to grow.

This means that without prayer even the grass which was already created didn't grow. If so, why was it created on the third day? So that it would sprout and grow only once a person prayed for it.

This shows that human prayer was intended from the very beginning to be part of the fabric of creation, a necessary condition for the world's existence.

Why? Why does a person have to pray so that the plants – which were already created – could grow?

Similarly, the Talmud (Yevamos 64a) states:

Rabbi Yitzchak said: Why were our matriarchs [initially] barren?
Because HASHEM desires the prayers of the righteous.

Why does HASHEM desire these prayers? Is it something He needs? Would HASHEM make a husband and wife suffer through years without children simply in order that they should pray to Him? And why would HASHEM do that to the righteous?

There is another question. Prayer is defined as service of HASHEM in the heart, as we saw above. This definition leads one to the conclusion that prayer cannot be performed simply by going through the motions but must flow from intent of the heart. The intent is the soul of prayer, as *Chovos Halevavos* writes: “Prayer without intent is like a body without a soul.”¹

Similarly, Rabbi Shimon says in the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:13): “When you pray, don't make your prayer fixed, but rather mercy and beseeching before the Omnipresent, blessed is He.”

¹ Rabbeinu Bachaye ibn Pekuda, *Chovos Halevavos; Sha'ar Cheshbon Hanefesh* chapter 3: And know that the words are like the husk and the intent in the words, like the heart. Prayer is like the body and the intent is like the spirit... When one prays with his tongue but his heart is thinking of other things, his prayer is like a body without a soul, like a husk without a heart, because his body is there but his heart is elsewhere. When a person thinks of something else while praying... and then finishes his prayer by saying “May the words of my mouth and the thought of my heart be acceptable before You,” it is an insult -- he claims he was speaking with his heart to God when his heart was not involved in the prayer.

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However, since the Rabbis established that a person must pray at set times with specific words, does this not limit a person's ability to have intent and doesn't it turn it into a rote action?

In the Talmud (Bava Basra 164b) we find the words of Rav, who says that every person transgresses the sin of "*iyun tefillah*" every single day. *Tosafos* explain there (s.v. *iyun*) that "*iyun tefillah*" means praying without concentration. "A person cannot avoid this sin every single day, because there is no person who is able to have proper concentration in his prayer."

In other words, it seems that every person sins each day through the sin of "*iyun tefillah*" since he cannot have the proper concentration.

If we are unable to do it, why is it a sin? What does HASHEM want from us and how can there be an obligation that nobody can live up to?

Similarly, we have to understand, if there is no one who can have intent, does that mean that in fact none of us is praying? For we have seen that intent is the soul of prayer.²

In general, why is lack of concentration so widespread during prayer? Why is it so difficult to concentrate specifically while standing in prayer? A person can talk to someone else for hours and concentrate easily, a person can read a book with hundreds of pages and concentrate well. And he certainly concentrates well when he is asking for something he needs. Why does his concentration disappear precisely when he comes to pray?

² One might answer that the Talmud is not referring to someone who has no concentration at all, but to someone who is not concentrating sufficiently, as *Tosafos* write: "There is nobody who can concentrate appropriately in prayer." However, this answer doesn't explain the continuation of *Tosafos* who cite the words of the Talmud Yerushalmi in Berachos (2:4) which say that someone who has no concentration does not need to repeat the prayer, because perhaps he also won't concentrate on the repeated prayer either. Apropos this Rabbi Hiyya said that in his entire life he never had intent in his prayer. In fact, once he wanted to have proper intent, and he found himself thinking about a question that was not related to prayer at all: Who goes first before the king, the minister or the Exilarch?

The Amora Shmuel added that in the middle of prayer he found himself counting chicks. Rabbi Bun bar Hiyya said that he found himself counting the rows of stones of the building. Rabbi Masanya said that he was grateful to his head because when he reached the line beginning "*modim*" ("we give thanks") in his prayer his head bowed by itself.

From these examples it seems that it refers to a complete lack of intent in prayer. The question is thus intensified: How is prayer like this even considered to be prayer if one has absolutely no intent? Could it be that the prayers of these Amora'im had no value at all?

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If the main purpose of prayer is the intent, we must also understand communal prayer, which is even worse for a person's concentration. It is so much more difficult for one to concentrate when he is not free to go at his own pace, but is bound to and dependent on others. How and why does *halakha* say that it is preferable to pray with a community even if that comes at the expense of a person's ability to concentrate on his prayer? Is the "event" of prayer more important than the intent in prayer?

Furthermore, the major part of prayer is private conversation between a person and HASHEM. A personal act should be done in private, when a person is enclosed within his own space, speaking with HASHEM and expressing the feelings of his heart and his prayers, without anyone watching him and without him feeling that others are looking at him.

However, the Rabbis stressed the importance of praying specifically with a community. It is not only a preference, but a halakhic obligation. The question is why should prayer, which is such a private, intimate, act, be performed in public?

Furthermore, we must understand a series of mitzvos which are similar to prayer. For example what is the purpose of the priestly blessing which was performed in the Temple, which the Rabbis established as part of the prayer service? This blessing seems to suffer from the same difficulties that we stated above with regard to prayer: If a person deserves goodness from HASHEM based on the principles of reward and punishment, why does he need a blessing of a priest for that goodness to come? And if he doesn't deserve it based on reward and punishment, how will this blessing help?

Three times each day a Jew stands before his Creator and prays, from birth until old age. But there are some who spend their entire lives without understanding their actions. These questions are fundamental and difficult. These are not questions of semantics. These are questions which reach the understanding of the act of prayer itself. This topic is difficult and requires in-depth study, *Iyun Tefilah*.

It turns out that the challenge is difficult for one who examines it, who wants to lay out a cohesive presentation of the subject, because the topic is a very complicated one. Furthermore, this subject is almost infinite, because there are so many sources dedicated to it. Not only are there an infinite number of sources, but some of them appear contradictory and thus demand clarification and explanation. We will try to examine these questions in the following chapters and search for the essence of the subject through in-depth study of

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the basic questions we have outlined here, in an organized and understandable way.

The Path of Prayer

The questions above relate to the essence of prayer and are the reason it is so important to examine prayer in depth. They form the basis of the following chapters. However, already in this introduction let us try to understand the way of prayer, i.e. how should we pray? This is also a subject that a person must study. We will begin with a few words and ideas on this topic, as a form of: "The opening of Your words give light," (Tehillim 119: 130).

The Repetition and the Entreaty in Prayer

The Rabbis taught that one of the conditions for prayer to be accepted is to pray lots of prayers.

The Talmud states: The righteous, as long as they are praying a lot, their prayer is heard, (Yoma 29a).³

We also find that the Torah states about the patriarch Yitzchak: "And Yitzchak pleaded with HASHEM opposite his wife, because she was barren," (Bereishis 25:21). Rashi explains "pleaded" – he increased and implored with prayer.

Similarly, when Moshe prayed for the Jewish people the Torah states, "And now leave Me," (Shemos 32:10). The Rabbis explain (Berachos 32a): "Rabbi Abahu said: Were it not written in the verse it would be impossible to say, this teaches that Moshe grasped HASHEM like a person who grasps another by his clothing, and said to him, 'Master of the universe, I will not let You go until you forgive and absolve them.'"

Moshe used the same approach to prayer when he wanted to enter the Land of Yisrael. The verse states, "I pleaded (*va'eschanan*) with HASHEM," (Devarim 3:23). The Rabbis explained in a *midrash* that Moshe prayed as many times as

³ The *Me'iri* on Yoma (29a) explains: A person must always be careful with his prayer and spend a long time in it; even if he sees that his prayer was not heard he should not despair because in time he will find that it was heard, and he should not consider himself to be pressuring or hassling HASHEM.

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the numerical value of the word "va'eschanan" (515). If Moshe would have prayed once more, he would have "forced" HASHEM (in a manner of speaking) to accede to his request. Therefore HASHEM commanded him, "It is enough for you, do not speak to Me again about this matter," (Devarim 3:26).

Hannah prayed many times until her request was fulfilled, as the verse states, "And it came to pass, as she prayed for a long time before HASHEM," (1 Shmuel 1:12).

The prophet Yishaya said, "Even if you pray a lot I will not listen," (Yishaya 1:15). The Rabbis explain (Yerushalmi Ta'anis 4:1) that by inference you can derive that when there is not a specific decree from HASHEM, anyone who prays a lot will be answered.⁴

Why is it necessary to increase prayer and exhort HASHEM? It would seem that someone who entreats a king should do so in a businesslike manner, fluently and quickly. And certainly not be a pest, repeating the same request over and over again. What effect does this exhorting have on the relationship between man and his HASHEM?

Another feature of prayer is "And you shall serve Him... with all your souls."

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 18a) cites the opinion of Rabbi Meir, who used to say, "If two people take to bed, both equally sick, or two people are on death row, both with the same sentence, one gets better while the other doesn't, one is released and the other is not. Why? Because this one prayed and was answered, whereas this one prayed and was not answered. And why was this one answered and the other one not answered? One prayed a complete prayer (Rashi explains "with proper intent") and therefore he was answered, and the other did not pray a complete prayer, and therefore he was not answered."

In situations of identical severity there are some who pray and are saved, and some who are not answered, depending on how well they pray.

The Vilna Gaon explains the source of Rabbi Meir's statement is the verse, "And you shall all seek from there the Lord, your God, and you will find

⁴ The Talmud (Berachos 32b) teaches that: "If one prays at length, his prayer does not return empty." Rabbi Yisroel Yaakov Kanievsky (author of *Kehilos Yaakov*), explains in his book *Hayei Olam* (section 2 chapter 28): "If someone spends a long time praying" – it seems that if someone prays very briefly, but he continues to ask for it day after day, it is also included in the category of "spending a long time praying." In other words, the concept of "prayer for a long time" is not specifically referring to praying at length, but rather to an increase of prayer.

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Him, when you seek Him with all your hearts and all your soul," (Devarim 4:29). Notice that the verse begins in the plural ("you shall all seek") and ends in the singular ("you will find"). This teaches that many seek but only a few are answered. The reason is given in the verse, because it requires the seeker to search "with all your heart and with all your soul." Only a complete prayer, which comes from the entire heart and soul, is accepted.

So what is prayer which comes from all the heart and how does one perform such a prayer?

In the Midrash (*Devarim Rabba*; Parshas Vezos Haberaakha; parsha 11; section 10) we find with regard to Moshe Rabbeinu that when he was told that it was decreed that he would not enter the Land of Israel, "the matter was light in his eyes," because he thought, "Israel sinned great sins, but when I asked for mercy for them HASHEM immediately answered me... I, who have never sinned since my youth, when I pray for myself the prayer will certainly be answered."

When HASHEM saw that Moshe didn't consider it so serious and didn't pray straight away, he immediately swore by His great name that Moshe would never enter the Land of Israel.

It turns out that even if it is Moshe who is praying, whose prayer has great intent and ultimate power, if "he doesn't consider it serious," so to speak, and he relies on his power of prayer, the prayer is likely to go unanswered. Why? His attitude came from trust in HASHEM, and the rule is: "He that trusts in HASHEM, mercy surrounds him," (Tehillim 32:10).

Pesikta deRav Kahana (pesikta 22) tells the following story:

A husband and wife were married for ten years without any children. The couple came before Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai and wanted to divorce. Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai said to them, "Just as you were married with a feast, so you shall separate from each other with a feast."

The wife made a big meal. The husband said to his wife, "Take anything you want from my house and go back to your father's home." She gave her husband wine until he was drunk. She motioned to her servant to take him to her father's home.

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In the middle of the night the husband woke up. He said, "Where am I?" His wife said, "You told me that I could take anything I want from your home, and I want nothing more than you."

When Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai heard this he prayed for them and they conceived.

The question is why did Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai pray for them only after he heard this? Why did he not pray immediately that the couple should have a child? Why did he make the couple go through all that rigmarole before Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai would pray?

It must be in order that his prayer be accepted they had to show that they desired it with their souls. Only when the couple showed that they were unable to separate from each other and they had no other recourse, could Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai move things for them through prayer. Why was this necessary before the prayer could be answered?

Prayer of The Poor

There may be a beginning of an understanding of the way of prayer in a definition given by Rav Naftali Trop. He gave a talk, at the request of the Chofetz Chaim, before the recital of *selichos*.

In the *selichos* prayers we say "Like destitute people and indigents we knock on Your door."

There is a difference between someone who is poor and a person who has reached the level of destitute and indigent. A poor person still has something in the house. So if he knocks on a door and is not answered he moves on.

This is not the case with one who is destitute and indigent – he has nothing at all. If a person reaches that level he won't leave the door he is knocking on, and if the door isn't opened, he will keep knocking until he is answered. He has no choice, he has nowhere to go to and nobody else to turn to.

In the prayers it says, "You hear the cry of the poor." When a poor person cries out, HASHEM hears. But "the cry of the indigent You will pay attention and You will save him." This means one who reaches the

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level of indigent, along with the recognition that he has no other hope. He will return to pray again and again. This person has a guarantee that HASHEM will save him.

This type of prayer is referred to by the Rabbis as “encounter” (*pegi’a*) as in the phrase “to request in contention” (*levakesh bemafigi’a*). This “encounter-prayer” is “a huge number of stubborn requests, in order to acquire something desperately needed.” In other words, to ask, and come back and ask again and again until HASHEM answers the requests.

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 16b) says: Every year which is destitute at the beginning will be enriched at its end.” The prayer of the indigent and destitute is answered. Its power is dependent on the understanding that there is no other possibility for salvation. This gives one the ability to beseech again and again until he breaks down the gates.

Prayer which is accompanied by self-surrender, from one who knows that he has run out of any other options, breaks down the gates and knows no boundaries. This was what happened to the couple who had no children and came to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to get divorced. The wife proved that she was unable to separate from her husband and could not live without him. This approach is the manner of prayer.

The Biblical Hannah taught us a chapter about prayer which breaks down the gates. Many of the laws of prayer are learned from her prayer, as we will examine in detail below. Hannah prayed to HASHEM, saying, “O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your servant, and remember me, and not forget Your handmaid.”

The Rabbis (Berachos 31b) gave the following analogy for Hannah’s prayer:

“And she said, O Lord of hosts.” Rabbi Elazar said: From the day that HASHEM created His world there was nobody who called the Holy One, blessed be He, “hosts” until Hannah came and called Him “hosts”. Hannah said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, of all the hosts and hosts that You have created in Your world, is it so hard in Your eyes to give me one son?

To what can this be compared? To a king who made a feast for his servants, and a poor man came and stood by the door and said to them, “Give me a slice of bread,” but no one took any notice of him. So he forced his way into the presence of the king and said to him, “Your

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Majesty, from all this feast which you have made, is it so hard in your eyes to give me a single slice of bread?"

In the depth of his pain a poor person reaches the level of standing before HASHEM. As long as the poor person is standing outside the door, nobody pays him any attention, because his status does not entitle him to take part in the feast. But someone who doesn't give up, and manages to get past the guards and through the walls to get inside the hall, then his prayer is "before HASHEM." This is the meaning of the verse, "A prayer of the poor, when he is faint, and pours out his complaint before HASHEM," (Tehillim 102:1).

Hannah taught us the way of prayer. She called to HASHEM and didn't give up. Hannah reached a situation where she felt that her entire world was collapsing and she acted like an indigent person who raps on the door over and over again – because she had nowhere else to go and all her world depended on opening the gate.

Hannah's prayer teaches about breaking down the gates and about prayer, through which a person entreats without giving up, without easing up, without accepting the reality as a given. Such a prayer seeks to change the order of the world, until even the poor person receives his slice. A person who has nothing to lose will not give up until he reaches the king himself; there all the obstructing forces are powerless, because, as the Talmud says, HASHEM is called "Hosts", which means that all the hosts belong to Him.

"Know before whom you stand." Hannah turned to HASHEM, Who is unlimited. All the natural rules made no difference to her, because for HASHEM there is no concept of "a barren woman" who is unable to give birth. Who could prevent Him from salvation that is beyond nature so that she can give birth?

HASHEM has the power to implant life even if according to the way of the world it is difficult. Is anything difficult for Him? When standing "before HASHEM" and looking at existence with the true outlook, nothing that happens is considered exceptional or impossible. Hannah innovated that one should never despair and never give up. Even if according to the way of the world there is no place for prayer. The one who makes the entire feast can easily give a slice to a poor person, even if he is not worthy to sit at the meal.

A prayer like this is sometimes the difference between life and death, between a sick person who is cured and one who isn't, between someone who is

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sentenced to death whose punishment is carried out and one whose sentence is commuted.

The words of Rabbi Shalom Noah Berezovsky, the Rebbe of the Slonim Hassidim, discussing the power of prayer in his book *Nesivos Shalom* are most appropriate here:

Since one who prays is like a son trusting the mercy of his father even though he does not deserve it and is not worthy. Therefore all accusations against him are irrelevant, as we find in *Midrash Shohar Tov* (Tehillim 25) on the verse, "O my God, I have trusted in You, let me not be ashamed," (Tehillim 25:2). This can be compared to a traveler who came to the city of the king. The king's guards found him and began hitting him. He said to them, "Don't hit me because I'm one of the king's household." They took him before the king. The king asked him, "Are you acquainted with me?" "No," he replied. "Then why," asked the king, "did you say that you are part of my household?" He replied, "I am not from your household, but I trust in you and your great kindness. I knew that if I come to you, you would have mercy on me." The king told his guards, "Since he trusted in me, let him go."

A complete prayer is one which comes from a complete feeling of "We have nobody to rely on but our Father in Heaven." A complete prayer is prayer with total concentration, from one who has reached a deep understanding that everything he sees and feels is only a husk of true existence. In reality, "There is nothing beside Him."

Someone who reaches that feeling and understanding knows that on the one hand nothing can harm him, and on the other hand any natural efforts that he makes won't help.

This recognition, when it shines through a person and permeates his existence, it breaks down the gates. For when a person comes to the king himself with this recognition, the king's reaction will be – if you have made it this far, I too will be to also remove all the walls and help you.

We find this also in the words of Rabbi Chaim Volozhin in his book *Nefesh Hachayim* (*sha'ar* 3, chapter 12):

In truth it is an important concept and wonderful charm to remove from himself and nullify all the obstructing forces and intents of others who will not be able to rule over him or make any impression: When a person fixes in his heart that HASHEM is the true God, and there is no

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other power besides Him in the world... and he removes from his heart completely and ignores any force or intention in the world, and subjugates and attaches the purity of his thoughts solely to the single Master, blessed is He, then HASHEM will allow him, that all the forces and intentions in the world will be rendered incapable of impacting him in any way whatsoever.

The principle of the matter is in a Mishna in Rosh Hashanah (2:8) which discusses the meaning of the verse which describes the war against Amalek. "And it was when Moshe raised his hands that Yisrael prevailed, and when he lowered his hands Amalek prevailed," (Shemos 17:11).

The Mishna asks:

Did Moshe's hands win the war or lose the war? Rather this teaches you that when Yisrael would look upwards and subjugate their hearts to their Father in Heaven they would prevail. But if not, they would fall.

The Mishna continues to explain another verse based on the same principle. "And HASHEM said to Moshe, 'Make for yourself a serpent and place it on a pole, and anyone who is bitten shall look at it and live,'" (Bamidbar 21:8).

The Mishna asks:

Does the snake kill or give life? Rather, when Yisrael looked upwards and subjugated their hearts to their Father in Heaven they were cured. But if not, they would perish.

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin explains in *Nefesh Hachayim* (*sha'ar* 3; chapter 12 in the footnote) that, "this means that when they looked upwards at the snake and the serpent and contemplated its power of evil, and despite this removed it from their hearts and paid no attention to its powerful force, but truly subjugated their hearts solely to their Father in Heaven, they would be cured. This is truly the concept of tempering the forces of obstruction at their root – it is clear to one who understands [kabbalah]."

Indeed, this must be the intent for prayer. Rav Pincus explains, as we shall see later, that intent in prayer does not mean that when a person reaches the prayer "Heal us" (*refa'einu*) he cries out from the depths of his heart that someone should be cured. Rather, his intent must be entwined in the recognition that there is no power other than HASHEM, Who gives death and

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life, Who creates cures and brings salvation. He is the One Who made sick and He is the One Who has the power to heal.

A complete prayer, then, is the prayer of one who understands that there is nothing else.

The Talmud (Nida 70b) teaches:

The people of Alexandria asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananiah, "What should a person do to become wise?" He replied to them, "He should spend more time sitting [in front of the Sages] and less time trading." They said to him, "Many have done this, and it didn't help them." Rather, "he should pray for mercy from the One to Whom wisdom belongs, as the verse states, "For HASHEM gives wisdom, from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding," (Mishle 2:6).

They further asked him, "What should a person do to become rich?" He said to them, "He should spend more time trading and act honestly in business." They said to him, "Many have done this, and it didn't help them." Rather, "he should pray for mercy from the One to Whom wealth belongs, as the verse states, "Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold, says HASHEM of Hosts," (Haggai 2:8).

The Talmud asks, "What does this teach us? What was Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananiah's insight? This advice is obvious – in everything a person does he requires the help of Heaven and prayer.

The Talmud answers that Rabbi Yehoshua came to teach that, "One without the other doesn't help." It is impossible to have one without the other. In other words, prayer will only be accepted when a person knows that "many have done this, and it didn't help them." Only when he has reached the understanding that natural efforts by themselves do not help, and only if HASHEM wills it will he become wealthy or wise.

The way of prayer is the way of the destitute, the one who knocks on the doors without giving up, because there is no other alternative. However, it is forbidden for a person to assume that if he prays a lot and beseeches with all his heart that his prayer will certainly be answered. Sometimes the father who loves his son says, "No," to his beloved son's request if the thing the son wants is not for the son's benefit. Sometimes HASHEM has made a decree and

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we have no permission to question it. The ways of Divine Providence are hidden from us.

We find this in the *midrash* cited earlier, that Moshe at first was not concerned about the decree that he wouldn't enter Israel because he relied on the power of his prayer. None can compare to Moshe in the recognition that "there is no other power besides Him in the world." Nevertheless, his prayer was not accepted, because Providence had decreed it for reasons that are beyond our understanding.

Similarly, we find in the Talmud (Berachos 32b): "Rabbi Chanin said in the name of Rabbi Chanina, 'If one prays at length, his prayer does not return empty.'"

The Talmud challenges this based on a statement in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "If one prays at length and looks deeply into it, he will eventually come to heartache."

The Talmud answers that the one who prays at length and comes to heartache is one who "prays at length and looks deeply into it."

Rashi explains: "Looks deeply into it – one who looks and waits for his lengthy prayer to be answered."

Similarly, *Tosafos* explain that one who thinks that because he had the correct intent in his prayer his requests will necessarily come true, will end up disappointed.

It is true that HASHEM "hears prayer," but it is not always correct to accept the pleas of a loved one because sometimes, according to Heavenly calculations, which are beyond human comprehension, it is better for the person that his requests not be fulfilled.

Nevertheless, the Talmud concludes there:

Rabbi Chama, son of Rabbi Chanina, says: If a person sees that his prayer is not answered he should pray again, as the verse states, "Hope in HASHEM; be strong, and let your heart have courage; and hope in HASHEM," (Tehillim 27:14).

Indeed, even when the door that a person is knocking on does not open – if he is destitute and has no other recourse – he will continue to entreat and hope, without falling to despair or dismay.

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But we find an even higher instruction from the Rabbis. They taught (Berachos 31a) that, "One may not stand to pray from sadness nor from laziness... but from happiness of the mitzvah."

This doesn't seem to make sense, because one must pray not only when things are good for him but also when he is wrapped in grief. Especially when his situation is at its worst he is most in need of salvation. Therefore, how can a person in dire straits pray in a state of happiness? How can all those who suffer or are depressed pray in happiness, when their hearts are bitter? Can we say that it is forbidden for such a person to pray, since the Talmud says one may not pray in sadness? But didn't Hannah pray when she was sad and suffering, as the verse states, "Her soul was bitter, and she prayed on HASHEM as she was crying," (Shmuel 1:10).

However, if we look closely at Hannah's prayer based on what we said above in terms of the correct spirit of one who prays, we can also answer this question.

It is true that according to the nature of things Hannah had good reasons for her bitterness. However, as we said, Hannah taught us the way of prayer. She reached a deep internal understanding that everything that she was experiencing was not reality itself, but only a husk of reality. The center of existence is the will of HASHEM. Therefore, there is no room for despair at all in the world. The situation was not hopeless, and she was not lost, because she had HASHEM to turn to.

This faith itself infuses into the one praying "happiness of the mitzvah." The happiness that we can turn to HASHEM himself, and to break through all the barriers. Hannah knew that the One who wipes tears from all faces is HASHEM. Hannah was in a deep crisis; her heart was bitter and she was whispering her prayer as the tears flowed down her cheeks. Yet the tears running down her face contained the spark of an enlightening smile, which was nurtured from the spring of prayer. She didn't give up but sensed and knew that there was One to turn to, One Who could save.

Therefore, the verse states that at the end of her prayer, "The woman went on her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad," (Shmuel 1:18).⁵

⁵ Perhaps we can add to what we said above that this may be the reason that Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai didn't immediately pray for the couple who came to him, since they were depressed and sad. Rabbi Shimon told them to separate in happiness. When they were happy they themselves found the strength of soul to understand that nothing was lost because there is nothing that can prevent God from saving. They didn't give up. When they came back to

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In this chapter we dealt with the manner of prayer, and we found what must be investigated regarding the essence of prayer. In the coming chapters we will examine the essence of prayer, and we will see how and why the manner of prayer fits in with the essence of prayer and is derived from it.

CHAPTER TWO: The Obligation of Prayer

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The obligation of prayer is derived by the Rabbis from the verse, "To love HASHEM, your God, and to serve him with all your hearts and with all your souls" (Devarim 10:12). The Rabbis ask, "What type of service is in the heart? You must say that this refers to prayer," (Ta'anis 2a).

A straightforward reading of this statement implies that the obligation of prayer is from the Torah.⁶ However, the Talmud does not specify when the Torah obligates one to pray.

Dispute Between Rambam And Ramban

⁶ Magen Avraham on Shulchan Aruch 106:2 writes that the verse, "to serve Him with all your hearts" is the source for the obligation of prayer.

We find similarly that Rabbeinu Mano'ach (commentary on Rambam *Hilchos Tefillah* 1:1) writes that the Rabbis learned from the tradition going back to Moshe that the verse, "To serve Him with all your hearts," comes to teach the mitzvah of prayer. However, Rambam in *Hilchos Tefillah* chapter 1 derives the obligation of prayer from the verse, "And you shall serve the Lord, your God," (Shemos 23:25). Whereas from the verse, "to serve Him with all your hearts," he only learns that the word "serve" in the Torah means "prayer."

Kesef Mishneh explains that Rambam holds that the obligation of prayer cannot be derived from the verse of, "To serve Him with all your hearts," because this verse is describing a situation, in the second paragraph of the *Shema*, where HASHEM promises that He will give His blessing if the Jewish people listen to Him. *Kesef Mishneh*, accordingly, explains the Rambam's position deriving the obligation of prayer from the verse in Shemos: "And you shall serve the Lord, your God."

Look at what Rambam wrote in *Sefer Hamitzvos* (positive mitzvah 5) where he writes that the obligation of prayer is repeated several times in the Torah: "You shall serve the Lord your God," (Shemos 23:25); "And you shall serve Him," (Devarim 10:12); "You shall serve Him," (Devarim 6:13); "You shall serve Him with all your hearts," (Devarim 10:12). This service refers also to Torah study (based on the *Sifri* Devarim 41 which states, "And to serve Him" – this refers to study). The Rabbis said (*Midrash Tanna'im* from *Midrash Hagadol* Parshas Re'eh) that, "The Lord, your God, you must fear, and you must serve Him," – serve Him through study, serve Him in His temple.

Nevertheless, Rambam holds that "even though this commandment (to serve God) is one of the general commandments, it also specifically refers to prayer." In other words, the phrase, "service of God," is not only a general concept which applies to all mitzvos, but also refers to the specific obligation of prayer.

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Rambam rules (*Hilchos Tefillah* 1:1) that the obligation to pray is by Torah law and that this obligation requires one to pray every single day.

It is a positive mitzvah to pray every day,⁷ as the verse states, "To love HASHEM, your God," (Devarim 11:13). [The Rabbis] have an oral tradition that this "service" is prayer, as the verse states, "And to serve Him with all your hearts." The Rabbis stated, "What type of service is in the heart? This is prayer."

Nevertheless Rambam writes that the number of times one must pray each day, the times of prayer and the text of the prayers are not defined by the Torah (*Hilchos Tefillah* 1:1).⁸ It was the Sages who instituted the obligation to pray at three specific times each day, as the Talmud explains, "The [three] prayer [services] were instituted to correspond to the daily sacrifices" (Berachos 26b). The Sages fixed the times of prayer to correspond to the times the daily sacrifices were offered.

Ramban disagreed with Rambam (in his glosses on *Sefer Hamitzvos* positive mitzvah 5) and held that the requirement for fixed prayer every day is not a Torah obligation.⁹ "Rather it is the kindness of the Creator toward us that He listens to us whenever we call out to Him," Ramban wrote.

If so, what does the verse "To serve him with all your hearts" mean?

According to Ramban it can be explained in one of two ways:

Either the obligation of prayer is rabbinic, so the verse is not the source but a support (*asmakhta*) for the rabbinic ruling;¹⁰

Or the requirement to pray is a Torah obligation, however the verse does not require fixed, daily prayer but an obligation to turn to HASHEM and cry out to him in times of need and trouble.

Ramban explains:

⁷ See Zohar volume 2, p. 270b which states that it is a mitzvah for a person, "To pray every day the morning prayer, the afternoon prayer and the evening prayer." See also Zohar on Pinchas p. 257a and the commentary of *Masok Midvash* there.

⁸ See also *Sefer Hamitzvos* (positive mitzvah 10).

⁹ Later we will see other opinions which agree with Ramban. *Magen Avraham* (106:4) points out that most authorities hold like Ramban.

¹⁰ Rashi also explains it this way, as we will see below.

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That our eyes and hearts should turn only to Him as a servant looks to his master. The mitzvah is to pray in times of need and to believe that HASHEM hears our prayers and that it is He who saves us from suffering through our prayers and cries. Understand this.¹¹

Talmudic Support for Rambam And Ramban

Ramban proves his view from three sources.

1. The Talmud (Berachos 21a) rules that a person who is impure due to a seminal emission and has not immersed in a mikva¹² must read *Shema* and recite *Birkas Hamazon* (Grace after Meals) which are obligated by Torah law, but he is exempt from certain mitzvos which are by rabbinic law, for example prayer.

This appears to show that daily, fixed prayer is a rabbinic obligation.

2. The Talmud there also says that if one is uncertain whether he has prayed or not he does not pray again because of the principle that "doubt in a rabbinic matter is lenient."

This also appears to show clearly that prayer is a rabbinic law.

¹¹ Look at *Sefer Hachinuch* mitzvah 433: There is no set time for this mitzvah from the Torah. Therefore, our Rabbis disagreed about the nature of the mitzvah. Rambam wrote in his great book (*Hilchos Tefillah* 1:1) that the mitzvah is to pray every day. Ramban (glosses to *Sefer Hamitzvos* positive mitzvah 5) disagrees with him and writes that the Torah did not command us to pray every day, nor every week or any specific time. The Talmudic Rabbis always say, "Prayer is rabbinic." Ramban, like one who is in doubt, says that the mitzvah is to pray and to cry out to God in times of trouble. Rambam himself also writes that the number of prayers and the wording of the prayers is not from the Torah, and prayer has no specific time by Torah law. Nevertheless, the Torah obligation is to entreat God every day and to give thanks to Him, because His is the dominion and He has the power to fulfil any request. *Divrei Yo'el* (*Choshen Mishpat siman* 139) rules that nowadays, when we are sunk in exile, we have no greater time of trouble than this, and the obligation of prayer is by Torah law even according to Ramban.

See a difficult *Pri Megadim* (general introduction, 5:36) who writes that on Shabbos and Yomtov the obligation of prayer is by Torah law.

¹² Bava Kama 82a: "Ezra instituted immersion for one who had a seminal emission." In other words, even though by Torah law it is permitted for one who experienced a seminal emission to be involved in matters of holiness though he is still impure, like anyone else who is impure, Ezra and his court singled out this kind of impurity and instituted that one who experienced a seminal emission may not read the Torah until he has immersed.

The Talmud, however, points out that this decree was subsequently nullified. Rambam rules at the end of *Hilchos Keri'as Shema*: Since the decree did not spread throughout the Jewish people and the majority of the public was unable to keep it, therefore it was nullified. The custom of all Jews is to read the Torah and *Shema* even after experiencing a seminal emission, since words of Torah cannot become impure, but remain pure eternally.

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3. The Talmud (Sukkah 38a¹³) asks why the Mishna requires one to interrupt his meal to perform the mitzvah of lulav if he forgot to do so before eating whereas if one has begun eating before the earliest time for the afternoon prayer he is not required to stop his meal when it is time to pray. Rava answers that the difference is that the mitzvah of lulav is a Torah obligation whereas prayer is a rabbinic obligation.

Ramban concludes that there is no Torah obligation to pray every day.

"If there is no daily obligation when does the Torah obligate us to pray? Once a year? Or once in a lifetime? ... Rather prayer is certainly not an obligation at all, but rather it is the kindness of the Creator toward us that He listens to us whenever we call out to Him."

How would Rambam explain the sources that Ramban brings which imply that there is no Torah mitzvah of daily prayer?

Kesef Mishneh (Hilchos Tefillah 1:1) explains by bringing out two points:

1. Rambam concedes that there is no requirement to pray every day with a specific order of prayer.
Even though there is a Torah obligation to pray every day, the set form of prayer is not part of the mitzvah. Rambam rules (*Hilchos Tefillah 1:1*): "The form of prayer is not from the Torah."

In other words, a person fulfills his Torah obligation with any form of prayer that he wants.
2. The requirement to pray three times daily is not by Torah law.
There is a Torah obligation to pray daily, but there is no obligation to pray three times daily. Rambam rules (*Hilchos Tefillah 1:1*): "It is a positive mitzvah to pray every day." But he does not mention any requirement to pray three times daily, because it is sufficient to pray once a day to fulfil one's Torah obligation.

These two points resolve the Talmudic sources which Ramban brought:

¹³ See also Shabbos 9a,

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1. The Talmud (Berachos 21a) says that a person who has experienced a seminal emission may not pray the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, which is the text established by the Rabbis. However, it is clear that he would still have the Torah obligation of prayer. So, even a man who has experienced a seminal emission must recite a short prayer once a day.
2. The Talmud (Berachos 21a) says that when a person is in doubt as to whether or not he prayed, he should not repeat the prayer. Similarly, the Talmud (Sukkah 38a) says that the obligation of prayer is rabbinic. *Kesef Mishneh* explains that this refers to a case when the person has already prayed at least once that day. In such a case the obligation for the rest of the prayers is rabbinic. But if he has not prayed even once on that day, he has a Torah obligation to pray. Therefore, if he is unsure as to whether he has prayed at all on that day he should pray again based on the principle in a case of doubt regarding a Torah prohibition one acts stringently.

This explanation also gives us an understanding of Rashi's opinion on the subject.

In the Mishna in Berachos (20a-b) we find that, "Women, slaves and minors are exempt from reciting *Shema* and from *tefillin* but are obligated in prayer, *mezuzah* and Grace after Meals."

The Talmud explains that prayer is like a positive, time-bound mitzvah, based on the verse, "Evening and morning and noon I will speak and shout, and He will hear my voice," (Tehillim 55:18). In general women are exempt from time-bound positive mitzvot. Nevertheless, women are obligated to pray, because prayer is an asking for mercy, and everyone needs the mercy of Heaven.¹⁴

Rashi explains the Mishna saying, "Prayer is a request for mercy, and it is a rabbinic mitzvah,¹⁵ and the Rabbis also instituted it for women and for children who are old enough to be educated."¹⁶

¹⁴ In *Yalkut Shimoni* (I Shmuel *remez* 80; *os* 2) we find another source for women's obligation to pray: The verse says, "And Hannah prayed," – from here we learn that women are obligated to pray, because Hannah was reciting the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer.

¹⁵ So, too, is Rashi's commentary on the topic of "one who is involved in performing a mitzvah is exempt from (performing another) mitzvah" (Berachos 17b) to be understood. There the Talmud teaches that one who is taking an active part in a funeral (i.e. carrying the coffin) is defined as involved in performing a mitzvah and exempt from all other mitzvos.

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Rashi adds that this refers to the mitzvah that was established by the Rabbis, because if it was a Torah mitzvah, since it is a time-bound mitzvah it would not apply to women.¹⁷ However, since it is rabbinic, it is understandable that the Rabbis instituted that women are also obligated, since it is essential for them too.

Tosafos there (s.v. *batefillah*) have a different text of the Talmud which reads: "You would have thought that since the verse states, "Evening, morning and noon," it is like a positive time-bound mitzvah [such that women would be exempt], therefore [the Mishna] teaches us [that women are obligated]."

Tosafos add that Rashi did not have this text of the Talmud because prayer is a rabbinic mitzvah, and therefore it cannot be considered a positive time-bound mitzvah.

However, *Tosafos* reinstated this text because they hold that the principle of "women are exempt from time-bound positive mitzvos" still applies even to rabbinic mitzvos, like the recitation of Hallel.

From *Tosafos'* explanation it appears that Rashi holds (like Ramban) that the obligation of prayer is rabbinic, and *Tosafos* does not disagree on that point.

However, according to *Kesef Mishneh's* explanation it is not necessary to say that Rashi holds that the entire basis of prayer is rabbinic. It is certainly possible to say that Rashi holds that the obligation of some form of prayer is by Torah law, but the set text is rabbinic. Therefore, Rashi explains the

However, those who are not needed to carry the coffin are obligated in Torah mitzvos. Nevertheless, the Mishna says that "both groups are exempt from prayer." Even those who are not actively involved in the funeral and are obligated in Torah mitzvos are exempt from prayer. Rashi explains the reason is because prayer "is not a Torah law."

¹⁶ In contrast, *Rif* (ad loc.) rules that women are obligated in prayer because it is not a time-bound positive mitzvah. This implies, however, that prayer is a positive Torah mitzvah and women are obligated since according to Torah law it has no fixed time.

¹⁷ Rambam disagrees and holds that prayer is not a time-bound mitzvah, even though it is from the Torah, because the requirement to pray does not have a fixed time. The set times for prayer were set by the Rabbis.

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Talmud which refers to women's obligation in the fixed text of prayer as being rabbinic.¹⁸

These sources show there are clear practical differences between the views of Rambam and Ramban.

Ramban, in his glosses on Rambam, writes that when someone is uncertain as to whether they prayed at all that day; according to Rambam, prayer is by Torah law and thus the principle of "doubt in a Torah matter is stringent" applies and the person must pray again. But according to Ramban, prayer is rabbinic and the principle of "doubt in a rabbinic matter is lenient" applies and the person would not need to pray again.

Similarly, if a person has not prayed at all one day and remembers at twilight, a time when it is a doubt as to whether it is considered day or night, according to Rambam the principle of "doubt in a Torah matter is stringent" applies and the person must pray. But according to Ramban the principle of "doubt in a rabbinic matter is lenient" applies and the person would be exempt from prayer.¹⁹

Explanation of Rambam's Opinion

Commentaries on Rambam explain the source for his ruling that the obligation to pray every day is by Torah law.

Kesef Mishneh explains that Rambam derives it by reason.

¹⁸ Likewise, can we explain Rashi's opinion (Berachos 17b) that since prayer is rabbinic, even someone who is not carrying the coffin, and therefore is not classified as "involved in a mitzvah," is exempt from prayer. He means that all those participating in a funeral are exempt from reciting the fixed *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer which was established by the Rabbis. Nevertheless, it would make sense that such a person is required to say a short prayer in order to fulfil the Torah obligation of prayer.

¹⁹ *Pri Megadim* 89; Introduction to the Laws of Prayer.

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This obligation must be to pray every day, because if it isn't daily what other definition could there be? Once in a lifetime? That is unreasonable.

So, the obligation must be to pray daily, but the number of daily prayers is not by Torah law. Once a day is sufficient to fulfil the Torah obligation.

However, this logic is not correct and is not sufficient. It is not correct because why would it be unreasonable for the Torah obligation to be to pray only once in a lifetime? To say it cannot mean that is to assume the conclusion.

It is not sufficient because even if you say that the definition of prayer as "service of HASHEM" requires a higher frequency than once in a lifetime, it doesn't explain the precise Torah obligation of prayer once a day. Perhaps it means once every two days, or twice a day?

Lechem Mishneh cites *Kiryas Sefer* who writes that the source for the obligation of daily prayer is from the verse, "You shall serve HASHEM," and "service" means "prayer." And the conclusion of that verse is, "And He will bless your bread and your water."

Just as bread and water are needed every day, so too prayer must be daily so that one can ask for his physical needs through prayer.

However, this explanation is also insufficient. Because even if it refers to an obligation connected to daily needs and necessities it is still unclear why prayer should be precisely once a day. Perhaps it is required several times a day, or perhaps before every meal. Or perhaps only once every few days when a person brings home his food.

The commentaries on the Rambam are better understood in light of what Rabbi Shimshon Pincus in *Tiferes Shimshon* (Bamidbar p. 94-96) explains as follows:

One of the great principles in Divine Providence is that even though HASHEM sees everything and knows all existence, He arranged things in His world so that it is as if he doesn't see what isn't shown to him and as if He doesn't know what isn't pointed out to Him... Similarly, with the troubles facing a person. Even if the person is truly in deep trouble, but he doesn't tell it to his Creator, the ways of Providence are such that it is as if HASHEM doesn't see and doesn't hear, and the matters seen in Heaven are based solely on what is told before Him.

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The requirement of daily prayer fits nicely with this explanation of Divine Providence. In order that a person achieve what he wants and succeed in his actions he must express it verbally and pray. It seems that the definition of prayer as "service of the heart" comes from the fact that a person must believe that HASHEM provides all his needs for him and that HASHEM will not do so if the person doesn't recognize it and doesn't ask for it.

Rav Pincus develops the idea further in his introduction to *She'arim Batefillah*.

Even if a person merits, either through his actions or through Divine kindness to receive a blessing or salvation, and it is laid out ready for him, that goodness will not happen to him without prayer. Because the essence of prayer is that it is the gate through which everything passes. Without passing through that gate, nothing will come into actuality.

The experts on Divine worship, the masters of service, learned this principle from the beginning of Bereishis which states, "And all plants of the field were not yet on the earth and all the grass of the field had not yet sprouted because Lord HASHEM had not yet brought rain on the earth, and there was no man to work the land," (Bereishis 2:5).

Rashi explains: "When the creation was completed on the sixth day, before man was created, all the plants had not yet sprouted. On the third day, when it says, 'The land brought forth grass,' they did not sprout, but waited at the opening of the ground until the sixth day."

Why? "Because Lord HASHEM had not yet brought rain on the earth."

And why had He not brought rain? Because "there was no man to work the land," and nobody to recognize the benefit of rain. When Adam came and knew that the world needed rain, he prayed for it and it fell, and the trees and grasses grew. This is what the Rabbis say (Chullin 60b) and they conclude that this "teaches you that HASHEM desires the prayers of the righteous."

This explains a principle regarding everything that comes into existence. Nothing is given without prayer.

This is ingrained in the very fabric of the world... That everything is waiting at the opening of the ground, but nothing will be given, nothing physical and nothing spiritual, until a person comes and brings it out of the ground through prayer. Because everything must

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pass through the gate of prayer. And if the gates are not opened, none of the things prepared and designated for us will come to fruition.

Therefore prayer, which stands at the gates of heaven, withholds from us all the blessings and goodness.

A similar idea is found with the patriarch Yitzchak. "HASHEM heard his entreaties," (Bereishis 25:21). Even though HASHEM had already promised Avraham that he would have future generations, they wouldn't come into the world without prayer, and only through Yitzchak's prayers did HASHEM listen to him.

Similarly, with the redemption from Egypt. Even though HASHEM had promised and sworn to the Patriarchs that it would happen, the Torah still writes, "The Lord listened to their cries," and without prayer they would not have been redeemed.

So, it turns out that even though we may think that prayer is intended to allow a person to get something that he does not deserve or avert calamity, in fact prayer is necessary even when the Divine Will is for good. It is needed to provide the goodness which was already prepared for the person. The way Divine Providence operates is that in every situation a person must pray to open the gate, and nothing comes to a person, even if it is already prepared for him to receive, without the person coming to ask for it.

Based on this we understand why prayer is the service of HASHEM, and why it is required every day.

Prayer is the service of HASHEM, because it is based within a person in his fundamental faith that there is nothing he attains through his own abilities. Rather everything comes from HASHEM. This foundation of faith is the service of HASHEM. In order to implant this faith, the Creator made a system through which nothing is given to a person without him asking HASHEM for it.

If so, it is clear that it is necessary to pray every day. Aside from the general principle that the mitzvah of faith is a constant mitzvah that one should be occupied with daily, the daily obligation of prayer is a direct outcome of the constant renewed daily needs of a person's existence.

A single day is parallel to the entire cycle of life, similar to "And it was evening, and it was morning, one day." Therefore, when the new day begins the Rabbis established the morning blessings, on the renewal of the day. And similarly, with all the other blessings of praise, like when a person sees

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lightning or hears thunder, *halakha* dictates that he recites the blessing only "once a day."

A person is bound by time, and the consciousness of things that happen in the daily cycle of existence – eating, working, learning and sleeping.²⁰ At the beginning of each cycle, a person gets up and says, "I thank give thanks before You, living, eternal King, that you returned my soul in me with kindness, your faithfulness is great."

Indeed, at each of these daily life cycles a person does many things. He must repeat and internalize that it is not through his strength or his abilities that he does anything. Rather he merely makes the attempt but doesn't achieve anything. Therefore, he must set aside time for prayer every day in which he details everything he needs and asks HASHEM for them. This type of prayer implants in his heart the recognition that every success and achievement of his daily needs for existence come from HASHEM.

Kesef Mishneh's words, that prayer must logically be every day, is based on this understanding that prayer implants faith. Nobody can reasonably assume that it would be enough to pray once in a lifetime.

Just as faith must accompany him throughout his entire life, so too prayer, the "service of HASHEM," is necessary for him in each part of his daily life. Similarly, this explains the opinion of the *Lechem Mishneh* who explained that prayer is needed daily like bread and water, which are part of the constant cycle of life and daily needs.²¹

Explanation of Ramban's View

We have seen that Ramban, in his glosses on *Sefer Hamitzvos* (positive mitzvah 5) disagrees with Rambam and holds that the obligation of fixed daily prayer

²⁰ *Maharal* in *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Ha'avodah* chapter 3) examines in detail how the times of prayer in the morning, afternoon and evening, were fixed precisely to correspond to times when a person ends a certain stage of his daily life (sleep, efforts at earning a living). He stands before God to give thanks on what has been and to pray for the future. In so doing a person subjugates his thoughts, actions and his efforts at providing for his needs, to God.

²¹ Rabbi Chanania Kazes in his book *Kinas Sofrim* when speaking about mitzvah 5 in Ramban's *Sefer Hamitzvos* is surprised at the Ramban's opinion that a person only needs to pray at times of trouble. Every day a person is faced with the struggle of life, and that which he needs, for the Creator gives him his needs each at their proper time. "The needs of people are constant, and without them they wouldn't be able to exist. And our eyes are turned to God because he gives us our food at its time."

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is not a Torah law. Rather, “It is the kindness of the Creator toward us that He listens to us whenever we call out to Him.”

However, how is a person calling for help and assistance considered to be “service in the heart?” How could it be that the Rabbis defined prayer as “service of HASHEM,” when, according to Ramban, prayer is at its essence the kindness of the Creator Who listens to us whenever we call out to Him? Even if we assume that the verse is a support (*asmachta*) how could the essence of prayer change from one extreme to the other? How can the Rabbis switch that which is defined as a human need and the kindness of the Creator, to a person’s whole-hearted service?

It appears that Ramban’s opinion is fundamentally different from that of Rambam.

According to Rambam, the Torah fixed prayer as a positive commandment, thus prayer is a fulfilment of a commandment, whereas according to Ramban, prayer is not an act of fulfilling a command.

In fact, it is the opposite. It is the kindness of HASHEM that a person is able to pray to Him and He will answer. According to Ramban, prayer is the testing point of a person’s faith – whether at the moment of truth, when he feels the need to receive help, does he immediately think of natural ways to help himself, or does he first of all turn to HASHEM for help, and believe with all his heart that HASHEM will save him.²²

Therefore, according to Ramban, prayer is not a mitzvah on its own, like an obligation to turn to HASHEM. Rather it is something necessary for a believing person who knows that there is no relief or salvation for him other than his Father in Heaven. The true test happens when a person finds himself in dire straits. In such a case it is clear that his senses force him to act to save himself with whatever practical means are available, and the fact that he chooses to

²² It is natural for a person in an unexpected situation to save himself, if he believes there is a way to do so. Similarly, we find in *Midrash Rabba* on Koheles (*parsha 7*) that one who doesn’t repent when he has the opportunity to do so is acting in a very disturbing manner, and it gives an analogy: A gang of thieves which was trapped in jail, one of them tunneled his way out, and they all fled, except for one who remained. When the jailer came he started to beat the remaining thief with a stick. He said to him, “You unlucky fool! There was a tunnel in front of you and you didn’t bother to escape!” Similarly, in the future, God will say to the wicked that the opportunity for repentance was before them, but they didn’t avail themselves of it.

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call out to HASHEM for help and to place the burden of his trust on Him demonstrates his faith that his only help comes from HASHEM.²³

If a person doesn't pray and doesn't use the opportunity to be saved through prayer, it is a sign that he doesn't believe that turning to HASHEM is a condition of salvation or that HASHEM's help is the only thing that can save.

In Rav Pincus's words (ibid):

See how wonderful the words of Sefer Hachinuch are. He wrote about this point that one who transgresses it is like one who removes Divine Providence from himself. It is clear that in every situation a person encounters, if he was with a friend who could help him, he would immediately ask for help. For example, someone who climbs a ladder and notices that the ladder is wobbling beneath him, will naturally call out to those down below to hold the ladder. Similarly, one who knows and feels the simple reality that HASHEM is always close to him, should simply say "I wait for Your salvation, HASHEM," (Bereishis 49:18), "Please HASHEM, Master of the Universe, hold the ladder for me so that I don't fall." ²⁴

²³ Ramban's view of medical treatment is similar (Ramban on Parshas Behukosai; Vayikra 26:11). There Ramban writes: When the Jewish people are perfect and numerous and will not be subject to nature at all... God will remove any illness from them, until they will not need doctors. They will not need to heed medical warnings at all, as the verse states, "I am HASHEM your Healer," (Shemos 15:26). And this is what the righteous would do at the time of the prophets – when some sin caused them to become ill they didn't call the doctors, but the prophets... and they would ask the prophet for advice rather than asking a doctor. What portion do doctors have in the house of those who do the will of God, since God promised, "I will bless your bread and your waters, and remove from your midst all sickness," (Shemos 23:25). But [people] do turn to doctors, and HASHEM leaves them to the randomness of nature. This is the intent of the Rabbis who explained the verse, " 'And He will surely heal' – from here we derive that a doctor has permission to heal." They didn't say that a sick person has permission to be cured. Rather, once the sick person is ill and he comes for a cure, for he has become accustomed to use cures, and he is not from the community of HASHEM who have a portion of life, the doctor is not forbidden to heal him etc., because the Torah does not rely on miracles etc. But when HASHEM favors a man's way he will have nothing to do with medical cures."

In other words, the verse which allows a doctor to heal does not describe an ideal situation but is a concession to a person who doesn't trust God enough and wants to find some cure from a doctor. Such a person actually needs the doctors, and with regard to such a person the doctors have permission to heal, according to Ramban. However, one who trusts God completely will not need a doctor. Look at the extended discussion of this point in my (Hebrew) book "*Faith and Effort*" (Feldheim) pages 95-126.

²⁴ Look at the words of Rav Yerucham Halevi Levovitz in his book, *Da'as Torah* on Shemos, p. 134: "These with their chariot and these with their horses," (Tehillim 20:8) – the nations have

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It seems that according to Ramban, prayer is not the fulfilment of a mitzvah of its own, but expresses a human need, that the Creator answers in His kindness. However, prayer expresses the level of trust a person has in HASHEM, and this is how he shows his service of HASHEM. Prayer, which is defined as "service of the heart," is not of itself the service of HASHEM. Rather, faith in HASHEM, which is expressed through the medium of prayer, is the service of the heart, and that is the mitzvah. The goal of serving HASHEM in the heart is expressed through prayer in times of trouble. Then a person requires help and is obligated by Torah law to turn with his troubles to HASHEM through prayer, or through daily prayer that the Rabbis instituted in order to accustom us to turn to HASHEM for help in every need and matter.

It seems, in light of this, that there are practical ramifications between the approaches of Rambam and Ramban, other than the question of whether in cases of doubt we should rule stringently, or leniently.

According to Rambam prayer is a constant daily Torah obligation.

According to Ramban prayer is not a fixed obligation. Rather there is a Torah obligation to pray only at times of trouble as an expression of a person's obligation of faith, to place his burden on HASHEM alone.

What is the status of one who has already prayed that day and then is thrown into a difficult or troublesome situation?

"chariots" and "horses" which is the portion that God gave them. But "We will call on the name of HASHEM," (ibid.) – we have nothing, we are not subject to nature. Everything that occurs to Jews is beyond nature. If so, in truth there is no difference to us whether our situation is of ease and relief, or of stress and strife – we are constantly hanging by a thread not maintaining any stance or approach. Who can we trust? Who will save us? We have nothing we can trust for salvation other than our Father in Heaven. "We will call on the name of the Lord, our God." This is the secret of prayer, which comes only after the total recognition that there is nothing other than HASHEM. There is none beside Him. This is the meaning of, "They grasped the trade of their fathers," because then they reached the level of the holy patriarchs, who were constantly "out of the straits" calling only to HASHEM. For this reason, all situations are identical whether a situation of plenty or one of trouble and pressure, only "He" can save us. When we truly recognize that there is no help or salvation other than through Him, then certainly, "A prayer of the poor, when he is faint, and pours out his complaint before HASHEM," (Tehillim 102:1). This is the trade of their fathers.

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According to Rambam he has already fulfilled his Torah obligation by praying once, and he is not obligated to pray again. He has fulfilled the obligatory mitzvah action of asking for his needs.²⁵

According to Ramban, however, the situation creates a new Torah obligation to pray.

This can be inferred from the *Sefer Hachinuch* who quotes the opinions of both Rambam and Ramban. At the end of *mitzvah* 433 he writes: This mitzvah applies in every place and every time, for males and females, and one who transgresses and goes a day and night without any prayers has nullified this positive mitzvah according to the Rambam's opinion. And someone who was in trouble and didn't call out to HASHEM to save him, transgressed a positive mitzvah according to Ramban's opinion, and his punishment is very great, because it is as if he has removed HASHEM's Divine Providence from himself.

This implies that only according to Ramban he transgressed. However, according to Rambam, he had already fulfilled the mitzvah when he prayed earlier in the day, before the trouble came.

However, this is not conclusive for it is possible that Rambam may agree with Ramban's view that in a time of distress there is a positive mitzvah to pray. Just as one's daily needs create an obligation to pray, so too a trouble that befalls someone may obligate him to pray. The way of Divine Providence is to give a person what he needs only after he has requested it from HASHEM. If so, when there is a new need, there would be a new requirement of prayer.

Let us now delve deeper into the dispute between Rambam and Ramban:

- a. There are mitzvos which are only fulfilled with the intent of one's heart, such as the mitzvos of loving HASHEM, fearing HASHEM, cleaving to HASHEM.²⁶ And there are mitzvos in which there is a distinction between the "act of the mitzvah" and the "intent of the mitzvah" such

²⁵ This appears from what Rambam wrote in *Hilchos Ta'anis*: "There is one positive mitzvah which is to cry out before HASHEM at any time of great distress that befalls the community, may it not happen." His words imply that there is a mitzvah to cry out to HASHEM only when there is a public distress, but for an individual there is no specific obligation of prayer. However, it is possible to say that Rambam here is speaking of a new obligation that when there is a communal trouble there is a need to gather together and pray as a community, which could be aside from the obligation of an individual to pray when there is an individual time of trouble.

²⁶ *Biur Halakha* on *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim*, *siman* 1 at the beginning.

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as reciting the *Shema* – saying the words is the “act of the mitzvah” but the “intent of the mitzvah” is accepting the yoke of Heaven.

- b. With regard to those mitzvos which have both the “act of the mitzvah” component and the “intent of the mitzvah” component, the rule is that the “act” is the critical component. Therefore, one who accepted the yoke of Heaven upon himself with all his heart, soul and might, but didn’t express the words, has not fulfilled the mitzvah of reading the *Shema* at all. Furthermore, there are mitzvos where if the person does the “act of the mitzvah” he has fulfilled his obligation even if his heart was elsewhere and he had no intent.
- c. Regarding those mitzvos, Rav Chaim Volozhin stresses in his book *Nefesh Hachayim* at the end of *sha’ar* 1 that: “Once Moshe came and brought [the Torah] down to earth, ‘it is not in Heaven.’ So a great person with a tremendous deal of perception should not be too wise and say he sees the secret and reasons for the mitzvah in the supernal powers and worlds such that it is appropriate for him according to the root of his soul ... to transgress, Heaven forbid, any mitzvah, or to reject even a single detail of the act to make it less – even a single detail of a rabbinic law... All we have is to keep and do everything contained within the holy Torah, both Written and Oral, according to its rules, laws, times, details and particulars, without changing anything even slightly. And when a Jewish person fulfils them correctly, even if he does not have intent and doesn’t know anything about the reasons for the mitzvos or the secrets of their intent, nevertheless, he has kept the mitzvah and all the words will be rectified through it... Because the Creator, blessed is His Name, established the nature of the worlds so that they work through the actions of people, and every mitzvah ascends by itself to do its specific task.”
- d. Based on the previous principle, it seems that there is a wide difference between the Rambam’s and Ramban’s opinions on prayer:
 - 1. Rambam at the beginning of *Hilchos Tefillah* rules that it is a positive mitzvah to pray. In other words, the mitzvah is a physical act. Indeed, Rambam defines the mitzvah of prayer as “to serve HASHEM every day in prayer.” This mitzvah is with the mouth, however, not the heart.
It turns out that there is a “mitzvah act” of verbalizing the words and there is also “intent of the mitzvah” to serve HASHEM during this act.
Since there is a “mitzvah act” of prayer, according to Rambam pure intent without reciting the words does not fulfil the mitzvah.
Conversely, reciting the words of prayer is the “mitzvah act” and is

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valid even without intent, similar to (for example) blowing shofar on Rosh Hashanah without intent.

2. In contrast, according to Ramban, "the mitzvah is in times of trouble to believe that HASHEM, blessed and exalted is He, listens to prayer and He saves us from troubles through prayer and cries." And "the entire concept of prayer is not an obligation but is the kindness of the Creator toward us that He listens to us whenever we call out to Him."

It makes sense to say that the mitzvah is in the heart and does not require any specific action. The Torah mitzvah is not to stand and recite prayers verbally. The mitzvah is to believe in HASHEM, which is expressed through prayer which demonstrates that person's trusts in HASHEM and shows that he relies solely on Him. When there is trouble the person doesn't turn to any other source but HASHEM.

According to Ramban, then, the mitzvah of prayer is part of the mitzvah of faith, which has no "mitzvah act" but is entirely within the heart and does not necessarily require any specific actions. Therefore, if there is intent, that is everything. And conversely, uttering the words without any feeling of reliance on HASHEM is not a mitzvah. Therefore, one who prays but doesn't concentrate with his heart, is missing the "mitzvah act" (because according to Ramban there is no separate "act") -- without intent there is no prayer. In practice this person had no intent in his prayer, so he has done nothing.

Based on what *Mabit* (Rabbi Moshe de Trani) wrote in his book *Beis Elokim* (*Sha'ar Hatefillah*, chapter 3) we have a greater understanding of Ramban's opinion:

The mitzvah of prayer is not like other mitzvos, about which the Talmud states, "mitzvos do not require intent" (Rosh Hashanah 28b), and the mitzvah is fulfilled provided the action is performed correctly. Prayer is not a mitzvah with an action, therefore one must have intent (Berachos 30b) because the essence of prayer is the intent of the heart.²⁷

²⁷ However, he continues and adds that prayer is not complete except through speech, because "thinking is not like speech" (Berachos 20b). The verse requires prayer through intent and speech, as it says, "And to serve Him with all your hearts," (Devarim 10:12). And the Rabbis teach "what is service in the heart? It is prayer," (Ta'anis 2b). It is called a service

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So, we have two different definitions of the essence of prayer.

One definition (that of Rambam) is that the mitzvah of prayer expresses the obligation of man to perform the action of prayer.

The second (that of Ramban) defines the mitzvah of prayer as the obligation of man to believe that everything comes from HASHEM, and as a result a person has to place his trust fully in HASHEM and to turn to Him, especially at times of need.

"Prayers Were Established by The Patriarchs" Or "Prayers Were Instituted to Correspond to Sacrifices"

This dispute between the Rambam and Ramban, is related to the fundamental Torah obligation for prayer. Is the essence of prayer the act of praying or the service in the heart -- the intent? The definition of the essence of prayer and its source decide what is the mainstay of prayer – service of the heart or act of prayer.

There is no doubt that even according to Rambam prayer requires intent, because "the Merciful One wants the heart" (Sanhedrin 106b). Rambam himself writes this in *Hilchos Tefillah* (1:2): "The obligation of this mitzvah is as follows, that a person entreates and prays every day and recites the praise of the Holy One, blessed is He, and afterwards asks for his own needs as a request and a plea. And afterwards he gives praise and thanks to HASHEM for the goodness He has imbued him with, each person according to his ability."

On the other hand, Ramban agrees that the Rabbis established an order and times of prayers, through which to fulfil the mitzvah. The two aspects of prayer require each other, like a body and soul which are both important but mainly when there is a union between them.

which has an action which is to move one's lips in his prayer. Therefore, one does not fulfil the obligation with thought alone, which is not like speech. But the main essence is the intent. In other words, the Mabit learns from the word "to serve Him," that one also needs some kind of action. But the main essence of prayer remains a mitzvah performed specifically "with all your heart." Look later in footnote [[XXX27]] where the Mabit maintains a novel position saying that the mitzvah of prayer is performed through speech alone, and this sets his view apart from those of Rambam and Ramban.

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We will see that the essence of the dispute between Rambam and Ramban, can seemingly be found earlier in the words of the Amora'im who argue about the source for the obligation of prayer.

In Berachos (26b) the Talmud states the following dispute:

Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina says: The prayers were established by the Patriarchs.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: The prayers were instituted (by the Men of the Great Assembly – Rashi)²⁸ to correspond to the daily sacrifices.

The Talmud brings support for each opinion. There is a *baraisa* which supports the opinion of Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina:

Avraham established *shacharis* (the morning prayer) ... Yitzchak established *mincha* (the afternoon prayer) ... Yaakov established *aravis* (the evening prayer).

There is also a *baraisa* which supports the statement of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi:

Why did they say that the morning prayer may be recited until midday? Because the daily morning offering could be brought until midday; Rabbi Yehuda says the morning prayer may only be recited until four hours into the day because the daily sacrifice could only be brought until four hours into the day. And why did they say that the afternoon prayer must be recited before twilight? Because the afternoon sacrifice had to be brought before twilight... And why did they say that the evening prayer has no set time? Because the limbs and fats (of the sacrifices, which were placed on the altar) which had not been consumed by the evening were burned on the altar the entire night. And why did they say that the additional prayer (on festivals) may be recited all day long? Because the additional sacrifice could be offered all day long.

The Talmud asks how Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina would address this *baraisa*, which implies clearly that not only were the prayer services instituted

²⁸ For an analysis of this dispute see *Maharal Nesivos Olam, Nesiv Ha'avodah* chapter 3.

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to correspond to the sacrifices, but also that the times of prayer correspond to the times of the sacrifices.²⁹ It answers:

The prayers were established by the Patriarchs... but the Rabbis found a basis for them in the sacrifices.

In other words, the Men of the Great Assembly connected the laws of prayer to the sacrifices.

What does this mean? If the basic obligation of prayer existed from the time of the Patriarchs, for example "Avraham established the morning prayer," how did the Men of the Great Assembly connect that prayer to the morning daily sacrifice? Before they made this connection, did people recite the morning service in the evening or vice versa?

Furthermore, Rambam in *Hilchos Melakhim* (9:1) rules that the prayers correspond to the Patriarchs. In other words, he follows the opinion of Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina. Whereas in *Hilchos Tefillah* (1:5) Rambam rules that the prayer services correspond to the sacrifices, in other words like the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. This appears to be an obvious contradiction.

Lechem Mishneh explains that the *halakha* is like Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina that prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs. However, the Talmud mentioned above explains that Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina agrees that they were instituted by the Patriarchs, but the Rabbis found a basis for them in the sacrifices.

Therefore, Rambam ruled that the prayers were established by the Patriarchs, but nevertheless said that the prayer itself corresponds to the sacrifices.

However, since Rambam wrote this in his book of laws, what is the practical *halakhic* difference as to whether the prayers were established by the Patriarchs or instituted to correspond to the sacrifices? What *halakhic* distinction did Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina teach by saying that the

²⁹ Rabbi Yehezkel Landau, author of *Noda Beyehuda* in his book *Tziyun Lanefesh Chaya* explains that the Talmud didn't ask how Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi would resolve the *baraisa* which says that Avraham established the morning prayer, Yitzchak the afternoon prayer and Yaakov established the evening prayer, because it is possible that what the patriarchs established was not established for future generations but something they established for their time and for them personally. Therefore, the *baraisa* itself does not present a contradiction to Yehoshua ben Levi's opinion.

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prayers were established by the Patriarchs, if in practice their basis is the sacrifices?

This question is compounded by the piece of Talmud preceding the above discussion.

The Mishna has a dispute as to whether the latest time for reciting the morning prayer is four hours into the day (Rabbi Yehuda's opinion) or until midday (the opinion of the anonymous Tanna). The Talmud explains the dispute based on the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that prayers were instituted to correspond to the sacrifices. The dispute between Rabbi Yehuda and the anonymous Tanna parallels a dispute as to whether the morning sacrifices may be brought until midday or only until four hours into the day.

Rif (ad loc.) and Rambam (*Hilchos Tefillah* 3:1) rule that the *halakha* is like Rabbi Yehuda, that the latest time for the morning prayer is four hours into the day. However, Rambam adds that,

If a person intentionally or unintentionally prayed after four hours but before midday, he has fulfilled his obligation of prayer, but has not fulfilled his obligation of prayer at the correct time. Just as there is a Torah mitzvah of prayer, there is a rabbinic mitzvah to pray at the correct time as the Sages and Prophets decreed. If a person erred and prayed later than four hours, he has the reward of prayer but not the reward of praying at the correct time.

So, it turns out that there is an obligation of prayer and a separate obligation to pray at set times.

The question is, once the Rabbis taught that there are set times for the positive mitzvah of prayer, and this person didn't fulfil the mitzvah of praying at the correct time, what is the source that there is a separate mitzvah for prayer at the wrong time?

Furthermore, how is it possible to say that there are two separate and independent concepts of "the obligation of prayer," and "the obligation of prayer at the correct time?" We learn the times of prayer from the times of the sacrifices, and regarding sacrifices there is a principle of "if the time has passed the sacrifice is invalid." So, it should be the same for prayer, that if the time has passed, the obligation of prayer has gone, and there should be no other mitzvah of prayer. How is it possible to say that the person only missed out on "prayer at the correct time" by praying late, but the mitzvah of prayer still remains?

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Is it possible in general to pray after the correct time has passed? For example, could one recite the morning prayer at night and have it still count as a morning prayer, but just not at the correct time?

One would have thought that the time of prayer and the mitzvah of prayer are connected to one another. How is it possible that, even after the correct time has passed, there is still a mitzvah of prayer?

This question is answered by *Kesef Mishneh* (ad loc.) He writes that Rambam's source is from the *halakha* that one who didn't pray the morning prayer is able to fulfill his obligation under the principle of "compensatory prayer," i.e. that he recites the afternoon prayer twice. So that there is a concept of fulfilling the prayer after its correct time has passed. Therefore, it is obvious that if it is possible to fulfil the obligation of the morning prayer when it is already time for the afternoon prayer, it is certainly possible to fulfil the obligation of the morning prayer before the time for the afternoon prayer.

However, *Lechem Mishneh* challenges *Kesef Mishneh* with a strong question: The afternoon prayer which is recited at its proper time is defined as prayer, and since it is prayer in its correct time it has the power to act as a compensation for the prayer which preceded it. But a prayer which is not recited at the correct time would appear to be defective and perhaps does not count as prayer at all.

If so, what is the source that teaches that even a prayer recited at the wrong time is also considered to be prayer, which is only lacking the "time" element? Perhaps a prayer which is not recited at the correct time is not prayer at all.

And once *Lechem Mishneh* has invalidated the answer of *Kesef Mishneh*, the question remains, from where does Rambam derive that once the time for prayer has passed one still has the reward of prayer at the wrong time?

Rabbi Shlomo of Chelmno answers the question in his *Merkeves Hamishna* which states as follows:

From the fact that Rambam cited two sources for the morning prayer, and he holds that both are valid, we have to say that the obligation of prayer was established by the Patriarchs (which is the opinion of Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina). However, based on that it would be permitted to recite the morning prayers any time which is defined as

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morning, i.e. until midday. Therefore, the Rabbis came and based the prayers on the times of the sacrifices (the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi) – the morning prayers correspond to the morning daily sacrifice and the afternoon prayers to the afternoon daily sacrifice, based on the times of those offerings.

With this principle the Talmud is clear, and we have the answers to our earlier questions:

1. While the basic obligation to pray was established by the Patriarchs, there was still room for the Men of the Great Assembly to set the sacrifices as the basis for prayer. The Patriarchs only created the obligation to pray, whereas the Men of the Great Assembly set the times of prayer. The decree of the Men of the Great Assembly limited the prayers so that one could not pray at any time of the morning (until midday) but only until the end of the time that the morning daily sacrifice was offered, the first four hours of the day.
2. Similarly, there is one law of the obligation of prayer, and a separate law of the set times for prayer. The obligation of prayer and the times of prayer are two separate matters, derived from different sources. The obligation of prayer was established by the mighty ancient ones, a decree of the Patriarchs, and one could pray at any time of the morning to fulfil the obligation of prayer. However, the set time of the morning prayer is learned from a different source, which is the daily morning sacrifice, which was only offered during the first four hours of the day. Prayer which is recited later than that, provided it is still recited in the morning, is considered as prayer, because it fits the definition established by the Patriarchs. However, once the Men of the Great Assembly based the laws of the morning prayer on the daily sacrifice, if the time has passed there is no longer the mitzvah of prayer at the correct time. Now it is clear how there can be a fulfilment of the obligation of prayer even though there is no fulfilment of prayer at the right time.

Based on this, the dispute between Amora'im is no longer merely a historical question as to when the prayers were established. Rather there is a practical difference between the two opinions – if a person recites the prayers after the fourth hour, has he fulfilled his obligation or not. According to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, prayer was only established to correspond to the daily sacrifices, so after the fourth hour of the day there is no longer an obligation of prayer at all. However, according to Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina,

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after this time there is still a mitzvah of prayer, because prayer was primarily established by the Patriarchs, such that the obligation of the morning prayer lasts all morning long. If one prays after the fourth hour he misses out on the concept of prayer that was established by the Rabbis to correspond to the sacrifices.

It appears that the dispute between Amora'im as to the source for prayer expresses not only *halakhic* differences regarding the times of prayer, but also expresses a fundamental dispute about the practical definition of the mitzvah of prayer. The dispute over who established prayer expresses also what principle forms the basis for the establishment of prayer as a fixed obligation to be done three times a day.³⁰

This dispute also speaks to the essence of prayer and the way in which the obligation is fulfilled, because the role of the Patriarchs in establishing a decree for their offspring is essentially different from the role of the Rabbis in establishing a decree, as follows:

1. The Patriarchs paved a path of faith, but they did not leave behind them a rabbinic obligation for performing mitzvos.³¹ However a decree of the Rabbis establishes the actual behavior of the nation within the framework of fixed laws.
2. According to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, prayers were established by the Men of the Great Assembly corresponding to the sacrifices. When there were no more sacrifices, the Rabbis established the daily prayer service to parallel the offering of the sacrifices. Sacrifices had a fixed time and manner and corresponding to that the prayers have set times and limits.

This view expresses prayer as a person's obligation to do an act of prayer.

Just as a sacrifice was a defined act, with a clear obligation on the person who wished to serve HASHEM, so too prayer breaks out of the

³⁰ The discussion in this section is not about the basic obligation of prayer. The Torah obligation, according to Rambam, is to recite a prayer once each day. According to Ramban, the obligation is to pray in times of trouble. The discussion here is regarding the institution of set prayers at the fixed times of morning, afternoon and night. Nevertheless, it makes sense that the establishment of prayers three times a day is not a completely independent, new decree, but rather that it has some basis in taking the obligation and enshrining it within a framework and set text.

³¹ See Chullin 101b where the Rabbis dispute whether or not the obligation for any of the mitzvos comes from the patriarchs.

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bounds of feelings and faith and becomes an action placed upon a person, with a set time and fixed text, in order to fulfil the obligation.

3. According to Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina, the prayers were established by the Patriarchs. The Patriarchs innovated and paved a new path in serving HASHEM and having faith in Him. In their times people would believe in different forces or idols; the Patriarchs came and established the principle for a person who trusts solely in HASHEM. In this framework, the Patriarchs innovated that a person can turn to HASHEM and ask Him for what he needs.

According to this ordinance a person must set aside time, three times a day, for prayer, and must embed within his heart the recognition that everything comes from HASHEM.

Prayer as service of HASHEM lays in a person a foundation of faith, that there is nothing he can attain through his own efforts. His strength and abilities do nothing, and he only goes through the efforts, but does not achieve anything.

So, one must place his trust and his burdens on HASHEM and turn to Him – especially in times of trouble.

Walking in the path of the Patriarchs is not through performing specific actions, because we have no knowledge of the structures of their specific deeds. But rather we must follow their path of belief, and how they expressed their faith.

Since the Patriarchs prayed three times a day, we learn from them that a person's faith must be expressed through asking his needs from HASHEM throughout the day. Based on what the Patriarchs established, all day long would be fit for prayer.

However, after the Patriarchs established the principle of prayer, the Rabbis came at a later stage and based the prayers on the sacrifices. They limited and defined the prayers so that they would also be a replacement for sacrifices. This definition meant that prayers were limited to the times of the sacrifices.

So, it is clear that a person who prays later than four hours into the morning has departed from the decree of the Rabbis in terms of the times of prayer, because the time of the morning daily sacrifice has ended. However, this person has not abandoned the definition of prayer as an expression of faith, which was established by the Patriarchs. When he turns to HASHEM and asks Him for what he needs, even though it is later than four hours into the day and the time for the daily morning sacrifice has ended, he fulfills only too well the original

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obligation of prayer, as a statement of faith established by the Patriarchs.³²

4. The dispute regarding the source for the obligation of prayer is entwined with the dispute as to the fundamental obligation of prayer and the nature of the central principle which the obligation hinges on.

³² Rav Ariav Ozer in his shiur about the mitzvah of prayer points out the following:

The Talmud explains that one who prays a compensatory prayer receives the reward of prayer but not the reward of prayer in its correct time. Furthermore, the Talmud says: "If one inadvertently did not recite the afternoon prayer, he should recite the evening prayer twice." The Talmud explains that even though the times of prayers correspond to sacrifices, and regarding a sacrifice, once the day has passed the sacrifice is no longer valid, nevertheless, since prayer is a plea for mercy, one can pray at whatever time he wants. Based on what we said above, we can explain that even though the "service" aspect of prayer cannot be compensated for at a later time, because it was instituted to parallel the sacrifices which have no compensation, nevertheless, the "mercy" aspect of prayer, which was established by the patriarchs, can be compensated for even at a later time. This is why it has the "reward of prayer" even though it doesn't have the reward of "prayer at the correct time" – because of that aspect of prayer which was instituted by the patriarchs.

This is made clearer by *Tosafos* (Berachos 26a) that there is no compensation for the *musaf* (additional) prayer since it was only instituted to correspond to a sacrifice. Once the time has passed the sacrifice is no longer valid. This prayer is unlike the others which are expressions of asking for mercy. Even though the other services were also instituted to correspond to daily sacrifices, there is also the aspect that they were established by the patriarchs, which means they are not limited to the times of the sacrifices. However, the *musaf* prayer, was not established by the patriarchs but was instituted entirely to correspond to a sacrifice, according to all opinions, as explained by the Talmud. Therefore, once the time has passed there is no compensation, because the concept of compensation comes from the fact that the patriarchs established the prayers as a plea for mercy.

This also explains the opinion of the *Magen Avraham* (593:3) who learns from the Talmud that states that the prayer blessings on Rosh Hashanah are dependent on one another, that on other days of the year, if a person knows a single blessing, he should recite it, and the other blessings are not dependent on it.

Kehilos Yaakov (Berachos 17) questions this based on what *Rosh* writes (at the end of Rosh Hashanah). *Rosh* disagrees with those who hold that an individual in the silent *musaf* prayer of Rosh Hashanah says only seven blessings. *Rosh* challenges that opinion, saying that since the Rabbis established nine blessings for this *musaf* prayer, how is it possible to skip two of them. It would be like the seven of Shabbos, which if one is left out the entire prayer is invalid. So, *Rosh* holds that it is forbidden for one to leave out one of the blessings instituted by the Rabbis. How does the opinion of the *Magen Avraham* fit with the words of *Rosh*?

However, based on our explanation this is not difficult. *Rosh* is referring to the *musaf* prayer, whereas the basis of the words of the *Magen Avraham* is because prayer is asking for mercy, and based on the *Tosafos*, the *musaf* prayer is different than other prayers because it was instituted solely to parallel a sacrifice. Therefore, only regarding the *musaf* service *Rosh* says that skipping a single blessing invalidates the prayer. However, in other prayer services which were established by the patriarchs, there can be pleas for mercy even if some of the blessings are skipped, and this is the opinion of the *Magen Avraham*.

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Prayers were established by the Patriarchs – this means prayer as an expression of faith through turning to HASHEM and asking for His mercy. Each of the Patriarchs established prayer at a specific time of day, when he would cry out to HASHEM and beseech with all his heart that HASHEM give him his needs (Rav Pincus defines “trouble” in terms of beseeching for mercy as anything which a person feels he needs help from HASHEM³³).

Prayers were established in place of the daily sacrifices – this means prayer as service. The Rabbis instituted prayer as a fixed act which must be done every day in place of the Temple sacrifices (based on the verse, “We will render bullocks with our lips,” Hoshea 14:3). In this context the fixed times of prayer are specified and limited, corresponding to the times of the sacrifices.³⁴

So, there are two facets of prayer:

1. Prayer as service of the heart – as an expression of a person’s obligation to believe that everything comes from HASHEM, and therefore he must place his trust and hope in HASHEM and turn to him especially in times of trouble. That is prayer as an expression of asking for mercy.
2. The act of prayer – which is obligatory, that is prayer as the service of HASHEM, in place of the Temple sacrifices. This is prayer as a fixed event, necessary for us as one of the three pillars upon which the world stands.

We find an expression of this in the text of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, in which the Rabbis established two blessings about prayer:

1. The blessing of *Shema koleinu* (“Hear our voices”) – in this we relate to prayer as a request for mercy. “Have compassion and mercy on us, and accept our prayers with mercy and favor, for You are HASHEM who hears prayers and supplications... Blessed are you, HASHEM, who hears prayer.”
2. The blessing of *Retzei* (“have favor”) – “Have favor, Lord our HASHEM, on Your people Yisrael and their prayers.” This is referred to by the Rabbis as “the blessing of service” which is a prayer that our “service” and the sacrificial fires of Yisrael and their prayers should find favor

³³ *Tiferes Shimshon* Bamidbar p. 95.

³⁴ See what Rabbeinu Yitzchak from Vienna says in *Ohr Zaru’a* siman 114, that the person leading the prayers must be acceptable to all members of the community, like a kohen (priest) who offers a sacrifice on behalf of a Jew, that the kohen must be acceptable to the one who sends him.

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before HASHEM, "And may the service of Your people be continually for favor."

The Act of Prayer and Prayer as Service Of The Heart – The Essence of Intent

Parallel to this distinction in which we saw prayer as a) a mitzvah act and b) the service of the heart, we can also delve deeper into the subject of "prayer without intent," as follows:

1. *Tur* (*Orach Chayim* §101) rules according to the Talmud: "The Rabbis taught, one who prays must have intent in every blessing, and if he is unable to have intent for all of them he must at least have intent for the first blessing called *Avos* (Patriarchs)," (Berachos 34a). "For Rabbi Elazar said, a person must always assess himself – if he is able to have intent during *Avos* he should pray, but if not, he should not pray. And if he prayed and did not have intent for *Avos* he should go back and pray again, but if he had intent for *Avos* he need not go back and pray again," (Berachos 30b). And it seems that even if he had intent for all the other blessings but did not have intent for *Avos* he must pray again. However, *Tur* adds a ruling that nowadays, "we do not repeat the prayer due to lack of intent, because even if someone were to repeat the prayer again, it is almost certain that he would not have intent. If so, what purpose is there in him repeating it?"
Rema rules like *Tur* in his gloss on *Shulhan Arukh* (*Orach Chayim* 101:1).
2. One could have said that *Tur's* ruling that nowadays someone who did not have intent does not repeat the prayer, applies to one who already finished the entire *Shemoneh Esrei*. However, one who is still in the middle of the *Shemoneh Esrei* should return to the beginning and repeat the prayer, because if not, how can he continue and finish the prayer? The continuation of the prayer would be considered a blessing in vain, because it is lacking the validity of the first blessing. So, it would be as if he began praying from the middle of the *Shemoneh Esrei*. If so, it would seem that to avoid this he must certainly pray again from the beginning of the *Shemoneh Esrei* with intent, before he continues his prayer. Or perhaps, if that is impossible, (because there is concern that also the second time he won't have intent) at the very least he should not continue with his prayer, so that he won't say more blessings in vain.

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3. However, *Biur Halakha* (ad loc.) cites *Chayei Adam* (klal 24, din 2) who rules that someone who is in the middle of the *Shemoneh Esrei* and remembers that he did not have intent during *Avos* should continue his prayer and not return to pray again from the beginning. *Biur Halakha* asks, "How can we tell him to continue praying and making further blessings which will not fulfill his obligation? Just because it is almost certain that he will not have intent (if he returns to the beginning) should we tell him to make more blessings with no validity? In other words, how does it make sense that someone who remembers in the middle of his prayer that he has not had intent in *Avos* should not return to that blessing, but should rather continue with his prayer? If he had no intent during *Avos*, it is clear that he has not fulfilled his obligation with this prayer, and therefore all the blessings he recites from there on are blessings in vain?"
4. Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky, in his book *Kehilos Yaakov* on Berachos (*siman* 27) gives a novel explanation that there are actually two separate laws within the *halakha* of prayer: One is to pray, and the other is to pray with intent. One who has no intent has not fulfilled the obligation of praying with intent but has fulfilled his obligation of prayer. Therefore, one who completes his prayer without intent, even though according to the Talmud he must repeat and pray again, that is not in order to fulfill the obligation of prayer, but only to fulfil the obligation of prayer with intent. Therefore, we don't say concerning one who did not have intent when reciting *Avos* and is still in the middle of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, that the rest of the blessings are in vain since the beginning of his prayer had no validity. Because even the beginning of his prayer was a fulfilment of an act of prayer.
5. *Kehilos Yaakov* bases his opinion on Mabit in his book *Beis Elokim* that there is a mitzvah of simply reciting the words even without intent.³⁵

³⁵ This is what Mabit writes in *Sha'ar Hatefillah* chapter 3, in continuation of the words we quoted above:

The intent is not completed properly without words, and speech also helps the ignorant people who do not understand what they say, and if there were no words to recite they would not fulfill their obligations of prayer at all. Even those who understand the meaning, it is not possible that they can have intent every time they pray. Therefore, we say at the end of the middle blessings, "Hear our voices, Lord, our God." Because even without proper intent we ask Him to hear the voices of our prayer, even if the voice was without intent. And we conclude that blessing by saying, "For You hear the prayers of every mouth." In other words, even the prayers that were only in the mouth, without any intent, You hear in Your great mercy, since we do not know how to have intent. As the verse states, "You Who hears prayer, all flesh will come to You," (Tehillim 65:3). Meaning, insofar as he hears the voice of prayer, even without intent, all flesh will come to Him.

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Mabit wrote this also in his book *Iggeres Derech Hashem*. This implies that one who did not have intent must return to the beginning of the prayer to fulfil it also with intent. However, even without intent, the actual recitation of the words is prayer and it is not a blessing in vain.

6. However, *Kehilos Yaakov* questions – what is the source of this distinction such that a lack of intent requires one to pray again, yet even when there is no intent it is not a blessing in vain?
7. In fact, this question gets to the root of the matter: Why does prayer without intent have any validity? It is nothing more than reciting words without any service of HASHEM and without any feeling of asking for one's needs.³⁶
8. It seems that here we can answer with our distinction between the "act of prayer" and prayer as "service of the heart," as a request for mercy. The "act of prayer" is not dependent on the intent of the prayer, just like all other practical mitzvos which can be fulfilled without intent, e.g. shaking a lulav or blowing a shofar. Regarding the "act of prayer" we can apply the words of *Nefesh Hachayim* cited above. "And when a Jewish person fulfils them correctly, even if he does not have intent and doesn't know anything about the reasons for the mitzvos or the secrets of their intent, nevertheless, he has kept the mitzvah and rectified all the words through it." Certainly, also in prayer, like in all other Torah mitzvos there is an ideal to have intent when performing the mitzvah, as the Rabbis said, "mitzvos require intent." However, this intent is not to understand the words of prayer, but it is general intent of one who recognizes that he is standing in prayer and performing his obligation of prayer.³⁷
9. On the other hand, prayer as the service of the heart requires another layer of intent, because its essence is to ask for mercy from the Holy One, blessed is He, that He should provide him with everything he needs. The service of the heart cannot be fulfilled simply by standing and moving one's lips in prayer, but it necessitates intent in the meaning of the words of prayer, and to feel them in one's heart. Only through the intent in prayer does one break out from "the act of prayer" and fulfill also the component of "service of the heart."

³⁶ In a later chapter we will discuss the idea of intent in prayer at more length. Here we will merely discuss the basic distinction of these two components of prayer.

³⁷ Look at the explanation of this distinction in *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Chayim* 60:4 and *Mishna Berura* there in *se'if katan* 7. See also *Mishna Berura* 8:19 who cites the *Bach* that the Tur mentions three practical mitzvos in which it is required to have in mind the intention of the mitzvah, and they are the mitzvos of tzitzis, tefillin and sukkah. Look there for the reason.

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The distinction between the act of prayer and prayer as the service of the heart clarifies the discussion about intent in prayer. It seems that this distinction is also articulated when one looks at the concept of public prayer, as we shall see:

1. The Talmud (Ta'anis 8a) states:

Rabbi Ami says, "A person's prayer is not heard unless he places his soul in his palm, (Rashi: "That his soul is focused in his palm."

Meaning, just as his palms are outstretched upward in prayer, so his heart must be directed upwards in prayer). As the verse states, "Let us lift our hearts with our palms to HASHEM in Heaven," (Eicha 3:41).

This means that one requires intent for prayer.

The Talmud challenges this from the statement of Shmuel who learns the verses, "They tricked Him with their mouth, and lied to Him with their tongues. For their hearts were not correct with Him, and they were not faithful in His covenant," (Tehillim 78: 36-37). Yet even so, "He, being merciful, will forgive sin," (verse 38). Rashi explains "He, being merciful, will forgive sin, and hear prayer. So how can you say that prayers are not heard unless one places one's heart in one's palm?"

The Talmud answers: This is not difficult. Here it refers to an individual, and here it refers to a community.

Rashi explains: In a community the prayers are heard even though not all of their hearts are perfect. This is derived from the fact that the verse is in the plural, "They tricked him..." However, for an individual it is not so unless he has intent.

In other words, when a community pray the prayers of all the individuals are accepted even if they don't have intent.

2. This raises the following question:
 - a. The Talmud says that the prayer of an individual without intent are not heard. This implies that prayer without intent is not prayer.
 - b. If so, how does the prayer of an individual who has no intent combine with others who have no intent to be considered communal prayer? If his words are not considered to be prayer at all, then it shouldn't make a difference whether he is part of a community or not. Being part of a community cannot make what is not prayer into prayer.
And in general, how can a collection of actions which individually have no validity, combine to communal prayer?
Any multiplication of zero should remain zero.

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3. Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik, the Brisker Rav, was asked a similar question about a novel ruling of his father, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik, which will be discussed at length below.³⁸ Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik says that a person who has no intent in the entire *Shemoneh Esrei* that he is standing before HASHEM [or similarly if he has no intent in the first blessing to the meaning of the words] has not fulfilled his obligation of prayer. Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev was asked, if so, it would appear that in order to fulfil one's obligation of communal prayer he must find a community filled with HASHEM fearing, perfect people, so that there will be at least ten who have intent that they are standing before HASHEM throughout their entire prayer. For if not, it is as if they have not prayed. And if so, even when an individual has intent, there was not a community if even one of the other ten had no intent, because there would not be prayer of ten men.
4. Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik answered, based on what is written in the book *Keser Rosh*,³⁹ that "prayer without intent, if it is not like a daily offering which has a soul, it is nevertheless considered like a meal offering which has no soul."⁴⁰

In other words, even prayer with no intent still has benefit, and one should not say it is considered as nothing. True, the prayer of one who has no intent is not heard and technically he must return and pray again, but nevertheless the action itself is considered an "object of prayer," and only the attribute of intent is lacking from it.

Now it is understood that the attribute of intent does not prevent the prayer of individuals from combining together to make communal prayer.⁴¹

The prayers combine with each other and are defined as communal prayer, since even without intent, there was an "act of prayer."⁴² The definition of communal prayer depends on having ten "acts of prayer"

³⁸ See Rabbi Eliyahu Schlezingar in his book *Sho'alin Vedorshin*, volume 4 *siman* 1 in the name of Rabbi Moshe Aharon Stern, who asked Rav Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik this question.

³⁹ This also appears in *Tosefes Maaseh Rav* section 12.

⁴⁰ The daily offering was an animal (a sheep) possessing a soul, whereas a meal offering was from inanimate things – meal, oil and frankincense.

⁴¹ See below on this topic, in the chapter about communal prayer.

⁴² Rav Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik also learns from the words of the *Keser Rosh* that Rav Chaim of Volozhin "couldn't find any merit in reciting 'amen' without intent." In other words, prayer without intent is at least like a meal offering, and there is an "object of prayer." But "amen" without intent is considered to be worthless. Rabbi Moshe Aharon Stern pointed out that based on this, if one answered "amen" without intent while in the middle of his prayers, in a place where it is permitted to answer "amen" but not permitted to say anything else, this seemingly would be a break in his prayer, and it would be as if he spoke words that were not permitted, since the "amen" without intent is not considered to have any meaning.

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even if the people reciting those prayers have not fulfilled their obligation properly by not having had the minimal required intent.

5. It seems that these words can be understood based on our explanation above. As we said, in every Torah mitzvah which has a practical component, the intent is not itself the mitzvah but only provides the content for the act. Therefore, prayer is divided into the act of the mitzvah, which is derived from the verse, "to serve Him," and the need for service "with all your hearts," which is the intent.

The soul of the prayer is the intent, but the prayer has another, physical, aspect, which comes in place of the offering of sacrifices. This aspect is fulfilled when a person fulfills, "We will render bullocks with our lips," (Hoshea 14:3), i.e. through speech at the set times for offering the sacrifices.

It turns out that the "act of prayer" has meaning and validity and is fulfilled even without any intent.⁴³ Similarly, Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik adds that the required combination for communal prayer is to have ten "acts of prayer," and not necessarily ten prayers with intent.

6. If prayer was only "service of the heart," then if there was no intent there would be no turning to HASHEM but only ten meaningless actions, and therefore they would not combine to anything.⁴⁴ But since the mitzvah of prayer also has an aspect of the "act of prayer," which is independent of intent, and is the expression of "prayers were instituted to correspond to the daily sacrifices," we can say that even without the intent, there is an "act of prayer." Therefore, ten acts which count towards the mitzvah can also combine with each other to be communal prayer.⁴⁵

⁴³ Look at *Shibolei Haleket siman 17*: "I heard from Rabbi Yaakov of Guenzburg that one can bring evidence that even though someone prayed many times without intent, he has still fulfilled his obligation, according to the opinion that holds prayer was instituted to correspond to the sacrifices. As we find in the beginning of Zevakhim (2a), "All the sacrifices which were offered with the wrong intent are valid, but they don't fulfill the obligation of the ones who bring them." This means that if they were offered without any intent they do fulfill the obligations of the ones who bring them. If so, the same principle should apply also in prayer, and one who has no intent should fulfill his obligation."

So even though the *halakha* is that he should repeat the prayer if he didn't have intent during *Avos*, it does not mean that his prayer had no validity at all.

⁴⁴ Look at what Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach wrote in *Minchas Shlomo* 1:2. He asks this question in very strong language. Because if someone prayed without concentrating at all, he is like one who is going through the motions but not like one who is praying.

⁴⁵ See below on this topic, in the chapter about communal prayer for further an elaboration on the above words of Rav Soloveitchik.

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This idea also seems to be the basis of what the *Sha'agas Aryeh* writes in *siman* 14, where he discusses the obligation of women to pray.⁴⁶

1. In the Talmud (Berachos 20b) we find that women are obligated to pray since prayer is defined as asking for mercy, and women require HASHEM's mercy no less than men. Without this reason, one would think that they are exempt from prayer, like all positive time-bound mitzvos, because the verse states, "Evening and morning and noon I will speak and shout, and He will hear my voice," (Tehillim 55:18).
2. Based on this the *Sha'agas Aryeh* asks about Rambam's opinion (*Hilchos Tefillah* 1:1) where he rules that prayer is a positive Torah mitzvah which is not time-bound, and the times of prayer were only instituted by the Rabbis. If so, why did the Talmud entertain the idea that women should be exempt from prayer? By Torah law prayer is a mitzvah which has no time component at all. The rabbinic fixing of set times for prayer was established in order to add upon the basic obligation, but not to lessen from the obligation and exempt women from their Torah obligation.
3. The *Sha'agas Aryeh* answers that by Torah law it is true that women are obligated in one prayer each day in any form they wish. The Talmud never entertained the idea that they would be exempt from this prayer. As we explained, this prayer is defined as "service of the heart," which is a service of HASHEM that instills the fundamental faith within a person that there is nothing one achieves by his own power, but everything comes from HASHEM. If so, there is an obligation to pray every day, in direct consequence from the renewal of one's daily needs. There is no question that this obligation applies also to women, and the Talmud never entertained any alternative hypothesis.
4. The Talmud in Berachos is discussing the obligation to pray three times a day. Regarding this obligation one might have thought that it is a time-bound obligation, since it is contingent on the changing times of day (morning, afternoon and evening) and therefore women should be exempt. For this reason, the Talmud had to explain that since prayer is a request for mercy and women also require Heavenly mercy, they are obligated to pray three times a day with the text that was established and fixed by the Rabbis.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Regarding women's obligation to pray see the chapter dedicated to this topic below.

⁴⁷ Rambam rules (*Hilchos Tefillah* 1:1) that it is a positive Torah mitzvah to pray once a day. He also rules that women are obligated to pray by Torah law, because it is a positive mitzvah which is not time-bound. The Rishonim challenge this: If the mitzvah is to pray once a day, and it is a separate mitzvah every day, why is it not considered to be time-bound? Rav Moshe Soloveitchik answers this question (cited by his son, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik in his book

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This distinction of the *Sha'agas Aryeh* also makes sense according to our explanation, that there are two aspects of prayer; a) the act of prayer which parallels offering the sacrifices (expressed in the blessing of *Retzei*) and b) service of the heart, which is expressed through a person's intent and the depth of feeling they invest in the prayer (expressed in the blessing of *Shema koleinu*, in which we say "For You are a HASHEM that hear prayers and requests.") These two aspects are the distinction on which the *Sha'agas Aryeh* bases his explanation:

- a) Prayer as service of the heart, as a basic obligation of faith that everything comes from HASHEM, which applies once a day as a result of a person's daily needs, and regarding this aspect the Talmud never even considered that a woman would be exempt.
- b) Prayers at set times, which are "acts of the mitzvah of prayer" and are like the sacrifices which have set times. One might have thought that women were exempt from this aspect of prayer because it has fixed times (which correspond to the times of the sacrifices). And the Talmud's answer is that this obligation also applies to women because prayer is a request for mercy. Just as a sacrifice atones for a person, so too is prayer essential, so that HASHEM will have mercy on the person and will show His attribute of mercy rather than His attribute of strict justice. Women require this show of mercy just as much as men do.

'And May You Turn to The Prayer Of Your Servant, And To His Supplication,' (I Melachim 8:28)

In this chapter we have discussed the essence of the obligation for prayer and have seen that it includes two separate components. The act of prayer and the intent of prayer. The act of prayer corresponds to the offering of the sacrifices, and prayer as service of the heart serves as an expression of a person's faith in his HASHEM.

Later, in the chapter dedicated to the essence of prayer, we will deal in detail with this aspect.

Reshimas Shiurim p. 73) that the obligation of prayer applies at all times. As the Talmud states, (Berachos 21a): "If only a person would pray the entire day." Even though the act of the mitzvah depends on time and must be performed at least once a day, the concept of "time-bound positive mitzvah" according to Rambam is based on the obligation of the mitzvah, not in the act of the mitzvah. Therefore, since the obligation is constant, like service of the heart, an expression of faith which applies every moment of a person's life, it is not considered a positive time-bound mitzvah.

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We have shown that prayer, like every mitzvah act, requires intent during prayer, like the general statement that “mitzvos require intent.” However, prayer has an added component, which distinguishes it from any mitzvah act which requires intent – there is an obligation of intent as an independent mitzvah.

There is an obligation to perform the act of the mitzvah of prayer, and a separate obligation, which stands alone, to have intent during prayer.

The first kind of intent, the “intent of a mitzvah” is like the intent of other mitzvos, that a person recognize in his service that he is standing before HASHEM in prayer.

The additional intent required for prayer, is the intent of the words as an expression of prayer as “service of the heart” in which a person asks all of his various needs from HASHEM and comes to a feeling that “alone I am unable to do anything.”

We will now examine the essence and the purpose of these two separate intents in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Prayer as Service of The Heart

Prayer as Service of The Heart

In the previous chapter we discussed the dispute between Rambam and Ramban as to the fundamental obligation of prayer.

According to Ramban prayer is an expression of the obligation that a person must believe in HASHEM. One who believes in HASHEM calls to Him when he is in trouble, just as a person standing on a shaky ladder will call out and ask someone else to hold it steady for him so he doesn't fall. The true test of faith is therefore whether in times of crisis one turns to HASHEM, and this is the essence of the obligation of prayer.

This obligation applies according to Ramban only in times of crisis, and the essence of prayer is the requests and supplications which a person expresses at that time. Along those lines, prayer in its essence is something emotional.

Even after the Rabbis instituted a set text and fixed times for prayer, the essence of prayer didn't change and remains the service of the heart. So, if a person praying doesn't have intent during his prayer to express his faith that HASHEM is the One who saves in times of trouble, the person hasn't prayed.

According to Rambam's opinion the foundation of prayer is the physical act which reinforces a person's faith. This act is performed even when a person is not in a time of crisis. The opposite – it is an obligation placed on a person to fulfil it at set times, every day, in place of the sacrifices. The act of prayer itself creates a closeness to HASHEM, as the person stands before HASHEM to serve Him.

However, we have seen that also according to Rambam's opinion the closeness to HASHEM is created because the person stands before HASHEM and asks Him for his various needs, with the clear recognition of the worthlessness of mankind and with complete dependence upon HASHEM. It turns out that also according to Rambam's opinion, if a person merely stands and moves his lips without any intent on his prayer, this will not be enough to fulfill the obligation of prayer.

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Prayer is defined as service of the heart, for the source of the obligation to pray is the verse, "To love HASHEM, your God, and to serve Him, with all your hearts and all your souls," (Devarim 11:13).⁴⁸

From this definition of prayer as service of the heart it seems that intent in one's prayer is essential, because if only the lips move in prayer but one's heart is elsewhere, this is not service of the heart, because his heart is distant and detached.

Rambam in *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:51) writes:

If one prays moving his lips while facing the wall, but at the same time thinking of business... Do not think that you have attained the goal of prayer. Rather you will then be close to one about whom the verse says, "You are close in their mouths, but far from their thoughts" (Yirmeyahu 12:2).

Similarly, we saw in Chapter Two the words of Mabit in his book *Beis Elokim* (*Sha'ar Hatefillah*, chapter 3):

The mitzvah of prayer is not like other mitzvos, about which the Talmud states, "Mitzvos do not require intent" (Rosh Hashanah 28b), which are fulfilled provided the actions are performed correctly. Prayer is not a mitzvah with an action, therefore one must have intent (Berachos 30b) because the essence of prayer is the intent of the heart.

We also find in the words of Rabbeinu Bachaye ibn Pekuda, in his book *Chovos Halevavos* (*Sha'ar Cheshbon Hanefesh* chapter 3: *heshbon* 9), where he distinguishes between mitzvos which are considered duties of the limbs of the body (e.g. the mitzvos of *sukkah*, *lulav*, *tzitzis*, *mezuzah* and observing Shabbos) and the mitzvos which are duties of the heart.

Regarding duties of the limbs there is a need to preface the performance of the mitzvah with the intention that the following act is in fulfillment of the mitzvah (Rosh Hashanah 28b), but if one is not paying attention while doing the mitzvah it is not invalidated.

⁴⁸ The Talmud (Ta'anis 2a) explains this verse: "What type of service is in the heart? You must say that this refers to prayer."

Rambam rules so in *Hilchos Tefillah* (1:1): It is a positive mitzvah to pray every day, as the verse states, "And you shall serve HASHEM, your God," (Devarim 11:13). [The Rabbis] have an oral tradition that this "service" is prayer, as the verse states, "And to serve Him with all your hearts." The Rabbis stated, "What type of service is in the heart? This is prayer."

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However, with regard to duties of the heart, one certainly needs intent while performing the mitzvah, and the person must empty his heart of all his concerns and thoughts of the physical world and must concentrate his thought at that time on HASHEM.⁴⁹ If he didn't do so, HASHEM will not accept from him the prayer of the limbs and the movement of his tongue⁵⁰ (Berachos 13a). Rabbeinu Bachaye continues:

Know that the words should be on the tongue and the intent in the heart.

The words are like the body of the prayer and the intent like the soul.

When a person prays with his tongue and his heart is not involved in his prayer, his prayer is like a body without a soul, like a husk without any fruit inside.⁵¹

The reason that prayer without intent is like a body without a soul is due to the fact that the main purpose of prayer isn't the content of the requests (because HASHEM doesn't need information from the person about his various needs), but rather to express the yearning of his soul to HASHEM and one's subjugation before Him, while offering praise to the Creator and giving

⁴⁹ *Chovos Halevavos* points out in this regard what one of the righteous individuals said, that he used to say in his prayer before HASHEM, "My God, my thoughts are to You, remove from me any other thoughts. My worry that I won't serve You properly removes all other worries from my soul."

⁵⁰ Look what Rabbeinu Yonah wrote (Berachos 12a): "With mitzvos that are dependent solely on speech, one certainly requires intent. Because speech comes from the heart, and when he has no intent on that speech and is not doing any action, he is like one who doesn't do any part of the mitzvah at all."

⁵¹ *Chovos Halevavos* adds that prayer without intent also brings Divine anger on the one who prays. As he writes: They compared this to a servant whose master came to visit him in his home. He instructed his wife and children to honor the master and do everything for him. But he himself went and involved himself in happiness and laughter and didn't serve the master himself and didn't give him honor or act appropriately. His children were unable to fulfil all the master's needs because of his distance from them. The master grew angry at the servant and didn't accept the honor and the service from the family but rejected everything. Similarly, if one prays when his heart and conscience are disconnected from the prayer, God will not accept the prayers of his limbs or the movement of his tongue.

You see what we say at the end of the prayers, "May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You." When a person thinks about anything else in the world, whether permitted or forbidden, and afterwards ends his prayer by saying, "the thoughts of my heart find favor before You," isn't it a great insult. He claims to be speaking with God in his heart and conscience, but his heart isn't with him. And then he asks afterwards that God accept that prayer and it find favor before Him!

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thanks to His name, and throwing all the person's concerns and worries on Him.⁵²

The *Chazon Ish* in his letter⁵³ about prayer also discusses that whether prayer is a practical action or a mitzvah involving thought, it is primarily a duty of the heart. Therefore, he says, anyone who didn't fulfil his duty with his heart has also done nothing of the action, because prayer is only the service of a person's heart, as the Rabbis said, " 'To serve him with all your hearts' (Devarim 11:13). What type of service is in the heart? It is prayer."

The *Chazon Ish* continues to explain that the essence of service of HASHEM is performed through prayer which flows from the fact that, " There is not a single moment for a person on this earth that all his desires are fulfilled and that he has everything he wants. He constantly tries to ask for what is lacking for his existence and wellbeing. He is like one in pursuit to fight off hordes of calamities that are surrounding him and enclosing him."

A person needs HASHEM's kindness at every single step of his life. " And if through his fervent desire and diligent efforts he forgets his Creator... without Whom all his actions would be as naught and none of his plans would help him, then all his prayers are like a collection of words and chatter... Is this the mitzvah of prayer? To pay respect with one's mouth while the heart is distant? This is clear and obviously makes sense."

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, in his book *Nefesh Hachayim* (*sha'ar* 2; chapter 1) finds the source for the need to have intent of the heart in prayer as "something derived from its context." The verse which teaches the obligation of prayer states, " To love HASHEM, your God, and to serve him with all your hearts and with all your souls" (Devarim 11:13). This verse contains two commands: a) to love HASHEM; b) to serve Him. And about both it says, "with all your hearts."

Regarding loving HASHEM, it is clear that the mitzvah requires the heart, so it must be done with all one's heart and all one's soul. This is also stated in the first paragraph of the *Shema*, " You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul."

The Rabbis taught us that this verse innovates that the mitzvah of serving HASHEM, i.e. prayer, must also be performed with all one's heart and soul.

⁵² Based on *Chovos Halevavos* there.

⁵³ Rabbi Avraham Yishaya Karelitz, author of *Chazon Ish* in his *Collected Letters* volume 3 letter 151. See also volume 1 letter 23: " The most elevated service during prayer is to conceive as real how God hears the utterance of his lips and listens to the thought of his heart."

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Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin adds that the meaning of the mitzvah, “with all your heart” with respect to prayer is a person’s duty to remove from his heart all his worries and thoughts and to fill it with complete intent to the words of prayer, with a whole heart and from the depths of the heart.⁵⁴

He brings many sources which teach the need to pay full attention in prayer however, one who comprehends his words will see that he has several different components of intent in prayer.⁵⁵

1. Preparation of the heart before prayer – in the words of Rav Chaim: “To remove from his heart all his worries and thoughts.” As support he cites a *baraisa* from Berachos 31a: “One who prays must direct his heart to Heaven, as the verse states, ‘You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear,’ (Tehillim 10:17).”⁵⁶
2. The intent of the heart during prayer – This is the “complete intent to the words of prayer.” The source for this is the prayer of Hannah, “Hannah was speaking in her heart,” (I Shmuel 1:13). The Rabbis said, (Berachos 31a), “From here we derive that one who prays must have intent in his heart.”
3. Whole-heartedly – The words of King David, “With my whole heart I have sought You,” (Tehillim 119:10).
4. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explains the statement of the Rabbis (Berachos 30b) with regard to the verse, “To serve Him with all your hearts,” – everyone who prays must wait before praying until his entire heart is filled only with intent for the words of prayer, because if

⁵⁴ See Ramban’s famous letter to his son, where he writes: “Remove everything from your heart when you pray and direct your heart before God. Think of the word before you utter it. Do this all the days of your life with everything and you will not be wanting. And in this way your deeds will be honest, and your prayer will be pure and clean, directed and accepted before God, as the verse states, ‘You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear,’ (Tehillim 10:17).”

⁵⁵ Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin cites verses and statements of the Rabbis as sources for his opinion. However, it seems that each source relates to a single one of the many components of intent in prayer and based on this his sources are cited below.

⁵⁶ The Mishna (Berachos 5:1) states: “The righteous people of yore would wait an hour (before prayer) and then pray, so that they could direct their hearts to God.” Rabbeinu Yonah writes on this (21a in the pages of *Rif*), “In order that they could have intent so that their hearts were complete in their service of God, and they would remove from their hearts any desires or pleasures of the physical world, because when they purify their hearts from the vanities of this world and their intent is on the greatness of God, their prayer is acceptable and received before the Omnipresent. And regarding this type of intent the verse states, “You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear.”

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any other kind of thought arises in his heart, his heart will be divided between two thoughts and he is not giving his full intent to prayer.⁵⁷

5. From the depths of the heart –Zohar (Parshas Beshalach p. 63b) states, “Everyone who recites a prayer before the Holy King, must ask for his requests and pray from the depths of his heart, so that his heart will be whole before the Holy One, blessed is He, and he must have intent of his heart and his desires.”

So, it would seem that without full and complete intent the service of prayer has not been performed.

This goes to such an extent that Mabit, after saying that prayer is not a mitzvah of action but is in a person’s heart, asks the following: If so, why must one speak and verbalize the words of prayer?⁵⁸ Mabit answers that prayer:

Is not complete except through speech. For thought is not like speech (Berachos 20b). The verse made prayer dependent on intent and speech, as the verse states, “To serve Him with all your hearts.” And the Rabbis said (Ta’anis 2b) “What type of service is in the heart? You must say that this refers to prayer.”

It is called service for it involves some kind of an action which is moving one’s lips in prayer, and for this reason mere thought is not

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the meaning of a complete heart, look at what is written in Rabbi Moshe Yoschor’s book about Rabbi Meir Yisroel Kagan, “*The Chofetz Chaim, His Life and Works*,” p. 250 where it cites the words of the *Chofetz Chaim* after the death of his son Avraham. This is what the *Chofetz Chaim* said:

It is brought in the book *Toldos Adam* (chapter 16) that during the Spanish Inquisition in 1492 the wicked ones, thirsty for blood, slaughtered two children before the eyes of their loving, righteous mother. This woman of valor cast her eyes heavenward and with a strong heart whispered a prayer: “Master of the Universe, I have loved you since forever. But as long as I had my dear, beloved sons, my heart was divided in two. I left some room in it to love them, too. But now, after my children are no more, my heart had become entirely filled with my burning love for you. Now I am able to truly fulfil the mitzvah of ‘You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul.’”

After saying these words, the *Chofetz Chaim* announced with fervor, “Master of the Universe, the love that I had for my son until now I give from now to You.”

⁵⁸ Look in Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov Algazi’s *Shalmei Tzibur (Communal Peace Offerings)* p. 102b; “If it would be possible to have intent without words, the mitzvah of prayer would be thus fulfilled.”

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sufficient because thought is not like speech. However, the essential component is intent.⁵⁹

Mabit innovates that even though the essence of prayer is the intent, nevertheless since one's thoughts crystalize, take shape and solidify only once they have been uttered by the lips,⁶⁰ speech is essential to express the intent.

So, intent is the quintessence of prayer, but speech is necessary as a vessel to crystalize the intent and express it. If you remove the intent, you have removed the living soul of the prayer.

⁵⁹ *Beis Elokim; Sha'ar Hatefillah* chapter 3. We already cited in footnote [[XX]] of the previous chapter the next part of his words, where he innovates that there is a value to the word of prayer even without thought. In his opinion, speech is vital for the Ignorant people who do not understand what they say, and if there were no words to recite they would not fulfill their obligations of prayer at all. Even for those who understand the meaning, it is not possible that they can have intent every time they pray, so the recitation of the words enables them to fulfill their obligation. Mabit adds: "Therefore we say at the end of the middle blessings, "Hear our voices, Lord, our God." Because even without proper intent we ask Him to hear the voices of our prayer, even if the voice was without intent. And we conclude that blessing by saying, "For You hear the prayers of every mouth." In other words, even the prayers that were only in the mouth, without any intent, You hear in Your great mercy, since we do not know how to have intent."

We can add that many people in different generations didn't understand Hebrew and nevertheless recited the prayers, despite the fact that they couldn't understand the meaning of the words. According to the *Poskim* this type of prayer is preferable than the attempt to translate the prayers into a foreign language. It makes sense that a person who cites the thoughts of those who established the prayer, even if he doesn't concentrate on their words, is able to activate their thoughts through his words. This is like someone who prepares a list of requests for the king and reads it to the king even though he doesn't understand the king's language or doesn't think about what he is saying. See later the words of Zohar in footnote 70.

⁶⁰ Look at what Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik wrote in *On Repentance* (Hebrew) pp. 62-63 in the chapter discussing the essence of confession and the need for a person to express the thoughts of repentance verbally: "Every feeling, every sense, idea or thought, becomes clear to a person and is grasped by a person once he succeeds in expressing it verbally in a sentence possessing logical structure and grammar. As long as a person wanders with undisclosed thoughts, regardless of how strong and lofty they are, until he expresses them and makes them real, they are different, distant and hidden. 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and is weak--who can know it?' (Yirmeyahu 17:9). The prophet Yirmeyahu is not saying that a person doesn't know what is in someone else's heart, or that others don't know what is in a person's innermost heart. Rather the person himself doesn't know what is in his own heart, until he concretizes his feelings and ideas and pours them into the mold of verbal expression." He continues, "There are many things that a person knows, even thinks them, but does not dare to bring them to his lips... The Talmud relates (Kesuvos 104a) that when Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi died his students said at the time of his death, 'Anyone who says Rabbi is dead, will be stabbed with a sword.' They knew that Rabbi was dead, but it was difficult for them to believe that someone could express such a bitter event. Knowing is one thing but expressing it and confirming the event with one's lips is something else."

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The obligation of intent in prayer is codified in *halakha* by the *Tur* (*Orach Chayim, siman 90 and siman 98*).

One who prays must prepare a place for his prayer and clothes for his prayer and his thoughts and his body.

“His thoughts” – how is that implemented?

We learned, one who prays must have intent in his heart, as the verse says, “You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear,” (Tehillim 10:17). This means he should have intent for the meanings for the words that he utters with his lips and think that it is as if the Divine Presence is in front of him, as the verse states, “I have placed the Lord before me constantly,” (Tehillim 16:8).

He should awaken his intent and remove any other thoughts which distract him, so that his thoughts and intent remain focused on his prayer.

He should think that if he would speak before a king of flesh and blood, who today is here and tomorrow in his grave, he would arrange his words and have great intent in what he was saying so as not to fail. Therefore, even more so when he stands before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, he must have intent also with his thoughts. For before HASHEM thought is like speech, because He examines all thoughts.

He should pray as one beseeching, like a beggar begging at the door, and pleasantly, so that his prayer not seem like a burden he is trying to get rid of.

And after he has done all this, it is guaranteed that his prayer will be accepted. Because prayer is in place of sacrifices, as the verse states, “We will render bullocks with our lips,” Hoshea 14:3. And the verse states, “To serve Him with all your hearts.” Can there be service in the heart? Rather, what type of service is in the heart? You must say that this refers to prayer. Therefore, one must be careful that his prayer be likened to a sacrifice regarding his intent, and not mix other thoughts into his prayer, like offerings which can be invalidated by other thoughts.

We learn from the *Tur* that the service of prayer must be performed with complete intention for three reasons.

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1. Since prayer is service of the heart, the intent is the life-breath of the action of prayer
2. Since prayer is standing before HASHEM, and for HASHEM thought is like speech, it is inappropriate to stand before HASHEM and think about something else, just as it would be inappropriate to stand before Him and speak about something else.
3. Since prayer is like the service of HASHEM in sacrificial offerings, and a sacrifice which has other intent mixed in is defective to the extent that the entire sacrifice is invalidated. So too, prayer is invalidated if it has other thoughts mixed in.

Rabbi Yoel Sirkis, in his commentary *Bayis Chadash (Bach)* cites the Talmud in Berachos (29b) which says that a person has an obligation to pray in a way of supplication, not in a way described as "fixed." He concludes there:

And if he didn't say it in a way of supplication, even *ex post facto* it is not considered prayer and he must pray again.

Mishna Berura (98:9) stresses that when one stands before HASHEM in prayer, his mindset mustn't be that he is praying solely because it is an obligation, but rather because he needs it. Therefore, even one who prays as a supplication, if his thoughts wander while he is praying, he is isn't like someone who wants something and asks for it from the king but is like one who is praying only out of obligation, in other words, to be rid of his duty. He has acted improperly and must be very careful to guard against this.

In *Biur Halakha* he adds that there are several authorities who require one to pray again in such a case.⁶¹

In *Yad Ketana* (on Rambam *Hilkhot Tefillah* 1:11), after citing the reason that nowadays one who doesn't have intent during prayer does not go and pray again, "because even if he repeats it, it is almost certain that he will not have intent the second time, so what is the purpose of repeating it for nothing?"⁶²

⁶¹ Rav Dessler in *Mikhtav Me'Eliyahu* volume 5; p. 149-150 cites Zohar (Yisro 67a) that one who raises his hands upwards but doesn't have intent in his prayer, "should be cursed by the ten powers appointed to raise up that prayer." Rav Dessler explains that by praying without intent a person brings a curse upon himself. The movements of his body do not match what he is thinking inside and are false. If he is not concerned that through his actions he is making his soul false, then he is fooling himself.

⁶² This is similar to what *Tosafos* write in Bava Basra 164b, citing the Yerushalmi in Berachos (2:4) where we find that one who did not have intent does not go back and pray again because praying without intent is a sin which all suffer from.

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He continues to say,

"But truly prayer without intent is not worth anything and doesn't do anything. Because the entire mitzvah of prayer is what the verse states, "You shall serve HASHEM." The Rabbis learned that this service is the service of the heart, as it states, "to serve Him with all your hearts." And the Rabbis stated, "What type of service is in the heart? You must say that this refers to prayer." Behold, they said that the essence of the mitzvah of prayer is service of the *heart*, but not service of the *mouth*. If one had no intent in his heart during prayer, then there is no service of the heart and the mitzvah has not been fulfilled at all.

The Torah did not command us to "pray" nor to "serve." Rather the mitzvah is to "serve Him with all your hearts." This teaches that words recited in prayer without any accompanying intent do not count to fulfil the mitzvah.⁶³ Rather they are, as *Reishis Chochma*⁶⁴ says, like "idle chatter."

⁶³ Look at *Shalmei Tzibur* by Rabbi Yisroel Yaakov Algazi (the father of Maharit Algazi) on p. 102b:

There are people who think that the mitzvah of prayer is completed when they come to the Synagogue and stand on their feet and say from "God, open my lips," until "He who makes peace." And when they do this they think they have fulfilled the mitzvah of prayer that God commanded... But someone who God has graced with intellect and given insight will look and contemplate how wise God was when He came to command us the mitzvah of prayer. He didn't write "You shall pray to Me" or "Entreat before Me" or "Ask from Me and I will give you," or anything similar, like in the *Shema* he wrote, "and speak of them." ... Rather, when He commanded about prayer He wrote, "And serve Me with all your hearts," to inform us that he is not commanding this mitzvah concerning words, rather it is only about the intent of the heart. One who gives Him the intent of his heart fulfils the mitzvah but one who offers Him only words does not fulfil the mitzvah, because He asked for service of the heart and not of words."

⁶⁴ Rabb Eliyahu Di Vidas, author of *Reishis Chochma*, at the end of his book *Totza'os Chaim* (p. 83-84 in the 1930 Warsaw edition s.v. *Hashem sefasai tiftach*) writes: "When a person prays but his heart is not with him, this is not praise but like idle chatter, because prayer without intent is like a body without a soul."

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Internal Service Not External Service

Prayer Without Intent Misses Its Entire Purpose

Mabit, in *Beis Elokim* (*Sha'ar Hatefillah* beginning of chapter 1) defines prayer as "Man's request from HASHEM for a need that is beyond him." He elaborates there explaining each word in this sentence.⁶⁵

How is it possible to make so many requests by uttering words without any intent on what he is asking and without giving attention to the contents of what he says? Is there any value in asking when the person asking isn't paying attention to what he is saying?⁶⁶

Intent is the living soul of the prayer both in terms of the essence of the prayer and its purpose.

We will see below, in the chapter about the essence of prayer, that prayer is an action which purifies a person and it is an act in which the person stands

⁶⁵ Rabbi Yitzchak Goldwasser in his book *Lesasson Ulesimcha* (*ma'amar* 3) points out that prayer is a scheme that God gave people to obtain from Him satisfaction of their needs when a person turns to Him and asks mercy for himself and for God's people. Therefore, it is obvious to the Talmud (Berachos 20b) that women are obligated in prayer because it is a request for mercy and women need mercy just like men.

Also, the Talmud explains the reason that one can fulfil the obligation of prayer in any language, saying that prayer is a request for mercy, and mercy can be asked for in any way. As the Talmud says (Sotah 33a), "It is mercy, and he can pray however he wants."

So, we see that the essence of prayer is the request for mercy from the Master of mercy.

The knowledge that we have the option of being saved from our suffering through prayer is so important that it is the main reason for reading Megillas Esther on Purim.

Rambam rules (end of the list of 613 mitzvos in beginning of *Sefer Mada*): The sages established reading the megillah at its time... to make known to the future generations that the Torah's promise is true: 'Who is the great nation that has God close to it like the Lord our God, whenever we call on Him,' (for He was close to our supplications and He saved us)."

⁶⁶ Look at the words of the *Chofetz Chaim* cited in Rav Pincus's book *Nefesh Shimshon* where he speaks about faith (*Yesodos Ha'emunah Ve'ikarah, Hanhagas Hashem Vehashgachaso*) on p. 67: Once a Jew stood next to the *Chofetz Chaim* and recited the blessing, 'He did good, he does good... Never let us be in need.' The *Chofetz Chaim* said to him, " 'Do you know that just now you asked for fifteen things?' The man was shocked. The *Chofetz Chaim* counted them for him. 'You asked God for grace - that you should find grace in the eyes of others and you shouldn't seem contemptible in their eyes, afterwards you asked for kindness, mercy and spaciousness - that your quarters be spacious and you will not have to live confined, you asked for salvation - how many times do your children cross the road in a day? And for success - when you go to learn today that you should be successful in your learning, blessing, salvation, consolation, sustenance and prosperity, mercy, life, peace and all good. Imagine that your child would come to you and say, 'Father, I need this, that and the other' very quickly - is that how we make requests?"

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before HASHEM, bereft of power and with the recognition that everything comes from HASHEM and that he is completely dependent on his Creator in every realm of his life, including his very existence.

Considering prayer and its essence, it is clear that praying by mindlessly reciting the words has no purpose.

For prayer to embody its essence, it is necessary that it be accompanied by this basic feeling of the person standing before omnipotent HASHEM, without sensing or understanding – for superficially it seems that the world runs on the principle of causal relationship – that in practice everything comes from Divine Providence. A prayer which doesn't express this deep feeling of the person, crying for salvation and recognizing that he himself is unable to save even himself but needs the help of Heaven,⁶⁷ has missed the essence of prayer as the service of HASHEM.

The understanding of the essence of prayer as service of HASHEM in a person's heart requires that the person has intent in his heart to the words he is saying and not to make do just with the utterances of his lips.

Rav Pincus in *Nefesh Shimshon* (*Yesodos Ha'emunah Ve'ikarah, Hanhagas Hashem Vehashgachaso* p. 42) illustrates the meaning of intent in prayer with the following analogy:

A person has a sick relative in his home, and in his prayer, he turns to HASHEM and cries out, "HASHEM, heal us and we shall be healed."

All his concentration is on this sick person... his intent in prayer is "I need." A little bit of intent is "I need it a little bit" and a lot of intent is "I need it a lot."

We must understand that this isn't additional intent in prayer. This is additional concentration on what he needs. If so, a person could recite the entire *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer and have intent on every word: "You endow man with intellect and teach humanity understanding" –

⁶⁷ Look later in the chapter on the essence of prayer that this feeling underlies the basis of Rabbi Yehoshua's answer to the questions of the people of Alexandria, as brought in the Talmud (Nida 70b). Only when we recognize that "Many have done this, and it didn't help them," in other words that physical effort does not guarantee success, only then is there room for prayer. Only after a person has tried with all his might to study without achieving wisdom, tried as hard as he could in business but didn't become rich, and the likes, then he reaches the situation where he recognizes that his natural effort on its own is not enough to afford success, only then can he pray from the depth of his heart as he should -- and his prayer will be answered and he will succeed.

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Master of the universe, I am ignorant and know nothing, help me to learn Torah; "Return us, our Father, to Your Torah" – I also need to repent; "Forgive us" -- I desperately need forgiveness and atonement. And so on, for the entire prayer. His intent in prayer is "I need, I, I, I..." but in fact he has not spoken at all to HASHEM.

The correct understanding of intent is to know that you are speaking with the Living God. There is a Master of the universe, living, real, and you stand before Him. All money is His, health is His. He is omnipotent. Simply speak to Him, cry and supplicate before Him – and He will give you. All your concentration during prayer must be about Him.

A small amount of intent would be: "Master of the universe, You heal all the ill people of Yisrael, You have billions of people in Your world. Can you not give me a small amount of healing?"

A lot of intent would be: "Master of the universe, I will not abandon You, because I love you so much. And You love me so much. You are my God. So please, give me some healing."

That is intent.

This concentration on HASHEM as the Living, Existing God is real and true. The greater this recognition is the more the person will have intent in his prayer.

Similarly, Rav Pincus in *Tiferes Shimshon* (Devarim p. 182 on "Prayer with Intent") explains that we are used to thinking that prayer with intent means, for example, if a person prays for a sick patient, to concentrate more while uttering the blessing of "heal us." But this is not correct. Even before the prayer "heal us," the heart of that person is hoping with all his heart for that person to get better. Additional intent in prayer is the recognition with the entire heart that: "HASHEM, You are so great, Your mercy is infinite, nobody restrains You, no sin prevents You, You do only what You choose to, You are able to save in a single moment... and You watch over everything, on every event, and You care. Therefore, please heal this sick person."

In other words, intent in prayer is concentrating on the greatness of the Creator, and His infiniteness, His unlimited power, and the futility of a person, one's complete submission to his Creator, like someone who has no independent power and requires HASHEM's salvation in every facet of his existence. Prayer is service of the heart, because the heart comprehends

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Divinity. "This is the entity of prayer. If there is no comprehension of the Divine, it is not service."

If so, once we have reached this understanding that this is the meaning of intent in prayer and this is the essence of prayer, how is it possible to pray without intent? Prayer without intent loses the purpose of prayer, its base and its essence.

Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv (the Alter of Kelm) in his book *Chochma Umussar* (vol. 2 p. 25) brings an analogy of two storekeepers. One comes each day to his store, checks his merchandise placed there, counts each item for sale and afterwards locks up his store and goes home. The second strives to sell his produce. That store bustles with many customers. As one leaves the next one enters. The merchandise is sold every day and turnover is very high, and business gets bigger each day.

The two stores open with identical merchandise, the same quality and the same amount. But one store is run like a living concern while the other is dead.

Similarly, says the Alter of Kelm, two people can stand and pray three times a day. Both even have intent for the meaning of the words. But even so, one runs it like a living concern while the other runs it as a dead business. One of them repeats the prayers day by day, while translating in his head the words of prayer into his own spoken language, but his prayer has no feeling. He had the same intent on the meaning of the words of prayer yesterday as he has today, and he has no new understanding. That is a dead business.

It is true that HASHEM doesn't withhold reward from any creature, but there is no chance of that business developing. This person will pray in the same way throughout his life as he did when he was a child. As he came, so he left.

In contrast, the second tries to understand the content of the words, he strives to imagine before his eyes in a way that concretizes that which is hidden within each word, and his ideas change from one day to the next. One who prays with attention finds in the same words new emotions and thoughts which he didn't feel or think ever before. This is a living business.

It seems, accordingly, that the self-criticism of the Amora'im cited in the Yerushalmi Berachos (2:4) was not of having no intent at all, but how difficult

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it is to concentrate and reach a level in intent and innovation that will meet the level of what they expect from themselves.⁶⁸

Rabbi Uri Weisblum (in the introduction to *He'aros Hatefillah*) adds:

“ In learning there is progress from one year to the next. When a person works hard at learning and comes back after a few years to the same section he will have to concede that his previous learning was shallow. Each time he returns to that section he will uncover new meaning. What was once *lamdus* becomes *p'shat*. Now let's imagine that a person would read a section of Talmud three times each day, and would translate the Aramaic words into the vernacular, without thinking about it – that is a dead business.

In prayer, the same prayer that we pray as children we pray in our youth and continue until we get old and even very aged.

The Talmudic Sages, with their piercing insight, compared prayer to a pitchfork.⁶⁹ A pitchfork is used to turn over grain and clean it from chaff. This means that when a person stands in prayer he is holding a pitchfork to turn things over. Let us turn sick people into healthy ones, let's turn sinners into penitents, let's turn those who are far from intellect to those wise in Torah, let's bring peace to the world. Each one of us, when standing in prayer, is an emissary of the congregation, even when praying alone. We stand holding a pitchfork, and yet we leave the grain in the field as it was, without doing a thing.

Are the Men of Faith Lost?

Since intent is the foundation of prayer, we would expect the default situation would be that people would have good intent while praying. However, not only do we know that in our generation the number of people who have intent for prayer is very small, but also in earlier generations we find many of the greatest Rabbis who said about themselves that they were unable to have intent in prayer. The impression is that having intent in prayer is very rare and not common at all.

Rabbi Nahman of Breslav in *Likutei Tefillah* testifies about himself in his prayer and crying out to HASHEM: “ Have mercy on my soul which is so

⁶⁸ See below for another explanation of the Yerushalmi and the words of the Amora'im.

⁶⁹ Yevamos 64a. They derive this from the verse, “ Yitzchak entreated the Lord opposite his wife,” (Bereishis 25:21). The Hebrew word “entreated” (*vayetar*) is like the Hebrew word for “pitchfork” (*atar*).

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exhausted, which is so worn out, and pour cold water on me to revive me and return my soul, which is so, so exhausted and so worn out, to health, because for days and years I have prayed with no heart, and I have not been able to put any intent from my heart into my prayers, my heart is distant from the words of prayer, and for this reason my heart is so exhausted.

Lest you say that these are merely words of righteousness of a unique tsaddik who aspires to perfection and complains that he has not yet achieved it – go and look at the words of the Talmud which say that this phenomenon is widespread among them all, and even the Amora'im testify about themselves that they had no intent in prayer.

So, for example, we find in Bava Basra (164b) that Rav says that every person transgresses every single day of his life the sin of "in-depth prayer."

What is the meaning of this sin called "in-depth prayer"?

Tosafos there explain that "in-depth prayer" means lack of intent in prayer. "There is no person saved from this daily sin, because there is no person who is able to have proper intent in prayer."⁷⁰ So it seems that every person sins every single day in the sin of "in-depth prayer," since nobody can have proper intent in prayer.

⁷⁰ Conversely, Rashbam there explains that *iyun tefillah* means a person who prays with all his heart that he will succeed in a certain matter, and afterwards "decides in his heart that God will give him his due and will do what he needs and will listen to his prayer because he prayed with such intent. Since in practice, not all a person's requests are granted, he is likely to come to think heretical thoughts. *Iyun tefillah* is thus the sense of "I deserve it" which flows from prayer with intent about a certain topic. This feeling is the source of many a sin.

However, the Talmud points out the words of Rav, who states that *iyun tefillah* is one of the sins that "a person cannot avoid every day." Whereas the phenomenon that the Rashbam points out, about prayer with great concentration when the person looks to it being answered, is not something which happens every day.

Therefore, *Tosafos* there explain that Rashbam's explanation does not appear correct, because "many people do not wait to see when their prayers will be answered, for they do not have such strong intent such that they are sure their prayers will be answered."

Why did the Talmud say that every person stumbles on this sin of *iyun tefillah* every day?

Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer in *On the Subject of One Who Prays Too Much* (Hebrew) in *Zechar Le'avraham* 186 on p. 190 also points out this contrast. He cites the Yerushalmi (Ta'anis 4:1), "Rabbi Yochanan... in the name of Rabbi Meir: One should pray at length because all who pray at length are answered." However, in the Talmud Bavli (Berachos 61a) Rabbi Meir says, "A person should always speak few words before God."

Rabbi Sofer resolves this apparent contradiction between the two statements of Rabbi Meir, explaining that in times of trouble or danger, one should say few words, "lest he stumble and question God's attribute of justice, and his tongue ensnare him." However, at other times a person should pray at length and will be answered.

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Maybe you will say that the Talmud is not referring to someone who has no intent at all, but someone who doesn't not have sufficient intent, as implied in the words of *Tosafos*, "Nobody is able to have proper intent in prayer."

However, this explanation does not fit with the continuation of *Tosafos* there.

Tosafos there cite the words of the Yerushalmi in Berachos (2:7) where we find that one who prays without intent does not need to repeat his prayer, because this is a common issue for everyone.

In that citation Rabbi Hiyya says that he never had intent for prayer in his life. Once he tried to have intent and he found himself thinking about a question that was completely unrelated to prayer – who enters to see the king first? The minister or the Exilarch?

The Amora Shmuel added that in the middle of prayer he found himself counting chicks.

Rabbi Bun bar Hiyya said that he found himself counting the rows of stones in the masonry.

Rabbi Masanya even said that he was grateful to his head because when he reached the line beginning "*modim*" ("we give thanks") in his prayer his head bowed by itself.

This implies that *Tosafos* is referring to a total lack of intent, to the extent that Rav Masanya's head bowed itself without any awareness, and Shmuel found himself counting chicks during prayer.⁷¹

These are the examples that the great Amora'im give us, from which we learn that the discussion is not referring to intent which is not complete, but rather to having the mind removed from the prayer completely and being involved in entirely other matters.

The question is: How is the prayer of these Amora'im considered prayer at all? They seemed to have completely lost the basic foundation of intent. Could it be that the prayer of these Amora'im was worthless and was like a body without a soul? Furthermore, what do these examples come to teach us?

In any event, following the words of the Yerushalmi we return to the question that we set down in the Introduction: How is the sin of lack of intent in prayer

⁷¹ For a homiletic explanation of the Yerushalmi look at Rabbi Yehoshua Heller in his book *Divrei Yehoshua – Beis Tefillah* chapters 2 and 30.

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so common? Why is it so difficult to concentrate? If the mighty Amora'im were felled by this, how can there be an obligation on every person when there is nobody who can uphold it? Is it possible that none of us are actually praying since we saw above that intent is the life-breath of prayer, and prayer without intent is like a body without a soul?

Prayer Without Intent Is Still Considered to Be Prayer

Although we saw sources above which say that prayer without intent has no meaning or purpose, we also find sources which say that such a prayer, even though not ideal, is still considered to be prayer and has some value.

Mabit in *Sha'ar Hatefillah* chapter 3, after writing that intent is the essence of prayer and speech is the actualization of thought, elaborates on the importance of vocalizing the words of prayer.

Speech also helps the ignorant people who do not understand what they say, and if there were no words to recite they would not fulfill their obligations of prayer at all. Even those who understand the meaning, it is not possible that they can have intent every time they pray. Therefore, we say at the end of the middle blessings, "Hear our voices, Lord, our HASHEM." Because even without proper intent we ask Him to hear the voices of our prayer, even if the voice was without intent. And we conclude that blessing by saying, "For You hear the prayers of every mouth." In other words, even the prayers that were only in the mouth, without any intent, You hear in Your great mercy, since we do not know how to have intent. As the verse states, "You Who hears prayer, all flesh will come to You," (Tehillim 65:3). Meaning, insofar as He hears the voice of prayer, even without intent, all flesh will come to Him.

So even though the essence of prayer is the service of the heart, nevertheless Mabit gives words without intent some value.

Beis Yosef (*Orach Chayim* 591) rules that it is preferable for a person to pray with his mouth rather than listen to the prayer leader recite the communal prayer, because it is difficult for someone to have intent while listening to the prayer leader, "But when a person reads the words with his mouth, even if he reads some of it without intent, he has fulfilled his obligation, as the Talmud

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says, "Until here is the mitzvah of intent and reading, from here on reading alone without intent," (Berachos 13b)⁷²

The reason for this is explained in *Maaseh Rav*, which is the customs of the Vilna Gaon, in section 41, where it says: To pray with intent, word by word, and to have intent for the meaning of the words,"⁷³

But it adds there in *Tosefes Maaseh Rav* section 12: Rabbi Chayim of Volozhin said regarding prayer without intent, which is like a body without a soul (*Chovos Halevavos* cited earlier), that if it is not like an animal offering which has a soul, it is nevertheless considered like a meal offering which also has no soul. If the prayer has intent, it is considered like the daily offering.⁷⁴

So, it turns out that even though prayer with intent is preferable, and it is like a daily sacrifice that was an animal with an animate soul, even prayer without intent is not worthless. Such a prayer is compared to a meal offering which comes from an animal which has no animate soul. Yet it is nevertheless considered to be like an offering.

This is where our question arises. How is it possible to do "service of the heart" without one's heart? How is it possible that prayer with no heart still has value? We have explained that the entire purpose of prayer is determined

⁷² This practical question was asked in *Responsa Torah Lishma*, siman 17: "Since the importance of prayer is dependent on intent, and the Rabbis said that prayer without intent is like a body without a soul, if so, someone who is preoccupied in his thoughts and cannot pray with intent, if his prayer will be for nothing and will be pushed away, why should he pray?" The answer was: "If he is preoccupied and cannot have any intent in prayer, nevertheless he should pray, and his prayer will not be rejected, because his lack of intent is beyond his control due to his preoccupation. This is apparent in the Zohar (Parshas Vayehi p. 243b): Rabbi Chizkiya said that which we say that a person must always prepare his praise of his Master and then afterwards pray, one whose heart is preoccupied and wants to pray but is in a dilemma and cannot prepare the praises of his Master as he should, what should he do? Rabbi Yosei said: Even if he is unable to have intent in his heart and mind why should his preparation and praise of his Master be worse? Rather he should prepare the praise of his Master even though he cannot have intent, and then recite his prayer. So, it is explicit there." From the Zohar that he cites it seems that the matter is like a choir that sings the praises of the king, that even if the members of the choir are not paying attention to the words of praise in the song, nevertheless it is preferable that they sing, because if all those who do not have intent in their song stop singing, the praise of the king would be lessened for only some of the choir would be singing his praise.

⁷³ The Vilna Gaon adds: If a stray thought comes during his prayer, he should wait until that thought has passed. At every mention of God's name, he need only have intent that He is "Master of everything."

⁷⁴ The daily offering was an animal (a sheep) possessing a soul, whereas a meal offering was from inanimate things – meal, oil and frankincense.

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by the intent that it expresses. If so, how can we say that prayer without intent is still valuable, and like a meal offering which has content and meaning even though it has no soul? The essence is lacking completely.

Intent According to Rambam

Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik, in *Chidushei Rabbeinu Chaim Halevi* on Rambam *Hilchos Tefillah* asks the following question.

- a. In the Talmud (Berachos 34b) we find that: "One who prays must have intent in his heart for all [the blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer] but if he is unable to have intent for all of them he must have intent for one [blessing]. Rabbi Hiyya said that Rav Safra said... [for the blessing of] Avos."

In other words, the one blessing for which it is an obligation to have intent is the blessing of Avos, which is the first of the blessings in the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer.

This is how Rambam rules the halakha. In *Hilchos Tefillah* (10:1) he says that "one who prayed and had no intent must pray over again with intent. But if he had intent in the first blessing, he does not need [to repeat his prayer]."

This implies that intent is only an absolute requirement in the first blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei* but not in all of the blessings.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Rabbi Avraham son of the Rambam in his *Responsa* (79) clarifies that there are two reasons that intent is necessary specifically for Avos. "Firstly, that it is the first prayer, and when one commences praying he must be diligent in having intent. And secondly, the essence of the blessing is accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is most appropriate for intent."

This ruling has yet another dimension according to Rav Pincus in his book *Tiferes Shimshon* (Devarim p. 182, regarding prayer with intent. See also p. 176-179 on the verse "And to serve Him with all your hearts," Devarim 10:12). Intent in prayer does not mean that when a person reaches the prayer "Heal us" (*refa'einu*) he cries out from the depths of his heart that someone should be cured. Rather, his intent must be entwined in the recognition that there is no power other than God, Who gives death and life, Who creates cures and brings salvation. He is the One Who made sick and He is the One Who has the power to heal.

He writes, "If a person only asks, that is not service. True, he is asking from the One who has the power to help, and he asks from the recognition that only God can answer his needs. However, if his entire petition is with this intent, this is still not service but a petition to One who can help him."

Therefore, Rambam rules that the mitzvah of prayer is first of all to know to Whom the person is speaking – to "the Great, Mighty, and Awesome God."

Before he begins his prayer, he must have the excitement in his soul, from the knowledge of Who he is turning to now.

"*Elohim*" means the One Who has the power. And Who loves us infinitely. He is concerned about us, He is close to us, He is our God.

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- b. This appears to contradict what Rambam himself rules in *Hilchos Tefillah* (4:1) that one of the five things that invalidates prayer is “lack of intent of the heart.” Rambam clarifies (4:15) “What is intent of the heart? Any prayer without intent is not prayer. If one prayed without intent, he must pray over again with intent. If one finds his mind to be confused and his heart distracted, it is forbidden for him to pray until his mind is calm.”

Rav Chaim concludes from the vague language of the Rambam that according to the Rambam every part of prayer must be recited with intent and if it was recited without intent is not considered to be prayer, for the Rambam stated “Any prayer without intent is not prayer.” If so, the part of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer that was recited without intent is not considered as if it was said at all, which would make it only a partial prayer and the person should have to repeat it and recite the full prayer. How can this be reconciled with the discussion in the Talmud (Berachos 34a) and Rambam’s ruling (10:1) that if one has intent for only the first blessing of *Avos* the entire prayer is still valid even without intent in the rest of the *Shemoneh Esrei*?

- c. Rabbi Chaim further asks, there is a general principle which applies to all mitzvos, that “mitzvos require intent.”⁷⁶

Prayer is a positive Torah mitzvah according to Rambam.⁷⁷

If so, it must be necessary to have intent during prayer to fulfill the obligation of the positive mitzvah of prayer, since all mitzvos require intent to give validity to the action. How can it be that specifically prayer, which is the service of the heart, does not require intent and is even less than the other positive Torah mitzvos which do require intent?

Without this it is not service, but merely petition. Service means submission to God.” Therefore, if this is the main intent in prayer, it is clear that the person has to have intent primarily in the first section of the prayer, in the blessing of *Avos*, because it does not contain any specific requests, but is only the recognition that the person is standing before the great, mighty and awesome God. In this blessing the person nullifies himself to his God and recognizes His powers. Therefore, this is the gist of prayer which requires intent.

⁷⁶ *Shulchan Aruch* 60:4: “Some say that mitzvos do not require intent. And some say that they do require intent in order to fulfill one’s obligation, and this latter is the *halakha*.” See also *Beis Yosef Orach Chaim* 589 where he says that this is also Rambam’s opinion. He writes, “In terms of *halakha*, since *Rif*, Rambam and *Rosh* agree that mitzvos require intent, this is how we hold.”

⁷⁷ *Hilchos Tefillah* 1:1 “It is a positive mitzvah to pray daily, as the verse states, ‘And to serve the Lord, your God.’”

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The Measure of Intent According to *Chazon Ish*

Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz (known as the *Chazon Ish*) in his glosses to *Chidushei Rabbeinu Chaim Halevi* does not accept the principle of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik that lack of this intent disqualifies throughout the entire prayer, because “this is something which is impossible.” A person cannot have constant intent throughout the entire prayer, and it is only natural that there will be moments when he utters words of prayer without intent. *Chazon Ish* in this context cites the words of the Talmud in Bava Basra (164b) that “there is no one who is saved from the sin of in-depth prayer” (which according to *Tosafos* means a lack of intent during prayer). Similarly, *Chazon Ish* cites the words of the Yerushalmi in Berachos quoted above, with the Amora'im who prayed without intent.

So, the *Chazon Ish* resolves the words of Rambam as follows:

In chapter 4 of *Hilchos Tefillah* Rambam is discussing the meaning of the essence of prayer, so he rules that prayer without any intent is not considered to be prayer. However, in chapter 10 of *Hilchos Tefillah* Rambam discusses the measure of intent, and in this he rules that it is sufficient to have intent in the first blessing of *Avos*,⁷⁸ because a person cannot manage to have intent in all of the prayer.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *Chazon Ish* points out that not all lack of intent invalidates prayer and nullifies it. He gives as an example the *halakha* in Rambam (*Hilchos Tefillah* 4:18) that, “One may not stand to pray following laughter, nor after light-headedness, nor after chatter, nor after argument, nor after anger, but rather through words of Torah. And not following words of *halakha* even though they are words of Torah, in order that one's heart will not be bothered with the *halakha*, rather following words of Torah which do not require in-depth thought, like clear halakhic rulings.” *Chazon Ish* points out that it is clear that a person who stands to pray after in-depth Torah study has not thereby invalidated his prayer, even though Rambam couches the *halakha* in terms of “One may not stand to pray...”

This demonstrates, says *Chazon Ish*, that not every *halakha* related to purity of intent in prayer invalidates and nullifies the prayer if it is lacking. The definition of lack of intent which invalidates the prayer is in chapter 10 and relates to the meaning of the words in the blessing of *Avos* and nothing else.

⁷⁹ *Chazon Ish*'s explanation seems to answer the contradiction in the Rambam's words. However, it doesn't appear to answer the conceptual difficulty that we asked above: How can prayer without intent for the words being spoken be considered as prayer if it doesn't express the essence of prayer as a statement of faith in God?

According to the *Chazon Ish* Rambam's approach is answered, because since the person fulfills his obligation with the blessing of *Avos*, even if he had no further intent during the rest of the prayer. However, our question about the essential purpose of prayer remains. What value does prayer, which is service of the heart, have when it lacks intent of the heart entirely? What meaning is there to that body without a soul?

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Two Types of Prayer According to Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik

Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik answers the contradiction in the Rambam's words using his approach of discerning between "two laws." In other words, in this case, between two types of thought which are both referred to in halakha by the term "intent."

1. The knowledge that while standing in prayer one is standing before HASHEM. With this intent the person defines his action as prayer. This is the minimal intent before standing in prayer, similar to the opening words, "HASHEM, open my lips."
2. Intent on the meaning of the words that one utters. This is the intent during prayer.

Rambam's ruling in chapter 4 (halakha 15) of *Hilchos Tefillah* relates to the first type of intent, of standing before HASHEM. Without that there is no act of prayer at all. Therefore, Rambam continues (in halakha 16) and clarifies: What is intent? That one removes all other thoughts from his heart and see himself as if he is standing before the Divine Presence."

The service of prayer must truly be performed with the recognition that one is standing before HASHEM as a tangible reality. If one lacks this type of intent in any part of his prayer, the prayer is invalid, because without this type of intent he is not performing an act of prayer.

However, Rambam's ruling in chapter 10 of *Hilchos Tefillah* relates to someone who knows and recognizes before Whom he stands. In other words, he is performing an act of prayer, but he is lacking the second type of intent. The Talmud in Berachos rules that this type of intent – concentrating on the meaning of the words – is only essential in the first blessing of *Avos* but not for the rest of the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik distinguishes between two sources for the different requirements of intent.

1. There is a general law which applies to all the positive mitzvos that mitzvos require intent. A person who wants to fulfil his obligation in any mitzvah must have intent while performing the mitzvah that he is

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doing it for the sake of the mitzvah.⁸⁰ Of course everyone must know which mitzvah he is performing and what it involves. Someone who does not know, for example, what *tefillin* are and what the mitzvah of *tefillin* is, cannot have intent for the mitzvah of *tefillin*. This applies also to prayer and requires that the person should know what prayer is and understand the essence of the act that he is performing when standing in prayer. So, at the outset a person should think "I have intent to fulfil the mitzvah of prayer." And what is the mitzvah of prayer? The most basic definition of prayer is standing before HASHEM. Therefore, one cannot have intent to fulfil the obligation of prayer without knowing that the meaning of prayer is to stand before HASHEM.⁸¹

2. There is a specific law that applies to the specific intent required for prayer. That is, to have intent for the meaning of the words being said. This is only essential for the first blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei* and does not invalidate the remainder of the prayer.

Therefore, if one did not have intent at any point during prayer that he was standing before HASHEM it invalidates the prayer, since it is not an act of prayer, but merely *misasek* - an absentminded engagement.⁸² The halakha is that mitzvos require intent, and he had no intent.

However, if the person knows that he is standing before HASHEM and only lacks the second type of intent, understanding the meaning of the words –

⁸⁰ So, for example, a person who wears *tzitzis* must have intent "for the mitzvah of *tzitzis*." *Biur Halakha* (siman 60; s.v. *veyesh omrim shetzerichos kavana*) writes: "Look in *Bach* and *Pri Megadim* in siman 8 and siman 625 where they imply that if one has no intent for the mitzvos of *tzitzis* and *sukkah* the act is invalid, just like with other mitzvos. Therefore, if one is called to the Torah and takes either his own *tallis* or a communal *tallis* to ascend the *bimah*, since he is in a hurry, probably won't have intent to fulfil the mitzvah of *tzitzis* when he puts it on, so he transgresses the positive mitzvah. See what Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach writes in *Minchas Shlomo* siman 1 who discusses this at length. Similarly, one who eats in a *sukkah* and doesn't have intent to perform the mitzvah of *sukkah* is considered like one who eats outside a *sukkah*."

⁸¹ Based on this it is clear why according to Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer is also known as the *Amida* – The Standing – because this is the essence of prayer, standing before God.

⁸² *Misasek* – "absentminded engagement" - is a *halakhic* term which refers to a person doing an action without any intent. One who is "absentmindedly engaged" is different from one who does something unwittingly, because one who does it unwittingly still has intent to do an action, but doesn't know that it is a prohibited action, or doesn't see the consequences of the action. However, one who is absentmindedly engaged doesn't intend to do that action at all. The example of absentminded engagement given in the Talmud (*Kerisus* 19b) is one who intends to pick up a plant that was not attached to the ground but ended up detaching the plant (See *Tosafos* there and in *Kesuvos* 5b s.v. *im timtze lomar*)

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which is only necessary for the first blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei* – his prayer is valid.

It seems that this distinction of Rabbi Soloveitchik is explicit in Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chayim* 98:1) in the laws of prayer:

One who prays must have intent for the meaning of the words he utters,⁸³ and must think that the Divine Presence is before him; he must remove all other thoughts that disturb him, until his mind and intent are focused purely on the prayer. And he must think that if he was speaking before a human king he would prepare his words and have proper intent on them so as not to fail. How much more so before the King who is King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, who scrutinizes every thought.

And this is what the early pious people and men of merit would do; they would isolate themselves and have intent on their prayers until they reached a level where they were divested from the physical and their intellect was promoted, until they almost reached the level of prophecy.

Thus, there is one type of intent that relates to the meaning of the words which one utters during prayer, and another intent where the person cleaves to the Creator and senses the Divine Presence before him, which is “standing before HASHEM.”

Based on the explanation of Rabbi Soloveitchik it appears that we have gained additional insight into the words of his grandfather, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, cited at the beginning of this chapter. We saw there that Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin in his book *Nefesh Hachayim* (2:1) brings many sources from where we learn the need for intent in different aspects of prayer.

One aspect is to have intent before prayer. His source for this is the Talmud Berachos (31a): “One who prays must direct his heart to Heaven, as the verse

⁸³ *Mishna Berura* (98:1) points out that the “meaning of the words” does not mean any special kabbalistic intent, but simply the plain meaning of each word, as a child would understand it. He writes, “One should not have intent on [kabbalistic] Names or Unifications, but simply pray according to the plain meaning, to understand the words with intent, unless he is someone who is initiated into the [kabbalistic] secrets and knows how to have intent with his heart and mind in awe. For if not, Heaven forbid, he can cause much damage. Look at *Magen Avraham* in the name of the Zohar. And in *Responsa of Maharshal* §98 he writes at length and testified about Rabbi Shimshon of Chinon who said that after he learned all the secrets of the kabbalah he would pray like a one-day-old baby.

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states, 'You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear,' (Tehillim 10:17).'"

The second aspect is intent for the words of prayer, as we find in the prayer of Hannah: "Hannah was speaking in her heart," (I Shmuel 1:13). The Rabbis said, (Berachos 31a), "From here we derive that one who prays must have intent in his heart."

The concepts are clear, for as stated, there is a preparation for prayer and intent which comes before the prayer, when this type of intent establishes the status of prayer and focuses on the person's feeling that he is standing before HASHEM. Then there is a separate intent during prayer, which focuses on the person's intent on the content of the words that he is reciting.

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik uses the concept of "standing before HASHEM" as a basic definition of the essence of prayer. Let us examine the foundation of this halakhic concept that underlies the definition of the act of prayer.

Standing Before HASHEM

The Talmud (Berachos 31a) says that, "One who prays must have intent in his heart."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Look at what *Mabit* wrote (*Beis Elokim* chapter 5): The core of our prayer is the Eighteen Blessings... and they were established as if one is speaking with the Divine Presence before him. "Blessed are You," "You are mighty," "You are holy," "You favor man with knowledge," "Bring us back," ... "Find favor," "We give thanks to You," etc. For this reason, one must turn to face the place of the Divine Presence, like a person speaking to a friend who turns to face him."

Ramchal (*Mesilas Yesarim* chapter 19) writes: "The principal fear is the fear of God's greatness. A person must think when he is praying or doing any mitzvah that he is praying or doing that mitzvah before the King, the King of kings. This is what the Tanna says, (Berachos 28), 'When you pray, know before Whom you are praying.'

"A person must look at three things and contemplate them in order to achieve this type of fear. Firstly, that he is literally standing before the Creator, blessed is His name, and is conversing with Him, even though no human eye can see Him. And you see that this is the most difficult, to envisage in a person's heart a true depiction since the senses do not contribute to this at all. However, one who has the correct intellect with some contemplation and attention is able to fix the truth of the matter in his heart, how he comes and converses literally with Him, blessed is He, and he supplicates before Him and requests from Him. And He, blessed is He, pays attention and listens to his words, just as when a person speaks to his friend, and his friend listens and hears him."

Similarly, the *Mishna Berura* (91:6) cites the words of the Zohar (Parshas Va'eschanan 260b) that "one who stands in prayer must place his feet next to each other (based on the verse speaking of the angels, "Their feet were straight feet" -- Yechezkel 1:7). And he must cover his

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Rambam explains this in *Hilchos Tefillah* (4:16): "That he empties his heart from all thoughts and sees himself as if he is standing before the Divine Presence."

Therefore, prayer includes two aspects. One is concentration on his requests and prayers, and the second relates to the state of prayer, that in this state he feels as though he is standing before HASHEM. Similarly, we find in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 22a), "As Rav Channah son of Bizna said that Rabbi Shimon Chassida said: One who prays must see himself as if the Divine Presence is before him, as the verse states, "I have placed the Lord before me constantly," (Tehillim 16:8).

There are practical halakhic implications of this definition of prayer as "standing before HASHEM." For example:

1. *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 102:1, 4) rules that: "It is forbidden to sit within four *amos* of one who is praying," and "it is forbidden to pass within four *amos* in front of one who is praying." The simple explanation of the prohibition is that one who sits or walks in front of someone praying disrupts the concentration of the one praying.⁸⁵

head with his *tallis* like one standing before the king. He must cover his eyes with his *tallis* so that he does not see the Divine Presence."

The *Mishna Berura* continues and cites the words of the *Pri Megadim* that "So is the custom today to cover the head until the eyes with the *tallis* during the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer."

Mishna Berura goes further, pointing out that one who opens his eyes during prayer brings the Angel of Death onto himself.

On this topic look at *Yalkut Yosef* (*Orach Chayim* 2:8 footnote 28): "In Israel the custom is to cover the head until the eyebrows during the entire prayer. He further brings from an early manuscript which says that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai from Jerusalem received from Eliyahu the Prophet after the destruction of the Temple to cover his head with his *tallis* during prayer in Synagogue from the beginning until the end. And even on festivals which are happy days... And one who doesn't cover his head at all during prayer is called a Gibeonite. (See *Yevamos* 78b-79a where one of the signs that a person is not a real Jew but a descendant of the Gibeonites is a lack of shame – indicated in this context by one who doesn't cover his head during prayer but stares directly at the Divine Presence.

⁸⁵ Look at *Mishna Berura* there (§15) who gives this as the reason for the prohibition, and therefore he rules (*ibid.* §3) that these prohibitions of sitting or walking within four *amos* in front of a person praying apply not only to one who is reciting the *Shemoneh Esrei* but "even if the person praying is standing in supplications after his prayer, as long as he has not taken steps backward." Similarly, if he is reciting the *Shema*. It is obvious that when a person is pouring out his personal prayers (after *Shemoneh Esrei*) one must also then be careful not to interrupt or distract him.

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However, *Chayei Adam* writes that the reason for the prohibition is because one who walks in front of someone who is praying interrupts between the person and the Divine Presence.⁸⁶

Biur Halakha explains the many differences between these two reasons for the prohibition of walking in front of someone who is praying. If the prohibition derives from a concern of disturbing the concentration of the person praying, this prohibition would not apply to one who is wrapped with a *tallis* over his face who can't see those walking in front of him. However, according to the reason of the *Chayei Adam* that the prohibition derives from the fact that the one praying is standing before HASHEM, even if the one praying is wrapped in his *tallis* it would still be forbidden since the one walking in front of him would be, so to say, interrupting between him and the Divine Presence. This shows that the essence of prayer is a tangible reality where the person stands before HASHEM.

2. In the Talmud (Yoma 53b) it says that one who finishes his prayer must take three steps backwards. He must then wait before returning to his place. If he immediately returns to his place, without waiting, he is "like a dog who returns to his vomit." It also says about such a person that does not take three steps back that, "it would have been better that he had not prayed."⁸⁷

In other words, even if he had intent and prayed the entire prayer with tremendous concentration, if he doesn't take three steps backwards, his prayer is despised, and it would have been better had he not prayed. Why? It is likened to one who had an interview with the king, and when he finished laying out his requests, he just walked away, without taking leave and without any submission or recognition of the king's importance. Everything he asked for originally will be nullified and as naught, because the session of subjugation before the king and recognition of the worthlessness of the petitioner and of the power of the king was substituted with a stance of dishonoring the king. Once again, we find the concept of standing before HASHEM as a tangible concept with halakhic implications.

⁸⁶ Thus, according to *Chayei Adam* these prohibitions only apply when one is reciting the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, but not when one is reciting *Shema*, when the Divine Presence is not before him.

⁸⁷ See *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 123:2 and *Mishna Berura* there 7): "Because if he returns immediately, he is like a student who takes leave from his master walking backward, but then immediately comes back. His latter action shows his initial intent - that he didn't walk backwards in order to take his leave of his teacher - which is disgraceful. However, when he waits until the *Kedusha* section, or at least until the beginning of the repetition of the *Amida*, (and then returns to his place) it appears that he is returning for the *Kedusha* and to be able to have intent to what the prayer leader is saying."

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3. In the Talmud (Berachos 5b) we find: Two who entered to pray and one finished and didn't wait for the other but left, his prayer is torn up in his face, as the verse states, "He who tears his soul in his anger, will the earth be abandoned for you?" (Iyov 18:4). Rashi explains: "Will the earth be abandoned for you," – do you think that because you left [the Synagogue leaving your friend behind,] the Divine Presence will depart and leave your friend who is praying before Him. A person's feeling must be that when his friend is praying, the Divine Presence is before him to receive his prayer, and therefore it is forbidden to leave the room until the friend completes his prayer.⁸⁸

See that the concept of standing before HASHEM is an idea rooted in the world of *halakha* and has clear practical halakhic implications.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik took this definition and passed it onto another level: when he used it to clarify Rambam's ruling that when praying, a person must know that he stands before HASHEM. This is the meaning of the basic intent that is required to make it an act of prayer.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik explains that a person who doesn't know this basic fact that prayer is standing before HASHEM lacks the required minimal basis to have intent to fulfil the obligation of prayer. He is like one who intends to fulfil the mitzvah of *tefillin* without any clue what *tefillin* are. If the person doesn't feel that he is standing before HASHEM, not only is there no prayer with intent, there is not any prayer at all. In such a situation there is no act of

⁸⁸ Rabbi Simcha Zissel Broide, in his book *Sam Derekh* (on Parshas Shemos) cites a long list of additional sources to show that prayer is the reality of standing before God as the Divine Presence stands before one who prays in order to accept his prayers.

So, for example, Rav Broide cites the Talmud (Berachos 8a): "Reish Lakish said: Anyone who has a Synagogue in his city and does not enter there to pray is called a bad neighbor, as the verse states, 'Thus says God, "For all my evil neighbors," (Yirmeyahu 12:14).'" This means that God is present in synagogues, and therefore one who lives nearby is literally a neighbor of God, as it were.

Similarly, he cites the Talmud (Megillah 3b) where Rashi writes (s.v. *Asara batlanim*) that the community must finance ten people whose main purpose is to be in the Synagogue in the morning and evening. This is based on the Talmud (Berachos 6b): "Rabbi Yochanan said: When God comes to the Synagogue and doesn't find ten men there, immediately He becomes angry." For this reason, the community has to ensure that there are ten men standing ready in the Synagogue to greet God when He comes there. This shows that God, as it were, comes to the Synagogue and stands there before those praying to Him.

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prayer but something similar to " *misasek*." It is a mechanical act without paying attention and is not considered a deed at all.⁸⁹

The act of prayer cannot be performed as going through the motions without any intent. Rather it requires the basic recognition that he is standing before HASHEM in a world with Divine Providence where everything in it comes from HASHEM.

This recognition is essential to define an act as an act of prayer. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv Broide, in his book *Sam Derech* (Shemos, *Chelek Hamamarim*, Parshas Shemos, *ma'amar* 3) clarifies that " the essence of prayer is the tangible reality of standing before the Divine Presence... therefore the service of prayer must be done with the recognition of standing before HASHEM like a physical reality, as Rambam writes, 'To see himself as if he stands before the Divine Presence.' "

Rabbi Broide adds that since the essence of prayer is the recognition of HASHEM's interaction with the world and His Providence, prayer is not performed simply through asking from HASHEM with the words of prayer, but " also that in itself that he is standing in prayer is part of the definition of prayer."

In other words, a person's actual recognition that he is standing before HASHEM counts as prayer, because standing to pray expresses the recognition that everything that happens to him comes from HASHEM⁹⁰ and prayer is a direct consequence of that.

⁸⁹ We explained this concept earlier in footnote [[XX825]]. Similarly, if one performed an act of marriage or purchasing without being aware at all of the implication of his actions but simply as a *misasek*, it is clear that the act has no validity. How much more so is this true with prayer, which should be service of God with a person's heart? Even though we find that slaughtering an animal is valid if it is done incidentally as a *misasek*, but slaughtering a sacrifice, which must be service and expresses a connection with God, is invalid if it is done incidentally as a *misasek*. It is necessary that the slaughter be performed with intent and with an understanding of the purpose of the act and the importance of the action.

⁹⁰ The sharper the sense of standing before God, the more a person increases his prayer. This is expressed not in the quantity of prayers, but in the quality of prayer. These words achieve additional validity according to the words of the *Maharal* that we will cite later in Chapter Five, dedicated to the essence of prayer, below, that commensurate to the amount of recognition a person has of his own mortality and his complete dependence in every part of his existence on God's Providence over His world, is the prayer more acceptable and answered favorably before God.

In addition, since standing before God is the essence of prayer, even if the prayer is lacking any intent for the meaning of the words that the person utters, if the sense and feeling was stirred in him that he is standing before God, it is considered to be a prayer. And the most

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As Rav Pincus writes (as we cited in the previous chapter), it is like someone who climbs a ladder and notices that the ladder is wobbling beneath him, who will naturally call out to those down below to hold the ladder. Similarly, one says "I wait for Your salvation, HASHEM," (Bereishis 49:18), "Please HASHEM, Master of the Universe, hold the ladder for me so that I don't fall, for You are constantly close to me and You are in control of the world."

This sharpens what has been stated, that a person who doesn't have proper intent for the words of prayer and the requests for mercy contained within it, fulfills his obligation of prayer provided he performed the essential act of prayer⁹¹ with the feeling and recognition at the beginning of his prayer that he is standing in prayer before HASHEM. This recognition that everything that happens to him comes from HASHEM is the core of prayer as a statement which defines the person's mood when he stands before HASHEM in prayer, in comparison with his mood in his other, mundane actions.

Prayer as Standing Before HASHEM Versus 'Know Him in All Your Ways'

It is important to clarify a certain aspect of the Rambam's opinion, which is based, as stated above, on the principle that the act of prayer reflects positioning one's self before HASHEM, or in Rambam's own words in *Hilchos Tefillah* (4:16), "He must empty his heart from all thoughts, and see himself as if he is standing before the Divine Presence."

The source for Rambam's ruling is the Talmud (Sanhedrin 22a): One who prays must see himself as if the Divine Presence is before him, as the verse states, "I have placed the Lord before me constantly," (Tehillim 16:8).

The verse cited as the proof-text by the Talmud appears to show that standing before HASHEM is not something specific to prayer or the preparations for prayer, but a state that a person must constantly be in. The verse states, "I have placed the Lord before me constantly." This means at all times and with all actions that he does.

Rambam writes similarly in *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:52) that a person must always see before him that he is standing before HASHEM. He writes:

important of all is that since the feeling of standing before God is the definition and the soul of prayer, praying without feeling and knowing before Whom he stands, is not praying.

⁹¹ Look at what Rav Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky writes in *Kehilos Yaakov* on Talmud Berachos, siman 27 that was quoted in Chapter One. There are actually two separate laws within the *halakha* of prayer: One is to pray, and the other is to pray with intent, at least in the blessing of *Avos*. Even one who had no intent at all and has not fulfilled the obligation of praying with intent, has nonetheless fulfilled the first obligation of the act of prayer.

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A person's sitting, movements and business when he is alone in the house are not like his sitting, movements and business when he is before a great king. Nor his speech or free discussions when he is with his family and relatives is as his speech in the company of the king.

Because of this, one who aspires to attain human perfection, who wants to truly be a man of HASHEM, will wake from his sleep and know that the great King who covers him and is constantly with him is greater than any human king... He is constantly with us, seeing and watching, " 'Can a man hide in secret places and I won't see him?' says HASHEM," (Yirmeyahu 23:24). Understand this well

We also find in Rambam in *Hilchos De'os* (3:3) that a person is commanded not to direct his various actions for his own benefit, but he should think at all times and in all his actions that he performs, including physical acts like eating, drinking, sleeping, marital relations and things for his well-being, that he is doing it so that he will be able to serve HASHEM. And when he has such a thought it turns out that all his actions that he does are for HASHEM, and he fulfils the commandment of, " In all your ways know Him." ⁹²

Rema on *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 1) rules:

" I have placed the Lord before me constantly," (Tehillim 16:8) – this is a great principle in the Torah and the levels of the righteous who walk before HASHEM. For a person's sitting, movements and business when he is alone in the house are not like his sitting, movements and business when he is before a great king. Nor his speech or free discussions when he is with his family and relatives is as his speech in the company of the king.

⁹² In Rambam's own words (*Hilchos De'os* 3:3): " He should have in mind that his body must be strong and healthy so that his soul will be directed to know God. For it is impossible to understand and become wise and knowledgeable in the intellects when he is hungry, sick or one of his limbs hurts. He should think that if he has a son perhaps he will become a wise and great person in Yisrael. It follows that one who walks in this path all his life serves God constantly, even when he is involved in business dealings, or even when involved in marital intimacy, because his thought in every matter is so that he can receive what he needs so that his body is whole to serve God. Even when he is sleeping, if he sleeps with the intent that his mind and body will be rested so that he won't become ill which would prevent him from serving God when he is sick then his sleep also serves the Omnipresent, blessed is He. Regarding this the Sages instructed, " And all your actions should be for the sake for Heaven." And this is what Shlomo said in his wisdom, " In all your ways know Him and He will straighten your paths," (Mishlei 3:6).

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How much more so when a person contemplates that the Great King, the Holy One, blessed is He, whose glory fills the entire world, stands over him and watches his actions, as the verse states, "Can a man hide in secret places and I won't see him?" says HASHEM." (Yirmeyahu 23:24). Immediately this person will be filled with awe and submission in fear of HASHEM, blessed is He, and will constantly be embarrassed before Him.⁹³

So, standing before HASHEM is not something which applies only to prayer, rather it is a law which applies to all the ways and actions of a person. What, then, is the distinction between "Standing before HASHEM in prayer," and the concept of "I have placed the Lord before me constantly," which applies at all times?

Behold, the verse from where the Talmud (Sanhedrin 22a) derives that one who prays must view himself as if the Divine Presence is before him is the same verse of "I have placed the Lord before me constantly" from where *Rema* derives the obligation for a person to constantly view themselves standing before the Divine Presence in all their actions. What is the additional obligation of standing before HASHEM in prayer above the constant obligation which applies to all a person's actions?

The answer is that there are two kinds of recognition that a person is standing before HASHEM.

1. A person's recognition that HASHEM exists in every place and there is full transparency so that all his actions are done under the supervision of HASHEM, who sees all his actions. This recognition is necessary at all times.⁹⁴
2. The recognition of a person positioning himself before HASHEM coming to request and to pray for his various needs before Him. In this the person recognizes that not only is everything revealed and known before HASHEM, but that the entire world is supervised and controlled at the hand of Heaven, regarding each and every detail, and everything

⁹³ In the Vilna Gaon's commentary on these words of the Rema, we find that the source of these words is the Talmud in Berachos 63a "Bar Kappara expounded: What is a short segment upon which all the principles of the Torah depend upon? 'In all your ways know Him and He will straighten your paths,' (Mishlei 3:6)." So, the verse of "I have placed the Lord before me constantly" teaches a principle which overlaps with that taught by "In all your ways know Him" and they are the same rule.

⁹⁴ See Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato in *Mesilas Yesharim* chapter 25 who clarifies that fear of Heaven is acquired through a person's recognition of two concepts: 1) That God supervises everything whether small or big. 2) Nothing is hidden from God.

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comes from HASHEM. Not only that HASHEM's eye is watching, but nothing happens unless it is by the will of HASHEM. This is an additional dimension, which breaks the natural causal chain of cause and effect, saying, "there is nothing other than Him." Everything comes to us from HASHEM and only through His will.

In this additional dimension a person stands before HASHEM to pray, and this is the essence of the intent and the necessary mood to transform the action into an act of prayer.

An Act of Prayer as Opposed to Intent in Prayer ('Hear Our Voices' vs. 'Accept Our Prayers')

In the previous chapter we discussed the source of the obligation of prayer. We saw that prayer has two foundations.

1. Prayer was established corresponding to the daily sacrifices – this is prayer as a fixed mitzvah, every day at a set time, in place of the service of sacrifices in the Temple.
2. Prayer was established by the Patriarchs – this is prayer as a request for mercy, as the Patriarchs prayed.

As a consequence, there are two facets to prayer:

1. The act of prayer placed upon a person as service of HASHEM, in place of sacrifices.
This prayer is of the aspect of the blessing, "Accept the prayers... of Your people Yisrael... and may the service of Your people Yisrael be constantly acceptable to You."
2. Prayer as service of the heart – as an expression of the person's obligation to know that everything comes from HASHEM, and therefore he has to place his trust and his burden on HASHEM and turn to Him especially in times of trouble. This is the prayer as supplication.
This prayer is of the aspect of the blessing, "Hear our voices" – in which we relate to prayer as a request for mercy: "Have mercy upon us and be compassionate and accept our prayers with mercy and with favor." It is directed to "HASHEM who hears prayer and supplication," and the conclusion of the prayer is "Blessed are You, HASHEM, who hears prayer."

It seems that based on this we can also understand the roots of the two types of intent required during prayer.

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1. The act of prayer is not embedded in the intent for prayer. It is like all other physical mitzvos that are fulfilled even without intent, like shaking a lulav or wearing *tefillin*. As the words of the *Nefesh Hachayim* that were mentioned above, "When a Jewish man fulfills them properly, even if he has no intent and doesn't know anything of the reasons for the mitzvos or the [kabbalistic] secrets of their intent, nevertheless he has fulfilled the mitzvos and rectified the [spiritual] worlds through them."
Indeed, in prayer, too, like in every mitzvah act, there is a point in having intent during prayer, intent of the type of the general rule of "mitzvos require intent," but this is not the special intent of prayer. Rather it is of the general intent of one who recognizes that he is standing at that moment in prayer before HASHEM and fulfilling his obligation of prayer.
2. Prayer as the service of the heart, which requires an extra level of intent. This is an expression of requesting mercy from HASHEM that He provide him with all his needs. This service cannot be fulfilled with the simple action of standing in prayer but requires intent to the meaning of the words of prayer and to feel them in his inner heart. Only so does a person go beyond the "act of prayer" and fulfill the component of "service of the heart."

Interruption in Prayer

Practical Halakhic Implications of The Explanation of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik

Based on Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik's explanation there are many practical *halakhic* implications. Rabbi Aryeh Pomoranchik discussed one of them in his book *Emek Berakha* (p. 11):

1. What is considered a forbidden interruption in prayer?
2. The general principle is that "talk" is considered an interruption, but not all talk.⁹⁵
3. Speaking for the sake of the mitzvah is not considered an interruption, and it is permitted even between reciting the blessing and beginning the action of the mitzvah, as we find in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 167:6) and in *Responsa of Rashba* (vol. 1 §244): "Even though if one interrupted, even unintentionally, with something that is not necessary for the mitzvah or the meal, he must repeat the blessing, nevertheless if

⁹⁵ See *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 104:6 and *Mishna Berura* there §25.

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necessary [to fulfil the mitzvah] it is permitted outright (*I'chatchila*)... and is not considered to be an interruption."

Accordingly, we find, for example, that a person speaking with family members during his search for *chametz* about matters connected to the search is not considered to be an interruption and is permitted.⁹⁶

4. Based on this it is apparently permitted also to interrupt in the middle of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer in order to look up the decided law with regard to a doubt one has with respect to the prayer itself. This would be for the sake of the mitzvah and if so is not considered to be a prohibited interruption in prayer. And this is how Rabbi Avraham Danzig ruled in his work *Chayei Adam* (*Hilchos Tefillah* 25:9)⁹⁷:
"One who is standing in prayer and is uncertain about a law of prayer, for example if he forgot to say some matter in the prayer, it is permitted to go from one place to another to look in a book. And whether it is permitted to ask the *halakha* from a person – it is unclear, but it seems to me that it is permitted."

However, based on the understanding of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik, Rabbi Aryeh Pomoranchik writes in his work *Emek Brakha*:

In my humble opinion it is clear that this is not the *halakha*. Certainly, it is forbidden to interrupt in the middle of prayer for the sake of prayer, to ask the *halakha* or even to look in a book.

There is no comparison at all between prayer and a blessing.⁹⁸ Because with regard to blessings any speech which is for the sake of the matter is not considered to be an interruption.

⁹⁶ See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 432 and *Mishna Berura* there §6.

⁹⁷ Cited in *Mishna Berura* 104:2.

⁹⁸ There are other halakhic distinctions pointed out in *Emek Beracha* between prayer, where a person has the status of standing before God and reciting a blessing. These relate to the law of one who is accustomed to reciting supplications after prayer, or one who has not taken three steps back after concluding his *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer that he is considered like one who is still praying, and it is forbidden to pass within four *amos* in front of him.

Rav Pomoranchik points out that "This only applies during prayer, which is when the Divine Presence is before him. Therefore, if one says supplications after prayer or has not taken three steps backwards he is still before the Divine Presence... However, for blessings, once he has finished the words of the blessing, even if the person adds other words afterwards it is no longer called involved in the blessing and what he adds is not part of the blessing but something else."

In other words, a person cannot continue beyond the set text of the blessing, but he can add to the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, insofar as he is able to continue the state of prayer, since prayer has a unique definition of standing before God. This is something which continues even if he

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However, in prayer, when the Divine Presence is before him, this is the essence of the purpose of prayer. If so, if one interrupts with speech it is an interruption of the Divine Presence being before him, and he no longer stands before the Divine Presence. It is as if he has completed his prayer, and what will it help him if he has done so for the sake of the prayer?

In other words, in terms of the laws of interruptions per se, looking in a book or even asking a Rabbi to know the relevant *halakha* of that prayer is an action done for that prayer, and it should not be considered to be an interruption. However, it is impossible to compare the laws of blessings to the laws of prayer, since the definition of prayer, according to Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik does not come down to just laying down one's requests in an uninterrupted manner, but we must also add to the definition of prayer the concept of standing before HASHEM. Asking a Rabbi is certainly an interruption of standing before HASHEM, and therefore it should be forbidden in the middle of prayer.

What Is *Iyun Tefillah*?

This understanding of the two types of intent in prayer opens an understanding of the Yerushalmi that we found difficult earlier.

Preparation for prayer creates a state of prayer and defines the act which follows as prayer. If a person only stands before HASHEM, recognizes the Divine Providence in the worlds and stands before HASHEM with the aspect of "know before whom you stand," it is already prayer. However, the work of one who prays is not finished with this. The status of prayer also requires additional service of the heart, *iyun tefillah*, solid concentration during prayer, relating to the meaning of the words and the appropriate intent while reciting each request.

Filling this additional requirement is not easy at all and the Talmud in Bava Basra (164b) says that everyone fails to do it. Giving each word the appropriate intent is a difficult goal to consistently achieve in every single prayer. A person struggles with the difficult phenomenon of habitual ritual, when habit destroys the power of concentration.

has concluded all the words of prayer, because this state of prayer is not limited to its words but continues as long as the person has not 'uprooted his feet' (moved away from the spot where he stood in prayer) and continues his personal experience of standing before God.

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Regarding the meaning of the words, the *halakha* is that a lack of intent does not invalidate the prayer, and one who has intent in *Avos* has fulfilled his obligation. For if not, there would be no hope for anyone. For there is hardly a single person who is able to concentrate completely in his prayer and have the correct intent and think of nothing else. This is the difficulty of *iyun tefillah* which nobody can escape from.

A person can, and is commanded to, have intent that he is standing before HASHEM. However, like in all Torah mitzvos, thought alone is not sufficient. A person needs to perform a physical action in order to fulfil the mitzvah and accompanying the action he must have the appropriate intent.

So too with prayer. Saying the words of the prayer is the physical action required to fulfil the obligation of the mitzvah of prayer. But the words are not the goal, they are only the physical action fixed by *halakha* so that the person can reach the goal, which is intent, the service of the heart. However, it is sufficient that a person succeeds in creating a spiritual state of standing before HASHEM in order that it be considered as prayer.

Mumbling words without intent seems entirely pointless and we asked above, why are a person's words considered prayer if he is not aware of what he is saying, and his lips move out of habit while his heart is elsewhere?

However, if at the time of saying these words the person feels that he is in a state of standing before HASHEM and presents himself before Him to request his human needs, knowing that everything comes from Him only, then there is a tremendous inner content to his action and it is an act of prayer (provided he has intent on the words of *Avos*). True, there is no intent in this action. But it is nevertheless defined as prayer and the person's standing before HASHEM is an act of prayer.

Based on this we can understand that the Amora'im mentioned in the Yerushalmi (Berachos 2:4) cited above expressed the difficulty to awaken their hearts with the proper intent, based on their lofty levels, in the meaning of the words while praying, as they pointed out that various thoughts prevented them from it.

However, they stood in prayer, since they felt with all their hearts that they are standing before HASHEM. This awareness and standing before HASHEM is, as we said, sufficient in order to invest the deed as prayer. Therefore, it is

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understood how saying the words can be considered as prayer, even with the tremendous difficulty of *iyun tefillah* which the Amora'im expressed.⁹⁹

It is true that Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin clarified in *Tosefes Maaseh Rav* that prayer without intent is like a body without a soul, however it is still a body which has reality, and is similar to a meal offering which comes from a plant. This means that a person standing before his HASHEM and who in his prayer expresses the desire of his soul for HASHEM and his subjugation before him, which is the purpose of prayer according to *Chovos Halevavos*. Indeed, the appropriate intent in the meaning of the words is lacking, causing a great deficiency in the vitality of the prayer. Nevertheless, it constitutes an act of prayer, because there is standing before HASHEM, and therefore it is prayer.

The Concept of '*Stama Lishma*' in Prayer¹⁰⁰

The Explanation of *Chazon Ish* in the Approach of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik

We brought the critique of Rabbi Avraham Yishaya Karelitz (*Chazon Ish*) on the approach of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik. It appears, claims the *Chazon Ish*, that according to the opinion of Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik nobody is fulfilling the obligation of prayer. This is because even when it comes to intent of standing before HASHEM, a person cannot constantly think of that for the entire duration of the prayer, and so, when any foreign thought comes to him during his prayer, even if he pushes it away immediately, he has already ceased standing before HASHEM. If any words were uttered when he is not in

⁹⁹ Rabbi Pinchas Friedman (Head of the Belz Kolel) pointed out to me another explanation which perhaps can be brought in connection to this. Rambam rules (*Hilchos Tefillah* 4:18) that, "One may not stand to pray following laughter, nor after light-headedness, nor after chatter, nor after argument, nor after anger, but rather through words of Torah. And not following words of *halakha* even though they are words of Torah, in order that one's heart will not be bothered with the *halakha*, rather following words of Torah which do not require in-depth thought, like clear *halachic* rulings."

However, it is possible that the Amora'im were always thinking of deep Torah thoughts, and this harmed their ability to have proper intent in prayer. It was because of their tremendous level and the fact that their entire being was Torah. Nevertheless, the statements of Shmuel and Rabbi Bun bar Hiyya, who said that they were counting chicks and rows of masonry, still require explanation.

¹⁰⁰ The concept of *stama lishma* comes from Zevachim 2a-b. The Talmud there explains that provided one had the correct intent when beginning the process of sacrificing (i.e. the slaughter) the other sacrificial acts are considered to be also with intent. That is provided there was no explicit intent that would invalidate the sacrifice. In other words, provided there is no explicit intent (*stama*) the sacrifice is considered as if it was done entirely with intent (*lishma*).

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the state of standing before HASHEM, those words do not count as prayer. Now, since the nature of things is that there are moments when a person utters words without intent that he is standing before HASHEM it is inevitable, according to Reb Chaim that almost all of a person's prayers are lost. Therefore, *Chazon Ish* deduces by logic of *ad absurdum* that we cannot understand the words of Reb Chaim Halevi at their face value. In his words, "This is something which is impossible, because when one's thoughts wander off and his heart thinks of various things, he certainly takes his mind off the intent that Rambam wrote about."¹⁰¹

If so, explains *Chazon Ish*, even according to the opinion of Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik one doesn't need constant, continuous and uninterrupted intent of being before HASHEM at every moment of prayer. Rather, "the intention of the great Sage of blessed memory [Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik] is that a person should have intent when he gets up to pray, and automatically the rest of the prayer is *stama kelishma*" - what was spoken without intent is considered as if it was said with intent.

This means that the intent of standing before HASHEM is essential at the moment before beginning the prayer, when the person gets up before his Creator to pour out before Him his heart's outpourings. However, after this, it is normal for his thoughts to wander and he stops concentrating. However, the status of standing before HASHEM continues even without explicit intent for this. This may be inferred from the inherent persistence of the status that was begun at the outset of the prayer, a status of praying with the intent of standing before HASHEM.¹⁰²

Based on this it turns out that:

1. Rambam's words in chapter 10 which only require intent for the blessing of *Avos* are referring to intent to the meaning of the words,

¹⁰¹ *Chazon Ish* brings in this context the words of the Talmud in Bava Basra (164b) that *Iyun Tefillah* i.e. lack of intent in prayer, is something which "no person can escape from it every day." Similarly, the *Chazon Ish* cites the words of the Amora'im in the Yerushalmi Berachos (2:4) we cited above, that they prayed without any intent at all.

¹⁰² We find an example of this in one who makes *tefillin* or *tzitzis* or who bakes matzos for Pesach. The performances of these mitzvos must be for the sake of the mitzvah. Since these mitzvos are performed over a long time, it is clear that even if one says at the outset that he is doing the act for the sake of the mitzvah, nevertheless, during the lengthy time it takes it is impossible not to think of other things. But as long as he doesn't take his mind off of the matzos, or the *tzitzis*, his act without positive thought that it is for the sake of the mitzvah is considered to be as if he is doing it with proper intent. It makes sense that the same applies to any drawn-out act, for if we wouldn't say so, it would be impossible to fulfill.

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and for this the *halakha* is that “if he had intent in the first blessing he doesn’t need intent further.”

2. Regarding Rambam’s words in chapter 4 that, “any prayer without intent is not prayer,” there are two approaches.
 - a. According to Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik this *halakha* refers to an entirely different type of intent from that mentioned in chapter 4. This *halakha* refers to the intent of standing before HASHEM, and this intent is necessary for the entire duration of the prayer. Without it there is no prayer and mumbling the words is considered merely *misasek*. Nevertheless, based on *Chazon Ish*’s explanation to Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik’s words, when a person gets up to pray with the correct intent of standing before HASHEM, even if afterwards his thoughts wander, as long as he is not involved in something else and taking his mind off prayer, it is considered as if all his prayer is continued with the intent that he began with.
 - b. According to *Chazon Ish* himself Rambam’s *halakha* in chapter 4 reflects the halakhic principle according to which prayer without intent is unacceptable, but it doesn’t define the amount of intent. This intent, according to *Chazon Ish*, is only the intent on the meaning of the words.
In chapter 10 Rambam sets the minimal halakhic amount of this principle, which means that it is sufficient to have this intent only for the blessing of *Avos*. Based on *Chazon Ish*’s explanation of Rambam, a person can technically fulfil his obligation of prayer through having intent at least to the meaning of the words for the first blessing of the prayer.

In terms of the claim of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik that the remainder of the prayer recited without intent is like one who is *misasek*, *Chazon Ish* is of the opinion that, “every person who stands to pray cannot be considered *misasek*, because he always has a faint awareness that he is in prayer before HASHEM, blessed is He, just that his heart is not so awake. And ex post facto a tenuous awareness is sufficient. However, the prayer is not so acceptable.”

In other words, according to *Chazon Ish* it is sufficient for a person to be aware that he is standing to pray in order that he not be considered merely *misasek*, and this is even if the person did not put himself in the spiritually elevated level of standing before HASHEM.

Earlier we saw that the words of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik fit with the *halakha* of *Shulchan Aruch* (*Hilchos Tefillah* 98:1) that one needs to have two intents –

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one for the meaning of the words, and the other “to think that the Divine Presence is before him.” Regarding the second intent *Mishna Berura* (ad loc. 1) points out:

These intents explicated here in *Shulchan Aruch* are impossible to have while praying,¹⁰³ only prior.

According to *Mishna Berura* appropriate prayer is based on two different intents at two different times.

One intent is expressed with preparing the heart and cleaving to HASHEM – before prayer

The second is to utter the words with concentration on their meaning which is required from a person as he stands before his Creator – while in the midst of prayer.

These words of *Mishna Berura* fit completely with *Chazon Ish*'s explanation of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik that the intent of standing before HASHEM is before the person begins his *Shemoneh Esrei* and this intent continues with him through the prayer.

However, while according to *Chazon Ish* this intent is required at the outset of prayer, but not during prayer, because a person cannot concentrate and keep his mind focused for such a long time, according to *Mishna Berura* the reason for this is the fact that a person cannot have two different intents at the same time, to be both involved in the service of prayer itself having intent on the meaning of the words, and at the same time to have intent of cleaving to HASHEM and having his heart filled with lofty thoughts of the greatness of the event in which he is partaking. A person can concentrate on the words only if his heart is empty of every other thought, including the thoughts of the

¹⁰³ Standing before God requires deep thought, “As if the Divine Presence is before him... And he must think that if he was speaking before a human king he would prepare his words and have proper intent on them so as not to fail. How much more so before the King who is King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, who scrutinizes every thought. And this is what the early pious people and men of merit would do; they would isolate themselves and have intent on their prayers until they reached a level where they were divested from the physical and their intellect was promoted, until they almost reached the level of prophecy.” All these thoughts cannot be achieved when the person says the blessings and has intent on the meaning of the words written in them.

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holiness of the event that he is experiencing. Therefore, the person must prepare his heart for the status of prayer before he begins to pray.¹⁰⁴

It appears that the source for establishing that the timing of the intent for standing before HASHEM is before prayer as a preparation, is already found in the words of the Rishonim. For example, we find that Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on *Rif* in Berachos (21a of the pages of the Rif) explains that the verse, "You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear," (Tehillim 10:17)," refers to the required preparation before prayer in order to stand in prayer before one's Creator.

Rabbeinu Yonah adds that similarly a person must direct his heart to the words of prayer. However, it seems from his words that this intent is not part of the definition of the state of prayer, and the verse he cites doesn't refer to that. Preparation for prayer is truly a person's preparation to feel that he is standing before HASHEM, and this preparation applies before beginning the prayer.

Prepare Their Hearts – a Request from HASHEM?

The Need for Divine Assistance to Have Intent in Prayer

We learn the necessity of preparation before prayer from the verse, "You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear," (Tehillim 10:17). The plain meaning of the verse is a plea to HASHEM asking that He prepare the hearts of those who pray and listen to their prayer. One might have thought it would be more appropriate to say that the one who prays should first prepare

¹⁰⁴ *Mishna Berura* points out the source for these words in *Pnei Yehoshua* on Berachos 30b s.v. *Bamishna*. *Pnei Yehoshua* derives this novel idea from the language of the Mishna, which says, "One may not stand to pray except following gravitas of the head." He points out that since the Mishna does not say "One may not stand to pray except with gravitas of the head," this would imply that this gravitas, (which Rashi explains to mean "subjugation") is required even before prayer, so that one who comes to pray should be already furnished with gravitas of the head before he stands to pray.

However, this is not the sole reason for the *Pnei Yehoshua's* novel idea. He reveals that there is an additional reason behind his opinion. That is, that subjugating one's mind to God alone and removing all physical thoughts from a person's heart are not appropriate for the time of prayer itself, "because in prayer one must have intent for the meaning of the words and to ask his needs like a servant requesting a reward from his master. Almost all of these needs are physical things necessary in the material world. Therefore, it is preferable to subjugate the mind before prayer to serve the Creator until he knows before Whom he stands." However, *Pnei Yehoshua* says that the matter requires further investigation "because *Tur* himself writes that this thought to remove the physicality and to clothe himself in the right spirituality is fitting to be done at the time of prayer."

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himself and then ask HASHEM to listen. Why, then, do we ask HASHEM to direct our hearts to have intent in prayer?

Rabbeinu Yonah discusses this in his commentary on the *Rif* (21a in the pages of *Rif*). He explains that preparation for prayer and having intent are both very difficult for a person to achieve and one requires Divine assistance to have intent in prayer. He writes:

The verse states, "Direct their hearts," because one requires assistance to have intent with a heart pure of sins and pleasures of the world, as the verses state, "HASHEM directs the hearts," (*Mishlei* 21:2) and, "Direct their hearts to You" (*I Divrei Hayamim* 29:18). And regarding this the author of *Tehillim* says, "Assist them and direct their hearts to purify them so that You can hear their prayers."

Proof that this is the meaning of the verse can be seen in the continuation of the Talmud when it states, "An indication of the matter [that one who prays must have intent] is from the verse: 'You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear.'" Why does it say, "An indication of the matter," it is it not a clear proof?

Rather, it must be that the main meaning of the verse is not about the intent of reciting the prayers, but about the intent for a pure heart. Therefore, when it cites the verse in relation to the intent of reciting the prayer it calls it "an indication of the matter."

The verse, "You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear," refers to purifying the heart from sins and from pleasures of the physical world and turning the person into a spiritual, more metaphysical being in order that he will be able to stand in prayer before his Creator.

This purity requires Divine assistance and without it a person cannot pass from his normal, physical state to the spiritually elevated level of standing before HASHEM, which is the essence of prayer.¹⁰⁵

If a person could only overcome his physical behavior, filled with materialism and the illusion that there is some causal connection between his actions and

¹⁰⁵ This is Rabbeinu Yonah's approach also in the mitzvah of repentance which requires Divine assistance. He writes in *Sha'arei Teshuva* chapter 1: "It is explained in the Torah that God will help those who repent when their natural abilities cannot achieve it, and He will renew within them a spirit of purity to achieve the level of loving Him... and the verse states about this, "And God will circumcise your heart, and the hearts of your children," (*Devarim* 30:6) – to attain the love of Him."

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what happens to him; if he would prepare his heart appropriately for prayer and stand up before HASHEM with wholehearted belief in HASHEM and with the knowledge that HASHEM controls every event in the world and pays attention to every single one of a person's troubles and his needs from beginning to end; if he would truly feel that absolutely everything is in the hands of Heaven and that there is "nothing else beside Him," -- then he would have achieved the essential task and could experience closeness to HASHEM.

However, the required preparation is difficult for a person and runs counter to his physical nature that is set in a world that appears to operate according to the principle of causal relation between an action and its result. Therefore, the sense of closeness to HASHEM requires a lot of Divine assistance and we must pray for it. As the verse states, "Direct their hearts and incline Your ear."

One must also direct his heart to the meaning of the words, however this intent is not critical to defining an event as a state of prayer, so the verse does not apply to that.¹⁰⁶

Because we requires Divine assistance in order to direct our hearts with the forces of our soul and to concentrate and lay out our various requests and to have the continuous intent required for prayer, we therefore begin the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer with the words of the verse, "HASHEM, open my lips so that my mouth will recite Your praise," (Tehillim 51:17).¹⁰⁷

Prayer begins with a prayer that we should have the ability to pray, a request for Divine assistance. To actually have intent in prayer we need Divine assistance. Without this assistance there cannot be intent in prayer.

This is how *Bach* explains the words of *Tur* cited above, based on the words of the Talmud (Berachos 31a):

The Rabbis taught: "One who prays must direct his heart to Heaven. Abba Shaul said: An indication of this is, 'You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear,' (Tehillim 10:17)."

¹⁰⁶ The verse was quoted by the Talmud regarding this type of intent only as "an indication of the matter" and not a "proof of the matter."

¹⁰⁷ The source for these words is the Talmud (Berachos 4b): "Rabbi Yochanan says, at the beginning he recites, "God, open my lips."

Rabbi David Avudraham explains that this phrase is similar to that which is said in Mishlei (16:1), "To man is the preparations of the heart and from God is the speech of the tongue." So, a person requires Divine assistance to be skillful in expressing his intent.

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It seems that the reason it says, "An indication of this," (and not a proof of this) is that the verse implies that it is impossible for a person to direct his heart to Heaven, since it says, "Direct their hearts," (that HASHEM must direct the person's heart in prayer) which implies that if You direct his heart, then "You will incline Your ear," as Rashi explains there (Berachos 31a).

We learn from this that:

1. It is HASHEM who prepares a person's heart to be able to direct it in prayer and to sense the lofty feeling of standing before HASHEM. If HASHEM would not help him, a person would not be able to direct his heart in prayer – neither in the meaning of the words, which is "in-depth prayer," nor in the basic intent of standing before HASHEM.¹⁰⁸
2. Nevertheless, the Rabbis say, "One who prays must direct his heart." A person must try, as well as he can, to have intent in his prayer. The Heavenly preparation of a person's heart is an "indication of this," that he must try to do it himself as well, even though it is not in his power to do so, because (in the words of *Bach*):

"If a person is aroused and decides in his mind to have intent, then certainly HASHEM will help him, because of the principle: One who comes to purify himself receives Heavenly assistance" (Yoma 38b).

But Where Is Man

Why Is It Difficult to Concentrate During Prayer?

From the sources cited so far it appears that the Talmudic Sages knew that a person would not be able to have proper intent in prayer, and therefore they warned of the need for Divine assistance.

The question is, how can it be that a person who feels constantly that, "Where there's a will, there's a way," suddenly, when he comes to pray he finds he

¹⁰⁸ This answers a question that arises on the words of Rabbeinu Yonah. The Talmud speaks of a person's obligation to have intent for the meaning of the words during prayer. And it brings an "indication of this," from something completely different – from a verse speaking of purifying the heart from sin and from physical desires, which is done by God for a person before prayer. What is the connection between the two types of intent and how do these two serve as an indication for each other? The answer is that without Divine assistance a person cannot have any intent at all, neither in the meaning of the words nor in the basic fact of changing his mood and giving him a sense of feeling that he is standing before God.

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has no strength or ability to concentrate his thoughts and have intent for prayer? Why is it so difficult for a person to stop for a few minutes, to prepare his heart and have intent in prayer?

Someone who speaks with his friend doesn't generally have any difficulty concentrating, and if he knows that his friend is listening he can speak with him at length, even without seeing him. Why, then, does one who prays to HASHEM find it difficult to have intent even for the meanings of the words which he utters from his lips? And why is it difficult for a believing person to feel that he is standing before HASHEM? These are matters which flow from the depths of his consciousness and his constant faith.¹⁰⁹

It appears that the explanation to this can be found in the understanding of the prayer process as defined in the words of *Maharal* in *Nesivos Olam*¹¹⁰:

The reason that prayer is called "service," as we explained above, is that the prayer that a person recites to HASHEM shows that the person is dependent on Him, blessed is He, and needs Him and has no existence without Him. This is his Godliness, -- that everything in existence needs Him and depends upon Him such that everything is towards HASHEM...

The concept of prayer is that one is praying to HASHEM because he needs HASHEM and depends upon Him and has no independent existence except due to HASHEM. Therefore, one prays to Him for everything he needs. When a person is dependent upon HASHEM, it is as if he sacrifices himself to Him, because anything that is dependent on another is offered and given to him. Therefore, prayer is the ultimate service of HASHEM, blessed is He.

According to *Maharal*, during prayer one does not request or give information to HASHEM about his situation. Rather the essence of service is in that he stands before HASHEM, in helplessness, with the complete recognition that

¹⁰⁹ See below, in footnote [[XX111]] the words of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, in his book *Kedushas Levi*, that various thoughts of impurity want to be redeemed and elevated, and therefore they come to a person when he is praying so that he can redeem them and elevate them from impurity to purity. However, even this lofty idea shows how it is specifically when a person is wrapped in holiness that impure thoughts come into this mind, Heaven forbid. However, what is the explanation for distraction and general thoughts about the world, to which the mind wanders specifically when a person is praying, and not at any other time during conversation with others or when concentrating on other matters that a person does for pleasure or for business?

¹¹⁰ *Nesiv Ha'avoda* chapter 3.

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everything is given to him from HASHEM, and there is nothing aside from Him.

This attitude of complete nullification before HASHEM goes against a person's natural inclination and feeling, which make him feel that he is doing or acting, and that he has natural possibilities which do not depend on miracles or requests from Above.

A person cannot reach this spiritual level without the correct preparation and without HASHEM helping him to achieve it.

This sense is not something simple at all, because a person cannot easily transition from a state in which he feels responsibility for his actions and their results, through using his free choice, and to a great extent is overcome with the pursuit of physical matters, to an entirely different mental state, in which his pursuit after the mundane stops at once, and he stands humble and helpless before his Creator.

This is easier for one who is suffering, as the verse states, "A prayer of the afflicted, when he is faint, and pours out his complaint before HASHEM," (Tehillim 102:1). However, even then one needs spiritual strength to escape from his consciousness which stems from the illusion of cause and effect, between actions and their results, and tries to find the tranquility which descends on one who places his worries on HASHEM.

It is clear that it is not at all simple to step out of the physical rat race which characterizes the human condition, and to stand suddenly, in the midst of everything, in an elevated spiritual state of a person standing before HASHEM.

Furthermore, there is a huge gap between a person's cognition and his feelings; between matters in which he believes and knows and those that he feels.

One can believe with complete faith in the Providence of the Creator and that "a person doesn't bruise his finger on earth unless it was decreed for him in Heaven,"¹¹¹ and yet there is a dichotomy between his cognitive world and his world of feeling.

Thus, for example, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato (Ramchal) writes in *Mesilas Yesharim* (chapter 25) regarding fear of Heaven, that it is acquired through the

¹¹¹ Chullin 7a, "Rabbi Chanina said: A person doesn't bruise his finger below unless they announced it for him above, as the verse states, 'It is from God that a man's steps are established, how can a man then understand his path?' (Mishlei 20:24)"

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recognition that HASHEM watches over every matter, whether small or big, and nothing is concealed from before His eyes.

If a person would recognize the fact that HASHEM is everywhere with him, he would stand before the Divine Presence and would automatically be filled with awe and fear lest he fail in his actions or do something inappropriate for the situation he is in.

Regarding this *Mesilas Yesharim* points out that:

This matter is not sharply defined in a person's intellect... since it is distant from our senses, the mind cannot picture it without diligent contemplation and consideration. And even after he pictures it, the mental image disappears quickly if he doesn't constantly focus on it...

Taking his mind off it and ceasing to contemplate is the greatest obstacle [to having this recognition], whether due to distractions or intentionally... because this fear is not naturally attained. Quite the opposite, it is very distant from a person because of the physicality of his senses and can only be acquired through learning.

And learning to fear HASHEM can only be acquired through great, uninterrupted diligence in Torah and its ways.

This is what a person should always contemplate and think about – when he is sitting, when he is walking, when he lies down and when he gets up – until the truth of the matter is fixed in his mind. The truth that the Divine Presence is present in every place, and that a person literally stands before Him at all times.¹¹²

¹¹² Look also at *Mesilas Yesharim* chapter 19:

A person must think when he is praying or performing a mitzvah that he is praying or performing the mitzvah before the King, King of kings. This is what the Tanna warns us, "When you pray, know before Whom you are praying" (Berachos 28b).

A person must perceive three matters and contemplate them properly in order to reach this fear: The first is that he is literally standing before the Creator, blessed is His Name, and conversing with Him, even though a person's eye cannot see Him. And you will see that this is the most difficult – for a person to form a true image in his heart, because his senses do not assist him at all.

However, one who has proper intellect, through a little contemplation and attention, can fix the truth of the matter in his heart. How he literally comes to converse with Him, blessed is He, and entreat before Him, and requests of Him, and He, blessed is His name, listens and pays attention to his words, just as when one speaks with a friend his friend listens to him attentively.

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A person's conscious knowledge that he is standing before HASHEM is not something that can be felt or sensed in a natural manner. Therefore, it is difficult for a person to get into this frame of mind in his regular everyday life.

Rav Pincus in his work *She'arim Batefillah* (p. 13) notes regarding this:

The essence of prayer is to feel that one is literally standing before HASHEM and to feel His closeness and that the existence and closeness of HASHEM are actual reality, no less than any other reality which is familiar to us. For this he needs much practice until it becomes part of his natural feeling...

To attain all this, more than the need to delve into and excite himself concerning his purity of heart, he must accustom himself in these matters and think about them and repeat them time after time, until his senses become accustomed that at the moment he approaches in prayer he is simply standing before HASHEM in a literal sense.¹¹³

There is an additional point expressed here. A person is very heavily influenced by his surroundings and from the circumstances that envelope him. A person is taken up with his physical matters and influenced by the society in which he lives. He stands among friends and creates his image in

After one has fixed this in his mind, he must contemplate God's exaltedness, blessed is He, which is higher and more elevated than any blessing or praise, and beyond all forms of perfection that a person's mind could imagine or understand.

He must also contemplate the lowliness of man and his worthlessness, because of his base physicality. And how much more so with all the sins he has ever committed?

For with all of these it is impossible that his heart will not tremble, and that he will not be terrified when speaking words before God and mentioning His name and trying to appease Him. This is what the verse states, "Serve God with fear, and rejoice in trembling," (Tehillim 2:11).

It also states, "God is dreaded in the great council of the holy ones, and feared by all those around Him," (Tehillim 89:8). For since the angels are closer to Him, blessed is He, than physical beings, it is easier for them to imagine the praise of His greatness. And therefore, the dread of Him is greater for them than for humans.

Indeed, King David, may he rest in peace, would praise God saying, "I shall bow to Your holy Temple in fear of You," (Tehillim 5:8). Another verse states, "And before My Name he was afraid," (Malachi 2:5), and it also states, "My God, I have been embarrassed and ashamed to raise my face to You, my God," (Ezra 9:6).

However, this fear must first grow strong in the heart and afterwards you will see its effects also in the parts of the body. That is, the gravitas of head, bowing, lowering of the eyes and the bending of hands, like a small servant before a great king. As they said in the Talmud, "Rava clasped his hands and prayed like a slave before his Master," (Shabbos 10a).

¹¹³ *She'arim Batefillah* p. 13.

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their eyes. A person also tends to be interested, to speak and to concentrate on things he enjoys.

Rabbeinu Bachaye, in *Chovos Halevavos* points out that a person cannot love both material and spiritual life equally. Just as a vessel cannot contain fire and water together, so is it impossible for a person's heart to contain equal love of this world and the world to come. The two cancel each other out.

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, in his book *Lev Eliyahu*¹¹⁴ clarifies:

Not that it is impossible for one person to have this world and the next world at the same time. That is possible. But the equal love of both, the love of this world and the love of the world to come both in his heart equally – that is impossible.

Therefore, a person who is not spiritual and metaphysical will have great difficulty having intent in prayer. He has no difficulty speaking for hours with other people, speaking about matters facing them and which are relevant to their worldly existence. But it is not so when a person is requested to leave his world and field of interest and love. It is difficult for a person to concentrate for any length of time on a topic which he doesn't enjoy, and which is far from his being.

This is the root of the difficulty to enter a spiritual world, which seems, as stated earlier, imaginary in his eyes. Because it is difficult for a person to feel that the world in which he acts and lives is only a make-believe world, and everything he sees is nothing other than the work of HASHEM, hidden from our eyes, and that there is nothing else besides HASHEM.

Yet in prayer a person needs to instantly detach from daily life and from the physical, tangible world, to experience a total experience of standing before HASHEM and cleaving to the Holy One, blessed is He.

Therefore, a person tries to stand before HASHEM, closes his eyes or looks at his siddur, but his heart is not with him. His thoughts run on with the topics that involve him constantly, and he continues to be caught up with his daily routine. Even though these moments of prayer are more essential for his achievements than anything else he does during the day, what is "urgent" pushes away what is truly important. And so, instead of closeness to HASHEM which could save him, a person stands at these fateful moments and thinks of

¹¹⁴ Volume 3. *Mareches hateshuva* letter 9.

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people and materialism and the natural physical environment he is rooted in, and of the actions that he or others will perform.

How can a person taken up with materialism stand before HASHEM, become spiritual and develop closeness with HASHEM? It takes a great deal of preparation to achieve this goal and a great deal of Divine assistance.

‘From the Depths I Called to You, O Hashem’

We find in the words of the great Hassidic masters that foreign thoughts which come to a person during prayer flow from his sins and from his distance from his Creator.

However, using an understanding based on the concept of “He created everything for His honor,” – even evil -- we can find a positive aspect for the appearance of foreign thoughts and the causes which disrupt prayer.

Similar to the idea that repentance preceded the creation of the world (Nedarim 39b), so that failure was created in order to enable improvement, so too HASHEM desires prayers of a person even when they come from a distance, and He sees them as an opportunity given to a person to return from the distant existence which the sin prevails upon him.

Based on this perception, the difficulty in having intent in prayer not only stems from the experiential distance of a sinner from his HASHEM, but also from a “heavy load,” for one’s closeness to HASHEM in prayer is like a vehicle on which people seek to mount and use to rectify the existence of alien thoughts which they had until that time.

Based on this, the time of prayer is a very powerful lever which lifts the person from his physical existence and elevates him along with his entire being, including the damage he caused through his sins. With the elevation of the person comes the purification of the sinful thoughts he had.

This is how Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev explains it in his book *Kedushas Levi*¹¹⁵:

“Her enemies became the head... because HASHEM has afflicted her on her many transgressions; her young children have gone into captivity before the enemy,” (Eicha 1:5).

¹¹⁵ Devarim; *Megillas Eicha* and *Tisha B’Av*, on Eicha 1:5.

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For it appears confusing and surprising, why do alien thoughts come into a person's head during prayer, despite the preparation of the heart for prayer?

The concept is as follows: that which was denigrated through sin and a person's wickedness (a negative spiritual existence created through a person's sins) yearns to be elevated at the time of prayer service.

This is the meaning of the verse:

"Her enemies became the head" – the alien thoughts in the mind are,

"Because HASHEM has afflicted," – "afflicted" [*hoga*] here means "speech", i.e., through the words of prayer spoken to HASHEM. "On her many transgressions" – [the alien thoughts] are above the many transgressions.

"Her young children have gone into captivity before the enemy" – They are elevated above the enemy. The "young children" are the sparks which "have gone into captivity before the enemy." They are elevated above the enemy because of prayer words to HASHEM.

This concept helps explain *Tefillah Zakka* which we recite fervently at the beginning of the holiest day, Yom Kippur.¹¹⁶

By the merit of the prayers that we will recite on this holy day, may rise and come and arrive and join with them all the invalid prayers that we have recited throughout the year without intent, and may they all be included in the prayers of this day, and may they reach Your head, to be a crown for Your head, along with the prayers of Yisrael.

In other words, there are certain times that a single prayer with intent places the person near to HASHEM and along with this prayer, all his other experiences are purified, and are accepted. All the prayers that the person recited in the course of many years, when his soul was dry, without intent, are elevated along with this prayer.

So, Rabbi Nahman of Breslav notes that even though a prayer without intent is not acceptable to HASHEM, a person should never despair from praying even when he is unable to concentrate. The prayer stands waiting, and when a moment of closeness to HASHEM arrives, and one recites prayers from the

¹¹⁶ Cited by *Chayei Adam* 144:20.

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depths of the heart, through which he unites his entire heart with HASHEM, at that moment his previous requests and prayers which were said without heart, are also elevated and come before Him together with this prayer and enter before the Throne of Glory.

Rav Nahman says in *Likutei Moharan*:¹¹⁷

A person must pray with great devotion to HASHEM, blessed is He, but if sometimes there is a moment when he is unable to pray with devotion, he should not say, "I won't pray at all since I can't have the proper intent and pray with devotion, and my prayer will not be accepted;" as Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa replied, "If my prayer is fluent in my mouth I know that it is accepted, but if not, I know..." This is as we said, if the praying was with devotion for then the prayers are practiced and flow from the mouth, then it is accepted, but if not – Heaven forbid – the opposite.

Even so, a person should not say that. Rather he should always pray and if he is unable to pray with the proper devotion, he should pray with all his might. For when he prays with proper devotion, then all the prayers are elevated with that prayer. And this is the meaning of, "I entreated HASHEM," – constantly, whether with devotion or without devotion. "At that time, saying" – at the time that I merited to pray with devotion, which is the aspect of "my prayer is fluent in my mouth." And at is the meaning of "At that time saying" - when the words were said and flow from his mouth because he was praying with devotion, then all the prayers that he had recited until then were elevated.

'I Am for My Beloved and My Beloved Is for Me'

The Difficulty in Having Intent as a Result of Prayer Being A Two-Way Connection Between the Person and His God

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus in his book *She'arim Batefillah*¹¹⁸ adds another level of depth:

Intent is cleaving to HASHEM, and this cleaving must come with the consent of HASHEM and is not solely dependent on the person.

Therefore, without HASHEM's will it is impossible to achieve this intent.

¹¹⁷ *Likutei Moharan Kama*, Torah 99. On the verse, "And I entreated God at that time saying."

¹¹⁸ Chapter on "Preparation for Prayer."

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Rav Pincus adds that since prayer is a conversation and intimate discussion with HASHEM, as it were, such that it is attachment to HASHEM, it is clear that a discussion between two is a mutual arrangement requires agreement from both sides.¹¹⁹

Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik in his book *The Lonely Man of Faith* defines prayer as a covenant between the person and his HASHEM, when the external act of prayer is performed through saying the fixed words of prayer. For this is the way of *halakha*, to translate the theoretical content and essence into physical acts.

The “external” expression established in the laws of prayer requires one to express the words and to utter them with the lips. However, the words are not the essence, but rather an external vehicle to create the deep feeling of the person’s attachment to his HASHEM. A person stands before HASHEM on one side, and HASHEM agrees to listen on the other side, until there becomes an experience which is basically a mutual covenant between the person and his HASHEM.

He writes:

Prayer is basically an awareness of man finding himself in the presence of his Maker and addressing himself to him. To pray has one connotation only: to stand before HASHEM. To be sure, this awareness has been objectified and crystallized in standardized, definitive texts whose recitation is obligatory... It is of enormous significance in the *halakha* which constantly demands from man that he translate his inner life into external facticity. However, it remains unalterably true that the very essence of prayer is the covenantal experience of being together with and talking to HASHEM and that the concrete performance such as the recitation of texts represents the technique of implementation of prayer and not prayer itself.¹²⁰

Rav Pincus writes that since we are dealing with a covenant between a person and his HASHEM, it is clear that just as a person cannot heap words of love at a

¹¹⁹ Look at what Rav Uri Weissblum writes in his introduction to the book *He'aros Hatefillah*: Prayer is a literal reality. The person literally stands before the Creator of the universe and converses with him. Just as in a business deal the two parties discuss with one another, so too a person discusses, as it were, with Him, blessed is He. He wants to ask certain requests from the Creator, and the Creator of the universe wants payment... It is as if the Creator says, “You want knowledge, health, and a livelihood, from me... What are you willing to invest in exchange?”

¹²⁰ Joseph B. Soloveitchik *The Lonely Man of Faith*, (Aronson, 1965) p. 56.

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random stranger, so too he cannot pour meaningful content into his prayer without coming with certain preparations, to create a connection between the person and HASHEM.

It is true that regarding the righteous we find that HASHEM desires their prayers,¹²¹ and even for other people there are times which are defined as "a time of favor,"¹²² when HASHEM is close to those who call out – and then it is

¹²¹ For example, Yevamos 64a: Rabbi Yitzchak said: Why were our matriarchs [initially] barren? Because HASHEM desires the prayers of the righteous." The *Kli Yakar* adds (Bereishis 12:3), "Because they are likened to a beloved child before their father – if he wants something from his father, even though his father knows what the son needs, nevertheless the father wants the son to express his request verbally, because the father enjoys hearing the speech of the son. This is what God says to the Jewish people, 'Make your voice heard to Me, because your voice is sweet' to reach Me. God doesn't want to act with us like officers that don't allow too much speech before them, and as soon as they understand the intent of the petitioner they tell him, 'Speak quickly or stop talking and leave.' But God in His mercy is not like this, as the verse states, 'You have given him his heart's desire,' and even so, 'and the request of his lips You have not stopped, Selah,' (Tehillim 21:3). This is because we are like the favorite son and a dear child in His eyes."

Similarly, look at the Midrash (*Derashos Rabbi Yehoshua Joshua ibn Shuaib*, Parshas Beshalach) on the prayer of the Jewish people when they stood before the splitting of the sea. "A great fear entered their hearts when they saw the hosts of Egypt traveling after them, they prayed and offered song, and God desired their prayers. This is the reason that He showed them the hosts pursuing, and about this the verse says, 'O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crevasse of the cliff, let me see your face countenance, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is beautiful.'" (Shir Hashirim 2:14). As explained in *Midrash Chazisa*: 'The analogy is to a dove who fled from the hawk and entered a cleft in rock inside a cave, but a snake stood there before it. It cannot enter because of the snake, but cannot leave because of the hawk, so it flapped its wings so that the owner of its dovecot would hear it. Similarly, when the Jewish people saw the stormy sea and the hatred of the pursuer, they cast their eyes upward in prayer. And why did God do this? Because he desired their prayers.

It is comparable to a king who was on a journey and a princess cried before him, 'Please, I ask of you, save me from the bandits. The king heard and saved her. Sometime later the king wanted to marry her, and he desired that she would speak to him but she didn't want to. What did the king do? He set the bandits on her so that she would call out, in order that he could hear her voice. Once the bandits came she started to cry out to the king. The king then said to her: This is what I desired, to hear your voice. This is what the verse means, 'O my dove, in the clefts of the rock.... because your voice is sweet' – in prayer.

¹²² Look at "The essence of prayer and the essence of time" by Avraham Weinroth in *Sinai* (vol. 139, 5767, p. 93) where we explained (p. 100) based on the *Sefas Emes* that although we understand time with the terms "time, speed, journey," – meaning that if we act at the given speed, within the set time we will achieve a certain distance, and the question of how far we can travel depends on the speed of the action and the time given to it.

However, in practice, there are times with additional value, which are a receptacle for the Divine influence and the assistance of Heaven. Furthermore, at every moment of a person's life there is a specific goal like no other.

We illustrated the point there through the conversation between the late Lieutenant Colonel Emanuel Moreno, who fell in the Second Lebanon War and his friend from the unit called

Stav. Several hours before they got into the helicopter they had a foreboding that a missile might hit their helicopter over Lebanon. Emanuel asked, "What will you do if, Heaven forbid, our helicopter is hit by a missile and you only have 10 seconds left to live?" Stav answered, "I don't know. I guess I would be very sad and scared. I would close my eyes and wait for it to be over as quickly as possible, without too much pain."

Emanuel said to him, "What I would do, and this is also what you need to do, is to say, '*Shema Yisrael*.'"

Stav asked, "Ok, I would say '*Shema Yisrael*...' but how would that help me? The helicopter would be destroyed a second later and we would all die."

Emanuel answered, "If a person has five seconds left to live, and there is still meaning to his life and a desire for what comes afterwards, that means that life has meaning. But if a person has five seconds left to live, and doesn't believe in the importance of those seconds, then it would seem that there was no meaning to his entire life..."

Indeed, if we see time as an empty vessel the content of which is filled through the acts of a human being, then in those last five seconds before the missile destroys everything there is nothing to do. If there is nothing to do in that time, the time remains empty and so time has no meaning. In this case, the entire life, which is a fixed amount of time, has no meaning.

However, time can also be a destination. Every moment of life has a specific, unique, purpose. Every moment has a goal to be accomplished at that unique opportunity.

Time comes with its purpose and its destination. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose," (Koheles 3:1). Every moment is a tool to achieve the purpose of that moment.

So, it is clear that every fraction of a second has a purpose. The last five seconds have a purpose – repentance, and to prepare for the afterlife. To look to the future, after the conclusion. The beginning which comes immediately after the closing of the circle. Those five seconds are a time with tremendous meaning for a believer. They are his "desire of desires" (a kabbalistic term referring to a moment of extreme devotion to God, usually when the Shabbos departs). They are his month of Elul (the last month of the year used for preparation for Rosh Hashanah).

And if this is a person's view of time, it is completely obvious that there is a different meaning to his entire life. This not only expresses itself in giving meaning to the final five seconds, but in the essence of the entire life.

We can similarly understand Rambam's definition of Yom Kippur as a time of repentance. This is the moment most opportune for repentance, because this is the time when there is a clear goal – to return to God, and we have an obligation to seize the moment and to feel it and make it a reality. Time at this moment of Divine goodwill is not measured only by the minutes which are opportunities for actions, but they have a specific goal and purpose, which must be achieved.

This is also the meaning of prayer at "a time of Divine goodwill" (see Tehillim 69:14). This is the time when God is close to those who call Him, a time when God calls to a person, a time specifically for the purpose of utilizing the closeness to God. In terms of a mutual relationship a person has no need to create closeness to God. All that he needs is to seize the fitting moment and to pay attention to the Divine call he receives.

This is as Rambam rules (*Hilchos Teshuva* 2:6): "Even though repentance and crying to God is always good, during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur they are especially good, and are accepted immediately, as the verse states, 'Seek God when He is to be found, call to Him when He is close' (Yishaya 55:6)."

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easy for a person to become attached to his Creator even without a great deal of prior preparation.

However, at other times he finds it difficult to concentrate on prayer, since the connection in prayer is defined as mutual devotion – and when a person is not close to his Creator, he is unable to become attached to him.

Therefore, one needs, "Divine assistance to succeed in creating a connection of prayer with the Holy One, blessed is He. A person's efforts in prayer is considered his attempt to speak with and draw close, like the relationship between lovers – as one takes a step towards the other with the desire to draw close, it elicits a closeness from the other side as well towards him. Therefore, when a person awakens and tries to have intent, HASHEM helps him and 'one who comes to purify himself receives assistance from Heaven.'"

So, it turns out that there is a need for Divine assistance in order to have intent in prayer, because prayer is a mutual connection with HASHEM, and therefore without Divine goodwill and finding favor in His eyes, a person won't be able to get close to Him and have intent in his prayer. HASHEM's goodwill is necessary to build a connection with Him.

Accordingly, it appears that there is an additional point of understanding regarding the required intent to stand before HASHEM in prayer.

Since the difficulty in having intent in prayer comes from the distance between a human being and HASHEM, therefore, when a person approaches to pray he must first create an atmosphere of closeness between himself and his Creator.

Indeed, prayer is the service of the heart, and as every feeling which depends on a person's heart and his love, it is considered a mutual connection of attachment between the person and HASHEM.

Regarding love the principle is that, "As water -- face turns to face -- so the heart of man turns to man," (Mishlei 27:19). A person's face is reflected in water. If he shows a merry face, he will see a merry reflection looking back at him. And if he shows an irritable face, he will see an irritable reflection.

"So the heart of man turns to man." If a person loves someone else, that person will likewise feel feelings of love toward him. And if a person is uninterested in his friend and feels distant from him, the feelings and relations of the other will be the same.

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The way for a person to change the way others relate to him depends on the change in his innermost heart towards the other. If the person changes his relationship with the other and feels love towards him, the feeling he directs towards the other will cause the other to also have similar feelings. A parallel concept can be said regarding the relationship between a human being and HASHEM. If the person's heart is distant from HASHEM, then HASHEM will be distant from him. Since prayer is a mutual relationship, he will not be able to have intent in his prayer or to create a connection with his Creator, since there will be a lack of HASHEM's goodwill in this relationship with him.¹²³

Rambam in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:51) adds how a person can reach this elevated level of attachment to HASHEM, which is the essence of prayer. He teaches how one can make the transition from his daily, normal life, involved with material affairs, and which express a distance from HASHEM, to a situation where HASHEM desires his closeness.

At the highest level, a person reaches the ideal situation where there is no separation at all between him and HASHEM throughout the entire day. He wisely becomes attached to HASHEM even as he performs his work and goes about his daily business, in the sense of "In all your paths know Him," (Mishlei 3:5).¹²⁴

¹²³ This idea is doubly reinforced according to the teachings of kabbalah. These teachings say that the intentions and the unifications that a person performs in his prayer achieve their aims in the supernal worlds. So that a person can be part of this holy work, in which a person unites with his Creator in the doings of the supernal worlds, he must prepare his heart, and be disembodied, clean and pure.

¹²⁴ See Rambam cited earlier in footnote [[XX45]]. See also *Shulchan Aruch* 231:1: "And similarly regarding every enjoyment that one experiences in this world, one should not have intent for his own pleasure, but in order to serve the Creator, blessed is He, as the verse states, "In all your ways know Him," (Mishlei 3:6). Our Sages said (Bartenura on Avos 2:12): "All your actions should be for the sake of Heaven, that even matters which are not compulsory, for example, eating, drinking, walking, sitting, standing, sexual relations, conversation or any other bodily needs – they should all be done for the sake of serving your Creator or for something which will cause you to serve Him. Even if someone is thirsty and starving and he eats and drinks for his own pleasure he is not praiseworthy. Rather, one should have intent that he is eating and drinking in order to remain alive, so he can serve his Creator."

See also *Mirkeves Hamishneh*, by Yosef Alashkar on *Pirkei Avos* chapter 3, on the words of Rabbi Chananya that a person is obligated to be involved in Torah even when he sits down to eat with his friends. "Before he eats, a person must fix times for Torah. And while he is eating, and is unable to open any book, he must speak about what he learned earlier, and converse in what he studied beforehand. If he comes to some novel idea he should tell his friend, and his friend should do the same. When they do this then the verse, "In all your ways know Him," (Mishlei 3:6) will be fulfilled.

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But what can an average person do who is not on this level of attachment? Someone who while he is involved in his own affairs is not attached to HASHEM and doesn't think about him. How can such a person in a moment switch to a situation where he stands before HASHEM in prayer?

Rambam answers that the service of prayer and closeness to HASHEM requires practice and a great deal of training. This person can only achieve it gradually.¹²⁵

He writes:

This is also explained in the verse, "When you sit to eat with a ruler, consider well what is before you," (Mishlei 23:1). In other words, when you sit to give food to the physical energies which come from the aspect of the evil inclination which rules over you, "Consider well what is before you." Contemplate what you learned before eating. This is the meaning of "what is before you." ... And then you will break the power of the evil inclination, and this is the meaning of the following verse, "and if you are the master of your soul," (Mishlei 23:2).

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev adds and clarifies that even when a person is involved in his business dealings or any of his own matters, he can still be involved in Torah. He must observe the many *halakhos* related to acting in an upright, trustworthy and modest manner.

He writes in *Kerushas Levi* in *Likutim La'avos*:

In answer to *Tosafos'* question (Sanhedrin 7a s.v. *ella*): The Talmud in Shabbos 31a says, that the first question a person is asked in the World to Come is, "Did you deal honestly in business?", and then, "Did you set times for Torah?" However, elsewhere the Sages said, (Sanhedrin 7a) that the beginning of a person's judgement is Torah learning. This implies that the first question is not about business but about Torah.

The answer appears to be that the two questions are the same for one depends upon the other. If a person deals honestly and faithfully in business, he is truly engaged in Torah. The following is the rectification of people who are scattered in the hamlets and villages and are perforce involved in business – for the financial needs of Yisrael are great – how they can study Torah while they are involved in business, as King Shlomo said, "In all your ways know Him," (Mishlei 3:6). Preferably, when a person goes to the market and meets a woman and doesn't want to gaze at her or at her colored clothing because he remembers the statement of the Sages (Avoda Zara 20a) that it is forbidden to gaze at a woman and forbidden to gaze at a woman's colored clothing -- he is learning *halakha* at that time.

And in the market where it is a free-for-all and he could lie, but he doesn't for he remembers the verse, "You shall not deal falsely," (Vayikra 19:11) -- he is then truly learning that verse.

One must be very careful about this so that he does not say or utter a falsehood from his mouth, because Heaven forbid, if a person tells a lie, then he has enemies in Heaven...

And similarly, when he comes to his store and another comes to purchase from him and he gives him fair measures and honest weights and doesn't coat his scales with salt (see Bava Metzia 61b) -- he remembers the verse, "You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest *ephah* measure, and an honest *hin* measure," (Vayikra 19:36).

Thus, if he does business honestly, then he is also learning Torah.

¹²⁵ In this Rambam follows his approach that no spiritual level can be gained without suitable preparation. Look at Rambam in *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:32, "In our opinion it is impossible that a simpleton, one of the masses, have prophecy, except insofar as it is possible for a donkey or frog to have prophecy. Our principle is that it requires practice and perfection."

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You must know that the goal of all these acts of service of HASHEM, such as reading the Torah, prayer and performing other mitzvos, is in order to accustom himself to be involved in HASHEM's commandments, and not in matters of the physical world... I will begin to direct you to the form of practice in order that you achieve this great goal. The first thing you must try to do is to empty your mind completely from all outside thoughts when you read the *Shema* and pray. Do not be satisfied with intent for the first verse of the *Shema* or the first blessing of prayer. When you have achieved this and implanted it for years, try next that whenever you read the Torah or listen to it do not be afraid to direct your entire being...

According to the words of Rambam, it is not only that prayer is a state of closeness to the Creator of the universe, but that part of the purpose of prayer is for a person to become accustomed to unifying himself with his Creator, without outside thoughts. Through prayer a person is able afterwards to accustom himself also in his other actions to be attached to his Creator without any separation.

Rambam stresses that there is reciprocity between the efforts a person makes to unite with HASHEM and the degree of attachment to Him. It is incumbent upon the person to create this awareness in order to have this mutual relationship.

The ability is given to you. If you want to strengthen this bond – do so, and if you want to gradually weaken it until it breaks – do so.

This bond will only become stronger if you employ it for the love of HASHEM and when your intent is towards HASHEM. And it becomes weaker when you turn your thoughts to other matters...

When you turn your thoughts to food or business, this attachment between you and HASHEM is broken. You are no longer with Him and similarly He is not with you. Because this relationship between you and Him is practically broken at that time.

Rambam clarifies that a person can become attached to HASHEM or weaken the ties to HASHEM, and at the moment a person is involved in his own physical affairs, his connection with HASHEM is broken.

But it goes much further than that. When a person is involved in his own physical affairs and his heart is not given to HASHEM, "He is not with you." In

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other words, the tie between a person and HASHEM is mutual, and "If you abandon Me for a day I will abandon you for two days."¹²⁶

Since, according to Rambam's words, the purpose of prayer is closeness to God, when a person detaches himself from the physical experience and becomes attached to HASHEM, the prayer serves as a ladder to attachment to HASHEM for the rest of the day.

Therefore, one who prays without proper intent and doesn't achieve closeness to HASHEM in his prayer, misses the entire purpose of prayer. Rambam writes:

You must know that the goal of all these acts of service of HASHEM, such as reading the Torah, prayer and performing other mitzvos, is in order to accustom himself to be involved in HASHEM's commandments, and not in matters of the physical world. It is as if you are engaged with HASHEM, may He be exalted, and you are nullified from everything else.

But if you pray by moving your lips, and facing the wall, but you are thinking of your business dealings... then you will be like one about whom the verse states, You are near in their mouths, but far from their thoughts," (Yirmeyahu 12:2).

The kabbalists add another dimension to the need for intent in prayer and the proper preparation to achieve it. They say that intent during prayer itself is the "fuel" through which a person is able to reach to HASHEM in his prayer and to overpower all the stumbling blocks that lie in his way.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Yerushalmi end of Berachos. Look at *Teshuvos Maimoniyos, Kinyan* §30. "If you abandon Me for a day I will abandon you for two days." For if one abandons Him for a day, the Torah also moves away the same distance of a day, making a total of two days between the two.

¹²⁷ In general, in kabbalah, the meaning of intent differs from the simple meaning that intent is to explain to one's self the meaning of the words. In kabbalah intent has another meaning according to which the person acts in the supernal worlds, and not for himself or for the inhabitants of the earth, but his intent should be, as it were, "for the sake of the One on High," which can bring about the perfection of the worlds. The kabbalah of the Ari dedicates a significant section of its teachings to the concept of intent. It contains detailed descriptions of delving into the supernal worlds and the complex processes that are activated when a person has intent during his prayer to activate them and unite the Holy One, blessed is He, and the Divine Presence. On this topic see the complicated and lofty words of Rabbi Chaim Vital in his book *Sha'ar Hakavanos*."

In general, in kabbalah the idea of intent is different than its simple usual meaning which is how a person would explain the meaning of the prayer words to himself.

In kabbalah there is an additional layer of intent according to which a person acts in the supernal worlds, and not for the sake of himself or the sake of those who live in the lower

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The kabbalists clarify that a person who comes to speak before the king in his palace must first pass through the “courtyard of the king” with all its ways and rules, to pass the guards and gatekeepers who check that unworthy people do not enter before the king.

Since the nature of things is that a person has obstacles that prevent him, he must first check himself and remove from himself all the things which prevent him entering. And to know how to appease the gatekeepers, or how to get around them. These roadblocks create a blockage in a person’s closeness to HASHEM, and preparation for prayer is designated to allow the person to overcome these obstacles and bring his prayer to HASHEM.

So, we find in the introduction to *Sha’arei Ora*:¹²⁸

A person must check himself and be careful when he wants to pray before HASHEM – to see and to understand whether he has prosecuting angels or other obstructions preventing his prayers from being heard. And he must clear the path and remove all obstacles from before him.

world, but the intent is for “God’s needs,” as it were. The prayers have power to bring rectifications to the supernal worlds.

The kabbalah of the Arizal dedicates a significant section of its teachings to the concept of intent. It contains detailed, in-depth, descriptions of the supernal worlds, and the complex processes that occur when a person has intent in his prayer, to affect them and unite therein the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, with His Divine Presence. On this topic see at length the lofty, complex words of Rabbi Chaim Vital in his work *Sha’ar Hakavanos*.

It is clear that prayer with intent of this kind is on an entirely different level. It is lofty and elevated and has unlimited power.

Rav Pincus gives an analogy for this in *Sh’arim Batefillah* on p. 14.

“This can be compared to one who purchased a car and drove it all his life in first gear, because nobody ever taught him that there are other gears or the possibility of increasing the speed and using the greater powers of the car. It seemed to him as if the purpose of the car was to drive at no more than 20 kilometers per hour. He sees tremendous power in this awesome speed, because it is much faster than he could walk. Sometimes he pushes hard and reaches 40 kilometers per hour and sees this as a tremendous achievement. However, others can see that he hasn’t truly understood the actual powers of the car which are hidden and sealed before him, and this is because he lacks simple knowledge. He could easily have been taught the awesome possibilities and capabilities that he has and could add many times its power and strength.”

However, in this book we will obviously not delve into this additional lofty, dimension of intent in prayer, because it is an entire world, which stands apart and one requires tremendous preparation in order to enter its gates.

¹²⁸ *Sha’arei Ora*h by Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, at the beginning of *sha’ar* 1. This book was written by one of the early kabbalists and in the preface of the publisher it says that the Ari testified that, “This book is a great key which enlightens the eyes to see through a clear window into the wisdom of kabbalah.”

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This can be compared to a person who goes to the king's courtyard to present his petition. He must be adroit to know whether there are problems or dangers on the way.

Apart from that he must consider how many gates there are in the king's palace, each within the previous one, and know the gatekeepers who are appointed to guard those gates. He must be beloved by all of them, and if he knows of anyone who antagonizes him, he must make peace with him.

Apart from that he should know and consider the "clothing" that he wears, whether it is appropriate for him to wear to the courtyard of the king...

And apart from all of that he should check himself whether he is fit to speak before the king and the ministers and advisers who sit before him... And to find out if any of them will challenge his petition...

The Sages needed to point out and tell us an important principle. "The kingdom of earth is like the kingdom of Heaven" (Berachos 58a). If for a flesh and blood king one must be careful about all of these matters we mentioned, how much more so when a person enters to greet the King, the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He.

A person must understand and know that from earth to Heaven... there are many impure creatures who cause damage and prosecute, and they all stand flying in the air. There is no place between earth and Heaven which is free of them, rather the entire space is filled with their masses... And all of these encampments between the earth and the Heaven are like one who goes on a journey in a dangerous place.

So too, a person's prayer passes through all these groups and ascends to heaven. If it has merit the bandits will not attack his prayer, but if he does not have merit, many damagers and destroyers attack along the way...

Therefore, a person must prepare himself when he prays and have proper intent in his thoughts so that his prayer will not be blocked, and his intent will not return empty.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ *Sha'arei Orah* adds that *Pesukei Dezimra* that we recite before our prayer was established by King David, who wrote the "songs" (*zemiros*) which comes from the word "*mazmeira*"

The Path to The King

Patience and Spiritual Tranquility

Apart from the need to set aside time for the preparation to prayer, Rav Pincus explains¹³⁰ that the first principle for success at having intent in prayer is patience and removing the pressure to finish the prayer. As the *baraisa* says, (Berachos 32b): “The Rabbis taught: The early pious ones would wait for an hour, pray for an hour, and then wait again for an hour.”

These are his splendid words:

When involved in prayer, the first principle for success is to spend the appropriate amount of unpressured time. This is truly the rule for success in everything, whatever it may be. For one who hurries to complete something and who is stressed about time, if he doesn't have time or the patience for the matter he is involved with, he will not be able to succeed in any manner or form...

We have a lack of time which destroys our prayers, and this causes damage before and afterwards. We hurry from the beginning, from the blessings, and through until the *Shemoneh Esrei* so that we can manage to pray with the community, and sometimes we even skip parts of the prayers to achieve this.

And if we manage to come on time and pray with the community, then the prayer leader sets the pace for us. If the prayer leader is in a hurry to get on his way, he drags along with him the entire congregation.

Our surroundings set for us how much time we have for *Shemoneh Esrei* and how to pray. It is true that we can take a little bit more time, but there is a limit, so as not to look like someone who is striving too hard.

Then at the end of the prayer we hurry to get to our pressing business and rush or skip those prayers which we don't consider to be quite as compulsory as *Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei*.

meaning “pruning hook.” For these verses cut and remove the damaging agents from the path and clear the way for prayers to reach the Throne of Glory.

Likewise, *Sha'arei Orah* explains that through the proper intent on the holy names of God the strength of the prayer is increased so that it can overpower the various things blocking its path.

¹³⁰ *She'arim Batefillah* pp. 17-19.

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Ultimately there isn't really patience for prayer. The set time is too short, and the prayers are long and we must cram in a lot in a small amount of time. In general, there is no choice but to cut parts out from both ends.

It is the way of the world that if you visit a doctor who is not a big specialist you will find him pressured when there is a long line of patients waiting, and so he will hurry through each one to try and see all of them.

But a specialist will not be pressured about anything. He will sit with each patient calmly and at length, as if he is the only patient the doctor has to treat that day. This is a sign of a great specialist, because it is impossible to reach a proper diagnosis under pressure when there is no time.

It is the same with prayer, which requires concentration and thought. If we hurry and are pressured, and the time is fixed and set, it is completely impossible to reach the depths of understanding or the proper intent. This will never be the service of a specialist.

They once asked a wise man how long the *Shemoneh Esrei* should take. He answered, "Until you finish." This definition is incredible. It makes no difference whether one takes a long time or a short time, he should not feel that his time is limited at all.

If his heart motivates him he can take a long time over his prayer, and if not, he can pray quickly. But the main thing is that there is nothing external to disturb him either while he is praying or before he prays.

The principle of prayer, and especially of the *Shemoneh Esrei* is that it is a world is full of blossoms and flowers of every color, and one simply needs time. Without time, it is impossible to pray.

There is also the issue of respect for Heaven. The most basic respect that one can give to another is to set aside a little time for him. There is no greater insult than to say, "I haven't got time for you." Everyone knows this feeling, when we have an audience with someone, but that person is in a hurry to finish with us because of the line waiting outside and we know how insulting this is. We immediately think that it would have been better for him not to grant me an audience at all. If I am sitting here at least give me a few minutes of patience.

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It is the same with prayer, when we are already speaking with HASHEM, we don't have time, but we rush to finish our business of prayer and race through a few words, as if to say, "I need life, livelihood, health and other things. Goodbye and so long!" We take off our *tefillin* and race away. What happened to our manners?

Since we are often truly pressured for time, the best solution is to arrive earlier. For example, if prayers begin at 7 a.m., come nice and early before that hour. This can make a huge difference to the entire prayer. Everyone knows this, and there is nothing more important than this for someone who wants his engagement in prayer to be beneficial.

Like in everything where the beginning is the most important, so too in prayer when we begin with the feeling that there is enough time to enjoy and pray with desire and intent, the feeling will continue until the end. But if we are late from the beginning, even by a few minutes, there is a sense of hurrying and rushing which continues throughout the prayer and it is impossible to pray with a full heart.

Another essential principle for prayer is calmness. A person who is distracted finds it hard to concentrate.

Ramban points out in his famous letter to his son, "Remove everything from your heart at the time of prayer."

Similarly, we find that *Rosh* writes in *Orchos Chayim* (*siman* 20), "When it is time for one of the three daily prayers, leave all your business and pray."

Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on Berachos (beginning of chapter 5) writes: "He should think in his heart as if he was standing in Heaven, and he should remove from his heart all the physical desires of the world and all the pleasures of the body. As the earlier Rabbis said, 'When you want to have intent, remove your body from your soul.'"

Indeed, when a person is in the midst of his earthly experience, he doesn't possess tranquility of mind and he is always hurried and worried.

Also, throughout the rest of the day, "many are the thoughts in the heart of a man," (Mishlei 19:21). It is not surprising that when he wants to stop thinking outside thoughts he finishes his prayer in a hurry in order to let his other thoughts flow.

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In such an atmosphere it is difficult to concentrate. It is difficult to have intent in prayer.

A person may strive to fight those thoughts; however, he is fighting them while he is in the midst of a situation that it in itself is distracting. So, he is really fighting his entire situation. This is a difficult struggle and hard to bear.

Therefore, if a person wants to have intent in prayer, he should change the atmosphere for himself. He should cease his earthly existence and think that he is already out of the hustle and bustle of his daily life, as if he is already after this, like one who has separated from the routine of life and its struggles. Now he has the opportunity to contemplate the world from above, from the lofty heights of the new experience in which he finds himself.

In the words of Rabbeinu Yonah, "He should think in his heart as if he is standing in Heaven," above the waves of the storm of worries, thoughts and desires. In a place where there is no pleasure or physical enjoyment, with no jealousy, no hate and no competitiveness. In this way a person will feel the tranquility surrounding him, his soul will be calm from its rushing along. He will feel his soul being elevated.

If he can manage to change the atmosphere around him and feel that he is gazing at the affairs of this world from above, he will be able to have proper intent in his prayer.¹³¹

Imagining the Letters in His Mind

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin in *Nefesh Hachayim* (2:13) gives a practical piece of advice for prayer with intent. His understanding is that the main service of prayer is to know the power of prayer which gives energy to the supernal worlds.

¹³¹ Look at what Rabbi Uri Weissblum wrote in *He'aros Hatefillah* based on this advice. He says, "This idea is alluded to in the continuation of Rabbeinu Yonah's words: He should remove from his heart all the desires of the physical world and all the pleasures of the body, as the earlier Rabbis said, 'When you want to have intent, remove your body from your soul.'"

If you want to have intent, you cannot remain within your body and from within the body fight the strength of the body. That is an internal contradiction. That is trying to grasp the rope at both ends. If you want to have intent, remove your body from your soul. Try to imagine a new reality of elevation and then you won't have to fight and struggle for every word so that you can say it with intent. From the elevated heights the words flow by themselves, with intent of the heart. When a person achieves this elevation from himself for a few moments, everything is revealed before him in a new light."

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Therefore, he writes, "When a person utters each word of prayer, he should imagine in his mind that word with the shape of its letters, and he should intend through this to add to the power of holiness... This is a wonderful practical advice, checked and validated, to those who accustom themselves in it, to nullify and remove through this all vain thoughts that distract and prevent pure thought and intent. The more one becomes accustomed to this the more purity will be added to his thoughts during prayer. And this is a simple intent."¹³²

Improving the Present Reality

Earlier we cited Rambam in the *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:51) where he teaches a person how to implement the purpose of prayer. He guides a person to become accustomed, step by step, to concentrate fully on what he is doing. Thought tends to wander, so that person is doing one thing with his body while his heart is somewhere else.

So, it turns out that the person doesn't enjoy the world, because when he is walking he doesn't see the sky and the world around him, but is thinking about what will happen to him when he reaches his destination. And when he arrives at his destination, his thoughts start worrying about what he will do later.

Someone who lives in this manner will find also when he prays that his thoughts wander, because that is his way in everything he does. The purpose of intent in prayer is to teach us, "Involve your thoughts only in what you are doing." So Rambam teaches us:

From here on I will begin to direct you to the form of practice in order that you achieve this great goal.

¹³² Look at what Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe writes in *Alei Shur* vol. 1 p. 115: "At the first gate of our words about the essence of prayer, we brought a definition of prayer from the novella of Rabbi Chaim of Brisk, that there is an intent in prayer regarding the act of prayer, that we stand before God, and there is an intent on the meanings of the words. With time, we will learn to feel in prayer how we are standing before God. At that point we will not differentiate anymore in our minds between the two types of intent. We will then be able to concentrate on the prayer words as Rabbi Chayim of Volozhin teaches us in section 2 of his wonderful book *Nefesh Hachayim*, chapter 13. And these two intents will become unified in our hands."

In other words, if a person puts in his mind how each word ascends Heavenward, he will necessarily feel that he is standing before God, and the intent of the meaning of each word will combine in this case with the sense of standing before God and he will combine the two intents into one.

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The first thing you must try to do is to empty your mind completely when you read the *Shema* and pray...

When you have achieved this and implanted it for years, try next that whenever you read the Torah or listen to it, not to hold back from directing your entire being and all your thoughts to concentrate on what you are hearing or reading.

When these acts of service of HASHEM have been refined by you and your thoughts are clean from any fleeting thoughts of this world, try afterwards not to let the thoughts on your needs or other areas of your life burden you. In general, use think about matters of the world, only when you eat or drink...

But when you are doing actions according to the Torah, focus your thoughts solely on what you are doing.

This is in my opinion the goal, which a wise person can achieve when he prepares himself in this path of training.

In other words, a person must train himself in the techniques of devotion in his actions and full concentration on what he does in the present, without allowing his thoughts to wander at all to think about other things that he is not involved with at that moment.

When a person does this at all times of the day in all his matters, he will learn to become attached to HASHEM in all of his actions. But the beginning of this path is to learn to do so when standing before HASHEM in prayer. Then his prayer will be pure and clear and will express the person's complete devotion to HASHEM while standing before Him.

Giving Headings, and Thinking Before Talking

The *Chofetz Chaim*, based on his own experience, gave good advice for everyone to help concentrate on prayer. A person should pray from a siddur and before each section of prayer he should look ahead and think to himself what the next section is about. Then his mind will be prepared, and he will have intent on the section he is about to recite.

He writes in the end of his pamphlet *Nefutzos Yisroel*:

First of all, a person should pray from a siddur, or at the very least recite the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer from a siddur. However, even then he

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is not fully protected from the wiles of the evil inclination, which tries to distract him by throwing all his worries at him so that he won't be able to concentrate.

With the help of HASHEM, I found a solution for this. The reader should not think that this is something which takes a lot of additional time. It doesn't, as I have found through experience. The siddur should be open in front of his eyes and he should think for a few moments before reciting each blessing. For example:

Before the first blessing – contemplate that he wants to recite praise before HASHEM who is our HASHEM and the HASHEM of our fathers, Who created everything, and to bless Him because he protected Avraham.

Before the second blessing – contemplate that he wants to bless Him for the resurrection of the dead.

Before the third blessing – bless Him because he is the holy God.

Before the fourth blessing – request knowledge from Him and bless Him for this.

Before the fifth blessing – Request repentance from Him and bless Him for this.

And similarly, for all of the other blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

And he should do the same thing also for the morning blessings and for *Birkas Hamazon*.

The general principle is that one should not simply recite blessings out of habit, but think about what he is blessing HASHEM for, and then recite each blessing with alacrity and joy, for the fact that he has the merit to bless the Lord, the HASHEM of Yisrael.

Emotion and Substantiation

Another piece of advice to have intent in prayer is to move the words from the realm of verbal speech to the realm of emotion and to depict his needs to himself and the meanings of the prayers.

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This fits with what the Talmudic Sages said in *Pirkei Avos* (2:13), "When you pray, don't make your prayer fixed, but rather mercy and beseeching before the Omnipresent, blessed is He."

Rabbi Eliya Lopian pointed this out, in the case of Moshe Rabbeinu when he asked HASHEM before his death, "Let the Lord, HASHEM of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go out before them, and who will come in before them, and who will lead them out, and who will bring them in, so that HASHEM's congregation will not be like sheep which have no shepherd," (Bamidbar 27:16-17).

When a person speaks with a friend and feels that the friend doesn't grasp the importance of the matter or how serious it is, he may clarify through an analogy, so that his friend will be able to understand and fully grasp his intent. However, here Moshe is speaking with HASHEM. Does HASHEM need, Heaven forbid, an analogy to understand the importance of having a leader?

Rather, explains Rav Lopian, Moshe gave the analogy for himself and this was his prayer: "Creator of the universe, Yisrael needs a leader!"

Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to illustrate for himself how serious the situation would be if the proper leader wasn't found. He said to himself, "The Jewish people without a leader would be like sheep without a shepherd." He did this so that his request to appoint a leader would come from the bottom of his heart.¹³³

¹³³ Rabbi Yitzchak Goldwasser, in his book *Tzerufa Imrasecha* (p. 325) discusses the verse, "To serve Him with all your hearts," (Devarim 10:12). He discusses the importance of prayer which flows from the burning heart which feels tangibly the lack of the object of his prayers and his requests. Rav Goldwasser illustrates his point from the prayer of the High Priest when he emerged from the Holy of Holies, which is cited in the Talmud (Yoma 73b). The High Priest would pray that the prayers of the travelers should not enter before God, because they pray that no rain should fall while they are still on their journeys.

This is a surprising prayer for the High Priest to recite, because we would have expected that the prayers of the travelers would not be accepted anyway. There were tens of thousands of Jews who needed rain, dozens of statements of the Rabbis stressing the urgency of rain to the world, and yet because of a handful of travelers for whom it is uncomfortable to be in on the road while it is raining would God withhold the rain? Why was there a need for the prayer of the High Priest on Yom Kippur when he emerged from the Holy of Holies, to pray that the prayers of travelers not be accepted?

From this piece of Talmud, it appears that since their prayers were from the heart, even though there were just a few people praying with feeling and true intent to save them from even minor suffering, sometimes that is preferable to the abundance of prayers with cognitive intent that God save them from great suffering.

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Having intent in prayer means the person pleads and requests from the depths of his heart. Words uttered only on the lips, without a desire in the depths of the heart to make them a reality, even if there is intent for the meanings of the words, are not considered to be a prayer with appropriate intent.¹³⁴

In order for a person to have intent, he must substantiate to himself the urgent need for his prayers to be answered, so that he will truly want it with his entire heart.¹³⁵

Rav Weissblum summarizes this in the introduction to *He'aros Hatefillah* and writes:

The Jewish people cognitively understood that if there was no rain they would suffer. But in the meanwhile, they were enjoying a good situation from the rains of the past year. So, their prayers were recited with cognitive intent, but did not come from a burning, hurting, heart. However, this is not the case with the prayers of an individual who is on a journey, soaking wet to his skin. He asks with all his heart that the rain should stop "just for now" until he gets to his home safely. It may be that his suffering is not all that great, but his prayer is said with emotion and bursts forth from his heart. And "The Merciful One desires the heart," (Sanhedrin 106b).

The more the person experiences the meaning of the suffering from which he wants to be saved, the more the prayer pierces the Heavens, because the person himself reaches heights and his spiritual situation requires Heaven to have mercy on him.

¹³⁴ *Maharal* in *Gur Aryeh* on Parshas Vayetze (Bereishis 30:3) writes:

What a person wants is his prayer, because He will do the will of those who fear Him. In this regard Rabbi Uri Weissblum writes in the introduction to *He'aros Hatefillah* that, "The essence of prayer is the will. The reciting of the lips is only the external expression of the inner will embedded within the heart. But the subject matter of prayer is the will.

Therefore, we can test ourselves whether we have prayed. If we feel when we pray that we want, with all our hearts, that everything we said with our lips should come true – then we have prayed. But if we do not feel this, or even worse, we have no idea what came out of our mouths, that means that we didn't pray those sections at all.

A person who has, Heaven forbid, a sick person in his home, and he wants with all his heart that God will heal the patient and expresses his desire through the expression of his lips – that is prayer. But when his family are healthy, and his close friends are healthy, and he is not interested at all at what goes on in the hospitals, if so, he doesn't want healing. And if he doesn't want it, even though he says the blessing of "heal us" (*refa'einu*) with his lips – this is not prayer at all because the essence of prayer is the desire.

This explanation gives a new viewpoint to the entire idea of prayer. Intent in prayer is not limited to the meaning of the words. Rather it means whether we want what we say. If we do not want it, having intent for the meaning of the words will not afford those words a title of prayer. This is a far-reaching matter.

¹³⁵ This lack stands out with most people when they have a sick relative for whom they are praying. Then, even if they did not have proper intent for the entire *Shemoneh Esrei*, when they get to "heal us" (*refa'einu*) and the prayer for a sick person, their prayer bursts out from the walls of their hearts with no effort. Only through experience to feel the lack in the other requests as well, can we reach the feeling that we are truly requesting them.

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Everyone feels that when his heart is not with him, no matter how much effort he exerts to have intent for the meaning of the words, it is difficult and an internal struggle. At the end of the day, even if he has intent, he does not achieve spiritual elevation.

This is not the right way. We must circumvent the evil inclination and not diametrically oppose it.

There is a secret key which opens the gates of prayer. The key is the power of imagination.

As long as we emit the words of prayer from our mouths, but without the power of imagination, even if we have intent for the meanings of the words, the gates of prayer remain locked.

The moment that we picture in our minds what we say, and the picture stands vividly before our eyes, the gates of prayer begin to open and we feel that our soul is excited and aspires to those words being said by the mouth, praying that they should be fulfilled...

In this state a person doesn't need to fight over every word so that it will be said with intent. When he is emotionally excited his soul from itself pours out to the Creator.

This is the direction we should toil for. As long as we do not change our spiritual state during prayer, and we approach prayer within all the worries, we will struggle unwillingly over every word, and the spiritual elevation of prayer will remain distant from us. Only if we awaken our soul through the depiction of our imagination will we bring our souls to be drawn, to yearn.

The *Chazon Ish*¹³⁶ addresses a different aspect of prayer that needs to be given a real-life picture in the mind of the one praying. In a letter to a student he points out that one who prays must imagine to himself the fact that HASHEM is listening to his prayer.

He suggests in this letter, that success depends on the amount of toil invested, but stresses that "the main thing is to precede his toils with prayer."

¹³⁶ Rabbi Avraham Yishaya Karelitz (*Chazon Ish*); *Kovetz Igros* vol. 1 letter 23.

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In this regard the *Chazon Ish* instructs, "The important task of prayer is to imagine as vivid as possible, how HASHEM hears the utterances of our lips and listens to the thinking of the heart."

The Recognition of The Power of Prayer

Another piece of advice is that a person brings to mind the simple fact that the condition for success in everything is assistance from Heaven. Without that he is striving in vain. And the primary source for Divine assistance is prayer.

Rabbi Uri Weissblum, in the introduction to *He'aros Hatefillah*, points out that:

The Talmudic Rabbis describe prayer as "Matters that stand at the heights of the world, yet people treat them lightly," (Berachos 6b).

It is astonishing that the Rabbis use the same expression about prayer that we use about the Creator of the world, "At the height of the world is Your throne."

If the Rabbis say that prayer stands at the heights of the world, it means that prayer has the power to elevate a person to the heights of the world and bring him before the Throne of glory.

Yet a person instead of his prayer bringing him to the heights of the world, he draws his prayer down to the deepest pit and leaves it there.

If we knew what we could achieve with our prayers, we would treat them completely differently.

When a person acknowledges this fact, a temperance for the physical world is planted within him, and to the contrary, all his drive to succeed in his affairs is focused and directed to the moment of prayer, where he can inject his entire heart and all his thoughts.

This is what Rav Shlomo Wolbe writes in *Alei Shur*¹³⁷ that the lack of intent in prayer removes from the person the tremendous Divine assistance that he could have been given for success in any field only through the power of prayer. He writes:

Even to achieve wisdom in Torah it is not enough to spend a lot of time studying, but only through prayer can one achieve it. However, without a lot of learning the prayer will not help.

¹³⁷ Vol. 2 chapter 4, p. 590.

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If people of the Torah would know this, they would generously pour out their prayers before the Giver of Torah asking that they should merit its wisdom. Who knows how many potential great Torah scholars are lost and do not realize their capabilities, because they rush through the prayers omitting bits and pieces, saying them without intent from the depths of their heart.

One who wants to become rich and hurries in the morning to his business after a dry, rushed prayer – who knows what Divine assistance he is stealing from himself because he doesn't pray in an organized manner with the community, slowly and paying great attention.

Everything is achieved only through prayer and spending a lot of time studying for one who seeks wisdom, or doing business honestly for one who seeks wealth, is only the condition that his prayers should be answered.

Prayer About Prayer

Due to the tremendous difficulty in approaching prayer appropriately, it is not surprising that the Hassidic Masters wrote in their books that the most important advice for having intent in prayer is prayer. This is because prayer requires effort and Divine assistance and everything which requires Divine assistance needs prayer.

So, it is obvious that a person must pray to HASHEM that He should assist him to pray with intent in his prayer. For this reason, we begin the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer with the prayer that, "HASHEM, open my lips and let my mouth declare Your praise."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev in his book *Kedushas Levi* relates to the piercing prayer that Moshe Rabbeinu said when he pleaded to HASHEM to allow him to enter the Land of Israel. He explains that even this prayer, which flowed from the depths of the heart of the greatest of prophets, required a prayer which preceded it.

He explains the verse in Parshas Va'eschanan (Devarim 3:23), "I entreated HASHEM at that time, saying."

The word, "saying" appears redundant [because these were not the words that Moshe said to another, but the direct prayer that he recited to HASHEM. So why does the Torah use the word, "saying?"] It seems

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that the meaning of the verse is, "I entreated to HASHEM at that time," that he was entreating first that he should be able to pray afterwards. "Saying" means the thing that he had to say, but he couldn't say it before because he was embarrassed before HASHEM, and he needed to pray that he should be able to say it.

Rabbi Matisyahu Rabinowicz, the Biala Rebbe, in his book *Tefillas Hatzadikim* brings a proof in the name of the Tzadikim that one must pray effusively that he may merit to pray properly. The proof is from the words of the Mishna (Berachos 30b): "The early righteous ones would wait an hour and pray in order that their hearts should have intent to their Father in Heaven."

Why does the Mishna say, "And pray"? It should have said, "...would wait an hour in order to have intent to their Father in Heaven and pray." Therefore, it must mean that they would use that hour to pray that they should be able to have intent in prayer.

The prayer of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk that was said as a "prayer before the prayer" is well known. In it a person prays to HASHEM that He should assist him to pray.

We will end this chapter by quoting the prayer in its entirety.

May it be Your will, Lord, Hashem our HASHEM and the HASHEM of our fathers, Who hears the voice of our entreaties and listens with mercy to the sound of the prayers of His people Yisrael, that You prepare our hearts and fix our thoughts and make our prayers flow from our mouth and pay attention with Your ears to listen to the prayers of Your servants who entreat You with the voice of entreaty and a broken spirit.

For it is revealed and known before You that we have not disobeyed Your mouth and the words of Your Torah and Your mitzvos intentionally, or out of rebellion, Heaven forbid. Rather it is due to the evil inclination which constantly burns within us and never rests and is not quiet until it brings us to the desires of this lowly world and to its vanities and constantly confuses our thoughts.

Even at the moment we stand to pray before You and plead for our souls, it confuses our thoughts with its wiles and we are unable to stand against it...

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For it is revealed and known before You our groans and suffering and speech about how we are unable to bring ourselves close to Your service and to attach our hearts to You truly and sincerely.

We cry for our souls, a great woe to us, our Father in Heaven.

But You, please awaken Your great and abundant mercy and Your kindness for us, to remove and destroy the evil inclination from within us, rebuke it so that it will depart and leave us and not incite to stray from serving You, Heaven forbid. Do not let any evil thoughts enter our hearts...

Especially at the time when we stand in prayer before You, or when we are learning Your Torah. When we are involved in Your mitzvos may our thoughts be pure, clear, lucid and strong in truth, with a complete heart, like Your good will with us....

Be with our mouths when we speak, with our hands when we serve and with our hearts when we think. May You grant us the merit, our Father in Heaven, HASHEM full of mercy, that we will unify our hearts, our thoughts, our speech and our actions. In all our movements and our emotions, both known to us and unknown to us, both revealed and hidden, everything should be entirely for Your sake in truth and perfection, without any ulterior thought, Heaven forbid.

Purify our hearts and sanctify us, throw on us purifying water, and purify us in Your love and Your compassion. Implant the love and fear of You in our hearts constantly without a break, at all moments, all times and in every place. When we go, when we lie down, when we rise up may a spirit of holiness constantly burn within us that we always rely on You and Your greatness, and that we be in love for You and fear of You, in Your written and oral Torah, both revealed and concealed...

Pour Your holy spirit upon us so that we may be attached to you and desire You constantly more and more. Raise us from one level to the next, so that we may merit to come to the level of our holy Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and may their merit stand for us that You accept the voice of our prayers, so that we will be always answered whenever we pray to You...

On the contrary, place in our hearts that we should see the good aspects of our friends and not their shortcomings; that we may speak

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to each other in the honest way that is favorable before You. May no hatred from one to another come into our hearts, Heaven forbid. Strengthen our ties in love to You as it is revealed and known before You that everything we do is for Your satisfaction, for this is our main intent.

If we don't have the intellect to have intent in our heart towards You, teach us so that we may know the true intent of Your good will.

For all of this we plead before You, HASHEM, full of mercy, that You accept our prayers with mercy and goodwill. Amen, so may it be Your will.

Chapter 4: PREPARATION FOR PRAYER

The Obligation of Preparation for Prayer

Mitzvos are not simply physical acts. They have spiritual content. Mitzvos require intent¹³⁸ and the prime intent is to do the will of HASHEM through the performance of this mitzvah.

Performing a mitzvah is an act of great importance, and therefore it requires preparation.¹³⁹ This obligation of preparation forms the basis of the custom to say before performing a mitzvah, "Behold, I am prepared and ready..."

Prayer is also a mitzvah which requires preparation at many levels within the physical plane.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 60:4: "Some say that mitzvos do not require intent. And some say that they do require the intent that the act performed is being done in order to fulfill one's obligation. This latter opinion is the *halakha*." See also *Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim* 589 where he says that this is also Rambam's opinion. He writes, "In terms of *halakha*, since *Rif*, Rambam and *Rosh* agree that mitzvos require intent, this is how we hold."

¹³⁹ An example of the need for preparation before doing something important is found at the beginning of *Beitza* (2b). There Rabba explains the Mishna based on the principle that an egg is prepared inside the hen the day before it is laid. Therefore, an egg laid on a festival which occurs on Sunday is prohibited because it was prepared on Shabbos, and "Shabbos may not prepare for a festival."

Why then, according to Rabba, is it permitted to eat an egg that was laid on a Sunday that is not a festival?

Rashi answers (s.v. *yom tov mechin lashabbos*): a weekday meal has no importance and therefore does not require preparation. However, Shabbos and festival meals are important and therefore they require preparation.

¹⁴⁰ Look at *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 91:2 which says that one who prays is obligated to wear a belt during prayer as part of the requirement to "prepare to greet your God, Yisrael," (Amos 4:12).

The meaning of this type of preparation for prayer is to separate between one's heart and one's sexual organs. This physical preparation is designed to prepare the heart for greater spiritual matters.

Similarly, one must cover one's head during prayer. The *Mishna Berura* there §6 cites the words of the Zohar (Parshas Va'eschronon 260b) that one who stands in prayer must cover his head and his eyes so that he does not gaze at the Divine presence. The *Mishna Berura* adds in the name of *Pri Megadim* that the custom is to cover one's head until the eyes with a *tallis* during the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer.

Similarly, one of the acts that is necessary before prayer is purification of one's hands. See Rambam (*Hilchos Tefillah* 5:1).

See the (Hebrew) essay by Rabbi Pinchas Korah, "Purity of Hands for Prayer on Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av" in *Moriah* 358-360 p. 131. There he explains that there is a fundamental dispute between Rambam and his son Rabbi Avraham as to whether the reason for the obligation of purifying one's hands for prayer is due to preparation for prayer and showing respect for

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However, prayer is an unusual mitzvah insofar as it requires not only physical preparation but also spiritual preparation.¹⁴¹

prayer, or whether it is an essential element of prayer itself -- part of the order of the service of prayer, similar to the kohanim washing their hands and feet in the Beis Hamikdash. If the latter, one who doesn't wash his hands before prayer has not performed one of the components of prayer and has thus negated its status as prayer, and he is therefore obligated to pray a second time.

Additionally, see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 92, where it states it that one who prays must prepare his body so that he will not need to use the bathroom during prayer. And he must remove phlegm and mucus and wash his hands before prayer.

Two different explanations are given for this:

1. One explanation is brought in *Sefer Chasidim* (Margolios) §57. It is stated, "Bless the Lord, my soul, and all my innards His Holy Name," (Tehillim 103:1). This teaches that even one's innards and intestines must bless God. Therefore, one must check whether he needs the bathroom before he comes to pray. It is not nice to bring a belly full of waste before God... And it is written, "Prepare to greet your God, Yisrael." When a person comes before a king of flesh and blood, he will not come as he would come to the market. Rather he would wrap himself up in fear, trepidation and respect. If so, when we come before the Master of the entire world, how much more so must we wrap ourselves before Him in fear, trepidation and respect?
2. An idea brought in the rulings of Rav Moshe Feinstein in *Iggros Moshe (Orach Chayim* vol. 2 §17). Rav Feinstein cites the words of *Tosafos* in Berachos (22b) and the words of the Rosh (Berachos chapter 3 §22) that when a person prays without physically preparing himself and he needs to go to the bathroom, the principle of "his prayer is disgusting" applies to him, and he must repeat the prayer. One could ask, why is he required to pray again? Rav Feinstein answers because prayer requires spiritual advocates and angelic helpers so that God will listen. If one prays whilst refusing to listen to the words of the Torah regarding his prayer, this acts to prosecute his prayer such that it will not be accepted. For this reason, he must repeat the prayer.

Similarly, the Klausenberg-Sanzer Rebbe, author of *Responsa Divrei Yetziv*, said that the Rabbis established reciting "How goodly are your tents Yaakov," (Bamidbar 24:5) before the morning prayers. Why do we begin specifically with the words of the non-Jewish prophet Balaam? Because our Rabbis taught (Shabbos 119b) that two angels accompany a person on Friday night from the Synagogue to his home, one good and the other evil. When he comes home and finds a candle lit, the table set, and the chairs arranged, the good angel says, "May it be God's will that it is like this next Shabbos," and the evil angel, against his will, answers, "Amen."

If so, also with prayer there are prosecuting angels which interfere and prevent a person's prayer from being accepted. This is the reason why we recite the section of the incense before and after prayer, because the offering of incense has the power to hold the evil angel at bay. This is also the reason why we specifically recite the verses of "How goodly are your tents Yaakov," stated by the evil Balaam, to signify that the evil angel will be forced to answer "Amen" to our prayers.

¹⁴¹ Look at what Rabbi Klonymos Epstein wrote in his book *Ma'or Vashemesh* on the verse, "The Levites shall perform the service in the *Ohel Mo'ed* and they will bear their sins," (Bamidbar 18:23). He writes, "You must know that the main essence of a person is only the thought and the intent. As our Rabbis said, "The Merciful One wants the heart," (Sanhedrin 106b).

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This is how Rambam rules in *Hilchos Tefillah* (4:16):

What is intent [in prayer]? That a person empties his heart from all thoughts and sees himself as if he is standing before the Divine Presence. Therefore, he must sit for a short while before prayer in order to direct his heart, and afterwards pray with tranquility and with supplication. He should not perform his prayer like someone who was carrying a burden who casts it off and leaves. Therefore, he must sit for a short while after prayer and afterwards leave. The early pious ones would wait for an hour before prayer and an hour after prayer and would pray at length for an hour.

Similarly, Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi in *Sefer Hayirah* explains about preparation for prayer:

When one comes near the Synagogue he should hasten his steps, as the verse states, "Unto the house of HASHEM we walked with excitement," (Tehillim 55:15) ... He should come to the Synagogue... and sit. He should not open his mouth until he has waited for a short while. He should think in his heart before Whom he stands, and Who hears his words, and then he will be clothed in awe, fear, and trembling, and begin his prayer in order.

The *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 93 rules as follows:

1. One must wait an hour before he stands to pray, in order to direct his heart to the Omnipresent. And remain an hour after prayer, so that it doesn't appear as if it was a burden for him, and that he is hastening to depart.
2. He may not stand to pray except with awe and subjugation. Not from laughter or lightheadedness or foolish matters, and not from anger. Rather from happiness, for example from Torah words of consolation as in the morning prayer that follows from the blessing on the redemption from Egypt, or as the afternoon prayer, that follows "A Psalm of David," in which it states, "He will do the will

It is the way of a Jewish person walking on the true path, to make preparations before prayer in many ways, each one according to the amount of preparation he needs, and according to his intellect and his mind. He does mitzvos and good deeds prior to prayer, and has thoughts of repentance or learns Torah beforehand, and makes other similar preparations.

If he stands afterwards to pray and is able to pray according to his intellect... this is certainly good and praiseworthy. Fortunate is he whose thoughts were good, and his actions were also good. But if he stands to pray afterwards and is not able to pray properly, even so, everything goes according to the beginning of his thought.

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of those who fear Him," "HASHEM guards all those who love Him," (Tehillim 145:19-20).

3. One may not stand to pray from judgment, nor from *halakha*, so that his heart should not be distracted by it, but rather from clearly ruled *halakha*.

[Rema] And this is also the meaning of "from happiness" based on the verse, "The laws of HASHEM are just, they make the heart happy," (Tehillim 19:9).

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, in his book *Lev Eliyahu* vol. 3 (*marachos hateshuva* §9) explains the words of the Talmud in Berachos (6b): "Rav Huna said, anyone who establishes a place for his prayers, the God of Avraham will be his help... as it is written, 'And Avraham arose in the morning to the place where he had stood there,' (Bereishis 19:27)."

He writes that establishing a place for prayer is essential in order that a person should have a set routine and pray with calmness and without confusion in his mind.

And if so, one can learn from this, that if the will of HASHEM is that his body, which is only the physical garb of a person, must be in a fixed place for prayer, how much more so should the person himself be in a fixed place, i.e. his soul which is the essence of the person, as the verse states, "And he created... the man, and breathed into his nostrils a living soul," (Bereishis 2:7). This means thought. Therefore, a person must certainly fix a place, so that he won't distract himself from thought to thought while he stands before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He. He must establish one special place for his thought – that he is standing before HASHEM!

To reach this tranquility of the soul, a person must stand in one place and concentrate. To attain this, he must stop the torrent of his life and dedicate a few moments of preparation to his prayer.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe in his book *Alei Shur* (vol. 2 *sha'ar* 3, p. 350) relates the aforementioned *halakha* in Rambam and *Shulchan Aruch* regarding the obligation to remain for "an hour" before prayer. He explains:

To wait a short while before and after prayer is a *halakha* for all generations.

How much is "a little while"? Five minutes would be a lot.

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One who waits before prayer for even literally, one minute, and sits quietly in his place, concentrating on himself and on the prayer he is about to recite, will see wonders -- how one minute can have such an influence on his prayer.

We race along at the pace of modern life where everything must be done urgently. With food or in conversation with friends, we have plenty of time. But with the *shacharis* morning prayer we are pressured because everyone is hurrying to his work, here or there, and we are hardly able to get used to a slow prayer. Even one minute is dear to us.

Therefore, even this one minute of waiting before prayer takes an effort and a struggle. But we cannot forego it.

'HASHEM Created a Pure Heart within Me'

The Mishna (Berachos 30b) states: "The early righteous ones would wait an hour and pray in order that their hearts should have intent to their Father in Heaven."

The Mishna attributes this behavior to the "early righteous ones" and it implies that this type of action expresses unique piety and dedication to the service of HASHEM. However, the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* implies that every person must prepare himself for prayer. Furthermore, a person who wants to express important, fateful words in an organized manner, must prepare himself in advance, to arrange the words in his mind and review his essential points so that he can speak freely and fluently and so his thought should be carefully directed, even while being in an excited and elevated state.

However, the prayer which the Men of the Great Assembly established is expressed in a preset formula. What need is there then to prepare for prayer when everything is arranged and organized in advance? It is set for the worshiper, written in the *siddur*, and one who prays regularly repeats the words three times every day over the course of years.

In this case it is clear that the worshiper does not need to prepare his specific words or arrange his arguments in advance. What, then, does he have to prepare?

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Furthermore, "The heart knows the bitterness of its soul"¹⁴² – a person knows his suffering and his needs, so when he comes to the prayers relevant to those things he needs, he will automatically have intent for his own needs, without requiring special preparation beforehand. Why is there a need to prepare for prayer?

It seems that we can find the answer by examining the source of the obligation to prepare for prayer, in the version of the text in the Mishna of Berachos (5:1).

One may only stand to pray following gravitas. The early righteous ones would wait an hour and pray in order that they could direct their hearts to the Omnipresent.

The Talmud (Berachos 31a) states:

One who prays must direct his heart to Heaven. Abba Shaul said: An indication of this is, "You will direct their heart, You will incline Your ear," (Tehillim 10:17).

In other words, if a person wants that HASHEM's ear will be inclined (in a manner of speaking) to listen to his prayer, he must prepare his heart for prayer.

From examining these sources, it turns out that the required preparation before prayer goes much further than organizing one's words so that they flow freely and fluently. The Mishna does not say that a person must prepare his heart to the words of the prayer. Rather it says that he must direct his heart toward the Omnipresent.

Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on the *Rif* (ad loc.) writes:

Some explain that he must remove the distractions of his thoughts and have intent in reciting the prayer. But this doesn't seem correct... For if so, it did not need to say, "You will direct his heart to the Omnipresent. Rather it should have said "to direct his heart to the prayer..."

Rather certainly the meaning of the statement in the Mishna is that they had intent that their hearts would be complete in their service of the Omnipresent, and that all thoughts of desires and pleasures of the

¹⁴² Mishlei 14:10.

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physical world be nullified.¹⁴³ For when they purify their hearts of the vanities of this world, and their intent is for the elevation of HASHEM, their prayer will be pleasant and accepted before the Omnipresent.¹⁴⁴

It seems that preparation for prayer involves purifying the heart from sins and from pleasures of the physical world, turning a person into a more spiritual and metaphysical being prior to standing in prayer before his Creator. It means drawing his heart to his Creator – preparing his prayer.¹⁴⁵

Preparation for prayer is an inseparable part of the process of prayer, like the act of coming close to HASHEM and standing before HASHEM.

Purifying one's heart, achieving spirituality and separation from matters of this world, are essential to allow for the possibility of fulfilling prayer as service of HASHEM, in fulfilment of the Talmudic statement, " 'To serve Him with all your hearts' – this means prayer."

A person must cleave to HASHEM in order to merit a closeness that will enable the attachment of a person to his HASHEM in prayer.

This is similar to what we saw earlier -- that it is an explicit *halakha* in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim, Hilchos Tefillah* 98:1) that one requires two different intents, one for the meaning of the words and the second, " He should think that it is as if the Divine Presence is before him."

Regarding the second intent the *Mishna Berura* writes there (§1):

¹⁴³ For a similar explanation see *Haksav Vehakabbalah* (on Shemos chapter 19): " 'Prepare to greet your God, Yisrael' – so that their entire mind and thoughts are only on spiritual, Divine matters, far from all types of physicality."

¹⁴⁴ Rabbeinu Yonah adds that this also the meaning of the verse, "Prepare their hearts, incline their ears," (Tehillim 10:17). And as for the verse stating, "Prepare their hearts," which implies that God is the One who prepares our hearts for prayer, the reason for this is related to the concept "that the intent to purify one's heart... requires assistance from God, as the verse states, 'God prepares the hearts,' (Mishlei 21:2). And it states, "Direct their hearts to You," (I Divrei Hayamim 29:18). Help them and prepare their hearts that they should be pure so that they You can pay attention to their prayers."

Indeed, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev explains that preparation for prayer means uttering a prayer to God that He help us with this process of preparation for prayer. Preparation for prayer according to him is a prayer about the prayer asking that it should be performed properly.

¹⁴⁵ Rabbeinu Yonah explains that this cleaving to God requires Divine assistance. "The intent of purifying the heart of sins and from pleasures of the physical world requires assistance from the Omnipresent... And regarding this it says help them, and prepare their hearts, that they should be pure so that You will listen to their prayers."

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The intentions explained here in the *Shulchan Aruch* are impossible to achieve during prayer, [and can be achieved] only beforehand."

In other words, the intent to comprehend the meaning of the words is required of a person when he stands before his Creator during prayer. But the intent expressed by preparation of the heart and cleaving to HASHEM is required of a person in prayer must specifically be performed prior to prayer.¹⁴⁶

However, the question can still be asked, why does one need to draw close to HASHEM, to purify his heart before prayer as a preparation for prayer? This appears to be the very essence of prayer itself. If this is what we do during prayer, why do we need to prepare before prayer through doing the very same thing before prayer?

Following from what was said in the previous chapter, the difficulty in concentrating on prayer is also a result of the experiential distance of a person from HASHEM because of sin. The person's sins distance him from his Creator and build walls between him and HASHEM.

In prayer a person is required to overcome this distance, in order to establish a spiritual reality in which he is close to HASHEM and merits, "From a distance HASHEM appeared to me," (Yirmeyahu 31:2) so that his prayer is accepted.

¹⁴⁶ Look at *Pnei Yehoshua* on Berachos 30b:

The Mishna says one may not stand to pray except following gravitas of the head. And Rashi explains that 'gravitas of the head' means submission... According to this explanation one can ask why did the Mishna uses the term "following gravitas of the head," when it should have said "with gravitas of the head" ... for this explanation cites as its support the verse, "I will bow to Your holy sanctuary in fear of You," implying that it is referring to the time during prayer when one bends his knee and bows at the beginning and end.

The answer may possibly be that the concept of submission that Rashi and Rabbeinu Yonah wrote about means subjugation of the mind, which is in the head, to God alone, and to remove any foreign thoughts about physical matters and the needs of this world. As the *Tur* wrote (*Orach Chayim* 98), the early pious ones would isolate themselves and have intent until they reached a transcendent level removed from physicality and strengthening the intellectual spirit, until they reached a level close to prophecy. It would seem that this type of thought and intent is impossible to have during prayer itself, because during prayer one must have intent for the meaning of the words and to ask for what he needs like a servant requesting a reward from his master, which are almost entirely physical matters of this world. Therefore, it is preferable to do this before prayer, to subdue his thoughts to serve the Creator until he knows before Whom he stands. For this reason, the Mishna states, "following gravitas of the head."

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However, the distance between a person and HASHEM due to sin creates a difficulty in concentrating on prayer, because the person must traverse a great spiritual distance to stand again before HASHEM.

It seems that this is the meaning of preparation for prayer which Rabbeinu Yonah discusses, in his commentary on *Rif* there and about which the verse states, "Prepare their hearts, incline their ears," (Tehillim 10:17). This preparation involves purifying the heart from sins and from the pleasures of this world and transforming the person to become more spiritual and transcendent before he stands in prayer before his Creator.¹⁴⁷

Once a person has purified his heart to his Creator before prayer and attached himself to Him, then "As water -- face turns to face," (Mishlei 27:19) – this love is reciprocal. Automatically he will merit to find favor with HASHEM and draw close to Him which allows for a person to cleave to HASHEM in prayer. This purification of the heart will allow for the possibility of a mutual connection of, " 'to serve Him with all your heart,' – this is prayer."

Only then will his prayer be upright, and he will be able to have proper intent on the meaning of the words in prayer. Preparation for prayer is therefore an essential component of the process of prayer – like the act of a person drawing close to his HASHEM and standing before HASHEM.

Rambam in *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:51) also discusses the question of how a person is able to reach this elevated level of cleaving to HASHEM -- which is the essence of prayer. How can he transcend his regular, usual situation of involvement with physical matters? Indeed, on the highest level when a person reaches an ideal state, in which there is absolutely no fracture between him and HASHEM throughout the entire day, there is no question. He is able to use his intellect to cleave to HASHEM even while performing his work and other physical needs, embodying the verse, "In all your ways know Him," (Mishlei 3:6).¹⁴⁸

However, what is a person to do who has not succeeded in reaching this level of attachment, and even when involved in his own matters he is not attached

¹⁴⁷ Look at the book *Ma'or Vashemesh* of Rabbi Kalonymos Kalman Halevi Epstein (one of the students of Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz, "the Seer of Lublin" and Rabbi Elimelech of Lezhinsk) on the verse, "And the man became a living soul," (Bereishis 2:7), which Onkelos translates as, "speaking soul." A person is defined by the fact that his soul has the ability to speak. *Ma'or Vashemeshi* adds, "That it speaks its words before God, cleansed of any dross or foreign thought. Before man merits the aspect of spirit, his prayer cannot be pure and clear." So, he says that a person must cleanse himself spiritually in order to merit to pray with intent.

¹⁴⁸ See what we wrote about this in Chapter Three, footnote [[XX 77]].

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to HASHEM and does not speak of Him? How can a person like this transform himself to a different state in a moment, when he stands before HASHEM in prayer?

Rambam answers that the service of drawing close to HASHEM is important even outside the framework of prayer. As he writes:

For this reason, the pious ones were upset if there was a time when they were unable to think of HASHEM... and David said, "I have placed HASHEM before me always, because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (Tehillim 16:8). That is to say, I do not take my mind off of HASHEM, and it is as if He is my right hand, which a person cannot forget even for a moment. And for this reason, "I shall not be moved," meaning I shall not fail.

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik¹⁴⁹ explains that the need for preparation from prayer flows from the fact that it is impossible to transform in an instant from mundane to holy. A person is unable to be involved one moment with matters of this world and the next to make the sharp transformation to be involved in holy matters. Every entrance to the holy requires preparation.

Rav Baruch Shimon Schneerson (Head of the Yeshiva "Kochav Meya'akov" – Tshebin)¹⁵⁰ sharpened the idea and explained that "the preparation makes the prayer." This is because when a person is involved in anything, whether material or spiritual, his thought is involved in that action and he has no time to think about other things.

In contrast, prayer is performed in such a way that the prayer happens on its own without concentrating on it, and one's thoughts wander to other matters.

¹⁴⁹ *On Prayer* pp. 28-31. Rav Soloveitchik adds there an original idea that preparation for prayer stems from the *halakhic* concept of "One must add from the mundane to the holy," (Yoma 81b Rosh Hashanah 9b) which speak of beginning the restrictions of Yom Kippur before the fast day actually begins.

Rambam writes that this concept applies solely to Yom Kippur, but *Bahag*, *Rif*, *Rosh*, *Ran* and *Maggid Mishneh* all rule that this principle applies also to adding to Shabbos and Yom Tov. See *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 261:2, "Some say that one must add from the mundane to the holy."

Based on this concept, just as one brings in Shabbos early and takes it out late on Saturday night, so too with prayer, one must begin before the prayer by waiting for an hour before prayer and an hour afterward, since the time of prayer is holy, and daily life is mundane, we "add from the mundane to the holy."

¹⁵⁰ See the (Hebrew) essay of Rabbi Natan Zilberman, "Nuggets from the words of Aggada on the topic of prayer from the great Rabbi Baruch Shimon Schneerson, Head of the Tshebin Yeshiva," in *Habe'er* 13, p. 81.

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The time of prayer becomes a time when the mind is set free to do be involved in any other matter that interests the being of the one praying.¹⁵¹

Indeed, as we pointed out earlier, a person is influenced by his surroundings and the circumstances around him. He is involved in his material affairs and finds it difficult to instantly detach from them so that he can experience an entirely different reality of standing before HASHEM and cleaving to the Holy One, blessed be He. His thoughts continue to race, and he continues to be pursued by daily life.

To escape this race and to purify his heart from thoughts of this world, the person must spend time before prayer, in which he stops racing and begins to concentrate on the state of standing before prayer which he is about to experience.

Preparation for prayer is required therefore to make it possible for a person to make the transition from the race of daily, material life, to a spiritual state of being. This transition cannot succeed if it is a sharp transition. It always requires spending time, making a gap between the mundane to the spiritual.

Actually, in every case where a person is required to enter the holy he must first perform an act of preparation. We find that the Children of Yisrael had a three-day preparation period before the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.¹⁵² We also find that the High Priest was required to spend seven days preparing before Yom Kippur;¹⁵³ preparation is required before Shabbos, and that which is not "prepared" is defined as "*muktzeh*,"¹⁵⁴ counting the Omer between Pesach and Shavuos is preparation for receiving the Torah;¹⁵⁵ and counting the seven Sabbatical Years before the Jubilee.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ It is said of the Rebbe of Kotzk that he turned to one of his followers, after that person finished praying, and held out his hand in greeting, because he knew the person's mind had just returned from a distant journey for when he recited the *Shemoneh Esrei* in Kotzk his thoughts had wandered to the sale in Leipzig.

¹⁵² Shemos 19:10-11. "God said to Moshe, 'Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow and have them wash their garments. And they shall be ready on the third day for on the third day God will descend before the eyes of the people on Mount Sinai.'"

¹⁵³ Rambam *Hilchos Avodas Yom Hakippurim* (1:3): "Seven days before Yom Kippur the High Priest would be separated from his home to his chamber in the Temple, and this is a tradition from Moshe Rabbeinu."

¹⁵⁴ Shemos 16:5. "And it was on the sixth day that they prepared that which they brought." See *Chayei Adam, Hilchos Shabbos* §66.

¹⁵⁵ Rambam *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:43. "Shavuos is the day of the Giving of the Torah. In order to increase the importance of this day we count the days from the preceding festival, like one who waits for his beloved and counts the days and the hours. This is the reason for

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Similarly, there are rabbinic mitzvos and customs whose purpose is to prepare the person for the transition from mundane to holy. So, for example, the shofar is blown throughout the month of Elul as preparation for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.¹⁵⁷ On Yom Kippur itself we find that the High Priest would prepare himself before each segment of the service he performed.¹⁵⁸ Similarly we find that a person may not enter the Temple without immersion in a mikvah.

This is the essence of preparation for prayer, as described in the words of the early Rabbis. But we will see later that there is an additional, deeper, aspect of preparation for prayer, which is essential in order that a person enter a mode of faith and a spirit of longing, which is specifically required at the time that he draws close to HASHEM.

'Renew a Correct Spirit Within Me'

Preparation for prayer creates the proper mode necessary for the worshiper

In the Talmud (Berachos 31a) we find the correct state of mind, which the worshiper is required to have. The Talmud says, "One may not stand to pray following judgement, nor following a matter of *halakha*, but only following a clear *halakhic* ruling."

This is in order that the person will not be distracted by any topic which would take away from the strength of his concentration and divert it to the

counting the Omer from the date of the Exodus from Egypt until the day of the Giving of the Torah."

¹⁵⁶ Vayikra 25:8-10. "You shall count for yourselves seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, and the days of the seven weeks of years shall be for you 49 years. And you shall sound a blast of the shofar in the seventh month; on the tenth of the month, on Yom Kippur, sound the shofar throughout your land. And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year."

¹⁵⁷ *Ran on Rif* (Rosh Hashanah 3a) s.v. *barosh hashanah* asks, "According to the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua that the world was created in Nisan, why is the world judged on Rosh Hashanah?" He answers that, "God wanted to acquit Yisrael at their judgment, so he desired to judge them at a time set for atonement and forgiveness. Since God was appeased on Yom Kippur, He set it as a day of forgiveness for all generations. Therefore, God decreed that man be judged on Rosh Hashanah... The Torah fixed a time in which they could examine their deeds and repent before God."

¹⁵⁸ Rambam *Hilchos Avodas Yom Hakippurim* 2:2. "Each time that he changed his clothes, removing clothes and putting on other clothes, he required immersion in a mikvah. As the verse states, 'He removed his cloth garment and washed his body in water in the holy place and put on his clothes.' And five immersions and ten times washing his hands and feet were performed by the High Priest, sanctifying himself on that day."

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subject he was previously learning. His heart must be free for prayer so that he can dedicate his time to it completely.¹⁵⁹

The Talmud continues:

One may not stand to pray following sadness and not following laziness and not following laughter and not following a conversation and not following light-headedness, and not following idle chatter, rather following the happiness of the mitzvah.

Why should a person not pray following sadness? There is nothing which directs a person's heart to his Father in Heaven causing him to cry out with his entire heart more than a broken heart and depressed spirit. Is there anything more complete than a broken heart? Why then did the Rabbis say not to pray following sadness?

Another difficulty arises when examining the need for a person to get himself into the right mood of concentration and feeling necessary for standing before HASHEM. There is nothing which kills emotions and the exalted feeling of being close to HASHEM more than habit. This is something which is detrimental in any relationship, including the relationship between a person and HASHEM.¹⁶⁰ If so, how can we reconcile the fact that one must pray as an act of closeness to HASHEM with the correct intent, with the obligation placed on a person to pray at set times, with a set text and even in a fixed place?¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ See *Beis Habechira* by the Meiri ad. loc.:

One may not stand to pray following conversation and not following laughter and not following light-headedness and not following laziness – meaning depression, without intent – and not following sadness, until his mind is calmed. This is what the Talmud (Eruvin 65a) says, "One who comes from a journey should not pray." In all these cases the person must first calm himself and then pray.

Also, he should not stand to pray following chatter, nor following complicated *halakhic* matters, because they may distract his mind with their complexity while he is praying – rather following thought turned specifically to prayer, disengaged from any other matter... In the Yerushalmi it says, "Following *halakha*," meaning a final *halakhic* ruling and its conclusion, so that his heart will not be distracted by it.

It seems that these words only apply to students, so that they should not stand to pray following complex *halakha* that their minds are still on. However, one who doesn't learn *halakha* so much, why should he not pray? Let him calm his mind and pray...

And our custom in this is to recite *Ashrei* (Tehillim 145) before prayer.

¹⁶⁰ Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz discusses this at length in his book *Sichos Mussar* pp. 51-54, *ma'amar* 16 (*Isru Chag Pesach* 5731) "And do not come at any time to the sanctuary."

¹⁶¹ The law of establishing a place for prayer is learned from Avraham Avinu, about whom the verse states, "Avraham rose in the morning to the place where he stood there before God," (Bereishis 19:27). This implies that he had a set place where he would stand before

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In prayer, as we have said in the previous two chapters, there is a clear view that “Prayer was established in place of the sacrifices.” A sacrifice is an act of standing before HASHEM and its purpose is to create a closeness to HASHEM. But it also done apparently as a technical action, in a set manner, by rote and at specific times.

This seems to be a recipe for absolutely removing any hint of emotion or spiritual elevation from the service of HASHEM and for turning it into a habit, similar to the concept of “Mitzvos of people learned by rote.”¹⁶²

Here we must discuss an important point – even though prayer is an act of drawing close to HASHEM and standing before Him, prayer is not an act coming from emotional ecstasy, but a rational act with intellect and wisdom of faith.

Let us explain this by examining what Rav Shlomo Wolbe teaches in his book *Alei Shur* (vol. 2; *sha'ar 2, mareches limud hamussar* chapter 4), in relation to the drive called “*frumkeit*,” (religious fervor).

Rav Wolbe explains that this concept has no accurate translation, but is a “natural, instinctive drive to connect to the Creator. This instinct is shared with animals, as King David said, “The lion cubs roar after their prey and ask their food from HASHEM,” (Tehillim 104:21) ... Animals have their instinctive sense that there is someone taking care of their food. That instinct also applies to people, though obviously at a higher level. It appears that this natural

God. See Targum Yonasan (ad. loc.) who writes, “Avraham rose in the morning to the place where he served in prayer before God.”

The Talmud (Berachos 6b) concludes from this that, “Anyone who fixes a place for his prayer, the God of Avraham will support him.” From here is learned that it is a mitzvah to choose a Synagogue and within it to choose a specific place and to pray there constantly. And one should not change the place of his prayer without reason.

Tikunei Zohar (tikun 6, p. 21a) explains that if someone establishes a fixed place for prayer his soul becomes a fixed Sanctuary for the Divine Presence. And if he does not establish a place for his prayer, the Divine Presence is with him only incidentally and comes to him occasionally. Fixing a place for prayer signifies that the connection to God is definite; everything else in the world can change, but the connection to God is strong and stable.

¹⁶² Based on the verse, “And God said, ‘Because this people approaches and gives Me honor with its mouth and its lips, but its heart is distant from me, and their fear of me is a mitzvah of men learned by rote. Therefore, behold I will continue to work wonders with this nation, wondrous wonders and the wisdom of the wise will be lost and the understanding of its insightful people will be hidden.’”

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feeling of " *frumkeit*" helps us to serve HASHEM, and without this help the service would be much harder for us." ¹⁶³

Rav Wolbe, however, clarifies that this " *frumkeit*" is actually a stumbling block in the service of HASHEM. This is because just like any instinctive urge, it expresses the person's selfish inclination, which desires to actualize his drives. ¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Look what Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman wrote in *Kovetz Ma'amarim* in his Essay on Faith. He asked how Noahides could be given seven mitzvos including the prohibition of idolatry. Let us imagine a Noahide, who all his life was drunk and shepherding animals. When he comes to the Heavenly court and they judge him for not having fulfilled the seven mitzvos, he will cry out, 'How was I supposed to know that I was commanded with seven mitzvos?' It seems that his complaint is extremely justified."

Rav Wasserman's answer is that faith in God is a natural inclination within every person. His heresy is due only to his base desires, which act as a bribe which blind even the eyes of the wise.

"The principles of faith in themselves are simple and obvious to every person who is not a fool... however only if he is not subject to bribery, i.e. that he is free of desires for the physical world and its temptations. So, the reason for his denial is not due to corrupt thinking itself, but due to his desires and cravings, which corrupt and blind his intellect."

Similarly, Rabbi Avraham Yishaya Karelitz (*Chazon Ish*) begins his book *Emunah Ubitachon* by writing:

The attribute of faith is a fine inclination which comes from the sensitivity of the soul. If a person is in touch with his soul and lives at a time of tranquility, free from physical deprivation the world appears to him like a challenging puzzle."

The *Chazon Ish* goes on to explain that through examining the world openly and honestly a person discovers the Designer behind everything in creation.

It is interesting that Professor Pascal Boyer, author of the book *Religion Explained* writes (in an essay entitled " *Religion: Bound to believe?*" published in " *Nature*" 23 October 2008):

"... religious thinking seems to be the path of least resistance for our cognitive systems. By contrast, disbelief is generally the result of deliberate, effortful work against our natural cognitive dispositions..."

However, in contrast to Boyer, the *Chazon Ish* and other Jewish sages explain that lack of faith in general does not come from 'deliberate, effortful work,' but is rather a result of being submerged in materialism and chasing one's physical desires, which do not allow the possibility of contemplating the ultimate purpose of the world.

¹⁶⁴ It seems that it refers to an egoistic inclination for two reasons: Firstly, since in this case the person does not focus intellectually on his nothingness and his complete dependence on God, but specifically on the egoistical inclination which draws him to realize his needs and to view God as a tool to actualize his personal desires. It is exactly like the "lion cubs... seek their food from God," (Tehillim 104:21). Secondly, since the urges and feelings do not come from the person's pure intellect but are part of an instinctive drive, like the desire to eat. A person gets pleasure from the emotion. He feels pleasure to hear a moving song, and from the excitement and fear of a roller coaster. This is a pleasant stimulation for his soul which creates satisfaction and pleasure but does not demand him to sacrifice anything for an ideal or for a personality change. Emotion in prayer may satisfy his "desire for emotion" and in such a case it is an egotistical inclination and not an intellectual service of God.

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Thus, in the service of HASHEM it is found that there is an intellectual foundation, but there is also a “drive for holiness.” We must ensure that our acts are motivated by the intellect and not by our drives.

The Netziv of Volozhin discussed the negative phenomenon of serving HASHEM out of a “drive for holiness” in his explanation of the actions of the two sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu. Let us take a moment to examine that story, which shows us the essence and shortcoming of this quality:

1. The verse says about Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aharon, that “they took... each one his pan... and they brought an offering before HASHEM of strange fire which He had not commanded them. And a fire came out from before HASHEM and consumed them. And they died before HASHEM,” (Vayikra 10: 1-2).

Moshe consequentially says, “This is what HASHEM spoke to me saying, through those close to Me I will be sanctified and before all the people I will be honored. And Aharon was silent,” (ibid. verse 3).

It is worth noting that the verse says, “They took... each one his pan.” Nadav and Avihu did not perform a joint, collective act, rather their actions were personal, individualistic, when they brought their pans of fire.

The Netziv explains in *Hamek Davar* that each one entered on his own, and only when they came inside they found each other. In other words, it was a spontaneous action of these two brothers, who both reacted in exactly the same way without consulting beforehand.

If so, the question is: Maybe it was natural and reasonable to respond like this to the emotional experience of erecting the Tabernacle. Why is it considered so “strange” and odd on their part?

2. Furthermore, the Netziv explains the concept of “strange fire” in *Hamek Davar* by citing the words of the midrash that they were caught up with a fiery enthusiasm to serve HASHEM – and the Torah says that this fire of love of HASHEM was dear in the eyes of HASHEM, but they were not commanded about it and that is why they died.

The question is: If they had such enthusiasm to serve HASHEM, why did they deserve to die for it? One who is enthusiastic breaks down boundaries. That is the nature of things. But the intent is totally positive. He has a burning love of HASHEM. Why should he be punished, and why so severely?

3. Moshe answered that, “This is what HASHEM spoke to me saying, through those close to Me I will be sanctified.” Does this answer make

sense to us? Is there a reason to sentence Aharon's sons to death because they are so close to HASHEM? Furthermore, it seems that Aharon was not satisfied with the plain meaning of this answer. The Netziv explains the words, "And Aharon was silent" -- "Even though he didn't cry, nevertheless he did not accept the words of Moshe with joy, which would have been appropriate to Aharon, the holy man of HASHEM. But not because of a lack of piety, Heaven forbid. Rather because he understood that there was more to it (related to his involvement with the sin of the Golden Calf).

4. According to these words we can understand the midrash of the Rabbis, who were not satisfied with the plain meaning of the text, that the sons of Aharon died because they brought strange fire. In Midrash Rabba (Vayikra 20:9) we find: "The sons of Aharon died because of four things... because they were drunk of wine, and because they were lacking the proper garments... and what were they lacking? The robe. And because they entered without washing their hands and feet... and because they did not have children..."

Later we find the Rabbis give an additional reason: "Because Moshe and Aharon would walk in front, and Nadav and Avihu would walk behind them and all of Yisrael behind them. [Aharon's sons] would say, 'When will these two old men die so that we can assume leadership of the congregation?'"

And another reason, "'They gazed at HASHEM, and they ate and they drank'" (Shemos 24:11) this teaches that their eyes derived pleasure from the Divine Presence... like a person who stares at his friend while eating and drinking."

5. Rabbi Yissachar Baer Eilenburg in his book *Tzeida Laderech* points out that, "All the commentaries had difficulty explaining why the Rabbi needed to give reasons and explanations for their deaths. One says this, and one says the other, while there is an explicit verse which denies it and presents the reason here, "when they offered strange fire..."
6. It seems that the simple meaning is that the Rabbis didn't intend to take the verse away from its simple meaning and say that Aharon's sons had committed so many sins. Rather, the rabbis felt that no sin justified, as it were, such a severe punishment and therefore they searched for various expressions and behavior traits that brought them to the sin itself.
7. Following the explanation of the Netziv it turns out that the entire subject revolves around the meaning of the concept, "strange fire." "Strange" is something which has no connection, it is removed, external and foreign. The opposite of drawing close, connecting, belonging. Worshiping other gods is described as "Strange service,"

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because it is external and removed from the existence of the Jewish people.

However, also the worship of HASHEM, can have "strange fire." A fire which is not part of what defines the essence.

The Netziv explains the words in relation to the verse, "And Moshe said, 'This is what HASHEM commanded to and you will see the glory of HASHEM upon you,'" (Vayikra 9:6). What is the thing that you must do? The Netziv says that there were burning with passionate love of Good, but not in the framework defined by the Torah. So, this is what Moshe said:

"Remove that evil inclination from your hearts," (*Toras Kohanim*) because also this desire, even though it is to attain the love of HASHEM in holiness, nevertheless if it is not in the way that HASHEM wants, it is nothing other than the path of the evil inclination, to sway you and fool the minds of the leaders of Yisrael with this desire. And Moshe said to them the reason for the matter, so that you will all be with one fear and with one counsel how to serve before the Omnipresent... and not lots of separate groups in your worship.

8. Individual worship of HASHEM, in which a person takes his pan and performs an offering without a Divine instruction, is not service of HASHEM but a personal ecstasy -- the person is serving himself. He isn't doing what he was commanded but what he feels.¹⁶⁵

At the center of this person's experience there is no Divine command, but only his own feelings. This is the evil inclination, and this desire is like all other desires. It is a "strange fire," which has no connection to worshiping HASHEM.

9. Accordingly, we can explain the continuation of the narrative. Aharon found it difficult to understand the reason why his sons died. For too much love of HASHEM? Moshe answered him, "Through those close to Me I will be sanctified," meaning the holiness comes only through the ways that HASHEM commanded to draw close to him. Closeness to HASHEM must be filtered through a sieve. Not all "*frumkeit*" is positive.

¹⁶⁵ The Jews had in their hearts a desire and a tremendous excitement to see whether the Divine Presence would rest on the Tabernacle, their handiwork, after they had spent so long gathering donations, building and investing hard work. At the crucial time of testing, would fire descend from Heaven or not? There was fear and tremendous tension. And "A fire came from before God... and the people saw and praised and fell on their faces." God did want their offerings, and all the people fell on the ground due to their strong emotions. However, like a butterfly drawn to a flame, which due to its strong desire for the fire draws too close and is burned, similarly, Nadav and Avihu were so strongly drawn to the holiness and could not control themselves to retain their intellectual boundaries – the desire drew them to the fire and they were burned.

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Sometimes it is not worshiping HASHEM but worshiping man, driven by foreign elements.

Closeness, exactly like distance, does not serve the value of doing the will of HASHEM, but rather it is an expression of one's self. And when there are personal elements in it, the worship is individualistic and not something collective and unifying.¹⁶⁶

The definition of the required service of HASHEM is "before all the people I will be honored."

Similarly, the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer is worded in a unifying way and applies to a righteous person, a genius, as much as to the simple people who are superficial and shallow. The intent may be different, but the framework is one and it must be unifying. There is no difference between people.

¹⁶⁶ Once we have penetrated to the root of the phenomenon, it is clear that the list of sins the Rabbis attribute to Aharon's sons are not additional sins. Rather they are all symptoms of the same phenomenon. The Rabbis show us that Aharon's sons had an unconventional way of serving God. They didn't follow the way of conformity. They didn't wear the robe that was required – not because they didn't want to dress well, but because they didn't want to wear a uniform. They had their own way of serving God. It was a very internal way, and therefore they threw away the external garb. For this reason, they did not wash their feet when they entered the Tabernacle. The external wrapping was unimportant. They entered immediately without waiting because of their internal ecstatic love.

They also entered drunk – as Rav Zevin explains (In *Latorah Ulamo'adim* on Parshas Shemini 10:11) the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel as to whether in Kiddush one recites the blessing for the holiness of the day first or the blessing on the wine. Someone who needs external stimulation blesses first on the wine, and through this comes to the happiness of the holiness of the time. One who doesn't need external stimulation begins directly with the blessing of the day and through the holiness of Shabbos he comes to the enjoyment, and therefore can recite the blessing over the holiness of the day and afterwards the blessing over the wine. This is the approach of Beis Shammai. Similarly, Nadav and Avihu were residing in lofty worlds. Wine didn't disturb them. It came after their internal stimulation and was unimportant to them. They were deeply invested in their emotions, flying in their ecstasy, and didn't need any framework. If so, this is also a symptom and an expression of that same phenomenon.

Nadav and Avihu also taught *halakha* in the presence of their teachers and awaited Moshe and Aharon's deaths so that they could take over the leadership, because they had their own unique path. They were unable to be part of the group and wanted immediately to become leaders, because they could not walk the furrowed path that others were directing them to. The Rabbis concluded that they had these thoughts in their hearts because one who offers incense in the presence of his teacher which was not commanded is publicly saying that he is not walking in the path of the elders but and is forging his own leadership path. Therefore, it was specifically when they set up the Tabernacle and they were drawn to God that it became forbidden for them to perform service that was not commanded by God.

10. This is the answer of “by those close to Me I will be sanctified” – so that “before all the people I will be honored.” And when he heard that, “And Aharon was silent.”

The *Sefas Emes* explains that Aharon wasn't silent only with his vocal chords, but also with his personality, “he nullified himself.” Aharon understood that the fire of his sons which flowed from exceptional and unique personalities, was “strange fire.” For sure, Nadav and Avihu were great, and they were close to HASHEM. And anyone who is greater than another has a greater inclination to serve HASHEM in an original manner, according to his unique personal understanding, based on what he knows and his own personal ecstasy.

In practice the more of a “Rebbe” a person is, the more he must be a “*chasid*.” He must develop his personal discipline and toe the line. Even if he is Aharon the Kohen he must nullify himself.

Is the “drive for Holiness” then a negative principle? Absolutely not. So, what is it?

After Rav Wolbe rejects “*frumkeit*,” the, momentary outpouring of emotion and “holy instincts,” as a sole basis for serving HASHEM, he continues and explains (*Alei Shur* *ibid.*) that our service of HASHEM must be based on intellect.

How can we know the difference between the two?

Rav Wolbe clarifies that one who bases his service of HASHEM on intellect does not attempt to “jump to Heaven.” His path of closeness is the opposite – to humble himself.¹⁶⁷

The more a person humbles himself before HASHEM, the closer he becomes to Him.¹⁶⁸ And the more one lowers himself and recognizes his abasement, the more HASHEM elevates him.

¹⁶⁷ We find in the Talmud (Sotah 5a) the exposition of the Rabbis on the verse, “I dwell in the high and holy place, and with the lowly and humble,” (Yishaya 57:15). Rav Huna and Rav Chisda disagreed about the meaning of the verse. One said, “With Me is the lowly.” Rashi explains “With Me is the lowly” – I, God, raise Him until he dwells with Me. And the other said, “I am with the lowly.” Rashi explains – I humble My Divine Presence to be with him.” The Talmud concludes that the opinion that God lowers Himself to be with one who is humble is more reasonable, because “God abandoned all the mountains and heights and rested His Divine Presence on Mount Sinai and did not raise Mount Sinai higher.”

¹⁶⁸ We will discuss this at greater length in the chapter on the essence and purpose of prayer.

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"*Frumkeit*" is an instinctive drive, and like all such drives it is egoistic and has no hint of humility. Being self-centered and having the Divine Presence rest on a person are complete opposites. Additionally, the emotional instinct expresses a momentary feeling, and this cannot bring one to true closeness of HASHEM, for the outpouring of emotion does not rectify his personality and is fleeting.¹⁶⁹

Conversely, one who humbles himself, distances himself from egotism and undergoes authentic, deep personal change.¹⁷⁰

Rav Wolbe explains about this that, "the path of true service is not to raise oneself to HASHEM, not to 'grasp for angels' but to remain on the ground, to delve deeply until reaching a deep subjugation before HASHEM, as the verse states, "From the depths I cried out to HASHEM," (Tehillim 130:1).

In keeping with this principle, when a person comes to pray to HASHEM, he must enter the appropriate spiritual state, which does not include religious ecstasy carried on the wave of emotional drives, not even a "drive for holiness." They are fleeting and do not change a person.

Prayer is a fixed action which is meant to express one's existing faith under conditions of emotional stability.

¹⁶⁹ Rabbi Chaim Shmuelewitz used to relate the saying of the Rabbis (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 16:2) on the verse, "This is my God and I will beautify Him," (Shemos 15:2) according to which, "A maidservant at the splitting of the sea saw more than the prophet Yechezkel." During the splitting of the Red sea, they saw the vision of the Living God and could point to Him with their finger and say, "This." It was a tremendous spiritual uplifting which even the lowest maidservant experienced. However, the maidservant saw all this and remained a maidservant. She did not reach the level of the prophet Yechezkel, because a one-time vision which is a momentary spiritual elevation cannot change a person. A great wave passes by, but not even the froth on its top remains.

¹⁷⁰ Rav Wolbe gives as an example the story of Rabbi Yisrael of Salant, who didn't come to the *Kol Nidrei* prayer service which begins Yom Kippur. When people returned from the Synagogue they found him sitting next to the cradle of a crying baby, whose mother had left him alone and gone to Synagogue.

Rav Wolbe concludes from this story that: "Rabbi Yisrael of Salant wanted to teach *halakha* through his actions. The obligation of the mother is to remain with her baby, and when she abandons him to go to pray *Kol Nidrei*, it is not a mitzvah but a transgression."

The religious feeling that beats within a person during *Kol Nidrei* is tremendous. It is a deep feeling and the clear instinct is to run to the Synagogue to elevate oneself. However, here is a clear incident of self-centeredness, because at the same time the mother left her baby alone, when he was crying uncontrollably.

The service of God cannot be self-centered acts like this, but the opposite. A person is required to behave humbly and a lowly stature, and the more he lowers and humbles himself the more he grows.

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Indeed, the Rashba (in his *Commentary on Aggada* to Berachos 6b) explains that the goal of having a set place for prayer is to create a solid and stable spiritual state, which comes after the proper preparation for prayer. The purpose of preparation for prayer is therefore, to bring a person to recognize his lowliness and the greatness of HASHEM.

In his words:

Why is one obligated to have a fixed place for prayer? The benefit of praying in a set place... alludes to a deep secret which I will reveal. One who prays must have intent before he prays to know before Whom he stands, and to stand in fear, with recognition of his own lowliness and the greatness of the Master he is petitioning.

As the Rabbis said, "The early pious ones would wait for one hour and then pray," (Berachos 30b). Their intent was to think of the fear of Him, blessed is He, and to stand in prayer with the appropriate intent. One of the criteria which facilitate preparation of thoughts and attention of the heart is fixing one's place. Because the fixed place for prayer adds fear within the Synagogue and places designated for worshipping HASHEM.

This idea is more explicit in the words of the *Maharal* in his book *Nesivos Olam* (vol. 1, *nesiv ha'avoda*, chapter 4). Fixing a place comes to teach that prayer does not flow from a fleeting, momentary emotional outburst but from establishing one's mind.

He writes:

Prayer is cleaving to Him, blessed is He. For a person becomes attached to HASHEM through his prayer. If this attachment is only circumstantial (i.e. due to some one-time emotional outpouring) it is not considered attachment at all. Because anything which is circumstantial is temporary and not constant... the idea of having a set place for prayer is because establishing a place teaches that his prayer is not coincidental.

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Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg¹⁷¹ brilliantly explains the words of the Talmud, “Anyone who establishes a place for his prayers, the HASHEM of Avraham will be his help,” (Berachos 6b):

The greatest rule and first principle of all practical pedagogy is constancy, having regular order. All education strives to give pupils knowledge that they did not have before and do develop certain character traits. How does one reach this goal? It is attained primarily through repetition and exercises, through establishing a measure and pace for doing it, every day, at its fixed hour, and through weighed, measured and fixed action, at a regular and precise time, place and amount.

Then the issues and sub-issues are impressed and ingrained upon the souls of those that are being educated with a strong, complete image, and an everlasting impression, acquired with a permanent acquisition – an acquisition of the body and soul such that it is impossible to separate between the impression and the impressed.

From this pedagogical perspective the Rabbis gave importance also to the value of set times for prayer. This means prayer at a set time and place.¹⁷²

Avraham Avinu was the first one to recognize his Creator. In a world drenched in worship of wood and stone, he was the only one in the generation whose religious feelings raised him above all the materialism and physicality and recognized his Creator.

¹⁷¹ Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg (author of the book *Seridei Aish*) in his (Hebrew) essay on “Be of the students of Avraham Avinu – a person is affected by his actions that he does constantly” (based on *Sefer Hachinuch* mitzvah 16) which appears in the book *Lefrakim* pp. 360-361.

¹⁷² Look at the words of the Rashba (in his *Commentary on Aggada Berachos 6b*) that the benefit in having a fixed place for prayer is also that it causes a person to persist in his prayers. In the book *Ishei Yisrael* (footnote 40) the author notes that he heard from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach that in a case where one has the option to pray in his fixed place, but to do so he will have to skip part of *pesukei dezimra*, or to pray somewhere that is not his fixed place and say all of *pesukei dezimra*, it is preferable to pray in his fixed place because every change in the place of prayer causes distractions in the prayer itself.

Eshel Avraham (Buczacz; second edition, *siman* 90, *se'if* 19) discusses whether the obligation to pray in a fixed place overrides the obligation to pray with a congregation, and it certainly overrides the advantage of praying at a time synchronized with the time that a congregation is elsewhere praying.

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Not only that, but he established the *shacharis* morning prayer. In other words, not only did he recognize his Creator in his thoughts when his soul was elevated and in a special mood, but he also turned this recognition, inspired by an awakening from Above, into something fixed. The momentary recognition of the Divine that a person cannot pinpoint, he turned into something constant which is repeated every single morning.

He was not satisfied with a spiritual vision that rang within him, but also established the morning prayer to give thanks and praise to the Master of all the worlds.

He, himself, also fulfilled this daily, even though he had no need to be educated in prayer or to learn it – for he was the instigator of the prayer – even he, the first one to recognize the Creator of the world; someone who had a fountain of religious feeling open within him which began to flow ever powerful and turned into a cascading waterfall with a freshness, the likes of which had never been seen; someone whose whole heart and soul and with all his being desired his Creator and was excited by the worship of Him; someone for whom the concept of prayer and service was a direct expression of his most deepest ideas and a cleansing of his soul before his Father in Heaven – nevertheless even he made his prayer into a fixed prayer.

Similarly, every Jewish person who sets his prayer every day, becomes through this a student of Avraham Avinu and is called "pious."

Every person has in his life moments of religious inspiration, in which he is raised above the plane of daily existence, breaks the bonds of his physical being and soars to the heavens on wings of his spirit.

However, they are only for a few moments, those specific times of elevation and rising, for afterwards comes a fall and descent to the regular level, and a return to crawling on the ground.

But it is possible to keep the elevated state that one merits by the loving-kindness of the One Above through self-education and stern discipline.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ The *Maharal* in *Nesivos Olam* (vol. 1, *nesiv ha'avoda* chapter 6) writes: You should know that Avraham would fix a place for his prayer and he had an attachment to Him, blessed is He, permanently, and not incidentally, as the verse states, "To the place where he had stood there." Therefore, God was with him constantly and permanently... and when he went out to

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People of this sort fix a place and a time for their prayer every day.

Prayer, like every physical mitzvah, has the purpose of bringing a person to his Creator, keeping him in a state of piety.

For people who have religious discipline, the state of piety becomes a constant and normal sight. About people like that they say, 'What a pious person.'

Rav Pincus writes that the *halakhos* that define how a person should pray and how his prayer should look are dependent on the essence of prayer. Prayer is an act of recognizing the greatness of the Creator and of complete nullification of the person standing before Him in prayer.

Because of this the *Tur* dedicates whole *simanim* (*Orach Chayim* 94-98) to how a person should stand to pray. So, for example, he rules:

When he comes to pray he should wait a while... and stand with his feet together... and his thoughts of how...

We don't find *halakhos* like those regarding any other mitzvah. There is no mitzvah in the Torah which has rules regarding how to do the mitzvah and how to appear while doing the mitzvah.

Conversely, in the service of prayer, there are many *halakhos* relating to the one doing the mitzvah.

In the continuation of his words, Rav Pincus delves deeper. You will never find a service without one who is serving. The "sacrifice" and the "one sacrificing" are not two things. The kohen is part of the offering of the sacrifice, no less than the sacrifice itself.

So too, and even more so, with prayer.

Just as a sacrifice cannot be blemished, so the one offering the sacrifice cannot be blemished in terms of his intent and the way he stands before HASHEM. The one who serves becomes part of the actual service, because the service

war the Divine Presence would fight his enemies and always the Divine Presence would help him. All of this was because he had a fixed place for his prayer. This means that his prayer, which was his cleaving to God, was permanent and not incidental. Something which is permanent cannot be removed, in contrast to things which are incidental, because incidental things cannot become permanent. And against an enemy a person needs strength and force so that his cleaving to God not be removed.

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affects the soul of the worshiper, bringing it into a state of lauding and praising HASHEM and of complete nullification before HASHEM.

The worshiper therefore becomes the "substance-object of the mitzvah."

Accordingly, Rav Pincus explains the law of preparation for prayer, because the worshiper enters, as it were, with his entire being into the mitzvah and becomes part of it. He himself becomes part of the service in the sense of "a sacrifice for HASHEM." Therefore, just as a sacrifice must go through a process of "draw and take for yourselves," (Shemos 12:21) – there is a mitzvah to prepare the sacrificial sheep in advance, to check and examine it such that offering a sacrifice requires much preparation beforehand – so too with prayer.

The worshiper must therefore stand before HASHEM with his mindset originating from a balanced psyche, from the calmness of his soul and deep introspection, which enables him to reach the level of deep submission, to self-nullification, in the sense of, "A prayer of the poor, when he is faint, and pours out his complaint before HASHEM," (Tehillim 102:1).

This is the required preparation for prayer.

Namely, preparation in which a person delves into himself and reaches true humility, after which can follow a prayer "from the depths." ¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ What brings a person to true humility is nullification of himself to the will of God, because there is nothing other than Him. The Rabbis taught (Berachos 31a) that, "One must not stand to pray, not following laziness, and not following sadness... but following the happiness of a mitzvah"

Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, author of the *Book of Our Heritage* (quoted in his grandson's book *Yosef Da'as* p. 170 on Berachos 30) asked, "What is this mitzvah? Since it is forbidden for a person to pass up a mitzvah, to push off one mitzvah for another that comes later, he should therefore fulfil the very first mitzvah that he was commanded by the Divine word, and which applies in both Israel and abroad, to both men and women at all times and every moment. What is that? "I am the Lord your God" and "You shall have no other gods before Me." Stand up, stand up, oh you man, with all your heart and soul, all your limbs and bones, all your wealth and acquisitions, and testify before the Master of the entire world Who is God above and on earth below, nothing being beside Him. Is it, 'I am the HASHEM, your God' or, Heaven forbid, other gods that you place before Me – the desires and cravings, your sadness and your groaning? Woe to the person who did not choose the former but empowered other gods to rule over him and shelters under them and bows to them and all his world is dark for him, with no shield or protection. Fortunate is the one who removes the false gods from within him and chooses HASHEM and crowns Him in their place. If you fulfil this mitzvah your heart will be happy, and you will stand to pray from the happiness of the mitzvah... If happiness is not complete within your heart, it is a sign that you have not yet fully made Him King over

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'A prayer of the poor, when he is faint'

The worshiper feels 'I am the one who is impoverished of deeds'

Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 98:1) rules clearly that one who prays, "Must think of matters which humble the heart and direct it to his Father in Heaven."

Similarly, *Shulchan Aruch* (ibid 5) rules:

[The worshiper] must not think he is worthy such that the Holy One, blessed is He, will fulfill his requests because he had intent in his prayer. Quite the opposite, doing so causes a person's sins to be mentioned [because through this they examine his deeds, whether he has any right to be so confident of his merits]. Rather he should think that the Holy One, blessed is He, will do it in His lovingkindness [in other words, as kindness and not as something which the person deserves in his own merit]. He should say in his heart, "Who am I, poor and lowly, who comes to beseech before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is he, if not because of His great mercy with which He treats His creations."

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk in his book *Noam Elimelech* (Devarim 21:10; Parshas Ki Tavo s.v. *Oh yomar ki tetzei*) adds an additional perspective on this matter, and stresses that the main service of a person to the Creator is through the conducts of "love and fear."

Love is the thinking of the greatness of HASHEM. Through these thoughts a person, "Places in his heart complete love, for in his thoughts he can imagine even something he has never seen." This brings a person to perceive his own lowliness – and this is fear.

However, there are people who love other things, which is the cause of foreign thoughts ["and certainly this is his love because that thing which he loves enters into his thoughts"].

Rabbi Elimelech clarifies that one who prays without the aforementioned love and fear of HASHEM, whose mind is filled with other ideas and other motivations, "his prayer brings him to love external, foreign matters, because

you. How can you not be ashamed to stand before Him with sadness and despair because you are sad over your destruction? This sadness testifies to your pride, as if there was substance to your power and ability in your 'kingdom' which was destroyed."

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a person's speech awakens his love and all his thoughts revolve about them when he is praying more than after prayer. And especially while he is praying all these strange thoughts which are beloved by him come to him."

Preparation for prayer requires, therefore, that the person bring himself to pray to HASHEM through true love and fear of HASHEM.¹⁷⁵

Indeed, true humility and deep prayer through which a person prays and wishes hopefully for HASHEM's lovingkindness -- not with the sense that, "I deserve it because I am worthy," or "I deserve it because I prayed with intent" -- is not something clearly understood. Preparation before prayer is required in order to achieve this state of mind.

Indeed, *Rema* (ad. loc.) adds in his gloss: "He should think before prayer of the loftiness of the transcendent HASHEM and of the lowliness of mankind."

To be precise, this is not the kind of preparation where a person arranges all his requests in his mind beforehand and how to express them so that they will be arranged and flowing. This is an entirely different type of preparation; preparation where the person intends to bring the correct spirit within himself which is appropriate for prayer.

As the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 93:1) expresses it: "He should spend an amount of time before he stands up to pray in order to direct his heart to the Omnipresent."

Indeed, prayer according to *halakha* requires a great deal of preparation.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Accordingly, *Noam Elimelech* explains the verse, "When you go out to war against your enemies," in a Chasidic manner:

"When you go" -- this means when a person's thoughts are diverted and have moved out of the proper bounds, he is thus found "to war" -- this is the war against the evil inclination. "On your enemies," -- on behalf of the foreign, external love that becomes your enemy. And the verse says, "God will deliver him into your hand" -- through correcting your actions and your thoughts so that your speech and your love will be the same. Then, "You will release captives" -- which means that God will give you advice to think of the love and fear of God, and in this way, you will release all the prayers which are trapped in the husks and bring them back to the holiness.

¹⁷⁶ The Seer of Lublin was accustomed to say that prayer is compared to the skill of shooting. The practice requires a great deal of time, but the actual shooting is done at lightning speed. Preparation for prayer requires a great deal of effort, but the prayer itself comes out like lightning from the soul after it is ready.

Similarly, it is related that Rabbi Leibel Eiger asked his Rebbe what to answer his grandfather -- Rabbi Akiva Eiger -- about the late hour of prayer, which was the custom for Kotzker Chasidim. The Rebbe of Kotzk replied, "Tell him that the Rambam rules in *halakha*

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Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, in *Alei Shur* (vol. 1 p. 113) discusses the clear connection between the need for preparation for prayer and the state of mind necessary for prayer, in which one prays from the depths, when all perceptions of pride and self-importance are removed from him.

He writes:

"When it is time for one of the thrice daily prayers, he should leave all his business and pray," (*Orchos Chayim* by the *Rosh*).

How does one leave all his business in which a few moments earlier he was so involved to the extent that he forgot himself? With the knowledge that one also needs prayer for his business to be successful. Only through prayer can we see these business dealings in a proper light and in their true proportions and not attribute an absolute value to them and live in a sense of "My strength and the power of my hand did this for me...", (Devarim 8:17).

Is it difficult to concentrate? Are thoughts and imaginations distracting? That is a sign that we have not completely thrown aside all our business and have not connected them with our prayers. Furthermore, we have not yet seen the need to do so.

Heed this principle: The prime distraction for prayer is pride.

Behind all the business that engages one's thoughts stands a person, who considers only himself and nothing else. His business not only distracts him, the person sees himself as central in the world – the main purpose of the world.

Prayer and pride are two contradictory elements. The entire essence of prayer is humility. With that humility comes another perspective and another approach to life and all human endeavors. However, it is necessary to dedicate time to this.¹⁷⁷

that a worker who spent all day sharpening his work tools and at the end of the day worked for only one hour, nevertheless receives wages for a full day's work."

¹⁷⁷ Look at what Rabbeinu Yonah writes (Berachos 6b): "The reason that the God of Avraham helps one who fixes a place for his prayer is that since he so loves prayer he must certainly have the attribute of humility, so that his prayer will be acceptable before the Omnipresent, as the verse states, "The offerings of God are a broken spirit," (Tehillim 51:19).

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As if we are to forget everything apart from prayer. It is as if we have only one task placed on us: "if only a person would pray all day long," (Berachos 21a).

This approach requires tranquility of the soul at the time of prayer. An impatient person, whose words of prayer rush one after the other, who is unable to contemplate on the "blessed" because the "are You" is pressing to be said, his prayer will remain outside him.

How amazing is the limit imposed by [the author of] *Yesod Veshoresh Ha'avoda* not to say more than three words of prayer at once! It seems that one who merits to have tranquility of the soul running through him during prayer, will have the depths of prayer open before him.

'Is HASHEM among us?'

Preparation – the required process for the essence of prayer

In addition to the need to enter a state of understanding that standing in prayer is standing before HASHEM, and in addition to the need to contemplate all the aspects of HASHEM's greatness and the utter dependence of the worshiper on HASHEM, along with sensing one's humility (love and fear) and praying in depth, there is also a need for another aspect of preparation for prayer.

This aspect surfaces from in-depth study of another principle that Rav Wolbe points out there (p. 348), about the essence of prayer.¹⁷⁸

Rav Wolbe asks -- how can a person ask HASHEM to perform his will? Whether he is praying about poverty, illness, lack of success or something similar – these are not coincidental but are based on the decree of the Divine Providence.

How can we ask HASHEM to nullify something which Providence has decreed? Do we ask that HASHEM nullify His own will for the sake of our will? Does a person even know what is good for him and what is worthwhile for him to want? A person lacks correct perspective and an all-encompassing accurate outlook on his life!

¹⁷⁸ The idea is based on the words of Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv (the Alter of Kelm) in his book *Chochma Umussar*, vol. 2, *siman* 1 and *siman* 8, and in vol. 1 *siman* 4. See also *Toras Avraham* p. 286.

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Rav Wolbe answers his own question with the words of the verse, "Not for our sakes, HASHEM, not for us, but for the sake of Your name give honor," (Tehillim 116:1). We are not asking for our own success but for perfection, and the foundation of perfection is faith. Not only faith that "there is a HASHEM," but faith in the presence of the Creator in our lives and his individual Providence over everything that happens to us.

What does this mean?

Let us examine the root of these matters by looking in depth at the words of the Ramchal in *The Path of the Just* (chapter 25). One must believe in two principles:

1. HASHEM is everywhere in our world. As the verses states, "his glory fills the entire world," (Yishaya 6:3) and "I fill the heavens and the earth," (Yirmeyahu 23:24). Wherever a person is, he stands before the Divine Presence. HASHEM sees and examines his way and his actions, without distinction between something big and something small, whether trivial or important. Everywhere a person goes he does not walk alone because HASHEM is with him.
2. HASHEM watches everything, whether small or big, that happens in our world. Everything comes from Him, without distinction as to the importance of the subject or its triviality.

However, Ramchal explains that these principles of faith are abstract and distant from the center of our being and senses. "This is not well pictured in the mind of a person, except through constant contemplation... since the matter is far from our senses, the intellect can only picture it after much depth and insight, and even after picturing it, the image is easily lost if one doesn't constantly repeat it."¹⁷⁹

Rav Wolbe clarifies that "the way to live with this faith is through prayer! In prayer we are accustomed to turn to HASHEM for everything that we lack, because there is nobody else in the world that can provide what we are lacking. This is a momentary feeling that one must revive three times a day."

¹⁷⁹ See the wonderful words of Rav Pincus in *Nefesh Shimshon* regarding faith (*Yesod Ha'emuna Ve'ikare'ah – Hanhagas HASHEM Vehashgachaso* p. 67): "Many of us have not made blessings since we left kindergarten. We are so well programed to recite blessings automatically, but we have stopped speaking to God, because God is not real for us. Each of us is polite, if someone gives us something we never forget to say thank you. That is because the waiter or mother is real for us and we know how to thank them. But God is not real or alive enough for us."

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Through prayer we complete our faith and in so doing we give honor for the sake of HASHEM's Name. We pray not only for our success and our redemption but also for HASHEM's honor, blessed is He.

A person asks HASHEM to save him and that request is an action through which he expresses his faith in HASHEM's existence and His Providence over every detail of the events of his life.

Prayer is an act of faith and in its merit a person is saved. It is also a request asking HASHEM to show the workings of His Providence in the world.

Rav Wolbe's words provide another reason why we must pray three times a day, with a fixed text, in a fixed place at fixed times. If prayer was an emotional act and requests for our own personal needs, a fixed order and fixed place would extinguish our feelings, making it difficult to ask for our personal needs.

However, prayer is not an emotional act, but an activity of intellect, education and practice. Its purpose is to transform the personality and accustom the person to think and completely internalize every single day, that he does not control his own life, but is like a mote of dust blown by a great wind in the totality of existence, like a cork bobbing on the mighty stormy waves of the sea. In the best case he serves as a pawn on a chessboard, who does not have breadth of vision but has someone moving him with great thought and vision of the totality.

This type of preparation for prayer involves thinking before the action. Once a person internalizes his own status and the greatness of the Creator, he can offer a prayer that can be defined as "service of HASHEM."

This definition of prayer answers the question of how a person can offer his requests for salvation to HASHEM, without the words being considered an attempt to nullify the will of the Divine Providence.

As Rav Wolbe writes in *Alei Shur* (vol. 2 p. 348):

Prayer is its own purpose. We are not intending specifically that HASHEM will fulfil our request – we are certain that He will do for us what is truly good for us. It is sufficient that we make a request from HASHEM, so that we can energize our faith with this act. Prayer is itself service of HASHEM with the heart, in that we ask that He, blessed is He,

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give us what we lack. But we have intent for the perfection of our faith and not for the perfection of our success.

In other words, the purpose of prayer is not to have our requests filled. Rather a person's recognition that everything comes from HASHEM and that he depends upon Him in every aspect of his being, his health, his finances and even his wisdom and his actual life. The requests are not intended to influence HASHEM that the person should receive them. Rather their purpose is to influence the worshiper to put his mind to understand that he is constantly dependent on the loving-kindness of Heaven in every aspect of his life and path that it takes. On his own, without the constant help from Heaven, he has absolutely nothing.

It turns out that prayer is an act of uttering requests not in order that the requests are fulfilled, but rather so that the one asking understands that he needs HASHEM. Prayer is a tremendous act of faith and self-education.

The statement of the Talmud can be explained in a similar manner. The Rabbis said, (Yevamos 64a), "Why were our matriarchs [initially] barren? Because HASHEM desires the prayers of the righteous."

The Patriarchs of the nation withstood difficult tests in order to forge their faith. HASHEM desires requests in which a person expresses a desire not for it to be actualized, but simply for the sake of expressing it as an act of the worshiper's pure faith and deep recognition that everything comes from HASHEM, and that He watches over every detail of the world with His Divine Providence. HASHEM does this with the specific intent of doing good for all His creations, and with a Heavenly overview which is impossible for a person to comprehend.

Accordingly, it seems that the reason prayer begins with praise of HASHEM before moving to the laying out of requests is not because the worshiper needs to appease HASHEM before turning to Him with his requests. Rather it is because the entire purpose of asking is to actualize the principle that is expressed at the beginning of prayer – the praise of HASHEM as One Who is Omnipotent and that everything exists by His word. The various requests which follow are only to actualize the general principle which appears at the beginning of the prayer, and the complete dependence of a person on his HASHEM.

Expressing thanks at the end of the prayer is intended to conclude the person's service of HASHEM with the recognition of goodness which is needed

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by one who deserves nothing yet has everything given to him through the loving-kindness of HASHEM.¹⁸⁰

This gives rise also to an understanding of the words of Rashi on the verse, "And all plants of the field were not yet on the earth and all the grass of the field had not yet sprouted because Lord HASHEM had not yet brought rain on the earth, and there was no man to work the land," (Bereishis 2:5):

Even though the verse says that on the third day of creation "The land brought forth grass," they did not sprout, but waited at the opening of the ground until the sixth day.

Because, "There was no man to work the land," and nobody to recognize the benefit of rain. When Adam came and knew that the world needed rain, he prayed for it and it fell, and the trees and grasses grew.

HASHEM wanted to instill within the human being the obligation to recognize the Divine goodness and to understand that there is nothing which does not come from Him. And that unless a person recognizes HASHEM's Providence and expresses requests to demonstrate this, nothing will grow. Even the forces of nature which were created, do not work automatically but only because of HASHEM's Providence over His creations and their prayers.

This view leads one to understand that prayer is the pinnacle of a person's service of HASHEM, as Rabbi Yehuda Halevi writes in *The Kuzari* (3:5): "This moment (when a person raises his hands in prayer) forms the heart and fruit of his time."

"The heart" - in the sense that it pumps blood throughout the body, so does prayer nourish a person. "The fruit" - in the sense that it is the essence, as opposed to its peripheral husk. Similarly, prayer is the center of the day for a servant of HASHEM.

¹⁸⁰ This is the basis also of the words of Rabbi Shimshon Pincus in *Tiferes Shimshon* on Devarim Parshas Ekev (pp. 174-179) on the verse, "To serve Him with all your hearts," (Devarim 10:12). He explains that one is not supposed to have intent in his prayer that so-and-so will be healed (because God well-knows his suffering). Rather it allows him to see the tribulation he is suffering as an opportunity for him to recognize that health is not to be taken for granted and is not given to us automatically but comes from the kindness of God. And also, to recognize that God is the one who heals all flesh, and nothing can prevent him from curing and saving.

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The other hours represent the paths leading to this moment... These three times of daily prayer are the fruit of his day and night, and the fruit of his week is Shabbos because this is the appointed time when a person attaches himself to Divine matters.

Viewing prayer as being an act of faith rather than an act in which we seek the fulfilment of our wishes is a complex mental process. This process requires stopping the race of "my power and ability," a change in one's view of "cause" and "effect" in the world, and the recognition in the necessity of faith for the existence of the world.

Thinking in this way clarifies that it is not sufficient to spend a few moments asking one's requests during prayer, but that it requires an entire process of preparation beforehand to bring the person to the required mood of faith.

Only the appropriate process of the preparation for prayer can bring about the intellectual revolution required for prayer in which one knows that he stands before HASHEM and that his entire being is dependent upon Him.

However, this understanding that the entire purpose of prayer is not for HASHEM to comply to our requests, but rather that the mere asking of the requests serves as an act of faith, requires further investigation.

It was explained in the words of the early sources cited above that HASHEM allows prayer a place to work within the world¹⁸¹ and for this reason a person is obligated to pray with great intent and using words of supplication.

However, if prayer is an act of faith and intellect why is it important to entreat and to request from the heart?

The answer can be found in the words of *Chasam Sofer* in his commentary on the Mishna (Avos 2:13):

Rabbi Shimon says, 'Be careful about the reading of the *Shema* and reciting prayer, and when you pray do not make your prayer into a rite, rather ask for mercy and entreaty before the Omnipresent, blessed is He. As it states, "Rend your heart, not your clothes, and return to HASHEM, your God; for He is merciful and compassionate, long-

¹⁸¹ Rav Wolbe explains that nevertheless, since God wants our prayers, He allows prayer to work. He writes that, "The world is like a complex clock. Inside the clock there are many cogs that turn one another until they move the hands. The clock has a spring which drives the cogs. This spring in the world is prayer. And since the life of our faith is dependent upon it, it was given to us to work real salvation through it."

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suffering, and abundant in loving-kindness, Who reconsiders about the evil," (Yoel 2:13).

Chasam Sofer asks: How does the verse from Yoel illustrate the fact that a person must beg for mercy and entreaty? And in general, why is it necessary to learn something like this from a verse? Isn't it logically obvious that a person standing in prayer before HASHEM must not just recite words without any inner intent?

Chasam Sofer answers as follows:

1. HASHEM commanded us, "To serve Him with all your heart." The verse in Tehillim states, "Evening and morning and noon I will speak..." (Tehillim 55:18). However, what is the purpose of prayer? Does a someone's prayer help to get HASHEM to change a decree? Is HASHEM a person who can be persuaded and appeased through supplication?¹⁸²
2. We explained that prayer is defined as presenting a request, the purpose of which is its mere presentation. This is in a way similar to the statute decreed by Heavenly Providence concerning the sacrificial offerings. Rambam writes at the end of *Hilchos Me'ilah* that sacrifices are one of the Torah's statutes, with no rational reason¹⁸³ – and prayer is therefore the same.
3. The worshiper does not come to appease HASHEM or to make Him change His mind, and prayer speaks of a request which is not for the purpose of changing the decree. Rather he prays because HASHEM commanded us to pray. Therefore, the entire purpose of prayer is actually to recite it before HASHEM, as an act of faith and intellect. So, one might think that that it is sufficient for the worshiper to merely recite the words with his mouth, without the need for emotion or as a request of mercy and entreaty.
4. Therefore, to remove this error, the Mishna warns: "Do not make your prayer fixed but rather mercy and entreaty." Because truly "HASHEM shows favor and is appeased, but specifically through pleading for mercy and entreaty."

¹⁸² See I Shmuel 16:29 where the prophet Shmuel says to King Sha'ul that there is no possibility of nullifying the decree of God against him. "The Eternal of Yisrael will not lie nor reconsider; for He is not a person that changes his mind."

¹⁸³ Rambam *Hilchos Me'ilah* 5:5: "It is appropriate for a person to contemplate the laws of the holy Torah and to know their ultimate purpose according to his ability. And something for which he cannot find a reason and doesn't know its reason, he should not treat it lightly... and all the sacrifices are within the category of statutes [which have no rational reason]."

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This is the meaning of the verse in Yoel which the Tanna cites, “Rend your heart, not your clothes, and return to HASHEM, your God; for He is merciful and compassionate, long-suffering, and abundant in loving-kindness, Who reconsiders about the evil.”

There is reason to entreat with a broken heart and to pray with emotion, because the prayer is not only an act of faith but also does its job and as a result HASHEM reconsiders about the evil.

5. However, the purpose of prayer is not to change HASHEM’s decree but to change the worshiper. Prayer is not intended to make the requests of one’s heart come true but to recognize the smallness of man and his complete dependence on HASHEM Who creates everything. However, acquiring this faith is done through entreaty and request from HASHEM – like one who can change the entirety of existence because his prayers are accepted. This is the reason that a person must pray with emotion and supplication.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, if prayer didn’t have the power to change the decree there would be no purpose in making requests that cannot become reality. Only one who requests and entreats from the One Who has the power to save – shows that he recognizes the power that He is “great to save.”
6. Seeing prayer as an act of entreaty, combines with a person’s understanding of his complete dependence on HASHEM and his low self-worth. The person prays to HASHEM as a great act of faith that he has nothing at all himself, not livelihood, health, life nor even intellect. He is dependent for every detail on the will of HASHEM and requires Divine assistance in every single step he takes. The worshiper beseeches and entreats because of this understanding. However, at the same time the worshiper is aware that “the world is judged for good,” (Avos 3:15) – HASHEM wants only to do good for His creatures – and he accepts the will of HASHEM whatever it may be.
7. In other words, a person who prays to HASHEM and makes requests from Him recognizes the great power of HASHEM and in this way, he makes it an act of faith. However, the essence of this faith is more evident when a person entreats for his very soul, while at the same time recognizing that HASHEM is the One who knows what is good for a person and that he accepts HASHEM’s judgment even if his requests are not fulfilled.

¹⁸⁴ *Chasam Sofer* concludes his explanation by saying that even if it is, “beyond our rational understanding, nevertheless it is the truth.”

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Two views of prayer and two preparations that they require

Prayer therefore expresses the combination of two views which we discussed in the two previous sections:

On the one hand, prayer is an act of faith, whose purpose is the act itself and which must be done in a fixed and ordered manner, unconnected to fulfilling the desires of the heart, with the recognition that the person is dependent on HASHEM. This is the service of HASHEM in place of the sacrificial offerings,¹⁸⁵ which a person expresses superficially and daily, with a fixed and ordered text. This is when he educates himself to believe that despite the apparent evidence of his eyes, there is no causal connection between natural acts and their results, rather everything is in the hands of Heaven, and not in the hands of human beings. This is prayer in the aspect of "Show favor... on Your people Yisrael... and may the service of Your people Yisrael always be favorable." This aspect of prayer must be constant and fixed.

On the other hand, there is prayer which is an expression of the person's obligation to entreat HASHEM that He save him. This is prayer as expressed in the blessing, "Hear our voices," in which we relate to prayer as a plea for mercy. "Have compassion and mercy on us and accept with mercy and favor our prayers... Blessed are you, HASHEM, Who hears prayer."

In Shabbos (10a) we learn that Rava bar Rav Huna wore fancy footwear when he would pray, to fulfill the verse, "Prepare to greet your God, Yisrael," (Amos 4:12). In contrast, Rava would remove his cloak when he would pray in order that he should not appear important, and he would clasp his hands like a person worried from fear of his master.

Rav Ashi said that Rav Kahana would follow both practices. When the world was suffering he would remove his cloak and clasp his hands like a person worried from fear of his masters. But when it was a time of peace and tranquility in the world he would put on his finest clothes for prayer and

¹⁸⁵ See Bereishis 35:1, "And the Lord said to Yaakov, 'Arise and go to Beis El and dwell there and make there an altar to the God Who appeared to you when you fled before Esav, your brother.'"

The *Seforno* explains the reason for dwelling there before bringing the sacrifice. " 'And dwell there' – To concentrate your mind before you build the altar, as our Rabbis said, 'The early pious ones would wait for an hour and pray, in order to direct their hearts to the Omnipresent.' "

The Ramban on the verse similarly writes, " 'And dwell there and make there an altar' – perhaps God commanded him to 'dwell there' to concentrate his thought to cleave to God."

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dress in finery to greet HASHEM, to fulfill the verse, "Prepare to greet your God, Yisrael."

Rav Yitzchak Pinchas Goldwasser in his book *Lesasson Ulesimcha (ma'amar 3)* explains that the manners of both Rabbis praying before HASHEM, and the compromise between them expressed by Rav Kahana, are explained based on the two aforementioned aspects of prayer.

If the purpose of prayer is to 'heal the barrenness' of the worshiper, it is appropriate that he should appear like a servant before his master; as one who has nothing, who is unable to provide for himself, impoverished and dependent on the good will of his master who will maybe help provide for him. However, if the purpose of prayer is to recite the praise and glory of HASHEM's name, it is appropriate that the worshiper should appear dressed well, because the more important the one giving the praise, the more valuable is his praise.

Now the compromise of Rav Kahana also makes a lot of sense. When the soul is despondent, the request is the primary thing, because it is difficult for a person to ignore his desire that his necessities be provided for, therefore it is preferable that he pleads for his needs to be filled like a servant before his master. But when there is peace and tranquility in the world, the prime need is the praise of HASHEM and the desire to draw near to Him. Therefore, it is appropriate to prepare well to greet HASHEM.

It turns out that there is a type of prayer in which the person desires mercy. He must find the correct balance of recognizing that prayer can change the order of the world and actualize his request, but at the same time without expecting his desires to be fulfilled or to come true. The goal being the prayer itself, not its fulfillment. In such a case one should not set out his prayer merely as an obligation, recited verbally and mechanically. Rather he needs to plead for mercy because HASHEM, "is merciful and compassionate, long-suffering, and abundant in loving-kindness, Who reconsiders about the evil."

The worshiper must understand that prayer purifies his personality and is a process through which he reaches the state of "from the depths," of humility and lowliness of stature. Indeed, this purification of the worshiper itself can bring about the nullification of the decree. We find, for example, that the verse states about Achav, "There was no one like Achav, who dedicated himself to do that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," (I Melachim 21:25). Yet after his heart was broken over all that he did, HASHEM said to Eliyahu, "Because he humbles himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days," (ibid. 25).

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There is also a prayer which is offered in time of peace, when the person's heart is secure, filled with praise for HASHEM of all the outpouring which HASHEM favored him with, and then his prayer is with all due honor and glory to one who comes to praise the great HASHEM.

Thus, a person who comes to pray must have his heart match the type of prayer he is about to utter. However, it is not only his heart that he must prepare. From the words of the Amora'im we learn that it is appropriate for a worshiper to prepare himself for prayer also with his external garb which influences his intent based on the type of prayer which he will recite. The reason for these external changes is, as the *Sefer Hachinuch* states in mitzvah 16, "For the hearts are drawn after the actions."

So much preparation is necessary – in thought, in mood, in soul and in action for this complex process that we have explained. During prayer a person is unable to think of all of these. To create the appropriate mood, one must prepare for prayer; not simple preparation but a lot of preparation. It is not surprising that the Mishna (Berachos 30b) points out that the early pious ones would spend an entire hour readying their hearts for prayer.¹⁸⁶

Prayer is an act that expresses faith and brings about a personality change, overriding the egoistic instinct within. It requires time! Not time during prayer, rather time before coming to pray.

Learning about prayer as preparation for prayer

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus in his book *She'arim Batefillah* (p. 15) expands the realm of preparation for prayer. He says that it is not sufficient for a person to spend a few minutes before prayer preparing. Rather a person must fix specific times for himself in which he learns about prayer.

Indeed, in order to ascend the levels of prayer it is important to reach the transcendent level of closeness to HASHEM, purity of heart and holiness.

¹⁸⁶ The Talmud (Berachos 32b) points out that, "The early pious ones would wait one hour and pray for one hour and then wait another hour. The Talmud asks, "If they would spend nine hours a day in prayer, how would their Torah be preserved and how was their work done? Only, because they were pious their Torah was preserved, and their work was blessed."

The students of Rabbeinu Yonah proved from here that the Talmud was referring to literal hours, because if it were only for a short while, the Talmud would not have asked, "if they would spend nine hours a day..."

However, the *Mishna Berura* (93:1) points out that "this refers only to pious ones. For the rest of the people, however, it is sufficient to spend a short while before beginning prayer, which is the amount of time it takes to walk eight *tefachim* (64-81 cm, 25-32 inches).

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However, even one who does not reach these levels can improve his intent and his prayer through learning and specific exercises in the conduct of prayer. Just as Torah learning is acquired through learning hour after hour, so too is it important for a person to dedicate specific time to prepare his heart and ready his soul for prayer. This is done through learning the topics of prayer and attaining important knowledge that will assist him.

In Rav Pincus's words:

"The main advice for how to ascend the steps of prayer and to attain the appropriate intent is to fix times for the service of prayer aside from the times of prayer themselves.

During prayer one must pray well, because that itself requires exertion and great effort, but that is not the time to add strength, skill and purity of the heart to his prayer. That must be done at a different time, through learning books that awaken the purity of the heart in prayer and increase understanding of its concepts.

These things are not done during prayer, but at separate, dedicated times¹⁸⁷... to learn books and essays that concentrate on awakening intent in prayer, to fix times and set hours for this, to learn the essays with zeal and with the soul's excitement, and to ensure that there is not a long gap between the times of learning."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Rav Pincus adds that we learn from Avraham Avinu (Rashi on Bereishis 18:23) that there is a prayer which is like war. "And in war it is obvious that success depends on prior planning. It does not make sense to approach war and only then, while it is happening, to plan the ways of warfare and to sharpen the swords, because in the meanwhile the enemy will prevail. So too with prayer, if a person tries only while praying to awaken his heart and to pray properly, in the meanwhile his thought will wander, and his prayer will not be sufficient, and he will miss out on his prayer."

¹⁸⁸ Rav Pincus adds that there are those who think that one should not dedicate extra time to perfect prayer, because it takes away time from Torah learning and other assignments. Rav Pincus replies that if we could exempt ourselves from prayer, perhaps this reasoning would make sense. However, "we are forced to dedicate a lot of time to prayer. The morning prayer... lasts about one hour, the afternoon and evening prayers are about 25 minutes, and when we put them together with the time for Grace after Meals it turns out that every day we spend about two entire hours praying. On Shabbos and Yom Tov, the prayers last some four or five hours. For someone who does not prepare properly most of those hours are for him almost without content, without growth and without enjoyment. Even though he certainly fulfils his obligation of prayer, in terms of growth and improvement they are almost completely wasted hours. If so, is it not worthwhile dedicating about twenty minutes each day and in this way transform all those hours into improvement and growth in the service of prayer?"

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Waiting after prayer

The continuation of the Talmud in Berachos (32b) says that, "the early pious ones would wait an hour, and pray for an hour, and would again wait an hour." We explained above why they waited before prayer, but why did they wait an additional hour after prayer?

It may be that this time after prayer also comes from the same obligation to serve HASHEM with intellect and not with an outpouring of momentary emotion and "drive for holiness (*frumkeit*)."¹⁸⁹ A person who is in the right transcendent spiritual mood cannot descend immediately to the onrush of life at once. If someone crosses in one moment from prayer to the mundane world of action, apparently his prayer was also in the world of action. The more a person is transcendent in his prayer and separates himself from the rush of life, from the usual thoughts of causal connection between efforts and attainment, so too is his prayer more transcendent. In as much, the worshiper will require a longer period to return to his rational, fixed and stable service of HASHEM. Therefore, the early pious ones, whose prayer was transcendent and lofty, required an hour of respite afterwards to preserve their emotional stability and return to their service of HASHEM.¹⁸⁹

Waiting after prayer is a time of meditation necessary for a person so that after his transcendent prayer he will not become full of himself and fall into the trap of pride. Many *Chasidic* books point out that after a transcendent act a person is exposed to his evil inclination no less than before the act.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ The *Mishna Berura* says in *siman* 93:1 the preparation before prayer that waiting a literal hour was only appropriate for the early pious ones, but for regular people it is sufficient to wait "a short while" before beginning prayer.

Eliyahu Rabba §1 learns that this is also true with regard to waiting after prayer. However, the *Rif* on *Ein Yaakov* (Berachos 32b) writes that everyone must wait one hour after prayer, but only the early pious ones waited an hour before prayer. It is very difficult to ascend the mountain and to get into the right mindset and so the early pious ones would wait an hour, but not everyone else. However, waiting after prayer is a process which is necessary for a person to preserve his spiritual stability and to ensure that he does not continue to fly in an emotional ecstasy and that he returns to the tranquility of his soul and his rational behavior. In this there is no difference between the pious and everyone else. Even one who is not of the early pious ones and did not ascend to their level in understanding the essence of prayer and their ability of understanding the greatness of the Creator and their own lowliness – nevertheless, if his prayer was emotional, he requires a certain amount of time to return to his normal balance.

¹⁹⁰ For example, see the explanation of Rabbi Shlomo Hakohen Rabinowitz, the Rodomsker Rebbe, in his book *Tiferes Shlomo* on Parshas Vayera on the verse, "And God appeared to him."

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There is a well-known explanation of that which is said in the *Hashkiveinu* prayer – “Remove the Satan from before us and after us.” This means that a person’s evil inclinations rage before the performance of a mitzvah and afterwards.¹⁹¹ Before the performance of the mitzvah the person’s evil inclination comes and explains that there is no reason to do that action, because it has no great value and it cannot make any real change. After the person has performed the mitzvah, his evil inclination comes and pushes him to think for a moment that he is tremendously important due to the action that he has performed, and so it tries to bring the person to the sin of pride and to remove the grace of the action from the one who performed it.

This is how Rabbi Menachem Simcha Rabinowitz, the Biala Rebbe, explains the Talmud in Berachos 32b about the early pious ones who would also wait an hour after prayer:¹⁹²

There is a type of wicked person who is destroyed in his wickedness, and a type of righteous person who is destroyed in his righteousness. The wicked person despairs of repenting when he sees how he has made God’s spirit bitter and extremely depressed. In this his sin is greater than in what he had done before. The righteous person when he opens his heart and sees the greatness he has performed... will become lax in performing the service of God and not stay as strong as he was formerly. He will also be eternally destroyed, Heaven forbid.

The following verse alludes to this, “And those who were lost in the land of Assyria shall come, and those that were dispersed in the land of Egypt,” (Yishaya 27:13). The land of Assyria refers to the happy righteous people, and those dispersed in the land of Egypt are the wicked who are sunk in all the gates of impurity.

The Sages (Berachos 30b) alluded to this when they said, “Even if a snake is coiled on his heel,” to allude to the wicked who is encircled by the filth of the primeval serpent, Heaven help us. Even so, he must not stop his service of God because He is great in loving-kindness and quick to forgive, without measure or limit. On the other hand, “Even if the king asks after him,” i.e. even if the Holy One, blessed is He, asks after a person, he should not cease rushing to serve him... and do not believe in yourself until the day of your death.

Similarly, even though God came and asked after his well-being, the verse states about Avraham Avinu, “He was sitting at the entrance to the tent.” This alludes to the verse, “Open for me the gates of righteousness.” He was like a poor person standing at the entrance who has nothing in his hand.

Likewise, it afterwards states, “And God went when he had finished speaking to Avraham, and Avraham returned to his place.” This teaches that even though the glory of God was increased by Avraham, nevertheless he returned to his place. Where was Avraham’s place? “I am but dust and ashes,” (Bereishis 18:27). This teaches that the righteous man must guard his humility and his standing even after performing an action, like, “Avraham returned to his place.”

¹⁹¹ See the book *Pardes Yosef* on Parshas Lech Lecha 13, p. 85 on the verse, “If you go left I will go right. And the many sources brought there, including *Chavos Yair* and *Be'er Shlomo ma'areches 6 os 5* and *Pri To'ar* on Parshas Chukas.

¹⁹² *Mevasser Tov* (p. 22).

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After performing a mitzvah, the evil inclination puts thoughts of pride into a person -- how important he is that he fulfilled this mitzvah in the best possible way, and with perfection, and he deserves tremendous reward, and similar ideas. It puts into him various thoughts to make him stumble in the attribute of pride. We pray, "Remove the Satan from behind us." After performing the mitzvah, the person should contemplate his own lowliness, thinking that he didn't perform the mitzvah properly and correctly.

This is the explanation of the Talmud (Berachos 32b): The early pious ones would wait an hour and pray for an hour and again wait for one an hour." That means before prayer they would wait an hour to contemplate the importance of fulfilling the Torah and the mitzvos and to remove the Satan of before fulfilling the mitzvah which makes a person think that he is not worthy of fulfilling the mitzvah. After prayer they would wait an hour to fulfil, "Remove the Satan from behind us." ¹⁹³

'It is not in Heaven'

How to practically prepare for prayer

Since we have discussed the essence and the purpose of preparation for prayer and the lofty peaks to which we are expected to ascend, one may become despondent and say, "Who will ascend to Heaven and get it for us?"

However, even though "it is not your duty to complete the task," nevertheless, "you are not free to desist from it." ¹⁹⁴ Even scaling the peak of the highest mountain begins with small steps at its base.

Let us try to sketch an outline of how to practically carry out the preparation for prayer we have discussed, relating to the required spiritual preparations (apart from the physical preparations of a clean body and clean clothing which are explained in *halakha*). What do we do during those times before and after prayer?

The first thing a person must do is to think. But not undirected, abstract thought. Rav Dessler¹⁹⁵ explains that the early pious ones would wait an hour

¹⁹³ On this topic see also the sources brought below in footnote [[XX197]].

¹⁹⁴ Avos 2:16.

¹⁹⁵ Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler *Michtav Me'eliyahu* vol. 3 p. 65 under the heading 'deveikus' in the name of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, the Alter of Kelm, in his book *Chochma Umussar* (see there, vol. 2, *siman* 1 and *siman* 8 and also vol. 1 *siman* 4). Rav Dessler explains that the early

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before prayer and contemplate and prepare their hearts for the prayer itself, and primarily, would “learn *mussar* and focus on the truth in their hearts.”

In order to enter the appropriate mood for prayer one should learn the ways which lead to this and to be fully familiar with the principles of prayer and internalize them. The purpose of learning is to learn how to think of oneself and to recognize the truth in one's heart.

However, a wise man does not try to learn everything by himself. He uses the wisdom that has been acquired over many years from the best teachers and he will find this in the books of *mussar* which direct him to purity of his heart.

This time of preparation before prayer requires a settled mind, and similarly *Shulchan Aruch* (90:21) rules that prayer requires a settled mind. Therefore, the *halakha* is that a person must wait a bit before entering the Synagogue and must not rush to pray as soon as he has entered.

Mishna Berura (ad loc. 62) explains that this waiting is required, “in order to settle his mind so that he can pray with intent. For if he prays immediately after suddenly entering, his mind will not be settled.”

Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 4) adds that by law a person “must wait before the entire order of prayer quietly, contemplating in his heart to understand before Whom he prepares himself to pray.”

However, this is not sufficient.

A person who is steeped in attaining his physical needs and who chases after his business and his worries must sit and think about these things, because if not, he will continue to think about them also while praying. But what will stop him from thinking during the preparation time these same thoughts that we are concerned will trouble him during prayer? The correct spiritual mood for a person during prayer does not come by itself and is difficult to enter. Therefore, a person must learn *mussar* and Jewish thought.

Furthermore, it seems that the solution given in the Talmud is appropriate also for preparing for prayer: “HASHEM said to Yisrael, ‘My children, I created

pious ones needed to wait after prayer, because “because of the great impression of their attachment, they could not return down to earth without a certain waiting period. So great was their attachment. Let us evaluate, in comparison, the departure of the Divine Presence from us at the end of the *ne'ila* prayer of Yom Kippur, and how immediately after the shofar blast ending *ne'ila* the evening prayer is rushed without seriousness.

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an evil inclination and I created Torah as an antidote. If you are involved in Torah you will not be given into its hand.”¹⁹⁶

A person transforms to become spiritual and close to HASHEM if he sits and learns Torah. A person who approaches prayer directly from his bed straight after waking up, or straight from work which he just finished minutes earlier in order to pray, will find it extremely difficult to detach from his physical reality and to strive to think about the loftiness of HASHEM and his own lowliness. In such a case, it would not be surprising if the essence of prayer becomes distant from him.

On the other hand, the process is likely to be entirely different if he does it after learning Torah.

Rabbi Chaim ben Attar (author of *Ohr Hachayim*) in his book *Rishon Letzion* on Tractate Berachos (32a) writes that for this reason the introductions to prayer were instituted and we recite before prayer sections of Torah, Mishna, songs and praises of HASHEM in *Pesukei Dezimra*.¹⁹⁷

The advice instituted for everyone to prepare their hearts is the minimal amount required for prayer. However, the more a person aspires to reach higher, the more he should invest and contemplate.

Rabbi Pinchas Friedman (head of the Belz Kolel) explained to me that even though according to *halakha* a person should rise from his bed and immediately stand up to pray without learning in between, in practice many are not accustomed to do this. God-fearing, wholesome people have a Torah lesson before their prayer, since learning Torah before prayer is the greatest preparation a person can do for prayer. Learning Torah helps and allows a person to come to his prayer when he is more spiritual, and in the right mood, acting in a conscious rational manner, not controlled solely by a momentary, emotional drive.

This preparation of learning Torah before prayer is not only a technical means with the goal of praying properly, but also adds depth to the connection between man and HASHEM, wherein prayer is inlaid as part of a broader system of the encounter between man and HASHEM. *Chazon Ish* discusses this connection between the Torah and prayer:

¹⁹⁶ Kiddushin 30b.

¹⁹⁷ Rabbi Chaim ben Attar also writes that we fulfil the obligation of waiting after prayer by saying *Ashrei* and *Kedusha Desidra*, i.e. *Uva Letzion* afterwards.

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Learning and prayer are interconnected. Toil in learning helps with prayer and prayer helps the learning. "Fixed" prayer (meaning prayer without the proper mood of a supplication) distances the learning and learning lazily prevents prayer.¹⁹⁸

So, preparation for prayer is not only a means to pray better but also is itself a spiritual process of drawing close to HASHEM, more precious than gold. This can be achieved through learning Torah which is the best way of drawing close to HASHEM and the most transcendent means to achieve a better spiritual overview of creation. Rav Dessler's words that not only prayer, but even the preparation for prayer already brings closeness to HASHEM, are commendable.¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, since the preparation for prayer is a way to achieve closeness to HASHEM, it itself causes HASHEM to grant the wishes of a person's heart. For when a person draws close to HASHEM, the result is that HASHEM immediately draws close to Him. As Rav Dessler writes:

This is what the verse states, "Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear," (Yishaya 65:24). This means that they are still learning *mussar* and contemplating the aspiration to cleave to HASHEM, and He already draws close to them from above and attaches himself to them. If they recognize in all matters of this world that they are but a vessel to be used for preparation to contemplate them and through them to draw close to HASHEM, then HASHEM will draw close to these worldly matters that serve as preparations. This is the resting of the Divine Presence on our handiwork, and the definition of "Who dwells with them in the midst of their impurity."

They have not yet left the impurity, they have not yet reached the completion of their desire, but they are learning *mussar* and contemplating the nullification of the existence of this world as a goal in itself, and they are preparing themselves in their hearts to draw to spirituality, so the Divine Presence already draws close and rests within them.

¹⁹⁸ Rabbi Avraham Yishaya Karelitz (*Chazon Ish*) in *Kovetz Igros* vol. 1 letter 2.

¹⁹⁹ Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler in *Michtav Me'eliyahu* vol. 3 p. 65 under the heading " *terem yikra'u*."

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Summary

In summation: We found that preparation for prayer is itself a spiritual process of drawing close to HASHEM. It is necessary, besides for the closeness of HASHEM that is attained through prayer, because it serves three purposes:

1. Preparation means waiting and taking a break, which helps the person to escape from his normal, mundane life, and allows him to enter a state of concentration and closeness to HASHEM.
2. Preparation gets a person into a mood of balanced thinking, free from emotional urges, and allows him time for introspection within a state of true humility that surrounds a person who recognizes the greatness of the Creator and one's utter dependence on Him in every aspect of life. Preparation in this respect helps fulfil the mitzvah of prayer as service of the heart of a person expressing his requests from HASHEM in complete faith that He is the only One able to truly help him.
3. Preparation allows a person to think about the essence of prayer as an act which is a combination between requests and pleading to HASHEM and the understanding that closeness to HASHEM itself comes through the request and standing before HASHEM. This preparation transforms prayer into an act which is performed at certain times in place of offering sacrifices, and its purpose is its very existence – even if the requests expressed within the framework of prayer are not fulfilled.

This mindset requires learning and correct preparation. This requires time and advance preparation – which cannot be within the framework of prayer itself. This preparation also preserves the spiritual stability of the worshiper and prevents him from disappointment if his requests are not granted. The preparation also prevents pride from the worshiper after he has experienced tangible closeness to HASHEM through a prayer which he has expressed with his whole heart.

Since we have discussed the appropriate thoughts and mindset at the time of preparation for prayer as an act which comes, amongst other things, from the essence of prayer, it is time to examine in depth the purpose of prayer and its essence. We will do this in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: The Essence of Prayer

The Essence of Prayer

In the previous chapters we discussed the various aspects of intent for prayer and the concept of standing before HASHEM in prayer. We also saw the necessity of preparing for the transcendent experience of an inconsequential person viewing himself in all his humility as if he is standing before the king. Not before a king of flesh and blood but before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He. In this chapter we will discuss the objective of prayer and also answer several fundamental questions that we raised in the introductory chapter.

The Service of Prayer – Whose Need Is It?

We saw that the Torah source for a person's obligation to pray is from the verse, "To love HASHEM, your God and to serve Him with all your hearts and all your souls," (Devarim 11:13) The Rabbis explained in *Sifrei*, also cited in the Talmud: "What type of service is in the heart? You must say that this refers to prayer," (Ta'anis 2a).²⁰⁰

Prayer is thus a person's service of HASHEM in his heart. In the introduction to this book we asked: How can we say that a person serves HASHEM through prayer, when he is actually asking for his own needs from HASHEM²⁰¹ and focusing on his most personal desires?

In prayer, a person asks HASHEM to fulfill his personal requests for livelihood, marital bliss, success, a life partner, children, a long life, health and every other part of his personal needs and desires. If he asks HASHEM to fulfil his completely egotistical requests, focusing on himself and his needs, how is this serving HASHEM?²⁰²

²⁰⁰ It also appears in the Yerushalmi Berachos 4:1 7a.

²⁰¹ *Mabit* in *Beis Elokim* in *Sha'ar Hatefilah* at the beginning of chapter 1 defines prayer as, "a person's requests from God for something he needs that he does not have."

²⁰² Rabbi Yitzchak Goldwasser in his book *Lesasson Velesimcha; ma'amar 3*, defines the question as follows:

"It is astonishing, for if prayer is a ploy used by a servant to procure from his master, then it would be inappropriate to call it 'service,' because 'service' is the means through which a servant gives to his master.

Perhaps one can answer: since the intent of the worshiper in his requests for health, livelihood, redemption etc. is in order to observe and keep the mitzvot of God, it is thus found that his requests are not completely physical but are tools to necessary to carry out his master's instructions. Therefore, these requests are also called "service."

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Let us delve deeper into this question. It is clear to us that the Creator of the world does not require the service of His creations. If so, what does it mean to serve HASHEM when the "Employer" does not need this service? It must be that this service is necessary for the one serving, i.e. the person himself. But if so, why is prayer considered service of HASHEM?

We asked a further question in the introduction. Why is prayer not considered a contradiction to one of the principles of faith? We believe that all a person's needs and anything he lacks is known in its finest details by the Creator of the world. HASHEM is aware of the troubled soul that longs for salvation. He is aware of everything that transpires even in the most private of settings, in one's mind and heart. Why, then, must we spell out our needs before Him in prayer, if the matter is already known to the creator of the word?

Furthermore, HASHEM is the ultimate cause and reason for everything that happens in our world. If so, not only is every trouble known to the Creator, but He Himself brought it upon the person. Why, then, does HASHEM need the requests for healing by a sick person or his relative, when the illness came originally through Divine Providence?

Perhaps you will answer that the goal of prayer is to ask for mercy so that HASHEM will improve our situation, in health, livelihood etc. But if so, the question is how does this help? It is one of the principles of faith to recognize

In this way we can understand the verse, 'He who turns his ear from hearing Torah, even his prayer is an abomination,' (Mishlei 28:9). Meaning, if a person is not interested in keeping the Torah then his prayer is an "abomination," in the sense of something which services the opposite of its purpose.

However, this answer is obviously forced.

Rav Goldwasser asks further:

The beginning of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer is, 'God open my lips and my mouth will recite Your praise.' If prayer is to attain what the person wants, its primary purpose is not praise but the request. If so, why is prayer defined as 'Your praise'?

Furthermore, in *Midrash Shochar Tov* (Tehillim 29) on the verse, 'Give to God the glory of His name,' (Tehillim 96:8) – When I mention His name, you give to God the glory. Just as Moshe said, 'For I will call in the name of God, give greatness to our Lord,' (Devarim 32:3) – recite prayers before Him.

They said to David, how will we know how many?

He replied to them: See how many times God's name appears in this chapter. There are eighteen. Therefore, it says, 'The glory of His name,' (see Berachos 28b).'

This teaches that 'recite before Him prayers,' is a fulfilment of 'Give to God the glory of His name.' In other words, the blessings of prayer are mentioning God's name with glory.

This does not seem to fit with the understanding of prayer as the requests a person makes from God.

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that poverty, starvation, illness, lack of success etc. are not by happenstance but are the result of Divine Providence. These events occur for a purpose, according to the perfect Heavenly calculations, which is all-encompassing, just and precise in terms of reward and punishment.

How, then, does it make sense for a person to ask HASHEM to nullify something that HASHEM Himself decreed for the person, according to what he deserves based on the person's actions? Can HASHEM be led astray from the principles of reward and punishment upon which the world operates?

Whichever way you look at it the matter is difficult. If a person deserves something good according to his deeds, based on the reckoning of reward and punishment, then HASHEM will certainly give him his reward, because HASHEM is trustworthy to pay good reward to those who fear Him. So why does a person need to request something which should come to him according to the judgment?

If, on the other hand, based on the principles of reward and punishment, the person does not deserve to receive the hoped-for good, how will the person's prayers help? Does prayer mean that HASHEM can be led astray from the principles of reward and punishment just because someone entreated Him in prayer to do so? Can prayer cause a deviation from the principles of reward and punishment and their violation?

Service of the Heart – Nullification Before the One Who Has 'Everything in His Hand'

Maharal of Prague, in his book *Nesivos Olam* (*nesiv ha'avodah*, chapter 3) explains that prayer is service of HASHEM, because while praying a person stands before HASHEM with his entire existence and reality as nothingness before Him. ²⁰³

The recognition of a person's weakness and complete futility before HASHEM, "Who has in His hand the soul of every living thing and the spirit of all mankind," ²⁰⁴ is expressed by the fact that the person turns to HASHEM and requests everything he needs.

²⁰³ See Tractate Rosh Hashanah 16b: "Rabbi Yitzchak said: 'Every year which is poor at its beginning will become rich at its end.'"

Rashi explains that "Poor at its beginning," means that Yisrael make themselves poor on Rosh Hashanah to speak supplications in their prayer, as the verse states, "The poor man speaks with supplication."

²⁰⁴ Iyov 12:10.

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The very act of prayer proves that the person is aware that life, health, success, honor, tranquility and peace, or Heaven forbid, death, illness, poverty and pain, are all given from the hand of the Holy One, blessed is He. The person is nothing more than a mote, which is blown along by HASHEM breath and whose fate is decreed with either the staff of wrath or with kindness.

However, a person has been granted freedom of will, and for this humanity is the crown and purpose of creation. A person has thus been given tremendous abilities. Yet, success is the result of Heavenly assistance, and if HASHEM leaves him but for one moment, everything will be lost. In a single moment the most successful person can lose his health or his life, or whatever is most dear to him, or the source of his success and his stature. He then loses all hope and is likened to a broken shard of pottery, to a dry twig, to floating dust, to a momentary cloud or to a fleeting dream.

Prayer is thus an expression of faith, of the person's trust in HASHEM, which causes him to stand before HASHEM with the recognition of the nothingness of man and the greatness of the Creator and His infinite powers.

*Mabit*²⁰⁵ points out that the purpose of prayer is "To acknowledge and to demonstrate that there is nothing in the world worth praying to other than HASHEM, blessed is He."

Rav Pincus in *Tiferes Shimshon* explains that it is not the requests for one's needs themselves that are the service of HASHEM. Rather the nullification of one's self before the Creator which is expressed through prayer – that is service of HASHEM in one's heart.²⁰⁶

From here it is clear that even though a person asks for his own needs, it is nonetheless the service of HASHEM in the deepest possible sense, and a pronounced act of pure faith toward the Creator to Whom the person prays.

When a person who asks his friend for help, the request itself does not express his self-nullification. True, he needs someone else and recognizes that

²⁰⁵ *Beis Elokim; Sha'ar Hatefillah* at the beginning of chapter 1.

²⁰⁶ Rav Pincus gives prostration as an example of this. Its meaning is complete subjugation. A person's head is higher than his feet, but compared to the Infinite, the head and feet are on the same level. Furthermore, there is nothing more transcendent and individual than the person's intellect. The lion, the strongest among beasts, which is much stronger than a person, can be trapped by the man who uses his intellect. When a person bows down he expresses the idea that compared to God even his head, with all its transcendence and greatness, is worth the same as his feet.

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his friend has something he lacks. Yet, he doesn't nullify himself totally before the other person, because he still has his own abilities which are valuable.

For example, when a person turns to a rich person and asks for financial assistance, he recognizes that the rich person has the ability to help him because he has the financial means, but the petitioner is not nullified before him because he also has many fine, genuine qualities of his own. However, someone who asks something from HASHEM is forced to complete nullification and the understanding that he has nothing of his own, because even what he has is entirely in the hands of HASHEM, whether for good or for bad. This is why prayer is service of the heart.

According to this explanation, the reason the Men of the Great Assembly began prayer with praise of HASHEM, that He is, "The great, mighty and awesome HASHEM," is intended to create the fear of HASHEM's greatness which leads to the recognition of the futility of man in comparison. A person recognizes when saying this praise that there is no causal connection between his actions and the "natural" results, but that everything, including his very life, his skills and his ability to act or understand how to act, come entirely from the Holy One, blessed is He, and without Him there is nothing.

Rambam rules in *Hilchos Tefillah* (1:2) that, "The obligation of this mitzvah is as follows: That a person should entreat and pray every day and speak the praise of the Holy One, blessed is He. Afterwards he should ask for his needs that he requires, with entreaty and supplication. Afterwards he should praise and give thanks to HASHEM for the goodness He has bequeathed him. Each person according to his ability."

The Torah obligation of prayer is not expressed only by the person asking for what he needs. Rather, he must first recite the praises of the Holy One, blessed is He. This is in order that the requests for one's needs, which come after the recognition of the greatness of the Creator and the worthlessness of the abilities of a creature who would be completely destroyed, Heaven forbid, if HASHEM concealed His face for a moment, are uttered with complete subjugation to the Holy One, blessed is He.

Rav Pincus writes:²⁰⁷

If a person would only ask, that would still not be *service*. True, he is asking from the One who has all the powers, and he asks with

²⁰⁷ *Nefesh Shimshon, inyanei emunah* p. 154.

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recognition that only the Holy One, blessed is He, can fulfil his requests.

However, if his requests are made with this intent, it is still not *service*, but simply turning to someone who can help him.

Therefore, Rambam rules that the mitzvah of prayer is firstly to know to Whom the person is speaking – to “the great, mighty and awesome God.”

Before beginning his prayer, one must have deeply impressed his soul with the knowledge of Whom he is addressing.

God [ELOHIM] means “the Omnipotent” and He loves us infinitely. He worries about us, He is close to us, He is our God.

Without this recognition it is not service, but simply requests. Service means nullification before the Divine.²⁰⁸

Combining the recognition in the greatness of the Creator along with subjugation towards Him and the recognition of the nothingness of mankind is also one of the fundamental concepts in the world of *Chasidus*.

So, for example, there is a well-known principle established by Rabbi Elimelech of Lezhinsk, author of *Noam Elimelech*.²⁰⁹ He said that a person was given two eyes so that with one of them he could see the greatness of the Creator, and with the second he could see his own inconsequentiality.²¹⁰ If a

²⁰⁸ According to Rav Pincus, a simple person relates only to the simple purpose of prayer – attaining what he wants -- and the accompanying prayers are a way of expressing thanks. Whereas a deep person relates to the true goal, fathoming the praise and honor of the Holy One, blessed is He. Similarly, Rav Pincus also explains that the third section of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer is the person's recognition that he has laid out his requests before God, Whose power and loving-kindness is infinite and the person in comparison to God is total nothingness.

²⁰⁹ See, for example, Rabbi Shlomo Loewenstein, *Umasok Ha'or* on Devarim 34:7.

²¹⁰ Contemplating the greatness of the Creator leads a person to delve into the paths of repentance and to self-nullification before the Creator. So, for example, it is said that Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon would repent every day for the repentance he had done the previous day, because as his understanding of the greatness of the Creator grew every day, so too his understanding that the repentance he had done the previous day was insufficient. This is the Chasidic explanation for the expression, “To warn the big ones about the little ones,” (Yevamos 114a explaining Vayikra 21:1) – It means that one should repent for the little sins today because tomorrow, after he has understood more of the greatness of the Creator, he reaches the recognition that the sins he did were not small sins, and so the repentance he had done so far with the thought that they were minor matters, was not complete repentance.

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person looks only at the greatness of the Creator but not at his own inconsequentiality, or the opposite, it is as if he is blind in one eye.

Bilaam, who recognized the greatness of the Creator and was as great a prophet as Moshe Rabbeinu, is called, "The man whose eye is opened," (Bamidbar 24:3) because even though with one eye he saw the greatness of the Creator, his second eye, which should have seen his own inconsequentiality, was closed. Therefore, he erred in thinking that he, "knows the mind of the Most High," (ibid. 16) and could change it.

On the other hand, Yisrael in the desert were called, "Yeshurun," (meaning "those who see well") because they saw both the greatness of HASHEM (who brought them out of Egypt and provided for their daily needs with miracles, including the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, the manna, the quail and the well of Miriam) and their own inconsequentiality and utter dependence of mankind on HASHEM.

This is the reason that the Rabbis teach that someone who is blind in one eye is exempt from making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the festival, because the pilgrimage and seeing the Divine Presence is only appropriate for one who can see both the greatness of the Creator and his own inconsequentiality.

Moshe Rabbeinu saw the Holy One, blessed is He, and recognized the greatness of the Creator on one hand, and his self-nullification as the humblest of all men. Even when he came at the end of his life to ask that he be permitted to enter the Land of Israel, "His eye was not dim," (Devarim 34:7) – the eye which looked at the self-nullification.

This idea appears in a practical and daily manner in the service of prayer of the great Chasidic masters. So, for example, the Klausenberger Rebbe, author of *Shefa Chaim*, whose whole-hearted prayer would split the heavens, used to say in the name of his grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Halberstam of Sanz (author of *Divrei Chaim*, who was known for his tremendous power of prayer): "I know that I am nothing, therefore I deserve nothing, and I expect nothing."

This self-nullification is essential so that a person does not think that his prayers must be answered because he recited them before HASHEM at length and with intent.

Similarly we find a Midrash on the verse, "Day by day he utters speech," (Tehillim 19:3) which says: With the extra knowledge and understanding that is added every day about the greatness of the Creator, one understands more deeply that until now his repentance was inappropriate with the understanding of the greatness of the Creator day by day, more and more.

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This principle is stressed in the High Holiday prayers.

Rav Goldwasser explains that during the High Holiday prayers we pray at length with our whole hearts and for this reason we are more likely to think that our prayers must be accepted. This thought itself can cause our prayers to be rejected.

It may be that for this reason that the Rabbis established that during the *ne'ila* prayer at the close of Yom Kippur, as the gates of our High Holiday prayers are closing, we repeat with great emphasis expressions of self-nullification: "What are we? What are our lives? What is our kindness? What is our righteousness?... All the mighty are as nothing before You and the people of repute as if they did not exist... for most of their actions are worthless and the days of their lives are nothingness before You, and a person is no better than an animal for everything is worthless."

Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (*Pri Tzadik, Tammuz* 1) developed a principle (based on the Talmud Bava Kama 55a) that the first place a concept appears in the Torah teaches about its true essence and the unique aspect of the concept.

"Prayer" first appears in the Torah in Parshas Vayera: "And Avraham rose in the morning to the place where he stood there before HASHEM," (Bereishis 19:27). Based on this the Rabbis said (Berachos 26a) that, "Avraham established the morning prayer, as the verse states, "To the place where he stood there." And "standing" means "prayer" as the verse states, "Pinchas stood and prayed," (Tehillim 106:30). In other words, Avraham Avinu returned to the place where he prayed for the salvation of Sodom and "stood" there before HASHEM and prayed. This is the first prayer mentioned in the Torah.

Why did Avraham understand that specifically that time and place were appropriate for prayer and to establish it for future generations? Was that really the place to make requests and to pray? When Avraham was standing and looking out over Sodom and Gomorrah which had been destroyed?

Actually, there was no better place to feel the worthlessness of man compared to HASHEM. Sodom and Gomorrah were wealthy and rich cities; the people there thought they could safely rely on the protection of their financial situation and they did not have to pay attention to anyone. They thought they could throw out any foreigners from their midst. Yet in a single moment they were completely erased from the face of the earth.

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The full execution of Divine justice can cause a person to lose his right to exist. Is there anything he can be proud of?

Therefore, that place where Avraham saw the destroyed Sodom, and that time when the world was judged, Heaven forbid, were the most appropriate time and place for Avraham to pray there and establish the fixed obligation of prayer.

This first prayer recorded in the Torah clarifies the essence of prayer as an event when a person stands before HASHEM. At this time, he recognizes his worthlessness and the fragility of existence which has no security. He understands something of the greatness of the Creator.

Rav Goldwasser²¹¹ shines a spotlight on the fact that this principle of prayer was founded at the time of complete nullification of the first worshiper before HASHEM.

He also notes that in this prayer of Avraham no mention is made of any request but only that he "stood there before HASHEM," to contemplate His greatness, to offer praise and to serve him through subjugation before him. This teaches that there was no more suitable place for prayer which implied the recognition that the Holy One, blessed is He, directs the world and controls everything that happens at every level of our world.

This is also the explanation for the fact that after we say in prayer, "To You, HASHEM, is the greatness and the strength... and You rule over everything, and in Your hand is the power and strength, and in Your hand is the ability to raise and strengthen everything," we recite afterwards, "You are He... who chose Avram... and found his heart faithful before You."

Avraham found the appropriate time and place to be the background to establish prayer. Through the great and renowned miracle of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah the heart and mind were prepared to grasp the totality of nature as controlled and ruled over by the Creator, leading to the conclusion that the entirety of nature is miraculous from HASHEM.²¹² This is the correct basis for prayer.

²¹¹ *Lesasson Ulesimcha, ma'amar 3.*

²¹² See Ramban at the end of Parshas Bo (Shemos 13:16):

From the great, renowned miracles a person acknowledges the hidden miracles which are the foundation of the entire Torah. For a person has no portion in the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu unless he believes that all the occurrences and events are all miracles and there is no natural or normal way of the world, neither for many nor

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Self-nullification in prayer is important for two additional reasons:

1. Only a person who recognizes that he is not able to save himself will have his prayers answered.²¹³

for individuals. Rather, if one performs the mitzvos, his reward will make him successful, and if he transgresses them, his punishment will destroy him, everything according to the decree of the Most High.

These words are explained by Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (*Chever Mamarim* 14):

When we see that the world works supernaturally, that a rock can turn into a pool of water and similar things, it is obvious that there is no distinction between nature and the supernatural and both are the same... Through this it becomes clear to a person that if he were to eat fats forbidden by the Torah he would die naturally, just as if he were to swallow poison it would kill him naturally.... And we learn from this that the purpose of the exodus from Egypt was not in order to teach the supernatural ways of God but the opposite, it was to teach the essence of nature.

²¹³ On this topic the words of one of the great Chasidic masters, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef ben Yehuda (the Maggid of Ostra) are beautiful. He explains the verse "I lay me down, and I sleep, I awake, for God supports me," (Tehillim 3:6) in his book *Rav Ya'ivi on the Torah* (5634 p. 29b):

The explanation is based on what our Rabbis said (Sanhedrin 97a): "Three things happen when one is not paying attention, they are Mashiach, finding [a lost object] and a scorpion." This applies to an individual Mashiach too -- when a person is saved from trouble it is as if Mashiach has come for him, and this needs to be without paying attention.

This is the meaning of the verse, "I lay me down, and I sleep, I awake, for God supports me." "I lay me down" -- that when I lie before my enemies who pursue me, and I am unable to escape or to overpower them, then, "And I sleep" -- when I take my mind off it, just like a person who does not think about the things he needs when he is asleep. Then, when I am not thinking about it I am redeemed from the trouble and it is as if Mashiach has come for me, since I was redeemed from the trouble. And this is "I wake up."

The reason that the redemption comes when one isn't paying attention is that when a person has it in mind then he thinks of ways of escaping from the trouble, and he doesn't have complete faith in God. Therefore, he does not receive help from God. Because God says, "Since you want to save yourself through your actions, I do not want to save you. Let us see how you are able to save yourself. But when a person takes his mind off the trouble, and says, "What actions can I take? God will do what he wants." Then God will help him. And this is the meaning of "And God supports me."

Toledos Yaakov Yosef explains that if a person tries to be saved from trouble, it negatively impacts on his relationship with God Who says, "If you think that you can support yourself on your own, then the opposite, I will give you the reins and let's see how far you get.

In practice, there is no human ability to know where his actions will lead him and what is truly in his future. One simply does not have the ability to save himself. On the other hand, if he takes his mind off the trouble, and places his trust in God by putting himself "to sleep" allowing God to lead him to a safe shore, then God will certainly save him.

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2. Only someone who recognizes his worthlessness understands that he deserves nothing, and he should not expect anything. Only with this recognition will his prayer come from the depths of his heart.

Let us explain.

The Talmud (Nida 70b) says that the men of Alexandria asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananiah several questions about the ways of the world:

"What should a person do to become wise?"

He said to them, "He should increase his studying and be brief in his business dealings."

They said to him, "Many have done this, and it did not help them."

"Rather," [he said], "he should pray from the One to Whom wisdom belongs, as the verse states, 'For HASHEM gives wisdom, from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.'"

What does this teach us? [Why did he advise them to increase studying if it is entirely dependent on prayer to HASHEM?]

[It teaches] that one without the other doesn't help.

The men of Alexandria asked, "What should a person do and become wealthy?"

He said to them, "He should increase his business and deal honestly."

They said to him, "Many have done this, and it did not help them."

"Rather," [he said], "They should pray from the One to Whom wealth belongs, as the verse states, 'Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold,' (Chaggai 2:8).

What does this teach us? [Why did he advise them to increase their business if it is entirely dependent on prayer to HASHEM?]

[It teaches] that one without the other doesn't help.

Rav Goldwasser asks a question on this: Why did Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya not tell them straight away that the way to become wise is to both spend time studying while minimizing business and also through prayer and

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requesting it from HASHEM? Why did he not tell them the “secret” of “praying from the One to Whom wisdom belongs?”

He answers that until a person understands and is convinced that no natural efforts or attempts will help by their own right unless it is the will of the Creator, even prayer will not help. Only when the men of Alexandria discovered the knowledge that making an effort does not help to attain wisdom, only when they accepted that many have tried and failed, only then was it possible to teach them the way of prayer.

Prayer which is performed as an aspect of, “It can’t hurt,” solely as an additional effort, is not service of the heart and does not have the qualification that will allow it to be accepted.

Only when the worshiper acknowledges that all his efforts can help only if HASHEM desires it, then his prayer is “service of HASHEM” and is capable and worthy of being accepted.

Prayer Is the Announcement That ‘Only to Him Is It Appropriate to Pray’ – but Not to Expect the Desired Results

The Talmud in Berachos (34a) explains that during the last three blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer the worshiper is compared to “a servant who receives a gift from his master, takes permission and leaves.”

The simple explanation of the Talmud is that the servant must praise his master, thereby giving him thanks for being attentive to his requests.

However, *Mabit* asks: “Why did the Rabbis require that one give thanks before he knows whether the request will actually be granted?”

He answers:²¹⁴

Perhaps they taught us here a principle of prayer, which is that when praying, a person’s objective should not be that his prayer be answered. If so, when they said, “like a servant who receives a gift from his master,” it means that the person should think to himself as if he has already been answered, because the goal of his prayer was not so that he should be answered. Rather, it is to demonstrate that there is nothing in the world appropriate to pray to other than HASHEM, blessed is He. And to recognize that the worshiper has nothing at all

²¹⁴ *Beis Elokim; Sha’ar Hatefillah* chapter 2.

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in the world but for what the Holy One, blessed is He, gives him. The person recites before Him what he lacks to demonstrate this concept, and the reward will eventually come on its own. But not that the goal of prayer should be to receive what he wants, such that if he would not receive what he asked for he would not have recited the prayer.

It turns out that a person's purpose in prayer does not need to be asking for what he wants, but as praise to the One who has the ability to answer all his requests.

When we say, "Heal us HASHEM and we will be healed," it is as if we are saying, "We have nobody else who can truly heal us other than You."²¹⁵

This is also explained in the Talmud (Berachos 32b): "Rabbi Chanina said, 'If one prays at length, his prayer does not return empty.'"

The Talmud challenges this from the words of Chiya bar Abba in the name of Rabbi Yochanan that anyone who prays at length and looks into it will eventually come to heartache, as the verse states, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life," (Mishlei 13:12).

The Talmud answers, "This is not difficult. One case is when he prays at length and looks into it, the other is when he prays at length and does not look into it."

Rashi explains: "Looks into it – expects that his requests will be fulfilled because he prayed at length."

Tosafos explain similarly: "He expects that his request will be fulfilled because he had intent in his prayer, and eventually when it is not fulfilled it turns out that he had a long-term expectation in vain. That is heartache – when someone expects something, and his desire is not fulfilled."

²¹⁵ Many disagree with this explanation (see *Nachalas Yaakov* on Berachos 6) because it is very difficult to explain that the requests in prayer are not actually asking for Divine mercy, since the Talmud states (Berachos 20b): "Prayer is requesting mercy."

Also, the format of prayer is not praise but requests. It seems therefore that when a person prays to God and asks for Divine mercy, the very asking is the service of God. It is the recognition that only He has the power to fulfil the heart's desires. This is making a request, not offering praise. However, the intent of the worshiper must be focused on his dependence on the Creator and God's infinite power, not only on the request itself.

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Why is his desire not fulfilled and his prayer not accepted? Perhaps because he feels that his prayer is like a payment for merchandise that he ordered and therefore he expects his requests to be fulfilled. In the future he will be disappointed and see that it is not so. Because even though the Holy One, blessed is He, hears prayer, that does not mean that HASHEM is obligated to answer the prayer and act on it. The opposite is the case. If one thinks that "he deserves it," it is likely to cause his prayer not to be accepted, Heaven forbid.

The correct way to pray is for the person to give himself in every matter into the hands of the Holy One, blessed is He, who has the ability to do what he wants. The secret to achieve this is a person's self-nullification, to not think that he is worthy of salvation, and not that because of his prayer, "he deserves it." ²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Rabbi Meir of Premishlan on Parshas Chukas explains the words of our Rabbis that the nations of the world and the Satan cause pain to the Jews and mock actions which appear to have no reason, such as the red heifer. They challenge in two ways, by asking: "What is this mitzvah" and, "What meaning does it have?"

In other words, before a person performs a mitzvah his evil inclination asks him, "What is this mitzvah and why are you doing it? But after the person has overcome this inclination and performed the mitzvah, his evil inclination asks him, "What meaning does it have!" That is, "What a great mitzvah you did! How much reward do you deserve for it!

God's answer is also twofold, "It is a decree before Me." Before performing a mitzvah, a person must think that his action has tremendous importance because it expresses the fulfillment of God's will. And after he has done the mitzvah, "You have no permission to consider it." It is forbidden for a person to fall into the sin of pride, to think of all the great things he has done and to imagine that he deserves something. This is the principle of, "Remove Satan from before us (before the act) and from after us (after the act)," (Evening service).

A person must know that his actions are not perfect, and that in every action he is only fulfilling his duty to the world. Additionally, what he has done in general is not associated with him, but the Holy One, blessed is He, helped him to do it.

The Baal Shem Tov explains the verse, "To You, God, is the kindness, because You give reward to man according to his deeds," (Tehillim 62:13). If it refers to rewarding a person according to his actions, why is it called kindness rather than justice? The answer is that in truth a person does not have the power to perform any of his deeds. Therefore, it is kindness of the Creator that he rewards the person "according to his deeds," as if they were his own deeds.

Rabbi Yitzchak Goldwasser explains similarly in his book *Avodas Levav* on the phrase at the beginning of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, "Who rewards good kindness."

He asks, is there such a thing as kindness that is not good? Furthermore, what do the words, "who rewards kindness" mean? The words appear contradictory, because "rewards" means to pay someone according to what they deserve, and "kindness" means something given undeservedly.

The explanation is that when a person feels that God has done kindness with him he is embarrassed by it (as expressed by the phrase "bread of shame" - bread that causes a person embarrassment when he receives it). However, God bestows kindness on the person

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With this *Mabit* resolves an additional problem regarding the daily repetition of the same requests to HASHEM. He writes:

This answers a question regarding prayer, which appears illogical and rude -- to repeat the same question many times. If one were to ask something of a human king and ask again once, twice or three times, the king would become angry with the petitioner, for if the king wanted to grant him his request he would have done so on the first or second time. So, the continued requesting is redundant and harms the petitioner.

Yet we pray to HASHEM every single day, morning, afternoon and evening, the same eighteen blessings...

Rather, the intent in prayer is to recognize and acknowledge that there is nothing in the world worthy to pray to other than HASHEM, blessed is He, who is the Master of the entire world, and that we lack many of the things mentioned in prayer and we mention them before Him so that we will recognize that there is nobody who can fulfill our needs and save us from our troubles other than HASHEM. We cast our burden on Him and we fulfil our obligation of prayer with this intent. And HASHEM will do what is fit in His eyes, either he accepts our prayers – if they were appropriate – or not.

so that he feels as if he has earned it. That is "good kindness" because the recipient feels good when he receives it.

Rabbi Pinchas Friedman explained to me accordingly the phrase in the Talmud (Berachos 30b) that "the early pious ones would wait an hour before prayer and one hour after it." The hour before prayer is essential as a person's preparation to stand before his Creator and to be worthy of that. And after the prayer he must wait another hour in order to return to his first level of self-nullification without thinking that since he stood before his Creator and prayed at length, he has elevated himself and done a great deed, and due to that he deserves to receive everything he wants.

This is similar to the explanation of the *Tiferes Shlomo* of Redomsk who writes that concerning Avraham Avinu it says, "And God appeared to him" – after the act of circumcision God came to him and Avraham experienced a complete closeness to God. But at the very same time he felt himself as one who was "sitting at the entrance of the tent" not having entered the innermost chamber and still being far from God.

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Prayer as faith in providence

Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky (the Slonimer Rebbe) explains another aspect of faith in HASHEM contained within prayer in his book *Nesivos Sholom*.²¹⁷

He explains that a person who prays demonstrates through his prayer that he recognizes the fact that the Holy One, blessed is He, listens to him, hears him, watches over him and worries about him. The person is not alone and cast to blind fate, natural forces and infinite space. The person has Someone to turn to,²¹⁸ and Someone who runs the entire world and pays attention to every event, whether large or small.

When a person understands that the world is not abandoned, and that events and circumstances are not arbitrary, he understands the kindness in the fact that he is able to connect directly with the King of kings who directs the world.²¹⁹

He can ask for food directly from the One who sustains and provides a person with everything he needs; for his health from the One who has the power to heal. He knows fundamentally that everything he has and anything he lacks is from HASHEM, and it is He who pays attention to his requests and his prayers.

This recognition in itself is a deep and important act of faith.²²⁰ This is pure service of HASHEM, service of the heart.

²¹⁷ *Nesivos Sholom* vol. 1, *tefillah ma'amar* 2 (pp. 186-187).

²¹⁸ Rav Goldwasser points out that the knowledge that we can be saved from our suffering through prayers is so important that it is the main reason for reading Megillas Esther on Purim. As Rambam explains at the end of his listing of the 613 mitzos in *Sefer Madda*: "They established reading the megillah at its time... in order to make known to future generations that what is promised in the Torah is true. 'Who is a great nation who has God close to it like HASHEM, our God, whenever we call out to Him,' (Devarim 4:7). He was close to our pleas in the times of Mordechai and Esther and He saved us."

²¹⁹ See the words of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato in *Mesilas Yesharim* chapter 19 that prayer must be, "like one person speaks to another - and the other pays attention and listens to him."

²²⁰ Rav Wolbe writes in *Alei Shur* vol. 2 p. 348:

We seek our perfection. Not our success. The foundation of perfection is faith. Our faith is not a faith "that there is a God." That we know completely. Our faith is the certainty in our heart of the presence of the Creator and His providence to the degree that we see the world and everything which occurs in it through the eyes of faith. The way to come to live with that faith is only through prayer. In prayer we teach ourselves to turn to God for everything that we lack, for there is nobody else in the

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The Slonimer Rebbe adds that when the worshiper expresses his faith that HASHEM listens through his prayer, this faith realizes itself. This is one of the principles for prayer to be accepted. For indeed HASHEM does run the world in a way that prayers are accepted.

There are three factors contained within this faith:

1. Faith in individual providence through which HASHEM created the world, directs it and continues to direct every detail within it. He alone did, does and will do everything that happens in our world.
2. Faith that it is appropriate to pray to HASHEM alone, and inappropriate to pray to anyone else.
3. Faith that the Creator, blessed is He, hears the prayers of every mouth, and His mercy and loving-kindness are especially for the Jews, even one who is not worthy and does not merit according to strict justice. "You hear the outpourings of the poor, you pay attention to the cries of the impoverished and You save," (*Tefillas Nishmas Kol Chai – nusach sefard*).

Rav Wolbe adds depths to this understanding of faith expressed through prayer. He defines prayer as a person's recognition that everything that happens in the world does not come by causal effect between actions and natural events and their "necessary" results. There are no necessary or automatic results. There is only the Divine, Who is the ultimate cause and reason, and "there is nothing beside Him."²²¹

world that can give us what we lack. This is an ephemeral feeling that we must constantly reawaken three times a day.

Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv in his book *Chochma Umussar* vol. 2 §1 notes that prayer is the need of the person himself, that he reminds himself and internalizes that he is in the hands of the Divine Providence at every given moment.

²²¹ An echo of this idea is found in the writings of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef ben Yehuda, the Maggid of Ostra cited above in note [[XXX194]]. He says that when a person thinks he is able to control things by himself, God, as it were, says to him, 'Do it alone and let us see how far you get.'

On the other hand, when a person recognizes the fact that he only puts effort into his actions but does not determine their success, but that rather his achievement is fixed by a Divine decree -- then he stands and prays, and God comes to his help. This is in accordance with the phrase, "When you reach the conclusion that you are unable alone, and you turn for My help, then I will certainly come to help and save you."

A person therefore needs the process of prayer in order to recognize the fact that there is nothing that can help him other than God Himself.

Some support is found for this idea in the Chasidic story about Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, when a woman turned to him with a bitter heart and asked him to pray for her. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak made his prayer conditional on her depositing a "redemption of her

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Rav Wolbe writes:²²²

It appears to our eyes that all events in the world come about through cause and effect. – a person is poor because he is not skilled at anything; he is ill due to hereditary factors or a virus; he is unsuccessful in his learning because he doesn't have talent.

We need to intentionally work on ourselves (to create within ourselves the awareness) that everything is dependent solely on the will of HASHEM, blessed is He and not on any physical cause.

Prayer conflicts with the ironclad rule of cause and effect and through it we must break through our first instincts of causation. Immediately when we begin our prayers we must elevate our viewpoint to the metaphysical.

That is the service of prayer.

Prayer Is Embedded in Creation

Prayer Is Meant to Remind the Human Being Of His Creator

This understanding also clarifies an additional point that we raised. The Holy One, blessed is He, runs the entire world according to the rules of "nature." Even so, at the time of creation of the world we find that rain, which was essential for the existence of the world, did not fall on the earth until Adam was able to pray and request it.²²³

soul" for a large amount. The woman claimed that she didn't have that amount of money, but Rabbi Levi Yitzchak remained firm. The woman attacked him for this and said to him, "If you won't help me, I'll pray for myself, and God will help me without you." When he heard these words, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak said, "This is the sentence I've been waiting to hear. Now you will be saved."

²²² *Alei Shur* vol. 2 p. 349.

²²³ See Bereishis 2:5: "And all plants of the field were not yet on the earth and all the grass of the field had not yet sprouted because Lord HASHEM had not yet brought rain on the earth, and there was no man to work the land."

Rashi explains that when the creation of the world was completed on the sixth day, before Adam was created, the plants had not yet sprouted. On the third day about which the verse states, "The earth put forth herbs," they did not emerge, but waited at the entrance of the ground until the sixth day. Why? "Because HASHEM, God, did not bring rain on the ground. And why had He not brought rain? Because "there was no man to work the land." There was nobody to recognize the benefit of rain. But when Adam came and knew that rain was necessary for the world he prayed for it and it fell, and the trees and plants sprouted.

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So, there are things which require mankind to pray and request before they can exist. The Holy One, blessed is He, provides those necessities only after someone asks for them.

Why did HASHEM create His world in such a fashion? Based on what we said the explanation is that HASHEM knew that by nature a person thinks only of himself and not of his Creator. If there was no reason to force a person to stop and think about his Creator and his own ultimate purpose in the world, he would end his days without any thought of it at all.

However, if he lacks something and faces situations where he is unable to save himself, this lack causes him to search for the One Who can save him.

The need for rain, which one cannot create for himself, and drought, which a person cannot prevent, force him to contemplate the fact that the Holy One, blessed is He, is the only One who has the power and the desire to do good for the person, and to fulfil his wishes.

Through this a person learns that the same is true regarding his other needs -- things do not happen by themselves. Rather, it is HASHEM who provides them for him.

A Jew who prays recognizes that a person is not omnipotent, and there is no guarantee that he will find what he lacks. A Jew who is directed by HASHEM's individual providence believes and knows that he is dependent on HASHEM for all his needs, and not just for rain. So, he prays and receives them only through prayer.

From this perspective it turns out that HASHEM established His world in such a way that the worshiper is answered only after he prays. The existence of a Heavenly system of reward and punishment is not sufficient because the purpose of prayer is to fulfil the Divine Will that a person contemplate HASHEM's providence in the world.

The Rabbis also included this in the wording of the blessing recited after eating, which states, "HASHEM created many souls and what they lack." Why was the deficiency created and why do we bless HASHEM for it? It is only due to what one is missing that a person recognizes the goodness of HASHEM who provides him with all his needs and so he is able to bless HASHEM.

A person lacks things in order that he will be forced to turn to HASHEM and ask Him to provide the deficiency. Prayer and its acceptance are therefore part of the Divine process which stimulates a person to turn to HASHEM, and

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in so doing to recognize the greatness of the Creator and the comparative inconsequentiality of man.

'Repentance and Prayer and Charity Remove the Evil Decree'

Prayer as a Return to HASHEM

This also answers the question of how we can attempt to change what HASHEM has decreed through our prayers. The ability of prayer to help stems from the fact that it was established by HASHEM as the means for a person to receive what he needs. Not only is there no contradiction to the principles of reward and punishment, and not only are we not trying to persuade HASHEM to forgo the judgment that He decreed for us, but the things we lack and the suffering around us are intended precisely for this purpose -- to get us to turn to the Creator of the world Who expects us to remember Him.²²⁴ If prayer were not part of the system of supplying a person's daily needs, the worshiper would forget to turn to HASHEM even in times of trouble.

Furthermore, this state of recognition itself grants a person their reward and so through the principles of reward and punishment prayer gives merit to the worshiper, it purifies him and brings him to the situation that he is worthy of having his requests fulfilled. When a person recognizes the glory of the Holy One, blessed is He, it elevates the person and brings him higher.

Rabbi Yosef Albo discusses this in *Sefer Ha'ikarim* (*ma'amar* 4, chapter 18) when he raises the question we mentioned above. If the goodness that a person receives is decreed by HASHEM based on his actions, according to the principles of reward and punishment, why does he need prayer to receive it?²²⁵ If the goodness was not decreed for him, how can prayer help to change the will of HASHEM and cause a good decree for himself? Surely the will of

²²⁴ This is explained in the *Tanya* (*Iggeres Hakodesh* chapter 22) with the following analogy. The author openly rebukes those who turn to human beings for advice when in physical distress, and even if it is from the greatest Jewish sages. He compares it to a father who hits his son. The father certainly expects the son to turn only to him, who cares about him and not to anyone else who will protect him from his father.

The *Tanya* states, "It is like a merciful, wise and righteous father who hits his son. A wise son should not turn away to flee and seek help or even to look for an advocate to speak to his merciful, righteous and pious father. Rather he should turn to face his father, and look at him directly, to bear the pain with love for his own good for the rest of his days..."

Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol expressed along similar lines the same idea in the poem, "*Keser Melucha*" where it says, "I will flee from You towards You."

²²⁵ For an answer to this question see the words of Rav Pincus cited earlier in the beginning of Chapter Two about the rabbinic statement on the verse, "And there was no man to work the ground," (Bereishis 2:2).

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HASHEM does not change, for HASHEM is not a person who reconsiders what He has decreed.

Rabbi Yosef Albo's answer is that prayer is returning to HASHEM and thus part of the concept of repentance.

HASHEM's decree of what will happen to a person, whether good or bad, depends on the person's classification (whether he is righteous or wicked) and his spiritual state.

So indeed, HASHEM and His will do not change, but the decree was made for a person who was in a certain spiritual state and who fell under a certain classification. Since the person has the power to change himself he can thereby change the classification he was given. A person can transform himself and his ways to such an extent that it will be as if he is a different person. He will no longer be the same disgusting person of the day before about who the decree was made -- the person he was before he returned to HASHEM and changed himself.²²⁶

This is the explanation of the principle stated by the Rabbis (Rosh Hashanah 16b) that changing one's name and actions helps to nullify the evil decree.

In the words of *Sefer Ha'ikarim*:

In this way repentance helps for a wicked person. Through repentance it is as if he transforms into a different person about whom that decree was not decreed.

Look at Achav, about the verse states, "There was none like Achav, who gave himself over to do that which was evil in the eyes of HASHEM," (I Melachim 21:29). Yet after the decree was made against him he fasted and wore sackcloth and subjugated himself before HASHEM. HASHEM, therefore, said to Eliyahu, "Because [Achav]

²²⁶ In the words of Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuva* 7:7): "How exalted is the level of repentance. Yesterday he was separate from HASHEM the God of Yisrael, as the verse states, "Your sins separate between you and your God," (Yishaya 59:2). He would cry out to God but not be answered, as the verse states, "Even if you heap on prayers I am not listening," (ibid. 1:15). If he performs mitzvos they are torn up in his face, as the verse states, "Who asked that from you, who trample My courtyards," (ibid. 1:12) ... But today he is attached to the Divine Presence, as the verse states, "And you who cleave to HASHEM, your God," (Devarim 4:4), he cried out and is answered immediately, as the verse states, "Even before you cry out I will answer," (Yishaya 65:24).

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humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days," (ibid. verse 29).²²⁷

This teaches that the decree made against a wicked person applies as long as he remains defined as wicked. But if he changes his definition through repentance, it is as if he has transformed into a different person who never had that decree made against him.²²⁸

²²⁷ We find that even a person who has remained with the appellation of "Achav the wicked" for generations, nevertheless once he humbled himself before God, he was already not the same and so the decree against him was changed.

²²⁸ See the words of Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dinov in his book *Bnei Yisaschar* (*ma'amrei hashabason, ma'amar 8 – minchas Shabbos*):

In explanation of the verse: "But as for me, let my prayer be to You, God, in a favorable time," (Tehillim 69:14). The early commentaries (see for example, *Sefer Ha'ikarim, ma'amar 4*, chapter 18) discuss how it is possible to say that prayer will be effective. It would mean that there is, Heaven forbid, a change of God's will, such that before the prayer His intent was a certain way, and afterwards, through prayer, it changed.

The students of the Ba'al Shem Tov wrote about this, explaining that through prayer a person becomes attached to a different place, higher than he was before, and is transformed into a different person. Even though the decree was made against that person, through his prayer to God, HASHEM, blessed is He, Who causes everything to exist, that person becomes attached to a higher place and becomes a different being. Hence, God's will does not need to change, because no decree was made against the person he is now.

In my humble opinion I also have an answer to the question based on teachings that I received.

Our Rabbis said, "The Holy One, blessed is He, made a condition with the [Red] Sea that it should split before Yisrael (*Bereishis Rabba* 5:5). So too regarding all miracles did our Rabbis write in the midrashim and in the Zohar. This concept that

"conditions" were made is in answer to the same question as above. How was it possible that God changed His mind about the role of the Sea? How could the work of the Craftsman, blessed is He, be altered, and how could nature change from how He intended at the beginning of creation? Rather, you must say that immediately from the beginning of creation, the Holy One, blessed is He, made a condition with all of creation and let them know what they would do at a certain time in a certain manner on condition that certain things occurred. This was due to free choice.

If the Egyptians would have immediately let the Jews go and not chased after them, the Sea would not have split. Only once the hearts of the Egyptians were hardened and they decided to pursue the Israelites; and after the Children of Yisrael cried out to God, only then did the Sea split. This was God's original will. The Sea was to split at that time, on condition that certain events would occur.

This is also what happens with prayer. There is no change in God's will. Rather, His original intent was that if the person prays at that time, then something else would happen. Understand this matter.

According to this you can understand the statement of *Knesses Yisrael* in Tehillim.

"But as for me" -- I understand that there is no change of Your will, "Let my prayer

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Behold this is how it is. The Holy One, blessed is He, does not make His decrees in a way that they will follow the person in every situation, but the opposite – HASHEM, “does not wish the death of one that dies but rather his return from his path so that he can live,” (based on Yechezkel 18:32).

Therefore, if a person transforms and returns to HASHEM the decree will not befall him. This is true whether the decree was for good or for bad.²²⁹ Just as it is clear to us that a blessing must have something to apply to, and even if it was decreed that a person's fields will be filled with produce, it is dependent on him plowing and planting, and if he doesn't do so the blessing will have nothing to apply to.

So too, if a decree of destruction was made against a person because he has a sealed heart, that is conditional. If the person is wise enough to remove the seal around his heart, in that way he will escape the punishment of judgment, because it was originally given only conditionally.

be to You, God,” -- Who is the cause of everything in existence and so when a person prays his existence undergoes a change, as the students of the Ba'al Shem Tov wrote. Furthermore, I pray before you, “in a favorable time” in which everything was included within the primordial intent, as we explained. Understand this matter.

Look there for additional explanations of the verse as is his manner in the interpretation of the holy verses.

²²⁹ Rabbi Yosef Albo, *Sefer Ha'ikarim*, *ma'amar* 4, chapter 18:

The supernal influxes flow onto the one who receives them when he is on a certain level and has made a certain preparation to accept them. If the person does not prepare himself to receive that influx he is the one who is withholding the goodness from himself. If it was decreed by HASHEM for a person, for example, to have a successful crop of grain in a certain year, and he does not plow or plant in that year, even if HASHEM brings heavy rains to the land, his crops will not succeed, since he did not plow or plant. He withholds the goodness from himself because he did not prepare himself to receive it.

Based on this we can say that when goodness is decreed for a person by HASHEM, it is decreed based on the person being on a certain level of proper conduct. This is a crucial principle in all of the promises of the Torah. And when evil is decreed for a person by HASHEM, it is decreed based on him being on a certain level of evil or having done certain preparation. When that level or that preparation changes, the decree will certainly change for good or for bad.

This can be compared to a king who decreed that all the uncircumcised men in a certain country will be killed, or that each will receive a bar of gold. If one of them went and circumcised himself, so that he changed, certainly the decree would change and be removed from him for either good or bad, based on the preparation that he did.

This is the reason why striving to do good and having proper conduct is necessary in every matter. It is the preparation that enables one to receive the Divine influx, or to remove the decree from one's self.

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Indeed, it seems that the word of HASHEM is not final, but it is up to mankind to act wisely, and to change the decree received based on the principles of reward and punishment.²³⁰

This is the essence of repentance and the power of prayer -- it can transform a person – and with this transformation also change the decree. The punishment, which must always be appropriate to his spiritual condition at the time he is punished -- and not what it was when he committed the sin -- also changes.

In his prayers a person stands before his Creator, and recognizes that everything comes to him from HASHEM, and his heart is humbled before HASHEM, “and he returns and is healed,” (Yishaya 6:10).

The transformation has the power to bring salvation, because the decree was not intended for this new person, whose innermost being has changed.

In the words of *Sefer Ha'ikarim*:

When evil is decreed by HASHEM against a person, it is decreed when he is on a specific level of evil or having done certain preparation. When that level or that preparation changes, the decree will certainly change for good or for bad...

This explains the benefit of prayer and the power of good deeds. The worshiper prepares himself to accept the influx of good or to nullify the evil that was decreed against him, since he changed himself from the level of evil he was on... If you prepare your heart for prayer and improve your actions, there is no doubt that through prayer and proper deeds you will escape these troubles.

This explains how prayer and improving one's deeds help to nullify the decree at any time. Similarly, our Rabbis said, “Crying out is good for a person, whether before the sentencing of the decree or after the sentencing,” (Rosh Hashanah 16a).

Do not ask how the will of HASHEM can change through prayer, because that was the will of HASHEM from the beginning. The decree would only be carried out if the person remains on the same level, in

²³⁰ This is the reason that according to some of the commentaries, Yonah tried to flee from prophesying and run to Nineveh.

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the same reality. However, if the reality changes the decree also changes.

Prayer helps a person even if he was a sinner and not worthy of salvation, since the very act of praying with intent purifies him, and through this purification itself there is sometimes enough to save. For the person raises himself and places himself on a higher, elevated level, abandoning any thought of "My strength and my power," (Devarim 8:17) and enters a state of humility and simple faith.²³¹

Prayer is a transcendent act which raises the person to spiritual heights in which he is totally worthy of salvation and Heavenly assistance. Since this is the rule, it is completely clear why it is necessary to pray a great deal and to entreat HASHEM, for prayer is service of the heart in which a person is purified and reaches the correct recognition and spiritual heights.

The more a person prays the more the process of self-purification deepens, and the change becomes fundamental and more embedded in his personality.

The greater the person's transformation the greater the salvation, because the more he ascends spiritually the more he earns merit according to the principles of reward and punishment.

With the person's transformation for good the evil decrees are withheld from him because they were decreed for someone who wasn't on that spiritual level,²³² and he merits all the goodness set aside for someone who reached this spiritual level.

²³¹ Rav Goldwasser, in his above-mentioned book, adds and explains that prayer has the power to tear up an evil decree of the King according to the well-known words of *Nefesh Hachayim* (3:12):

When a person resolves in his heart to say, Behold HASHEM is the true God and there is no other power in the world beside Him... HASHEM will provide for him, because automatically all the forces and powers in the world will be nullified for him, and nothing at all will be able to act against him.

Rav Goldwasser adds that this is also the power of prayer, which contains the unification of HASHEM, that there is no other power in the world beside Him. In this way, the worshiper sets himself appropriately for the direct providence of HASHEM, and then there is nothing beside Him and nothing other than Him.

Since nothing bad comes from the Heavenly mouth, because HASHEM, blessed is He, is good and does good, by unifying His blessed name in prayer, the person is saved from all trouble and sorrow, and merits everything good.

²³² In the words of Rav Goldwasser in his book *Lesasson Ulesimcha, ma'amar 3*: "In this case he becomes worthy to be tested on another 'tractate' instead of the 'tractate of suffering.'"

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Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef summarizes the matter in *Yalkut Yosef*:²³³

Even though the attributes of the Holy One, blessed is He, are not like the attributes of humans, to rescind matters which were decreed, nevertheless, prayer recited with intent has the power to change decrees. Through prayer a person transforms himself and draws close to HASHEM, sanctifies and elevates himself and places his trust in HASHEM. Then his fate changes, because the decree was not made for such a person. Especially because HASHEM desires the prayers of Yisrael. Furthermore, the essence of prayer is only for a person to clarify in his mind that he is under HASHEM's control in everything. Then he will gain the fear and subjugation [before HASHEM].

'For We Trust in Your Great Mercy' – Do We?

Rabbi Shalom Noah Berezovsky, the Slonimer Rebbe in his book *Nesivos Sholom*²³⁴ adds and stresses in this regard that apart from the fact that prayer is an expression of faith in HASHEM, demonstrating that the person is

²³³ *Yalkut Yosef: Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 89:9; *Yalkut Yosef* (2004 edition) *Tefillah* vol. 1 p. 35 *siman* 89 note 1; *She'aris Yosef* vol. 2 p. 243.

²³⁴ Rabbi Shalom Noah Berezovsky, the Slonimer Rebbe in his book *Nesivos Sholom* vol. 1, *Prayer, ma'amar* 2 (p. 186-187). See also in his book *Nesivos Sholom* on Devarim, Parshas Shoftim (p. 24) on the verse, "When you go out to battle against your enemies... You shall not fear them," (Devarim 20:1):

The verse speaks here of two battles which depend upon each other – the battle against the enemy and the battle a person has with his evil inclination. The Torah reveals a wonderful cure to be saved from all suffering, both in the spiritual battle against the evil inclination, the enemy of the spirit, and also in the physical battle with the enemies who constantly rise against the Jewish people. The power of trust is a wonderful cure against all these oppressors.

As the liturgical poet writes, "To make known that all those who hope in You will never be ashamed and all those who shelter in You will never be embarrassed."

When a Jew has true trust in God, through believing and feeling, "You have loved us, HASHEM our God, with an eternal love; You have great and further compassion on us," this is the cure and the answer for all situations.

As Rambam writes (*Hilchos Melachim* 7:15):

Once he enters the fray of battle, he should rely on the Hope of Yisrael, the Savior in times of trouble...

"I am HASHEM, your God," includes two articles of faith – the faith that I am HASHEM and the faith that I am your God. A Jew must believe with complete faith in the eternal covenant between the Holy One, blessed is He, and the Jewish people, that HASHEM is your God. Because of this My Help can come even in a hopeless situation. A Jew has trust in HASHEM, your God', who helps him in every situation... Even when you have no merit but only "Hear O Yisrael," you will still not be defeated. Even if you have no merit but you have the power of trust of "Hear O Yisrael, HASHEM is our God, HASHEM is One," that power overcomes all obstructions.

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completely dependent on Him for every act and need, prayer is also an expression of the necessary trust in HASHEM, which is the main cause for prayers to be accepted and for a person's desires and requests to come true. He writes:

Even when the accusing [angels] prevent the salvation, true trust is like a wonderful cure that breaks brass doors and iron locks. Since the worshiper is like a son that puts his trust in the mercy of his father, even though he does not deserve it and is not worthy, all accusations against him are nullified...²³⁵

We find this idea in *Midrash Shochar Tov* on the verse, "O my God, I have trusted in You, let me not be ashamed," (Tehillim 25:2). This can be compared to a traveler who came to the city of the king... The king's guards found him and began hitting him. He said to them, "Don't hit me because I'm one of the king's household." They took him before the king. The king asked him, "Are you acquainted with me?" "No," he replied. "Then why," asked the king, "did you say that you are part of my household?" He replied, "I am not from your household, but I trust in you and your great kindness. I knew that if I come up to you, you would have mercy on me." The king told his guards, "Since he trusted in me, let him go."

Similarly, King David said, "My God, in You I trusted. Let me not be ashamed." The explanation is that as much as the power of prayer is helpful due to the attachment to HASHEM it affords and thus mollifies strict judgments, the power of complete trust is far greater. This is because complete trust is at the highest level of cleaving to HASHEM. Hence, if I trusted in You, let me not be ashamed.

Therefore, faith and trust are the foundations which ensure that a person's prayer will be accepted.

²³⁵ *Nesivos Sholom* points out that this idea is alluded to in Tehillim (22:1-5): My God, my God, why have you abandoned me... I call to You by day, but You do not answer, and by night I am not silent... Our ancestors trusted in You, they trusted, and You saved them... They trusted in You and were not confounded."

This means that at a time when HASHEM's countenance is hidden, which is then a time of, "I call to You by day, but You do not answer, and by night I am not silent," there is one solution. That is the path of, "Our ancestors trusted in You, they trusted, and You saved them." For the poet writes about trust that, "All those who hope in You will never be ashamed and all those who shelter in You will never be embarrassed."

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However, the power of prayer as an expression of trust seems to raise a difficult challenge. Is a person commanded concerning every event that occurs to him to have trust and expect that it will be good? Have we not cited already the words of the Talmud and the early commentaries that one who expects his requests to be answered will not merit to a response for his prayer?

On the other hand, if he does not trust that HASHEM will help him, what is his trust?

It is necessary to understand in depth the concepts of faith and trust, and in this way to understand trust in prayer.

1. *Chazon Ish* in his book *Emunah Ubitachon* (2:1) explains that the meaning of the mitzvah of trust in HASHEM is not to believe that in every case the end will be good. Rather the principle is to believe that everything that happens to us, whether for good or for bad, is from HASHEM. He writes:
Many people have a classic error in their hearts about the concept of trust. The concept of trust described by the Chasidim as a praiseworthy and fundamental attribute has become confused. Some people think they are obligated to believe that every event that happens to them, and every time they face an uncertain future, with two possible outcomes, a good one or another, that it will certainly be good. They think that if they are uncertain and concerned that it may be the opposite of good, they lack faith. This is not the correct meaning of faith, because unless the future fate has been prophesied it is uncertain. Who can know the justice of HASHEM and His rewards?
Rather the concept of faith is to believe that there is no happenstance in the world; that everything that happens under the sun comes from HASHEM's proclamation.
2. In other words, according to *Chazon Ish*, when a person stands before an uncertain future, and is in doubt whether it will be good for him – whether he will find blessing and success, or whether his portion will be pain and suffering – he has no guarantee that he will have only good and kindness surrounding him.
There is no source for trusting that HASHEM will specifically do only good for him and not the opposite. The future is only revealed in advance to prophets, and anyone who is not a prophet cannot know what Divine Providence decreed for him and in which path he will be taken.

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So, what is the concept of trust in HASHEM? *Chazon Ish* answers that a person must rely and trust that even if bad things happen to him, they do not occur in an arbitrary manner, for no purpose, by chance. Rather everything flows from Divine Providence, which directs the person in all his ways according to what is fit for him in such a way that in the overall Heavenly accounting it is for his benefit.

So, for example, it may be that his overall goodness requires him to suffer certain financial troubles so that he will be cleansed and saved from even worse physical or mental suffering.

The knowledge that there is nothing happenstance in the world and that any danger that faces a person is from HASHEM, removes the person's fear and gives him the strength to believe in the possibility of salvation. There is nothing that can prevent HASHEM from saving him from the evil he faces, thus there is no propensity that he will suffer evil instead of good.

This knowledge, however, leads the person to turn and pray to the One who placed him in this awful danger.

However, this still does not explain the *Nesivos Sholom*'s claim that, "True trust is like a wonderful cure which breaks brass doors and iron locks," (cited above). What guarantees a person that his prayers will be accepted, when, based on the principles of trust in HASHEM, there is no trust in certain outcomes? True faith means that even if the outcome seems to be bad (in his eyes) it is not arbitrary but comes from HASHEM, Who is a merciful and kind father, so that, "This, too, is for good."

3. Complementing the words of *Chazon Ish* is the well-known statement of the Rabbis that the Holy One, blessed is He, has mercy on His creations and wants what is best for them. Everything that HASHEM does with a person is done for the person's benefit. We find the following in the Talmud (Berachos 60b):

Rav Huna said that Rav said in the name of Rabbi Meir, and he also taught the words in the name of Rabbi Akiva:

A person must always be accustomed to say, "Everything that the Merciful One does, He does for good. Like the incident of Rabbi Akiva when he was going on a journey.

Rabbi Akiva came to a certain city. He looked there for a place to stay, but nobody would host him.

Rabbi Akiva said, "Everything that the Merciful One does is for good."

He went and slept in a field.

He had with him a rooster, a donkey and a candle.

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The wind came and blew out the candle. A cat came and ate the rooster. And a lion came and devoured the donkey.

Rabbi Akiva said, "Everything that the Merciful One does is for good."

On that very night a legion of soldiers came and took the residents of the city captive.

Rabbi Akiva said, "Did I not tell you that everything that the Holy One, blessed is He, does is all for good?"

If Rabbi Akiva would have lodged in the city, he would have been taken captive. HASHEM performed kindness for Rabbi Akiva when he was unable to find a place to stay in the city and was forced to sleep in a field. Similarly, if the soldiers would have heard the rooster or the donkey, or if they would have seen the lit candle, they would have found him in the field. So, it turns out that the pain and suffering saved him from even a greater loss, and everything was for good.

In these words of the Rabbis we find an additional aspect of perceiving existence thorough the eyes of one who believes that everything is from HASHEM. One who believes and trusts that HASHEM knows the entirety of existence, including what a human with limited perspective is unable to see.

This is how to of perceive matters beyond the limited human viewpoint, with knowledge of the future which a person cannot know. Since he knows that the suffering which befalls him is from HASHEM, Who is good and does good to all, the person can see in everything the possibility that it will ultimately turn out that it was done for his benefit.²³⁶

²³⁶ Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner in his book *Pachad Yitzchak* on Chanukah, *ma'amar* 2 §5 explains that words with similar roots show that there is a common denominator between the phenomena expressed through those words. (Rav Hutner discusses the root "hodah" which means to admit to facts or to guilt, and to give thanks for good things. See also *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Shavuos*, *ma'amar* 8 §6 where he discusses the root "pe'er." Also, *ibid.* *ma'amar* 18§5 with regard to the root "zemer.")

Based on this principle, Rabbi Dovid Kohen (Rosh Yeshiva of "Knesses Yisrael – Hevron") cited in Rav Yitzchak Goldwasser's book *Lesasson Ulesimcha ma'amar* 13) explains that the root "nachem" can mean support and reviving hope – like "nichum aveilim," "comforting mourners." The root can also mean "regret" as in the verse, "And HASHEM regretted that He had made man," (Bereishis 6:6).

The two concepts derive from the same source, because a person's comfort comes when he stops from seeing events as destructive and starts seeing them as building. This transformation in a person's attitude to the events which happen to him is the source for

comfort and hope. A person is comforted when he understands that even something which happened to him and which appears now to be bad, can ultimately lead to a blessing. With hindsight it will be "Blessed is the One Who is good and does good."

A tangible example of this is in the story of Rabbi Akiva that we cited from Berachos 60b. He said that everything God does is for good. But at the time, each one of those events that happened would have seemed bitter and may have appeared to be God punishing him. Rabbi Akiva, who did not know the future, encountered the worst of humanity when the people of the city refused to host him, and was forced to sleep outside in a field. He encountered the evil of nature when the little that he had was lost. But after the fact, when he looked at the full picture, it turns out that it was not punishment happening there, but kindness and mercy and great goodness from God to him.

See also Pesachim 50a:

Rabbi Acha bar Chanina said: "The World to Come is not like this world. In this world one says on good tidings, 'Blessed is the One who is good and does good,' and on bad tidings one says, 'Blessed is the True Judge.' But in the World to Come everything is 'the One who is good and does good.'"

Tzlach asks, how can it be that there will be bad tidings in the World to Come on which to recite, "The One who is good and does good"? And if we are referring to events that happened in the past, why does he say that in the future the blessings will change, if it refers to things which happened beforehand, and which were bad tidings at the time?

He answers using a concept that he heard as a child from the famous preacher Rabbi Ephraim, from the city of Brod:

The late preacher said that the verse states, "I give thanks to You, HASHEM, for You were angry with me," (Yishaya 12:1). The question is how can one give thanks for a punishment? Because "From the mouth of the Most High evil does not come," (Eicha 3:38). Nothing bad comes from God, but everything is for good.

Even the afflictions that come to a person are not bad, but good – they cleanse him and subjugate his evil inclination within him, to purify his soul so that he will merit to the World which is eternally good. However, in this world a person doesn't understand the matter properly and it seems to him as if it is bad.

It is like a sick person who gets a bandage which causes him pain. The foolish patient cries out that he wants the bandage removed, but the wise one bears it gladly. So too with the suffering of the wicked – it is a bandage for them. However, after his death, when he sees and understands the true good, and similarly in the future, he will say on that day, "I give thanks to You, HASHEM, for You were angry with me." He gives thanks retroactively for the fact that God grew angry with him temporarily, to give him ultimate good.

This is the meaning of the statement. Here, in this world, one says on bad tidings, "Blessed is the True Judge," because the person thinks that it is some form of punishment. But in the World to Come everything is from the One who is good and does good. In other words, the person sees retroactively that everything was HASHEM's attribute of kindness, and he should have recited the blessing of "the One who is good and does good."

We see things with limited vision. We think that punishment is bad for us. However, with hindsight, retrospectively, we see that the overall Heavenly calculation did not do bad things for us and the punishment was for our benefit. Therefore, in the future we will not recite "Blessed is the True Judge" on bad things that happened to us as judgment, but rather, "Blessed is the One who is good and does good," on the kindness that HASHEM did for us. With regard to this, the verse states, "The pain of the wicked is great, but one who trusts in HASHEM will be surrounded with loving-kindness," (Tehillim 32:10). In other words, the

wicked person sees everything as pain, but one who trusts in HASHEM waits for the completion of the cycle of events, so that he can see that everything was kindness.

Similarly, we find in the Ramchal's book *Da'as Tevunos* §128:

In truth you will see that even regarding the events of the world evil is not found but in partial things before they have come together to complete the matter. There is nothing complete which is bad. Since we know that everything that God does is only very good, anything that seems lacking in one respect, its other conditions complete the deficiency and make it complete. The deficiency was only because the matter was not fully completed. Once it is complete it will certainly be good.

This is seen to be true from the events themselves. From the universal occurrences that constitute the full circuit of world events the matter will become clear that it is so. At the end of everything, the promise of, 'I give thanks to God because You grew angry with me,' will be fulfilled, because then all the components of what transpired will be completed, and the outcome will be only true good.

In other words, after the entire picture is revealed to us, we will be able to understand the essence of each event, and then it will be clear that it was good and that there was no punishment, but kindness and benevolence of God with His creations.

This is alluded to in the essence of the Tetragrammaton YHWH – which is a name of mercy. The meaning of this name appears in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 5 -- "That He was, is and will be."

The reason is that once the cycle of time is completed and the circuit of world events is completed, it will become completely clear that the past and the present were not judgement, but mercy and kindness from God, Who is merciful and benevolent, Who wants only to do good for His creatures.

Similarly, the verse, "Hear O Yisrael, HASHEM is our God, HASHEM is One," teaches that the attribute of mercy (HASHEM) and the attribute of justice (ELOHIM) when viewed from the perspective of past present and future are one. There is nothing that happens in our world without God's individual Providence, the purpose of which is to do good for a person and to bring him to the ultimate happiness and purpose of his creation.

Similarly, the words of the Talmud (Ta'anis 30a) are understood:

Rabbi Elazar said: In the future HASHEM will make a circle for the righteous and He will sit among them in the Garden of Eden, and each one will point with his finger, as the verse states, "It shall be said on that day, 'this is our God, for Whom we waited, and He saved us; this is HASHEM, for Whom we waited, let us rejoice and be happy at His salvation,' (Yishaya 25:9)."

What is the message hidden in this description of a circle where HASHEM sits with the righteous surrounding Him? This can only mean that in the future the circle will be completed and all the righteous who believed in HASHEM will be able to point with their fingers and show that from the perspective of the entirety of creation each of them did the right thing all his life that he lived by his faith. The harsh judgment that each suffered was not punishment but benevolence and kindness. The circle represents the completion of the circuit from beginning to end, and HASHEM sits in the middle, at the center of everything. Because He is the reason for every cause and effect. At that time the righteous will be able to show with their fingers and say on that day, "This is our ELOHIM (justice), for Whom we waited, and He saved us."

The attribute of justice itself saved us through our punishments, and in fact, "This is HASHEM (mercy) for Whom we waited" – it was not the attribute of judgment, but it was HASHEM, so-called because it is the attribute of mercy and kindness.

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With this knowledge and faith, one can find great consolation. This can prevent the sense of bitterness which comes from the thought that he is in the hands of cruel, random, fate.

If everything has a reason and a purpose, and things are also ultimately leading to the person's benefit, he can go with the sense of trust that he is not walking alone on the paths of his life. He has Someone walking with him, worrying about what is best for him.

To a certain extent this explanation of trust in HASHEM is like the case of a father who forces his son to drink bitter medicine, which is necessary for his health. The child, with his limited understanding does not know at the time why he must suffer. But it is important that he should know and believe that the actions are not arbitrary but are done for his benefit and out of love and care.

The child's trust in his parent that he will do what is best for him and not do things which are arbitrary, is very important and also makes it easier for him. True, it will not make the medicine any less bitter, but the knowledge that he is loved and cared for cheers him up, makes it easier and helps him to bear the pain.

4. Indeed, along the lines of this explanation we find that a person should not have faith that his Father in Heaven will not force him to drink the bitter medicine, the cup of poison, down to the final drop. Trust is not that he will only experience good and pleasantness. Rather, trust is that even if things are bad and bitter, it is directed from Divine Providence with the purpose of ultimately being for our benefit, according to the overall Heavenly calculation, which is beyond our understanding. After a tragedy or suffering happens, Heaven forbid, this faith is enough to strengthen a person's spirit whose fate has been bitter to him, because the matter comes from HASHEM and is intended for his benefit.²³⁷

²³⁷ Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pequda points out in his book *Chovos Halevavos (sha'ar cheshbon hanefesh* chap. 3 §27): "The contemplation a person must have in his mind when something bad, Heaven forbid, happens to him or his possessions, is to accept everything with joy, because, 'All the paths of HASHEM are kindness and truth for those who guard His covenant and His statutes,' (Tehillim 25:10). For when something bad happens to a person – if it is to forgive his sins, it is truth. And if it befalls him from God to give him good reward for bearing the test, it is kindness. Therefore, my brother, do not forget to constantly direct your thoughts to this. Then your hope to God will be fortified, and it will be easier for you

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Does One Who Prays 'Reject Suffering'?

1. If there is a reason or purpose in suffering per se, the question needs to be asked: Why do we pray to the Holy One, blessed is He, to change our situation to better conditions of redemption, healing, livelihood etc.? How do we know that this thing is not indeed good for us? Perhaps it is better for a person that his requests are not fulfilled, since it may be "wealth kept for a person for his detriment" (see *Koheles* 5:12). Would it not be better for him to say, "This too is for good," or "Everything that the Merciful One does he does for good"? How does a person know that it would not be preferable for him to have his sins wiped away in this world so that it will be good for him in the World which is entirely good? Or perhaps he needs to withstand and pass the test?
Even with regard to suffering that befalls a person the Rabbis testified (*Bereishis Rabba* 9:8): " 'Behold it is very good,' (Bereishis 1:31) – this refers to suffering." This is because the purpose of this suffering is to bring about atonement for the person so that he is cleansed and is saved from worse evil in this world or the World to Come.
Why, then, is a person commanded to pray every time there is trouble and to ask for mercy from HASHEM to remove it from him if it is what HASHEM has graced him with by the attribute defined as, "Very good"?
2. Indeed, we explained the "mechanism" of prayer, and we learned that the decree was decreed against a person who acted badly, but through prayer he improves his ways and transforms himself. However, how does he know that this request for mercy is truly good for him?

The answer to this can be found in our words above. Prayer is a return to HASHEM and it itself has the merit to transform the person for better. Through this, the need for the suffering and deprivation becomes redundant.

Rabbi Yitzchak Goldwasser, in his book *Lesasson Ulesimcha (ma'amar 3)* resolves the question in greater depth. HASHEM has two attributes and different ways of behaving. These are referred to by the Rabbis as "The throne of judgement" and "The throne of mercy." A master who judges his servants is not like a father judging his son.

when the pain of the misfortune and the bitterness of the burden is on your mind. This will show your acceptance of the decrees of God and your consolation and trust in Him..."

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Through prayer, which is defined as a request for mercy, we awaken HASHEM's love for us.²³⁸ HASHEM then moves from the throne of judgement to the throne of mercy.

This is explained in the Talmud (Sukkah 14a): "Just as a pitchfork turns the produce in the silo from one place to another, so the prayers of the righteous turn the mind of HASHEM from the attribute of cruelty (of strict justice by which a master judges his servant) to the attribute of mercy (by which a father judges his son)."

Rav Goldwasser explains that piece of Talmud as follows:

A sinful act has two aspects. There is the rebellion against the One who commands it (HASHEM), and destruction to the soul of the one who is commanded (the sinner).

A master becomes angry that his servant has ignored his command; a father is hurt at the destruction of his son's soul.

Therefore, it may be that through the same sin a master will beat his servant with appropriate strength according to strict justice, while a father may beat his son gently out of mercy because the destruction of his son awakens the mercy of the father...

Now we can understand well the act of requesting mercy. Like a pitchfork which turns over the produce in the silo, so prayer turns over HASHEM's perspective, from that of a master looking at the sin to that of a father looking at the sinner.

This is with regard to the punishment, and so too with regard to being tested. From a son one asks for less proof that he is faithful. It is possible to decide that he deserves the World to Come based on an easier test.

Therefore, even if it is definite and certain that in our current situation these are the fitting "tests" and "cleansing," they alone are what, "He does it for good," with regard to our situation, nevertheless there is room to pray for our situation to change to a better one...

²³⁸ The Aramaic translation of the Hebrew word "love" is "mercy." "Because HASHEM, your God, loves you," (Devarim 23:6) is translated by Onkelos as, "Because HASHEM, your God, has mercy on you."

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True that the spiritual situation where the worshiper is in requires suffering, poverty etc., through which he suffers or is tested. And if indeed he will not elevate himself and raise himself up, there is no reason, and it would even be foolishness to ask HASHEM to remove the suffering which is the medicine he needs in that situation.

Indeed, the real contents of any entreaty forthcoming from suffering and deprivation is not to remove the suffering or the poverty, but to enter into a spiritual situation such that the person no longer requires these medicines and tests.²³⁹

Here is the explanation laid out in an orderly fashion:

1. Initially we explained that the purpose of prayer is to transform the person's spiritual state, so that he will change from one that is worthy of punishment to one that improved his ways and changed his definition. In his new, corrected, situation there is no more room for punishment and he is worthy of salvation.
2. This explanation is not sufficient, because sometimes it is good for a person to withstand certain tests and to live through a certain level of suffering. If he changes his behavior and prevents the punishment or test, he will not merit the ultimate good set aside for those who withstand these tests.
3. Here there is room for a deeper answer, according to which the essence of prayer is not only requesting a person's needs and entreating for his salvation, but also standing before HASHEM and asking for closeness.

Therefore, once a son stands before HASHEM and asks to be returned to the closeness of his Father as it was originally, then his

²³⁹ Rav Goldwasser points out that although the purpose of prayer is to transform a person, so that he will no longer need to suffer, the diction used in prayer mentions the "suffering," and not the spiritual elevation which is the reason for removing the suffering. This is because the suffering is what hurts us and the prayer, which is the service of the heart, reminds us that it should be through crying out in pain.

Rav Goldwasser clarifies this point with an analogy: A young man whose arm was broken and, in a cast, suffered a lot with the cast in the summer. At the end of his prayer he added a plea, 'Master of the Universe, please free me from this cast. I can no longer bear it.' His friend heard his whispered prayer and yelled at him, 'How can you ask that? Do you not know that without the cast you may lose your hand completely, Heaven forbid? A broken arm must be in a cast.'

The youth with the broken arm replied, 'Did I say that I wanted my arm to remain broken without a cast? I mean that I wanted God to heal my broken arm and then remove the cast, obviously.' 'If so,' asked his friend, 'why did you pray for the cast to be removed and not for the arm to be healed?' 'Because that is what hurts me and troubles me,' his friend replied.

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spiritual state improves even further than what it was before the sin, until in this situation he no longer needs the test or the punishment at all in order to attain closeness to HASHEM. In other words, not only does he not need that punishment in order to return to do good, but his spiritual situation is even more elevated than it was before the sin. He attains tremendous closeness to HASHEM, when the Holy One, blessed is He, has mercy on him for the fact that he grew distant from HASHEM, and now wants to return to his Father with all his strength and seeks closeness. In this situation of closeness to HASHEM and the loving relationship of a "Father and son," there is no longer any need for tests or suffering, because the person has already climbed to the peak and conquered it.²⁴⁰

'You Gave a Banner to Display to Those Who Fear You'²⁴¹

'Test After Test'²⁴²

1. However, prayer does not always remove the need for a test. There are times when it is impossible to attain through prayer that what could be attained through withstanding a test. So, for example, let us imagine that Avraham Avinu asked for mercy, and prayed with all his heart that he should not have to sacrifice his son – and he withheld from himself and from his son the test of the *Akeidah*. How then would we be able to come in every generation to plead for salvation without the merit of this act of the Patriarchs?

²⁴⁰ See the words of the Vilna Gaon in his commentary to Shir Hashirim 1:17.

Rav Goldwasser ad loc. explains the words of the Rabbis that the phrase, "You have loved us with a great love, HASHEM our God," was said about the exodus from Egypt. Whereas, the phrase, "Great mercy and additional compassion have you bestowed on us," relates to the fact that God forgave us for the sin of the Golden Calf at the time He commanded us to make the Tabernacle so that He could dwell among us. This was something additional that we did not have before.

So, it seems as if the sinner is rewarded! Through the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jews received extra kindness, a Tabernacle in which God's Divine Presence resides openly among the Children of Yisrael. How can that be? Does it make sense that specifically through a sin the Jews merited to greater love and stronger closeness to God? It must be because the spiritual destruction caused by the sin aroused greater mercy on them, and with the perspective of a father to his son who was distant from him and wanted to draw close again, they attained a tremendous spiritual achievement -- "In the place where the penitents stand the completely righteous are unable to stand."

²⁴¹ Tehillim 60:6.

²⁴² *Bereishis Rabba*, Parshas Vayera 55:1

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Indeed, the sacrifice of Yitzchak brought merit and acquired spirituality for all generations. Furthermore, our prayers throughout the generations derive their nourishment from that act and we pray to be saved in its merit.

It is beyond what could have been attained through prayer and it is something which was acquired for all generations that cannot be substituted and replaced.²⁴³

Therefore, *Rosh* (in his *Orchos Chayim* §49) guides us: "Want what your Creator wants."

In other words, a person must pray and request from HASHEM that he will be saved from all trouble and pain, affliction and illness. However, if HASHEM does not listen to his prayer, he must believe that the matter is done for his own good, and that even through pure prayer he was not able to attain his appropriate spiritual level without experiencing what happened to him.

2. Even so, a person needs to pray for salvation also at the time of the test. We find this in the Talmud (Yevamos 64a): "Why were our matriarchs [initially] barren? Because HASHEM desires the prayers of the righteous"

In other words, the Patriarchs were tested with the test of being barren, and they eventually nullified it through their prayers.

Why does HASHEM desire the prayers of the righteous? Because through prayer they passed on to future generations the measure of merit that they were able to attain through their tests or through their suffering. The Patriarchs taught us that it is possible to ask HASHEM to alter the test – through prayer.

3. The Rabbis taught us concerning the verse, "Yitzchak entreated the Lord opposite his wife," (Bereishis 25:21) that the Hebrew word "entreated" (*vaye'tar*) is similar to the Hebrew word for "pitchfork" (*'atar*). This indicates that prayer is like a pitchfork that turns over hay. It is a request for mercy, and it causes HASHEM to move from His throne of judgement to His throne of mercy.

²⁴³ There is a story in the book *Mo'ach Velev* about Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, that he related the following at his daughter's wedding: "I was summoned by the Japanese army in Shanghai... I knew what they wanted – they wanted to know what three hundred students who were not working were living off... Everyone knew – from the third floor nobody returns alive. I was terrified to death as I went up there... As I walked I prayed. They heard what I said: 'Master of the universe, if you choose me as a sacrifice, I go willingly... but if I return from there alive, Master of the universe, I ask you for three things...'"

In other words, if God chose him as a sacrifice, then there is no place for prayer. But if the purpose of the suffering (the deathly fear at the incident) was to experience some "payment" in order to gain something, then also standing and praying with the recognition that, "There is nothing beside Him" will contribute to the same result.

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Likewise, He who answered the prayers of the Patriarchs, will answer us, if only we would be wise enough to request closeness to HASHEM and the mercy of a Father to His children, as the Patriarchs did.

Now pay attention, that when a righteous person prays to the Holy One, blessed is He, to remove his barrenness, it appears as though the barrenness was the cause of the prayer. In fact, however, the purpose of the barrenness was only in order to lead to prayer. Thus, it turns out that the longed-for prayer is the cause of the barrenness.²⁴⁴

However, we know our level and we are not certain of ourselves that we will properly withstand tests, so we pray that we should never be tested like this. As we say in our prayers, "Do not bring us to a test nor to scorn."

Summary

The lesson of what has been said is that the essence of prayer is a person's recognition that there is nothing other than HASHEM and that a person is completely dependent on HASHEM for his entire existence. A person has no ability to achieve anything without Divine assistance.

A person only makes an effort, but the accomplishment is not his, for everything he does is dependent on HASHEM.

²⁴⁴ Rabbi Goldwasser explains that if the trouble was for the sole purpose of prayer, like the barrenness of the Patriarchs, then when they prayed, and the purpose was achieved, there is no further reason for them to be barren and automatically they would be saved.

But that doesn't seem to be the case, based on the continuation of the Talmud there. For immediately after Rabbi Yitzchak said that our forefathers were barren because God desired their prayers, the same Rabbi Yitzchak continues and says (regarding the same prayer through which they were saved from barrenness), "Why are the prayers of the righteous likened to a pitchfork? Just as a pitchfork turns over produce from one place to another, so the prayers of the righteous turn God's attributes from the attribute of anger to the attribute of mercy."

This is incredible, because the barrenness was apparently not given to the Patriarchs because of God's attribute of anger but because God desires the prayers of the righteous. If so, the prayers did not turn God from the attribute of anger to the attribute of mercy, but rather removed the very reason for the barrenness.

Therefore, we must say that the desire of God for the prayers of the righteous is a reason that He acts toward them with the attribute of anger (strict justice), in order to force them to pray. In other words, from the perspective of the righteous their prayers are the same as prayer from suffering, but they would not see that suffering if God did not desire their prayers. Since God does desire their prayers, He judges them with anger and therefore they were punished to be barren.

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Prayer is the clear act of faith which purifies a person and draws him closer to HASHEM. This purification can itself change the evil decree and bring about the desires that a person requests from HASHEM.

However, it does so much more.

Prayer is not only a request for his needs, but also primarily to produce a greater closeness to HASHEM and thereby change HASHEM's interaction with him from the attribute of judgement to the attribute of mercy.

Through prayer not only does a person transform his spiritual state and his definition, in such a way that he will not receive punishment, but his prayer also transforms the way HASHEM treats him. Thus, HASHEM will relate to him and change the way He looks at him, from the viewpoint of a master who looks at the sin and becomes angry that he rebelled against Him, to that of a father who sees the transgression of His son and becomes angry at the damage caused to His son's soul who became distant from Him.

We again find those two viewpoints when we think about the essence of prayer.

On the one hand, it is requests for a person's needs after he recognizes his total dependence on HASHEM – prayer as a request for mercy;

And on the other hand, creation is an intimate connection between man and HASHEM, and this is prayer as a substitute for the offering of the sacrifices (which is known to create a connection between a person and HASHEM).

This two-faceted approach was also in the previous chapters, as the distinction between the prayer, "*Shema koleinu*" (Hear our voices) which relates to prayer as a request for a person's needs and personal entreaty to fulfil his needs, and the prayer "*Retzei*" ("Have favor") in which we recite, "Have favor, Lord our HASHEM, on Your people Yisrael and their prayers... And accept their prayers with love and favor."

This service of the Jewish people creates a closeness to HASHEM and changes HASHEM's interaction with a person from the attribute of judgment to the attribute of mercy – to love and favor.

So even this analysis of the essence of prayer led us to the same fundamental distinction that we found in the previous chapters, regarding the fundamental obligation to stand in prayer.

Chapter Six: Communal Prayer

Communal Prayer

Even though each individual is commanded to pray in every situation, we find that the Rabbis extolled the value of communal prayer.

The Talmud teaches (Pesachim 46a) that a person is obligated to travel up to four *mil* (4 km/2.4 mile) in the direction he is traveling in order to pray with a community or one *mil* (1 km/0.6 mile) in the opposite direction.

In Berachos 47b the Talmud states, "There was an incident with Rabbi Eliezer who entered a Synagogue but did not find ten men, so he freed his non-Jewish slave, [thereby making him Jewish] to complete the *minyan*." Even though in so doing he transgressed the positive mitzvah of, "You shall always enslave them," nevertheless, "A communal mitzvah is different," i.e. more important.

Rashi explains there, "To allow the community to fulfil its obligation of the *kedusha* prayer." Whereas *Tosafos* explain that Rabbi Eliezer freed the slave in order to complete the *minyan* which allows the people to fulfil the obligation of communal prayer.²⁴⁵

The *halakha* clearly states as an obligation that a person must strive to pray with a community rather than alone.

Rambam rules (*Hilchos Tefillah* 8:1) that, "A person must not pray alone if he is able to pray with a community."

Tur (*Orach Chayim* 90) writes, "A person should only pray in a synagogue with a community."²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ See *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* 267:79.

²⁴⁶ *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 90:9 rules as follows: A person should strive to pray in a synagogue with the community." The commentators discuss his language – why did he say strive, meaning that one should try to, rather than say that it is obligatory? They explain that the term "strive" is not applied to the obligation to pray with a community, but that one should prefer praying in a synagogue over praying with a *minyan* in a home. However, praying with a community is an absolute obligation. This is how *Mishna Berura* explains it ad loc. §27.

Another explanation is that the term "strive" does not come to limit the obligation but rather to add to it. The word "strive" means to "attempt with all his might." See *Minchas Shlomo* vol. 9 §6. He cites *Tur* who writes, "Therefore one should strive with all his might to pray with a community."

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Mishna Berura adds (90:28) that if a lot of people pray in the synagogue and there is a lot of disturbance due to the crowd such that it is impossible to hear either the prayer or the Torah reading, then is it preferable to pray in his home with a minyan (and if he must choose between prayer in a Synagogue alone or in his house with a *minyan* communal prayer is preferable.)²⁴⁷ This mean that if a person does not have a *minyan* in his home and must choose between praying alone with intent or communal prayer – he is obligated to pray with the community.

Everyone agrees that when a community gathers for prayer it is a fulfillment of the principle of, "In a multitude of people is the King's glory," (Mishlei 14:28). The power of the community is certainly greater than the power of an individual. Our Rabbis explain in *Toras Kohanim* (cited in Rashi on Vayikra 26:8):

"And five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand." – Are these ratios equal? One hundred should only be able to chase two thousand. However, there is no comparison between a few doing what the Torah says and many doing what the Torah says.

We also find that the people would get together in times of trouble to assemble the community and inspire it to repentance and prayer.

In the prayer for the new month we say, "That He fulfill all the desires of our heart in the merit of the prayers of the many."²⁴⁸

However, we need to explain the requirement to pray to HASHEM with a community in a fixed way, and the preference for communal prayer over individual prayer. If prayer is a conversation between a person and HASHEM, does one not deserve privacy when entreating Heaven? Especially at a time of trouble?

It would seem that a person who wants to turn to HASHEM and request his heart's desires would prefer to do so in private, without a community around him.

We find this at the beginning of the book of Shmuel when it describes Hannah's prayer for a child – and her prayer is the source for many laws of

²⁴⁷ He writes there that even if one will still be able to hear *kaddish* and *barchu* (separately from the prayers) communal prayer is still preferable.

²⁴⁸ It should be noted that this version of the prayer is in dispute – see *Encyclopedia Talmudis* "Birkas hachodesh."

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prayer. Hannah had no children, she was depressed and filled with tears. She went to pray in the house of HASHEM alone, without her family. Nobody was present when she prayed other than Eli the Kohen. The verse states, "And it was, as she prayed at length before HASHEM... And Hannah, she spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard," (I Shmuel 1:12-13).

There is no doubt that this was a personal prayer and we all understand the need for privacy at a time like that. Why, therefore, is a person commanded to pray specifically with a community? The relationship between a person and HASHEM includes personal requests, confession for sins, thanks for HASHEM's kindness, which are matters that the more intimate they are, the more they will be authentic and issue from the heart.

It appears that when a person stands among others, it limits his ability to unite with HASHEM. A person would be better off praying in a place where he stands alone²⁴⁹ and has a conversation with his Creator, without others watching him, and without feeling that others are looking at him.²⁵⁰ How can such an individualistic act as prayer be performed in a community?

²⁴⁹ Indeed, the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (*Likutei Moharan Tanina* §95, §98, §100) pave a path for the service of God through solitude and being alone with God when nobody sees him. This path depicts the authentic connection of an individual with his Creator most clearly. "Rabbi Nachman explained that solitude is the conversation of a person with God. It is the most personal, individual prayer which comes from the depths of the heart, embodying, 'A prayer of the afflicted, when he is faint, and pours out his complaint before God,'" (Tehillim 102:1). Rabbi Nachman likens the regular prayer to the known, well-trodden, public path, which has murderers and thieves lying in wait along it (these are foreign thoughts and accusers) because they already know about it. However, the private conversation between a person and God is like a new path, an unknown trail, which the bandits and highwaymen have not discovered, and therefore are not lying in wait there." (*Breslov Behind the Veil* p. 57. Look there further).

Look at what Rabbi Baruch Dov Povarsky wrote in *Bad Kodesh on Tanach* (Parshas Vayetze): "The concept of, 'Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field,' (Bereishis 24:63) is that the foundation of prayer is solitude and being alone with his Creator. This is why Yitzchak called the Temple Mount 'a field' (Pesachim 88a), a place of solitude."

Nevertheless, despite this, our Rabbis saw even greater importance in a person praying three times a day with a community.

²⁵⁰ An act that a person performs when he is seen by others does not express a true connection with HASHEM but is the complete opposite of service of God for its own sake. There is well-known Chasidic story of a person who served HASHEM with extra devotion when he heard footsteps in the adjacent room and thought that his mother-in-law was there, so that she could hear him "cleaving" to God. After a long time of doing so, he looked into the other room to see what impression his actions had made and saw that it was not his mother-in-law but a cat. So, his actions were done for the sake of a cat.

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Furthermore, in earlier chapters we discussed the essence of prayer as a direct connection between the worshiper and HASHEM. Prayer is when a person stands before HASHEM, with the recognition that everything comes from Him. Accordingly, a person stands before HASHEM, alone with HASHEM, and asks for all his requests and desires. Prayer is at its core an individualistic act which is different for each person -- each one according to his level or degree of closeness that he feels to HASHEM. People's requests are not identical, and their closeness to HASHEM is not the same. So how can the prayers of different individuals be included together and combine?

Furthermore, earlier we saw that the main ingredient of prayer is intent. Communal prayer would seem to take away from a person's intent in his prayer, because it is harder to concentrate when he does not pray at his own pace, unhampered, without being dependent on others.²⁵¹ A person is likely to find it difficult to concentrate when others are looking at him, and most certainly he will find it difficult to be authentic, to express honest, true emotion, when he is doing so in public.

The question can be strengthened: Why should a person not prefer to pray alone in private? His prayer has better intention when he is not forced to match the pace of the prayers of others, when he is not being watched by others.

Why does *halakha* say that one should prefer communal prayer, even though that comes at the expense of a person's ability to concentrate on his prayer? Is the event more important than the content of the prayer?

²⁵¹ It is true that Meiri in his commentary on Berachos 6a writes: "Whenever a person is able to pray in a synagogue he should do so because that is where intent of heart is to be found." It seems that he holds that in a place designated for prayer a person will have greater concentration than when he prays in his own home or anywhere else where there are things that distract his thoughts. However, we claim that having to pray with a community distracts one from praying with intent.

See, for example, Rabbi Shimshon Pincus's book *She'arim Batefillah* p. 17: "When involved in prayer the first principle is to find the appropriate time and freedom (and actually this is a general principle for success in any endeavor, because one who rushes to complete something under time pressure, who doesn't have the time or the patience for what he is involved in, will never be successful) ... At the times of prayer themselves, we have a lack of time which destroys our prayers, and which is destructive... We rush from the beginning of the morning blessings to the *Shemoneh Esrei* to manage to pray with the community. Sometimes we even skip parts of the prayer to catch up. If we do eventually manage to come on time and pray with the community, then the prayer leader sets the pace, fixing for us how long to spend on each section. If the prayer leader rushes, hurrying to finish, he drags the rest of the community along with him. The time allocated for the *Shemoneh Esrei*, and how to pray, is set for us by those around us. True, it is possible to go a bit slower, but there is a limit..."

The Fire-Offerings of Yisrael – And Their prayers

Communal Prayer Is Like a Daily Offering and Individual Prayer Is Like an Individual Offering

In the previous chapters we discussed the Talmud (Berachos 26b) that there are two foundations to prayer:

1. Prayer established by the Patriarchs – Prayer as a request for mercy, just as the Patriarchs placed their trust and worries in HASHEM and turned to Him especially in times of trouble. This is prayer as expressed in the blessing of, "Hear our voices... have mercy and kindness upon us and accept our prayers with mercy and favor... Blessed are You, HASHEM, Who hears prayer."
2. Prayer was instituted to correspond to the daily sacrifices – The act of prayer is imposed on a person as service of HASHEM, in place of the service of sacrifices. This is prayer as a mitzvah with a fixed time, and it is in place of the sacrifices in the Temple, as expressed in the blessing, "Find favor... in Your people Yisrael and in their prayers... and may the service of Your people Yisrael be constantly for favor."

Accordingly, it appears that individual prayer is a personal request for mercy. Everyone stands and concentrates on requesting his needs and is reviewed alone, like those climbing the ascent to Meron.²⁵²

The emphasis of the intent of the worshiper is on his personal needs – one focuses on requesting livelihood, another stresses the need for health, while a third wants intellect. This is the aspect of prayer as instituted by the Patriarchs. While the text of prayer is the same and was set by the Men of the Great Assembly, "the Merciful One desires the heart" – the heart and the intent are personal. This is prayer as service of the heart.

In contrast, communal prayer is not a collection of individual prayers reviewed "in one scanning." It is more than just a request for the needs of the community. Communal prayer is an offering of the community in place of communal sacrifices, as the Talmud states, "Prayers were instituted in place of the daily sacrifices."

When the Temple stood, individuals would bring personal sacrifices known as voluntary offerings -- such as burnt offerings, peace offerings,

²⁵² Rosh Hashanah 18a: "On Rosh Hashanah everyone in the world passes before Him like on the ascent to Meron... Rabbi Yochanan says: And everyone is reviewed in a single scanning."

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and thanksgiving offerings. As well, there were communal sacrifices that were specifically an obligation on the entire community and could not be brought by individuals. All Jews were equal partners in these sacrifices, and there were even “*ma’amados*” which were communal representatives of all the tribes who would preside over the sacrifice as representatives of all the Jews.

Two communal sacrifices, which had to be offered each day of the year, were the morning daily offering, which was the first sacrifice offered on the altar each day, and the daily evening offering, which was the last sacrifice each day. Within this “framework” of the two communal offerings all the individual sacrifices were brought.

It seems, that similarly, our communal prayer, which was instituted by the Men of the Great Assembly after the destruction of the First Temple when the service there ceased, is also arranged in a similar way to the framework of the service in the Temple where there is room for individual sacrifices only within the daily communal sacrifices offered on behalf of the entire Jewish people. Furthermore, it seems that only inclusion within the entirety of the Jewish people gives an individual the ability to stand and pray before HASHEM. This fits with what some are accustomed to say before their prayers, “Who am I that I should merit to pray before HASHEM, who is the great and awesome HASHEM while I am a sinner?”²⁵³

A person is able to stand and pray before HASHEM only because he states before prayer, “Behold I accept upon myself the positive mitzvah of ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’” (as Rabbi Chaim Vital teaches in *Pri Etz Chaim* in *Sha’ar Hakorbanos* chapter 2).

Let us examine the words of our Rabbis to find the reason that the framework of sacrifices and prayer is specifically through the inclusion within the community.

The Power of Communal Prayer

Communal Prayer Is Accepted Even Without Intent

The Talmud (Ta’anis 8a) teaches the benefit of communal prayer:

²⁵³ See *Shlah: Inyanei Tefillah*.

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Rabbi Ami said: A person's prayer is not accepted unless he places his soul in his palm, as the verse states, "Let us raise up our heart with our palms to Hashem in the heavens," (Eicha 3:41).

Rashi explains that, "His soul should be directed with his palms." In other words, just as his palms are raised upward in prayer, so his heart must be directed upward in prayer.

The Talmud challenges this from the words of Shmuel, who says that HASHEM always hears prayer. He derived this from the verse, "But they enticed Him with their mouth, and lied to Him with their tongue. For their heart was not true with Him, and they were not faithful in His covenant" (Tehillim 78:36-38) – Even so, He, being full of mercy, forgives sin."

Rashi explains that even though "their heart is not true with him," nevertheless "He, being full of mercy, forgives sin," and hears their prayers. If so, how can Rabbi Ami say that their prayers are only heard if they place their soul in their palms?

The Talmud answers: This is not difficult. One refers to an individual, the other refers to a community.

Rashi explains: In a community their prayers are heard, even if not everyone's heart is whole, as the verse states, "They enticed him with their mouth," in the plural. But an individual's prayer is not heard unless he has intent in his heart.²⁵⁴

In other words, when many people pray, the prayer of an individual is accepted even though he is unable to concentrate in prayer.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ See Berachos 31a: "One who prays must direct his heart to Heaven... This was Rabbi Akiva's custom, when he would pray with the community he would hurry and finish, so as not to trouble the community. But when he would pray alone, a person would leave him in one corner and find him [by the end of his prayers] in the opposite corner. Why? Because of his bowing and prostrating." *Iyun Yaakov* explains that Rabbi Akiva prayed quickly with the community, "Because in any event communal prayer is heard better even when they do not direct their hearts so much, which is not the case for an individual who must direct his heart for his prayer to be heard."

²⁵⁵ In addition to the special value of communal prayer, there is also a promise from the Holy One, blessed is He, that one who prays with a community, and cuts back on his work to do so, will not be harmed. God Himself, as it were, worries about his livelihood.

The *Kesav Sofer* writes in his commentary on Parshas Ekev 11:13 (s.v. *ule'ovdo*) on the verse, "I will give rain for your land in its time":

When God says and promises that, "I will give rain on your land in its time," this is because communal prayer takes a person away from his business and work.

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There is a similar idea in the Zohar (vol. 1 Bereishis, Parshas Vayechi p. 334a) on the verse, "He has turned to the prayer of the destitute, and has not despised their prayer," (Tehillim 102:18). The Zohar points out that the verse does not say, "pays attention" or "hears" the prayer of the destitute. Rather it states, "He turns." What does that concept mean? The Zohar answers that when we are involved in prayer as individuals, the Holy One, blessed is He, turns to examine us from every side. What intent was there in prayer and was it expressed favorably? Or perhaps it was a burden on the worshiper that he was glad to be rid of. Similarly, the identity of the worshiper is examined – is he worthy? What are his merits and what are his deeds?²⁵⁶

In contrast, regarding communal prayer the verse states, "and has not despised their prayer." The Holy One, blessed is He, accepts communal prayer even if the individuals do not have the proper intent. In the words of the Zohar:²⁵⁷

All the prayers of the world [when prayed communally] are prayers [which are heard and accepted. HASHEM does not check, as it were, whether they are worthy. Rather the prayers break through all the locks of the gates of prayer, and ascend before Him, because the power of the community is very great]. But the prayers of an individual do not ascend before the Holy King except with strong force [i.e. powerful

Sometimes he must go and work at the time set for prayer. When he prays alone he can pray whenever he wants, which is not the case when there is a set time for communal prayer. Rather, God does not allow any injury to come to him due to taking that time off from his work. God Himself will place a blessing on his business and it will become successful on its own.

This is the meaning of the verse, "And to serve Him with all your hearts," – that the service of the heart, which is prayer, should be with others. "And I will give you rain on your land in its time," And you will incur no loss through this.

Nevertheless, we must point out that *Mishna Berura* (4:59) writes that if communal prayer will cause a person financial loss, he is permitted to pray alone. See also the ruling of Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliashiv cited in *Avnei Yashpeh* p. 49. However, *Mishna Berura* also implies that if it is not a direct loss but only a lack of profit, that is not sufficient reason to miss communal prayer.

²⁵⁶ See *Eicha Rabba* 3:3:

The Rabbis say: If one comes after the community, his actions are examined in detail. To what can this be compared? To a king whose workers and family came to honor him. One of them came after the others, bringing a barrel of wine as a gift. The king said his barrel should be sealed. What caused this to happen to him? Because he came after the others. Similarly, if one prays after the community his deeds are examined. This is the meaning of the verse, "Even though I cry and call out He seals out (*sasam*) my prayer," (*Eicha* 3:8). The word "seals" (*sasam*) can also be read as, "who finished," (*shetam*). This happened because the community finished its prayer.

²⁵⁷ With the explanations of Rabbi Daniel Frisch in *Masok Midvash* in parenthesis.

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intent]. Because until that prayer ascends to be a crown in its place [a crown for the Holy One, blessed is He] the Holy One, blessed is He, watches over it and investigates it [as to whether it was recited with complete speech and proper intent], and investigates the sins and merits of that person [to see whether he is worthy to have his requests answered]. But He does not do that to prayers of the community, because in communal prayer, how many prayers are there which are not from righteous people, but they all ascend before the Holy One, blessed is He, and He does not examine the sins [of the worshipers].

What does communal prayer have which allows it to overcome the lack of intent? What is the reason that prayer is heard even if the individuals that make up the community do not have the correct intent in their prayers?

We saw earlier, in the chapter "Intent in prayer," that "prayer without intent is like a body without a soul." We investigated in depth why intent is an integral part of the definition of the mitzvah of prayer, the "obligation of the heart."

Why do all those concepts not also apply to communal prayer? Why is there a difference between a community and an individual? Prayer without intent lacks its essence -- it is like a body without a soul. Even if there are nine other men also standing there, also praying without intent, and reciting prayers without content, why is it not just a body without a soul?

This question is discussed in *The Kuzari* (*ma'amar* 3:18) after the Rabbi explains the concept of prayer to the King of the Khazars. He says to him, "Prayer is only heard if it is recited for a community or by a community, or by one who is in place of a community – but such a person is lacking in our times."

The King of the Khazars asks why communal prayer is preferable. Would it not be better for a person to be alone by himself when praying, and thereby his soul will be pure, and he will avail his thoughts entirely to the prayer. The Rabbi explains two advantages of communal prayer to him:

Notwithstanding your words, there are several advantages of communal prayer:

1. The community does not pray for things which cause damage for another, whereas an individual may pray for things which can

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cause damage to others.²⁵⁸ Such a prayer which includes within it a request which is not appropriate will not be answered. One of the conditions for prayer to be heard is that it must be beneficial for the world and not cause damage to it in any way.

2. It is rare for an individual to be able to complete his prayer without any mistake or sin.²⁵⁹

For this reason, the Rabbis instituted that an individual should pray with a community, and that it should be communal prayer which should have no fewer than ten men. In order that some of them will complete that which the others lack, unintentionally or intentionally,²⁶⁰ and between them all there will be a complete prayer with pure intention, and the blessing will come to them all and each individual will receive his part of it.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ In other words, when an individual prays for his own success, sometimes that comes at the expense of another. But when the community prays for his success, there is general good for all, with no damage to another. It is good for all.

²⁵⁹ In other words, an individual has great intent in what he needs at that time. The needs of others are not always in his head and so his intent for those parts of the prayer may be deficient.

²⁶⁰ According to this explanation, the benefit gained by communal prayer is conditional on the fact that in each and every prayer there is a different part lacking intent. In this way each person's prayer completes the others, because one prayer does not have the same deficiency as another. However, according to this, it turns out that if none of the ten men have intent in a certain section of prayer, that portion would not be accepted, and the communal prayer will not correct it. Even if you say that the entire community of Yisrael is judged as one in the communal prayer, you still need to find general intent among the prayers of all of them. This indeed is true.

So, Rashi writes (Ta'anis 8a): "In a community – their prayers are heard even if not all of their hearts are perfect." This implies that they, each and every one of them, are not perfect in their intent. However, clearly some of them must have intent, but not all of them.

See also the words of Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuva* 2:6): "In which case does this apply? To an individual. However, with a community, provided they repent and cry out with a whole heart they are heard. As the verse states, "Like HASHEM our God whenever we call out to Him," (Devarim 4:7).

Rabbi Akiva Eiger asks (in a marginal annotation on Rambam there) that the words of Rambam which say that the community is answered only if they cry out with a whole heart are apparently contradicted by the Talmud (in Ta'anis quoted above) which explains that a community is answered even if "their heart was not true with Him." Rabbi Akiva Eiger cites an answer of Rabbi Chayim Elfandri who says that even though a community does not need to have everyone praying with a perfect heart, but there must be at least one of them praying with a whole heart.

²⁶¹ *The Kuzari* explains that an individual is answered by the Divine influx that descends on the community, just as an individual has benefit from rain which falls on the land for the general population. He writes, "The Divine Influx is like rain which waters a certain land when that land is in general worthy of it. It is possible that it also includes someone who is not worthy of it among the individuals, but these individuals receive their success for the sake of the many. The opposite is also true. Rain will be withheld from a certain land because

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... One who prays for his own needs is like one who tries to strengthen his house alone but does not want to join with the other people in the city to help them strengthen the city walls. He will spend a lot but remain in danger. However, one who enters the community spends a little, but remains safe. For what one lacks another completes... and between them all, the inhabitants of the city will enjoy its benefits with a minimum expenditure, in a just manner and consent amongst them.

In other words, when there is improper prayer, the deficiency can be completed if another prayer is recited at the same time which does not have that deficiency. Therefore, provided that each prayer has a different deficiency, among the total there is nothing lacking.

The words of *The Kuzari* come to explain what is stated there earlier, that communal prayer is an essential condition for the prayer to be accepted. However, other sources imply that they do not see an obligation in the institution of communal prayer, but “advice” for prayer to be accepted.

So, for example, *Chofetz Chaim* writes:²⁶²

It is known that today the worries have grown great and it is almost impossible for a person to pray a single prayer with proper intent, unless he strives a lot for it. Every person really wants to have his prayers accepted above; if so, in any case he can be helped with this advice – to pray with a community, about which the verse says, “HASHEM does not despise the many,” (Iyov 36:5). Our Rabbis said about this that the Holy One, blessed is He does not despise the prayers of a multitude. This is not the case with individuals, where He examines closely every blessing to check whether he had the correct intent.

So, the words of the Talmud in Berachos contain “advice” inherent within communal prayer.²⁶³ However *Chofetz Chaim* does not view this as the main

the land in general is not worthy, but it is possible that it will include some individuals who are worthy, but it is withheld from them because of the majority. This is how God governs the world. God keeps the reward of those individuals for the World to Come, while in this world He gives them reward and does good for them with some good so that they can be recognized from their neighbors. Few, however, will be saved completely from a general punishment.”

²⁶² Rabbi Yisroel Meir Hakohen, *Shemiras Halashon* at the conclusion of the book, section 2; 1:8. See also *Letters of the Chofetz Chaim* letter 66 about the importance and value of communal prayer.

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reason that communal prayer was instituted. The rabbinic sources which explain the benefit of communal prayer do not link it to lack of intent among individuals. Rather they are profuse about the benefit of communal prayer in its own right.²⁶⁴

Even when speaking of a person who expends all his energy in his intent, the Rabbis did not “forgo” his obligation of communal prayer. Clearly, communal prayer was not established only to add that which an individual lacks in his intent. So, we must still answer our earlier question – why is communal prayer preferable *ab initio* to an individualized prayer? How does the essence of prayer as an individual act, with intent as its core, fit with the need to pray with a community, even if doing so interferes with an individual’s pure intent and authenticity of his act as a private connection between a person and HASHEM?

Furthermore, there is a logical difficulty here: According to the explanation of *The Kuzari’s* Rabbi, communal prayer benefits intent in prayer, because one person’s prayer completes the intent of another. However, when an individual is obligated to pray among others, that itself ruins the intent of the worshiper, because sometimes there is confusion there which distracts from his intent. How can the Rabbis say that to make up for a deficiency in intent one should pray in a way that distracts him further from our intent? We are forced to say that the obligation of communal prayer is not to improve intent - there must be another reason.

²⁶³ The Talmud in Sotah (33a) can be understood similarly. It asks: “Can prayer be recited in any language? But didn’t Rav Yehuda say a person should never ask for his needs in Aramaic? Because Rabbi Yochanan said that if one asks for his needs in Aramaic the angels do not pay attention to him, because the angels do not understand Aramaic.” The Talmud answers, “This is not difficult. One refers to an individual the other to a community.” Rashi explains, “An individual – needs help from the angels, but a community does not, as the verse states, ‘God does not despise the many,’ (Iyov 36:5) – he does not despise the prayers of the multitude.” Also, here we find that the Rabbis are giving “good advice” that a person should pray with a community, for then he does not require help from the angels. But that is not the reason for the obligation to pray with a community.

²⁶⁴ Look in Berachos (21b) where the Talmud entertains the possibility that a person who prayed as an individual and then enters a Synagogue and finds a community praying should pray again. Because individual prayer in comparison with communal prayer is as nothing, he is considered as one who has not prayed. As the Talmud states, “An individual compared to a community is like one who has not prayed.”

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The Community Includes Also Those Who Are Not Worthy of Having Their Prayers Heard

Indeed, from the words of Rambam (*Hilchos Tefillah* 8:1) it seems that the benefit of instituting communal prayer is specifically that it is prayer of a community. When an individual prays in the company of the multitude he “joins himself with the community,” and communal prayer is on a higher level by its very nature.²⁶⁵

Communal prayer is always heard, even if there are sinners among them the Holy One does not despise prayer of a community. Therefore, a person must always join himself with a community, and not pray alone if he is able to pray with a community.”

In other words, communal prayer was not established to help the intent of the worshipers, but for the ability of those individuals among the many who are not on the appropriate level to be heard. An individual does not always have the status to stand before HASHEM and lay out his requests. However, when he joins with the community, his prayer is not defined as individual prayer but as communal prayer, and HASHEM does not despise communal prayer.

An individual could be distant due to a sin or a lowly spiritual level. But for a community, the principle of “HASHEM is close to all those who call Him,” (Tehillim 145:18) is always true.

However, not only those who are unworthy need to worry that their prayer will remain unheard. It is the obligation of the entire community, including the righteous, to include their prayers also with those of the wicked. As the Talmud states, (Kerisus 6b):

Rabbi Chana bar Bizna said that Rabbi Shimon Chasida said: Every fast that does not include the sinners of Yisrael is not a fast, and the proof is that galbanum smells bad, yet the Torah counted it with the herbs of the incense (Shemos 30:34).

Abaye said the proof is from here: “He founded His group upon the earth,” (Amos 9:6).²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ The source of the Rambam’s words are in the Talmud Berachos 7b which we will discuss below.

²⁶⁶ Rashi explains, “This implies that when all of them are together then they are founded upon the earth.”

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This is also how commentaries explain the reason for binding the lulav and esrog with the willow, which symbolizes those Jews who have neither “taste” nor “smell.”

The author of *Seder Hayom* explains the intent behind the binding of the lulav:

The reason that they said to bring galbanum with the incense, though it smells bad, is because when it combines with the other herbs its bad smell leaves it and it adds a good smell to the other herbs. Similarly, the light can only be noticed from the dark. Likewise, our Rabbis commanded that every prayer which does not include Jewish sinners is not a prayer.

Another benefit of communal prayer is that it is prayer for all Jews. Whereas an individual has no guarantee of existing forever, within the Jewish people he has a guarantee that “the eternity of Yisrael will not fail.” HASHEM has guaranteed us that even in the lowest situation He will fulfil the verse, “I will not despise them nor abhor them,” (Vayikra 26:44). The power of this guarantee and HASHEM’s covenant with the Patriarchs means that Jews will never be erased from the world.

So, for example, the *Kli Yakar* (on Devarim 29:21) explains:

You must know that this is the attribute of the Holy One, blessed is He. When an individual person sins, he suffers physically according to his wickedness. But when many sin, it is impossible to do to them what is said about an individual, that “HASHEM will erase his name from beneath the heavens,” (Devarim 29:19). For it is impossible to destroy the name Yisrael, both because HASHEM already swore to the Patriarchs that He would not replace them with another nation, and also because the twelve tribes correspond to the twelve zodiacal constellations in the sky, and if a single tribe were destroyed, the corresponding constellation which is dependent upon it would fall. Therefore, HASHEM consumes His anger on wood and stones and on the land, “Sulphur and salt shall burn the entire land,” (ibid. 22).²⁶⁷

²⁶⁷ The words of Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner in *Pachad Yitzchak* on Purim §25 in the name of *Maharal* are beautiful in this context:

“And it turned around” (Esther 9:1) – Purim is the idea of “as they tried to do” (Devarim 19:19). It is like the idea that, ‘One who rolls a stone will have it return upon him,’ (Mishlei 26:27). In other words, when a person throws a rock both the force of the throw and the direction it is thrown depend upon him. But when the stone hits a wall then the force and the direction are split. The person’s force remains

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There is a similar idea expressed in *Midrash Rabbah* (Vayikra parsha 29):

The Holy One, blessed is He, said to Adam, "This is a sign for your children. Just as you stood before me in judgement on this day and went out acquitted, so too your children will stand before Me on this day and will go out before Me acquitted.

Tur rules based on this Midrash in *Hilchos Erev Rosh Hashanah* (*Orach Chayim* 581):

We bathe and cut our hair based on the midrash... for the way of the world is that if a person has a judgment, he wears black, and wraps himself in a black turban, and allows his beard to grow, and does not cut his fingernails, because he does not know which way his judgement will go. But with Yisrael it is not so. They wear white and wrap themselves in a white turban, shave their beards and cut their fingernails, and eat and drink and rejoice on Rosh Hashanah, because they know that the Holy One, blessed is He, will do a miracle for them.

The question may be asked, how can Jews rejoice, eat and drink, if Rosh Hashanah is the day of judgement when it is decreed, "who will live and who will die... who by water and who by fire... who will be humbled and who elevated"? How can a person know that a miracle will be performed for him and it will be decreed that he should live?

The answer is that there is a doubt as to what will be decreed for each individual. But for the entire Jewish people there is no doubt that they will always emerge righteous in judgement, and "the eternity of Yisrael will not fail."

The practical upshot of these words is that communal prayer is never despised.²⁶⁸ The verse states about the Jewish people, "I will not despise

in the stone but the direction reverses to the way it came. But this is only when the force of the thrower hits an impediment which prevents the force being dissipated in a straight line. So, if we see a stone thrown that bounces back we know that not only was there an incident of returning backwards but also that it was prevented from continuing in a direct line. Therefore, specifically from the fact that the Jews ruling over their enemies came through "And it turned around," we know that the decree, "to destroy, kill and cause to perish," (Esther 3:13) was impossible. Therefore, we say that this redemption exemplifies the aspect of the eternity of Yisrael – since the destruction of Yisrael is impossible, we have found the secret of eternity.

²⁶⁸ Maybe you will ask, doesn't it happen all the time that such a prayer is not accepted? How can the Rabbis say that communal prayer is always heard? *Kaf Hachayim* (90:59) asks this question in the name of the *Shelah*: "Our eyes see that every day the community prays the

them," and if the community is not despised then its prayers are also not despised.²⁶⁹

These words seem to explain the difficulty we raised.

Indeed, the essence of prayer is the personal and individual connection of each individual with his Creator. It requires intent and it is possible that one will have greater intent when praying alone. Yet, even so, a person is obligated to pray with a community, for otherwise, he may have no status at all to pray this prayer.

In contrast, communal prayer is an entirely different type of prayer. Communal prayer is not at all on the same level as individual prayer, and the two are not even comparable, just as the greatness of a person cannot be compared to one of the wonders of nature. The Holy One, blessed is He, could find each individual from the Jewish nation guilty, but the Jewish people are never despised. "The Eternity of Yisrael will not fail." The practical import of this is HASHEM never despises communal prayer.

However, this answer which is derived from the words of Rambam is not sufficient. We still need to explain it further.

Shemoneh Esrei prayer, which mentions many times the redemption from exile ("See our suffering," "Sound the shofar," etc.) yet the prayer has no affect! There are three answers:

1. In *Beis Elokim*, *Mabit* explains, "that it does not mean that the Holy One, blessed is He, will fulfill all our requests. Rather He does something similar to the request. For every day there is a redemption, for we are like a solitary sheep among the wolves. And every day they rise against us to destroy us, but HASHEM saves us from them.
2. *Shelah* answers that the Holy One, blessed is He, chooses the communal prayer and the angel ties it and makes of it a connection to HASHEM. But there is no guarantee that He will fulfill our requests, only that He accepts the positive mitzvah that was done, as He accepts all mitzvos, such as *tzitzis*, *tefillin*, *mezuzah*. The mitzvah and its reward are noted in Heaven. Similar the valid prayers. They ascend to Heaven to become crowns and tiaras for HASHEM, but as for them being fulfilled - sometimes God fulfills the request and sometimes not. For HASHEM, praised be His Name, is righteous in all His ways. However, an invalid prayer can be completely rejected, as if it had never been uttered. It would be better to remain silent and not be punished for "You shall not take the name of HASHEM, your God, in vain." Communal prayer, however, always ascends to Heaven.
3. *Kaf Hachayim* answers, "Communal prayer is always heard. But it will not be answered until the end of days.

²⁶⁹ Someone who is not despised by the Holy One, blessed is He, will have his prayer accepted. This is the advantage of communal prayer which is never despised by HASHEM. Later in the chapter we will give another reason why communal prayer is not despised, because ten men who pray together have "the Divine Presence with them." This approach removes many of the questions which we will raise here.

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1. Looking carefully at the words of the Rabbis teaches us that also individual requests for mercy ascend better when the prayer is recited with the community. For this reason, a person should recite his individual prayer with the community.²⁷⁰

This means that when an individual is included within a community it makes his personal prayer stronger.

The question is, even though in our prayers there are many matters and requests pertaining to the entire Jewish people, there are also specifically individual prayers. In the individual prayers, each worshiper focuses on his personal requests and his individual success. How does it make sense that the prayers which are essentially, and according to their content, individual prayers which have no relevance to the community, have the status of “prayers of the entire Jewish people”?

2. Why is the prayer of an individual recited in his house different than the identical prayer recited in a place with nine other men? It is the same intent, the same text. True, there is a group of men next to the worshiper, and each one is saying his own requests. But why, when the prayers are recited next to nine other men does it have the status of communal prayer? What unites all these worshipers and brings the ten prayers together into one communal prayer? At the end of the day, though they are gathered together, the ten men are standing withdrawn each in his own corner, each one reciting his own prayer, while expressing his personal and individual desires. How do these individual prayers transform into communal prayer just because these multiple individual acts are done at the same time and in one place? What turns the collection of personal prayers, with their individual intent, into communal prayer?
3. Is it right to forego the essence of prayer and recite a prayer which Rabbi Yehuda Halevi described as “a body without a soul,” with the goal of attaining a higher, more acceptable prayer? Is not the essence of prayer that a person stands before HASHEM and has a private conversation with HASHEM? It seems that without this there is nothing and it is not prayer. How does it make sense to descend from the ladder and climb the higher, loftier peak of communal prayer when the entire base crumbles on the way?

²⁷⁰ See, for example, Berachos 7a. This discussion will be brought in detail below.

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The Individual Needs the Community

An Individual Jew Is A Part of The Jewish People

In the words of the *Rishonim* it seems that individual prayers transform to become communal prayers because each of the individuals nullifies himself towards the community. From here on there is no individual prayer with the community, but his prayer is a component of the communal prayer.

This is how *Mabit* explains.²⁷¹ He says that when an individual prays with a community his prayer is heard because he is not judged as an individual but is viewed as part of a community. The individual is absorbed within the group and his prayer is included within the communal prayer, while he, for his part, is "nullified by the majority," as if he is not even there. Hence, even if his individual prayer is not worthy, lacking the proper intent or without sufficient merit as an individual, and he himself could not stand in judgment²⁷² -- his prayer can be accepted in the merit of the community, since it is not judged as the prayer of an individual but is part of communal prayer.

Mabit cites the words of the Yerushalmi (Ta'anis 3:4) that, "A community is only judged according to its majority." He learns from there that just as a community that lacks merit prevents the prayer of an individual from being accepted, so, too, by logical deduction and a fortiori reasoning,²⁷³ when the community is righteous and good, their merit will help the individual to have his prayer accepted in their merit, even if alone it is not properly complete.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ *Beis Elokim; Sha'ar Hatefillah* chapter 11.

²⁷² Even if the community includes people who are not worthy, their prayer is accepted in the merit of the community. *Mishna Berura* 90:28 writes, "Because the Holy One, blessed is He, does not despise the prayers of the community, even if there are among them sinners, one should not refrain from praying with them."

²⁷³ *Mabit* explains that it is an a fortiori argument, because God's attribute of goodness is greater than His attribute of punishment.

²⁷⁴ *Mabit* writes: "For the prayer of an individual, if it is not proper and not recited with intent – it is not accepted at all. But when it is said with a group, sometimes it is accepted in the merit of the group, because an individual is dragged after the majority even for matters of guilt. So, regardless of whether he is righteous, sometimes his prayer is not heard because the majority are not worthy. As they said about Eliyahu at Mount Carmel in the Yerushalmi of Ta'anis, what can the great people of the generation do if the community is judged according to its majority? We find that if Yisrael had not said on Mount Carmel, 'HASHEM IS ELOHIM, HASHEM IS ELOHIM,' the fire would not have descended from Heaven and burned the sacrifices. That is, the prayer of Eliyahu would not have helped at all were it not for the merit that Yisrael said, HASHEM is God. That is what made the fire descend from Heaven. Thus, even though the greatest people in a generation are perfect, they still need the virtue of the collective. If so, how much more is it true when it comes to merit? For God's attribute of

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So, we find that, "If Yisrael would not have said on Mount Carmel (I Melachim 18:39), "HASHEM is ELOHIM, HASHEM is ELOHIM," no fire would have descended from Heaven to burn the sacrifices."

In other words, if the Jews had not been worthy of that miracle, even the prayer of Eliyahu Hanavi would not have been sufficient for it to be accepted. The prayer was accepted only because they believed in HASHEM and so there was the merit of the community.

Along the same lines of this explanation, it is clear that this requires prayer of ten who have the status of a community and a congregation.²⁷⁵ It does not refer to combining the powers of several prayers together, but refers to a nullification of each individual for the sake of the Jewish people, in order to attain the level of a community based on the power of the principle that, "A community is judged according to its majority."

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz²⁷⁶ stresses the benefit of one who nullifies himself to the group and is judged as part of it and within it, and not when he is by himself. The matter is explained in the words of the Zohar in the explanation of the verse, "HASHEM remembered Noach," (Bereishis 8:1):

Rabbi Eliezer says, "Come and see, when the attribute of strict justice rules the world, a person should not want his name to be mentioned in Heaven. The evidence of this is from the incident of the Shunamite woman (II Melachim chapter 4), because on the same day that she prayed – it was the Yom Tov of Rosh Hashanah, when HASHEM judges His world, as Elisha said to her, 'Is there a need to speak on your behalf to the king?' (II Melachim 4:13) – "the King" is the Holy One, blessed is He, who rules over the entire earth. 'And she said, I dwell among my people,' (ibid.) – I do not want them to mention me or pay attention to me, rather 'I dwell among my people.'"

goodness is greater than His attribute of punishment. If the majority can prevent the prayer of an individual, how much more so, if they are righteous and good, will their merit help an individual to have his prayer accepted in their merit? Even if the prayer is not completely perfect it will be accepted, because the community is judged according to the majority."

²⁷⁵ See Megillah 23b where the Talmud learns from the verse, "I shall be sanctified among the Children of Yisrael," (Vayikra 22:) that for every holy matter there should not be less than ten. Because it says, "I shall be sanctified among the Children of Yisrael," and elsewhere the verse states, "Separate from among the community," (Bamidbar 16:). And the Talmud learns by means of a *gezeira shava* (drawing an analogy) from the spies, about whom it says, "How long for this wicked community" – which teaches that a "community" consists of ten (the ten spies excluding Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh).

²⁷⁶ *Sichos Mussar* for 5733, p. 62-3.

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Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that as long as she is “among her people,” she is judged together with the entire community, and since this is so she can be acquitted in judgment – even if she herself is not worthy of it. However, if she is judged by herself she is in great danger, even though Elisha is a good intercessor for her. It was therefore correct for her to forgo Elisha’s efforts, provided she was included within her people.²⁷⁷

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz discussed the value of being part of the group²⁷⁸ and the power of the community, based on an in-depth study of the Talmudic dictum (Yoma 75b) on the verse, “A man ate the bread of the mighty, He sent them provisions to satiation,” (Tehillim 78:25). The Talmud says that, “This (singular “a man”) refers to Yehoshua for whom as much manna descended as for all of Yisrael (mentioned in the second half of the verse).”

Rabbi Chaim asks, what did Yehoshua do with so much manna, as much as for all the rest of the Jewish people? And in general, the Torah says about the manna that one who gathered more did not gain more than an *omer*, “Each person gathered according to his eating,” (Shemos 16:18).

It must mean allude to something different.

Yehoshua accompanied Moshe Rabbeinu to the foot of Mount Sinai. He wanted to remain with his teacher for the extra few minutes as he ascended and when he returned. How far was it from the foot of the mountain to the encampment of Yisrael? From where he remained, he could hear the people behaving wickedly with the Golden Calf. How far away was Yehoshua from the rest of Yisrael? Perhaps ten minutes away, maybe a quarter of an hour?

But the manna fell for the Jewish people. It did not fall at the foot of Mount Sinai. The manna fell in the merit of the multitude. An individual only

²⁷⁷ This is how Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz explains the words of the Rabbis, “A person must always join himself with the community,” (Berachos 30a). Rashi explains, “A person must not recite a short prayer in the singular, but in plural, because in this way his prayer will be heard.” We need to understand – true, the prayer of a community is heard better, but how can an individual gain merit that he would not have if he only prayed for himself? But this is exactly the point. The individual nullifies himself to the majority and is included within them. For this reason, we pray for the health of an individual, “among the rest of the sick people of Yisrael.”

See the opinion of Rabbi Yosei in Shabbos 12a that a person should say to a sick person, “The Omnipresent should have mercy upon you among the other sick people of Yisrael.” Rashi explains, “That because he includes them with others, his prayer is heard in the merit of the majority.”

²⁷⁸ In *Sefer Hazikaron for Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz*, ‘Mind and heart’ p. 60-61.

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received the influx due to the power of the collective. If one were to leave, Heaven forbid, he would forfeit his soul.²⁷⁹

So, when Yehoshua distanced himself from everyone else, not far, just a quarter of an hour away, he needed merits equivalent to the entire Jewish people for the manna to descend for him – so that he could have a means of staying alive.

A group of individuals is not a community. In order to be a community, they must be, “like one person with one heart,” (Rashi on Shemos 19:2). However, when there is a group, the individuals also benefit.

Let us delve deeper. In the chapter about intent in prayer we discussed prayer as a person standing before HASHEM. Even regarding the concept of standing before HASHEM it would seem that an individual is not the same as, “You are standing today, all of you before HASHEM, your God,” (Devarim 29:9). An individual who nullifies himself to the collective, even when he concentrates on his private prayers, is part of the Jewish people, “The heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers,” (Devarim 16:18) along with the wood cutters and the water drawers. All of them together comprise “All the people of Yisrael.”

When we examine the essence of standing before HASHEM as we clarified earlier, we see that there is additional value to standing before HASHEM as part of the Jewish people. We saw that in addition to intent on the meaning of the words of prayer and its content, there is also a requirement for the worshiper to have intent to be standing before HASHEM, exemplifying, “Know before Whom you stand,” (Avos 3:1). When standing like this the worshiper recognizes the nothingness of mankind and the fact that his abilities and strength not only do not help him succeed at all by themselves, but they will not save him in any aspect of his life, including his very existence. Without HASHEM’s help, he would lack existence or any kind of abilities.

This viewpoint receives secondary strength when the individual stands before HASHEM along with many others and is part of the community. In this case, there is an entire group of people all gathering for a prayer event and standing before HASHEM. This is a public proclamation in the face of the entire

²⁷⁹ Rabbi Chaim Shmuelewitz continues to describe his personal experiences in Europe during the Holocaust. “With our eyes we saw those wandering with the Mir Yeshiva. For those who remained with the yeshiva nothing happened, and they all escaped the terrible exile without injury. But those who strayed, even those who only left to take leave of their families in nearby villages along the way, intending to immediately rejoin the yeshiva – those people never returned.”

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world – there is HASHEM, to Whom one must pray, and without Him there is nothing.

Truly, each individual person stands before his Creator and spells out his needs and his troubles. He stands withdrawn in a very personal manner – nevertheless this aggregation of individual prayers turns into a “communal prayer” with the power of the occasion of gathering these individuals to stand as a community – at one time and one moment – and to stand before HASHEM.

Standing as individuals before their Creator in an organized and consolidated manner defines it as prayer together – prayer as one – communal prayer.

When a person stands with many others to pray, he performs a great act of faith, in which the community proclaims that no one and no force can do anything because they are all dependent upon HASHEM. This is a consolidation of individuals who want to integrate themselves as a community standing before HASHEM. In this event there is the exaltedness of communal prayer because the holy community stands as one before HASHEM and makes Him the King over everything, by standing and raising their palms to Heaven in prayer.

There is no comparison between one person accepting the king over himself to a community which accepts on itself the king. This act has the status of a public proclamation to the world, “I am part of this community which believes in HASHEM and stands before HASHEM to pray!”

In such a case the individual is judged as part of the community and benefits from the special status of the community when he stands before HASHEM.²⁸⁰

This observation about the status of communal prayer is explicit in the well-known words of Ramban at the end of Parshas Bo (Shemos 13:16). He writes that the purpose of creation and the intent of all the mitzvos is to stand and say in a public proclamation, in a loud voice, that the person believes that there is no such thing as “nature,” but everything that happens to us flows from the will of HASHEM and His providence over His creations. That is the purpose of gathering a congregation in the Synagogue to pray aloud.

Ramban writes:

²⁸⁰ See a similar idea in *Mishna Berura* 268:19. He writes that one should recite “*Vayechulu*” while standing because it is a testament to God creating the world. And witnesses must stand, as the verse states, “The two men will stand.” *Mishna Berura* adds, “And it is good to say it together with the community, because we need an entire congregation to testify about God.”

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The intent of all the mitzvos is that we believe in our HASHEM and give thanks to Him that He is our Creator. This is the purpose of creation, and we have no other explanation for the initial creation, and the Supernal HASHEM has no desire in the lower world other than that mankind should know and give thanks to HASHEM Who created him.

And the intention of raising our voices in prayers and the purpose of Synagogues and the merit of communal prayer is that people should have a place to gather and give thanks to HASHEM that He created them and gave them existence. They make this known and say before Him, "We are Your creations." This was their intention when the Rabbis said, " 'And they called to HASHEM with strength,' (Yonah 3:8)—From here you learn that prayer must be aloud," (Yerushalmi Ta'anis 2:1).

In this case the individual who prays is a part of the sum total of all those gathered in the Synagogue, publicizing and crowing the King, fulfilling the verse: "with many people is the glory of the king," (Mishlei 14:28).

Regarding the element of prayer that expresses "standing before HASHEM," when a group gathers to stand before HASHEM it stresses the person's faith in the Creator of everything, which is part of the essence of prayer, and so it is clear why this makes it essential to pray with a community.

Mabit suggests an additional explanation of the advantage of communal prayer. He says that the service of many has a great advantage over the service of an individual, because an action performed by a number of individuals together has power and ability beyond their combined strength which come from the individualistic actions of each person. A person has greater strength when he is part of a group of people.

In physical terms it is obvious that two people can lift more than twice what each could lift on his own.²⁸¹ *Mabit* explains, "How much more so with Divine matters, that the concept of the mitzvah is more elevated when several people unite than its value for each one individually."²⁸²

²⁸¹ See Sotah 34a regarding the eight spies who came to scout out the land carrying the giant cluster of grapes (Bamidbar 13:23).

²⁸² See also Sanhedrin 95a where we find that through his prayer Avishai helped King David to escape from Goliath's brother, Yishbi. Regarding the verse, "Avishai ben Tzruya helped him," (2 Shmuel 21:17), Rav Yehuda said that Rav said that he helped him through prayer. This shows that the prayer of two is stronger than the prayer of a single individual.

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Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz²⁸³ cites the words of our Rabbis on this topic, on the verse, "HASHEM shall be for you an eternal light," (Yishaya 60:19). The Rabbis explain (*Midrash Tanchuma*, Parshas Nitzavim 1):

When is this? When all of you are bundled together. In the world, a person is unable to break a bundle of reeds, whereas a single reed can be snapped even by a baby. Similarly, you find that the Jews will not be redeemed until they are all in a single bundle... When they are bundled together they receive the Divine Presence.

In other words, even though each individual Jew on his own is not worthy of being redeemed or receiving the Divine Presence, when all of them are bundled together, the value of the bundle and its strength is so great that they merit to be redeemed and to receive the Divine Presence. What binds the Jewish people? Rabbi Shmuelevitz answers, "The individuals join all together to become a community through hating dispute and loving peace. This is what binds them together until "no person can break them."²⁸⁴

However, the matter still needs further explanation, even after the answers of *Mabit* about communal prayer.

The first explanation of *Mabit* raises the following difficulty: Why does a person who is on a higher level than the other worshipers also need to pray with a community? If an individual is judged according to the majority of the community, he should be judged with him for good or for bad. An individual who nullifies himself to the community can rise with the community, but once he has nullified himself to them the rule should be that he can also sink with them. Indeed, if they are meritorious then an individual benefits from this, but if they are not as meritorious as he is, his prayer will not be heard even if he is completely righteous.

²⁸³ Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz in his book *Sichos Mussar* (5731 *ma'amar ma'alas haklal*) on the great power of a community.

²⁸⁴ Our Rabbis said more than this: How great is peace, that even if they were worshiping idols but had peace between them, the Divine Presence, so to say, does not want to harm them, as the verse states, "Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone," (Hoshea 4:17). Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that the virtues of the group are applied to the individual when he nullifies himself to the group, and there is solidarity and unity among the society. We find this at the Giving of the Torah, as the verse states, "He camped there, Yisrael, facing the mountain," (Shemos 19:2). "He camped," is singular. Rashi explains, "as one person with one heart."

See the explanation of *Ohr Hachayim* on Shemos *ibid.*, who writes that this was the preparation for receiving the Torah, that all of them became like one person. Similarly, the Rabbis say: Once the Jews hated dispute and loved peace, and became one encampment, the time had arrived for Me to give My Torah, (end of *Derech Eretz Zuta*).

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So, in fact, in this case of a righteous person with his own merits, he may cause damage to himself by praying with a community and he may harm his own situation.²⁸⁵ If so, the question is: Why does the Talmud say that an individual must always strive to pray with a community in order that his prayer will be heard? Are there not cases when the majority do not have as much merit as he does, and specifically by joining together with a community he will be harming his prayer?

The second explanation of *Mabit* also requires explanation. *Mabit* explained the tremendous power of a person when he binds together with others, so that their united strength is greater than the combined strength of all the individuals. Yet this still requires further explanation because it should be true even if there are two people praying as one, or nine, and is not limited specifically to ten men. Why should the concept of communal prayer unite them in prayer specifically when there are at least ten men? It is an explicit *halakha* in Rambam (*Hilchos Tefillah* 8:4): What is communal prayer? That one person prays aloud and everyone else listens. We do not do this with less than ten free, adult men, including the prayer leader."

In other words, communal prayer is a concept which applies specifically for a *minyan* of ten. We never find that there is a concept of praying with others if they do not together form a *minyan* of ten.

Similarly, according to *Mabit's* explanation it should be that prayer with twenty men is preferable to prayer with ten, because the more people there are the stronger is their combined power. However, from a *halakhic* viewpoint, there is no difference between a *minyan* of ten and a greater number of people who gather together to prayer (apart from the concept of, "In the multitude of people is the King's glory," (Mishlei 14:28)). So, it seems that we are left with a fundamental question – why is it correct to forego the intimate, authentic experience of a person turning to HASHEM with the goal of attaining a higher and more acceptable prayer? Does it make sense that the way to ascend a level spiritually means descending?

It seems that examining some of the many sources in the words of the Rabbis about communal prayer will allow us to establish a general approach to the strength and way of communal prayer. This approach will answer the

²⁸⁵ Indeed, see the words of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi in *The Kuzari* (*ma'amar* 3 §18): "The concept of the Divine is like rain which waters the earth when the entire world deserves it. Sometimes it will include an individual place that is not worthy which will have success because of the majority. And conversely, sometimes rain will be withheld from a certain country because the entire world does not deserve it. And it is possible that the individuals who were worthy of rain have it withheld from them because of the majority."

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questions we raised and will also explain how prayers of individuals who are not focused on the needs of the community, receive the status of "the prayer of all the Jewish people." This approach will also explain how all the prayers combine with each other, through the individual worshipers standing next to each other.

"As for Me, My Prayer Is to You, HASHEM, At A Time of Favor" ²⁸⁶

Communal Prayer Creates A Time of Favor

The Talmud (Berachos 7b) relates:

Rabbi Yitzchak said to Rav Nachman: "Why did the master not come to the Synagogue to pray?"

He replied to him, "I was unable."

He said to him, "Then let the master gather ten [men] and pray."

He replied, "It is too much bother for me."

Rabbi Yitzchak asked, "Then the master should appoint a messenger to come and tell the master at the time the community prays – then you can pray alone, but at the same time as the community." ²⁸⁷

He asked him, "Why is this so important?"

Rabbi Yitzchak answered, explaining the importance of communal prayer from four sources:

1. "Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: What does the verse mean, "As for me, my prayer is to You at a time of favor," (Tehillim 69:14)? – This implies that there is a specific time of

²⁸⁶ Tehillim 69:14

²⁸⁷ We learn from this discussion that there are three levels of communal prayer. 1. Praying alone at the same time as the community. 2. Praying with ten men at home. 3. Praying with the community in the Synagogue.

Similarly, in Berachos 6a we find: "The Rabbis taught that Abba Binyamin says: A person's prayer is only heard in the Synagogue, as the verse states, "To hear the rejoicing and the prayer," (I Melachim 8:28). – in the place of rejoicing, that is where prayer should be. Ravin bar Rav Add said that Rabbi Yitzchak said: From where do we derive that the Holy One, blessed is He, is to be found in Synagogues? As the verse states, "God stands in the congregation of God." See *Mishna Berura* 90:27, where he rules that, "Even if there are ten men in his home, he should try to pray in a Synagogue."

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favor before the Holy One, blessed is He. When is that time of favor? When the community prays.

2. Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina said that the principle is derived from this verse, "Thus says HASHEM, at the time of favor I answered you," (Yishaya 49:8).
3. Rabbi Acha son of Chanina said that it is derived from this verse, "HASHEM does not despise the many," (Iyov 36:4)²⁸⁸
4. The verse states, "He redeemed my soul in peace from my being embattled, because many were with me [i.e. prayed with me]," (Tehillim 55:19).²⁸⁹

This section clarifies the value of prayer recited by any individual – even in his own home – when it is recited at the same time that the community prays,

²⁸⁸ The word "many" is interpreted as meaning the *prayer* of many. Thus, the meaning of the verse is that God does not despise the prayers of a group. Cf. the commentary of *Maharsha* ad loc.

²⁸⁹ *Chida*, in his work *Pesach Einayim* on this section points out that these sources for communal prayer allude to the three explanations given by *Mabit* describing the value of communal prayer (in *Beis Elokim*; *Sha'ar Hatefillah* chapter 11, p. 12b).

1. Matters of holiness cannot be recited with less than ten men. This is an esoteric secret that the Holy Name may not be sanctified with less than ten men
2. A few people doing a mitzvah is not comparable to many who perform it.
3. If the prayer of an individual is not recited with intent or is not appropriate it is not accepted. But when it is recited with a group sometimes it is accepted in the merit of the many, because a community is judged according to its majority.

These three explanations are alluded to in the three verses mentioned in this section of Talmud.

1. The verse, "As for me, my prayer is to You, HASHEM, at a time of favor," (Tehillim 69:14) alludes to the fact that a community may recite matters of holiness. When they recite *kaddish* and *kedusha* it is a time of favor which gives pleasure to HASHEM. *Tur* writes (*Orach Chayim* 125) in the name of *Sefer Heichalos* that God says, "I have no other pleasure in the world like the time that they say "kaddosh" and their eyes are cast heavenward. This teaches that it is a time of favor. Also, during the *kaddish* prayer when people answer "Amen, may His Name be great" it gives Him pleasure. For this reason, it is called a time of God's favor, because it is performing His will.
2. The verse, "He redeemed my soul... because many stood with me," (Tehillim 55:19) alludes to the *Mabit's* second reason, that a mitzvah performed along with others has more value than if it was performed by each person individually. "Because many stood with me" – through their accompanying me it is more valuable.
3. The verse, "At the time of favor I answered you," (Yishaya 49:8) alludes to *Mabit's* third reason, that even if an individual's prayer is not recited with intent, it is answered in the merit of the many righteous people. This is why "At a time of favor," when the community prays, in its merit, "I answered you."

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because the time that the community prays is a "time of favor" that elevates the prayers of everyone.²⁹⁰

The fact that the community prays transforms that time into a time of favor before the Holy One, blessed is He. This time of favor also help prayers of individuals to be accepted.²⁹¹

Similarly, we find in Yevamos (49b) that the benefit of communal prayer is founded on the fact that it creates a time of favor:

[King Menashe] said to [the prophet Yishaya]: Moshe, your master, said, "Who is like HASHEM our HASHEM, whenever we call on Him." Yet you say, "Seek HASHEM when He is to be found," (Yishaya 55:6). [This implies that there are times when He is not available.]

The Talmud answers:

²⁹⁰ See *Maharsha* and *Tzlach* ad loc. The novel idea of the Talmud is not the principle that communal prayer is more acceptable than individual prayer, because that is derived directly from verses. Rather the novel *halakha* of this section is that even prayer of an individual in his home is acceptable and more desired if recited when the community is praying.

²⁹¹ Surely there is not a single moment when communal prayers are not being recited somewhere across the globe. Does that mean that the entire day is therefore a "time of favor"? Does the prayer of a community only act as a time of favor for those who are connected to that community, or does it create a general time of favor for everyone?

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky in *Kehillos Yaakov* (§3) discusses this question and concludes that a person is drawn after the people of his city and community. Therefore, he is also drawn after the "time of favor" of that community. He writes, "It seems that it refers to the time that the community within his city prays. For if the time of prayer of those in another city also affects him, then it seems that when a community on the other side of the world prays it also helps, and every hour of the day presumably there is a community somewhere in the world that is praying, since there are so many time zones. Even though it should make no difference to the Heavenly Court whether it is the time of prayer of a community in this city or in another, but nevertheless, we find a similar concept in *Berachos* at the end of chapter 4 (30a). Rabbi Yehuda says in a city where the community recites the *musaf* prayer an individual is exempt. However, a community in another city does not exempt him at all from the *musaf* prayer. We see from this that even if one does not join with the prayers of the community, he is dragged along and becomes subordinate to his community. So too is he is also drawn after the "time of favor" of his community.

However, the words of *Rema* (*Orach Chayim* 90:69) in the name of *Semag* brought to my attention. He writes that those who live in small villages where there is no community... should pray at the "time of communal prayer," and *Mishna Berura* explains that this means the time when the Jewish communities (elsewhere) pray.

It seems that the resolution is that the law for the villages is different because they do not have their own community.

Then others pointed out to me that *Netziv* discusses this in *Meromei Sadeh* on *Berachos* 7 (s.v. *veleima* and on p. 6. See there what he writes.

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“ This (what Yishaya said) refers to an individual, whereas that (what Moshe said) refers to a community. And for an individual when [is his prayer favorable before the Holy One, blessed is He]? Rav Nachman said [that] Rabba bar Avuah said, “ These are the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

In other words, the time of favor for individual prayer is only between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. But communal prayer creates a “ time of favor” whenever the community stands together to pray.

Similarly, we find in Rosh Hashanah (18a) and in Yevamos (105a):

Rav Shmuel bar Oniya said [that] Rav said, “ From where [is it derived] that the sentence of a community, even though it is sealed, can be torn up? The verse states, ‘Who is like HASHEM, our God, whenever we call out to Him.’”

The Talmud challenges this:

But doesn’t a verse also state, “ Seek HASHEM when He is to be found.”

The Talmud answers:

That refers to an individual. This refers to a community.

Not only is a community answered at any time, but it is also answered even after the sentencing, which is not the case with an individual who is only answered before the sentence is passed.²⁹²

The Vilna Gaon, in the book *Imrei No’am* (on Berachos 8) explains that the expression “ a time of favor” contains an assumption that times are subject to change. The implication of this is that the term “ a time of favor” does not relate to HASHEM, because there is no change whatsoever in His will, “ for He is not a person that changes his mind,” (I Shmuel 16:29). HASHEM is the one who, “ alters the seasons and changes the times,” (*Maariv* prayer). He Himself, however, is beyond time, Who sees every event beforehand as if it had

²⁹² *Maharsha* (*Chidushei Aggados* on Yevamos 49) explains the reason that an individual is answered during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is due to the fact that those days are prior to the sentencing. His words imply that those who are completely wicked and are sealed for death on Rosh Hashanah do not have their prayers answered even during the Ten Days of Penitence.

However, many commentaries disagree with this and write that during the Ten Days HASHEM can be found even by individuals after their sentencing. Look in Rabbi Gamliel Rabinowitz’s *Tiv Hatefillah* p. 132.

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already happened. From His viewpoint there is no difference between past, present or future. How can various times make any difference such that they transform "bad hours"²⁹³ to "a time of favor"? Does HASHEM have different moods? The will of the Holy One, blessed is He, to do good to His creations is constant at every time. It is the actions of people that decree what happens, based on the principle of reward and punishment. So what changes from one time to the next?

The Vilna Gaon explains that the "time of favor" is not a change in HASHEM but is a change that happens within the person and how he is treated according to his deeds, and the awakening of the person from below, on earth.²⁹⁴

Similarly, we find that the *Sefas Emes* (Elul 5634) discusses the words of the Rabbis that, *mincha* on Shabbos is a "time of favor." Likewise, the days of the month of Elul are a "time of favor." In other words, there is a parallel between the time of favor on Shabbos – the conclusion of the week (Zohar vol. 2 88b) and the "days of favor" of the month of Elul – the end of the year, both which are "last moments."

The *Sefas Emes* questions the concept of "time of favor" from the fact that there is never any change in HASHEM, and He is above time. What does a "time of favor" mean with regard to HASHEM, when the very concept of time has no relevance to Him? The *Sefas Emes* answers that, "The change is in the time, there is a time of favor when the time can accept the favor and the influx from the point above time."

In other words, time is the vessel for a person's action on the one hand and the Heavenly influx on the other hand.

We normally understand time in concepts such as, "time, speed, distance." If we work at a certain speed within a certain time, we will achieve a certain "distance." So, we think that the question of how much we will achieve depends only on the speed at which we act and the time available. The *Sefas Emes* stresses that there is an additional critical dimension, Heavenly

²⁹³ This is from the *Av Harachamim* prayer recited when removing the Sefer Torah from the Holy Ark. "May the Father of Mercy have mercy with those He bears, and remember the covenant with the spiritual giants, and save our souls from the bad times."

²⁹⁴ Similarly, it is to be understood that whenever we find in the words of the Rabbis or the Zohar, phrases such as "HASHEM wanted" or "HASHEM requested," or the likes, they are euphemisms, for One who is lacking nothing cannot want or ask for anything. The concept of "will" with regard to the Creator expresses what we see in the way he relates to us and created us and gives us an influx of good.

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assistance -- The Divine influx. Time is the vessel through which we receive this Divine influx.²⁹⁵

Similarly, it seems that when the community prays, it does not change the Divine will, but rather the ability to receive the Divine influx at that time. In other words, the worshipers transform the time to be suitable to accept the Divine influx and turn that time into a time of favor.

The Community Needs the Individual

Individuals Who Join Together Create the Beauty of the Group

Within the words of the Zohar there may be a reason as to how the power of the community can transform time into a "time of favor." The Zohar (*Vayishlach*, 167b) explains that the act of prayer by a community has additional importance because it contains different aspects and kinds of prayers.

The Zohar says:

Rabbi Shimon said: Prayer of a community ascends before the Holy One, blessed is He, and the Holy One, blessed is He, is crowned with that prayer because it ascends in many varieties and is made up of many aspects. Because it is made up of varieties, it becomes a crown placed on the head of the Righteous One, the Life of the Worlds.

²⁹⁵ Sefas Emes continues there:

And on the holy Shabbos, when there is an influx from HASHEM for all the other days of the week, time connects with what is above. Similarly, in the month of Elul, before the renewal of the new year. Therefore, those are times of favor, when we can receive blessing also in this world from what is above.

In other words, our view of time is incorrect. Not only because we see it only as a tool for measuring our actions, when it is also a vehicle for receiving the Divine influx, but also it should be viewed from another vantage point. *Mincha* on Shabbos is not the end of the week - rather it is the time before the new week begins, and it has influx from Heaven -- before the next six work days come. It is our spiritual preparation for our journey at the last moment before we set out. Similarly, the month of Elul is not just the end of the year, but the last moments before the new year begins, before the days of judgment. Therefore, those are times when a person is in this world, but the time is influenced by a Divine influx which is higher than that. Obviously, the concept of "time of favor" does not express any change in HASHEM, Heaven forbid, but rather a change in the vessel for receiving what is given to us. This vessel has an additional dimension. The difference is in the special Divine influx for which time is the receiving vessel. There is time which is readier to receive the Divine influx.

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But individual prayer is not inclusive and only has one aspect. Therefore, individual prayer is not ready to be accepted like communal prayer.

Rabbi Daniel Frisch explains in *Masok Midvash*:

There are many aspects to communal prayer,²⁹⁶ for one person seeks healing while another asks for a livelihood, one wants children and another desires life. But prayers of an individual do not include the multifaceted prayers of a community. Therefore, they are not as ready to be accepted as communal prayer.

When HASHEM's children stand together at one time, even though each one of them has his own suffering, that is worthy of being a crown for HASHEM, specifically because of its multifaceted nature. Since every individual has his own suffering, the multitude of requests ascends before the Divine Presence at one time and awakens HASHEM's mercy when He sees the many needs of His children. Once His mercy is awakened, HASHEM accepts all the prayers, included in a single crown (including those prayers recited by individuals at the time the community is praying). In this case prayer is accepted, not because any one individual is worthy on his own of having his prayer accepted, but because the multifaceted nature of the prayer expressed at that time teaches of the "Many needs of Your people," and then HASHEM's mercy is awakened for His children and the prayers are accepted.

According to this explanation of the value of the community, it is possible that the troubles of the many, which stress the difficult situation in which "the needs of Your people are great," are what awakens HASHEM's mercy on His children, and it is those which transform the time into a "time of favor" that causes prayers to be answered. So, even though one might have thought that the power of communal prayer is that it deals with communal, general requests, it seems that the level of "communal prayer" is attained specifically because it is when individual prayers of people are expressed, each person focused on his own needs. Prayer which embodies many varieties awakens the Heavenly mercy and creates a time of favor.

²⁹⁶ Were it not for his explanation perhaps the Zohar means simply that each person has a different prayer than another. Prayer comes from the mind and heart, and just as people's thoughts and feelings are different from one another, so too the prayers that come from them are unique. The beauty created within the framework of communal prayer is worthy of being a crown and decoration for HASHEM. Just as the proper combination of instruments playing together in harmony creates beautiful orchestral music which is sweeter than any single instrument on its own.

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However, this explanation of how communal prayer creates a “time of favor” does not explain why a person should pray with the community and it is not sufficient for him simply to pray at the same time as the community prays. From the Talmud (Berachos 7b) it appears that the “time of favor” helps even for individuals praying at the same time as the community worships, even though it is not communal prayer. Yet the Talmud points out that the value of communal prayer is greater than that of individual prayer at a “time of favor”, and therefore ideally Rav Nachman should have come to the Synagogue to pray with the community.²⁹⁷

An in-depth study of *Tosafos* on Avoda Zara (4b) will allow us to perceive these different aspects in prayer. From their words it seems that there is a great distinction between prayer which is considered “communal prayer,” to prayer of an individual which is offered at a “time of favor” but does not merit to be defined as “communal prayer.”

Let us explain:

1. In the Talmud (Avoda Zara 4b) we find that the first three hours of the day on the first day of Rosh Hashanah are hours of “anger” and the Attribute of Strict Justice rules the world. The Talmud asks, if there is concern about the Attribute of Strict Justice, why is it permitted to pray during those hours with a community? The Talmud answers that the community has many merits. The Talmud then challenges, if so, an individual should not be permitted to pray *shacharis* in his home during that time. The Talmud answers that since there is certainly a community praying *shacharis* at that time, the individual’s prayer will not be rejected – even though it is a time of strict justice.
2. *Tosafos* explain that the merit of the community helps even when an individual prays in his home and the community prays elsewhere (e.g. in the Synagogue). It is sufficient that the individual’s prayer is offered at the same time as the community prays.
3. Nevertheless, *Tosafos* explain that the merit of the community of worshipers at that time helps an individual only insofar as his prayer will not be rejected. However, worshipping at the same time as the communal prayer does not ensure that the individual prayer will be

²⁹⁷ This is brought as *halakha* in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 90:9): “One should strive to pray in a synagogue with the community. If he is unable to come to the Synagogue due to circumstances beyond his control, he should time his prayer for when the community prays. Similarly, if due to circumstances beyond his control, he is unable to pray at the same time as the community and is praying alone, he should nevertheless strive to do so in the synagogue.”

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heard. For individual prayer to be heard and accepted the person must pray not only at the same time as the community but also in the same place as the community, as we find in Berachos (6a), "A person's prayer is only heard with the community."²⁹⁸

4. So, we learn that there are two concepts in prayer:
 - a. Communal prayer which is prayer that is heard,
 - b. Prayer at the same time that the community prays, but not with them, which is not rejected.
5. Based on this, the words of the Talmud in Berachos (7b) regarding the value of prayer offered while the community prays, even if they are not in the same place as the community, relate only to the fact that the prayers of the individual will not be rejected, but the prayer will not be accepted. There is a clear distinction between these two concepts.

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky asks in his book *Kehilos Yaakov* (*Berachos* §3) what this distinction means. Is "to be heard" not the same as "to not be rejected," since any prayer which is not heard is automatically rejected? He answers by making a distinction between these two concepts, after he explains the meaning of prayer that is rejected, as follows:

1. Prayer which is rejected is prayer which causes the scales to be tipped to the side of guilt, and creates a sentence that his requests will not be fulfilled.²⁹⁹ In other words, an individual prayer which comes at a time of strict judgement causes the Divine Court to examine his actions, and if according to strict justice he will not merit to have his prayers accepted – the Divine Court will issue a decree not to fulfill his requests, thereby creating a *fait accompli* to his detriment.

²⁹⁸ This is according to the *Tosafos*'s edition of the text of Avoda Zara 4b, s.v. " *keivan*." See also *Ravan* on Berachos §132: Rabbi Yochanan said, a person's prayer is not heard unless it is with the community, as the verse states, "As for me, my prayer is to You HASHEM, at a time of favor," (Tehillim 69:14). When is it a time of favor? When the community prays. And it was taught that Rabbi Noson said, "From where is it derived that the Holy One, blessed is He, does not despise prayers of the many? The verse states, 'He redeemed my soul in peace from my being embattled, because many were with me.'"

²⁹⁹ See the words of *Machatzis Hashekel* on *siman* 90 on *Magen Avraham* §17. He writes that the concept of "not rejected" relates to the fact that he has fulfilled the mitzvah of prayer.

However, the requests that he prays for are not fulfilled.

However, *Kehillos Yaakov* challenges this explanation, because according to this it turns out that when an individual prays *musaf* in the first three hours of the Rosh Hashanah and the Talmud says that his prayer is rejected, it means that he has not performed the mitzvah of prayer at all. This is difficult to say, because there was prayer. Why should we say that he loses the reward for prayer? In addition to the fact that his requests will not be granted, why should he be considered as someone who has not prayed at all simply because his prayers were recited alone during the first three hours.

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Prayer like this actually causes harm, because without the prayer at that time in Heaven they would not have examined his deeds, and he would have been judged with the rest of the community. For the communal judgment it is possible that there are certain times when the judgment is tilted leniently away from strict justice, since they have so many merits. However, one who prays alone is judged by himself, and if it turns out that he is not worthy of having his prayers answered, his prayers will be rejected. In this regard *Kehilos Yaakov* cites the words of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin in *Ruach Chayim* on *Pirkei Avos* on the words, "Do not be a wicked person by yourself."³⁰⁰

"This means that one should not pray alone, by himself, because if he prays alone he may be called "wicked," Heaven forbid.³⁰¹ One who prays alone must have extra intent and fear and awe and dedication, for if not, his prayer is rejected completely."

2. Prayer which is not heard – this is prayer which does not cause either merit or guilt regarding fulfilling the wishes of the worshiper. If one prays when the community prays, even though his prayer is not heard and judged for merit, nevertheless it is not rejected, in other words it does not cause a guilty sentence. His judgment will be identical with that of one who did not pray.³⁰² This means that communal prayer which is heard is the best kind of prayer, because when a person prays with the community it helps his prayer to be heard and accepted before HASHEM.

It can be concluded that when an individual prays at the same time as the community, he benefits from the "time of favor" which flows from the multitude and varied requests which help at that time. However, this "time of favor" helps only so that the prayers will not be rejected.

³⁰⁰ Avos 2:13: Rabbi Shimon said, "Be careful with reading the *Shema* and with prayer. When you pray, don't make your prayer fixed, but rather mercy and beseeching before the Omnipresent, blessed is He. As the verse states, "For He is gracious and compassionate, long-suffering, and full of mercy, and regrets the evil," (Yoel 2:13). And do not be wicked in your own eyes."

³⁰¹ This is also explicit in the Shelah's section called Tractate Tamid, chapter *Ner Tamid*. He writes in his gloss:

Valid prayers ascend above to become a crown and tiara. But with regard to answering the requests, sometimes the Holy One, blessed is He, does what the person wants and sometimes not. HASHEM is the One who knows all and is just in all His ways. However invalid prayer, may we be spared from it, is rejected completely. It is as if it never existed. If only he would remain silent to avoid being punished for transgressing: "Do not take the name of HASHEM, your God, in vain," (Shemos 20:7). But the prayers of the many ascend upwards.

³⁰² *Kehillos Yaakov* explains that, "Nevertheless he has certainly fulfilled the mitzvah of prayer that he is obligated in and will receive reward for the prayer."

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Communal prayer, on the other hand, is a different, loftier concept – because that is prayer which is heard. Based on this, the value of a “time of favor” is still not equivalent to the value of communal prayer, and we must continue to seek for the essence and power of this concept.

‘All Together as One’

The Unifying Text of Prayer

We can discover the secret of the matter when we delve deeply and examine the words of the Zohar cited above.

Rabbi Shimon said: Prayer of a community ascends before the Holy One, blessed is He, and the Holy One, blessed is He, is crowned with that prayer because it ascends in many varieties and is made up of many aspects. Because it is made up of varieties, it becomes a crown placed on the head of the Righteous One, the Life of the Worlds.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, when he comes to explain the value of communal prayer, does not speak of the “prayers” of the many, but “prayer” in the singular. This means that the crown with which HASHEM is adorned from the prayers of the many is, as it were, a single item composed of various facets. Despite the multifaceted, many-colored nature of communal prayer, it is not a collection of prayers, but rather HASHEM relates to it as if it was a single prayer and one item of jewelry.

Communal prayer is a single prayer because the community prayers “together as one,” even though each person invests his own personal abilities in his prayer. Only when the individuals combine into a community and nullify themselves to the community, only then can they create a single, united, item of jewelry to adorn the King’s head. Therefore, only when everyone is together does it become communal prayer, and this is different when one prays alone at the same time as the community but in a different location. Someone who joins the community and nullifies himself to the community becomes part of the community and participates in making the crown for the King’s head. One who prays in his home at the same time as the community, even though it is a “time of favor,” since he has no part in the community, therefore is not part of making the crown.

What is the thing that transforms a group of worshipers to a single unit and unites them into a group, a community and a congregation? It seems that the answer to this question can be found in that part of prayer where we see the individual nullifying himself to the community and seeing himself as part of

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that community. The investigation of prayer shows that what gives the prayers of individuals the appearance of communal prayer and unites them is the text of prayer.

The text of prayer that was established for us by the Men of the Great Assembly is mostly in the plural. The requests are partially for the entire Jewish people. Even the personal requests like for wisdom, forgiveness, healing, livelihood etc. are expressed in the plural and the individual requests on behalf of everyone. Let us try to understand the reason that the Men of the Great Assembly established prayer in this manner.

We can explain the matter based on the insight of Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk in his book *Meshech Chochma* on the verse, "With my sword and my bow," (Bereishis 48:22).³⁰³

Onkelos translated this verse as, "With my prayer and my request." Prayer is equated with a sword and request with a bow.

The distinction between a sword and a bow is that a sword is very sharp on its own and a slight touch from its blade can cut without effort by the one who wields it. On the other hand, an arrow does not have that power. It does not work on its own, but its power comes from the strength of the one who draws the bow from a distance. The power of the arrow is therefore dependent on the one who holds the bow, and the more he pulls the bowstring with greater strength the further the arrow will fly and will hit with greater power. "My prayer" is the fixed order of prayer, as our Rabbis said, (in *Tosefta* Menachos 6:6), the praise, prayer and thanksgiving are essential; "My request" is the personal requests that a person adds himself, as the Rabbis said, "A person may ask for his needs that are related to each of the blessings," (Avoda Zara 8a).

Onkelos' translation compares the fixed order of prayer to a sword, because the concept of "prayer" relates to the fixed prayer which cannot be changed. This text was established by the Men of the Great Assembly and has its own power and is not dependent on the intent of the individual praying with that text. Conversely, the individual prayer which a person may add to his prayer is compared to the strength of a bow, where the individual must exert his effort and aim it well so that the arrow of his request will reach its target.

³⁰³ This idea also appears in the writings of Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik in his book on the Torah (*Stencil*), on this verse.

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This is how *Meshech Chochma* explains the words of the Talmud in Ta'anis (8a) that we cited earlier that communal prayer is accepted even when the worshiper does not direct his heart.

In the order of prayer which is a fixed service intent is not essential... Which is not the case when the person requests his own new needs, then he needs extra intent... And perhaps this is included in what the Rabbis said in Ta'anis (8a) ... "Here it refers to an individual, there to a community." This means that the order of prayer, which is communal, is accepted even without intent. But not a new request, which requires exceptional intent.

The innovation of *Meshech Chochma* is that the power of communal prayer derives from the unified text of prayer which is the order of prayer established a long time ago by the Men of the Great Assembly. This is different than a new text, which is innovated now by each and every person according to his own needs. One who innovates a new text must invest his energy and his intent for this. This is the meaning of the Talmud, "here it refers to a community," meaning the communal text established by the Men of the Great Assembly.

Based on *Meshech Chochma* we have a new understanding of the words of *The Kuzari* cited above. *The Kuzari* counts two reasons for the benefit of communal prayer:

1. The community does not pray for anything that causes damage to another,³⁰⁴ whereas an individual may pray for something which causes damage to others.
2. It is unlikely that an individual will complete his prayer without having any error or lapse of concentration.

To correct these defects, "They established for us that an individual should pray a communal prayer, and that the prayer should be recited with a community, in order that some of them will complete that which the others are lacking in error or intentionally, and from the total there will be a complete prayer with pure intent."

It seems clear how the second defect is corrected with the power of the community. But it is not at all clear how the community standing side by side will correct the first defect where an individual may pray for his needs and success in a way that will cause harm to others.

³⁰⁴ See [[[footnote XXX233]]] above.

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However, *The Kuzari* is very precise in his words and his intent was primarily for the text of the prayer which is called communal prayer. According to him, the Rabbis established two parameters: "They established for us that an individual should pray a communal prayer, and that his prayer should be with a community." The establishment of communal prayer has two facets. An individual who prays with a community and using the fixed communal text. One who prays with this text will not harm others, and in this way both defects mentioned will be corrected.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin adds to the aforementioned ideas of the importance and value of the fixed text established by the Men of the Great Assembly, in his book *Nefesh Hachayim* (2:13). In the text established by the Men of the Great Assembly for communal prayer the Rabbis included lofty intent, and it contains from its outset the expressions for all remedies and forces that arise individually at any given time.³⁰⁵

In his words:

For the true, deep, inner intent of prayer we do not know... Only a small part of the intent of prayer was revealed to us by the early Rabbis... until the last of the Godly men, the Arizal, who worked hard to make wonderful intents in prayer. They are not even a drop in the ocean compared to the deep inner meaning intended by the Men of the Great Assembly who established the prayer. They were 120 elders including many prophets.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ A certain well-known military man who was distant from Torah and mitzvos, stood next to the Western Wall after his release. Someone handed him a book of Tehillim and he began to recite chapters of Tehillim. When they asked him why he did so, he answered, "I don't know. But what I felt and wanted to say was written here."

Similarly, look at what Professor Harel Fisch wrote in "Power of Prayer" in *Maariv* Cheshvan 28, 5734 (1973):

That awesome day, Yom Kippur 5734. Toward evening I sat in the Synagogue along with my brothers the house of Yisrael when we heard the sirens. Prayer continued. We did not compose this prayer to make it match the trouble that was striking us, but it was as if it wrote itself without need for correction or updates based on the events of that time. "Do not abandon us, HASHEM, our God. Do not become distant from us. Act Give us a sign for good that our enemies will see and be shamed. For you are HASHEM, our helper and our consolation. You answer, HASHEM, our God."

³⁰⁶ See also the words of Rabbi Yosef Chaim (Ben Ish Chai) in *Ben Yehoyada* on Berachos 7. He writes that the *Shemoneh Esrei* blessings, "according to the truth contain lofty secrets and were established to perfect supernal worlds and holy *sefiros*... Because these words were established through prophecy and Divine spirit. The Men of the Great Assembly did not establish them based on their intellect, but rather the spirit of HASHEM spoke through them and placed the words on their tongues. HASHEM placed these words in their mouths to

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Anyone who truly understands will understand that there is no human being who could establish such a wonderful and awesome rectification. To include and conceal within a fixed set prayer of one single text the rectifications of all the supernal worlds and energies and the drawing down of new, different influxes. From the time they established it until the coming of the Mashiach... there was not, nor will there be, any individual prayer which is the same as any another that preceded it or followed it, at all³⁰⁷... This would be impossible other than through prophecy from up Above, and His holy spirit, blessed is He, which appeared to them in a tremendous degree when they established the set text of the prayers and blessings. HASHEM placed these numbered words in their mouths and concealed within them all the rectifications.

There is tremendous power within the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer which is recited in a unified and set formula established by the Men of the Great Assembly. True that within this single text each individual gives expression to his personal needs, about which he has intent, however all the intents together were included initially within this unified text, established by prophets.

An additional facet pertaining to the text of the prayer was explained by the Vilna Gaon. He explains that in a certain sense every person when he stands in prayer is a *shaliach tzibur*, even when he prays alone. He writes in *Bi'ur Hagra* at the beginning of the fifth chapter of Berachos that the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer was established using plural language because its essence is a prayer for the nation. We pray that the Holy One, blessed is He, will return all those who stray in repentance, and will heal all those who are suffering. The entire community is focused around a single text, though each person has intent in his own framework concentrating especially on his individual needs. That request and intent has the value of communal prayer, because the entire community uses the same version of the text at the same time. Therefore, it is considered as if the entire community asked and beseeched along with each individual for their personal needs. Even though each member of the community does not know what is in the other's heart, he uses a text in which

establish them just as He places words in the mouth of a prophet, and within them are concealed very many hidden secrets, like the words of Tanach which have seventy different facets..."

³⁰⁷ Rabbi Chaim Vital in *Sha'ar Hakavanos* 59a points out:

There has been no prayer from the time the world was created until the end of the world which was similar at all to any other prayer. The concept is that the purpose of the mitzvah of prayer is to collect the sparks of holiness, and each day and every prayer collects new sparks which were never gathered before that time. This is the secret reason for the obligation placed upon us to pray every day and at every time. Because in every prayer there are new aspects that were never made in any other prayer ever.

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the Men of the Great Assembly initially included all possible intents, so all of them share the prayer of each and every one in their quorum.

Similarly, we find in the Zohar (Parshas Vayishlach 167b) that Yaakov was “wholesome” and therefore the Holy One, blessed is He, desired his prayer. About this the verse says, “Yaakov was very afraid and was distressed,” (Bereishis 32:8). The explanation (based on the *Masok Midvash* commentary on the Zohar) is that Yaakov’s prayer included all the prayers of his children who prayed with him, and thus included all their wishes and requests. His prayer was therefore considered like public prayer, and for this reason the Holy One, blessed is He, desired his prayer. Since the Holy One, blessed is He, desired his prayer, he brought fear into his heart in order that Yaakov would pray with his heart and soul.

Based on this, the section of Talmud in Berachos 7b cited above can also be explained. Rav Nachman stood to pray for his troubles and his personal needs – individual prayer. Rabbi Yitzchak turned to Rabbi Nachman and questioned why he did not recite his prayers with the community. The Talmud says that he should have done so to fulfil the verse stated by King David, “He redeemed my soul in peace from my being embattled, because many were with me.” This seems strange – what is the proof from the verse to the situation of Rav Nachman? True, there it deals with prayer about war in which all the community stands behinds the single need for victory in the battle, and therefore they all gathered to pray communally, whereas Rav Nachman prayed an individual prayer for his own needs. But even if he had done this at the time the community was praying it would not be similar to the case when all the community gathers to pray for a single trouble shared by them all.³⁰⁸

However, based on this, it is clear that even when a person recites a personal prayer, he is praying the same *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer recited with a *minyan* that is considered communal prayer. Even though each individual has intent for his own needs, it creates a coherence that includes all the prayers of their various shades and types that unite and become a communal prayer that presents requests both for the entire community, and also for every individual. Furthermore, it also includes all the inner intents which the Men of the Great Assembly invested within it.

³⁰⁸ *Ben Ish Chai* in *Ben Yehoyada* explains that Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Yosei did not bring these sources for communal prayer, because these verses may be referring specifically to “many people praying for a matter that concerns them all. But an individual who prays with the community for something that concerns only him, cannot be inferred from this verse.”

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Based on this, the words of the Talmud (Berachos 7b) are clear. Even when Rav Nachman came to pray his individual prayer, if he recited it with the rest of the worshipers, his prayer transformed into communal prayer insofar as it was "because many were with me." Although prayer should express a trove of desires, troubles and requests, of many people, at various times, the unified text allows the entire community to join with the individual in his private requests, and they all pray for the individual needs of each person. This prayer is transformed to an act of unity, with all the community focused around it.

'HASHEM, Hear My Prayer and Let My Cry Come to You," (Tehillim 102)

The Cry of The Individual Among the Prayer of The Group

Nevertheless, communal prayer does not harm the unique connection that every individual has with his Creator, because, as we said, the Men of the Great Assembly put into the framework of this unified prayer the possibility for every single individual in every single generation to give expression to the cries of his heart that he has intent for, since all the different intents were initially included in this unified text.

Furthermore, not only did the Rabbis not limit the individual at all from his meaningful prayer and intent of his heart, but they also permitted an individual with his mouth to include his personal requests in his own words for everything he needs, within the text of the prayer.

So, we find in *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 119:1)*:

If one wants to add to any of the middle blessings something which is similar to the blessing, he may add. How so? If he had a sick person, he prays for mercy for them in the blessing of "Heal us"; If he needed a livelihood, he asks for it in the "Blessing for livelihood."

Rema: And when he adds, he begins the blessing, and then adds (in the middle) but should not add and then begin the blessing (*Tur 567*).

And in "Hear the prayer," he may ask for anything he needs, because that blessing contains all the requests.

So, the Rabbis allowed for the possibility of an individual adding his personal requests, in his own words, while reciting the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer. An

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individual can combine his request into the blessing which deals with that topic.

Furthermore, *Mishna Berura* (§3) explains why the worshiper must first begin the blessing with the fixed text and afterwards add his personal needs in the middle of the blessing. It is because, "He needs to create the essence of the set framework that was created by the Rabbis, and his request should be secondary to that, not the other way around."

The requirement that his personal request must be "secondary" to the Rabbi's fixed wording of the blessing can be understood in light of the fact that the text of the original blessing was arranged by our Rabbis and based on prophecy and supernal secrets as Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explained. This text includes all the requests and all the necessary rectifications that extend to all the supernal worlds. It is infinitely more important than the personal request of a certain individual at a specific moment.

But it seems that there is an even deeper explanation for this. When a personal request is presented in this way the individual has far greater power. On the one hand, he expresses himself in an individual and intimate manner to his Creator. On the other hand, his prayer is included within the text of the blessing that was established with prophecy by the Men of the Great Assembly, so it receives the tremendous power of prayer of the Rabbis.

The person's request is not moved by his own limited power. One who needs healing pours his pain into the blessing of "Heal us," and the entire Jewish people cries out with him, "Heal us." In this way his prayer receives the maximum power to break through the Heavens and to combine his personal prayer with the combined prayer of the masses in the immortal text of the Rabbis.

Furthermore, when an individual includes himself with the entire Jewish people, and he prays with the community, he is judged and sentenced along with the community. So, for any event that may happen, this individual will receive the benefits of HASHEM's guarantee of the eternity of the Jewish people. His prayer is not a lone voice within the community, but rather a part of the communal prayer.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹ The distinction between an individual and a community is not whether one prays alone or with a minyan. Rather the distinction is between the "sentence" of a community and the "sentence" of an individual. For a community as a whole, HASHEM answers at any time. Whereas an individual's fate requires a "time of favor" from HASHEM to receive his prayers -- during the Ten Days of Penitence.

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In conclusion, we learn that the personal facet of prayer is retained. They embodied it within the text of prayer, and when necessary they allowed an individual to add further to the blessing in his own words.

Thus, the unified text of prayer is what brings together the prayers of the individuals into a communal prayer. Were it not for this unified text, it would not be possible to say that ten men gathering together in one place and praying together, each in his own words, would transform into a community. Without the unified prayer bringing them together there would be no communal prayer. Indeed, it would be a "time of favor" and a time of mercy, but it would be personal prayer and not communal prayer. Even the fact that this is done in a holy, shared place, is not enough to transform it into communal prayer. In order that the prayers of an individual will become part of a communal prayer, it is necessary that he recite the *Shemoneh Esrei* in the unified text established by the Men of the Great Assembly. Only when ten men are united around the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer does it become communal prayer, and there becomes a union in which they all share and partake in each and every individual's own specific intent, even though each person is involved in his own needs. The unified text is what creates communal prayer and unites everyone into a single prayer, even though the individual intents are different.

The Divine Spirit Rests with a Community

A Minyan Can Recite Matters of Holiness

There is another reason that communal prayer is preferable to individual prayer when the community is praying.

This is how Rabbi Yitzchak Yehuda Shmelkes explained it (in *Tzela'ot Habayit* on his *Beis Yitzchak, Even Ha'ezer*, end of section 2, §3). He asks a question on the Talmud in Yevamos (49b) which explains that the verse, "Like HASHEM, our God, whenever we call on Him," (Devarim 40 refers to the community, whereas the verse, "Seek Him when He is to be found," (Yishaya 55) refers to an individual whose prayer is heard when God is close to all those who call on Him, during the Ten Days of Penitence.

Beis Yitzchak asks: How can the Talmud say that the verse, "Seek HASHEM when He is to be found" refers to an individual, when the verse is written in the plural? He answers, "Perhaps when the Talmud says, 'this refers to a community' it means the sentencing of the community, which applies to the entire community together. The verse says about that, "whenever we call on Him." But this is not the case for a community where everyone prays for their individual needs. Regarding this the verse says, "Seek HASHEM when He is to be found."

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The Talmud states, "From where do we derive that ten who pray have the Divine Presence with them? As the verse states, 'HASHEM stands in the congregation of God,'" (Berachos 6a).

Based on this, when people combine to form a community, they cause the Divine Presence to rest in that place, and so their prayer is recited when the Divine Presence is with them. This value is not derived from the shared prayer, but from the fact that they gather together in a single place, which creates a situation of a "congregation of God," which has "the Divine Presence with them." Even if the ten men were gathered together and were involved in their own personal prayers, nevertheless they would have the benefit of the Divine Presence being with them. This itself helps their prayers to be accepted, and even more so when they combine it with communal prayer.

It may be that the foundation of all the benefits mention above, that communal prayer is at a "time of favor," and that HASHEM does not despise communal prayers, derives from the fact that the Divine Presence rests with the community as they pray. This fact is what creates the "time of favor," and what causes the Holy One, blessed is He, not to despise their prayers. Perhaps this is the reason that the Rabbis established the prayer for the return of the Divine Presence and instructed us to say, "Find favor, HASHEM, our God, in Your people Yisrael and in their prayers... and may You accept with love and with favor the fire offerings of Yisrael and their prayers."

Evidence for this idea comes from:

1. The Talmud in Sotah (33a) which asks:

May prayer be recited in any language? But didn't Rav Yehuda say a person must never ask his needs in Aramaic, for Rabbi Yochanan said that if anyone asks for his needs in Aramaic the ministering angels pay no attention to him, because the ministering angels do not recognize Aramaic.

The Talmud answers, "This is not difficult. Here it refers to an individual, here to a community."

2. Rashi explains: An individual requires assistance from the ministering angels. A community does not require their help, as the verse says, "For HASHEM does not despise the many" (Iyov 36:4) -- He does not despise the prayers of the many.

3. Rabbi Akiva Eiger in *Gilyon Hashas* ad. loc. refers to the question of the *Batei Kehuna* who asked, why does Rashi say that a community does not require Heavenly assistance for the reason that HASHEM does not despise the prayers of the many? He should have explained more simply based on the Talmud (Berachos 6a) which says that when ten men pray together the Divine Presence is with them. This itself is a reason why they can pray in Aramaic, because when the Divine Presence rests in a place it is possible to pray in Aramaic. We find this in Tractate Shabbos (12b) that at the bedside of an ill person a visitor is able to recite his prayer in Aramaic because the Divine Presence is above the head of a sick person³¹⁰ and the prayer does not require the assistance of the ministering angels. Why then, did Rashi not give this as the reason why a community may pray in Aramaic?
4. The resolution of this difficulty in Rashi appears to be based on what Rabbi Shmuel Aharon Ravin wrote in his book *Einei Shmuel* on this section. "The explanation of this matter that the ministering angels assist in the acceptance of prayers³¹¹ is that it is well known that the essence of prayer is from the heart, as the Rabbis taught in Ta'anis (2a), "What is service of the heart, you must say it is prayer." But words without thought are nothing, because the essence is the intent of the heart. Due to our many sins, a plague has spread in our midst, when we stand to pray our thoughts wander away all over the world, here and there. Such a prayer cannot come before HASHEM, because He examines the heart, and this prayer is without any heart at all. However, the ministering angels, who do not know the thoughts within the hearts, accept this prayer, for they do not know the thoughts. They intervene and ask Him, blessed is He, to accept the prayer. Therefore, an individual requires the assistance of the angels. However, concerning a group of many the verse states, "For HASHEM does not despise the many (Iyov 36:4).
5. It turns out that there is no difficulty in the words of Rashi, because even though the Divine Presence hears the prayers even in Aramaic, there still is a catch. For the Divine Presence also sees what is in the hearts and knows that the prayer lacks complete intent. Therefore, Rashi is forced to explain, based on the Talmud in Ta'anis, that the prayer of a group is not despised even when there is a lack of intent. In fact, according to how we explained, the closeness of the Divine

³¹⁰ See in more detail below in the chapter of "Prayer for an Ill Person."

³¹¹ This requires explanation, because the Holy One, blessed is He, "the entire earth is filled with His Glory." How does He not know about the needs stated in prayer? Does he need the ministering angels to bring the prayer before Him and advocate for it?

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Presence is what causes that the prayers of the group will not be despised.

The Divine Presence resting amongst ten men, who form a "congregation of God," is noted also by additions that are added to the communal prayer. It allows the community to recite words of holiness, such as *barchu*, *kaddish* and *kedusha*. Holiness is what was promised to the "Jewish people," and therefore only the community has permission to sanctify HASHEM. The gathering of a community of worshipers into a *minyan*, therefore, gives communal prayer its unique style and sanctifies it. Thus, we find in Berachos (21b):

From where do we derive that an individual does not recite *kedusha*? As the verse states, "I shall be sanctified among the Children of Yisrael." Every matter of sanctity cannot be with less than ten.

How is this implied in the words?

The verse states here, "I shall be sanctified *among* the Children of Yisrael," and the verse states elsewhere, (about the spies,) "Separate from *among* this congregation." Just as in that case there were ten (the ten spies, because one spy from each of the twelve tribes was sent, but Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh separated from the other spies, so there were ten who remained) so too here, [with regard to a *minyan* it requires] ten.

We see, then, another facet which distinguishes between an individual who prays alone and a gathering of a community which comes to pray. Only a community, which is different in its essence, and the totality is greater than its parts, represents something which itself is called "Children of Yisrael," and may recite matters of holiness.

In the early sources the Rabbis highly praised the value of saying words of holiness. *Mabit*, in *Beis Elokim*³¹² saw in this a reason for the obligation of communal prayer, because only in this way is the prayer complete when it includes matters of holiness which can only be said among ten.

Chofetz Chaim expanded upon this in his book *Shemiras Halashon* (part 2, *chasimas hasefer* 2:9):

³¹² *Sha'ar Hatefillah*, chapter 11 which we cited earlier.

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When one prays with a community he has *barchu*, *kedusha* and " *amen, yehe shmei rabba*," each of which alone is something very great. Through reciting *barchu* a crown is made onto the Holy One, blessed is He, as cited in the midrash. Through *kedusha* one fulfills the verse, "I shall be sanctified among the Children of Yisrael." In addition, through this we add sanctity to ourselves, as the verse concludes, "I am HASHEM Who sanctifies you." And through saying " *amen, yehe shmei rabba*," a person's sins are forgiven, as our Rabbis said, (Shabbos 119b): "Anyone who answers ' *amen, yehe shmei rabba*,' with all his might (i.e. with all his intent) – even if he has a taint of heresy, he will be forgiven."

However, even though we find that words of holiness are recited in communal prayer, it does not seem that the sources which obligate praying with a *minyan* are the reason for communal prayer. This raises the following question which we will now address.

'Prayer in a Community' Or 'Prayer of the Community'?

The halakhic authorities question whether individuals praying among ten men, some of who have already prayed, is considered communal prayer.

1. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (*Iggros Moshe, Orach Chayim* vol. 1 §28) was asked whether six men who have not prayed can pray while four other men who have already prayed stand with them, such that the prayer of the six will be considered communal prayer.
2. The question arises from the rule mentioned with reciting *kedusha* or *kaddish* where Ramban (cited in *Ran* on *Rif* in Megillah 3a) writes that it is sufficient that there should be ten men present, including six who are obligated to pray (i.e. who have not yet heard *kedusha*). This leads to the question of whether the same law applies to prayer with a *minyan*. Is it sufficient to have most of a *minyan* praying to have it considered as communal prayer? Rav Feinstein distinguished between two principles.
3. In general, there is a principle of "the majority is like the entirety." For example, regarding a cup of wine for *kiddush*. There is no need to drink the entire contents of the cup, and it is sufficient to drink the majority, because "the majority is like the entirety." Do we similarly say that when there are six out of a *minyan* of ten who need to pray that "the majority is like the entirety" and so it is considered to be communal prayer?
4. Rav Feinstein notes the language of *Chayei Adam* (19:1) cited in *Mishna Berura* (90:28): "The essence of communal prayer is that ten adult males

must pray together," and derives from there that it requires ten who are praying.

5. Rav Feinstein explains that the principle of "the majority is like the entirety" does not apply here, because, "the principle of the majority is like the entirety" does not apply to minimum required sizes, because with those sizes, lacking even a tiny amount makes it invalid. In other words, even though in drinking, it is sufficient to drink the majority of the cup, that is because there is no minimum amount for that drinking. But regarding the size of the cup, which must contain a minimum of a *revi'is*, it is impossible to fulfill the obligation with a cup that only holds slightly less than a *revi'is*. Similarly, when the Torah obligates eating a *kezayis* of *matzah* to fulfill the obligation, the mitzvah cannot be fulfilled by only eating the majority of a *kezayis*. Similarly, when the minimum size of a *sukkah* is given as seven *tefachim*, it is not kosher if it has only the majority of seven *tefachim*.

So too, since ten is the minimum number of worshipers to form a *minyan*, it is impossible to reach the same result with only the majority of a *minyan*. Just as it is impossible to say *kedusha* with only nine men, and one cannot apply the principle of "the majority" because the required minimum amount of ten is lacking, so too, regarding communal prayer, there is no *minyan* without the minimum required number of ten male worshipers.³¹³

6. This distinction can be understood also according to the words of Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik of Brisk (cited by his student Rabbi Baruch Ber Leibovitz in *Birkas Shmuel* on Yevamos §21). Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik analyzed those matters which may only be done in the presence of ten men, such as reading the Torah, or reading the Megillah, or the repetition of the *amida*. He asked whether:
 - a. Is the obligation on each individual, but an individual has no way to fulfill the obligation without a community? Or
 - b. Does the obligation not exist unless there is a congregation of ten? In other words, without the community it is not that there is an obligation which cannot be fulfilled, but rather the obligation does not exist until a congregation of ten men gathers.
7. According to Rabbi Chaim there is a clear distinction between these two approaches regarding the principle of "the majority is like the entirety."
 - a. If there is an obligation on each individual which can only be fulfilled with a congregation of ten, then we can say that if there

³¹³ See further in *Emek Beracha* by Rabbi Aryeh Pomeranchik, siman 7.

is a majority of men who are obligated and a minority who are exempt, we would follow the principle of “the majority is like the entirety,” and it is as if they are all obligated. In such a case the obligation already exists, and the issue is only how to fulfill it, so the principle can be applied. Since the majority of the ten has not yet prayed, and is obligated to recite those matters of sanctity, they outweigh the minority who are not obligated, and it is as if all ten have not yet prayed.

- b. However, if the obligation does not exist until there is a congregation, then until there are ten men gathered there is no obligation at all. In such a case we cannot apply the principle of “the majority is like the entirety” because there is not a majority that is obligated. The obligation only begins once there are ten, and not when there are only nine or less. The obligation which begins only once there are ten cannot apply when there are less, because the obligation is only on a congregation, and there is not yet a congregation.
- 8. Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik writes that this issue needs to be decided separately in each case when a *minyan* is required, and he does not make a clear ruling. Similarly, *Iggros Moshe* discusses both prayer with a *minyan* and reciting matters of holiness. If, for reciting matters of holiness the obligation is on each individual, but it requires the presence of ten in order that the holy words can be recited, “among the Children of Yisrael” it is possible to apply the principle of “the majority is like the entirety.” However, with regard to a *minyan* for prayer, the number of ten men is the required size for the mitzvah, thus without ten the minimum size for a *minyan* is lacking, and it is impossible to apply the principle of “the majority is like the entirety.”³¹⁴

³¹⁴ It was obvious to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein that if only six people pray, even according to those who hold that they may repeat the *amida*, it is still not considered communal prayer. On the other hand, even if there is only one who has not said *kedusha*, along with nine others who are not obligated, he can say *kedusha* aloud. See further there in his responsum that if the obligation is due to the principle of “the majority is like the entirety” then six who have not prayed cannot join with a larger group who have already prayed to form a *minyan*, because the majority is not obligated. Rather they must separate and bring four others from the community who have prayed to join with them. Only when they have separated do the six comprise most of the *minyan*.

Shaliach Tzibur

Prayer of the Group or the Representative of the Group?

We have seen that the value of communal prayer stems from a number of different factors that include: the prayer event and the power of a group, a “time of favor,” the unified text of the prayers and the presence of the Divine Presence. When there are ten men who comprise a “congregation of HASHEM” it is possible to recite matters of holiness. These explanations clarify the power and strength of communal prayer, which is a prayer of individuals who worship with a congregation. We saw earlier that when an individual is nullified to the group it is not only “communal prayer,” but “prayer of the community.” We also discussed the reason that the wording of the prayers was established in the plural.

Let us now examine how prayer of the community works. Is it a community that prays together, or a community that sends a representative to pray on its behalf, as a *shaliach hatzibur* (representative of the community)? Let us try also to understand how it is possible to appoint a representative for “service of the heart,” because there is a principle that even uttering words cannot be performed by a representative.³¹⁵

From the fact that the prayer leader is designated as the *shaliach tzibur* it implies that he recites a single prayer in the name of, and on behalf of, the community. This is not prayer of individuals, but an act performed by many as a group through their representative – the *shaliach tzibur*.

To be precise, communal prayer nowadays includes two parts – the silent *amida* which is recited by each individual in the presence of a *minyan* of ten men, and afterwards the repetition of the *amida* by the *shaliach tzibur*. We will see below that there is room to say that the silent *amida* of the individual is not the main essence of communal prayer, and it is specifically the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* which is the essential component of communal prayer.

It seems that the question about the essence of communal prayer is itself a dispute between Tanna'im in the Mishna on Rosh Hashanah (33b):

³¹⁵ Gittin 29a. The meaning of this expression is that something which is essentially verbal cannot be performed by someone else on behalf of another, but only by that person uttering it himself.

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Rabban Gamliel holds that the *shaliach tzibur* fulfills the obligation to recite the *amida* on behalf of the rest of the community. The other Rabbis hold that each individual has the same obligation as the *shaliach tzibur*.

The Talmud (34b) brings a *baraisa* relating to this dispute:

It was taught: [The Rabbis] said to Rabban Gamliel, "Why does the community pray?" He replied, "In order that the *shaliach tzibur* will be able to arrange his prayer."

Rabban Gamliel asked them, "According to you, why does the *shaliach tzibur* descend before the ark [to repeat the *amida*]?" They replied, "In order to fulfill the obligation for anyone who is not proficient [and cannot recite the words on their own]." He said to them, "Just as he fulfills the obligation for one who is not proficient, so he also fulfills the obligation for those who are proficient."

It seems that Rabban Gamliel's opinion is that the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* is the main one, and the individuals recite their prayers silently before the repetition solely so that the *shaliach tzibur* will have time to prepare his prayer.³¹⁶

Conversely, the view of the Rabbis is that the silent prayer of individuals is the main thing, and nobody is permitted to skip it. The Rabbis only allowed for the possibility that someone who is not an expert can fulfill his obligation through the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur*.³¹⁷

This dispute appears to make a practical difference for one who comes to Synagogue late, after the community has already prayed its silent *amida*.

³¹⁶ The Kozhiglover Rav in his responsa *Eretz Tzvi* (vol. 2 siman 6) explains Rabban Gamliel's opinion:

It seems strange to permit the entire congregation to pray the *Shemoneh Esrei* blessings for no reason in order that the *shaliach tzibur* can arrange his prayer. They could wait while he prepares himself without praying. Therefore, it seems that the explanation is that communal prayer is for the sake of the *shaliach tzibur*. The community prays first to help the *shaliach tzibur* recite the prayers properly and fluently, and so that his prayers should be accepted on behalf of the community. The Rabbis saw with their wisdom that to achieve this the community must pray in the Synagogue in the presence of the *shaliach tzibur*... and that the prayer must have some of the value of communal prayer. Even though the main communal prayer is when the *shaliach tzibur* prays, nevertheless all the silent prayers of the community are necessary preparation for the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur*. Therefore, it also has the value of communal prayer, based on the principle that "one who joins with someone performing a mitzvah is considered as if he also did the mitzvah."

³¹⁷ This is brought as *halakha* in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 124 cited above.

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Should he begin his prayer and recite it with the *shaliach tzibur* and it will be considered as communal prayer exactly as if he had begun praying with the community when they recited the silent prayer?

If we say that the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* is the essence of prayer, then the recitation of an individual with the *shaliach tzibur* would be considered communal prayer in every respect.

Conversely, if the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* is only a rabbinic decree to fulfill the obligation on behalf of one who is not an expert, then the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* is not the essence of communal prayer, and an individual who recites his prayer silently along with the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* has not fulfilled the mitzvah of communal prayer properly.

Chasam Sofer ruled on this in a responsum (*Likutei Responsa* §3):³¹⁸

When an individual prays with [the *shaliach tzibur*] that is the essence of communal prayer. For when each individual in a group prays by himself that is called individual prayer. Only when one person prays on behalf of the group does it become communal prayer. And the Rabbis decreed that each person must pray by himself first only because it is impossible for them all to have intent when the *shaliach tzibur* prays. It would be fitting to recite the prayer word by word with the *shaliach tzibur* because that it like fulfilling the obligation of the group. However, the Rabbis established the silent prayer first in order that the *shaliach tzibur* has time to arrange his prayer, as explained at the end of Rosh Hashanah (34b). If so, when an individual recites the prayer with the *shaliach tzibur* that is the true communal prayer.³¹⁹

Conversely, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein³²⁰ disagrees with *Chasam Sofer* and concludes that one who prays with the *shaliach tzibur* is not considered like one who has prayed communal prayer, since the *halakha* is not like Rabban

³¹⁸ See also *Chasam Sofer* on the Torah at the beginning of Vayikra:

Even if thousands of people pray, each one is still called an individual. However, a *shaliach tzibur* who fulfills the mitzvah for the group and prays on their behalf makes them into "many," and "with many people is the splendor of the King," (Mishlei 14:28).

³¹⁹ See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 109:2: "If one begins to pray with the *shaliach tzibur*... he should recite with him word by word all of *kedusha* as he says it..."

Mishna Berura ad loc. (§14) writes: It is permitted even *ab initio* to begin at the same time as the *shaliach tzibur*."

See also *Chazon Ish (Orach Chayim siman 19:7)* who writes that it is preferable for an individual who is late to pray with the *shaliach tzibur* than to hear the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* and then pray alone afterwards.

³²⁰ *Iggros Moshe, Orach Chaim* vol. 3 §9.

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Gamliel but like the Rabbis who disagreed with him. For the rest of the year, other than the High Holidays, the *shaliach tzibur* does not fulfill the obligation for one who is proficient, and even though the rabbinic decree for the *shaliach tzibur* to always repeat the *amida* remains in place, even when everyone is proficient and knows how to pray, "This is not considered as if the community is praying, since they are not actually praying."³²¹

The view of *Chasam Sofer*, however, is that, even according to the Rabbis who disagree with Rabban Gamliel, once the Sages decreed the repetition of the *amida* by the *shaliach tzibur*, it becomes a communal prayer in every respect.³²² Moreover, it is the essential part of communal prayer.

Rambam seems to offer support for *Chasam Sofer's* opinion when he writes (*Hilchos Tefillah* 8:4): What is communal prayer? One person prays aloud and everyone else listens."³²³

It turns out that the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* is defined as communal prayer, and that distinguishes it from the silent prayer of all the individuals in the *minyan*.

This is explicit in *Shiltei Giborim* at the end of Rosh Hashanah which says that the shofar blasts (of the "standing" section blown during the *amida* prayer) are blown while the *shaliach tzibur* repeats the *amida* and not during the silent prayer. Because the *shaliach tzibur's* repetition of the *amida* is considered communal prayer and is answered. But when the members of the community pray silently they are all considered as individuals.³²⁴

³²¹ Rabbi Moshe Feinstein explains the words of *Mishna Berura* and *Chazon Ish* (cited above, footnote XXXX292) as follows: "It is only preferable than praying totally alone." Rabbi Feinstein rejects all the proofs of *Chasam Sofer* to the extent that he labels his words as "mistaken." Since the words attributed to *Chasam Sofer* is so mistaken, "these words cannot be from the *Chasam Sofer*, and therefore take no notice of this responsum." However, many authorities have justified *Chasam Sofer's* opinion. See also the rulings of Rabbi Shmuel Vosner in *Responso Shevet Halevi* vol. 4, §11.

³²² This opinion fits well with the loftiest levels that the early authorities attributed to the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* as mentioned above.

³²³ This is how Rabbi Moshe Feinstein himself understood the words of Rambam in a different responsum (*Iggros Moshe, Orach Chayim* vol. 1, §28). However later he rejects this understanding of Rambam's words, according to his stated opinion that the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* is not the essence of communal prayer. Therefore, he was forced to give a different explanation for Rambam's opinion.

³²⁴ See *Responso Avnei Nezer, Orach Chayim* §445 and *Responso Yechave Da'as* vol. 8, §7.

'Service of the Heart' During the Ailent *Amida*

'Service of the Daily Sacrifice' Through a Representative

However, whether we say that the silent *amida* is the essential prayer, or that the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* is the main one, we must explain why the Rabbis decreed to always recite the prayer and then have the *shaliach tzibur* repeat it, even when there is nobody present who is not proficient to pray by themselves.

It seems that this expresses a principle that we mentioned earlier that prayer has two different expressions: (a) prayer as service of the heart, and (b) prayer which replaces the sacrifices. Communal prayer is "service of the heart" of each individual within the community united in a single gathering of prayer. After the individuals have completed their "communal prayer," which is defined as a request for Divine mercy, the *shaliach tzibur* comes and offers the "prayer of the community" as a communal sacrifice offered in the name of the entire community. This prayer comes in place of the daily sacrifice.

In previous chapters we discussed the words of the Talmud (Berachos 26b) that prayer has two fundamental principles:

1. "Prayer was established by the Patriarchs" – prayer as a request for mercy, just as the Patriarchs placed their trust in HASHEM and turned to him particularly in times of trouble. This is prayer as expressed in the blessing, "Hear our voices... Have compassion and mercy on us, and accept our prayers with mercy and favor, for You are HASHEM who hears prayers and supplications... Blessed are you, HASHEM, who hears prayer."
2. "Prayer was instituted in place of the daily sacrifices" – the act of prayer placed on the person as the service of HASHEM in place of the sacrifices. This is prayer as a mitzvah with a fixed time, and it is in place of the sacrifices in the Temple, as expressed in the blessing, of Retzei ("have favor") – "Have favor, HASHEM our HASHEM, on Your people Yisrael and their prayers... And may the service of Your people be continually for favor."

Similarly, it seems that individual prayer is a personal request for mercy. Every person stands and concentrates on requesting his needs and he is

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reviewed alone like those ascending the path of Meron.³²⁵ The focus of intent of the worshiper is his personal needs; one focuses on requesting livelihood, another focuses on the need for healing, while the third specifically needs intellect. This is the aspect of "the prayers were established by the Patriarchs." True, the text is unified, and was established by the Men of the Great Assembly, however, the intent is personal. This is prayer as "service of the heart" and it cannot be performed by a representative.

Conversely, the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* is prayer offered by the community in place of the communal sacrifice, which the Talmud calls, "Prayer was instituted in place of the sacrifices." It does not collect the individual prayers together, which are reviewed with a single scanning, and it doesn't even include the needs of the community. Rather the *shaliach tzibur* works as a representative of the community as a whole, like the *kohen* who offered the communal sacrifice on behalf of the entire nation.

Two Types of Representation and the Act of Prayer of the *Shaliach Tzibur*

What is the nature of this representation?

In the laws of representation there is a fundamental distinction between two types of representatives.³²⁶

1. Effectual representation (taking effect) -- when the representative performs an action, but the action works only because he received authorization from the one who sent him. For example, when giving a bill of divorce, it is clear that even if someone performs the required actions to divorce the wife of another, the divorce has no legality since

³²⁵ Rosh Hashanah 18a: On Rosh Hashanah all the inhabitants of the world pass before Him like those ascending to Meron... Rabbi Yochanan said, "And they are all reviewed in a single scanning."

³²⁶ For an in-depth discussion see Rabbi Baruch Dov Lebowitz in *Birkas Shmuel* on Kiddushin §19 in the name of Rabbi Itzele Rabinovitz of Ponevitzh; Rabbi Shimon Shkop in *Sha'arei Yosher* 7:7 and in *Kuntres Hashelichus*.

The distinction is between attributing the act itself to the one who appoints the representative when the representative acts as the long arm of the sender, to attributing only the legal outcome to the sender while the one who is considered to have done the act is the representative. So, for example, one who acquires something as a representative for another through the mechanism of his courtyard -- must he use the courtyard of the representative or of the one who sent him? If it is the act of the representative with only the legal result passing on to the one who sent him, the representative could make the acquisition using his own courtyard.

she is not his wife. However, if the husband appoints him as his representative he can give him power of attorney to give the divorce and effectuate it on his behalf. In this case the action belongs to the representative, and the one who sent him did no action. Only the effect of the action of the representative is attributed to the one who sent him.

2. Action representation -- when it is considered as if the one who sent him did the action, and the representative is like a long arm of the one who sent him. A representation such as this has force because of the command of the sender who nullifies the will of the representative who fulfills the actions of the sender while he himself is considered as if he is not there. In this case the sender is considered as if he himself performed the action.³²⁷ The expression, "A person's representative is like him" relates solely to this second type of representation, when the action itself is attributed to the sender, and the representative is considered to be his long arm which carries out the action. Therefore, in the discussion of the topic of representation in Kiddushin (41b), it does not use this expression except with regard to the action of slaughtering the Pesach offering. This is because regarding the Pesach sacrifice it is necessary to attribute the action of the slaughter to the sender.³²⁸

It is noteworthy that the expression, "A person's representative is like him" only appears once in the entirety of the Mishna (Berachos 5:5), "One who prays and errs, it is a bad sign for him. And if he is the *shaliach tzibur* it is a bad sign for those who sent him, because a person's representative is like him." If so, a *shaliach tzibur* attributes the action of prayer to those who sent him. This is not the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* on behalf of the community or about the community, but rather the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* is the prayer of the community itself.

The entire community offers a prayer through the *shaliach tzibur* and it is recited from his mouth. The prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* is therefore the prayer of the entire community and is similar to the act of offering sacrifices. It turns out that the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* is an expression of the prayer of the

³²⁷ An example of this definition attributing the action to the sender is in the opinion of Shammai the Elder in Kidushin 43a. When a person sends another to murder someone, the sender is held to be the murderer and is liable to the death penalty. (This is in accordance with his opinion that one can make a representative for a sinful matter). Murder is not a legal status but a physical action. If we were dealing with effectual representation, which attributes only the effect to the sender, it would be impossible to sentence him to death for a murder committed by the representative. Conversely, when we attribute the action to the sender, it turns out that when the representative killed the victim, the sender committed murder.

³²⁸ See Rabbi Baruch Lavski in *Responsa Minchas Baruch* vol. 1 §13.

community, because there is a community that offers a single prayer through the *shaliach tzibur*.

Another understanding that gives a different meaning to the status of the *shaliach tzibur* and the essence of his prayer appears in the writings of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik. He says that since communal prayer is a collective act of the entire community, it must be that the action of the *shaliach tzibur* is not due to "A person's representative is like him" in the simple meaning (neither of the two types of representation discussed above; not effectual representation, nor an action representation³²⁹) because if the *shaliach tzibur* serves as a representative for each of the individuals of the community who send him, then his prayer is considered as if each of those who sent him was praying a second individual prayer in the presence of the rest of the community. But that would be the same as the silent *amida* that they have already recited. The concept of "a person's representative is like him" would express the representation on behalf of the individuals such that the representative presents in one go a collection of individual prayers. But from the term "*shaliach tzibur*" we learn that he is not the representative of the group of individuals, rather he serves as the representative of the entire community. That is, he serves as a representative of the community as a whole, which has a separate identity than the collection of individuals.³³⁰

³²⁹ Rabbi Soloveitchik assumes (as will be explained later) that the concept of "a person's representative is like him" is brought in this context only as a metaphor and not as an expression of actual representation.

³³⁰ Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik in *Masora* vol. 5 p. 6-7, explains according to his opinion that the *shaliach tzibur* is a delegate of the community as having an independent existence, which only applies when the *shaliach tzibur* expresses aloud the text of the prayer. There must be nine men listening and paying attention to the *shaliach tzibur*'s repetition and he must say aloud "HASHEM, open my lips," at the beginning of the *Shemoneh Esrei* and "May the words of my mouth be for favor," at the end of his prayer. The *shaliach tzibur* must also be careful to recite the blessing, "We give thanks" aloud in a way that the community will hear. He must also be careful to recite aloud the entire text of the shortened repetition said on Friday night as explained in *Mishna Berura*. Because by definition, "communal prayer" requires that the entire congregation take part in listening to his prayer. Similarly, Rabbi Soloveitchik points out that when the *kohanim* recite the priestly blessing, the custom is that the *shaliach tzibur* says, "Our God and God of our fathers," so that saying "*kohanim*" and the verses will not be considered as a break in the middle of his repetition (based on the words of *Tosafos* Berachos 34 s.v. "*lo ya'aneh*"). It would appear that the *shaliach tzibur* must recite the entire text of "Our God and God of our fathers" aloud, not like the custom *Rema* mentions (*Orach Chayim* 128:10), because only those words that he says aloud when there are ten men listening are considered as part of the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur*.

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When the *shaliach tzibur* repeats the *amida* he presents a single prayer for the entire community before HASHEM, and this is the prayer of the community.³³¹

Let us now examine this explanation of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik in detail.

Communal Prayer – Explained by Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik

We might have thought that a *shaliach tzibur* offers the prayer in the name of each individual, being a conduit through which the many prayers of each and every person flow at the same time.³³²

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's insight is that the term "community" does not mean individuals gathered together so that each one can do his own thing in one gathering. Rather it expresses the joint nature of a community which allows them to work as a single entity.³³³

According to this explanation, the concept of "a person's representative is like him," mentioned in the Mishna (Berachos 5:5) regarding a *shaliach tzibur* does not mean that the individuals appoint a *shaliach tzibur* to act in their name, but rather he is the delegate of "the community" – he represents the action on

³³¹ *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* at the beginning of *siman* 581 rules that any Jew is valid to serve as a *shaliach tzibur* provided he is acceptable to the community. But if he takes the position by force (against the will of the congregation) they do not answer "amen" after him. The Vilna Gaon explains (ad loc. §17) that the *shaliach tzibur* must be acceptable to all the members of the community. This is true for both aspects of the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur*. According to the first aspect, where the *shaliach tzibur* is a representative who has the laws of a regular representative, it is obvious that he cannot act for the sender unless it is done with the knowledge and will of the sender. Also, in relation to the second aspect, where the *shaliach tzibur* represents the entire community and prays a single prayer on behalf of all of them, it is clear that in order to represent the community he must be acceptable to them.

³³² According to this explanation, the meaning of the concept, "A person's representative is like him," in the Mishna (Berachos 5:5) can be understood according to its plain meaning – the representative performs the action for the individual. This individual prayer is performed by the *shaliach tzibur* – in a community. However, it is not a collective action of the "community" as a whole. Rather this is representation that the *shaliach tzibur* makes on behalf of every individual.

³³³ Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz in *Sichos Mussar* (5733, p. 62-3) explains that the community is a new reality and is more than just the combination of so many individuals. For this reason, the community merits to more than any individual alone could merit. Rabbi Shmuelevitz cites *Derashos Haran (drush 1)*, which says, "Our Rabbis enthused about the praise of the community and the fear of it, until they said, 'The reverence of the community should always be upon you,' (Sotah 40a). We find that Moshe Rabbeinu, the foremost prophet, was punished for saying, 'Listen, you rebels!' (Bamidbar 20:10). This is despite the fact that each individual deserved this rebuke, but the group has esteem and importance greater than the sum of its parts."

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behalf of the entity known as "community." Therefore, the concept of "a person's representative is like him" is brought in this context only as a metaphor, because a representative does not have greater authority than the person who sent him. But in this case the action that the community performs through the *shaliach tzibur* is greater than the abilities of those individuals that form the community.

This new entity is possible because the *tzibur* as an abstract concept has a power of prayer which each individual alone lacks. The elevated position of the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* comes from the fact that it is a prayer offered by the community, which is a separate entity. It is the entire community turning to its Father in Heaven, and the Holy One, blessed is He, is never far from a community of Jews who turn to Him. Due to this, the communal prayer performed through the repetition of the *amida* is a higher, more lofty prayer.

The practical expression of this is explained by Rabbi Soloveitchik³³⁴ in terms of a *halakha* regarding a person who wants to fulfill his obligation of prayer though listening to the prayer recited by others.

1. In the Yerushalmi (Berachos 3:3) we find that even though there is a general principle that "all Jews are responsible for one another,"³³⁵ there are three places where a person cannot fulfill his obligation through another person: Reciting the *Shema*, prayer, and Grace after Meals.
In prayer – because it is a request for mercy and one person cannot request mercy on behalf of another.
Reading the *Shema* – because it is accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and one person cannot accept that on behalf of another.
Grace after Meals – because it is contingent on benefitting from the food. Therefore, only the person who actually enjoys the benefit is able to recite the blessing, and another person cannot give thanks on his behalf (just as he cannot eat on his behalf).
2. We find in *Beis Yosef* (on *Tur*, *Orach Chayim* 124) that an individual is not able to fulfill the obligation for someone who does not know how to have intent during prayer. In *Beis Yosef* Rav Yosef Karo points to the Yerushalmi as the source for this. Yet despite this, in *Shulchan Aruch*

³³⁴ *Reshimas Shiurim* on Sukkah 38a.

³³⁵ The principle is that, "All Jews are responsible for one another," (see Sanhedrin 43b on the meaning of the verse Devarim 29:28. See also the explanation of Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch on Devarim 27:1 and 27:9). This principle is the basis for the fact that one person can fulfill a mitzvah for another even after he himself has fulfilled the mitzvah.

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(*Orach Chayim* 124) Rav Yosef Karo rules that a *shaliach tzibur* can fulfill the obligation for one who does know how to have intent during prayer. How can that apparent contradiction be resolved?

3. Similarly, the words of the Yerushalmi are the source for this ruling in Rambam *Hilchos Tefillah* (8:4-5): "What is communal prayer? One person prays aloud, and everyone listens. This is not done with less than ten adult free men including the *shaliach tzibur*... And similarly, one may not recite the blessing for reading the *Shema* while the others listen and answer "amen" unless there are ten."

The first part of that *halakha* is understood based on the principle that the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* was instituted by our Rabbis only in a community of ten. However, the continuation of the *halakha* requires explanation, because there is a principle that one who hears a blessing from another and has intent to fulfill his obligation does so due to the principle of "hearing is like saying." What is the connection between "hearing is like saying" and the need to have ten men present?³³⁶

Similarly, we must understand how having a community helps. We saw in the Yerushalmi that a person cannot fulfill his obligation by hearing prayer from another person, because he must entreat for himself. Similarly, with reading the *Shema*, a person must recite it for himself and accept the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and he cannot do that through another. How does it help if there is a community to overcome these difficulties?

4. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik answers:

When there are ten Jews, there is a principle of communal prayer. Communal prayer is not the prayer of ten individuals but a new entity of prayer which is uniquely defined and has a unique name of prayer. One who is not proficient fulfills his obligation with the prayer of the community by joining with the community. The *shaliach tzibur* prays on behalf of the community and an individual who is not proficient fulfills his obligation because he is part of the community. An individual fulfills his obligation through the community but not because of the general principle of "hearing is like saying" like in other blessings.

In other words, an individual request for mercy by an individual must be recited by that individual and cannot be done by another on his behalf. A person must express his plea himself because feelings and emotions cannot be expressed through a representative. However,

³³⁶ See *Kesef Mishneh* ad loc. "What is the reason that when there are not ten we do not say that the scholar recites the blessing and fulfills the obligation on behalf of an ignoramus, just as we say with regard to Grace after Meals?"

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communal prayer is not the prayer of each individual within the community which flows through a conduit of the representative. Rather, it is a prayer offered by the *shaliach tzibur* in the name of the community as a separate entity.³³⁷ It is a request for mercy of the collective group,³³⁸ and in this way, there is nothing to prevent the *shaliach tzibur* being a representative for the entire community including every individual within it.³³⁹

³³⁷ Rav Soloveitchik discussed this principle also in his book *On Repentance: The Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik* (Pinchas H. Peli (2000) Jason Aronson, p. 102) where he clarifies the distinction between an "offering of partners which belongs to many individuals," and a communal sacrifice which is for the community as an entity on its own, separate and independent of its component individuals.

³³⁸ Along these lines, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik explains (cited in *Reshimas Shiurim* ibid.) Rambam's ruling in *Hilchos Tefillah* (1:10) that a community may not recite a voluntary prayer because the community may not bring a voluntary sacrifice. This seems apparently difficult, because even if ten men gathering and reciting a voluntary prayer is not considered the mitzvah of communal voluntary prayer, why does it not count as voluntary individual prayer? He answers that there are two entities of prayer: "There is an entity of individual prayer and there is an entity of communal prayer. Communal prayer is not simply a better form of individual prayer. Rather communal prayer is a different entity that does not contain any element of individual prayer. Therefore, if the community does not fulfill the obligation of communal prayer with a voluntary prayer, because a community cannot offer a voluntary sacrifice, they do not even have individual prayer that would fulfill the obligation for individuals.

³³⁹ I heard from my Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi an entirely different explanation for this. He said that since an individual hears and answers "*amen*" it means that this is his own utterance. Rabbi Ezrachi's approach is as follows:

In Rambam *Hilchos Tefillah* (8:9) he rules, "A *shaliach tzibur* fulfills the obligation for the group. How so? When he recites the prayers and they hear and answer '*amen*' after each blessing, they are like worshipers." Why does the community need to answer "*amen*" to be considered as if they are worshipers? Based on the principle of "hearing is like speaking," they should fulfill their obligation even without answering "*amen*." Similarly, why does Rambam say, "they are like worshipers," rather than ruling simply that they fulfill their obligation? The answer is that in general the principle of "hearing is like speaking" does not apply to prayer. So, in the Yerushalmi (Berachos 3:3) we find that in three places a person may not hear the prayers recited by another to fulfill his obligation of prayer using the principle of mutual responsibility. In reading the *Shema*, in prayer and in Grace after Meals. Prayer is a request for mercy and one person cannot request mercy on behalf of another. If so, how does the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* work if one person cannot recite prayer on behalf of another? The answer is that if the community listen and answer "*amen*" it is considered as if they themselves are praying. Indeed, this distinction between fulfilling an obligation through an action of another and being considered as the action of the individual by answering "*amen*" is explicit in Rambam's *Hilchos Berachos* 1:11: "One who hears any blessing from beginning to end and has intent to fulfill his obligation has indeed fulfilled it even if he did not answer

The Secret of Two Prayers – the Silent *Amida* and the Repetition of the *Shaliach Tzibur*

The 'Prayer' Of the *Shaliach Tzibur* Or The 'Repetition' Of the *Shaliach Tzibur*

From a superficial glance at the *halakha* in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 124) one might think that the *shaliach tzibur's* repetition of the *amida* does not add anything more than the silent individual *amida* recited by one who knows how to pray. Each individual silently reciting the prayer with his own mouth, in the presence of the rest of the community, seems no less than the prayer offered from the mouth of the *shaliach tzibur*. This seems to be the simple implication from *Shulchan Aruch's* ruling:

After the community have finished their prayer, the *shaliach tzibur* repeats the *amida*. For if there is one who does not know how to pray, he will have intent on what the *shaliach tzibur* says and will fulfill his obligation... even in a community that prays, where all are proficient in prayer, nevertheless the *shaliach tzibur* goes and repeats the prayer to fulfill the regulation of the Sages.³⁴⁰

However, the Vilna Gaon,³⁴¹ differs with this based on an explanation that he presents for the Talmud (Berachos 32b) which says: Rabbi Chama son of Chanina said, "If a person sees that he prayed and was not answered, he should pray again, as the verse states, 'Have hope in HASHEM; be strong, and take courage in your heart and have hope in HASHEM,' (Tehillim 27:14)."

The Vilna Gaon explains that the concept, "pray again" refers to the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur*, through which the prayers are answered.³⁴² In other

"amen." But one who answers "amen" after the person reciting the blessing is considered as if he recited the blessing himself."

Based on this it is clear that the *shaliach tzibur* does not fulfill the obligation of prayer for others, but rather each individual fulfills his own obligation when he hears the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* and answers "amen" and it is considered as if he had recited the prayer himself.

³⁴⁰ The source of *Shulchan Aruch* is from the discussion in Rosh Hashanah 34b cited earlier and he rules according to the opinion of the Rabbis there.

³⁴¹ Rabbi Asher Hakohen, a student of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin in the name of the Vilna Gaon, in *Keser Rosh* §45.

³⁴² *Beis Yosef* (*Orach Chayim* 124) adds in the name of Rabbi David Avudraham (from the beginning of his book), that the three prayers which we recite every day each have nineteen blessing, making a total of fifty-seven blessings. One who prays with a community recites fifty-seven blessings in a single prayer session, because his silent *amida* contains nineteen blessings; and one has an obligation not to speak while the *shaliach tzibur* reviews his prayer

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words, the benefit and importance of the *shaliach tzibur's* repetition is based on the fact that it is a repetition of the previous prayers. In the words of the Vilna Gaon there, "He should return and pray, this is the secret of the two prayers -- the silent and the *shaliach tzibur's* repetition – for there the prayer is more accepted."

The source for the Vilna Gaon's explanation is found in *Iggeres Hateshuva* of Rabbeinu Yonah (§9): One who answers "amen" after every blessing is like one who prayed twice. And our Rabbis said that one who prays and did not have intent and prays again is guaranteed that his prayer will be heard."

From Rabbeinu Yonah's words it seems that the words of our Rabbis stating that if one prays again, his prayer will be heard, applies to one who answers "amen" after every blessing of the *shaliach tzibur's* repetition. In this way it is considered as if he prayed an additional prayer and this causes his prayer to be heard.

This "secret" of the essence of the *shaliach tzibur's* repetition leaves us with a puzzle. Why is repeating the prayer, from the mouth of the *shaliach tzibur* and answering "amen" better than the first, initial, prayer which each person recites for themselves silently? What is so special about this repetition that it causes the individual prayer to be accepted?

It seems that the explanation for this can be understood from the words of Rabbi Shimshon Pincus in *Tiferes Torah* on Shemos (p. 282-283):

When some trouble befalls a person, for example, if he urgently needs a sum of money and he is running from one person to another, he goes to get a blessing from *tzadikim*, and he also prays and pleads; or if he has a sick person in his family and he does everything possible, he goes to doctors and buys medicine and also recites extra prayers as part of his obligation to do everything he can, he is like a poor person going from door to door. In other words, he is like a poor person seeking help from various different sources among them also this person that

and so when he has intent to hear the blessings and using the principle of "hearing is like speaking" that adds another nineteen; and a person must answer "amen" after each blessing, and our Rabbis (Berachos 53b) said, "Greater is the one who answers amen than the one who recites the blessing," so it is as if he recited an additional nineteen blessings, making a total of three times nineteen.

Regarding one who arrives late to the minyan and recites his *amida* along with the *shaliach tzibur*, and whether he is considered to have prayed with a community see *Responsa Betzel Hachochma* vol. 4 3:8 and *Chazon Ish, Orach Chayim* 19:7 s.v. "echad."

he is asking from – in such a case the *halakha* is that the person does not need to give him more than a small amount.

It is the same with prayer. When someone is involved in all sorts of efforts and among them he also offers his prayer and casts his eyes to the Heavens, then they give him only a small gift. Indeed, even HASHEM will give him only a small amount of Heavenly assistance. This is comparable to what the Rambam writes in *Hilchos Matanos Ani'im* (7:7). He rules that it is forbidden to send a poor person away with nothing, but giving him even a single penny is sufficient, as the verse says, "Do not turn back the oppressed in shame," (Tehillim 74:21). However, he is not obligated to give more than a tiny amount, because he has others to take from and can survive alone. When a poor person with very great needs comes and asks for a big donation and the donor sends him away with something small, we can imagine that that the donor is thinking at the time that he accompanies the poor person back to the door, "He will manage without me and will not die of starvation." ... However, if it was clear that the poor person had no one else to turn to – he would not send him away empty-handed. It is the same with the Holy One, blessed is He. When a person comes and prostrates himself before Him, with a clear request that He have mercy on him for he has nobody else to turn to, and if HASHEM will not have mercy on him he will remain in his suffering forever – HASHEM will immediately have mercy on him and give him what he lacks.

This is the prayer of "prostration"³⁴³ by one who has entirely thrown himself down before HASHEM with complete nullification, as if to say, "My only hope is from You, and I have nobody else to save me." (This is similar to Esther when she fell down before the king, because he was the king and no one else could undo the decree apart from him.) This was also the power behind the awesome prayer of Choni the Circle-Drawer, who drew a circle, stood inside it and said before HASHEM, "Master of the universe, I swear by Your Great Name that I will not

³⁴³ Rabbi Shimshon Pincus in *She'arim Batefillah* discusses the thirteen phrases of prayer (listed in *Sifrei Vaeschanan* 1; *Devarim Rabba* 2:1) and explains that each expression of prayer represents a different, unique facet of prayer. In a chapter entitled, "Prostration" Rav Pincus clarifies that this concept is drawn from the verse, "I fell down before HASHEM," (Devarim 9:18) and from the verse, "Esther spoke again before the king and she fell before his feet and cried and pleaded with him to remove the evil of Haman," (Esther 5:3). This concept expresses, "A unique form of forceful request which includes tremendous subjugation until one falls down in complete subjugation before God, with the feeling that there is none beside Him who can save. In his words, "Humility and subjugation is the correct form of the very essence of prayer."

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move from here until You have mercy on Your children," (Ta'anis 19a). He established with an oath and complete clarity that he was not like a poor person going from door to door, but that his salvation could come only from HASHEM – therefore HASHEM had mercy on him.

The commentaries explained along these lines why the Holy One, blessed is He, hears the cries of the orphans and widows. Because they cry only to Him and have nobody else to turn to, therefore, HASHEM hears them and answers them.

Based on this, how amazing is the precision of the wording of the verse, "If afflict you will afflict him, for if cry he will cry to Me, hear I will hear his cries," (Shemos 22:22). "Call he will call" twice:

In general, a person does not call out twice. Once he has called out once to HASHEM, and HASHEM has not answered him, he goes and seeks alternative solutions.

But a widow or an orphan who have no one else to turn to, call and cry out again and the Holy One, blessed is He, answers them.³⁴⁴

Similarly, each person must make himself like a widow or an orphan, as the verse states, "For my father and mother abandoned me, but HASHEM will gather me in," (Tehillim 27:10) – for he has no one else to turn to other than the Holy One, blessed is He.

He does not call and also seek other solutions. Rather he calls out again and again – then there is no doubt that HASHEM will answer his prayer.

From these words we learn that the repetition of prayer, or of calling out to HASHEM, expresses the person's awareness that he has understood that he has no other address to turn to apart from turning solely to HASHEM. One who repeats his prayer understands that he has no refuge in any other way, and if his prayer is not answered, it is a sign that he did not pray enough. Therefore,

³⁴⁴ Another explanation for the double language of the crying out of an orphan is found in the words of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk. When a child falls, he runs to his father to comfort him. In this case, his foot hurts, but he is comforted by his father. However, when an orphan falls he wants to run to his father, but then he is once again reminded that he has nobody to run to. In this case, not only does his foot hurt but also the renewed sense of loss of his father hurts him. Therefore, when an orphan cries out to the Holy One, blessed is He, the cry is twice as powerful. It is both about his suffering, and also about the fact that he has no father to comfort him. God hears both cries and answers them both. Therefore, the verse repeats the words, "Cry he will cry," and "Hear I will hear."

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he has no option but to pray to HASHEM again, because there is no one else who can help him.

Therefore "Have hope in HASHEM; be strong, and take courage in your heart," (Tehillim 27:14) and if you are not answered, "Have hope in HASHEM," for there is nothing other than Him alone.³⁴⁵

Now we understand that the power of communal prayer, expressed through the *shaliach tzibur's* repetition flows specifically because it is a repetition of the individual prayer which guarantees that the prayer is heard. The power it gains is contingent on the fact that a person returns again and asks from the same address because it is clear to him that there is no other source to turn to, and so he has to cast all his worries upon HASHEM. This determined prayer, called "prostration," has such strength and power that will be answered.

However, if the entire power of the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur's* prayer is based on the fact that it is the repetition of the individual's silent *amida*, we must ask, why is a *shaliach tzibur* appointed to recite the repetition? Why does each individual not recite the *Shemoneh Esrei* a second time, and in this way, perform his own "prostration" with even greater strength – when he himself recites the repetition of the same prayer itself again, and expresses, with no intermediary, his sense that he places all his burdens on HASHEM, and he has no other source to turn to?

The answer is that the above explanation – that the power of communal prayer in the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* stems from the fact that it is a repetition of the individual prayer – does not stand on its own. Rather it is an additional brick in the building that we have constructed until now, which says that the prayer of the *shaliach tzibur* is the main prayer of the entire community. This explanation is just adding why the Men of the Great Assembly saw fit to institute that this prayer will come as a repetition of the silent, individual prayer. For this reason, we explained that the prayer of the community, when it receives the additional power of repetition becomes

³⁴⁵ Rav Pincus brings a metaphor for this. A poor man who in desperation turned to Baron Rothschild and listed all his troubles before him. The Baron had mercy on him and gave him enough money to solve not only his immediately pressing problems, but also to set him up financially. When another poor person heard this he also went to meet Baron Rothschild, but he only received a few pennies. When he asked the Baron why he acted differently with the first person, the Baron answered that the first person placed all his burdens upon him. However, the second poor person survived through various donations he received, asking many people and receiving help from each. Since this was the case, the Baron realized that he did not have to provide everything for this second person and he allowed him to continue to fend for himself.

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stronger, as a prayer of “prostration,” apart from the other benefits it has as communal prayer.

An expression of the fact that the status of communal prayer is greater than that of the silent prayer offered by each individual, as explained by the Vilna Gaon that it has a greater chance of being answered, is learned from the fact that it is said aloud. The source from this is in the books of Rabbi Chaim Vital (*Sha’ar Hakavanos* 39b):

We repeat the very same words but there is a difference between [the silent *amida* and the *shaliach tzibur’s* repetition] because the first one was silent, since it was still below, where there is fear that the outside (contra-good) forces of impurity will seize it, as we find that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the Zohar warned about making one’s voice heard in prayer, because the outside forces can grab hold of the prayers, since it is in a low place. But now [with the *shaliach tzibur’s* repetition] as it ascends upwards, there is no fear of these outside forces, and so we recite it aloud.³⁴⁶

Since we have understood the elevated and powerful essence of “communal prayer” and “prayer of the community” we may now conclude with the enthusiastic words of Rav Pincus in the introduction to *She’arim Batefillah* (p. 14):

It is well known from the writings of the Arizal, that the concept of the *shaliach tzibur’s* repetition has tremendous value over the silent prayer, and there is an infinite difference in measure and value between these two sections of prayer. Our Rabbis alluded to this (Berachos 32b): “If one prayed and was not answered he should pray again.” The Vilna Gaon explains that this refers to the *shaliach tzibur’s* repetition upon which the answering of the prayer depends. About this they said, “HASHEM does not despise the many,” (Iyov 36:5). Our Rabbis said about this that the Holy One, blessed is He does not despise the prayers of many. For the *shaliach tzibur’s* repetition in its essence is the prayer of the community.

The allusion to all of this is that the *amida* prayer must be said first silently and repeated by the *shaliach tzibur* aloud. For a silent prayer,

³⁴⁶ See *Ben Ish Chai*, year 1, Parshas Terumah, based on *Sha’ar Hakavanos*, *derushei chazaras ha’amida*, §1: “When he repeats the prayer all the rectifications that were done during the silent *amida* are done again, but during the repetition they reach to a higher, loftier place than where they reached during the silent *amida*.”

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for all its value, is like a person hiding an expensive diamond so that thieves do not steal it from him. Which is not the case in the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur*. Its level is so elevated that the thieves and powers of evil have no reach there at all. At that level it already stands so closely attached to the King, that there is no more danger from other forces, and there is no danger that these awesome prayers will be stolen.

There are many who do not have this knowledge. The *shaliach tzibur*'s repetition for them is a time set aside to look in a book,³⁴⁷ or simply wasted time. They could spend seventy years without having intent during the *shaliach tzibur*'s repetition even once. Even if they hear the blessings and answer "*amen*" it is without any special feeling about the requests and praises being uttered. All this is simply because of lack of knowledge, lack of education and lack of being accustomed to the details of the ways of prayer and its preciousness.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁷ See the words of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky in his book *Orchos Yosher* (p. 104): "It is forbidden to speak during the *shaliach tzibur*'s repetition even to say supplications or to learn (124:17). One who learns or reads the *parsha* during the *shaliach tzibur*'s repetition or *kaddish* – not only will he not receive reward, but he will be punished. About this it says, "Woe to those that draw iniquity upon themselves with cords of falsehood," (Yishaya 5:18) (see Berachos 24b). Torah learned like this will not be successful, as it says in *Midrash Rabba* on Parshas Matos. It is possible that he has not even fulfilled the mitzvah of reading the *parsha* twice, since it is a mitzvah which comes through a sin."

For the *halakha*, see the ruling of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein in *Iggros Moshe, Orach Chayim* vol. 4 §119 that it is forbidden when there are not ten answering "*amen*" to the blessings of the *shaliach tzibur*.

³⁴⁸ Rav Pincus brings an example of this, cited in Chapter Three, of a person who purchases a car but doesn't learn it has more than one gear.

Chapter 7 - Prayer for the Sick

“On the Day of My Trouble I Will Call You, For You Will Answer Me,” (Tehillim 86:7)

Illness Is A Crossroads in A Person's Life

Yaakov Avinu prayed that people should not die without first becoming ill,³⁴⁹ so that they would have time to prepare themselves and their relatives for the change that was about to happen. Illness is also a signpost, calling on the patient to get up and pray to remove the evil decree and merit a complete recovery. The Divine Presence resides at the head of a sick person,³⁵⁰ and HASHEM waits for his prayer. Illness, even deathly illness, is not a reason to despair but rather a call to prayer, because, “Even if a sharp sword is placed on a person's neck he should not refrain from prayer.”³⁵¹ Someone who has a sick person in their home should turn to a sage to pray for the one ill,³⁵² as the verse states, “You shall decree a matter and it shall occur for you,” (Iyov 22:28). This teaches that a righteous person decrees and HASHEM fulfills it.³⁵³ A person's illness creates a special obligation to pray.

³⁴⁹ Bava Metzia 87a: Until Yaakov there was no illness. Yaakov came and prayed and there was illness, as the verse states, “He said to Yosef, ‘Behold, your father is sick.’” (Bereishis 48:1).

³⁵⁰ Shabbos 12b: One who enters to visit a sick person must not sit on the bed, and not on a chair, but must clothe himself respectfully and sit before him, because the Divine Presence is above the head of a sick person, as the verse states, “HASHEM will support him on the bed of woes,” (Tehillim 41:4).

³⁵¹ Berachos 10a: Even if a sharp sword is placed on a person's neck he should not refrain from [praying for] mercy, as the verse states, “Even though He kills me I will place my hope in Him,” (Iyov 13:15).

³⁵² Bava Basra 116a: Rabbi Pinchas bar Chama expounded, “Anyone who has a sick person in his home, should go to a sage and he will request mercy for him, as the verse states, “The anger of a king is an angel of death; but a wise man will atone for it.” (Mishlei 16:14). We find in *Nimukei Yosef* (ibid 53a on the pages of the *Rif*), “The custom in France is that anyone who has a sick person seeks out the Rabbi who heads the Yeshiva to get a blessing for him.”

³⁵³ See Ta'anis 23a: “You shall decree a matter and it shall occur for you, and light shines upon Your ways,” (Iyov 22:28). “You decree a matter,” -- You decreed from below and the Holy One, blessed is He, fulfills your words from above.”

Rabbi Asher Weiss in *Minchas Asher* Does this need another reference, e.g. Bamidbar (§23), in the chapter, “Prayer for the sick” points out an incident that happened long ago in the town of Zlatchov (Zolochiv) which shook the world of *halakha*. One of the townspeople was dangerously ill, and he asked that they write a note for him, giving his name and his mother's name with a plea for mercy and bring it on Shabbos to the Chassidic Rebbe, the “*Sar Shalom*” of Belz, who was staying in the nearby city of Brody. When the matter came before the Rabbi of the town he instructed them that the request of the patient was permitted and allowed them to send the note to Brody with a non-Jew. This was because it only transgressed a rabbinic prohibition (asking a non-Jew and traveling outside the town limits), and having a sage pray for the sick person was sufficient reason to permit it.

When the matter came before Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, the Rabbi of Brody, he came out strongly against this ruling and declared that this town's Rabbi was never allowed to make another

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In Chapter One we discussed the dispute between Rambam and Ramban as to whether there is a Torah obligation to pray, but nevertheless praying for a sick person in trouble is a Torah obligation according to all opinions.³⁵⁴

Visiting the Sick and Praying for The Sick

It is not only the sick person himself who needs to pray. In the Talmud (Berachos 12b) we find that anyone who does not pray on behalf of a friend is called a sinner.³⁵⁵ Furthermore, later we will see that one of the central purposes of the mitzvah of visiting the sick is so that the visitor can identify with the patient and that will lead him to pray for him. It is true that HASHEM answers the prayers of the sick one himself,³⁵⁶ but a prisoner is unable to free himself from jail to pray for his salvation.³⁵⁷

halakhic ruling. Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathanson, author of *Sho'el Umeishiv* and Rabbi of the regional capital Lvov, also joined with Rabbi Kluger and wrote that this behavior was completely forbidden and there was no way of permitting it.

Rabbi Avraham David Buchach wrote in *Eshel Avraham* (328:17) that, "To write that a loved one should come to visit him or to pray for him, it seems forbidden, but requires further study." His words imply that he was uncertain about the matter.

Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer writes in *Kaf Hachayim* (306:77) that Rabbi Chaim Binyamin Pontremoli ruled on this in *Petach Hadvir*. He writes that there was a sick person who wanted to have a gentile write a letter on Shabbos to his brother that he should pray for him and gather a minyan to learn in his merit. *Petach Hadvir* permitted this, adding, "There is not even the slightest hint of prohibition in this."

In *Responsa Maharsham* (103:225) the author writes "Regarding an incident where one of the Rabbis permitted writing a note and sending it with a non-Jew to the Belzer Rebbe." He writes that if the righteous person is known to perform wonders with his prayers and his blessings perhaps it is considered like saving a life, which overrides Shabbos. However, he cites the opinion of Rabbi Shlomo Kluger who thundered that it was forbidden. He also adds that the *Sar Shalom* Rebbe of Belz himself was angry, and said, "Now I am obligated to ensure he has a complete recovery so that the sick person won't die, and it won't turn out that they desecrated the Shabbos." From this it seems that if the prayer would work it would not be desecrating the Shabbos, but if not, it would. This seems difficult to understand, because even if it did not work, the effort towards saving a life, in this case by sending the note, should be permitted. It seems therefore, that these words were not said seriously.

However, *Maharsham's* conclusion is that even if the previous generations could find some permission to violate a rabbinic prohibition in order for a *tzadik* to pray, in our generation which is abandoning Judaism, one should not be lenient in this at all.

³⁵⁴ P. XXX.

³⁵⁵ "Anyone who is able to pray for his friend and does not do so is called a sinner, as the verse states, 'As for me, Heaven forbid that I should sin before HASHEM by refraining from praying for you,' (1 Shmuel 12:23)."

³⁵⁶ We find that even though Hagar prayed for Yishmael, the verse states, "God heard the voice of the youth," (Bereishis 21:17). Rashi cites the words of *Midrash Rabba* (53:14): "From here we learn that the prayer of the sick person is better than the prayer of others and is accepted first." We also find that King Chizkiyahu prayed for himself and was answered, as the verse states, "Chezkiyahu cried a great weeping," (Yishaya 38:3). See *Chashukei Chemed* on Bava Metzia 105b and the sources cited there.

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Either because the patient is not in a mental or physical state which allows him to pray at all, or because he is unable emotionally to have intent in his prayer, to break down the gates of Heaven. Additionally, it may be that in order to save the patient and to judge him favorably there is a need for more additional merits than just those of the patient,³⁵⁸ and so he needs to bring into the equation the pain caused to those around him.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ Berachos 5b. Rabbi Eliezer gave his hand to Rabbi Yochanan and raised him from his sick bed. The Talmud asks why Rabbi Yochanan was unable to raise himself. It answers that a prisoner is unable to free himself from jail. This would seem to contradict Rashi's words on Bereishis 21:17 that the prayer of the sick person is better than the prayer of others on his behalf. *Sifsei Chachamim* (on Rashi), in the name of Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi, answers that the words of the Talmud in Berachos relate to a situation where the sick person is unable to concentrate on his prayers, but if he can concentrate the prayer of the sick person is preferable to the prayers of others. Similarly, the Talmud in Mo'ed Katan 5a says that regarding a leper the verse states, "He shall cry out 'impure, impure,'" (Vayikra 13:45) to teach that he must make his suffering known to others so that they will pray for him. *Chofetz Chaim* explains (*Shemiras Halashon*; *Sha'ar Hazechira* 7) that the need to ask others to pray for him comes from the fact that he himself is a leper, which is an illness caused by speaking ill of others, which causes prayers offered from his mouth to not be accepted. However, if his prayer would be acceptable the prayers of the sick person is better, because who knows better than he the suffering of his illness, as the verse states, "The heart knows the bitterness of the soul," (Mishlei 14:10)

On the other hand, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky responded to this question by saying that healing through prayer is better by the sick person than by others, but healing through the principle of "the righteous decrees and HASHEM fulfills" cannot be carried out except by others. This is what the Talmud means when it says that "the prisoner cannot free himself from jail," (in *Merapson Igri* p. 343).

³⁵⁸ Prayer for a sick person adds merit for him, because he is also accredited with the merits of the one praying. In addition, one who prays for a sick person asks HASHEM to lessen his sins. In *Sefer Hazikaron* for Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (*Avnei Shlomo* p. 21) it says that Rabbi Wolbe taught that the main chapter to read when reciting Tehillim for a sick person must be chapter 130, "A song of ascents from the depths," Because "the main prayer for a sick person is to minimize his sins, and this is stated in the verse, 'If God keeps sins, HASHEM, who could stand?' (Tehillim 130:3)."

³⁵⁹ Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian in *Lev Eliyahu* (vol. 3 *ma'areches hateshuva* 5) writes that even though human courts do not consider the suffering of the family and relatives of the one judged, HASHEM looks at those around the person, his family, his friends and others who are close to him, as to whether they will suffer if this person is punished. If they do not deserve this suffering, he is saved in their merit."

See the explanation of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler in *Michtav Me'eliyahu* (vol. 2 p. 76; *Strive for Truth* vol. 4 pp. 105-108) that on the first day of Rosh Hashanah a person is judged according to his ability to be a vessel for the Divine Presence to dwell in, and this is the concept of "harsh judgment" (or "upper judgment") mentioned in the Zohar. For a person is judged based solely on his own fate and for his usefulness to Heaven in light of what he alone has contributed. Whereas on the second day of Rosh Hashanah a person is judged according to the benefit that society in general gains from him. In this context a person is judged as part of the general, and this is a more lenient and flexible judgment ("soft judgment") because the person is not judged according to his personal value for Heaven, but it is sufficient for the

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The Rabbis of the Talmud spoke at length of the importance of the mitzvah of visiting the sick, and it is included in the list of mitzvos that a person benefits from the fruits of the mitzvah in this world while the principle remains for the World to Come (Shabbos 127a). The mitzvah of visiting the sick is included in the mitzvah of performing acts of kindness but it has a separate source,³⁶⁰ and its basis is from the fact that HASHEM visits the sick people, as the verse says, "HASHEM appeared to him in Elonei Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day," (Bereishis 18:1). Our Rabbis explained that HASHEM came to visit Avraham because he was sick on the third day following his circumcision (Sotah 14a).

The Rabbis (ibid.) explain the verse, "You must walk after HASHEM, your God," (Devarim 13:5) – Is it possible for a person to walk after the Divine Presence? Rather he must go after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed is He. Just as HASHEM visits the sick (in the case of Abraham as mentioned above), so you must visit the sick.³⁶¹

Similarly, the Rabbis derive from the verse, "You shall make known to them the path that they should walk on," (Shemos 18:20) that the concept of "walk" refers to visiting the sick, because doing so requires walking to the patient (Bava Kama 100a).

They also said: "Where is an allusion to visiting the sick in the Torah? The verse states, 'If they die like all other men, and are visited like all men are visited,' (Bamidbar 16:29). This teaches that people must come to visit the sick," (Nedarim 39b and Rashi there).

In the Talmud (Nedarim 40a) we find a close connection between the mitzvah of visiting the sick and praying for the sick.³⁶² When a person is directly confronted

person to have benefit to society or his relatives or friends who add to the Glory of Heaven directly or indirectly.

³⁶⁰ One who visits a sick person fulfills two positive mitzvos: 1. Doing kindness for another (see Bava Metzia 30b) and thus the positive Torah mitzvah of "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," (Vayikra 19:18) which is a general mitzvah (Rambam *Sefer Hamitzvos, shoresh 2*; Ramban *Hasagos Lesefer Hamitzvos shoresh 1* s.v. "Vehateshuva harevi'is"). 2. The mitzvah of walking in the path of HASHEM, as the verse states, " "You must walk after HASHEM, your God," (Devarim 13:5). See the introduction of the *Chofetz Chaim to Ahavas Chesed*. From Rambam in *Sefer Hamitzvos*, positive mitzvah 8 and *Hilchos De'os* 1:5-6 it appears that even though one fulfills the general mitzvah of "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" through visiting a sick person, nevertheless, the obligation to do some specific action of kindness is rabbinic (*Sefer Hamitzvos, shoresh 2*; Rambam *Hilchos Avel* 14:1; *Kiryas Sefer* ad. loc. This is explicit in *Meiri* (Nedarim 39b): It is a rabbinic positive mitzvah to visit a sick person, even though it is alluded to in the Torah."

³⁶¹ See *She'iltos*, Parshas Acharei Mos; *she'ilta* 93.

³⁶² The Talmud (ibid) implies that there are three purposes in visiting a sick person: 1. To pray for the sick person; 2. To check what the patient needs, and there it explains that the term "visiting" relates to checking what the patient needs, and that the visitor fulfills the mitzvah by helping the sick person; 3. In addition the visit has the benefit that it makes the sick person feel better knowing that others are interested in him and have his best interests at heart.

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with a sick person, he identifies with him and prays for him with all his heart and thereby causes him to live. In the words of the Talmud (ibid.): "Anyone who visits a sick person causes him to live and anyone who does not visit a sick person causes him to die." The Talmud there explains that this is because anyone who visits a sick patient prays for him to live, and anyone who does not visit does not pray for him.

Rosh explains that if one does not visit the sick "there is no greater evil, for if he would visit him he would pray for him, and it may be a time of favor and his prayer may be heard, so refraining from visiting may cause him to die."

In other words, visiting a sick person and identifying with his suffering causes the visitor to pray for him, and this may be the time that the prayer will be answered. Prayer at such a time may save the patient and cause him to live. Therefore, refraining from visiting the sick or praying for them during the visit is "great evil" because it shows an abandonment of prayer which could lengthen the patient's life and save him from death.³⁶³ This means he displays a callousness to the situation of

We find in *Rosh* (*Commentary on Torah* Bereishis 18:1) that even if one visits a sick person and finds them asleep, and the sick person does not see the visitor, but he was only told of the visit afterwards, he has fulfilled the mitzvah of visiting the sick. See also *Maharsha* on Bava Metzia 30b s.v. "vehoda'ata" who explains that when the Talmud derives, "They shall walk in it" as meaning visiting the sick, that there is no need to do any action and it is sufficient to go to visit. The purpose of the visit is that the sick person sees that others care about him and come to visit. *Meiri* (on Nedarim 39b) says that if a buddy of the ill person visits him, he removes one sixtieth of his illness from him, since "His visit is pleasant for the patient, that enjoyment lightens the illness."

³⁶³ Rambam *Hilchos Avel* 14:1: "It is a rabbinic positive mitzvah to visit the sick, to comfort the bereaved, to remove the deceased (for burial), to bring a bride (to the wedding canopy), to accompany guests (on their departure on a journey), to be involved in all needs of a funeral -- to carry the coffin, to walk before it, to eulogize, to dig the grave and to bury; and to rejoice with a bride and groom and to provide them with all their needs. These are performing kindness with one's body which has no upper limit. Even though these mitzvos are rabbinic, they are included within "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." All the things that you would want others to do for you, you should do them for your brothers in Torah and mitzvos."

Rema on *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'a* 335:1 rules: Anyone who visits and does not pray for him has not fulfilled the mitzvah (*Beis Yosef* in the name of Ramban)."

See *Tur*, *Yoreh De'a* 335: Rav Yitzchak son of Rav Yehuda said that one must always pray that he will not become ill, because if he becomes ill they will say to him, "Give us your merits and become free," (recovery from illness depends on the level of merits of that person). If a person becomes ill it is a mitzvah for every person to visit him, because we find that HASHEM visits the sick, as our Rabbis learned from the verse, 'HASHEM appeared to him in Elonei Mamre' -- this teaches that he came to visit the sick. And they supported it with the verse, "You shall make known to them the ways that they should walk in," -- it is a great mitzvah to visit the sick because in this way one will pray, and it is considered as if he brought the patient back to life. Furthermore, when he sees him he will look if he needs anything else and will try to find it for him, and he will sweep and clean for him."

The purpose of visiting the sick is therefore to see if the patient needs anything and to worry about what he needs. But mainly, and chiefly, it is to pray for the sick person. But see *Beis*

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the patient and is opposed to the mutual responsibility of a Jew for all the Jewish people.

Rabbi Pincus³⁶⁴ points out that praying for another is something that people are naturally disposed to. This is because the nature of every person is to do what is just, so when he sees another person suffering and he can help him, he is concerned to do so. For example, if a person sees someone who has fallen and is bleeding, he will rush to bandage his wounds and to call a doctor to help him. Similarly, if one of his very wealthy friends gives out generous amounts of charity to all those in need, he will certainly ask him to also help his friend who is in desperate need of livelihood. In this way, "each and every one of us has Someone who loves them, Who cares about them, Who is their close Friend, their Merciful Father, Who has all salvations in His hand, and we have the ability to call on Him on behalf of our friend to ask for him to be saved in everything he needs – how could we not do so? Someone who does not ask HASHEM to save his sick friend, is considered as a sinner."³⁶⁵ For either it shows a lack of faith in the power of prayer to save a sick person, or it demonstrates cruelty because he knows he could help him, but he closes his eyes, turns away and ignores him."

Along these lines Rabbi Pincus cites the words of Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe, author of *Levush Ha'orah*.

The Torah writes about one who kills another unintentionally, "For he must remain in his city of refuge until the death of the High Priest," (Bamidbar 35:28). Our Rabbis said that the mothers of the High Priests would provide those who were sent to the cities of refuge with food and clothing so that they should pray for their son, the High Priest, that he should not die. For the High Priest should have prayed for his generation to prevent unintentional murder, and he did not do so.

The *Levush Ha'orah* writes on the verse, "He shall dwell there until the death of the High Priest," (ibid. verse 25):

Since the High Priest did not pray [when he was inside the Holy of Holies] that such an incident should not happen in Yisrael during his lifetime, therefore this [case of accidental homicide] occurred.

Yosef there: "Ramban writes in *Toras Adam* that we learn from here that visiting the sick is to sweep and clean for him and to do everything he needs... and that the ill one should be relaxed with his friends, and also in order that the visitor will have intent to pray for him."

³⁶⁴ Rabbi Shimshon Pincus in *Tiferes Shimshon* on Vayikra (p. 129-130) on the words of the Talmud (Shabbos 47a) which derive from the verse said about the leper, "He shall call, 'Impure, impure'" (Vayikra 13:45) that a person "must make his pain known publicly so that many will pray for him."

³⁶⁵ Cited earlier, Berachos 12b: "Anyone who is able to pray for another and does not is called a sinner."

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For this reason, the Torah requires [one who killed unintentionally] to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest, and he will be upset that he cannot return to his home while the High Priest lives. For this reason, he will pray for the death of the High Priest and his prayer will be accepted, and the High Priest will receive his punishment with poetic justice – because he [the High Priest] did not pray he will die prematurely through the prayer of this person [the unintentional murderer] and another [High Priest] will be appointed in his place, who will pray that such an incident should never happen in Yisrael.

So, not only is there a concern that the murderer will pray for the High Priest to die, but the Torah wants that to happen and sets things up so that it will occur – in order that the High Priest will be removed, and another appointed in his place, who is more sensitive to the pain of his generation and who will pray for them.

The lack of praying for another is therefore a blemish in the character of the High Priest who is insensitive to the lives of others, and this defect causes him to be removed from his priesthood and from the world.

Indeed, in *Sefer Chasidim* (§753) we find that the obligation to pray for a sick person comes from the mutual concern of all Jews for each other:

Because Jews are mutually responsible for each other, therefore when one of them is in pain everyone is required to be pained and to pray, as the verse states, “But I, when they were sick, wore sackcloth, I afflicted my soul with fasting, and my prayer should return to my chest,” (Tehillim 35:13). If he would not pray he would be a sinner, as the verse states, “As for me, Heaven forbid that I should sin to HASHEM and refrain from praying for you,” (I Shmuel 12:23).

The Talmud in Nedarim (ibid.) continues and points out that a person should not visit a sick person in the first three hours of the day, nor in the last three hours of the day. In the first three hours, the sick person generally appears better and seeing him then may cause the visitor to think that the patient has already recovered and there is no longer any need to pray for him. Similarly, he should not visit in the last three hours of the day because then the patient appears worse and the visitor may think that his case is hopeless and will despair, and not pray for him. This is brought as *halakha* in *Shulchan Aruch* (Yoreh De'a 335:4):

One must not visit a sick person in the first three hours of the day because every patient feels better in the morning, and [the visitor] will not bother to

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pray for him. And not in the past three hours of the day because then his illness gets worse and [the visitor] will despair of praying for him.³⁶⁶

And anyone who visits [a sick person] and does not pray for him has not fulfilled the mitzvah (*Beis Yosef* in the name of Ramban).³⁶⁷

If so, the need to pray for a sick person is the essential goal of the mitzvah of visiting the sick. The purpose of this mitzvah is not to make the sick person feel better or to make him less lonely, or to distract him from his illness. Rather the essence of the mitzvah is to cause the visitor to pray for the patient with all his heart.³⁶⁸

Similarly, Rambam rules (*Hilchos Aveilus* 14:6):

One who enters to visit a sick person may not sit on the bed nor on a chair nor on a bench nor on any high place, nor above his head – rather he must clothe himself respectfully and sit below his feet and pray for him and then leave.

The purpose of visiting the sick is therefore to pray for the patient, and therefore he must clothe himself properly, pray and leave.

The mitzvah to visit the sick is entwined with the mitzvah to pray for the sick person, because standing with the patient creates a deep connection with his situation, and this causes the visitor to pray wholeheartedly, with full, deep intent. In such a case

³⁶⁶ In *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'a* 335 which deals with visiting the sick, Rabbi Yosef Karo dedicates several halakhs to the concept of praying for the sick person. So, he rules (§5): "When one prays, if he prays in the presence [of the sick person] he can do so in any language he wishes. But if he prays not in his presence he should only pray in Hebrew." And in §7 he writes: "And he should include him among the other sick people of Yisrael, and he should say, 'May the Omnipresent have mercy upon you among the other sick of Yisrael.' On Shabbos he should say, "On Shabbos it is forbidden to cry out, but healing should come soon." In §8 he rules: "We do not visit those suffering from intestinal troubles, nor eye troubles, nor illness of the head... One may not visit before him but may enter the outer room and ask after him and whether they need to sweep and clean for him or similar things. And they hear his suffering and pray for him."

³⁶⁷ The Vilna Gaon there explains that the source for this is the aforementioned discussion in Nedarim 40a. See *Beis Yosef*, *Yoreh De'a* 335: It is a great mitzvah to visit [the sick], because through this he will pray for him and it is as if he brings him back to life. Also, because he sees him and investigates whether he needs anything, he will try to find that thing for him. He will make sure they sweep and clean before him... Ramban writes in *Toras Adam* that we learn from here that the purpose of visiting the sick is to perform anything necessary for his illness, and that the ill one should be relaxed with his friends, and also in order that the visitor will have intent to pray for him.

³⁶⁸ As we find there in *Rema* on §10: Some say that one who has a sick person in his house should go to the local sage to pray for him (*Nimukei Yosef* Bava Metzia 53a). The custom is also to recite a blessing for a sick person in Synagogue."

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there is a great likelihood that the prayer will be answered, and the patient will recover. The strong intent causes the prayer to be accepted. We find this in Rosh Hashanah 18a:

Rabbi Meir used to say, two who take to bed with similar illnesses, or two people who are taken to the gallows and their sentence is identical, but one recovers, and the other does not, one is saved, and the other is not saved. This one prayed and was answered, and this one prayed and was not answered. Why was this one answered and that one not? This one who prayed a complete prayer (Rashi: With intent) while that one who did not pray a complete prayer was not answered.

Behold, in the same difficult situation some people pray and are saved while some are not saved. The matter depends on the amount of intent of the worshiper and the completeness of his prayer. A complete prayer can sometimes save the patient and be the difference between life and death. Therefore, there is an obligation on one who visits a sick person to pray for him, and this can literally be a life-saver. Standing at the side of the patient and seeing his situation causes the visitor to pray for him with deep, complete intent.

Prayer for a sick person would appear to be something obvious and any believing person would do so without any specific obligation. However, after in-depth study of the topic, a number of basic questions arise, beginning with an understanding of the obligation:

1. The place of the obligation – Our Rabbis point out that “the Divine Presence rests above the head of a sick person.”³⁶⁹ Therefore there is extra value in uttering the prayer in the presence of the patient or nearby, because the Divine Presence is there.³⁷⁰ The question is, why does the Divine Presence rest

³⁶⁹ There are several practical halakhic implications from the fact that the Divine Presence rests above the head of a sick person:

1. *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'a* 135:3 rules: “One who visits a sick person must not sit on the foot of the bed nor on a chair or a bench, but should clothe himself properly and sit before him, because the Divine Presence is above his head.” *Rema* adds: “This applies only when the sick person is lying on the floor, which means the visitor is sitting higher than him. But if the patient is lying on a bed, it is permitted to sit on a chair or a bench (*Beis Yosef* in the name of *Ran*), and this is the custom.”
2. Similarly, *Shulchan Aruch* (§5) rules: When one prays, if he prays in his presence he can do so in any language he wishes. But if he prays not in his presence he should only pray in Hebrew.”
3. *Magen Avraham*, *Orach Chayim* 119:1 rules: One who prays for another does not need to mention his name (Berachos 34a based on the fact that Moshe prayed for Miriam, saying “God, please heal her,” (Bamidbar 12:13) without mentioning her name). But this only applies when praying in the presence of the sick person. “However, when he prays not in his presence he must mention the name [of the sick person]” (In the name of the *Maharil*).

³⁷⁰ In *Tur*, *Yoreh De'a* 335 we find that there is a difference in the version of the prayer recited with a sick person. “When praying for him, if he prays in his presence (i.e. next to his bed) he

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- specifically above the patient's head? One would have thought the opposite – that HASHEM's attribute of strict justice is visited upon the patient, and that is the reason for his suffering.³⁷¹ Why does the Divine Presence rest specifically with a person who is suffering from the attribute of strict justice, and why is that the best place to pray?
2. Definition of the obligation – As we discovered earlier, prayer for a sick person can mean the difference between life and death. Thus, the mutual responsibility that rests upon every Jew, coupled with empathy for the sick person, obligates one to visit him and pray for him, and anyone who refrains from doing so is considered to be a sinner. The question that arises now is whether there is an obligation to visit every Jewish sick person, including those who the visitor does not know, like the mitzvah of "Do not stand by the blood of your fellow," which obligates one to help any Jew who is in danger?
 3. The nature of the obligation – when we are dealing with a sick person, and especially a patient whose life is in danger, we are standing in a situation of judgment. The sick person is being judged at those moments as he hovers between life and death, and his sentence will be for good or bad according to the principles of reward and punishment. The reason that prayer can change

may pray in Hebrew or in any other language. When he does not pray in his presence he may only pray in Hebrew, like other individual prayers. And he should include this patient with the other sick people of Yisrael, as the verse states, 'May the Omnipresent have mercy on you among the sick people of Yisrael.'" (See Shabbos 12a. Rabbi Yosei's opinion is that one should say, "May the Omnipresent have mercy on you among the sick people of Yisrael." Rashi explains that because he includes him with others, his prayer will be heard in the merit of the multitude.). See Rabbi Asher Weiss's *Minchas Asher* §23: "It seems obvious to me that even though it is not appropriate to pray for the sick person simply, "that they should have mercy on him from Heaven," because the Rabbis established a text of prayer to ask and specify all a person's needs, and to request his needs. This is the secret of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, the standing prayer established by the Men of the Great Assembly with their holy spirit and depth of understanding to include all human needs both general and specific. See at length in the Zohar (beginning of *Vayishlach*) which explains how much a person must express and detail all his needs in prayer. This is what Yaakov did, "Save me please from my brother, from Esav," and this is also in *Or Hachayim* at the beginning of *Va'eschanan*."

Chasam Sofer on Nedarim 40a explains that there is an extra value to prayer recited near the bed of a sick person, because in general a person must mention the name of the patient he is praying for. However, when he stands next to the patient, the rule is, "One who prays in the presence of a sick person does not need to mention his name, as the verse states, 'God, please heal her.'" And the kabbalists wrote that mentioning the patient's name invokes a small amount of Heavenly judgment on him. Even though it brings him mostly merit through the prayer, sometimes there is a slight loss through mentioning his name. So, 'When praying in the presence of a sick person he does not need to mention his name' -- then it is better for him. That is because when he enters to visit him and prays for his survival he does not need to mention his name, which is not the case when he does not visit and is not in his presence. Then he must mention his name in prayer and sometimes it causes the patient a loss even though he is praying for him to get better."

³⁷¹ Shabbos 55a: "Rav Ami said there is no death without sin and no suffering without iniquity."

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the judgment was explained earlier that it is one of the principles of prayer that standing before HASHEM with the complete faith that everything is in the hands of Heaven creates a new merit for the worshiper. One who beseeches with all his heart is purified when he stands before his Creator and prays. Therefore, even if he has been sentenced, through his prayer he is no longer the same person who received the sentence, since he has changed and become purified.³⁷²

However, if that is the essence of prayer, how is it possible to pray for someone else? The person who is being judged is not the one standing in prayer and has not changed at all through the power of prayer. Praying for another person who is being judged would appear to be like one who eats on behalf of a starving person out of his concern for him. What does this contribute to the patient? Indeed, we find in the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 53:14) that, "Prayer of the sick person himself is better than anything else." However, how can another person's prayer help him at all? Even if the worshiper is fundamentally changed through his prayer, how is that transferred to the sick person hovering between judgement and mercy?

We will now try to answer these questions.

The Place of The Obligation – 'I Am with Him in His Suffering'

In *Sifrei* Bamidbar (Parshas Beha'alosecha §84) our Rabbis explained: "Similarly, you find that whenever Yisrael is enslaved, it is as if the Divine Presence is enslaved with them, as the verse states, 'They saw the HASHEM of Yisrael and there was under His feet like a rock of sapphire,' (Shemos 24:10). And similarly, the verse states, 'In all their suffering there is suffering for Him,' (Yishaya 63:9). This only refers to the suffering of the entire community, from where do we derive also for suffering of an individual? The verse teaches, 'He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble,' (Tehillim 91:15).

Rashi (Shemos 3:2) says that HASHEM appeared to Moshe from a burning bush, which had thorns, because "I will be with him in trouble."

Se we see that even though HASHEM is the One who brings the suffering on an individual or a community, He is also with them in their suffering sharing their pain with them, to help them and support them when it is possible. This is because, "For whoever HASHEM loves He reproves, like a father who desires his son," (Mishlei 3:12). Specifically, when a person is in dire straits, he must know that HASHEM is with him and he needs to turn to Him and trust in Him.

Our Rabbis taught us that even when Yosef Hatzadik was suffering the greatest degree of HASHEM's Presence being hidden from him, and was thrown into jail in

³⁷² We discussed this at length in the chapter about "Intent in prayer" citing Rabbi Yosef Albo in *Sefer Ha'ikarim* 4:18. See also footnote XXX209 above in the name of Rabbeinu Yonah.

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Egypt, it says of him, "The chief officer of the jail did not look to anything that was under his jurisdiction because HASHEM was with him, and anything he did HASHEM made successful," (Bereishis 39:23). But when Yosef turned to the butler, asking him to save him from his trouble, our Rabbis saw this as a lack of faith on his part. He turned for help to a human of flesh and blood and did not call on HASHEM to save him, though He was with him. Rashi (on Bereishis 40:23) explains, "Because Yosef placed his trust in [the butler] remembering him, he was forced to remain in jail for an extra two years, as the verse states, 'Fortunate is the man who places his trust in HASHEM and does not turn to the arrogant,' (Tehillim 40:5). He should not have trusted the Egyptians who are referred to as 'arrogant.'

It is clear that the change in the situation of the sick person can happen due to the atonement of his sins, either through his suffering, or through his turning to HASHEM in prayer, or through some other merit which comes to the sick person. It is therefore not surprising that one who visits a sick person and wants him to recover should also pray for his wellbeing in the place where the Divine Presence is found, in keeping with the verse, "Call on Him when He is near," (Yishaya 55:6).

Furthermore, a place of judgment is precisely where prayer can be renewed. We saw earlier (in the chapter "The Essence of Prayer") that the first time the Torah records that Avraham prayed to HASHEM was specifically when Sodom was being judged. For in that place the futility of mankind and his utter dependence on HASHEM was the clearest. This is a place where the Divine Presence is revealed, where it is the most appropriate place to pray. This is a pronounced expression of standing before HASHEM with the proper intent and the required humility.

'The Heart Knows the Bitterness of The Soul' (Mishlei 14:10)

Based on this we can understand that the prayers of the sick person himself are closer to HASHEM than the prayers of others who are not suffering with him. For who knows as well as the patient the fragility of existence and the utter dependence of mankind on HASHEM. Who feels as well as him the closeness of HASHEM who is with a person in his suffering, like a father standing next to his suffering son, to support him and help him. This is even if the father thinks the suffering is the best thing for the son. The patient himself therefore benefits more than anyone from the closeness of HASHEM and his prayers with the proper intent are like standing before HASHEM with the greatest closeness possible. This is explained in the Zohar (Shemos 20a) as Rabbi Pincus teaches us.

The Zohar distinguishes between two types of calling out to HASHEM –

"Calling out" – this means prayer, as the verse states, "Hear my prayer, HASHEM, and listen to my call," (Tehillim 39:13).

"Crying out" – is in the heart, "When he shouts but does not utter a word" ... as the verse states, "Their hearts cried out to HASHEM," (Eicha 2:18). "Crying out is closer to

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HASHEM than prayer and sighing, as the verse states, 'For if they cry out to Me I will surely hear their cries,' (Shemos 22:23)."³⁷³

Rabbi Pincus adds, in *Tiferes Shimshon* on Shemos (p. 10):

The explanation is as follows: calling is prayer which must ascend upward, and it is possible that there will be obstructions on the way which will prevent it rising. Through this the prayer will not be accepted. However, crying out does not need to ascend at all, because regarding such a situation the verse states, "I am with him in his suffering," (Tehillim 91:15) – in times of trouble HASHEM is literally present (in a manner of speaking), within the heart of the person and there is no need for the prayer to ascend upward. So, there is no possibility of the cry to be returned empty.

We learn from here a great principle. A person does not need to seek the value of prayer in a distant place because everything is already placed within his heart. A person's heart is built for closeness of prayer and only if there is a defect in the heart and it is filled with other matters does the need arise to seek that closeness in other ways.

So, when a person is sick and in straits, HASHEM is with him, and he does not need to "stand before HASHEM" like those who stand in prayer, because at that time he is closer to HASHEM more than ever and he prays to HASHEM from his heart. Prayer, as we said, is the service of the heart, therefore prayer is the cry of the heart which is not returned empty.

It is true that HASHEM judges a sick person and his sick bed is a place of judgment. However, HASHEM is the One who judges the patient, and He is with him in his time of trouble. Specifically, at that time of judgement, the patient feels incredible closeness to HASHEM. This feeling is real and one who has suffered a serious illness

³⁷³ The distinction between the Hebrew words "*tze'aka*" and "*ze'aka*," both translated as "crying out" is explained in Malbim on Tehillim 107:6 on the verses, "They wandered in the wilderness in the desolated path, but found no inhabited city... Then they cried out (*tze'aka*) to HASHEM in their distress, and He saved them from their troubles... Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, were chained in affliction and iron... Then they cried out (*ze'aka*) to HASHEM in their distress, and He redeemed them from their troubles... Their soul abhorred all food, and they drew near to the gates of death. They cried out (*ze'aka*) to HASHEM in their distress, and He redeemed them from their troubles... Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters... They cried out (*tze'aka*) to HASHEM in their distress, and He saved them from their troubles."

Malbim explains that, "In the desert and the sea the verse says, 'They cried out' (*tze'aka*) but regarding a sick person and a prisoner it says, 'They cried out' (*ze'aka*). This is because '*tze'aka*' is greater than '*ze'aka*.' It also says in both these cases, 'saved them,' whereas with regard to the sick person and the prisoner it says, "redeemed them" because "salvation" is greater than "redemption." The dangers of the sea and the desert are greater than those faced by a sick person or a prisoner."

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knows the experience. The person in straits senses that HASHEM is with him constantly in his distress.

If so, the sick person who feels the closeness of HASHEM can cry out to him from his heart – a cry that is beyond anything that can be expressed in words of prayer. This is the cry of a person to his HASHEM – who is with him in his time of distress. This is a close conversation without any intermediary – and therefore it is authentic.

My older and greater brother Rabbi Yaakov Weinroth described the meaning of a crying out that surfaces at these moments of truth by the ill one, when he eulogized his close friend (Ariel Rosen-Zvi).³⁷⁴ He had stayed with him in the hospital and heard him speaking during the night in his illness with his Creator. In this intimate conversation of the sick person meeting HASHEM, he heard him complaining about his pain. There is no contradiction, however, between a patient crying out for salvation and an “argument” which he has, as it were, with HASHEM. Because in this matter there is a distinction between “calling out” which comes from the intellect, from the brain, and is expressed in words, when it is forbidden to argue with Heaven, as opposed to “calling” without words, which comes directly from the depths of the heart and the intensity of feeling and pain, when there are no criticisms of the sick person. Quite the opposite -- the call which comes from a broken, burning heart are heard and not returned empty. This is how my brother explained it in his eulogy:

Regarding complaints to Heaven, it appears that the words of our Rabbis are in complete contradiction.

In Berachos (31b-32a) the Rabbis tell us about three people who complained to Heaven and HASHEM admitted that their complaints were justified and answered them:

Hannah, the woman who became the mother of the prophet Shmuel, complained to HASHEM that she was barren. The verse states, “She prayed on HASHEM,” instead of “to HASHEM.” Rabbi Eliezer derived from here that Hannah complained to Heaven. Her prayer was answered, and she gave birth to Shmuel.

Eliyahu, when he faced the prophets of Baal, after Izevel’s prophets slaughtered their sacrifices, when he stood against the wicked and foolish people joined together, he complained to HASHEM and said, “You have turned their hearts backward,” (I Melachim 18:37). He was saying that You, the Creator, caused this terrible profaning, because there is not good or evil without You.

Moshe complained to HASHEM after the sin of the Golden Calf, and said, “Master of the Universe, because of the silver and gold that you poured over Yisrael they made the Calf.”

³⁷⁴ Yaakov Weinroth, “*Levavos Yisrael*” in *Dinei Yisrael* vol. 18 (5755-5756) 13, pp. 16-17.

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Our Rabbis say that HASHEM admitted that their complaints were justified. In *Midrash Tanchuma* the Rabbis speak of another person who complained to HASHEM – Hagar, who was evicted from Avraham's home along with her son, Yishmael. There, her water supply was exhausted, and she threw her son under one of the bushes, not to see him while he was dying of thirst. Rabbi Berachya said about this, "She complained to Heaven," and immediately HASHEM instructed an angel to show her a well.

Conversely, in Ta'anis and several other places in the Talmud they taught, "Levi decreed a fast and the rain did not fall. He said to HASHEM, 'Master of the Universe, You ascended and sat on high and You have no mercy on Your children.' The rain fell, but Levi was [punished by becoming] lame.

Based on this, Rabbi Eliezer said, "A person must never complain to Heaven, because a great man complained and became lame."

What is the difference between Levi, who complained and was punished, and the others who complained and merited HASHEM's acknowledgement of their request and His salvation?

Maharsha, in his *Chidushei Aggados* on Ta'anis, concisely states that Levi spoke argumentatively. This implies that the distinction is between a person who cries out from his bitterness, and one who comes to HASHEM with attacking arguments. The distinction between the two is so subtle as to be barely visible. It is due to the authenticity of the former cases, compared to its lack in the latter case. Both one who complains and one who cries out are doing so because of the suffering they experienced. Both are sincere. But one who cries out in his pain does not question whether he deserves it and does not ask, "Why?" He does not attack HASHEM with his argument. He simply cries out, "Please!"

When there is a grievance instead of a simple cry, the person is making a "calculation" and this is expressed with thought and words. This is not authentic – the authenticity required from a person is to be without any kind of mask (as the Chasidim would say – "Do not make for yourselves false gods," and the word for "false" (*masecha*) can also be understood as "mask"). An authenticity that is free from any role-playing, without any makeup, but with fundamental purity, a purity that is not preconditioned on any purpose. This authenticity exists when a barren woman cries out for a child, or a mother complains about her dying son. To complain without risking punishment, a person must come to his Creator wallowing in his blood, naked and bare, with the unique "I" which is only mine.

The great insight of our Rabbis was that a leader can also cry out in such an authentic manner on behalf of his people. A Jewish leader is required to have such a high level of sensitivity that there is nothing between his own pain and the hurt of others. Therefore, Moshe and Eliyahu complained and were not harmed. Levi was different. True, he was a great man, but he was not a leader. The leader of that generation was

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Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi. Levi was not crying out about his own pain but was complaining on behalf of others. He took upon himself a very important role, with extremely positive intent. However, it was still a role and a goal, and not pure "I," he decreed a fast and only afterwards complained, which implies that it was not a spontaneous outcry. In other words, he lacked the requisite authenticity that would allow a person to complain to HASHEM and not be harmed.

Why does everything depend on authenticity? Our Rabbis also revealed this to us in an *agadda*. Judaism is not afraid of for an individual to completely expose himself. The opposite, he should stand up and find there his HASHEM.

The Torah describes the creation of Adam, "He blew a living soul into his nostrils, and the man became a living soul," (Bereishis 2:).

The Zohar says of this, "Anyone who blows, blows from within himself." The place where the person is completely laid bare, reaching his living soul, that is where he finds HASHEM close to him, dwelling within himself.

The Chasidim explain the verse, "You shall seek all HASHEM, your Lord, from there and find Him, when you seek Him with all your hearts and all your soul," (Devarim 4:29) – how does a person find HASHEM? "When you seek Him," after suffering the search. And where is He found? Not in heaven, and not over the seas, but within the person himself, with all his heart and all his soul, at the core of his very being.³⁷⁵

Someone who cries out and speaks to his HASHEM as when the Divine Presence is standing at the head of the bed, this is the permitted complaining mentioned in Berachos, and not the forbidden kind discussed in Ta'anis. In contrast to this closeness, which is born from the pain, and the revelation of HASHEM before him, through the revelation of the "I" with him and within him literally, Levi said, "You ascended and sat in Heaven." He came with a complaint. One who sees HASHEM in Heaven, at a distance, and speaks with him from afar, not only will he not reach HASHEM, but he has not even reached himself with the authenticity which protects one who complains to HASHEM from being punished by the Omnipresent..."

The Gates of Tears Are Never Sealed

The Divine Presence stands at the head of a sick person --and it is a time of judgement. However, prayer offered on behalf of the patient at the time of judgment is considered like the struggle between the angels and the terrestrial creatures who are trying to save the holy ark³⁷⁶ -- i.e., a person's soul, the Temple of the Divine Presence within him. This is sometimes, literally, the time of the *ne'ila* ("closing") prayer of Yom Kippur, when the sun is already setting, and its rays are playing on

³⁷⁵ This interpretation comes from understanding the preposition in the Hebrew phrase, "*Bechol levavecha*" not as "With all your heart" but "In all your heart."

³⁷⁶ See Ketubos 104a.

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the treetops, and the Heavenly gates that were open throughout Yom Kippur day are closing. To contend with such a difficult situation requires tremendous energy to force one's self through the closing gates. Every prayer is important and can save, but in this difficult battle prayer is not always enough. At the time of the closing of the gates we must find additional strength which can prevent them from closing. And this is what the Rabbis said in Berachos (32b), " Rabbi Elazar said: From the day the Temple was destroyed the gates of prayer were sealed, as the verse states, 'Even though I cry and beseech, my prayer is closed,' (Eicha 3:8). Yet even though the gates of prayer are sealed, the gates of tears are not sealed, as the verse states, 'Hear my prayer, HASHEM, and listen to my call, do not be silent to my tears,' (Tehillim 39:13)."

There is something which can open the gates – the tears, which are more likely to be found at the head of a sick patient. One who comes to visit a sick person can utter a true cry of pain from within himself, which comes from his complete empathy with the patient. He will come, therefore, to visit the patient and pray at his head – a true, wholehearted, prayer – and this will cause his prayer to be heard, and the patient will be saved and will recover.

Furthermore, illness highlights for a person the fragility of his existence and its futility before the Creator. Illness shakes and rattles the foundations of his consciousness and personality, it removes him from the ongoing race of life and gives him a new set of priorities. When a person stands before the gates of death, either his own or of a loved one, a moment of faith is created, a moment of soul searching, a real moment of truth when he stands helpless before HASHEM. Prayer offered at this time is the most transcendent. It is higher than anything else, and it has the power to make systems crumble. Just as a pitchfork turns the produce, so a person's prayer can turn the fate of a sick person, can change the nature of the world. Therefore, there is a great weight to the place where prayer is offered – for at the head of the patient the prayer is cried with the entire heart. These are not only words and not only calling out, but these are words which reach the level of crying out to HASHEM.

Bearing the Suffering with Another

Earlier we asked that since prayer for a sick person could make the difference between life and death, and since someone who refrains from praying for a sick person is considered a sinner, is there an obligation to visit every Jewish sick person, even if one does not know him?³⁷⁷ Does a person have an obligation to go to the hospital every day to pray for those being treated there? If so, when will he have

³⁷⁷ See *Tur*, *Yoreh De'a* 335 who writes that, " As soon as he becomes sick, there is a mitzvah on every person to visit him." This implies that the mitzvah applies to everyone, even to those who do not know the patient at all. See also the continuation of *Tur*, "Relatives enter immediately to visit him, but those who are distant only after three days. And friends are like relatives. But if he became ill suddenly, everyone enters to visit him immediately." This implies that there is an obligation to visit the sick even for those who are not relatives and not friends of the patient but are defined as distant from him.

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time to learn Torah? The reality is that this is not common practice, not even by the greatest or most righteous Rabbis.

It seems that the solution to this is to be found within the understanding that we brought about the nature of prayer for a sick person.³⁷⁸

1. The power of prayer for a sick person is dependent on the depth of the crying out at a time like this, and the sense of closeness of the patient and his visitors to HASHEM. The sick person who is suffering, or even standing at the gates of death, while his relatives and those close to him all share his pain and are afraid of his fate. They and any chance visitor who may come -- if this visitor reaches complete empathy with the patient and draws close to him with a degree of closeness that brings him to stand at the foot of the bed and to pray for him -- pray authentic prayers, which come from the depths of the heart and reach the highest heavens. Such a prayer is the type of crying out which breaks down barriers and creates salvation. This can tear up an evil decree.
2. From this reality we can also derive the definition of "visiting and praying for a sick person." The obligation applies to all sick person when the visitor feels that visiting him can create from within him a feeling of empathy, to the extent that it leads to authentic crying out with a broken heart for him to make a total recovery.³⁷⁹ Someone who ignores his relatives and friends and does not pray for them is a sinner. This seems implicit in the words of the Talmud (Berachos 12b), "Anyone who is able to pray for his friend and does not do so is called a sinner." Who is it that is not able to pray, that the Rabbis stressed, "Anyone who is able...?" Furthermore, why did they say specifically for a friend and not for every person? The intent seems to be for

³⁷⁸ These words are being presented based on my own reasoning, since we have not found any halakhic source for them. Quite the opposite, as mentioned in the previous note the words of *Tur* imply that the mitzvah applies to everyone.

³⁷⁹ Rabbi Chaim Sabato cites the words of Rav Kook, that even in regular prayer, "A person can pray for the entire Jewish people only if he loves them and feels that he is part of them and they are part of him." Therefore, the only way a person can pray for someone else is if he feels he is like a part of him, like a person's prayers for his wife and children -- then the prayer works, because it is prayer for himself. If the condition of the patient changes it makes a difference to those who are praying for him. As one cannot say that in a person's prayer only his head is elevated, but not his hands, likewise it seems that a person's prayer helps those who he prays for when he is united with them. Therefore, a person can pray for all the Jewish people only if he loves them and feels that he is part of them, and they are part of him. Thus, the only one who can pray for the entire Jewish people is a *tzadik*, who feels in himself that he is part of the soul of the Jewish people. When he ascends, he carries up all those connected with him. However, if a person feels separated from another, his prayer for him will have no meaning, even if he prays for him incessantly. Because he if he is not part of him, he is not able to pray for him. In the Oriental countries, the custom was that before praying the *amida* when the community would stand up to pray, when the *shaliach tzibur* would say the words " *Tehillos le'El elyon*," he would turn around and wave his hand in a motion signifying, "We are all connected together in this prayer." For if a person is not connected to the Jewish people, how can he pray for them?

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one who can cry out from the depths of his heart for a friend. For a good friend or a close neighbor, it is reasonable that he will care enough about the illness and will be able to cry out with his whole heart. In that case, if he does not do so, he is a sinner.

So, it makes sense that since the goal of visiting the sick is to offer such a prayer, from the depths of the visitor's heart, it makes sense to say that the obligation (as opposed to the mitzvah) does not apply to one who would visit the patient and not have such deep empathy with him from which would flow a whole-hearted prayer for the sick person. Someone who cannot cry out from his heart, whether because he does not know the patient or because he is not close to him, is not held accountable for not praying for him.

3. There is another angle to this. One of the great *mussar* teachers once began his talk with the following words, "I am not speaking to any specific person in the audience. I am speaking only to myself. But someone who feels that I was speaking to him, then it is to him that I was directing my words." Similarly, it seems one could say that one who feels the essence of prayer for a sick person and is able to reach the level of empathy with him and true feeling in his prayers for him, then the statement of the Talmud applies to him and he has an obligation to visit the patient and to pray for him. However, not every person is able to empathize with every sick person. Moreover, it would seem that if visiting the ill was to become a mass-produced action, it would destroy the sensitivity necessary for a true prayer.
4. Nevertheless, even if there is no obligation to visit every sick person, it appears that there is a great mitzvah in it for every person.³⁸⁰ Nobody can exempt himself by claiming that he does not yet have the required feeling of empathy with the patient, and that he is therefore exempt from visiting him. The essential component of the mitzvah of visiting the sick is that a person goes to the patient and that will create a feeling of empathy with him.³⁸¹ *Sefer Hachinuch* taught us that, "The heart is drawn after the actions,"³⁸² so even if

³⁸⁰ This seems to be what *Tur* -- cited earlier -- meant.

³⁸¹ In the words of *Chazon Ish* in *Kovetz Iggras* vol. 1 letter 123: "You are lacking the feeling of sharing the pain of others, and the advice for this is to strive to be good to another, and to save him from pain. The actions affect the heart. Also praying for the trouble of another, even though it does not come from the heart, and even if the one who is suffering is one of the riff-raff, lowly and contemptible."

³⁸² *Sefer Hachinuch*, mitzvah 16: "Do not think, my son, to take issue with my words and say, why did HASHEM command us to do all these things to remember that miracle? Would not a single remembrance we raise the matter in our minds and it would not be forgotten by our children? For it is not out of wisdom that you take issue with me on this, and it is childish thoughts that lead you to speak thus. Now, my son, if you understand, listen to this, and incline your ear and hear, I will teach you something that will help with Torah and mitzvos. Know that a person is influenced by his actions. His heart and all his thoughts always follow his actions which he does, whether good or bad. Even someone who is completely wicked in his heart and all his thoughts are only for evil all day long, if his spirit awakens him and he strives and involves himself constantly with Torah and mitzvos, even not for the sake of Heaven, immediately he will turn toward the good. The power of his actions will slay his evil

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the patient is not known by the visitor, and even if his illness is not serious, or his suffering is not noticeable, so it does not bring the visitor to pure prayer, there is still a principle that, "All Jews are responsible for one another," and the person is commanded to teach himself to feel the pain of another.³⁸³

5. Furthermore, the Talmud (Sotah 14a) teaches:

Rabbi Chama son of Rabbi Chanina said: "You must walk after HASHEM, your God," (Devarim 13:5) – Is it possible for a person to walk after the Divine Presence? But the Torah states, "For HASHEM, your God is a devouring fire," (Devarim 4:24). Rather he must go after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed is He – just as he clothes the naked... so you should clothe the naked. HASHEM visits the sick... so you should visit the sick. HASHEM consoles mourners... So too, you should console mourners. HASHEM buries the dead... so you should bury the dead.

We find that visiting the sick comes from the obligation to teach ourselves to follow HASHEM's attributes of mercy that He displays to all His creations.³⁸⁴ It

inclination, because the heart is drawn after the actions. Even if a person is completely righteous and his heart is good and true, desiring Torah and mitzvos, if he is constantly involved in other matters (for example, if the king forced him to oversee evil work) he will eventually come to leave his righteousness and become completely wicked. This is because it is well known and true that every person is influenced by his actions, as we said. Therefore, our Rabbis said (Makkos 23b), 'The Omnipresent wanted to give merit to Yisrael, therefore he increased for them Torah and mitzvos' – in order to have all our thoughts preoccupied with them, and to have us constantly busy with them, for our own ultimate good. Through those good actions we are influenced to become good and to merit eternal life."

³⁸³ Regarding the suffering of the public it is an explicit *halakha* in Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuva* 3:11): "One who separates from the ways of the community, even if he has not committed any transgressions, but separated from the congregation of Yisrael and does not do mitzvos among them and does not share in their suffering or fast on their fasts, but goes on his way like one of the nations of the world, as if he is not one of them, he has no share in the World to Come."

³⁸⁴ Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook in *Ein Aya* on Shabbos 12b writes: "Visiting the sick has a positive effect on the person's senses, humbles his heart and brings him close to that which is good and just. The purpose of the mitzvah of visiting the sick is to connect with an ethical uplift, and to bring into a person's heart servility, when he sees with his own eyes the weakness of the physical. He understands that it is inappropriate to make the physical reality the main purpose, but rather matters of the eternal soul. Additionally, he awakens powers of mercy and kindness within himself in their purest forms. Also, going to visit the ill indicates a strengthening of the attribute of kindness and giving. This is not only due to the natural inclination of one's heart to become broken in such an encounter. This feeling can be felt even by the toughest of people when an unfortunate person encounters them, and they see suffering with their own eyes, but when they are honest with themselves they admit that they would prefer that he had not come to them and their heart had not been saddened within them, and they would not have been forced to put themselves out, or to spend money for another. Going to visit the sick, however, is a sign of pursuing kindness, because a sick person cannot go to the one who visits and trouble his peace, rather the visitor must go to him out of the goodness of his heart and fear of HASHEM, to pursue righteousness and kindness."

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thus follows that there are two types of attributes of listening that we must emulate. There is listening which does not have the power to save, but it allows the person to share the suffering of another, and it calms and comforts the complainer because someone is listening to him. This is described in Yoma (75a) on the verse, "Worry in the heart of a man bows him (*yashchena*)," (Mishlei 12:25). Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Assi – one says he should remove it (*yassichena*) from his heart, and the other one says he should speak about it (*yesichena*) to others.

Then there is another type of listening the goal of which is to hear the matter and try to help and save the person.

Similarly, with HASHEM we find this distinction. On the one hand, "The cries of the poor You hear," which refers to hearing the prayer and listening to the cries.³⁸⁵ On the other hand, there is also, "The cry of the poor You will hear, and You will save." For this reason, one who follows the path of HASHEM should bear the burden with his friend and listen to his cries and pray for him, even if he is unable to save him.

6. So, it appears, that even if a person is unable to pray with his entire heart for a sick person and cannot have enough empathy to be able to offer a pure prayer which will tear up the evil decree, it still is a mitzvah on his part to visit the patient. It may be that there is no obligation as described in the Talmud (Berachos 12b), and he is not considered a sinner if he fails to do so. That obligation only applies when the visitor can reach total empathy and offer a pure prayer from the depths of his heart. It is possible that only someone who can truly empathize like this can actually save the person with his prayer, and therefore if such a person refrains from praying, it is as if he is allowing his friend to die. However, even someone who cannot have such deep solidarity with the sick person and is unable to reach the level of

³⁸⁵ This is explained by Rabbi Meir Tzvi Bergman in his book *Sha'arei Orah* on the Torah, vol. 1, on Parshas Re'eh in the section entitled "outcry of the poor" on the text of *birchas hashir* of Rambam: "You hear the outcry of the poor, you listen to the call of the poor and save him." "You hear the outcry of the poor" – that is, HASHEM listens and hears the outcry of the poor. And the second attribute is "You listen to the call of the poor and save him" -- this is accepting the prayer and the crying out. Therefore, there is an obligation to hear the cry of the poor who is suffering, and to bear his burden with him, even if there is no way to accept his cries and to save him, but only to listen to him and to be with him in his time of trouble. Look at the essay by Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz in *Sichos Mussar* 5732, essay 31 on Parshas Beha'alosecha, "He shall dwell alone." There he defines that the nature of a living person is to feel the pain of others, and if not, he is considered as if he is dead. This characteristic is shared with the leper, who is outcast from society due to his affliction, and therefore feels no empathy with others; with the blind, who cannot see the pain of another; and with one who has no children, who therefore is cut off and unable to fulfill the natural drive to give to others and thereby identify with others.

See *Sefer Zikaron* for Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, "Mind and Heart" p. 112-113, regarding identifying with pain of another even when there is no way to help him.

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helping him through pure prayer, still has a mitzvah to visit him and to pray for him with as much feeling as he can muster. This is so he can attach himself to HASHEM's attributes and even if his prayer is not accepted, HASHEM always listens.

The Essence of The Obligation

'He Will Pray for You and You Will Live' (Bereishis 20:7)

Prayer by the sick person himself is not essentially different than other prayer except that it has greater power. Prayer for a sick person derives its power from the fact that it is not only "service of the heart" but is service which comes from the depths of the heart. In the chapter "Intent in prayer" we discussed the question of how prayer can be considered service of HASHEM even though a person is asking his own needs.³⁸⁶ We explained that even though the worshiper is asking HASHEM for wisdom, redemption, healing, livelihood and every other kind of human desire, what turns it into "service" is the act of faith where a person recognizes that all his needs come from HASHEM and that he is unable to help himself. We cited the words of *Maharal* of Prague in *Nesivos Olam* (*nesiv ha'avoda* 3) which explain that when a person stands before HASHEM and pours out his words to Him, this is his deep recognition that, "On my own, what am I?" A person on his own is unable to succeed in his actions, or to save himself from trouble, without the help of HASHEM. When, during prayer, a person stands before HASHEM and discards all his existence and being, he is performing a deep act of faith. This is a transcendent service of HASHEM in the recognition that life, health, success, honor, peace and tranquility, or (Heaven forbid) lack, pain, illness and death, all come from the hand of HASHEM – and a person is nothing more than a mote of dust, blown by the spirit of HASHEM which decides his fate, for punishment or kindness.

We also brought the explanation of Rabbi Yosef Albo in *Sefer Ha'ikarim* (*ma'amar* 4:18) that prayer helps because a person is purified through his prayer. The act of faith which is prayer, with the feeling that he prefers to place himself in the hands of HASHEM than to think he can save himself, transforms the person from one who pursues physicality, to a more spiritual person. After the prayer, he is no longer the same person about whom the decree was issued, even based on the principles of reward and punishment. The change that happens to the person through prayer brings one who is distant back to HASHEM, because of the thoughts of prayer itself and not only through the requests for repentance and forgiveness. Just as repentance changes a person and removes the evil decree, so

³⁸⁶ By way of analogy, see the well-known statement of Rabbi *Sar Shalom* Rokeach, the Rebbe of Belz, in the name of Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz, that only few people come to him to learn and accept the truth for him. "They all come to me, but most of them do not really have me in mind, rather they come for themselves, to solve their problems through me."

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prayer can transform the person and the judgement that was decreed against him.

Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuva* 2:4) explains that a penitent person, “changes his name, as if to say, ‘I am not the same person who performed those deeds,’ and he changes all of his actions to the good and just path.” Due to his repentance, “yesterday he was hated by the Omnipresent, disgusting, distanced and abhorrent. But today he is beloved, sweet, close and dear.”³⁸⁷ This is also true of one who prays and recognizes the greatness of the Creator and his own dependence upon him. This purification and transformation that happens to a person because of whole-hearted prayer with intent, is what saves the person, because he is a “new” purified person and the decree was never made against him.³⁸⁸

Prayer for a sick person comes at a difficult time, when a sense of despair is near. The patient is truly powerless and completely without energy before the Creator of the world. He does not have to imagine in his thoughts that he is like this, because he actually is so. With all the power he acquired in the world, and even if he himself is a great doctor, when he himself is sick, he faces the futility of mankind and his total dependence on HASHEM. Faith in HASHEM at a time like this takes on tremendous power, because the feeling that, “My strength and handiwork has gotten me this wealth” which fills a person’s existence when things are going well, and which keeps faith away is removed and pushed to a corner. There is no doubt that if we are dealing with prayer as service of HASHEM and as a cause for the transformation of a person and his purification, prayer for a sick person is a very strong example of this.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ Rambam *Hilchos Teshuva* 7:6.

³⁸⁸ *Sefer Ha'ikarim* cites as an example of this Achav, about whom the verse states, “But there was no one like Achav, who was addicted to do what was evil in the eyes of HASHEM,” (I Melachim 21:25). But, after the decree was made against him, he fasted, covered himself in sackcloth and humbled himself before HASHEM. Once he did so, God said to Eliyahu, “Because he [Achav] humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring evil upon his house.” (ibid. 29). We see that even someone who is defined as wicked for generations to come like Achav, the actual softening that he underwent once he humbled himself before HASHEM caused a change in him and that changed his sentence that had been decreed against him.

³⁸⁹ Look at what Rabbi Asher Weiss writes in *Minchas Asher* on Bamidbar §23, “The concept of prayer for a sick person.” He discusses at length the words of our Rabbis in *Bereishis Rabba* (53:14) that, “Prayer of the patient is better than prayer of others on his behalf and is quick to be accepted.” Even though they also say in Berachos (5b), “A prisoner cannot free himself from the jail,” it seems that this only applies to the decree of a righteous person, as they said, “The righteous decrees and HASHEM fulfils.” Sometimes a righteous person is unable to nullify a decree against himself and come out of the darkness to light. But regarding prayer, a prisoner or a sick person who entreats in prayer before the Jailer that he should have mercy on him -- his prayer is more accepted because he is crying out from his suffering. True there is an opinion that even regarding prayer the principle that a prisoner cannot free himself from

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However, regarding the mitzvah of visiting the sick we saw that there is an obligation for the visitor to pray for the patient. Here we asked, how can prayer by another help the patient? Even if the one praying with all his heart for the sick person changes and becomes elevated and purified, when he sees the suffering of his brother, and he stands before his Creator and beseeches on his behalf, but the patient himself does not experience this change. The patient is the one who is being judged at that difficult time and he is the one who must purify his heart, repent and change. How can prayer for a sick person work if he himself does not pray and does not change in any way through this prayer?³⁹⁰

jail applies, and the matter depends on whether the sick person can have intent in his prayer or not. If he has intent on his prayer, it is heard, however anyone who is unable to have intent in his prayer, his own prayer is not preferable to the prayers of others for him. That is what the Rabbis referred to when they said a prisoner cannot free himself. (Rabbeinu Eliyahu Mizrachi Bereishis 21:17). However, there are some early Rabbis (*Sefer Chasidim* §753) who wrote explicitly that even regarding prayer did our Rabbis say that a prisoner cannot free himself. He wrote: "Sometimes one prays for others and is answered, but his own prayer for himself is not answered. But our Rabbis said (Bava Kama 33a) that anyone who prays for others, his desires will also be fulfilled, like Avraham who prayed for Avimelech and immediately afterwards the Torah writes, "And Sarah gave birth," (Bereishis 21:2). Further, the verse states, "And HASHEM returned what Iyov had lost when he prayed for his friends," (Iyov 42:10). So how can we say that "Sometimes one prays for others and is answered, but his own prayer for himself is not answered?" Rather, we find regarding Rabbi Chiya that the flax in Eretz Yisrael was never blighted from the time Rabbi Chiya came to Israel, but his own flax was blighted. In his merit the flax of others was successful, and he prayed for others and his prayers were heard, but his prayers for himself did not help. Maybe this is because a prisoner cannot free himself, as the verse states, "In all their suffering He suffers, and the angel of His presence saved them," (Yishaya 63:9). These words of the *Sefer Chasidim* are explicit that sometimes a person's prayer for himself does not work because of the rule that a prisoner cannot free himself, which applies also to prayer.

This seems difficult, because prayer is unlike freeing someone from jail through authority and power, like the one who in charge of the king's prisoners. Prayer is beseeching the king himself to have mercy on the prisoner. If so, why does the prayer of a person himself not help? I saw that the *Maharal* writes in *Gur Aryeh* (Parshas Vayera), "Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi asked how we say in Berachos, "Let Rabbi Yochanan heal himself!? [He could not, because] a prisoner cannot free himself from jail," and he answers that it is because he cannot have intent, but where he can have intent it is different. However, this certainly is not difficult, because the principle that a prisoner cannot free himself certainly does not apply to prayer, because through prayer it is HASHEM who frees him. But there, when he said, "Give me your hand," and he healed him, what he meant was, "Strengthen yourself and then you will receive Divine assistance which will make you strong." In this the principle of a prisoner cannot free himself applies because a person cannot strengthen himself, but he needs others to strengthen him. But with prayer this does not apply, because the Holy One, blessed is He, hears prayer." This is clear. See also the Yerushalmi (Maaser Sheni 5:5 23b) concerning the verse, "Listen to me, you hard of heart, who are far from righteousness," (Yishaya 46:12).

³⁹⁰ We find a similar question asked by *Maharsha* (*Chidushei Aggados* Berachos 10a) regarding the words of Beruriah, Rabbi Meir's wife, that one should not pray for the sinners to die but that they should repent. For the verse states, "Let the sins cease from the earth and the wicked

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True, we find that Avraham Avinu prayed for the people of Sodom, and Moshe Rabbeinu prayed for the Jewish people. But there it can be explained that they were pleading the defense at the time of judgement. Similarly, what we find that HASHEM instructed Avimelech, "And now, return the wife of that man, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live, (Bereishis 20:7). This seems like forgiveness by the one who was offended. However, a regular person, who is not coming to defend the patient but to pray for him with all his heart, how does that work?

It appears that the answer to this question is many faceted depending on the purpose of suffering which befalls a person.

1. Let us examine the spectacular words of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook in *Ain Aya* on Shabbos 12b:

The existence of illness gives benefit to the character of a person. Through it the person is humbled before HASHEM. The knowledge of the possibility of illness to the human species works for their benefit, to soften the stubbornness of the stubborn and to slash the wickedness of the evil-hearted. However, the completion of the positive benefit a person receives from the existence of illness is that through it the person's nature becomes purified by praying, when he beseeches HASHEM to save him in his time of trouble and day of evil. Therefore, the benefit of prayer during sickness is very great, because through the human character we recognize that one of the goals of Providence in the existence of illness is to return a person to HASHEM. "You reduce man to wreckage; and You say: 'Repent people,'" (Tehillim 90:3). Therefore, many times when the illness serves its ethical purpose properly through either the sick person or a relative or friend growing strong in prayer, bringing him to an ethical state which draws the hearts of many close to HASHEM, softening them and purifying their behavior, then it has achieved its purpose. Then it will go, and the person will return to full health.

will be no more," (Tehillim 104:35). It says, "Let the sins cease," not "Let the sinners cease." *Maharsha* asks, "This needs explanation. Certainly when a person prays for himself to repent, that makes sense, because even though everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven, our Rabbis said (Makkos 10b), 'In the way a person wants to go that is how they lead him,' and (Yoma 38b), 'If one wants to purify they help him.' So, if he prays for himself that they should help him repent it is included within 'one who wants to purify himself.' But to pray for another that he should repent does not make sense. How can his prayer help? Our Rabbis said (Berachos 33b), 'Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven.' Insofar as what we pray 'And return us in complete repentance before You,' the difficulty may be resolved since he includes himself also [however the case when one prays only for others must still be resolved]. This can be resolved, and it is easy to figure out."

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In other words, the goal of illness and suffering which befall a person is not only subjugation of the stiff-neck of the person himself, or atonement for sin, or as a test for the patient himself. Rather, the goal of the suffering is also to purify the people in general and to bring them closer to their Father in Heaven. If so, once someone prays for a sick person, whether by the sick person himself or another, it "draws the hearts of many close to HASHEM, softening them and purifying their behavior." This general purification elevates the entire world.³⁹¹ Through this it turns out that the illness has already achieved its purpose, and therefore, the illness "will go and the person will return to full health."³⁹²

From his words it appears that the sick person was chosen to be the catalyst to elevate his surroundings and to return them to HASHEM, like the verse states, "and You say: 'Repent people.'" If so, a person who is the catalyst for repentance and causes others to pray and to return to HASHEM, that itself is a tremendous merit for him. It turns out that the sick person, who caused those

³⁹¹ A person who ascends and becomes pure elevates the entire world with him and perfects it. So, we find in Kiddushin 40b, "Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon said, 'Since the world is judged according to its majority... if one did a single mitzvah, fortunate is he who tipped himself and the entire world to the scale of merit.'" And Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto explains this in *Mesilas Yesharim* chapter 1. For "The world was created for the use of mankind. However, man stands at a point of weighing, because if the person is drawn after the physical world and distances himself from his Creator, then he corrupts himself, and he corrupts the world with him. But if he controls himself and cleaves to his Creator and uses the world only to help him to serve his Creator, he elevates himself and elevates the world with him. For it is a great benefit to all the creations to be used by a wholesome person (see Bereishis 23:17: And the field that was in the cave before Mamre arose, the field and the cave within it and every tree in the field in all its boundaries around." Rashi explains, "It was elevated because it left the possession of a commoner for the possession of a king.) *Mesilas Yesharim* continues and cites the words of the Rabbis (*Midrash Koheles Rabba* 7): "Look at the actions of God," (Koheles 7:13). When the Holy One, blessed is He, created Adam, he took him and showed him all the trees of the garden of Eden and said to him, "Look at my actions, how beautiful and nice they are. Everything I created was created for you. Pay attention that you do not corrupt and ruin My world." For a person who sins destroys worlds. But a person who performs a mitzvah and purifies himself builds them and elevates the entire world with him.

³⁹² In general, Rav Kook maintains that prayer for a sick person does not view the patient as an individual standing by himself, but rather the love flows to him because he is part of the Jewish people, "who are very worthy of care and great love." In the words of Rav Kook, "It is appropriate for a person to strive to sanctify his soul and the emotions of his heart that they be imbued with the holiness of the entirety of the People of Yisrael until he channels the love of his relative who is sick in his home not out of personal pain or his individual value, but as because he is part of the great whole which is very worthy of care and great love. Like Rabbi Yosei who elevated the love of the whole as the principle from which flows love for the individuals, as they say, "Among the sick people of Yisrael," and not "For you and for the sick people of Yisrael" ... The goal of this lofty principle is that even the love of his family who are closest to him is drawn from the well of everyone, because they are individuals within the nation."

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who visited him to pray, receives the merit of all of them to save him from his suffering.

2. Additionally, it seems that we can offer an explanation to this difficult question based on the principle discussed by Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian in *Lev Eliyahu* (vol. 3 *ma'arechos hateshuva* §5). Rabbi Lopian asks about the verse, "All His ways are just, a HASHEM of faithfulness with no iniquity," (Devarim 32:4). What kind of praise is this of HASHEM that he does not act with iniquity in judgement? Is this not obviously required from anyone who judges? Rabbi Lopian's answer is as follows:
 - a. By the laws of man, a person is himself judged and no consideration is made as to the suffering of the family and the relatives of the accused. The court must rule on the case according to the actions of the person standing before the court. If he is guilty, there is no escape from punishment even if through it his relatives and those around him will suffer from his punishment, without them having done anything wrong themselves. If the accused tells the court that it will be unfair to his wife, because she will suffer greatly if he is found guilty and she has done nothing wrong, the court will reply that they must judge the person before them, and he himself should have thought of the consequences from the beginning. His claim is likened to one who murdered his parents and then asked the court for clemency because he was an orphan. The court is not able to include considerations of suffering for the family within its legal framework. So, there is a certain type of iniquity to those close to the accused who suffer without having sinned. This is how human courts work.
 - b. However, this is not the case with HASHEM's court. "The Holy One, blessed is He, looks at the person's surroundings, at his family, his friends and his associates, who will suffer when he receives his punishment. If they do not deserve this suffering, the accused will be saved in their merit." The principle that "A person will die for his sin," does not remove the application of the attribute of mercy which comes from the pain of the rest of the family members who suffer from the judgement being wrought on their relative. The Heavenly judgement is executed with a broad all-encompassing grasp of existence. The Holy One, blessed is He, does not judge a person alone, detached from his environment. Rather he judges him as part of a tapestry of all those around him who empathize with him and feel his pain. Therefore, Rabbi Lopian points out, the pain of those close to the accused is also taken into account by the Heavenly court, and if they do not deserve this suffering, then injustice will not be done to them, and the punishment will be mitigated. This merit can therefore save a person that is being judged and spare him great suffering.
3. Similarly, it seems that when one comes to visit a sick person and feels sincere empathy for his pain and suffering, the circle of people being judged along

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with the patient is widened and their merit can improve the patient's sentence. The way things work, therefore, is as follows:

- a. One who visits a sick person empathizes with him, draws close to him and has mercy on him. He also understands the depths of the patient's suffering and it touches his heart.
- b. The visitor stands to pray about this from the depths of his heart. Through the medium of pure, authentic prayer, the visitor himself is purified.³⁹³
- c. It turns out that the visitor who empathizes with the patient and suffers his pain, is not worthy of such pain which comes from the punishment of the patient. In this way he saves the sick person and causes his sentence to be resolved positively, because it may be that this visitor does not deserve the pain that would be caused to him if the patient died.

The prayer of the one who visits a sick person is prayer which can perforate the Heavens.³⁹⁴ This is a time of favor and a moment of mercy which can tip the scales of justice. How can it be that a person could refrain from this?³⁹⁵ A great responsibility

³⁹³ We find something similar in Rosh Hashanah 4a: "One who says this coin is for charity in order that my son should live, or in order that I merit the World to Come, is considered completely righteous." A person can give charity to save his son, and this purifies him, because when he gave it he sensed and understood that everything comes from the Holy One, blessed is He, and that there is none beside Him. This deep recognition gives merit to the one who gives charity and is in the category of the highest service of HASHEM.

³⁹⁴ See *Ran* on Nedarim (40a) s.v. "ein." "For this reason, he said that one who visits a sick person helps him through prayer -- even to live, because it is a more valuable prayer."

³⁹⁵ A person who knows that his prayer is not simply a prayer, but that it has the power to change the fate of another, and yet refrains from praying, transgresses the prohibition of "Do not stand by at your neighbor's blood." If the sick person himself refrains from praying, this act shows a lack of faith. A person is obligated to take advantage of the time of favor and to pray a prayer that has tremendous potential to be accepted. One who does not feel for another and does not strive to help him, he is wicked. "Cursed is Meroz," said Devorah the Prophetess. Cursed is one who does not come to help another in his trouble to help HASHEM among the mighty but dwells among the sheep pens, (see Shoftim chapter 5). True, one who refrains from praying for his friend when conditions are normal has not transgressed an obligation, according to the opinion of many early Rabbis. But when there is the possibility of saving a sick person through prayer, which is the special prayer recited at a time of favor, and nevertheless refrains from doing so, he is comparable to an illustration found in Rabbeinu Yonah in *Sha'arei Teshuva* (1:2). He writes, "A sinner, when he delays repenting from his sin, makes his punishment much worse every day. This is because he knows that God is angry with him and that he has a place to flee to, which is repentance, but nevertheless he remains in his rebellion and wickedness. Because he has the ability to leave the upheaval, not having to fear the anger and rage, therefore his evil is so great. Our Rabbis said about this (*Koheles Rabba* 7:32), "It can be compared to a group of thieves who were jailed by the king. They dug a tunnel, and all broke out and ran away except for one who remained. The governor of the prisoner came and saw the tunnel and the man who remained in jail and hit him with his staff. He said to him, "You pathetic being! The tunnel is dug before you -- why did you not flee for your life?"

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is therefore placed on the relatives of the sick person, because if they empathize with his pain on the one hand, and are purified through prayer for him on the other hand, until they suffer as a result of the execution of the punishment against the sick person, in this way that can tip the scales of merit for the patient and draw him out of his suffering to peace, and from his illness to a complete recovery.

Based on this last explanation, which is derived from the words of Rabbi Lopian, we can shed new light also on the words of the Talmud (Berachos 12b) that one who does not pray for his friend is considered as a sinner. Because when they judge in Heaven whether or not to bring an illness on a person, they also judge his relatives with him. They are scrutinized whether they are worthy of the pain that they will suffer as a result of his illness, and perhaps even his death, or perhaps they are meritorious in their deeds and such suffering should be withheld from them, so that in their merit the sick person is saved. If a visitor prays for the patient with all his heart and even so it does not sway the judgement, then the merit of the visiting relative was not enough to save the patient. This is the judgement that is done for the family of the sick person, who was sentenced to punishment and not kindness.³⁹⁶

But if a person visits the patient and does not pray for him with all his heart, he is a sinner. Not only because he could have saved him yet remained detached from the fate of the sick person, so that he sealed his fate, but also because the visitor's sins were also included in the sentence as to whether to impose pain on the patient. Since it was decided in Heaven that the patient should suffer, it seems that the visitor, too, has a responsibility for the pain of the patient, and since he did not pray and return to HASHEM himself, he is a sinner.

The Power of Prayer to Influence the Entire World.

It appears that there is an additional insight here about the essence of prayer and its power to nullify suffering of an individual or a community.

In I Shmuel (12:23) the prophet relates that when Yisrael asked for a king against the will of HASHEM. HASHEM sent thunder and rain to scare them. The people then asked Shmuel, "Pray to HASHEM for your servants," and Shmuel answered them, "As for me, Heaven forbid that I should sin before HASHEM by refraining from praying for you."

³⁹⁶ In general, we find many sources for the fact that a person can bring merit to his family. A son can pray or learn in the merit of his deceased father (Sanhedrin 104a). On Yom Kippur we light candles for the dead for their atonement (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 610:4 and *Mishna Berura*). In this context, however, it is clear and explicit in Shabbos (105b-106a). The Talmud states there: "Rabbi Chiya bar Avva said that Rabbi Yochanan said: If one of the brothers dies, all the other brothers should worry. If one of the group dies, all the rest of the group should worry." Rashi explains: "It means all the members of the family should be worried and afraid of death, since the attribute of strict justice fell on the head of the house." *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'a; Hilchos Aveilus* 394 rules: That entire year (when a person is in mourning) judgement is spread over that family."

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Also, the wording of the prayers that were instituted for us by the Men of the Great Assembly show the power given to a person to have an effect with his prayers. The wording goes beyond requests for personal needs and for the easing of one's own suffering. Apart from the fact that we discussed earlier, that even the individual requests are worded in the plural, a large part of the prayers are requests for the entirety of the Jewish people – complete redemption, ingathering of the exiles, returning the judges as in olden times, removing the wicked and having mercy on the righteous, rebuilding Jerusalem and raising the horn of the scion of David, the Mashiach. All of these are clearly not personal needs, and they are beyond one's personal merits and his attainment. Why did the Men of the Great Assembly institute that a person should pray for them?

The answer is that a person's prayer has the power to influence both individuals and the collective. The secret of the power to do good for his friend is rooted in this fact: Just as a person has the ability and is commanded to worry about the welfare of his friends – physically and financially, by returning lost objects, helping him when he is in trouble, so he also has the ability and is commanded to worry about his friend and his spiritual standing. He must pray for his friend both for his physical health and for his spiritual needs.

So, it is clear and obvious that when he is part of a group he must also be concerned about the group. We already cited the words of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin in *Nefesh Hachayim* that a person is called a "small world" because he was created corresponding to the world around him and HASHEM gave him the power to influence all the worlds. Just as we explained there that in the words of prayer there is a key to affect all the worlds above us, so a person's prayer has the power "to perfect worlds in the kingdom of HASHEM," and to influence the fate of the nation and the world. The Mishna (Sanhedrin 37a) says that, "Every single person is obligated to say, 'The world was created for me.'" This teaches that a person is responsible for the entire world through his actions, to make a change for good or for bad.³⁹⁷

If a person has responsibility for the world, he certainly has the ability to improve and fix it through his good deeds and his prayers, and so one prayer and another prayer combine to the collective merits of the entire world. Even the future redemption will not come through the merits of the generation of the redemption. Rather, the Third Temple will be composed of the tears of the many generations who poured out their hearts to HASHEM that He should give them the merit to see it

³⁹⁷ In a deeper sense Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explains (*Nefesh Hachayim* 2:11-12 and in the additions to *Ruach Chaim* on Avos 3:2 and 3:4) that the main purpose of a person's prayer must be the pain of the Divine Presence which is troubled by every suffering that Yisrael endures, individuals and groups. If this is so, it does not matter if it his suffering, or that of another Jew, or the suffering of lots of Jews. In all these cases the Divine Presence is upset. As the verse states, "In all their suffering He suffers," and therefore the prayer of each person is for God's sake, to minimize the pain of the Divine Presence.

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rebuilt and established. The combination of all these powers and prayers that were offered to HASHEM through the generations is what will bring about the redemption.

Now we can understand that also prayer for a sick person has two approaches.

One approach comes from the change that a person undergoes when he prays, and this exists also when he visits the patient, and applies mainly when the sick person prays for himself. Therefore, his prayer is preferable to the prayer of others on his behalf, because his heart is humbled and broken. The person who had the decree made against him has changed and has become purified through his prayer, so that the decree was not made against such a person and he is likely to escape his punishment.

However, there is another approach to prayer. Prayer has the power to influence the entire world in general and all who live in it as individuals. Prayer, when it comes from the depths of the heart, has the power to destroy systems and tear up a decree both against the entire world and against individuals. From here comes the tremendous power of prayer for a sick person. When a person stands at the head of a sick person, he is able to truly cry out from his heart. When a person stands at the gates of death, either his own or of someone he is close to, there is a moment of faith, a moment of self-assessment, and then the person's prayer offered for the patient can change the entire order of the world. It can break down barriers, smash open gates, tear up the decree and bring the salvation necessary for a complete recovery.

Chapter 8 – Women's Prayer

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[Women] Are Obligated in Prayer, Because It Is [Supplication for Divine] Mercy (Berachos 20b)

In Chapter One we discussed the dispute between the early authorities regarding the fundamental obligation of prayer. Rambam holds that there is a positive Torah mitzvah to pray each day, although prayer has no fixed time during the day by Torah law, and no set text by Torah law. Accordingly, it would seem that prayer is not a time-bound positive mitzvah, and there is no reason why women should be exempt from the mitzvah of prayer.³⁹⁸ True, our Rabbis later established set times for prayer,³⁹⁹ but this does not remove the Torah obligation, which is not dependent on a set time and therefore applies equally to women.

In contrast to the opinion of Rambam, we also discussed Ramban's opinion. He holds that there is no positive Torah mitzvah to pray every day, and our Rabbis were the ones who established not only the times of prayer and its set text but also the obligation of prayer. A rabbinic obligation with set times is defined as a time-bound positive mitzvah, and therefore women should not be obligated in prayer.

However, when we look at the sources we will see that this conclusion is not necessarily correct.

The Mishna (Berachos 3:3) says, "Women, slaves and children are exempt from reading *Shema* and from *tefillin*, but are obligated in prayer, mezuzah and grace after meals."

The Talmud (ibid. 20b) explains, "They are obligated in prayer, because it is [is supplication for Divine] mercy."⁴⁰⁰ You might have thought that since it is

³⁹⁸ See Kiddushin 29a: "Every positive mitzvah which is time-bound, men are obligated, and women are exempt. And every positive mitzvah which is not time-bound, both men and women are obligated." The Talmud discusses this at length there on 34a.

³⁹⁹ The times are listed in the Mishna Berachos 4:1, "The morning prayer is until midday. Rabbi Yehuda says until four hours into the day. The afternoon prayer is until the evening. Rabbi Yehuda says until *plag hamincha* (1.25 hours before nightfall)."

⁴⁰⁰ Prayer is defined as a request for mercy from the Holy One, blessed is He. We find the following written by Rabbi Shimon ben Zemach Duran (the author of *Tashbetz*) in his commentary *Magen Avos* (on Pirkei Avos 2:13): One who prays must view himself as if he is suffering and requesting mercy. Like they said in Shabbos (10a), "He clasped his hands and prayed..." In other words, he put his hands together and prayed like a person who is in pain. Our Rabbis also said in *Midrash Tehillim* (Mizmor 61) that the essence of prayer is that one should be pained like one wrapped up, as the verse states, "A prayer of the poor, when he is faint, and pours out his complaint before God," (Tehillim 102:1). For prayer is called mercy, as we find... in Berachos (20b) where it obligates women in prayer, "Prayer is different

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written, 'Evening, morning and afternoon,' it is like a positive time-bound mitzvah,⁴⁰¹ therefore we are taught [that women are obligated in prayer.]”

From this section of Talmud that we can derive the following conclusions:

1. Prayer is a positive time-bound mitzvah, because each of the daily prayers has a fixed time, and therefore one might have thought that women would be exempt from the obligation of prayer, based on the principle that women are exempt from time-bound positive mitzvos.
2. The reason that women are obligated to pray, despite the principle, is based on the fact that prayer is a request for Divine mercy, and women require mercy just the same as men.⁴⁰²

This fits well with Ramban's opinion, because he holds that the mitzvah of prayer was fixed initially by our Rabbis with set times, and therefore it is a time-bound positive mitzvah. The obligation of women in prayer comes from the reason given, that prayer is a request for Divine mercy, which is essential for everyone, whether male or female.

However, according to Rambam the Talmud seems extremely puzzling. Rambam holds that prayer has no set time by Torah law. Why is it, therefore, considered as a time-bound positive mitzvah? Why would the Talmud even consider that women should be exempt? Why do we need the reason that

because it is mercy.” Prayer is always referred to as “mercy” – “He asked for mercy for it.” And the verse states, “That they might ask mercy of the God of Heaven,” (Daniel 2:18).

⁴⁰¹ The concept of “time-bound positive mitzvah” mentioned in this discussion is a borrowed term. We are not discussing a positive mitzvah with a Torah-mandated fixed, defined time. Even according to Rambam, who says that there is a Torah mitzvah to pray, the Rabbis are the ones who established the times of prayer. However, the Talmud understands that even regarding rabbinic laws one can apply the general principle that women are exempt from time-bound positive mitzvos, because, “Anything the Rabbis establishes, they established like the Torah law.” See also the words of *Tosafos* on this in *Berachos* (ad. loc.).

⁴⁰² Rabbi Ovadia, Yosef, *Yabia Omer* vol. 6, *Orach Chayim* §17 points out that women have the custom to pray on Shabbos and Yomtov when the prayers are entirely praises of HASHEM. It seems that the reasoning of the Talmud, that “it is mercy” applies to those prayers. In this context Rabbi Yosef also discusses the actual text of the Shabbos service. In *Berachos* 21a we find that on Shabbos we do not recite the weekday formulation of prayer due to the honor of Shabbos. This is strange in light of the clear *halakha* that prayer which does not include a person's requests does not fulfil the obligation of prayer. How could the Rabbis remove the obligation to ask for one's needs due to the honor of Shabbos? By doing so they destroyed the mitzvah of prayer! Rabbi Yosef answers that also Shabbos prayers contain requests for one's needs, but it is done in a formulation hidden within the framework of the prayer. “Find favor in our rest, sanctify us with Your mitzvos... satisfy us with Your goodness,” etc. In this way he answers the custom of women to pray the Shabbos prayers, because even within those prayers there are also some requests for mercy.

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prayer is a request for Divine mercy for the mitzvah to apply to women? It should be like all mitzvos which do not have any set time, and which apply equally to men and women.

Indeed, Rambam himself (ibid. 2) rules that women are obligated in prayer, "Because it is a positive mitzvah which is not time-bound, rather the obligation of the mitzvah is for every person to entreat and pray every day." This fits completely with his opinion that prayer is a positive mitzvah which is not time-bound, however the Talmud requires explanation according to his opinion.

Sha'agas Aryeh asks this question (in *siman* 14) and he adds:

Even though according to Rambam's opinion prayer is a positive Torah mitzvah which is not dependent on a set time, nevertheless we find that our Rabbis established set times for each prayer (morning, afternoon and evening) and they turned prayer into a time-bound mitzvah. However, it is obvious that their decree was not intended to remove the Torah obligation from those who were obligated, but only came to add set times to fulfil the existing obligation.

Sha'agas Aryeh answers that the Talmud was not asking about the obligation to pray once a day, which clearly applies to women. Rather, the Talmud was asking specifically about the obligation to pray three times each day. The Talmud gives this explanation for women's obligation, since it is a time-bound mitzvah which otherwise they would have been exempt from. And the Talmud's conclusion is that since prayer is a request for Divine mercy women need that just as much as men. So, it is not enough for them to fulfill the Torah obligation and pray once a day; women are also obligated, following the decree of the Rabbis, to pray three times each day using the set text established by the Men of the Great Assembly.⁴⁰³

According to the explanation of *Sha'agas Aryeh* there is no practical difference between the opinion of Rambam and Ramban -- both say that women have a rabbinic obligation to pray at set times.

True, according to Rambam there is also a basic Torah obligation on men and women to pray once a day, at any time, using any words. But in practice this makes no *halakhic* difference, because according to the Talmud, both men and women are obligated to fulfill the rabbinic decree and pray at the times they

⁴⁰³ In contrast to the Torah mitzvah to pray and ask any request from HASHEM in individual language.

set. To clarify the reasoning of the Rabbis who obligated women in the mitzvah of prayer at fixed, set times, in contrast to the general principle that women are exempt from time-bound positive mitzvos, the Talmud gave the reason that prayer is a request for Divine mercy.

It is interesting to note Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's explanation on this matter.⁴⁰⁴ It would seem that the concept of prayer being a request for Divine mercy overrides the general rule that women are exempt from time-bound positive mitzvos. However, when we investigate the deeper meaning of prayer being a request for Divine mercy, we find that the exemption of a time-bound positive mitzvah does not apply to the mitzvah of prayer to begin with and not merely overridden. Let us explain:

1. The basis of most mitzvos is an obligation on the person.
In other words, a person is obligated in the mitzvah of *tefillin* or *lulav* or *tzitzis*. This obligation turns the object of *tefillin*, *lulav* and *tzitzis* into a "mitzvah entity" and the action into a "mitzvah act." But everything begins with the obligation of the person, and without it the *tefillin*, *lulav* and *tzitzis* in themselves are not objects of a mitzvah.⁴⁰⁵
2. In prayer the order of things is the opposite. The Holy One, blessed is He, created the "entity" of prayer (or in the words of Rabbi Pincus, HASHEM created the "power of prayer") and the person makes use of this "entity." Using this power of prayer is the fulfillment of the person's obligation of prayer.
3. The meaning of the term "it is mercy" conveys that prayer is a request for Divine mercy by its very nature.
In other words, prayer does not transform to become a "mitzvah entity" due to the obligation to pray, but rather the person uses the power of prayer which the Holy One, blessed is He, put into His creation.⁴⁰⁶
4. Now, if we pay intention, the principle which says that women are not obligated in positive time-bound mitzvos relates to mitzvos which are obligations on the person. That is, when the basis of the mitzvah is the obligation of the person, and this obligation is time-bound, then women are not included in the type of personage that is obligated in

⁴⁰⁴ Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *Shiurim Lezecher Avi Mori*, Mossad Harav Kook publishers, vol. 2, regarding having redemption immediately before prayer, p. 47.

⁴⁰⁵ For example, if a non-Jew dons *tefillin*, it is no more than a box and straps. If one shakes a *lulav* in midwinter, he is merely waving a palm branch. Without an obligation to perform the mitzvah, the action and object involved in the action do not take on their mitzvah meaning.

⁴⁰⁶ Unlike other mitzvos, it is not the obligation to pray that transforms the words uttered on this terrestrial world into a meaningful supplication directed to the One Above. For the entity of prayer exists irrespective of its obligation.

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the mitzvah. Hence, the meaning of the exemption for time-bound positive mitzvos is that a woman is not confronted by the “object” of the mitzvah demanding of her to fulfill it, and she is not ignoring a “mitzvah act” awaiting her. Since her personage does not have an obligation, there is nothing facing her at all.

5. However, this is not the case in prayer!
Prayer is a request for Divine mercy. It is not dependent on fulfilling a person’s obligation to pray. The person is required to use the “power of prayer” which the Holy One, blessed is He, put into His creation. It turns out then that this “mitzvah” is available to a woman just as to a man, even if she was not commanded about it. In such a case the woman cannot ignore it and we do not apply the principle that she is exempt because it is a time-bound positive mitzvah.
6. Thus, the concept of prayer as a request for Divine mercy explains that we are speaking of a type of mitzvah where *ab initio* there is no exemption of a time-bound positive mitzvah.

Now the Mishna teaches that women are obligated in prayer. We also saw that they have a rabbinic obligation to pray the fixed prayers established by our rabbis, because it is a request for Divine mercy, both according to Rambam and Ramban. Nevertheless, in practice we find that many women do not keep this mitzvah.

Magen Avraham (106:2) discusses this:

Most women are not accustomed to recite prayers regularly because they make some request in the morning, immediately after washing their hands, and by Torah law that is sufficient, and it is possible that even the Rabbis did not obligate them further.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷ Rabbis Mordechai Ze'ev Ettinger and Yosef Shaul Nathanson in their book *Magen Giborim* 106:3 ask how “some request” helps in this. Even though Rambam’s opinion is that the text of the prayer is not essential, nevertheless a person fulfills his Torah obligation of prayer only if the prayer is according to the order that Rambam cites (*Hilchos Tefillah* 1:2), “He must begin with praise of the Omnipresent, afterwards he asks for what he needs, and afterwards he must give praise and thanks.”

If so, the words of *Magen Avraham*, who opines that any type of request is sufficient to fulfill the mitzvah of prayer are difficult to understand.

This question was also discussed in the book *Seder Mishna* on Rambam *Hilchos Tefillah* chapter 1; *Sedei Chemed* vol. 10; *Responsa Or Li* §8. See also *Siach Tefillah* p. 262 who asked this question in the name of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik.

They also bring there the question of *Eliya Rabba* that even without this question the words of *Magen Avraham* are difficult to understand, because they appear to contradict his own words in 70:1. There he writes that women must say the “*Emes veyatziv*” blessing after the *Shema* in

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Magen Avraham relies on Rambam's opinion that by Torah law one prayer a day using any words is sufficient, so any kind of request by a woman is enough to fulfil this obligation. Regarding the rabbinic obligation of praying three times a day with a set text, *Magen Avraham* points out that "perhaps" this obligation does not apply to women.⁴⁰⁸

This ruling seems difficult in the face of the Talmudic discussion (Berachos 20b) where we find that women are obligated to pray "evening, morning and afternoon." How can *Magen Avraham* then justify the custom of women who exempt themselves completely from praying other than some daily request?

Many commentaries explain that Rambam does not have the words, "they are mercy" in his text of the Talmudic discussion.⁴⁰⁹ In his opinion, the obligation of women to pray does not stem from the fact that prayer is a request for Divine mercy. Women are obligated to pray because there is a positive Torah mitzvah to pray every day.

True, the Talmud questioned that since prayer is a time-bound positive mitzvah, women should be exempt. However, the Talmud's conclusion does not accept this,⁴¹⁰ but rules that prayer is not a time-bound positive mitzvah. According to Rambam's opinion, prayer is a daily positive mitzvah without

order to recite the blessing of redemption immediately before the *amida* prayer. The obligation to recite redemption before the *amida* implies that a woman must recite the order of prayer set down by the Rabbis, and it is not sufficient for her to make some kind of personal request.

The conclusion in *Magen Giborim* is, "Therefore, one must warn women to pray and recite the *Shema*, to accept the yoke of Heaven and to recite the redemption prayer of " *Emes veyatziv*" immediately before the *amida* prayer.

⁴⁰⁸ *Magen Avraham* prefaced this with "possibly." This implies that he was not exempting women definitively from the obligation of prayer. As we said in the previous note, he himself holds (70:1) that they are obligated in prayer. It seems that his words were intended to justify the custom of "most women." It is common in several places in *halakha* that the authorities tried to justify the popular custom, even though they themselves would not rule to act in that way *ab initio*.

⁴⁰⁹ See *Pri Chadash* beginning of §89; *Dikdukei Soferim* p. 49 §6; See *Meiri* on Berachos 20b) who points out, "There are those who rule (Rambam) that prayer is a positive Torah mitzvah but the text and times of prayer are rabbinic... and there are those who explain (Ramban) that prayer is rabbinic, and their text of the Talmud reads "It is mercy." It also appears that the *Rif* did not have this text in his Talmud.

⁴¹⁰ In contrast to the commentary of Ramban earlier and the explanation of *Sha'agas Aryeh* of Rambam's opinion, which holds that even according to the conclusion of the Talmud, the type of prayer we are dealing with has fixed times and is a time-bound mitzvah. However, women are obligated because it is a request for mercy.

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any set time.⁴¹¹ Quite the opposite, the conclusion of the Talmud is the source for Rambam's ruling that prayer is not a positive time-bound mitzvah.

According to this explanation, the Talmud does not discuss an additional obligation other than that imposed by the Torah and there is no source that women are obligated rabbinically to recite set prayers. Based on this we can explain the *Magen Avraham* who says women are only obligated with some kind of prayer each day with no set text or time.⁴¹²

The *Halakhic* Ruling

The ruling of *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 106:2) is: Women and slaves, even though they are exempt from reading the *Shema*, are obligated in prayer, because it is a positive mitzvah that is not time-bound."

Mishna Berura explains (§4):

This is according to Rambam's opinion, that the times of prayer are by rabbinic law, but the essence of the mitzvah of prayer is from the Torah, as the verse states, "To serve Him with all your hearts," (Devarim 10:12). What kind of service is done with the heart? The verse must refer to prayer. However, there is no set text from the Torah and one can pray using any words he wants and at any time he wants, and if one prays once during the day or night, he has fulfilled his Torah obligation.

Magen Avraham wrote that for this reason women are accustomed not to recite the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer regularly, every morning and afternoon, because they recite some request every morning, and by Torah law they discharge their obligation with this. It is even possible that the Rabbis did not obligate them in more than that.

However, the opinion of Ramban is that the main mitzvah of prayer is by rabbinic law, enacted by the Men of the Great Assembly who

⁴¹¹ The question of *Sha'agas Aryeh* still remains. What was the Talmud assuming initially, when it said that women should be exempt from prayer? There is a Torah obligation to prayer which is not time-dependent, and it appears that the obligation to prayer three times a day at fixed times which were set by our Rabbis was intended to add to the obligation of the fixed times, and not to lessen the obligation and exempt women from the Torah obligation placed upon them. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the Talmud fits well with the ruling of Rambam according to the explanation we gave above.

⁴¹² Look in *Maggid Ta'aluma* where Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov on Berachos 20b writes that according to the words of *Rif* and Rambam who do not have the words "It is mercy" in their text, women are only obligated in one prayer daily.

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instituted the *Shemoneh Esrei* as a set text to be recited morning, afternoon as an obligation and in the evening as voluntary. Even though it is a positive rabbinic time-bound mitzvah, and women are exempt from all time-bound positive mitzvos, even if they are rabbinic, such as *Kiddush Halevana*, nevertheless they are obligated to pray *shacharis* and *mincha* just like men, since prayer is a request for Divine mercy. This is the main opinion, because the majority of authorities rule like this, and the *Sha'agas Aryeh* rules this way.⁴¹³ Therefore, one should instruct women to pray the *Shemoneh Esrei*.⁴¹⁴

If so, the main *halakhic* opinion which is the ruling of *Shulchan Aruch* and *Mishna Berura* is that women are obligated to recite the *Shemoneh Esrei* twice each day, and this follows the opinion of Ramban (which most authorities hold like) and also according to Rambam's opinion (according to *Sha'agas Aryeh*).⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ The conclusion of *Sha'agas Aryeh* maintains this even according to the opinion of Rambam, as we explained above.

⁴¹⁴ *Mishna Berura* points out that, " This is all regarding *shacharis* and *mincha*. However, women did not accept upon themselves the evening prayer, which is not obligatory, even though nowadays all [male] Jews accepted it upon themselves as an obligation, and so most women do not pray *ma'ariv*. See also *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 106:2, " But some say that the main mitzvah of prayer is rabbinic, i.e. from the Men of the Great Assembly who instituted the eighteen blessings in the order they must be recited in prayer, *shacharis* and *mincha* are obligatory, and *ma'ariv* is not obligatory. And even though it is a positive time-bound rabbinic mitzvah and women are exempt, from all positive time-bound mitzvos, even if they are rabbinic, such as *Hallel* and *Kiddush Halevana*, nevertheless they obligated them in *shacharis* and *mincha* since prayer is a request for mercy. This is the essential ruling. But this applies only to *shacharis* and *mincha*. However, *ma'ariv*, which is not obligatory, even though nowadays all [male] Jews accepted it upon themselves as an obligation, nevertheless women did not accept it upon themselves and most of them do not recite the *ma'ariv* prayer.

⁴¹⁵ See *Responsa Divrei Yatziv* of the Sanz-Klausenberger Rebbe, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehuda Halberstam regarding the question of whether our Rabbis established " *Ya'aleh veyavo*" as part of the set text of the prayer on Rosh Chodesh, such that one who did not say it has changed the text of prayer and would be like one who has not prayed, and for this reason must repeat the prayer. Or perhaps the text of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer is the same on Rosh Chodesh, but our Rabbis established separately that one must recite *Ya'aleh veyavo* during prayer, so that one who forgets to recite it must repeat the prayer, but he has fulfilled his obligation of prayer, just not his obligation of *Ya'aleh veyavo*, and that obligation can only be fulfilled by reciting the *Shemoneh Esrei*. (*Divrei Yatziv* writes that it seems this is a dispute between the Rabbis of *Tosafos* in *Berachos* 26b, s.v. " *ta'a*"). He also discusses whether one who did not recite *Ya'aleh veyavo* at *mincha* is considered as if he did not pray and must recite *ma'ariv* twice to compensate, or whether he should not repeat *ma'ariv* because then it is no longer Rosh Chodesh and it is not appropriate to recite *Ya'aleh veyavo*. While discussing this, *Divrei Yatziv* points out that it is relevant to the issue of women's prayer. What is the *halakha* if a woman forgets to recite *Ya'aleh veyavo* (or any other addition to prayer)? Must she repeat the prayer? If our Rabbis instituted that one who forgets an addition to prayer is considered as if he has

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Rabbi Ovadia Yosef⁴¹⁶ adds that in earlier generations women did not know how to read or understand Hebrew, and this is why they were accustomed not to pray. However, nowadays, there has been an improvement, especially among those who live in Israel, and it is relatively easy for someone to pray *Shemoneh Esrei* – therefore it would be good if they recite the fixed prayers.⁴¹⁷

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef has a long discussion citing many authorities and concludes that the *halakha* is that “women are not obligated by law to pray three times a day, but it is sufficient to pray once a day. Preferably, this should be the *shacharis* prayer, including the morning blessings.”⁴¹⁸ Nevertheless, if women want to be stringent and pray three times a day in order to fulfil the opinion of all the authorities, may they be blessed. Moreover, there is no concern at all that they are reciting unnecessary blessings.⁴¹⁹

Between *Halakha* and Reality

However, despite the explicit words of the Mishna, Talmud and *Rishonim*, looking at the words of the later authorities shows a very different reality. Many women who observe Torah and mitzvos, do not pray daily, not even a single recital of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer. Or as *Magen Avraham* wrote, “The custom of most women is that they do not pray regularly.”

not prayed at all, then also a woman would have to repeat the prayer to fulfill her obligation, because without the addition she would be considered not to have prayed. However, if one who forgot *Ya'aleh veyavo* has only missed the obligation of that addition but is still considered to have prayed, perhaps a woman does not have to repeat her prayer, because she has already fulfilled her obligation, and the requirement to recite *Ya'aleh veyavo* is a time-bound positive mitzvah, so she is not required to recite it.

⁴¹⁶ *Yabia Omer* vol. 6 *Orach Chayim* §17.

⁴¹⁷ Rabbi Yosef points out that women are also obligated to recite the morning blessings (*Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 46:4) and blessings for Torah (*ibid.* 47:14) and the first verse of *Shema* (*ibid.* 70:1).

⁴¹⁸ When Rabbi Ovadia Yosef writes that it is sufficient for women to pray once a day, he is referring to the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, as explained in his responsum. It appears that this ruling is a “compromise” between the authorities, for according to the opinion of *Magen Avraham* there is no obligation for women to pray at all with the set text of our Rabbis, and it is sufficient for them to recite some individual request, whereas the opinion of the *Sha'agas Aryeh* and other authorities is that a woman has an obligation to recite at least two prayers daily using the same text as men. Look in his responsum where Rabbi Yosef explains why he chose this “compromise.”

⁴¹⁹ Rabbi Ovadia Yosef clarifies that a woman who prays should certainly not be concerned that she may be committing the transgression of reciting a blessing that is unnecessary. In fact, she fulfils the mitzvah of prayer, because all the reasons given by the authorities only exempt women who do not pray, but certainly do not prohibit her from praying.

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This does not only refer to a custom of those who are not experts in *halakha*, but even the author of *Mishna Berura* himself instructed his wife that as long as she was involved with raising the children and running the household, she had no obligation of fixed prayer.⁴²⁰

So, there is a gap between the *halakhic* sources and the reality. We saw the words of the *Magen Avraham* earlier, who explains the custom of women not to pray in accordance with Rambam's opinion that by Torah law it is sufficient for a woman to make some individual prayer to fulfil her obligation. However, *Mishna Berura* did not accept his answer.

This reality caused other authorities to struggle to find justification for the custom of women not to pray *shacharis* and *mincha* regularly. Let us look at what they wrote and examine their reasoning.

Someone Whose Heart Is Preoccupied Is Forbidden To Pray

Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch in *Teshuvos Vehanhagos* (vol. 1 §74) explains the reality that women are not accustomed to pray regularly due to the definition of prayer. Let us explain:

1. We saw in Chapter One that the source for the Torah obligation to pray is the verse, "You shall serve HASHEM, your God"; "And serve Him with all your heart." The Rabbis explain, "What kind of service is done with the heart? The verse must refer to prayer," (Ta'anis 2a). This defines the essence of prayer as "service of the heart."
2. In Chapter Three we saw that prayer is considered to be "service" only if the person prays with complete intent.
3. Rabbi Sternbuch concludes, therefore, that when intent in prayer is lacking, the positive mitzvah is not fulfilled at all. Furthermore, a person who cannot concentrate should not pray at all.
4. We find this in the Talmud too (Berachos 30b): "Rabbi Eliezer said, a person should always examine himself. If he is able to concentrate his heart, he should pray. But if not, he should not pray." Rambam also rules this as *halakha* (*Hilchos Tefillah* 4:16): If he finds that his mind is confused, and his heart is preoccupied, it is forbidden for him to pray until his mind is calm. Therefore, one who comes back from a journey and is tired, or sad, is forbidden to pray until his mind calms down."
5. Based on this, Rabbi Sternbuch explains that women, who are preoccupied with running a house and raising children, cannot be

⁴²⁰ The *Chofetz Chaim*'s son testified to this in his book *Sichos Chofetz Chaim* vol. 1 §27.

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obligated to pray, since it is difficult for them to pray regularly, due to this preoccupation.

6. In relation to this, Rabbi Sternbuch cites the *Chofetz Chaim's* instruction to his wife, that she had no obligation of fixed prayer as long as she was preoccupied with raising children and running a household. Indeed, the *Chofetz Chaim's* son pointed out that his father's reasoning was based on the principle of, "One who is involved in performing a mitzvah is exempt from any other mitzvah."⁴²¹ However, Rabbi Sternbuch clarifies that according to his words there is a fundamental reason to exempt women from prayer, which stems from the fact that prayer requires concentration, and this does not fit with the preoccupation women have with raising children and running a household.⁴²²
7. Rabbi Sternbuch points out, therefore, that there is justification for women who do not pray, but only those women that are preoccupied with raising their children and running their homes.
8. So, we have a *halakhic* basis, which is also the practical cause of the phenomenon. In other words, the reason for the custom of women not to pray regularly, which is the daily preoccupation with raising their children and running their homes is also the *halakhic* reason that they are exempt from praying in a fixed manner.

According to Rabbi Sternbuch's opinion, it turns out that there is an obligation on a woman to pray according to her ability. If it happens that a woman is not preoccupied to the extent that she cannot have intent in prayer, there is no reason for her to be exempt. A woman is obligated in any prayer that she can have intent she in. This is the ruling of Rabbi Sternbuch:

The obligation is according to her ability.

Someone who is able to recite the blessings and *pesukei dezimra*, the blessings of the *Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei*, her portion is fortunate, and it is appropriate for her to do so, especially before she is married... if it is possible for her to pray daily...

⁴²¹ *Sichos Chofetz Chaim* ibid. Rabbi Yekusiel Yehuda Halberstam explained similarly in *Divrei Yatziv, Orach Chayim* 121, "Women who have little children and are busy with them are concerned that if they pray they will not be able to care for their children properly, so they are considered like someone who is involved in performing a mitzvah, who is exempt from another concurrent mitzvah.

⁴²² Nevertheless, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch in *Teshuvos Vehanhagos* (vol. 3 §36) cites in the name of Rabbi Chaim of Brisk that women should not be exempt from prayer. "It seems that his opinion is that even if they do not have intent in all their prayer, by Torah law it is sufficient to have minimal intent, and they can manage that much."

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Through prayer a person connects with the Creator, therefore she should try to pray based on her abilities...

This is the principle behind the ruling that she should not pray at all when she is preoccupied, and does not thereby transgress *halakha*, because the Rabbis did not obligate her when she is preoccupied. However, one who prays merits to serve HASHEM with her prayer which is the pillar of the world, and therefore any time it is possible, she should strive to recite the entire order of prayer when she can.⁴²³

This opinion of Rabbi Sternbuch raises the question of whether a man, who is preoccupied with his business or raising children, also has this sweeping exemption from prayer. Because if the obligation of women is identical to that of men, then when men are preoccupied they should also be held to the same standard.

It may be that Rabbi Sternbuch holds that women's preoccupation with raising children and the needs of the home are justified preoccupations and she has no possibility to give it up during the day, whereas the preoccupation of men is not as continuous, and it is possible for him to take a break.

This is different than the approach of the Klausenberger Rebbe, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehuda Halberstam, in his *Respona Divrei Yetziv* (*Orach Chayim* §62) who holds that women are completely exempt from praying even when they are not preoccupied with anything. Let us explain his approach:

1. In the words of our Rabbis we find that nowadays there is great difficulty to have intent in prayer, and there would be room to say that the entire Jewish people is completely exempt from prayer. For example, we find the statement of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria in Eruvin (65b): "I can exempt the entire world from judgment from the day the Temple was destroyed until now." The Talmud explains there that his words were said regarding the sin of praying without intent. Rashi there explains: "If they judge them for not praying with intent – I can exempt them."
2. Rabbi Elazar explains his words, because the Jewish people are in exile, and surrounded by preoccupations and worries, subjected to suffering and violence, and these make it difficult to concentrate one's thoughts

⁴²³ Indeed, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehuda Halberstam (*Divrei Yatziv*, *Orach Chayim* 121) uses this reasoning to explain the custom that women have (which Rabbi Ovadia Yosef asked about in his response mentioned earlier) to pray on Shabbos and Yomtov more than during the week, because "On Shabbos and Yomtov they are not so busy."

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on prayer. It is like a drunk person, when the prophet turned to the Jews saying, "Therefore listen now to this, you who are afflicted, and drunk, but not with wine," (Yishaya 51:21). If so, just as a drunk person is exempt from prayer, because he is unable to concentrate his thoughts, so the Jewish people could be completely exempt from prayer, or at the very least, not be judged stringently for their lack of concentration.

3. Nevertheless, the Klausenberg Rebbe points out the words of *Sefer Hakaneh* in his *Ma'amar Hatefillah* (p. 21) that there was never a complete exemption from prayer, in order "that the concept of prayer not be forgotten by the Jewish people."⁴²⁴
4. Based on this the Klausenberg Rebbe explains that since even men should technically be exempt from the obligation of prayer nowadays, and they pray only in order that the Jewish people should remember the custom of praying, therefore, "in any case, they were lenient for women nowadays, that they are not obligated in more than the basic Torah obligation."⁴²⁵

The book *Seder Mishna* (on Rambam, *Hilchos Tefillah*) writes similarly:

1. *Tur* (*Orach Chayim* 101) rules that nowadays one who prays without intent does not repeat the prayer, "because even with repetition it is likely that he will not have intent. If so, why should he repeat it?" It is clear from his words that nowadays there is a presumption that most people do not have sufficient intent in their prayers.
2. If so, it is difficult – how are we permitted to stand and pray since we know that we will not have intent? Our Rabbis said that one who cannot have intent should not pray. Rather we must say that our ruin is our salvation. The Rabbis of the early generations saw that in our times nobody would have intent (in prayer). Therefore, they said, based on

⁴²⁴ See Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, *Michtav Me'eliyahu* vol. 2 p. 193: "The essence of prayer is the intent of the heart, where the point of truth within his heart is awakened and joins with his prayer. One who prays without intent, even though he is obligated to pray so as not to forget about the concept of prayer, nevertheless it is very difficult to earn merit praying in this way. Fortunate is one who has intent in his prayer, for through that he merits to have his prayer accepted and much Divine assistance depends on this."

The concept of "so as not to forget about" means that it is a mitzvah, but one does not fulfil one's obligation. Rabbi Dessler clarifies with the following example, "One who does not own a proper *tallit katan*, should put on one which is not big enough in order that he not forget the concept of *tzitzis* even though he does not fulfil the mitzvah of *tzitzis* (see *Mishna Berura* 16:4).

⁴²⁵ See further in *Divrei Yatziv* *ibid.* for another reason to be lenient for women based on the words of *Rema* in *Orach Chayim* 88 (and see *Mishna Berura* *ibid.* 5). He suggests that women should not pray in case they begin menstruating during the Shemoneh Esrei and according to one opinion their earlier blessings would retroactively be in vain.

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the principle of “A time to act for HASHEM, to make void His law,” (Tehillim 119:126) that in order that it should not be nullified completely, the early Sages instituted that we must pray three times each day... and instituted that a person must pray three times a day even if he is unable to concentrate... and that every person must pray three times a day according to his abilities, until HASHEM sends His holy spirit from Heaven and pours His spirit over all flesh and souls the knowledge and fear of HASHEM.

3. Accordingly, *Seder Mishna* concludes that nowadays, women who are certainly unable to concentrate in prayer, because they are no better than men, “The Rabbis of that generation saw that they should not place the obligation of prayer on women but only on men, for with this it is sufficient that the ordinance of the Rabbis should not be uprooted and nullified completely.”
4. In other words, since nowadays men are unable to concentrate properly on their prayer, the purpose of prayer is only so that the obligation of prayer should not be forgotten. For this reason, it was sufficient for the obligation to apply only to men and there was not need to put the requirement also on women. Therefore, women are exempt from the obligation of prayer.
5. It is clear from the approach of the *Divrei Yetziv* and *Seder Mishna* that the exemption of women is not dependent on a woman’s preoccupation, and even a woman who is not preoccupied with anything will also be exempt from prayer. This is due to the lack of concentration during prayer by everyone nowadays.

Perhaps you will ask, if anyway men do not have proper concentration, why did the Rabbis of the generation establish the rule of “so that it will not be forgotten” only on men and not also on women? We saw earlier the words of the Talmud that in principle the obligation of women is no different than that of men. Given that both men and women have identical obligations, why was a distinction made between women and men regarding the obligation of prayer nowadays?

This question can also be asked according to the first approach (of Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch), that women are exempt because they are preoccupied with the needs of their house and raising their children. How are women different from men who are preoccupied and immersed over their heads in earning a livelihood? Why does this exemption not apply for the same reason, and based on the same statement of the Rabbis, to a man who is preoccupied with earning a livelihood and supporting his family, or with raising and educating his children?

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Here the author of *Seder Mishna* was forced to define the difference between the source of obligations for men and for women in prayer. Men are fully obligated to pray, either by Torah or by rabbinic law. However, women should have been completely exempt from praying at fixed times, because it is a time-bound positive mitzvah. Their entire obligation stems only from the concept that prayer is "a request for Divine mercy."

This reason (the request for Divine mercy) only applies when one prays with intent, but not when one prays without intent and his heart is elsewhere, and the prayer is only on his lips. In such a case, the reasoning that it is a request for Divine mercy is not relevant.

In other words, nowadays, the entire basis for women's obligation to pray is no longer relevant. The reason that the Talmud obligated women in prayer at set times is because prayer is a request for Divine mercy. However, prayer is only considered to be a request for Divine mercy when it is said with the appropriate intent. Therefore, nowadays when there is no intent in prayer, there is no basis to obligate women in prayer, because such a prayer will not embody the idea of "a request for Divine mercy."⁴²⁶

However, this explanation still requires further clarification, because the definition of prayer as a request for Divine mercy also applies to men's prayer as well. This is the very essence of prayer. So, once we reached the conclusion that it is difficult for both men and women to pray with intent nowadays, why are men not exempt in the same way as women? What is the difference? The distinction between men and women is not clear in this matter. If prayer without intent is not a request for Divine mercy, then men should also be exempt from praying without intent. If, despite the lack of intent nowadays, men are not exempt from fixed prayer in order that it should not be forgotten, then that should also apply to women.

⁴²⁶ See the words of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef above that lack of intent does not "forbid" women from praying but only "exempts" them. In other words, a lack of intent that leads to the prayer not being a request for mercy, does not turn the blessings of prayer into unnecessary blessings. *Divrei Yatziv* rules similarly in his responsum. In contrast, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch in *Teshuvos Vehanhagos* (vol. 3 §36) cites the words of *Yad Hamelech* (by Rabbi Elazar Segal Landau, the grandson of the author of *Nodah Bayehuda*) that, "If his heart is not with him and he is unable to have proper intent, he has completely negated the positive mitzvah... since the foundation of the obligation is that it is 'a request for mercy' ... If a woman is preoccupied and cannot have proper intent, even though she can say the words of prayer, this is insufficient for the obligation is of "a request for mercy," and that applies only if she can have intent."

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Before we answer this question let us ask another. Even though there are women who are strict about praying at a set time every day, but they are not strict at all about praying with a community. Why? How is the *halakha* different for them than for men who must strive as much as possible to pray with a community, as we discussed in the previous chapter?⁴²⁷

They are obligated in the 'service of the heart' but not the 'service of the sacrifices'

Here we reach a crucial point that has been a central theme throughout our book, and which creates a difference between the obligation of men and that of women regarding prayer:

1. In previous chapters that dealt with the topic of the obligation of prayer and the topic of communal prayer, we discussed the fact that there are two aspects of prayer, the communal and the personal.
 - a. The communal aspect – "Prayer was instituted to correspond to the sacrifices."
This is prayer which replaces the sacrificial service in the Temple, in keeping with the verse, "We will render bullocks with our lips," (Hoshea 14:3).
This is prayer as expressed in the blessing, "Find favor... in Your people Yisrael and in their prayers," a request that the service will be acceptable before HASHEM. "And may the service of Your people Yisrael constantly find favor."
 - b. The personal aspect – "Prayer was established by the Patriarchs."
This is prayer as a personal request for Divine mercy from a person who needs HASHEM's salvation. It is learned from the Patriarchs, for each of them established one of the daily prayers, at the time that he cried out to HASHEM and requested with all his heart that he be given what he needs.

⁴²⁷ The authorities rule clearly that a woman is not obligated to pray with a community. See *Responsa Shevus Ya'akov* vol. 3 §54; *Responsa Mishne Halakhos* vol. 15 §26. In *Iggeres Hagra* the Vilna Gaon warned his daughters not to go to the Synagogue. True, the matter is clear that a woman is not counted for a *minyan* of ten for matters of holiness, but that does not prevent her joining an existing *minyan* to pray with the community. The Vilna Gaon may have ruled like this because of the principle of "All the honor of a daughter of a king is within," and therefore a woman is not required to go to communal places. But from the words of the authorities and the stringency of the Vilna Gaon it appears that there it is not that a woman's modesty overrides her obligation of communal prayer but rather that she has no obligation at all to pray with a *minyan*.

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This is prayer as expressed in the blessing, "Hear our voices" – in which we relate to prayer as a request for mercy: "Have mercy upon us and be compassionate and accept our prayers with mercy and with favor."

2. Only men are obligated in the communal aspect of prayer that replaces the sacrifices, because women were not obligated in the communal Temple sacrifices. So, for example, we find in the Mishna that women were not obligated to bring the half shekel which went to purchase the communal sacrifices.⁴²⁸
Women are obligated in prayer only because of the aspect of being a request for Divine mercy, as the Talmud itself says, "They are obligated in prayer because it is [a request for Divine] mercy," (Berachos 20b).⁴²⁹
3. Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch⁴³⁰ derives this also from Rambam's order in *Hilchos Tefillah* (1.2): "Therefore women and slaves are obligated in prayer because it is a positive mitzvah that is not time-bound, but the obligation of this mitzvah is as follows, that a person entreat and pray every day and recite the praise of the Holy One, blessed is He, and afterwards ask for his needs which he requires, as requests and entreaties, and afterwards give praise and thanks to HASHEM for all the good that He has given him, each person according to his ability." So, the definition of prayer which is obligatory for women is its being entreaty. It alone is the basis of the obligation on women.
4. Take note: the essence of prayer that is in place of the sacrifices is contained within the act of prayer performed by members of the

⁴²⁸ Mishna Shekalim 1:4: "From whom did they take security? Levites and Israelites, converts and freed slaves, but not women or slaves or minors." Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura explains that the exemption for women is derived from the verse which states, "'Each man shall give atonement for his soul,' – and not a woman."

⁴²⁹ According to this approach it would seem that women are not obligated to recite the *musaf* prayer, which is entirely in place of the additional communal sacrifice, and its obligation does not derive at all from the requirement to request mercy or to ask for one's needs. Indeed, Rabbi Akiva Eiger raised this point in his glosses on *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 106, and in *Responsa Rabbi Akiva Eiger, mahadura kamma* 9, s.v. "gam." See also *Mishna Berura*, 106:4, who writes, "Regarding the *musaf* prayer, the *Tzlach* writes that they are exempt, but *Magen Giborim* rules that they are obligated." Following the approach of *Tzlach* and Rabbi Akiva Eiger, the authorities discuss whether a boy between the ages of thirteen and twenty can serve as a *shaliach tzibur* for the *musaf* prayer, because according to Rashi (Menachos 46b) and *Sefer Hachinuch, mitzvah* 105, men below the age of twenty are exempt from bringing a half shekel for the sacrifices (and this is based on their manuscript text of Shekalim 1:3). For an in-depth discussion on this see *Responsa Beis Yitzchak, Orach Chayim* 17:2; *Be'er Yitzchak* §20; *Amudei Ohr* §7; *Sha'arei De'ah, mahadura kama* §17; *Mishnas Ya'abetz, Orach Chayim* §4; *Mikrai Kodesh* on the four *parshiyos* §10; *Torah Temima, Shemos* 30:13 §22.

⁴³⁰ Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch *Teshuvos Vehanhagos* vol. 3 §36.

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community. However, prayer that is a request for mercy is something personal, contingent on the intent of the worshiper.

5. Therefore, prayer without intent cannot express the personal aspect of prayer. Anything connected to prayer as a request for Divine mercy can clearly not be fulfilled when there is no intent. "Prayer without intent is like a body without a soul," because without intent it is not a request for Divine mercy.
6. Conversely, prayer which was established in place of the sacrificial rite is fulfilled if it is done properly even without intent.
7. So, for women, whose obligation stems from the need to request Divine mercy (for themselves and for those close to them), it is clear that without intent there is no basis for their obligation to pray. In contrast, men, who have an obligation from an additional source – Prayer is in place of the sacrificial rite – even without proper intent in prayer, an obligation remains by way of the law of a communal sacrifice, which has a fixed time, and which is not dependent on the intent of any specific worshiper.
8. If so, women are no different from men in terms of their preoccupation, because men, too, can be preoccupied with earning a livelihood, just as women can be preoccupied with raising children and maintaining a household. However, when a man cannot concentrate, he still has an obligation of prayer because, "Prayer was instituted to correspond to the sacrifices." But, a woman whose only obligation in prayer is because "Prayer was established by the Patriarchs," as an individual request for Divine mercy, is exempt from prayer without intent.

In addition, one can say that whereas we find for men that communal prayer acts as a salve for lack of intent in prayer, for women, however, there is no remedy for lack of intent in their prayers, since women do not have a mitzvah of communal prayer. Let us clarify:

1. In chapter 6 we discussed the words of the Talmud in Ta'anis (8a) regarding the words of Tehillim (78:36-37): "They enticed Him with their mouth and lied to Him with their tongue. For their heart were not true with Him, and they were not faithful in His covenant," (Tehillim 78: 36-37). Yet even so, "He, being merciful, will forgive sin," (verse 38).

Shmuel says this refers to a community.

Rashi explains: In a community the prayers are heard even though not all of their hearts are perfect. This is derived from the fact that the verse is in the plural, "They tricked him..." However, for an individual it is not so unless he has intent.

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So, communal prayer works to correct a lack of individual intent.

2. Nevertheless, why does this not help also for a woman? True, she cannot join with men to be counted as part of the *minyan*, but if there is already a *minyan* of men why is it not beneficial for a woman to pray with them?⁴³¹ Rabbi Shneur Zalman Fradkin of Lublin explains in Responsum *Toras Chesed* (4:6): Since women are not able to join with men to make a *minyan* of ten, their prayer is also not considered communal prayer, rather it is only individual prayer that each one prays by herself."
3. The explanation behind this is that a woman's prayer only expresses the personal aspect of prayer. She lacks the communal aspect of "Prayer was instituted to correspond to the sacrifices," because women are not obligated in communal sacrifices. Thus, a woman cannot combine with the community and benefit from the advantage of communal prayer. Let us explain further.
4. In the chapter about communal prayer we discussed two different aspects of prayer with a community:
 - a. The community has the advantage of gathering its components together so that the prayers are accepted even if there is a lack of intent.
 - b. Ten men are defined as a community in terms of reciting matters of sanctity (e.g. *kaddish*, *kedusha*, *barechu*).

It seems that these two aspects stem one from the other and are contingent each on the other:

A group defined as a community insofar as it combines to recite matters of sanctity, is defined as a community which fulfills as one unit the aspect of communal prayer as service which is performed in place of the sacrifices. Therefore, it can discharge one from his obligation of prayer even if it was performed without intent. However, someone who cannot join the *minyan* for reciting matters of sanctity is also unable to benefit from being part of the community as a remedy for a lack of intent.

⁴³¹ An example of this would be an individual who is in a room adjacent to nine others who are praying – he cannot complete their *minyan* unless he is visible to them and joins with them. However, if there are already ten men praying in a room, an individual praying in an adjacent room is considered to have worshiped with the community in every respect. So, we see that even one who is in a place where he cannot join the *minyan* can nevertheless benefit from the *minyan* and join with it. See *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 55:13-14 and *Mishna Berura* ad loc.

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5. This deeper explanation stems from the roots that we explained in the previous chapters:
 - a. We asked earlier, how can it be that the members of the community fulfil their obligation without intent in their prayer – what would happen if not even a single person in the *minyan* has intent? How is that considered communal prayer when there is not even one person who has prayed properly? It is prayer that is totally lacking intent, and it is like an entire body without a soul. How can ten times zero amount to anything? The answer of the Brisker Rav was that with the group “there is an act of prayer here.”
 - b. One of the explanations is that since prayer has a communal aspect that comes in place of the sacrificial rite, and in this aspect, prayer has validity even without individual intent, it is considered an “act of prayer.”
 - c. However, if prayer without intent is considered an “act of prayer” because of the communal facet of prayer, it turns out that a woman who does not have this facet of prayer, but only her personal standing in prayer, then without intent there is no act of prayer.
 - d. If so, it is clear that for a woman there is no possibility of making up what is lacking in her intent by asking to benefit from the system of communal prayer. A woman, who has no facet of the communal, but only her personal aspect, is not part of the “act of prayer” without intent. And without the “act of prayer” it is impossible to benefit from the system and advantages of communal prayer which is combining the different acts of prayer.
6. This appears to be the reason that women who pray daily are not particular to pray with a *minyan*, because their prayer is not communal prayer and they do not join with the community.

The Uniqueness of Women's Prayer

In the Talmud we find that many principles of prayer are learned specifically from the prayer of women. We find in Berachos (31a):

Rav Hamnuna said: How many great *halakhos* are derived from Hannah's prayer:

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The verse states, "Hannah was speaking in her heart," (I Shmuel 1:13) -
- From here we derive that one who prays must have intent in his heart.

The verse states, "Only her lips were moving," (ibid.) – From here we derive that one who prays must enunciate with his lips.

The verse states, "But her voice was not heard," (ibid.) – From here we derive that it is forbidden to raise one's voice in prayer.

The verse states, "And Eli thought she was drunk," (ibid.) – From here we derive that it is forbidden for a drunk person to pray.

From the words of the Talmud it seems that one cannot say that a woman's prayer is less than a man's prayer just because it only has the principle of "mercy" and not the status of "sacrificial rite." Quite the opposite, when fulfilling the "service of the heart," a woman's prayer has an advantage insofar as it is a request for Divine mercy. It is used as the example and foundation of all other worshipers. Although in general there is a principle of, "One who is commanded and acts is greater than one who is not commanded but acts,"⁴³² in prayer women are also commanded, as we saw. However, their obligation is the service of the heart and not communal prayer.

Let us now discuss the advantages of women's prayer.

The prayer of a woman specifically, because it is a request for Divine mercy and is not placed on her as an obligation in place of the daily sacrifices, is closer to be "mercy," more than prayer of a man. Prayer which is not performed as though it was an obligation is easier to fulfil with emotion. In contrast, for a man there is the difficulty of fulfilling the aspect of prayer as a request for Divine mercy, because his prayer is defined as obligatory. One of the most difficult problems with prayer is the lack of proper intent. The

⁴³² See Avoda Zara 3a: Rabbi Chanina said, "One who is commanded and acts is greater than one who is not commanded but acts." *Tosafos* there (s.v. "*gadol*") explain, "Because he is always struggling to control his evil inclination in order to fulfil the mitzvah of his Creator." Similarly, in Kiddushin 31a *Tosafos* write: "It appear that this is the reason: One who is commanded and acts is greater because he is more concerned and worried lest he transgress than one who is not commanded, who has all options (lit. "bread in his basket") and if he wants he can let go [of the mitzvah]."

Ritva there explains that one who is not commanded and acts is not forced to battle his evil inclination so therefore his reward is less, because the reward for a mitzvah is fixed according to the difficulty in fulfilling it. In his words, "The reason for this is that the one who is commanded has Satan obstructing him, but the other does not have Satan obstructing him. And the reward is according to the pain."

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difficulty in concentrating and reaching an emotional state, comes, among other things, from the set text of prayer and the fixed times. This formality wreaks havoc in a person's soul.⁴³³ So we find in the Mishna (Pirkei Avos 2:13): Rabbi Shimon says... "When you pray, don't make your prayer fixed, but rather mercy and beseeching before the Omnipresent, blessed is He, as the verse states, 'For He is merciful and compassionate, longsuffering, and abundant in loving-kindness HASHEM, Who reconsiders about the evil,' (Yoel 2:13)." ⁴³⁴ The concept of "fixed prayer" is the opposite of prayer as a request for Divine mercy.

Similarly, we find in Berachos (28b): Rabbi Eliezer says, "One who makes his prayer fixed, his prayer will not be entreaty." The Talmud there (29b) clarifies the concept of "fixed prayer" – "Any time the prayer seems burdensome to him." ⁴³⁵

The obligation of prayer at fixed times indeed creates a sense of "burden" – a person feels that it is a yoke that is placed on him, which he is glad to have finished with and to put a checkmark next to it after he is done. Rashi explains: "It is a fixed law. I must pray, and I have to fulfil my obligation." Similarly, Rambam explains in his commentary on the Mishna in Pirkei Avos: "The concept of fixed is that prayer feels heavy to him, and he considers it like one who is commanded to perform a task which he does and then then leaves it alone." Similarly, Rabbeinu Yonah explains: "He should not do it like one who is paying off his debt." ⁴³⁶

⁴³³ This is what *Chazon Ish* writes in a letter (*Iggros Chazon Ish* vol. 3 §151): "Indeed, how difficult it is for a person to be cured from this illness (of lack of proper intent in prayer) and to master the mitzvah of prayer. So, if he makes his prayer fixed it at first seems boring but making it a request for mercy and supplication before the Holy One, blessed is He, is one of the greatest perfections and one of the greatest things in the world that a person can acquire." See the words of Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz in *Sichos Mussar*, *sicha* for 5731 §16, "Do not come at all times to the holy" where he brings many sources which teach that, "habit is the greatest enemy of the sense of holiness and spiritual elevation."

⁴³⁴ This is the *halakha* in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 98:3: "One must pray in a supplicating manner, like a poor person asking at a door, and calmly, so that it should not appear to be a burden for him which he is trying to get rid of." *Mishna Berura* *ibid.* §9 explains: "Even though he says it using words of supplication, if he does not think that he needs something and is coming to ask for it from the king but prays because he has a to discharge his obligation, it is not correct, and one must be very careful about this."

⁴³⁵ The other opinions in the Talmud there are that "fixed prayer" is prayer that is not said in the language of entreaty, or prayer in which he is unable to innovate something.

⁴³⁶ Rabbi Pincus in *Tiferes Shimshon* on Devarim, Parshas Va'eschanan p. 17, points out in this regard that there is a wonderful midrash brought by the commentaries:

When Moshe ascended to Heaven HASHEM showed him a room filled with treasures. Moshe said to him, "Master of the Universe, who are these for?" HASHEM replied, "To those who toil

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For a man, who is obligated in prayer like a daily sacrifice, at fixed times every single day, all the days of his life, there is a constant battle in prayer, that he should not have the feeling that he is just fulfilling his obligation.

Here we find the uniqueness of a woman's prayer. Since she has no obligation, her intent is purer, and she is free of any sense of "fixed." Specifically, Hannah's prayer, which was not an obligation and not like a daily sacrifice, was the one that was chosen to teach the form of prayer as request for Divine mercy – and it is that which our Rabbis set as the basis for all prayer.

A Woman's Prayer – A Cry from The Heart

Earlier we discussed the awesome power of prayer and the causes that help it to be more easily accepted. We investigated the power of communal prayer to be accepted, even without the correct intent of the individual worshippers. Women are not accustomed, as we said, to pray with a community, but we will see ahead that their prayer has other powers which bring their prayer closer to HASHEM. In prayer based on a request for Divine mercy and intent of the heart, there are tremendous advantages for women. In general, women are more merciful and sensitive by their nature, therefore their hearts are purer and closer to true prayer. However, more than this, it seems that a woman's prayer has two additional unique strengths.

in Torah." HASHEM showed him other storehouses, and Moshe asked, "Who are these for?" HASHEM replied, "To those who perform acts of kindness." HASHEM continued showing him more rooms filled with treasures until he showed him a very big room filled with treasures. Moshe asked, "Who are these for?" HASHEM replied, "To those who have no deeds. I give him treasures from this room for free." Later, when Moshe made a request in the merit of the Torah and it was not given to him, he said, "I only ask in the merit of the big storeroom." This is why he used the word, "*va'eschanan*" which has connotations of for free ("*chinam*"). HASHEM uttered the parable that, "It is better to have a snake in your house than a person," because a person has eyes. "If I would not have shown you all the storerooms, you would not have known what I have." In other words, when Moshe ascended to Heaven he learned great secrets there by which a person can earn great, wonderful stores of treasure from HASHEM through performing mitzvahs and good deeds. But one who understands that he truly has nothing of his own at all earns even more than this. He is poor and destitute before his Creator and does not depend on his deeds or his merits. In HASHEM's great kindness and goodness, blessed is He, He prepares for him treasure rooms of grace and kindness greater than all the other rooms. This is the beauty, splendor and perfection of prayer."

Rabbi Pincus continues to explain there that one who prays and makes requests in the merit of his Torah and deeds has only limited merit. But one who prays like a poor, destitute person beseeching before HASHEM, will be graced with free gifts by the goodness of HASHEM. This is "a claim which has no refute and it cannot be that he won't be answered through this, because there is no limit or end to God's kindness and goodness, and there was and can never be anything which can prevent or restrict Him."

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1. Crying – the strength of request
This is called in Yiddish “*ausweinen*” – rending the heavens and reaching inward.
2. *Pegia* – To increase prayer and exert concentrated, continued, non-stop effort over and over without giving up until the prayer is accepted.
This prayer is called in Yiddish “*ausbeten*” – to achieve through tremendous request. This is the type of effort made by one who sees his desire as his life’s goal.

‘Crying for Her Children’ – Crying

A mother crying for her children is a sight toward which no heart of flesh can remain indifferent. Not only on earth, but in the “Heavenly kingdom,” too, the prayer of a mother for her children breaks through the heavens and acts as the foundation of the redemption. So, we find the verse stating, “Thus said HASHEM: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel is crying for her children; refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are not.” (Yirmeyahu 31:14). And the verse continues, “Thus says HASHEM: Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears;⁴³⁷ for your efforts will be rewarded, says HASHEM; and they will return from the enemy’s land. And there is hope for your future, says HASHEM; your children will return to their borders,” (ibid. 15-16).⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ *Sefer Hazikaron for Rabbi Chaim Shmuelewitz*, “Mind and heart” p. 108 relates a well-known story:

Rabbi Chaim used to cry at the grave of Rachel Imeinu and say, “Mother Rachel, the Holy One, blessed is He, asked you, ‘Withhold your voice from crying and your eyes from tears,’ The Father asked you to stop crying. But I, your son Chaim, ask you, ‘Mother, do not stop crying before the Throne of Glory and beseeching mercy for your children who are suffering.’”

⁴³⁸ Moreover, the prayer of Mother Rachel can part the heavens and be accepted even when the merit of the Patriarchs has ended – not only because of her tears, but because of the strength of her claim. So, do we find in *Eicha Rabba (pesichta 24)* where our Rabbis detail at length the prayers offered by the Patriarchs and Moshe Rabbeinu to prevent the destruction of the Temple. Avraham and Yitzchak mentioned the merit of the *Akeida*, the binding of Yitzchak; Yaakov mentioned his selflessness for the sake of his children when Esav tried to kill him after he had worked for Lavan; Moshe Rabbeinu mentioned his selflessness on behalf of the Jewish people and the fact that he never merited to enter with them into the Land of Israel. However, HASHEM was not appeased with those merits and the decree was not nullified. On the other hand, the prayer of Rachel for her children helped, because Rachel argued to HASHEM that there is no greater jealousy in the world than that of a woman toward another who takes her beloved from her. Nevertheless, Rachel gave to her sister Leah the signs that Yaakov had given her, even though by doing so she distanced Yaakov from herself and he was given away to her sister. If she was able to overcome her jealousy and have mercy

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Rabbi Shimshon Pincus in *Tiferes Shimshon* (Bereishis p. 177) points out the unique power of women's prayer – through their tears and strong emotions that they feel. Indeed:

Both men and women were given the power of prayer, but women have a special power in prayer, that of weeping. The Talmud (Bava Metzia 59a) says: "Be careful with your wives because their tears are commonly encountered." The emotional trait of women is designed for the difficult task of opening the gates of Heaven with tears.

As the Talmud there explains, there are situations when "all the gates are locked, except for the gates of tears."

Rabbi Pincus explains there that:

There are prayers for which the power of their influence comes through merit, and there are some whose power comes from legitimate arguments and justice.⁴³⁹ With regard to those prayers there is a chance

on her sister so that she should not be embarrassed, it is only fair that the Holy One, blessed be He, have mercy on His children and not be upset with them for having served other gods. When He heard that argument, the Holy One, blessed is He, forgave his children, as our Rabbis said, "Immediately the mercy of the Holy One, blessed is He, was awakened and He said, 'For you Rachel, I will return Yisrael to their place.'"

⁴³⁹ In this context the words of Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler in *Michtav Me'eliyahu* (vol. 2 p. 193) are well-known: "Regarding three definitions of prayer." Rabbi Dessler related to the prayer of Avraham for Sodom, about which the verse states, "He approached... and said, 'Would You destroy the righteous with the wicked?'" (Bereishis 18:23). Our Rabbis explain in *Midrash Rabba*, "He approached for war, for appeasement and for prayer."

Maharal (*Gur Aryeh* ad loc.) explains that Avraham's words contain elements of harshness, appeasement and also prayer. He adds, "And you should know that our Rabbis in this *midrash* allude to something esoteric, that Avraham had intent for three Divine names, *El*, *ELOHIM* and *HASHEM*. Towards *ELOHIM*, which is God's attribute of justice, he spoke harshly (for war), towards *El*, which is the Divine attribute of kindness, he spoke words of appeasement. And towards *HASHEM*, the unique name to which prayer and requests for mercy are directed, he worshiped in prayer."

Rabbi Dessler explains that normal "prayer" is a request from *HASHEM* for things the person lacks, with the recognition that everything comes from *HASHEM*. That is prayer as a request for mercy. "Appeasement" is a person's request from God to forgive him for his sins and to make up with him, because his sins prevent him from drawing close to *HASHEM*, and a person wants to repent. "War" is a person's argument that God's name is being profaned in his eyes, harming his service of *HASHEM*. In this case the person can "wage war" without it being considered as a sin, because he is not acting out of any personal vested interest, but he is fighting to change God's actions for the sake of God's great name. This is speech which can even withstand the Divine attribute of justice. Prayer such as this can only be offered by a truly righteous person and it is part of the general principle of "a righteous person decrees

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that the gates will be locked, the merits and the arguments will not help. But there is no power which stands in the way of crying prayer. Tears have power against all the gates.

A woman's tears are common, and with her heartfelt prayer they can tear apart the Heavens.

The Rabbis explained the verse, "Behold, He stands behind our wall, He looks in through the windows, He peers through the lattice," in *Midrash Rabba*:

"Looks in through the windows" – that is the merit of the Patriarchs;

"Peers through the lattice" – that is the merit of the Matriarchs.

Rabbi Betzalel Simcha Menachem Ben-Zion Rabinowicz (the Biala Rebbe) has a wonderful explanation for this in his book *Mevaser Tov* (vol. 1; p. 142). He writes that the merit of the fathers can work only in a situation of "looking through the window" – in public, in other words when the Jewish people deserve it based on measures which can be judged publicly. However, the merit of the women remains for the Jewish people even when they are in a difficult situation when HASHEM hides His face, when the merit is only "peering through the lattice" and they have no open merit which can save them.

What does the prayer of the Matriarchs have that the Patriarchs' prayer lacks? It seems that the matriarchs awaken Divine mercy through their great measure of tears before the Holy One, blessed is He thereby bringing merit to their children through their prayers.⁴⁴⁰

'Refusing to Be Comforted' – Confronting

The Talmud (Berachos 31b) points out that one of the things learned from Hannah's prayer is the ability to persist and to request until the gates are broken down.

and HASHEM fulfills," since it expresses an argument using the attribute of justice itself, forcing a change in the way God acts for the sake of His name.

⁴⁴⁰ Rabbi Avraham Yishaya Karelitz (*Chazon Ish*) in *Kovetz Igros* vol. 1, letter 74, formulates a prayer for a mother to recite for her son in the blessing of "Hear our voices," – "May it be the will of HASHEM, my God and the God of my fathers, that You have mercy on my son... and transform his heart to love and fear Your name, and to diligently study Your holy Torah. Remove from before him all the causes preventing him from diligence over Your holy Torah, and prepare for him all the causes which bring him to Your holy Torah, for You are God of mercy and kindness..."

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From the day that HASHEM created His world there was nobody who called the Holy One, blessed be He, "HASHEM of hosts" until Hannah came and called Him "HASHEM of hosts."

Hannah said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, of all the myriads of hosts that You have created in Your world, is it so hard in Your eyes to give me one son?

To what can this be compared? To a king who made a feast for his servants, and a poor man came and stood by the door and said to them, "Give me a slice of bread," but no one took any notice of him. So, he forced his way into the presence of the king and said to him, "Your Majesty, from all this feast which you have made, is it so hard in your eyes to give me a single slice of bread?"

Our Rabbis demonstrated Hannah's way with an analogy. She did not stop at the doorway, she did not behave according to the rules and did not pay attention to the lawful order – she entered all the way inside and spoke directly to the King. This is the meaning of the analogy of the poor person who wants a slice of bread at the time of the feast.

As long as the poor person stands outside the door, he does not elicit any attention, because by law his standing does not allow him to participate in the feast. But someone who does not relent and manages to break through the barriers and walls and get into the hall – his prayer is heard. This is the meaning of the verse, "A prayer of the poor, when he is faint, and pours out his complaint before HASHEM," (Tehillim 102:1).

However, what is the meaning of the name "HASHEM of Hosts" which she used to refer to HASHEM? It seems that she bypassed, as it were, all the Hosts of HASHEM, and went straight into the innermost chamber and asked for the slice of bread directly from the King.

I heard a lovely explanation for this. Hannah disagreed with the claim that one must accept reality as something that cannot change and make peace with it. Hannah claimed that a person can defy reality and try to change it, and that is the power of prayer. The Heavenly Kingdom is revealed in all its glory when the reality changes due to prayer. In that case the King shows that the various hosts (nature) are His hosts and subjugated to His will. Therefore, He has the power to change the world order at any moment.

Hannah innovated that one should never despair or give up -- even if someone will think that she is drunk, and even if by nature there is no possibility of the prayer being fulfilled. Hannah called to HASHEM and did

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not relent. Since everything is HASHEM's handiwork and the product of his desire, there is no nature or reality in the world that one must take into consideration, and no room to accept reality as it is.

Indeed, from the perspective of truth, there is no event that happens which is considered a miracle. Because for HASHEM there is no concept of "a barren woman" in a definite sense, and nothing prevents Him from saving her with a salvation which is beyond nature, so that she can give birth. All the hosts are HASHEM's hosts, and He has the power to plant life even if according to nature it would be impossible. Is anything impossible for Him? Does anything prevent the One who made the entire feast from giving a slice of bread to a poor person, even if he is not worthy of dining at the feast?

Hannah's prayer teaches a chapter in breaching the gates. Prayer in which a person implores and implores and implores without giving up, without relent, without accepting the reality as a given. This prayer wants to change the order of the world until even the poor person will receive his slice of bread. Our Rabbis called this type of prayer "badgering" which means to entreat with constant effort.⁴⁴¹

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus discussed this view of prayer in *She'arim Batefillah*.

Rabbi Pincus clarifies that "badgering" is "multiple entreaties with stubbornness in order to attain the thing he desperately needs." In other words, to ask and come back and ask again and again, until HASHEM fulfills his request.⁴⁴²

We find that the greatest people of our nation prayed in this way.

So, we find that the verse says about Yitzchak, "Yitzchak entreated the Lord opposite his wife, for she was barren," (Bereishis 25:21). Rashi explains, "He increased his prayers and entreated."

This was the prayer of Moshe Rabbeinu, who greatly multiplied the number of requests and claims, equivalent to the numerical value of the word "va'eschanan," to be permitted to enter the Land of Israel.

⁴⁴¹ See Berachos (26b): "Yaakov established the evening prayer, as the verse states, 'He encountered the place and he slept there,' (Bereishis 28:11). The word 'encountered' (*vayifga*) means 'prayer,' as the verse states, "As for you, do not pray for this people and do not raise a cry or prayer for them, and do not badger (*tifga*) Me," (Yirmeyahu 7:16).

⁴⁴² See Rashi on the verse from Ruth (1:16), "'Do not badger me' means do not beseech me."

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On a different occasion the verse says of Moshe's prayer, "And now leave Me" (Shemos 32:10). The Rabbis explain (Berachos 32a): "Rabbi Abahu said: Were it not written in the verse it would be impossible to say. This teaches that Moshe grasped HASHEM like a person who grasps another by his clothing, and said to him, 'Master of the universe, I will not let You go until you forgive and absolve them.'"

Likewise, we find with Hannah that she prayed very much until her request was fulfilled, as the verse states, "And as she increased her prayer." The Rabbis explain (Yerushalmi Ta'anis 4:1) from the verse, "Even if you increase prayer I will not listen," (Yishaya 1:15) – from here we learn that anyone who increases their prayer is answered.

This was how all the saints acted when they wanted to attain something. They increased their prayers until HASHEM fulfilled their will.

Rabbi Pincus points out that entreating HASHEM in prayer helps the prayers to be accepted, "And this is analogous to how a beloved son behaves toward his father. If he just continues and asks his father incessantly there is nothing that he cannot get from him... This is how the Holy One, blessed is He, acts with us. If we just increase our prayer and entreat incessantly, even if we do not deserve that our prayers be accepted based on our actions, nevertheless HASHEM will fulfill our desires unless it is something harmful for us."

The "badgering" type of prayer has several rules. So, for example, it requires that the person concentrates in his prayer on this one thing alone.⁴⁴³ Rending the gates of Heaven requires a person's full concentration that entreats HASHEM and does not give up because he views that thing as his entire world.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ The source for this is Ta'anis 8, where the Talmud tells that in the days of Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeni there was a famine and a plague. The Talmud explains that it is impossible to pray for two matters at the same time, rather one must pray for only one of them. Rabbi Pincus asks, "Why is it impossible to pray for two things? In our daily prayers there are thirteen different requests in the middle blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, in addition to all the requests and entreaties throughout the entire prayer. Rather the meaning is that there it was referring to prayer of the type known as "badgering" and about this it says that one cannot ask for two things at the same time, because in order to badger for a certain matter, one must concentrate all the powers of the prayer specifically on this matter."

⁴⁴⁴ In his book *Tiferes Shimshon* on Devarim, Parshas Va'eschanan (p. 21) Rabbi Pincus adds that, "Prayer which is war, does not mean to speak harshly. Rather, it is likened to war because war has the general form of concentrating all one's forces to conquer a certain position. War has a clear target and it is impossible to conquer it by shooting arrows in all directions without aiming at the target. One must concentrate all his fighting powers at the

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Rabbi Pincus summarizes by saying, "In practice this is tremendous advice for a person, and this is what Jews have done throughout the generations. When they wanted to attain a specific goal, they made a prayer "campaign" which is called by people, "to overturn the world." To increase prayer and all with the intent to attain the thing that is needed. This is a unique type of prayer."

Prayer which is "badgering" is the complete opposite of prayer which is "fixed" which a person offers only in order to fulfil his obligation. Prayer of badgering is a concentrated effort of one who entreats another beyond any measure, and beyond any limit, like someone who is "clinging on with his teeth" and does not let go.

The mood of one who is obligated to pray in a fixed way is paying off a debt. This is an act of habit, and it has an order and definition. It is difficult to reach a spiritual uplift in prayer when it is offered at a fixed time and it is dictated in advance.

In contrast, the mood of "badgering" means that a person does not focus on any other requests, but concentrates on only one thing and entreats, without letting go and without paying attention to the conditions of his surroundings or place. He focuses solely on fulfilling his soul's desire.

A woman who does not pray the obligatory prayers has the qualifications needed to give her the advantage that enables her to offer a prayer of badgering that can rend the Heavens.⁴⁴⁵

target and with great strength he can conquer it. Similarly, with prayer, one must concentrate all his energies on a specific matter that he wants to attain, until he reaches his goal that his prayer will be heard and answered."

⁴⁴⁵ Rabbi Pincus gives as an example a couple that underwent a major change in their lives. When pondering how they had been so successful he found out that, "the wife of this Jew stubbornly decided that her husband had to sit and learn. Even though she knew that it would be unlikely, and therefore she hardly spoke to him about it, nevertheless she decided to pray for it repeatedly, and to recite much Tehillim, all with this goal in mind, that her husband would become a Torah scholar. Years passed, and gradually it became a reality." Rabbi Pincus said that, "From this incident I gained a new understanding of this type of prayer which is called in Yiddish, " *Ausbeten*." It means to constantly offer many prayers for a specific thing until one achieves it. This has practical implications. For example, someone who wants success in Torah and fear of Heaven, or wants to become a Torah scholar, or, for example, praying for children, or for livelihood, one must enter into the war of prayer day and night, never abandoning it and never weakening, until they have mercy on him from Heaven, and he attains his goal."

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Summary

1. The prevailing opinion, which is ruled in the *Shulchan Aruch* and the *Mishna Berura* is that women are obligated to recite the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer twice a day. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef rules that it is sufficient for them to pray once a day.
2. However, the practice is different, and many women do not pray every day. As the *Magen Avraham* wrote, "The custom of most women is that they do not pray regularly."
3. We brought opinions that try to justify the practice, which is different from the plain *halakha*.
 - a. Rabbi Sternbuch's opinion is that women who are preoccupied with the needs of the home and raising children cannot be obligated to pray. The author of *Mishna Berura* instructed his own wife that she was not obligated to pray the set prayers as long as she was preoccupied with raising children and the needs of the home.
 - b. In accordance with Rabbi Sternbuch's opinion, it turns out that there is an obligation for women to pray as best as they can and a woman who is not so preoccupied that she cannot concentrate on her prayer has no reason to be exempt. Every prayer that a woman can concentrate on she is obligated in.
 - c. *Seder Mishna* and the Klausenberger Rebbe in *Divre Yetziv* wrote that there is room to exempt women completely from prayer even when they are not preoccupied, since prayer requires intent, and nobody in our generation has intent. Indeed, in practice there was never a general exemption from praying, "so that the concept of prayer should not be forgotten from Yisrael." However, "They were lenient on women nowadays to not obligate them more than the minimum Torah requirement."
4. We made the distinction between the communal aspect of prayer (prayer in place of sacrifices) where the prayer serves in place of the service of the Temple sacrifices ("We will render bullocks with our lips") and the personal aspect of prayer (prayer established by the Patriarchs). Only men are obligated in the communal aspect of prayer which is in place of the sacrifices, because women were not obligated in the communal Temple sacrifices. Accordingly, we explained that women are not different from men in their preoccupation. However, when a man is unable to concentrate, he is still obligated to pray because prayer "was instituted in place of the sacrifices." In contrast, women, whose personal obligation stems from the individual request

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for Divine mercy, are exempt from prayer, because without intent it is not a request for Divine mercy.

5. Specifically, because prayer was not placed upon women as an obligation in place of the daily sacrifice, women's prayer has an advantage in that it is a request for Divine mercy. A prayer which is not offered as an obligation is easier to recite with the heart's emotion. In contrast, it is difficult for a man to fulfil the aspect of prayer as a request for Divine mercy because of the definition of his prayer as an obligation. Indeed, we find in the Talmud that there are many principles of prayer that are learned specifically from women's prayer.
6. In this context we discussed the advantage of women's prayer which is based upon the request for Divine mercy, which is built on the intent of the heart in two levels:
 - a. The power of crying – tears have power to break through all the gates. Women's tears are common; thus, her wholehearted prayer can break through the gates.
 - b. The power of badgering – from the term "to request unrelentingly," this is the ability to entreat and request the one thing that is the heart's desire, over and over again, without letting go, until the prayer is answered.

This prayer is the complete opposite of "fixed" prayer which a man must offer only in order to fulfil his obligation. A woman who does not pray the obligatory prayers has the qualifications needed to give her the advantage that enables her to offer a prayer of badgering that can rend the heavens.

Chapter 9 – Priestly Blessing

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Is the Priestly Blessing a Mitzvah for Laypeople?

The author of *Hilchos Gedolos* (*Behag*) counts the mitzvah of "raising the hands," the priestly blessing, among the positive mitzvos, §189. Later, when *Behag* lists the laws and statutes given to the community, he includes another positive mitzvah of the Priestly Blessing, §32. From the words of *Behag* it turns out, apparently, that there are two positive mitzvos: One for the priests, to raise their hands, and the second on the community.

However, a close look at the verses in Bamidbar chapter 6 apparently shows that the mitzvah relates solely to the priests who recite the blessing but not to the community that is blessed.

It says there, "Speak to Aharon and to his sons, saying, 'Thus shall you bless the Children of Yisrael, say to them,'" (Bamidbar 6:23). And in verse 27, "And they shall place My name on the Children of Yisrael and I will bless them." Where is the source in this verse which can be understood as a mitzvah for the Jewish people to receive the blessing?

In *Sefer Charedim* by Rabbi Elazar Azkari (one of the great Rabbis of Safed in the 16th century, the time of *Beis Yosef* and the Arizal) in chapter 12 §18 we find that there is a positive mitzvah, "For the priest to bless the laypeople, as the verse states, 'Thus shall you bless the Children of Yisrael.'" However, *Sefer Charedim* continues and writes, "Laypeople who are standing facing the priests silently, concentrating their hearts to receive the blessing according to the word of HASHEM, are also included in the mitzvah."⁴⁴⁶

In other words, the priests are commanded to bless, but those who receive the blessing -- the community -- are also included in the mitzvah.

This raises several questions:

1. Why does *Behag* write that there are two positive mitzvos, one on the community and one on the priests? Isn't it the same mitzvah itself of the priests, in which the community is also included? And more generally, what is the positive mitzvah of being blessed? What is the required action to perform this mitzvah?

⁴⁴⁶ *Chofetz Chaim* in *Biur Halakha* on *Shulchan Aruch* 128 opens his discussion about the mitzvah of the priestly blessing by citing the words of *Sefer Charedim*. See also what *Mabit* writes in *Iggeres Derech Hashem* (*ne'ilas she'arim* 1:15), "The priest who blesses the people and the people who receive the blessing, should not say, 'How can a blessing of a simpleton help?' because they are included in the mitzvos."

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2. Where do we find a biblical source that the community that receives the blessing is included in the mitzvah of the priests to recite the blessing?

The answer to these questions is found in *Hafla'ah* on Kesuvos 24b, under the heading "Rashi s.v. *d'issur aseh koh tevarchu*." He explains as follows:

1. In the Torah we find a positive mitzvah for a man to perform levirate marriage, to establish the name of his dead brother. The mitzvah is on the man to have relations with his deceased brother's widow. Nevertheless, we are forced to say that there is also a mitzvah on the deceased brother's widow to allow the brother to perform the mitzvah. This is because the relationship between the man and his late brother's widow should be forbidden, because she is his "his brother's wife." The reason that a man is permitted to perform levirate marriage with his late brother's widow stems from the idea that "a positive mitzvah overrides a negative prohibition." In other words, the man has a positive mitzvah to establish the name of his dead brother, and that positive mitzvah overrides the prohibition of marrying his brother's widow. However, the prohibition should also apply to the woman. If she did not have a positive mitzvah, how would it be permitted for her to have relations with the brother of her late husband? So, we are forced to say that she also has a positive mitzvah to perform levirate marriage.
2. What is the source for the positive mitzvah for the widow to perform levirate marriage? The answer is that the mitzvah for the woman is included in the mitzvah of the man.
3. If so, by the same principle, the community which receives the blessing is included the positive mitzvah of the priest who gives the blessing.

What laypeople (those who are not priests) are required to do when the priest recites the Priestly Blessing is -- to receive the blessing. This is alluded to in Sotah (38a): "Thus shall you bless" -- face to face. "Say to them" -- like a person speaking to his friend.

This is brought as *halakha* in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 128:23:

When the priests bless the people, they [the people] should not look at the priests nor be distracted. Rather their eyes should be cast downward as if they were standing in prayer, and the people must have intent for the blessing. And their faces must be towards the priests, but they must not look at them directly.

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Ateres Zekeinim adds that the reason the people must not look at the priests is in order that they not become distracted from the blessing.

In other words, the one who is blessed indeed participates in the act of the blessing, and this is his positive mitzvah.

Hafla'ah points out that there is practical import to the fact that the laypeople are included in the positive blessing of the priests as the ones who are blessed. This would be if someone who is not a priest would ascend the platform and recite the blessing.⁴⁴⁷ In this case, according to the Talmud in Kesuvos (24b), "A layperson who raises his hands transgresses a positive mitzvah." The *Hafla'ah* explains that the sin is not that he recites a blessing in vain (because at the time of the Talmud not all the priests who ascended the platform would recite the blessing; rather, one would bless the people and the rest would remain silent). However, this layperson transgresses a positive mitzvah since he did not participate with the community in receiving the blessing. To be part of the community one must stand in front of the priest, face to face, and receive the blessing. Someone who stands alongside the priest to give the blessing is not part of the community that receives the blessing. Therefore, he transgresses a positive mitzvah.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁷ In Shabbos (118b) we find in this regard: Rabbi Yosei said, "In all my days I never transgressed the words of my friends. I know that I am not a priest. But if my friends tell me to 'ascend the platform' I ascend. *Tosafos* write there (s.v. "ilu"), "Rabbeinu Yitzchak did not know what prohibition there was in this, unless it is reciting a blessing in vain." *Rema* (*Darchei Moshe, Orach Chayim* 128) asks, how did Rabbeinu Yitzchak not know what the prohibition is in this? It is clear in the Talmud (Kesuvos 24b) that a layperson who raises his hands [to bless the people] transgresses a positive mitzvah, and Rashi there (s.v. "d'issur") explains that this prohibition is learned from the verse, "Speak to Aharon and his sons saying, thus shall you bless." *Rema* answers that a layperson transgresses only if he is standing there alone, but if he ascends with other priests, it appears there is no prohibition.

⁴⁴⁸ *Meshech Chochma* on Bamidbar chapter 6 explains the words of Rabbi Yosei in Shabbos, cited above, that if others would ask him to ascend the platform he would do so. He explains that Rabbi Yosei would ascend the platform but would not recite the blessing... However, the issue is how he could ascend the platform, based on what our Rabbis said, (Sotah 38b), "Those who stand behind the priests are not included in the blessing," because they show that they do not want to be included in those who are blessed, so he would miss the priestly blessing. But since he never transgressed his friends' words, and his friends told him to ascend the platform, he is considered to be under duress, and therefore is included in the blessing, since he only ascended the platform, not because he wanted to, but because his friends instructed him to do so. If so, he would be included in the blessing, and therefore he ascended the platform. And there is no prohibition in this."

It seems that according to the opinion of the *Hafla'ah* one could explain the words of *Tosafos* on Shabbos that Rabbi Yosei would ascend alone, without any other priests, and therefore he

Hafla'ah adds that indeed the Torah says, "Speak to Aharon and to his sons, saying, 'Thus shall you bless the Children of Yisrael.'" However, this is like when the Torah commands a man to perform levirate marriage, "Her brother-in-law will have relations with her." The words were directed at the priest, since he is the one who performs the action, but that does not take away from the one receiving the blessing to be included in the mitzvah.⁴⁴⁹

In the commentary on Torah by the author of the *Hafla'ah*, called *Panim Yafos* (on Parshas Naso), he clarifies that in every mitzvah which is dependent upon another, there is a mitzvah also on the passive receiver. The reason that the mitzvah was stated for the priests alone is because they are the ones who perform the action. In this context *Hafla'ah* brings the words of *Sifrei* on the verse, "Speak to Aharon and to his sons, saying":

Because all the actions mentioned in this section involve priests, it mentions Aharon and it mentions his sons to include them in the instruction. For this is the principle, that every time the speech is to the priests, the action is by the priests.

However, it appears that this brilliant explanation of *Hafla'ah* which likens levirate marriage to the priestly blessing is extremely difficult.

1. It is impossible to fulfil the mitzvah of levirate marriage without a specific woman, the widow of the late brother. So, she is specifically included in the mitzvah of levirate marriage, because the brother-in-law cannot perform the mitzvah without her.
2. In contrast, there is an explicit *halakha* in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 128 that if a Synagogue is entirely made up of priests and there is not even a single layperson there, all the priests ascend the platform. The

did not nullify the blessing, because anyway he would not be able to receive a blessing from the priests, since there were no priests present. The prohibition is only when someone who is not a priest stands next to a priest and does not turn to face him and makes it appear that he does not want to receive his blessing.

⁴⁴⁹ Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in *Halichos Shlomo* chapter 10, "The Mitzvah of the Priestly Blessing," points out that if a layperson does not pay attention and misses a word when listening to the priestly blessing, it is uncertain whether he has fulfilled his positive mitzvah according to *Sefer Haredim*. He also points out that, "One should not ask if so, why do the laypeople not recite a blessing before performing this mitzvah? Because there is a principle that our Rabbis only instituted a blessing for a mitzvah which involves an action, like tzitzis, lulav etc. In shofar the reason for reciting the blessing "to hear the sound of the shofar" is because ultimately there is a mitzvah to blow the shofar. Here, however, there is no action at all, because when the kohen recites the blessing the layperson is blessed automatically, and a blessing is not appropriate in such a case."

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Shulchan Aruch asks, “Who are they blessing?” And the answer is, “Their brothers in the fields.” In other words, the blessing is for the abstract community and not for any specific person. HASHEM’s will is that the priests bless the Jewish people, but their blessing is not contingent on the fact that there be someone standing before them to receive the blessing. It is reasonable to assume that the people in the fields are not even aware that at that time there is a *minyan* of priests blessing them.

How can we say, then, that there is a positive mitzvah on those who are not priests to stand and receive the blessing to the extent that if a layperson stands alongside the priests he nullifies that mitzvah?

3. The analogy to levirate marriage is thus not necessarily valid, because a priest can recite the priestly blessing towards the congregation without the need for the layperson to have intent to receive the blessing. From where is the concept that there is a positive mitzvah to stand and receive the blessing? And from where is it derived that every single person individually is included in that positive mitzvah of receiving the blessings?

Rabbi Asher Weiss, in his book *Minchas Asher* (Bamidbar, Parshas Naso §12) sharpens these questions. He clarifies that there are mitzvos which are a partnership between two people, and there are those which are placed solely on one person while a second assists him. Let us give examples:

1. An example of a mitzvah which is a partnership between two people is the mitzvah of levirate marriage, when the brother-in-law and his late brother’s widow must perform that mitzvah together. Without them both the name of the deceased brother will not be established. In this mitzvah the widow literally fulfils the mitzvah and she is obligated in the mitzvah just the same as her brother-in-law.
2. The second type is a mitzvah where one person is obligated and the second is explicitly exempted from the mitzvah, but without him the first person cannot fulfil it. In this case the first fulfils the mitzvah and the second helps. An example of this is the mitzvah of being fruitful and multiplying. The *Ran* writes in the beginning of chapter 2 of Kiddushin that even though the wife is not commanded to be fruitful and multiply, nevertheless she has a mitzvah because she assists her husband. In this case the wife is not commanded to be fruitful and multiply.⁴⁵⁰ If she refrains from doing so, she does not transgress any

⁴⁵⁰ There is an explicit Mishna in Yevamos (65b): “A man is commanded to be fruitful and multiply but not a woman.” The Talmud there explains, “Rabbi Illa’i said in the name of Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon, that the verse states, ‘And fill the earth and conquer it,’ (Bereishis 1:28). It is a man’s nature to conquer and not a woman’s nature.”

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mitzvah. Nevertheless, she has a mitzvah to help her husband to be fruitful and multiply.

Now, when we come to examine the mitzvah of the Priestly Blessing, to which type can the status of the laypeople receiving the blessing be compared? Are they partners in the mitzvah, analogous to the widow in levirate marriage? Or, do they merely assist with the mitzvah, but without any obligation, like the role of a wife in the mitzvah of being fruitful and multiplying? According to *Hafla'ah*, the laypeople who receive the blessing are included in the positive mitzvah, like the widow in the mitzvah of levirate marriage. However, reason would lead one to conclude that the laypeople receiving the blessing are more comparable to a poor person who receives charity from a rich person who is obligated to donate. It is obvious that the poor person is only helping the rich person to fulfil his mitzvah, which is comparable to the wife's role in the mitzvah of being fruitful and multiplying.

There is no obligation on any specific community to search for a priest who can bless them.⁴⁵¹ If so, it makes sense that they have no obligation to receive the blessing. Once the analogy between the Priestly Blessing and the mitzvah of levirate marriage has been refuted, what kind of positive mitzvah is there on someone who is not a priest to receive the blessing?

Furthermore, *Hafla'ah*'s proof that someone who fulfils a passive role becomes part of the mitzvah was derived from the mitzvah of levirate marriage. *Hafla'ah* shows that the mitzvah of levirate marriage also applies to the widow. For if not, she would not have a positive mitzvah that overrides the negative prohibition of marrying her husband's brother.

However, *Minchas Chinuch* (mitzvah 1) rejects this argument, and clarifies that the woman does not have the negative prohibition to begin with such that she requires a positive mitzvah to override it. This is because the prohibition of having a relationship with a brother's wife as it appears in Scripture applies

⁴⁵¹ Regarding this we find that Rabbi Shimshon Pincus wrote in *Tiferes Shimshon* (on Bamidbar p. 46) in the section where he discusses the Priestly Blessing:

It is related that when the Brisker Rav once prayed *shacharis* in a Synagogue where there were no priests, he sent someone to bring a priest from another place. They asked him what the point of this was. He explained that if they would hear that in the Diaspora there is a great *tzaddik*, whose blessings always come true, they would certainly travel to him to receive a blessing. Regarding the Priestly Blessing the verse states, "They will place My name on the Children of Yisrael and I will bless them." The Holy One, blessed is He, guarantees that He personally will bless them. The Brisker Rav asked them: Is it not worth making an effort to receive a blessing from such a "tzaddik"? This incident confirms that there is no *halakhic* obligation to call for a priest from another place to receive the blessing.

to the brother. The entire source that this prohibition applies also to the wife is learned by *hekeshe*.⁴⁵² Therefore, if the man has no prohibition (because he is fulfilling a positive mitzvah of levirate marriage), the result is that the prohibition of relations with a husband's brother also does not apply at that time, since there is no source from the *hekeshe* to apply the prohibition to the woman. It is unnecessary to claim that she can participate in the levirate marriage only because she has her own positive mitzvah, because she actually has no prohibition at all that must be overridden. Based on this, *Hafla'ah's* argument that the man's mitzvah of levirate marriage also applies to the woman, falls away.

Indeed, when we look at the early authorities, it seems that they hold that the mitzvah of levirate marriage applies solely to the man. For example:

1. In *Responsa of the Rashba* (vol. 1 §18) *Rashba* answers the question of why there are positive mitzvos for which we do not recite a blessing. *Rashba* explains that it is not dependent on a single reason but on several reasons. We do not recite a blessing on some of the mitzvos because they do not involve any action (so, for example, the mitzvah of relinquishing debts in the *Shemita* year). Some of the mitzvos have no blessing because the mitzvos are not solely contingent on the person who performs them (for example, giving charity to the poor -- the fulfilment of the mitzvah is dependent on the will of the poor person to accept the gift). We do not recite a blessing on some of the mitzvos since they come from a sin (for example, the mitzvah of returning a stolen item, or returning interest charged illegally). Some of the mitzvos have no blessing because the person does not give of his own, but *HASHEM* already entitled the recipient (for example, the priestly gifts which they receive from the "Heavenly table"). And some of the mitzvos do not have a blessing since the mitzvah is primarily fulfilled by someone who is not obligated in it -- for example levirate marriage, in which the primary purpose of the mitzvah is the birth of a child by the woman, "and she is not commanded in the mitzvah of being fruitful and multiplying."⁴⁵³ If so, *Rashba* holds that a woman is not commanded in the mitzvah of levirate marriage.

⁴⁵² A *halakha* derived from Scripture equating two subjects. In this case the equation is from Bamidbar 5:6, "A man or a woman, when they commit any sin that people commit..." The Talmud (Yevamos 84b) says that this teaches that the Torah equates men and women regarding all punishments mentioned in the Torah.

⁴⁵³ Although *Rashba* wrote that she is not commanded to be fruitful and multiply, it is clear from his words that she is also not commanded in the mitzvah of levirate marriage.

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2. In *Sefer Hachinuch* (mitzvah 598) he writes about levirate marriage, "This mitzvah applies in all places and at all times to men."
3. Rambam (*Hilchos Yibum Vechalitza* 1:1) rules: "It is a positive mitzvah from the Torah that a man will perform levirate marriage on his paternal brother's widow, whether the brother was married or only betrothed, if he dies without children."

From these sources we see that the early authorities disagree with the words of *Hafla'ah* that the woman has a share in the mitzvah of levirate marriage.

If so, we return to our original question -- what is the source that there is any mitzvah of Priestly Blessing for the rest of the Jewish people, since it was stated only regarding the priests?

The approach of *Hafla'ah* is also not identical with that of the early authorities who hold that those who are not priests are commanded to receive the blessing. For the *Hafla'ah* holds that the mitzvah for laypeople to receive the blessing is only in partnership with the actions of the priest giving the blessing, like the widow and brother-in-law in the mitzvah of levirate marriage. However, *Ra'avad* writes that laypeople have a separate mitzvah to receive the blessing, and the priest is supposed to fulfil the obligation for the laypeople. So, do we find in *Ra'avad's* commentary on Tamid (7:2) where he wrote that a priest must not ascend the platform if he is uncertain as to whether he is impure or not, because the prayer of one who is impure would not be accepted. "And furthermore, he does not discharge the obligation of the laypeople."⁴⁵⁴

Also, *Tosafos* in Rosh Hashana, according to *Chasam Sofer's* explanation, contradicts *Hafla'ah's* opinion. Let us explain:

1. In Rosh Hashanah 28b we find that a priest who recites the priestly blessing is prohibited from adding an additional blessing of his own to the fixed text, due to the prohibition of "adding to mitzvos."⁴⁵⁵ The

⁴⁵⁴ See what Rav Pomeranchik wrote in *Emek Beracha* in the section on "Raising Hands" §7.

⁴⁵⁵ Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank in his *Responsa Har Tzvi, Orach Chayim* 1 §62 was asked about a priest who descended from the platform and told everyone as he walked back to his seat, "May you be blessed." He was in doubt as to whether there was concern that this transgressed the prohibition of "adding to a mitzvah." He also asked there about the prayer "Master of the Universe" which the priests recite after the priestly blessing. Its source is in Sotah (39a) where Rav Chisda said to Rav Ukva that the priests recite "Master of the Universe, we have done what You decreed on us, do with us what You guaranteed, look down from Your holy sanctuary, from the Heavens, and bless Your people Yisrael," after reciting the priestly blessing.

Why is there no concern that the priest is adding a blessing of his own?

Rabbi Frank answers this and explains that it is permitted because this prayer is recited after the priests have turned away from the community, and once they do so, it is considered a break between the three priestly blessings and this blessing such that it is not considered adding to the earlier blessings but is rather a blessing on its own.

Even though with other mitzvos turning away is not considered an act which makes a "break," nevertheless here it marks the end of the priestly blessing because the priestly blessing must be recited with the priests facing the community, as we find in the Talmud (Sotah 38a), "Thus shall you blessing" -- this means face to face.

Look in *Nodah Biyehuda* (§5) where it is clear from his words that being face to face with the congregation is an essential component of the priestly blessing and the blessing is invalid without it. (He rules there about a priest whose hands shook that if he is unable to raise his hands with his fingers spread the blessing is invalid. He proves this from the words of Rambam (*Hilchos Tefillah* 14:11) who writes: "This is what they learned by tradition from Moshe Rabbeinu, 'Thus shall you bless' -- while standing, 'Thus shall you bless,' --- with raised hands, 'Thus shall you bless' -- in Hebrew, 'Thus shall you bless' -- face to face, 'Thus shall you bless' -- in a raised voice." Just as there is a complete requirement to stand and without it the prayer is invalid, so too, raising the hands is essential and without it the blessing is invalid. Likewise, concludes Rabbi Frank since if the blessing is not recited face to face with the community the mitzvah of the priestly blessing has not been fulfilled, it is reasonable to say that a blessing recited after turning away from the community is not considered "adding on to the mitzvah," since it is not recited face to face.

In addition, Rabbi Frank clarifies that since raising the hands is an essential part of the priestly blessing, it is clear that there is no concern of "adding to the mitzvah" when the priest recites the "Master of the Universe" or "May you be blessed" since they were not recited with the hands raised.

See also *Shulchan Aruch Harav* (128:40) who writes that there is no concern of "adding to the mitzvah" by reciting the "Master of the universe" prayer... because they have already lowered their hands and turned their faces away from the community. They would only transgress the prohibition of "adding to the mitzvah" if they said it with their hands raised while facing the community.

We find similarly in *Chidushei Harashba* (Sukkah 31b, s.v. "mai"): "We say that a priest who ascends the platform and adds a blessing of his own that he transgresses the prohibition of "adding to the mitzvah"; but we do not say that each blessing stands alone, that is different because it requires raised hands.

In the *Siddur Ohr Hachama* Rabbi Zundel Kreuzer points out in the name of his father, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kreuzer about the wording that the priests say, "Master of the universe, we have done what You decreed on us, so You do as You promised." This wording is not clear, why is the mitzvah called a "decree"? Rather this goes with what the Rabbis said, that a priest who comes to add a blessing is lashed for "adding to the mitzvah," and therefore the priests say, "Master of the universe, we want to add a blessing, but You decreed that we may not add, and we have done as You decreed. Therefore, it is incumbent upon You to add and bless as You promised in Your Torah, 'I shall place My Name among the Children of Yisrael and I will bless them.' The reason they finish, "You also do as You promised," means what You

Talmud asks, "But the prohibition of adding no longer applies after the time of the mitzvah." (So, for example, there is no prohibition in sitting in a sukkah during the rest of the year). After the priest concludes reciting the words of the Priestly Blessing using the Torah's text, the time of the mitzvah has ended, so what difference does it make if he adds more words of his own afterward, it is no longer considered to be "adding to the mitzvah." The Talmud answers that the mitzvah of the Priestly Blessing applies all day long and the time of the mitzvah does not end when the priest concludes his blessing, because, "If he would happen to go to another community, he would bless them also." Since, if he would find a community that had not yet heard the Priestly Blessing he would have a responsibility to bless them, when the Torah states, "Thus shall you bless the Children of Yisrael," it applies all day long. Since the time of the mitzvah has not ended, if the priest adds a blessing of his own he transgresses the prohibition of "adding to the mitzvos," since he added it in a time when the mitzvah can be fulfilled.

2. In Rosh Hashanah 16b we find that even though a community has fulfilled its Torah obligation of blowing the shofar with the blasts before the *musaf* service (the "sitting blasts") they continue and blow the shofar during the *musaf* service (the "standing blasts") "in order to confuse the Satan."
3. *Tosafos* (s.v. "vetok'im") ask: How is it possible to add more blasts without transgressing the prohibition of "adding to the mitzvos?" *Tosafos* strengthens the question; the answer cannot be that the additional "standing blasts" are not at the right time for fulfilling the mitzvah, because the entire day is considered the time for blowing the shofar – for maybe he will find another community which has not yet heard the shofar blasts. *Tosafos* compares this to the Priestly Blessing, where the entire day is considered the time of the blessing -- perhaps he will find a community that has not yet heard the Priestly Blessing.
4. Rabbi Akiva Eiger asks, how can *Tosafos* compare blowing the shofar to the Priestly Blessing?⁴⁵⁶ Regarding the Priestly Blessing, when the priest blesses another community, he himself fulfils the mitzvah placed upon him to bless a second community. So, the entire day, from his perspective, is a time of performing the mitzvah. However, if a person has already fulfilled his mitzvah of blowing the shofar with the first blasts, when he blows again for another community, he does not fulfil

wrote in the Torah, that when the Jewish people keep the mitzvos properly they will be blessed by HASHEM.

⁴⁵⁶ This question of Rabbi Akiva Eiger is quoted in *Responsa Chasam Sofer, Orach Chayim* §22

an additional mitzvah. Rather, he discharges the obligation of the others. If so, for the one who blows the shofar, the time when he is obligated does not continue for the entire day. Why, then, should he have a prohibition of adding to the mitzvos if he blows after his time for fulfilling the mitzvah has passed? How could *Tosafos* compare the two laws and how could they conclude that the time of the mitzvah has not finished for the one who blows the shofar?

5. *Chasam Sofer* answers that *Tosafos*' reasoning is that regarding the Priestly Blessing, just like with the sounding of the shofar, the priest has only a single mitzvah. Anything he does afterwards, including reciting the blessing again for another community, he is discharging the obligation of others. Therefore, there is no distinction between the Priestly Blessing and blowing the shofar.
6. It turns out that *Chasam Sofer*'s explanation in *Tosafos* is the complete opposite of *Hafla'ah*'s approach:
 - a) According to *Hafla'ah* the mitzvah is on the priest, and the non-priests are partners in the mitzvah, because in order to recite the blessing, the priest requires a "vessel" which will receive the blessing, just as the mitzvah of levirate marriage applies to the brother-in-law and the widow is the means to accomplish the mitzvah.
 - b) According to *Chasam Sofer* the mitzvah for a layperson receiving the blessing is a separate mitzvah which applies even when the priest has no obligation. If so, the mitzvah for the person receiving the blessing is an independent mitzvah which stands by itself!

On the other hand, there are early authorities who seem to have the identical approach to that of *Hafla'ah* and not like *Chasam Sofer*. So, for example, *Ritva* writes (Sukkah 31a) that the prohibition of "adding to the mitzvos" relates to someone who adds a detail to the mitzvah while doing it, for example, having five sections in *tefillin* or five corners on *tzitzis*. However, anyone who performs a mitzvah as the Torah commanded and afterwards adds to it by repeating the mitzvah again, does not transgress the prohibition of "adding to the mitzvos." *Ritva* brings as evidence for this that it is permitted for a priest to bless another congregation that has not yet heard the Priestly Blessing after he has already recited the blessing once that day in a different congregation.

Ritva continues:

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One cannot say that he is doing it to discharge the obligation of others, because there is no obligation on laypeople to receive the blessing. It is a mitzvah of the priest.

In other words, the mitzvah of the Priestly Blessing is placed solely on the priests and the laypeople have no independent mitzvah at all.

The words of *Ritva* would seem to imply that he argues with *Sefer Charedim* and holds that there is no mitzvah of the Priestly Blessing at all for laypeople. However, this is not conclusive for it is possible to explain that *Ritva* holds like *Hafla'ah*, that when a priest recites the blessing, the laypeople who receive the blessing are partners in the priest's mitzvah. In other words, the laypeople themselves do not have an obligation to be blessed, and do not have to search for a priest to bless them. Therefore, when a priest has already recited the blessing and fulfilled his obligation, he does not need "to discharge the obligation for an additional congregation," because they have no such obligation. However, it is possible that the laypeople have a mitzvah to receive the blessing in partnership with the mitzvah of the priest.

The words of *Ritva*, therefore, provide an explanation which is not in line with that of *Chasam Sofer* who innovated that laypeople have an independent mitzvah to receive the blessing even when the priest no longer has a mitzvah to recite the blessing. However, we cannot conclude definitively that *Ritva* disagrees also with *Hafla'ah's* explanation that the layperson is a partner in the mitzvah of the priest, when the priest fulfils the mitzvah and blesses him.⁴⁵⁷

So, we have before us two different approaches to explain how the Priestly Blessing is a mitzvah which applies also to laypeople.

1. The opinion of *Behag* that the Priestly Blessing is a separate positive mitzvah which applies to a congregation of laypeople and the priest fulfills their obligation for them, even if he himself has already fulfilled his own obligation. Laypeople have a mitzvah even when the priest himself has no obligation. *Chasam Sofer* sides with this opinion in his explanation of *Tosafos* in Rosh Hashana, that there is a separate mitzvah on laypeople which applies even when the priest has

⁴⁵⁷ This is also how the opinion of *Ritva* is explained in *Dvar Avraham* vol. I §31. *Dvar Avraham* points out a distinction that if laypeople do not have a separate mitzvah, then even if they have already been blessed, they are obligated to have intent and receive the blessing upon themselves at the time they are blessed a second time. Because even the first time the priest blessed them, they had no mitzvah to be blessed, so there is no room to make a distinction between whether they had already been blessed or not.

discharged his own obligation. Similarly, we found that *Ra'avad* holds that the priest discharges the obligation for the laypeople.⁴⁵⁸

2. *Sefer Charedim* and *Hafla'ah* say that laypeople are included within the mitzvah of the priest, just as the widow of a man who dies childless is included in the mitzvah of levirate marriage. Laypeople are the necessary vessel which allows the priest to recite the blessing. However, if the priest has already discharged his obligation, the laypeople have no independent mitzvah, and have no requirement to seek out a priest to bless them.

Ritva holds that laypeople have no obligation to receive the blessing. It is a mitzvah solely on the priest. *Dvar Avraham* explains *Ritva*'s position to mean that laypeople have a passive mitzvah, like one who takes part in the priest's mitzvah. This is like the opinion of *Hafla'ah*.

We must still explain the opinion of *Behag*.

1. Where do we find a source that laypeople have an independent mitzvah to receive the blessing? The verse states explicitly, "Speak to Aharon and to his sons, saying." The words of *Sefer Charedim* and *Hafla'ah* do not afford an explanation of *Behag* because his is an entirely different approach, in which laypeople are not commanded as part of the general mitzvah of the Priestly Blessing. Rather they have an independent mitzvah.
2. There is another difficulty because *Behag* does not count the mitzvah of levirate marriage as an independent mitzvah obligation for the widow. Why, then, regarding the Priestly Blessing, does *Behag* list one positive mitzvah for the priest and an additional, separate mitzvah for the community as a whole?
3. *Dvar Avraham* challenges the opinion of *Behag*: "His opinion is not necessarily true because there is no principle that in every case the mitzvah applies to both people. Regarding the mitzvah of charity or the gifts one gives when freeing his slave, do we also say that just as the donor has a mitzvah, so too the poor person or the slave has a mitzvah to receive? And similarly, in many other examples." In other words, the Torah has many mitzvos which require a second person to perform the mitzvah, like charity, which is dependent on the poor person accepting the donation, or the mitzvah of giving gifts to a slave when setting him free, which is dependent on the freed slave accepting the gifts, yet we do not find that those other people are part of the mitzvah. Why is it different regarding the Priestly Blessing, such that there is a mitzvah on the laypeople to receive the blessing?

⁴⁵⁸ Commentary to Tamid attributed to the *Ra'avad* on Tamid 33b.

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'With Love' -- What Is It?

In the responsa of Rabbi Nachum Treibitz (*Orach Chayim* §1) the author challenges *Hafla'ah*. "And to me, the young one, poor in wisdom and in years, it seems that what is obvious to the author of *Hafla'ah* is very difficult. For in the Torah there is a positive mitzvah only for priests. If so, the mitzvah is specifically for the priest and not for laypeople. And similarly, with levirate marriage, the positive mitzvah is solely on the brother, and not on the widow."

Rabbi Treibitz suggests a completely new explanation, whereby there is an obligation of a joint act of the priest giving the blessing and the laypeople receiving it. This creates a mitzvah on them both, different to the case of levirate marriage. The reason for this is that the priest and the laypeople must express a mutual loving relationship.

Rabbi Treibitz bases this on the words of the Zohar (Parshas Naso p. 147b): "Any priest who is not beloved by the people and who they do not want to bless them, must not spread his hands. There was an incident with a certain priest who raised his hands and before he completed the Priestly Blessing he became a heap of bones. Why was he punished? Because he did not recite the blessing with love. Another priest arose and raised his hands and recited the Priestly Blessing and that day was perfected and blessed. From here we learn that any priest who does not love the people or who is not beloved by the people must not raise his hands to bless the people. This is because he is unable to bless them with a good heart and a good eye, and the verse stipulates, "A good eye will be blessed," (Mishlei 22:9) which is understood not as "will be blessed," but rather as "shall bless."

Look closely at the wording of the Priestly Blessing as brought in the Talmud (Sotah 39a): "Who has commanded us to bless His people, Yisrael, with love." The source for these words is in the Talmud (ibid. 38a), "Thus shall you bless," which requires that the blessing be "face to face," like a person speaking with his friend.⁴⁵⁹ From here it is derived that the priest must love the people. However, in the Zohar we find that the people must also love the priest. Where is the source for this? It is derived from the fact that love is a

⁴⁵⁹ Magen Avraham on *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 128:23 §35 explains that the Jewish people do not look at the priests when they are reciting the blessing but cover their heads with their *tallit* in order that "they do not distract their minds." If the Jews are not part of the mitzvah, what is wrong with being distracted? It is therefore clear that the Jews who are blessed are also included in the action, and for this reason they have a mitzvah not to be distracted from the action.

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reciprocal act, as the verse states, "Like water, face to face, so is the heart of man to man," (Mishlei 27:19). Since this is a joint act of the priest and the laypeople, which includes mutual love for one another and working together to receive the blessing of HASHEM, the laypeople are also considered to have a share in the act.⁴⁶⁰

However, even this explanation does not remove all the questions on the words of *Behag*:

1. If this is a joint action between the laypeople and the priest, how does he count it as two positive mitzvot which are independent and separate from one another, one mitzvah for the priest and the other for the laypeople?
2. Furthermore, if it is a joint action, why do we find early authorities who rule that laypeople still have a mitzvah even when the priest has already fulfilled his obligation?
3. Rabbi Asher Weiss in *Minchas Asher* on Parshas Naso adds a further question on this explanation: The Priestly Blessing also applies to "the people in the fields." They are certainly not partners in the action of the mitzvah because they are not even aware of their being blessed at the time when the priests stand up and bless them. So, it must be that the "love" in the wording of the blessing expresses the essence of the mitzvah and the way it is to be performed, as an act between two people who love each other. But how can we say that the mitzvah also applies to the laypeople to receive the blessing?⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶⁰ See *Yosef Ometz* §812 who cites the words of *Sefer Charedim* and points out: "If so, how careful one must be with this, for his own benefit, to receive the blessings with a good countenance. Those who turn to idle chatter only do so if they are ridiculing the blessings, and therefore they are certainly sinning, in addition to the fact that the blessing does not apply to them." This is obvious, since we see that the priestly blessing is a combined action of mutual love between the priest reciting the blessing and the laypeople receiving it.

⁴⁶¹ In Rabbi Weiss's words: "The blessing is one thing and the mitzvah is a separate thing. Even though the blessing has affect even on the people in the fields, they have certainly not fulfilled the mitzvah. The reason one must have intent during the priestly blessing is not so that the blessing will apply to him. Nor so that the priests can fulfil this mitzvah. Rather this is the concept and manner of fulfilling this mitzvah, and it is fulfilled by both sides; the priest recites the blessing and the laypeople listen and pay attention to his blessing. And this is how our Rabbis explained, 'Say to them,' -- 'Like a person speaking with his friend.' For this reason, they must stand face to face."

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‘And I Shall Bless Them’

It seems that to understand the approach of *Behag* we must delve deeper and understand the essence of the Priestly Blessing, to understand why we were commanded about this and what its purpose is. The difficulty stems from the fact that in practice the One who blesses the Jewish people is the Holy One, blessed is He, as the verse states, “Thus shall you bless the Children of Yisrael, and I shall bless them.” If so, what is the purpose of the Priestly Blessing at all?

Indeed, in the words of our Rabbis we find clearly and explicitly that the blessing does not actually come from the priest but from HASHEM, because the Jewish people were opposed to receiving a blessing from flesh and blood in place of the blessing of HASHEM. Thus, we find in *Midrash Rabba* on Parshas Naso (11:2):

When the Holy One, blessed is He, said to Aharon and his sons, “Thus shall you bless...” Yisrael said before the Holy One, blessed is He, “Master of the Universe, are You telling the priests to bless us? We need nothing other than Your blessing and to be blessed by Your mouth, as the verse states, ‘Look down from Your holy sanctuary,’” (Devarim 26:15)

The Holy One, blessed is He, said, “Even though I told the priests that they will bless you, I will stand with them and bless you.”

Therefore, the priests spread their hands as if to say that the Holy One, blessed is He, stands behind us. For this reason, the verse states, [“Behold, He stands behind our walls,] peeking through the windows,” (Shir Hashirim 2:9) – from between the fingers of the priests. “He peers through the lattice,” – from the gaps in the fingers of the priests.

In other words, the blessing of the priests does not come in place of the blessing of HASHEM. Rather HASHEM blesses Yisrael through the Priestly Blessing.

Furthermore, one cannot say that HASHEM’s blessing is dependent on the Priestly Blessing, because in *Sifrei* (Bamidbar Parshas Naso §43) we find, “And I shall bless them,” so that the Jews will not say that their blessing is dependent on the priests. For this reason, it states, “And I shall bless them.” So that the priests should not say that we are blessing the Jews, for this reason it states, “And I shall bless them.” I shall bless My people, Yisrael.”

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But if so, what purpose do the priests serve? Why is the Priestly Blessing necessary?

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama asks this question in *Akeidas Yitzchak* on Bamidbar (Parshas Naso 74:1): "What purpose is served by this mitzvah that these blessing should be recited by a priest to the people? He, may He be magnified, He is the One who blesses, and what does it add to you or give to you whether the priests give a blessing or not? Does He need them to help Him?"

Abarbanel in his commentary on Bamidbar (chapter 6) discusses the explanation of the term "blessing" here, because there are three separate types of action all included in the word "blessing."

1. Influx and goodness that surrounds a person – as in the verse, "The blessing of HASHEM makes you rich," or the verse, "And HASHEM blessed Avraham with everything."
2. Praise and thanks -- this is the blessing that a person gives to HASHEM, as the verse states, "And David blessed HASHEM." Or the verse, "I will bless HASHEM always, His praise is constantly in my mouth." A person obviously cannot bless or give influx to HASHEM, so clearly the meaning of the phrase, "And David blessed," is praise and thanks.
3. Prayer -- this is the blessing of one person to another that is actually a prayer to HASHEM on behalf of the person that he is blessing. In the words of Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel: "There is a blessing which is from people, some of them to some others. It is not an influx like the blessing of HASHEM to His creations, nor is it praise and thanksgiving like the blessing of a creature to his Creator. But prayer and requests for mercy for one who is being blessed that the Holy One, blessed is He, should pour His blessing over him."

The essence of the Priestly Blessing is, according to Abarbanel, a "prayer of the priests," towards the Jewish people. He writes:

That is why it says here, "Speak to Aharon and to his sons saying, 'Thus shall you bless the Children of Yisrael, say to them.'" This means that Aharon and his sons should not think that they are actually, truly blessing or influencing the supernal blessing for Yisrael. They are only like worshipers with their blessing. This is the meaning of, "Say to them" -- that their task should be speech and prayer for them alone, and nothing else.

In other words, a priest does not influence with any influx of his own the Jewish people who are being blessed. He also does not praise them. The priest

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is asked to pray for the Jewish people. For this reason, the verse states, "Say to them," -- pray for them. The appeal to the priest is to please not imagine that he is doing anything at all himself. "Please understand that you are only praying for the people, and HASHEM is the One who blesses them with His supernal influx."

We find similarly in Rashbam's commentary (on Bamidbar 6:23):

"Thus shall you bless the Children of Yisrael" -- in other words, do not bless them with a blessing of your own, like a person who says, "May a blessing come to the head of so-and-so." Rather pray to me that I should bless them, as is explicit in the phrase, "May HASHEM bless you." And I will hear your voice when you say it and I shall bless Yisrael. This is explicit in the verse, "And I shall place My name on the Children of Yisrael." When the priests bless Yisrael with My name and not in their name, I shall bless Yisrael, as the priests pray when they say, "May HASHEM bless you."

These words explain the question we asked in the introduction to this book⁴⁶²: Why did the Rabbis establish the Priestly Blessing as part of the prayer service? According to the explanation of the early authorities that this blessing is a prayer it is understood why this was fixed as part of the prayer service. So is evident when we delve into the sources for in the Mishna in Ta'anis (4:1) we find: "At three times the priests raise their hands, four times a day; in *shacharis*, and *musaf* and *mincha* and the time of closing the gates." The Talmud Yerushalmi there explains that, "We find prayer without raising the hands, but we have never found raising the hands without prayer." We see that the Priestly Blessing is part of prayer.

'Why Did They Place the Priestly Blessing After Thanksgiving?'

However, we still need to understand, even if the Priestly Blessing is prayer, why was it placed together with the blessing of "Accept our prayers"? Why is the prayer of the priests specifically part of communal prayer and the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei*?

The answer can be learned from the Talmud in Megillah (18a) which explains the reason for the order of the prayers of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, established by the Men of the Great Assembly.

⁴⁶² P. 10XXX.

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It says there, "Once prayer came -- the blessing of "Hear our voices" -- service came -- the blessing of 'Accept our prayers.' As the verse states, "Your burnt offerings and your sacrifices shall be for favor on My altar." And once service came, 'Thanksgiving' came, as the verse states, "He who offers thanksgiving honors Me," (Tehillim 50:23). And why did they say the Priestly Blessing after 'Thanksgiving'? Because the verse states, "Aharon raised his hands towards the people and blessed them, and descended from performing the sin offerings and the burnt offerings and peace offerings" ... And why did they say 'Place peace' after the Priestly Blessing? Because the verse states, "They shall place My name on the Children of Yisrael and I shall come and bless them," (Bamidbar 6:27). The blessing of the Holy One, blessed is He, is peace. As the verse states, "May HASHEM bless His people with peace."

Similarly, we find in Sotah (38b) that it says: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "Any priest who does not ascend [the platform when the *shaliach tzibur* recites] the service, may no longer ascend, as the verse states, 'Aharon raised his hands towards the people and blessed them, and descended from performing the sin offerings and the burnt offerings and peace offerings.'⁴⁶³

So, we see that the Priestly Blessing is part of the service of a priest, similar to the service in the Temple.

We learned in earlier chapters that prayer has two components. The "service of the heart" in individual prayer, and "prayer was instituted to correspond to the daily sacrifices" which is the communal prayer of the *shaliach tzibur*. If the Priestly Blessing was part of the daily routine of the Temple service and its sacrifices, it is clear that nowadays, when the sacrificial service is expressed through prayer, as the verse states, "We shall offer bullocks [with] our lips," the place of the Priestly Blessing must be part of this prayer. For this reason, the Men of the Great Assembly instituted saying it in the communal prayer and established that the priests ascend the platform during the blessing of "service."

This has a practical implication because in *Responsa of Chasam Sofer* (vol. 1 *Orach Chayim* §23) he cites in the name of Rabbi Zalman Margoliyos in *Beis Ephraim* (*Orach Chaim* §6) that the reason for the custom that outside the Land of Israel the priests do not recite the Priestly Blessing daily (but only on festivals) stems from the fact that the Priestly Blessing is part of the Temple service, and prayer is in place of the sacrifices. Therefore, nowadays when

⁴⁶³ Rashi explains there: "Before the *shaliach tzibur* finishes the blessing of 'May our prayers find favor' he must ascend the platform."

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there are no sacrifices being accepted there is also no room for the Priestly Blessing to take effect on those being blessed. Since during the weekdays we are preoccupied with earning a livelihood, and most of our prayers are without intent and full of distractions, and prayer without intent is like a sacrifice which is not favorable, therefore the priests recite their blessing only on festivals, when the congregation is free and concentrates on their prayers. Similarly, in the commentary on the festival prayer book it says about the custom to bless one's children that it should be done only on Shabbos and festivals."

So, it is clear that the Priestly Blessing is considered to be prayer, and its place is specifically within the communal prayer.

It is worth noting that Rambam includes the laws of the Priestly Blessing together with the laws of prayer in "*Hilchos Tefillah and Birkas Kohanim*."

Netziv in *Ha'mek She'alah* on the *She'iltos* (Parshas Beha'alosecha 125) weaves these ideas together as one fabric and sees the Priestly Blessing as part of the system of the influence of HASHEM's Divine influx over the Jewish people which flows from "the fire offerings of Yisrael and their prayers." The sacrificial service was, as it were, the need of the Holy One, blessed is He,⁴⁶⁴ in order that He pour His goodness and His blessing to His people. "And prayer is in place of the sacrificial service, and blessings of enjoyment are also included in the need of Heaven. For this reason, the Talmud says that, "Anyone who enjoys anything in this world without a blessing steals from the Holy One, blessed is He." ... This means that he prevents the influence of blessing from that species and in this way, he steals from HASHEM Who wants to pour His blessings over the Jewish people... And even more so the Priestly Blessing which is literally prayer, as Targum Yonasan explains in Yishaya 1, on the verse, "And when you spread your hands" -- "And when the priests spread their hands to pray for you." For this reason, when the *shaliach tzibur* is a priest, who is certain he can return to his prayer, he also raises his hands, even if there are other priests... because the Priestly Blessing is (part of) the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer itself, and this is not an interruption in his prayer."

⁴⁶⁴ In the words of the *Netziv* there: "This is a well-known concept, that the sacrificial service is for the sake of the Supernal." See *Ramban* on *Shemos* 29:46; *Rabbeinu Bechaye*, *Shemos* 13:8, 20:1, 29:46. See also *Shelah*, *Toldos Adam*, *Sha'ar Hagadol* 22, and *Asarah Ma'amaros*, *Hakdamah* 11 for a detailed discussion of this concept.

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Indeed, it is an explicit *halakha* in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 128:10) that the priests do not begin to recite their blessing until the *shaliach tzibur* has called "Priests" to them. Rambam in *Hilchos Tefillah* (14:3) explains that the laypeople must request the blessing from the priest. This is the order of things: "How do they perform the Priestly Blessing outside Jerusalem? When the *shaliach tzibur* reaches the "Temple service," when he says, "May it find favor," all the priests standing in the Synagogue leave their places and go and ascend the platform and stand there facing the Holy Ark with their backs to the people and their fingers curled up in their palms. Until the *shaliach tzibur* completes 'Thanksgiving.' Then they turn their faces toward the people and spread out their fingers and raise their hands to shoulder height and begin, "May HASHEM bless you." And the *shaliach tzibur* reads to them word by word and they repeat, as the verse states, "Say to them" -- until it is said.⁴⁶⁵ When they complete the first verse, all the people answer 'Amen.' The *shaliach tzibur* continues and reads them the second verse word by word and they repeat, until they complete the second verse, and all the people answer, 'Amen.' And similarly, with the third verse." In *halakha* 8 he writes, "If there are two or more, they do not begin to recite the blessing until the *shaliach tzibur* calls to them and says to them, 'Priests' and they respond and say, "May HASHEM bless you," and he reads them word by word in the order that we said."

Notice that this mitzvah of reading and calling to the priests and requesting their blessing is not an obligation of the individual but is placed on the community through the *shaliach tzibur*. It is an explicit *halakha* in Rambam (*Hilchos Tefillah* 8:4): "How is communal prayer? One person prays aloud, and everyone listens. We do not do this with less than ten free adult males, including the *shaliach tzibur*." And in the following *halakha* he rules, "And the priests do not raise their hands unless there are ten including the priests."

⁴⁶⁵ We find in the responsa of *Mabit* (vol. 1 §64): "In chapter seven of Sotah (38a) it implies that [calling the word 'priests' to the priests reciting the blessing] is a Torah law. For Abaye said, 'We hold that for two priests he calls 'priests' but for one he does not call 'priest' because the verse states, "Say to them" -- to two [or more] ...' This implies that it is a Torah law and its main derivation is learned from the word 'to them', whereas reading to the priests word by word is derived from "say" ... And for this reason, he reads out word for word even to a single priest but does not say 'priests' except to two, since by Torah law we derive from 'Say to them' that one needs to call 'Priests.' It is clear that this only applies to adults who are obligated to bless by Torah law. And even though we educate children, nevertheless they are not considered as priests in terms of calling to them because it is not respectful for the community."

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The Priests in Their Service and the Laypeople in Their *Ma'amados*

Here we begin to understand the role of the layperson and his place in the Priestly Blessing. In the time of the sacrificial service the laypeople were commanded to be present and standing over the sacrifices. For this reason, they established *ma'amados* that were representatives of the Jewish people who took part in the Temple service by standing over the communal sacrifices. The blessing of the priest to the people after he came down from doing the sacrifice also required the presence of the people. For this reason, the *shaliach tzibur's* repetition of the prayer and the Priestly Blessing require the presence of the community and they cannot send a *shaliach tzibur* to pray or bless without them.

However, there is another purpose in having the priests and the laypeople face to face at the *ma'amados*, which cuts to the essence of the role of the one giving the blessing and the ones receiving it.

Already when Yaakov blessed Yosef's sons we find that Yosef brought his sons before Yaakov and Yaakov did not bless them until they were standing before him and had bowed. Afterwards he placed his hands on them and blessed them. Yosef and Yaakov gave great meaning to the placing of the hands of the one giving the blessing on the one receiving it. However, with the Priestly Blessing he is not able to place his hand on every layperson, but the mitzvah of the blessing is, "They shall place My name on the Children of Yisrael." It is done by raising the hands toward the people, as the verse states, "And Aharon raised his hands to the people and blessed them."

Let us now look at the words of *Alshich* in his commentary to Bamidbar 6:23.

Because through speaking with the laypeople they prepare them to receive the blessing, when they place His blessed name on the people... Through this they prepare and influence them to receive the blessing, and through this comes the "And I shall bless them," together with you... You place the name of HASHEM on the laypeople, to prepare them and relate to those who are blessing.

In other words, placing the name of HASHEM on those being blessed means to prepare the people to receive the blessing of HASHEM on themselves by them relating to those who bless them.

The laypeople themselves also have a task during the Priestly Blessing. One who is blessed must request the blessing. This request itself is an aspect of

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the layperson preparing himself to receive the blessing. This is how *Sefer Hachinuch* (mitzvah 378) explains the essence of the Priestly Blessing:

The root of the mitzvah is that HASHEM, in His great goodness, wants to bless His people through His servants who are constantly in the house of HASHEM, and whose thoughts are attached to His service, and whose souls are tied to the fear of Him all day long. In their merit, the blessing will fall on them, and all their actions will be blessed, and the pleasantness of HASHEM will be on them.

Do not wonder, "If HASHEM wants them to be blessed, let Him bestow blessing open them without a need for the priests to give a blessing?"

Because I have already introduced to you many times [the concept], that the power of preparing our deeds is what allows the blessing to fall upon us. For His hand, blessed is He, is open to anyone who asks, if he is prepared and ready to receive the goodness. Therefore, when He chose us from all the nations and wanted that we should merit His goodness, He warned us and commanded us to ready our deeds and prepare our bodies through His mitzvos so that we can be worthy of the goodness. He also commanded us, in His great goodness, to ask from Him a blessing and that we should ask it through His pure servants, for all this will be a merit for our souls and through this we shall merit His goodness.

Similarly, we find in Ramban (Bamidbar 1:45). He asks why HASHEM commanded Moshe to count the Children of Yisrael and know their number.⁴⁶⁶ Ramban answers that, "One who comes before the greatest of prophets and his brother, the holy one of HASHEM, and is known to them by his name, he will have through this merit and life." In other words, one who stands before Moshe and Aharon and is known to them by his name, prepares himself in this way to receive the merit and life. Similarly, with the laypeople who stand before the priests who place upon them the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, they prepare themselves to receive the blessing.

⁴⁶⁶ In the words of Ramban there: Moshe and Aharon were commanded to know the number of the census of the entire people and to know the number of each tribe. For this is the way of kings when they count the people. But I did not understand the reason for this commandment, why did the Holy One, blessed is He, command this? There was a need for the people to have their genealogy reckoned to each tribe for the sake of the divisions, but I do not know why He commanded that they know the number?

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What is the path through which the community prepares itself to receive the blessing? Further examination of the words of the *Alshich* reveals to us that the priests cause those that they are blessing to relate to HASHEM who blesses them. In his words: "The task of the priests is 'to prepare and relate to those they are blessing.'"

What is this relationship that causes them to receive the blessing? These words can be illuminated with the radiance shining forth from the words of *Maharal* that we saw earlier regarding the essence of prayer. From his words we will also understand how the request for blessing serves as a preparation to receive the blessing. Let us explain:

The Talmud (Ta'anis 2a and Yerushalmi Berachos 4:1) states: "What is service that is in the heart? You must say it is prayer." The question has been asked, what is the meaning of Divine service when the recipient has no need of this service? The answer is that the service is required for the person himself. But, if it is needed for the person himself, how is it considered the service of HASHEM? Can a person asking for his needs from HASHEM and focusing on himself and his needs, be considered "serving HASHEM with one's heart"?

Maharal answers this question in his book *Nesivos Olam* (*nesiv ha'avoda* chapter 3)⁴⁶⁷ that when a person stands before HASHEM and pours out his thoughts before Him, like a son pleading before his father, this is an act of deep recognition, that our world is governed in a Heavenly way. A person who stands at this time before his HASHEM and all his existence and being are stripped from him, recognizes the weakness of his power and his complete nothingness before HASHEM, in Whose hand are the souls of all living things and the spirit of all of humanity. During prayer the person recognizes that life, health, success, honor, peace and tranquility, and Heaven forbid, death, illness, lack and pain, are all in the hand of the Holy One, blessed is He, and a person is nothing more than a mote, which the Divine spirit blows and decides his fate, for the staff of punishment or kindness.

This recognition of faith is that even if a person has the power of choice, and he is the crown of creation and its purpose, he is entirely in the hands of the Holy One, blessed is He, in his very existence. In a single moment, the most

⁴⁶⁷ In the words of *Maharal*: The service of Hashem of Jews in exile, wherever they are, is prayer. The reason prayer is called "service" is that the prayer that a person recites to Hashem shows that the person is dependent upon Him, and he needs Him, and he has no existence without Him. When a person is dependent upon Him it is as if he sacrificed to Him and given over to Him. This is the service of prayer -- that the effect unites with the Cause of all Causes, blessed is He.

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successful person could lose, Heaven forbid, his health or even his life, or those most dear to him, or the source of his continued success. He then loses everything he has at once and is likened to a broken shard of pottery. This feeling which rings in the person's heart when he stands before HASHEM and prays with intent, is what is called serving HASHEM. For his requesting in prayer is itself stressing the recognition that everything comes from the hand of HASHEM. A person who prays announces publicly to the world that he believes in the fact that HASHEM listens to him, hears him, watches over him and worries about him. The person has Someone to speak with. He has Someone to turn to and therefore he "pours out his speech before HASHEM" and cries out from the depths of his heart. This recognition on its own is a deep and important act of faith. This is the pure service of HASHEM -- the service of the heart.⁴⁶⁸

Similarly, it is clear that by the very same token, the request for a blessing by the laypeople is the recognition of the need to be blessed by HASHEM and that without this blessing the laypeople lack the Divine assistance on which all their success depends. This request for blessing, and relating it to HASHEM Who gives the blessing, is itself a distinct act of faith which can be a fitting preparation that in its merit the blessing of HASHEM can be received by the one asking for it. This is the intent of *Sefer Hachinuch* when he writes, "He also commanded us, in His great goodness, to ask from Him a blessing and that we should ask it through His pure servants, for all this will be a merit for our souls and through this we shall merit His goodness."

'The Holy One, Blessed Is He, Agrees with Them'

The question still remains, why can the preparation and the relationship not be made by the laypeople without the need for priests as intermediaries? Why do we require an intermediary between HASHEM's blessing and the laypeople?

⁴⁶⁸ In the words of Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe in *Alei Shur* (vol. 2 p. 348): We seek our perfection, not our success. The foundation of perfection is faith. Our faith is not a faith "that there is a God" -- that we know with clear knowledge. Our faith is this certainty in our hearts of the presence of the Creator and His providence until we see the world and every event that occurs through eyes of faith. The way to reach this way of living in faith is only through prayer. Through it we teach ourselves to turn to the Holy One, blessed is He, for everything we lack, because there is no one else in the world who can give us what we lack. This is the subtle feeling that we must experience three times each day.

Rabbi Simcha Zissel in *Chochma Umussar* (vol. 2 §1) points out that prayer is something a person needs for himself, to remind himself and to envision with his spiritual eyes that at every single moment everything and every matter is in the hands of Divine Providence.

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Rashi (on Bamidbar 6:27) writes about the blessing: "I will bless them – laypeople – and I will confirm with the priests."

The source for Rashi's words is the opinion of Rabbi Akiva in Chullin (49a) who says: "The priests bless the laypeople, and the Holy One, blessed is He, confirms what they have done." Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi (*Re'em* on Bamidbar 6:27) explains: "That if they bless the laypeople, I will also bless them... The meaning of 'I will bless them' is that I will confirm with them... because if 'I will bless them' were to be taken literally, what would be the purpose of the Priestly Blessing?"

In other words, the priests ask the Holy One, blessed is He, to give the blessing, and the Holy One, blessed is He, answers their request.

HASHEM Himself taught Moshe Rabbeinu this path of awakening His mercy through the prayer of the righteous. Thus, we learned in Berachos (32a):

When he said, "Now leave Me and I will destroy them," Moshe said: "This matter depends on me." Immediately he arose and strengthened himself in prayer and requested HASHEM's mercy. This can be compared to a king who became angry at his son and was hitting him with great blows. His close friend was sitting before him and was afraid to say anything. The king said, "If it were not for my close friend sitting before me, I would kill him!" [The friend] said, "This matter depends on me." Immediately he arose and saved him.

"Now leave Me..." --- Rabbi Abbahu said: If this verse were not written, it would be impossible to say it. It teaches that Moshe grabbed the Holy One, blessed is He, like a man who grabs his friend by the clothes, and said before Him, "Master of the Universe, I will not let You go until You forgive and pardon them."

This is also how Rashi explains it in Devarim (3:24):

Moshe said to Him, "I learned from You. For You said to me (Shemos 32:10), 'And now leave Me,' – was I holding on to You? Rather You wanted to give me an opening, that it was dependent on me to pray for them."⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁹ As an example, we find that the Holy One, blessed is He, requires the "help" of people to have mercy on the Jewish people. We find in a *baraisa* brought in Berachos (7a): It is taught that Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha said, "Once I entered to offer the incense in the Holy of Holies and I saw Akasri-el, Hashem, Lord of Hosts, who was sitting on His lofty, elevated throne.

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What is the meaning of this behavior of HASHEM that someone must ask of Him in order that a blessing will be able to come upon him? Why does the Holy One, blessed is He, require, as it were, this help? The answer can be found in *Shita Mekubetzes* on the piece of Talmud (Bava Kamma 50a) which says:

Our Rabbis taught: There was an incident with the daughter of Nechunia, digger of cisterns, who fell into a large well. They came and told Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa. In the first hour he said to them, "Peace (is on her)." In the second hour he said to them, "Peace (is on her)." In the third hour he said to them, "She has come out [of the well] ... They said to him, "Are you a prophet?" He replied, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. But I said, a matter which this righteous man is so concerned about [providing water for the people] – could his descendant be struck down from it?"

Rabbi Acha said, "Even so, his son died of thirst, as the verse states, "Surrounding Him it is very stormy (*nis'ara*)," (Tehillim 50:3). This teaches that the Holy One, blessed is He, judges those around him even to a hair's (*se'ara*) breadth.

Rabbi Betzalel Ashkenazi asks in his work *Shita Mekubetzes*: How is the case of Rabbi Nechunia's daughter, who did not die in the well because that was the matter her righteous father had been concerned about, different from the case of his son who died of thirst?

He answers:

He said to me, 'Yishmael, My son, bless me!' I said to him, "May it be the will before You that Your mercy overpowers Your anger and that Your mercy dominates Your other attributes, and that You act with Your children with the attribute of mercy and deal with them beyond the letter of the law.' And He nodded His head at me.' This teaches that the blessing of an individual should not be light in your eyes.

Look at what *Rikanati* wrote in Shemos 29: This is the idea of the statement of our Rabbis (Shabbos 89a): You should have been a help to you. The Rabbis (Berachos 32a) also said concerning the verse (Bamidbar 14:21), "However, by My life" – Rava said, [Hashem, so to say, said to Moses] you gave Me life with your words. This is the secret of "Yishmael My son, bless me," and the secret of "nodding His head at me." It teaches that the blessing of Rabbi Yishmael drew good oil from the level of *Ayin* (*Keser*)."

The section of Talmud (Shabbos 89a) that *Rikanati* referred to reads as follows: And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, When Moshe ascended on High he found the Holy One, blessed is He, tying crowns on the letters. He said to him, 'Moshe, does one not give a greeting in your city? He said before Him, "Is there ever a servant who greets his Master?" He said to him, "You should have helped Me." Immediately he said to Him, "And now, please, may Your strength increase as You spoke," (Bamidbar 14). Rashi there explains, "You should have helped Me" by saying "May Your work be successful."

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It appears to our Rabbi to explain that [when Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa told them,] “I said,” he meant that he made this matter heard before the Holy One, blessed is He... “A matter which this righteous man is so concerned about...” And the Holy One, blessed is He, agreed with his words, because it is the way of HASHEM to agree with the reasoning of the righteous of the generation. But when [Rabbi Nechunia’s] son died, Rabbi Chanina was already dead.

In other words, Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa was not a prophet, nor did he have supernatural powers with which to save Rabbi Nechunia’s daughter. However, Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa’s power was that he spoke on behalf of Rabbi Nechunia’s daughter and the Holy One, blessed is He, agreed with the words of the righteous man of the generation. The Heavenly kingdom is like an earthly kingdom. When a person stands to be judged, the prosecuting angel stands to prosecute, and the defending angel stands to defend him. When a righteous person joins with the defending angel, his words can tip the balance of judgment for good. The difference between the first case of Rabbi Nechunia’s daughter when Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa was involved, and the second case when his son died of thirst is explained as follows:

When the incident occurred with Rabbi Nechunia’s daughter, Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa was alive and he interceded with Heaven, so to speak. “How can You, the Holy One, blessed is He, kill the daughter of Rabbi Nechunia in a well of water? Even if she deserves this based on the principles of reward and punishment, it is not reasonable to carry it out. Because Rabbi Nechunia dedicated his life to digging those wells. That is a point in her favor.”

The claim of a righteous person like Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa was heard, “and the Holy One, blessed is He, agreed with his words, because it is the way of HASHEM to agree with the reasoning of the righteous of the generation.”

In contrast, Rabbi Nechunia’s son died of thirst many years later, after Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa had passed away. Due to that, there was nobody who could make that claim before the Holy One, blessed is He. Without the defense, the judgment was decided for punishment. Behold, it is not sufficient for a claim to exist; it requires a good defender who knows how to offer it and make it heard in the right way and at the right time. Similarly, the personality of the defender is important.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁷⁰ The action of the defense angel and its importance is also explained in this way. Certainly, we are believers, the children of believers, that “The Rock, His actions are perfect, and all His

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Indeed, "Death and life are in the tongue," (Mishlei 18:21). For this reason, after the death of Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa, the Heavenly judgment could affect the son of Nechunia, digger of cisterns, and he died of thirst, despite the good claim that could be made in his defense.

This shows that a righteous person cannot change the nature of the world. The order of things is fixed by Heaven based on the principles of reward and punishment. However, a righteous person is compared to a good defense lawyer who by uttering a prayer from the depths of the heart, which is classified as a valid claim, can convince the Judge of all the earth to accept the words of His defending angel. This is the power of prayer and blessing for another.

Standing before a prophet of HASHEM who mentions the one standing before him for good, and similarly the blessing of the priests who are the emissaries of the Merciful One, who bless the Jewish people with love, is a form of entering a plea on behalf of the Jewish people. It is a request from the priest that all these people, who are all beloved and fair, are fitting for blessing and for good influx. The priest has the special power to advocate on behalf of the Jewish people and to make known that they are worthy of receiving the Divine influx from HASHEM for good. From where does the priest derive the power to advocate and be a good mediator for the laypeople? From his role as a servant of HASHEM in the Temple and from the power of the love which the priests are commanded to love the Jewish people.

Based on these words it seems that we can answer the difficulty raised on *Behag's* position very neatly, as follows:

1. The Priestly Blessing is part of communal prayer of the entire Jewish people. Thus, it is clear that this mitzvah is not specifically for the priests, but also for the community to hear the Priestly Blessing, while the priest fulfills their obligation on their behalf (in the words of *Ra'avad*), because

ways are just" (Devarim 32:4). However, when people do not understand with their intellect the attribute of strict justice it can create a situation of desecration of HASHEM's name in the world. When Rabbi Chanina says that according to people's intellect it is not appropriate that the daughter of the one who digs wells should fall into the well that her father dug, there is a claim of desecration of Hashem's name. As Moshe said to Hashem, after the incident of the Golden Calf, "The nations, who have heard of Your reputation will say..." And Hashem answered him, "I have forgiven according to your word," (Bamidbar 14:15). Similarly, when a righteous person says that according to people's intellect it is appropriate to deal with this person with mercy, because he is righteous or because he has a family or some other merit, then he takes into consideration that the goal of judgment is to sanctify His name in the world, and not to desecrate it or to cause its desecration.

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the mitzvah of prayer applies not only to the priests but also to the congregation of laypeople being blessed.

2. This is a communal mitzvah placed on the community, not on the individual being blessed, for the Priestly Blessing is part of the communal prayer and is included in the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei*.
3. We asked, given that the command in the verse related to Aharon and his sons the priest, what is the source which teaches that the mitzvah also applies to the laypeople?
4. The answer is in the verse (Bamidbar 6:22-27):

"HASHEM spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Speak to Aharon and his sons saying, thus shall you bless the Children of Yisrael, say to them: May HASHEM bless you and protect you; May HASHEM shine His face upon you and show you grace; May HASHEM turn His face to you and give you peace.' And they shall place My name on the Children of Yisrael and I will bless them."

From the words, "Say to them" our Rabbis derived that the intent is that there is a need for a new statement to the priests, and therefore they established that the *shaliach tzibur* must read the blessing to the priests. This is an obligation on the community.
5. Now the words of *Behag* are completely clear. According to him, apart from the mitzvah of "raising the hands" which applies to the priests, there is a separate, independent mitzvah called, "the section of the Priestly Blessing" which applies to the community, and is fulfilled when the *shaliach tzibur* "causes" the recital of the blessing by calling the priests and reading the blessing to them word by word.
6. This fits with the explanation of *Chasam Sofer* in his explanation of the words of *Tosafos* in Rosh Hashanah that there is a mitzvah for the laypeople to "say to them," which applies even when the priest has already recited the blessing on that day and fulfilled his obligation. Indeed, this is not a mere passive partnership in the mitzvah of the priest to bless as *Hafla'ah* explained, but rather it is an active mitzvah on the laypeople to request the blessing and to cause the blessing to come to them.
7. Quite the opposite, in the mitzvah of the laypeople asking for the blessing, the priest is the passive vessel to draw this blessing to the Jewish people, because he repeats the words of the layperson who requests the blessing, and the priest only answers the request, word for word.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷¹ *Chasam Sofer* on Parshas Naso §25 adds that not only does the priest receive when he recites the priestly blessing, but he receives it from the laypeople. *Chasam Sofer* cites the words

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It would seem that this is how Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch understood the matter in his commentary to Bamidbar chapter 6, where we find the following most beautiful words:

The Torah says, "Thus shall you bless the Children of Yisrael." "Thus" – as it is written and said, and the *halakha* teaches this in Sotah (38b):

"Thus" – using these words, in Hebrew

While standing – as a servant,

With outstretched arms – with hands raised high as if gesturing to HASHEM, and not with hand stretched out as if about to give – the priests are not the ones giving the blessing,

Face to face and aloud.

The Priestly Blessing does not have a magic power flowing from the priest nor from the wording...

At the end of the matter, "Say to them" as you Moshe command to Aharon and his sons to say the blessing, that is how it should always be performed. Every time you reach the time of the blessing, you should turn to the priests with the request that they bless the people. For if not, they are not obligated, and they have no permission to recite the blessing.

The *shaliach tzibur* who represents the congregation should call to them loudly to bless the people... Even after they answered this call and have already said the first word, he reads the rest of the blessing to them word for word... It turns out that they only say the blessing because it was already said to them by the representative of the congregation being blessed. And according to Rambam (Hilchos Tefillah 14:3) this is also part of the mitzvah of "Say to them."

of Rabbeinu Bachya that the priests received twenty-four priestly gifts and the priestly blessing is the twenty fifth gift. *Chasam Sofer* explains his words that certainly the priestly blessing is part of the Divine service, meaning that when the laypeople hear the words "May you be blessed" from the priests it is considered as if they answered back "May you be blessed" to the priest. "So, it turns out that the priest is doubly blessed -- once from his blessing to the laypeople because anyone who blesses others is blessed, and the second time when the laypeople answer, "May HASHEM bless you," as it were, and the words of a wise man are beautiful.

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The priests who recite the blessing are therefore completely passive, and they are no more than a vessel for the blessing. They only bless once they have been called to do so by the congregation, and they say only the blessing which is called to them in the name of the congregation.

The truth of the matter is that the congregation brings the blessing upon itself which comes from the mouths of the priests at the command of HASHEM.

He continues with his explanation in verse 27 and clarifies that:

It is not the priests who bless the laypeople. The word which comes from their mouths has no power to bless in any place. Rather, their task is to place My name on the Children of Yisrael... Their task is to place the name of HASHEM on the lay people in order that they will be the chariot of the Divine Presence. It is for them to imbue the holy name of HASHEM on all the relationships of the laypeople. It is for them to express that the laypeople look only to HASHEM for every blessing and every protection, for every revelation and every skill, for every burden and every peace. They seek this only from HASHEM...

The priest is designated to be the vessel through which the name of HASHEM is called on the laypeople and the congregation standing to be blessed calls on him to be the vessel for the blessing, and then HASHEM will bless them.

In summary, we have learned that regarding the Priestly Blessing there are three opinions, as follows:

1. The Priestly Blessing is an act of the priest. The mitzvah applies to Aharon and his sons who do the actions. However, the laypeople are the container to receive the blessing of the priest, who cannot bless without someone to bless.
Therefore, the laypeople are included in the mitzvah of the priests, just as a widowed sister-in-law is included in the mitzvah of levirate marriage.
This opinion is the view of *Sefer Charedim* according to the explanation of *Hafla'ah*.
We saw the opinion of *Ritva* that "there is no obligation for the laypeople to be blessed," and that this is a mitzvah solely for the priest. *Dvar Avraham* explains that *Ritva* holds like the opinion of *Hafla'ah* that the laypeople are only included in it and helps fulfill it. The laypeople

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have a passive mitzvah, like someone who joins in the blessing of the priest, but he has no positive mitzvah of his own. Therefore, if there is no priest, the laypeople have no need to search for a priest to give the blessing.

2. The Priestly Blessing is a joint act between the priest who recites the blessing and the layperson who receives it. " 'Thus shall you bless' – like a person speaking with his friend." This refers to a joint mitzvah of the priest and the layperson.

This is the opinion of Rabbi Nachum Treibitz based on the words of the Zohar according to which the priest and the layperson come together and are both included in the mutual love. Without this love, the priest may not recite the blessing.

3. In the Priestly Blessing there are two separate mitzvos. One is for the priest and the other for the layperson.

This is the view of *Behag* who defines the mitzvah for the priest as "raising hands," yet he also counts a separate mitzvah that applies to the community which he defines as "the Priestly Blessing." This is a different, separate mitzvah placed on the community that hears the blessing.

We saw that *Chasam Sofer* explains the words of *Tosafos* in Rosh Hashanah that there is a separate mitzvah for the layperson to be blessed, which applies even if the priest has already fulfilled his obligation and blessed a different congregation on that same day. Similarly, we find that *Ra'avad* wrote that a priest fulfills the obligation of the layperson, which implies that laypeople have an independent obligation of their own.

We explained the opinion of *Behag* based on the fact that the Priestly Blessing is part of the mitzvah of prayer, and as prayer it is a communal mitzvah. The Priestly Blessing is actually the prayer of the priests and it is a component of the repetition of the *shaliach tzibur* and the service of prayer said by the community.

This mitzvah of the community to receive the blessing is for the *shaliach tzibur* to invite the priest to recite the blessing and call it to him word by word. In this act the laypeople are not passive at all and are not a vessel to receive the blessing. They cannot even be defined as only a partner in the blessing of the priest. Rather the laypeople have an independent function of their own, which stands on its own, to bring the blessing on themselves. They do this by requesting it and in this way understanding that nothing be done in our world by itself, by the power of cause and effect between a person's action and the outcome. Rather, everything comes from HASHEM and a person can only make an effort but cannot change anything. Once a person understands this,

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the recognition of the need to be blessed by HASHEM will immediately awaken within him. This recognition of the necessity of the blessing is indeed a complete act of faith, which is the preparation of the one receiving the blessing in order that he should receive the blessing from HASHEM. This act is an important and essential positive mitzvah for the laypeople receiving the blessing, which is included in the verse, " Say to them." It expresses the essence of the Priestly Blessing.

Chapter 10 – *Kaddish*

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'I Shall Be Magnified and Sanctified and Made Known To The Eyes Of Many Nations, And They Shall Know That I Am HASHEM,' (Yechezkel 38:23)

The *kaddish* prayer begins with a request for the fulfilment of this verse from the prophet Yechezkel about the future, on the day when Gog comes against the land of Yisrael. It appears to be just another prayer for the complete redemption that we pray for in the *Shemoneh Esrei* in several blessings. However, if we look more carefully we see that this is not a general prayer for redemption. This verse was said in the framework of the description of the war of Gog and Magog and the execution of judgment against the nations. This component is not the peak of the redemption. Perhaps it is even permitted to say that this is the part we are least looking forward to, because several sages in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 98b) said about it, "May it come, but let me not see it."

It is more probable that this prayer is more focused and directed to the verse itself, and to the ultimate goal that will happen on that day, which is the magnification and sanctification of the name of HASHEM on that day.

The call for magnifying and sanctifying the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, is stated at the beginning of the *kaddish* by the *shaliach tzibur*, and at the summit of *kaddish* everyone joins in this call as the congregation says, "May His great name be blessed forever and ever."

The importance of *kaddish* in the framework of prayer is seen from the fact that every prayer of the day opens and closes with *kaddish* -- sometimes even more than one *kaddish*. *Kaddish* is therefore built into the essence of prayer. We must understand its importance and why it was specifically chosen to provide the framework for prayer. The significance of *kaddish* is also apparent from the fact that the *kaddish* prayer is recited at other events in daily life, such as the conclusion of Torah learning, at a *bris milah*, at a funeral, and other times.

As we shall see below, the *halakhic* authorities also ascribed great importance to reciting *kaddish* and the congregation's response of "May His great name..." Additionally, many people who are distant from keeping Torah and mitzvos nevertheless strive to recite *kaddish* after the death of a relative.

The uniqueness of the *kaddish* prayer and its great importance is seen also in the tremendous power attributed to it, for the community and for the individual, in the words of our Rabbis.

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For the community: We find a description of in Sotah (48a) which says: Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says that Rabbi Yehoshua testified, "From the day the Temple was destroyed there is not a day without a curse." The Talmud explains (ibid. 49a): Rava said: Every day's curse is greater than that of the day before, as the verse states, "In the morning you will say, 'If only it was evening,' and in the evening you will say, 'If only it was morning,'" (Devarim 28:67).

The Talmud asks, "So what keeps the world in existence?" And it answers, "The *kedusha* recited in the *Uva Letzion* prayer *in shacharis* and recital of "May His great name..." which is recited after learning *Agadda*.⁴⁷²

It turns out that on days of difficulty and suffering the world stands in the merit of reciting *kaddish*.

For the individual: We find its importance in Shabbos (119b): Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "Anyone who recites 'Amen, May His great name be blessed...' with all his might, destroys the evil decree." Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said that Rabbi Yochanan said "Even if he has a smear of idolatry, they forgive him." ... Reish Lakish said, "If one answers 'Amen' with all his might, the gates of the Garden of Eden are opened for him."

What is the importance of this prayer and what is it about its recital that causes the evil decree to be destroyed? How is it possible that a decree which was decreed against a person based on his actions, as a result of Heavenly principles of reward and punishment, would be annulled in an instant just because that person expresses verbally the words, "May His great name be blessed..."? Why does this have greater power than the serious sin of one who has a smear of idolatry? And how can we merit through its recital to open the gates of the Garden of Eden?

Similarly, we must understand the value of reciting it "with all one's might." It makes sense according to Rashi, who explains there that the phrase means "with full intent." However, *Tosafos* there point out that "Rabbeinu Yitzchak says that in the *Pesikta* there is an incident of Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha... When the Jews enter the Synagogues and recite, "May His great name be blessed..." in a loud voice, harsh decrees are annulled." Thus, according to *Tosafos*, the phrase, "With all one's might," means "loudly." What is there in

⁴⁷² Rashi there explains that, "The Aggada expounded upon by the homilist in the weekly sermon. Every Shabbos was their custom that all the people would gather to hear him because it was not a work day. This constituted both Torah (in the sermon) and the sanctification of HASHEM's name (in the *kaddish* prayer)."

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this vocal announcement which annuls a person's decree? And what does saying it loudly add to the recital itself? Is saying it loudly different than saying it quietly? Why is it important to say these words loudly?

Reciting *kaddish* is important not only in general and for individuals, but also, as it were, for the Holy One, blessed is He. In Berachos (3a) we find:

It was taught. Rabbi Yossi said: Once I was walking along the road, and I entered one of the ruins of Jerusalem to pray. Eliyahu, of blessed memory, came and waited for me at the entrance until I had completed my prayer. After I finished my prayer he said to me, "Peace be upon you my Rabbi." I answered him, "Peace be upon you, my Rabbi and teacher." He said to me, "My son, why did you enter this ruin?" I said to him, "To pray." He said to me, "You should have prayed on the road." I said to him, "I was afraid lest I be interrupted by passers-by." He said to me, "You should have prayed a short prayer." At that moment I learned from him three things. I learned that one may not enter a ruin, I learned that one may pray on the road, and I learned that one who prays on the road should recite a short prayer.

He said to me, "My son, what voice did you hear in that ruin?" I said to him, "I heard a Heavenly voice that whimpered like a dove and said, 'Woe to those children who, due to their sins, I destroyed My house and burned My sanctuary and exiled them among the nations.'" He said to me, "By your life and the life of your head, not only at that time does it say this, but every day, three times it says so. And not only that, but when the Jews enter the Synagogues and Houses of Study and answer 'May His great name be blessed' the Holy One, blessed is He, nods his head and says, 'Fortunate is the King Whom they praise thus in His house. What did a Father see fit that caused Him to exile His children? And woe to those children who were exiled from their Father's table.'"

This teaches that the Holy One, blessed is He, values very much the fact that His children enter the Synagogues and Houses of Study and praise His great name and say, "May His great name be blessed."

The question begging to be asked is – Why is it important to the Holy One, blessed is He, in His Glory, that they praise His name, and he even nods His head, as it were, to the hearing of this praise? In general, what is the value of reciting praise to the great name of HASHEM? Does the Master of the Universe need a person -- who is as nothing compared to Him -- to praise His great name?

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Why is it important that “May His great name...” be recited specifically in the Synagogues and Houses of Study? Such that the Talmud points out, “Fortunate is the King Whom they praise thus in His house?” Why is the Holy One, blessed is He, as it were, pained over the exile of His children specifically at that time when he hears this praise being recited?

The *kaddish* prayer requires deep contemplation, regarding its meaning and essence, and with regard to understanding its tremendous importance given to it both for the community and for individuals, and also for the Holy One, blessed is He, Himself, and in regard to its role in prayer and the way in which it is recited (specifically aloud, in Synagogues and Houses of Study). Let us try to understand the uniqueness of *kaddish* as the framework (marking the beginning and end) of the mitzvah of prayer in its entirety.

‘May His Great Name’

“May His Name Be Great and Blessed” Or “May His Great Name Be Blessed”?

It seems that the basis of the focus of the *kaddish* prayer when we request that the name of HASHEM should be blessed comes from the book of Daniel (2:20): “Daniel spoke and said, ‘Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and strength are His.’” Similarly, we find in Tehillim, “May the name of HASHEM be blessed from now and forever,” (113:2).

However, when we recite *kaddish* we add a word which is not found in the verse in Daniel. We say, “May his name be great” – in other words, there is some acknowledgement of the greatness of the name of HASHEM. *Tosafos* in Berachos (3a s.v. “*ve’onin yehei shmei hagadol mevorach*”) cite the explanation of *Machzor Vitri* who maintains that according to the correct punctuation of this prayer it should be translated as: “May His name become great.” In other words, it is a prayer that the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, should become “great,” that is “complete.”⁴⁷³

⁴⁷³ *Tosafos* quote *Machzor Vitri* when attacking his explanation. *Tosafos* state that the wording of the Talmud, “They answer, ‘May His great name be blessed’” disproves the explanation of *Machzor Vitri* that, “*yehei shmei raba*” is a prayer that we recite that His name should be made whole, as the verse states, “For the hand is on the throne (spelled without an *alef*) of God (spelled with only two letters – *yud hei*).” The missing letters signify that His name will not be complete, nor his throne complete, until the descendants of Amalek will be wiped out. Thus, the explanation of *yehei shmei* is that *shmei*, which can also be read as “*shem Yah*”, or “the name of HASHEM, means, “May – the name of HASHEM, be great.” In other words, we pray

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According to this explanation we have here a prayer which precedes the request that HASHEM should be blessed eternally, and that is the request that the name of HASHEM should be greater than it is now. We pray for the completion of HASHEM's name because today His name is incomplete. As it is written, "For the hand is on the throne of God," (Shemos 17:16). The word "throne" (*kiseh*) is written incompletely (*kes*) and the Tetragrammaton is written with only two letters (*Yah*). Our Rabbis therefore explained the verse as an oath expressed by HASHEM that His name would not be complete nor His throne complete until the descendants of Amalek are wiped out.

Accordingly, there are two prayers in the recital of *kaddish*:

1. "May His name" – the name of HASHEM – "become great" – in other words we pray that His name should become great and complete.
2. "Blessed forever" – this is a separate prayer that the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, be blessed for the World to Come.⁴⁷⁴

that His name should be great and whole. And "blessed forever," is a separate prayer, meaning it should be blessed in the World to Come

⁴⁷⁴ It seems that the source for the words of *Machzor Vitri* is in the words of his teacher, Rashi, who wrote in *Sefer Hapardes* (p. 326) under the heading, "Explanation of *Kaddish*": "May He be great and may He be sanctified," is based on the verse, "And I shall be made great and I shall be sanctified, and I will be known in the eyes of the many nations, and they will know that I am HASHEM," (Yechezkel 38:23). How can a person make the name of HASHEM great? Perhaps, Heaven forbid, God lacks something? Yes, He certainly does lack something. As the verse states, "For the hand is on the throne of God." The Holy One, blessed is He, swore that His throne would not be complete until the descendants of Amalek will be wiped out. And similarly, regarding His name, *yud-heh-vav-heh*, when the verse states, "throne of God," it only uses half the letters of the name. Similarly, the throne (" *kiseh* ") is called only " *kes* ". They are both lacking letters. Therefore, we pray, "May He be great, and may He be sanctified." In other words, may it be the will before the One who spoke, and the world came into existence that He redeem us from among the nations and wipe out the descendants of Amalek so that His name will be sanctified to become complete."

This explanation is cited in *Tur, Orach Chayim* §56: "May He be great and may He be sanctified," is based on the verse, "And I shall be made great and I shall be sanctified," (Yechezkel 38:23) which refers to the war of Gog and Magog [at the end of days] when the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, shall become great, as the verse states, "On that day HASHEM will be one and His name will be one," (Zechariah 14:9). "His great name" – some explain the name " *Yah* " should be great. We pray that the name " *Yah* " which is not whole should be made great and sanctified and return to become complete. This refers to the time of the redemption, when He will wreak His revenge on Amalek. For He swore that His name will not be whole until He has wreaked His revenge on Amalek, as the verse states, "For the hand is on the throne of HASHEM." The throne will not be complete, and the Name will not be complete until He has wreaked revenge on him. Then the name will be whole and also the throne. As the verse (Tehillim 9:7-8) states, "Oh enemy, the destroyed places are ended forever," and it continues, "Then HASHEM shall forever dwell; ready for judgment is His throne," then the name and the throne will be whole.

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Tosafos disagree with the explanation of *Machzor Vitri* and point out that this is not a prayer that the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, become great. The correct way of reading *kaddish* is: "May His great name be blessed forever and ever." The expression "Great name" is read together and refers to the great name of the Holy One, blessed is He, as a given. This teaches that His greatness is constant and does not require prayer. The prayer the person recites is therefore only one -- that this name of the Holy One, blessed is He, should be blessed forever. *Tosafos* demonstrate this from the wording of the Talmud which cites the prayer in Hebrew as, "May his great name be blessed."⁴⁷⁵

The dispute between *Tosafos* and *Machzor Vitri* is thus, whether the *kaddish* is only a prayer that God's name be blessed forever, or whether it is also a prayer that the name of HASHEM be magnified and made whole.

One can challenge *Tosafos's* explanation, because if it is not a prayer that the name of HASHEM be magnified, why is the wording of *kaddish* different than the verse in Daniel or in Tehillim which do not mention the greatness of HASHEM's name at all? Why does *kaddish* mention that "His great name should be blessed" in place of the words, "May the name of HASHEM be blessed forever"? What is the meaning of saying the word "great" if *kaddish* does not include a prayer that the name be made great?

On the other hand, the explanation of *Machzor Vitri* raises a fundamental question. We asked earlier, how can a person bless God, Who has all the powers, and everything exists by His word? According to the explanation of *Machzor Vitri* this question is even sharper because according to him the person actually prays for God that His name be made whole. What does it mean for a person to pray for the name of HASHEM to be made whole? Perhaps one could say that we pray that HASHEM should redeem us from among the nations of the world, and erase the memory of Amalek, and through this to sanctify His name to be complete. If this is a prayer for the redemption of the Jewish people and erasing the memory of Amalek, why is the prayer not simply expressed clearly in those words? And if the intent is really for the name of HASHEM, it is difficult to understand – does HASHEM require the prayer of people so that His great name will be whole? Let us try to understand why the completeness of HASHEM's name is contingent on the destruction of Amalek, and what the concept of

⁴⁷⁵ In the words of *Tosafos*: The explanation of *Machzor Vitri*... does not appear correct, since it says here (in the section of Talmud we are discussing), "May His great name be blessed." This implies that it is a single prayer. It does not mean that His name should be whole, but rather that His great name should be blessed.

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“complete name” actually means. Is a name not a name? What does it mean to have half a name or a whole name?

Tosafos there continue discussing why the *kaddish* prayer is recited in Aramaic, and they say:

Furthermore, what people say-- that we recite *kaddish* in Aramaic, because it is a beautiful prayer with great praise and therefore it was established in Aramaic so that the angels would not understand and be jealous of us⁴⁷⁶ -- does not appear correct, because there are many beautiful prayers which are in Hebrew.

Rather, the correct reason appears to be according to what we said at the end of Sotah (49a) that the world only exists due to reciting *kedusha* and “May His great name...” which is recited after learning *Aggadata*. They were accustomed to recite *kaddish* after the lesson. The people there were not educated, who did not necessarily understand Hebrew. Therefore, they established that it be recited in Aramaic, so that everyone could understand for that was the vernacular

The words of *Tosafos* that one cannot explain that *kaddish* is recited in Aramaic because it is a beautiful prayer with great praise... because there are many beautiful prayers which are in Hebrew,” requires explanation. Firstly, even *Tosafos* themselves cite the statement that, “The world only exists due to the recital of *kedusha* and *kaddish*.” This implies that *kaddish* is on a higher level than other prayers. Secondly, the comparison between *kaddish* and the other prayers is contradicted by many other sources which say that *kaddish* is the loftiest of all the prayers:

1. In that Talmudic discussion we find that the recital of “May His name be great” is considered a unique and exceptional praise which causes HASHEM to nod His head when he hears that praise recited, something which we do not find in relation to the rest of the prayers.
2. In Berachos (21b) we find a discussion as to whether a person can stop in the middle of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer to answer, “Amen, may His great name be blessed.” It says:
They asked: What is the *halakha* regarding stopping [during the *Shemoneh Esrei*] for “May His great name be blessed?” When Rav Dimi

⁴⁷⁶ Similarly, we find in Rashi's *Sefer Hapardes*: If a person asks why it is in Aramaic, the answer is so that the ministering angels should not be aware that the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, is lacking, lest they destroy the world. Therefore, we recite it in Aramaic because they only understand Hebrew.

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came he said [that] Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Shimon, the students of Rabbi Yochanan said, "For everything [every other praise, such as "Blessed is HASHEM" or *kedusha*] one does not stop [during the *Shemoneh Esrei*] except for, "May His great name be blessed," for which, even if one is involved in the [Kabbalistic secrets of the] Heavenly chariot, he interrupts. But the *halakha* is not like his opinion.

Indeed, the *halakha* is not in accordance with Rabbi Yochanan's opinion, who says that one interrupts his *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer to answer, "Amen, may His great name..." Nevertheless, we learn that this prayer is not like all other praises of HASHEM, but is unique, for it is the only one for which the question arises at all as to whether to interrupt in order to recite it during the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Magen Avraham (on *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 56:1) points out (in the name of *Be'er Sheva* §31) that the Talmud's question of whether to interrupt during the *Shemoneh Esrei* to answer, "Amen, May His great name...", while for other prayers including "We give thanks" and *kedusha* it is clear that one does not interrupt during the *Shemoneh Esrei* teaches us that the mitzvah of answering, "Amen, may His great name" is greater than reciting *kedusha* or "we give thanks." Rabbi Shabtai Yonah (*Shai Lamoreh* §9) wrote similarly.

If so, how can *Tosafos* compare *kaddish* with other prayers which are recited in Hebrew when the *kaddish* prayer is more important and loftier than those prayers? It seems that *Tosafos* did not come to minimize the importance of *kaddish*, but rather to bring evidence that even beautiful prayers can be recited in Hebrew and there is no reason for the angels to become jealous.

This is implicit in the *kaddish* prayer itself which is a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic. For we say, "May He be blessed and praised and made glorious..." and the beginning of *kaddish*, "May His great name be magnified and sanctified" are in Hebrew (see *Sefer Hapardes, Beis Yosef* and *Mishna Berura* 56:2). If so, it is clear that the discussion is primarily about the congregation's recital of the words, "May His name be great...", which was instituted in Aramaic for some reason.

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‘For I Will Call the Name of HASHEM, Ascribe Greatness to Our God’

In the introduction to the book *Ohr Yescharim*⁴⁷⁷ these questions are raised, and due to them he reaches the following approach.

1. In the Mishna (Yoma 35b) we find that on Yom Kippur, when the High Priest mentioned the name of HASHEM in his confession, those who heard him would answer, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever." This is a general *halakha* that in the Temple the people would not answer "Amen" to blessings, but "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever."⁴⁷⁸ The Talmud (Yoma 37a) points out the source for this: It was taught, Rabbi [Yehuda Hanasi] says, "When I will call the name of HASHEM, ascribe greatness to our God." Moshe said to the Jewish people, "When I mention the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, You should ascribe greatness." If so, when magnifying the name of HASHEM, they used the praise, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom."
2. This implies that the concept of "May His name be great" is comparable to the concept of "blessed – may it be increased – the name of His glorious kingdom."⁴⁷⁹
3. In relation to the concept, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom" the words of *Tur* (*Orach Chayim* §619) are well known: In Germany the custom is to recite, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever" aloud (on Yom Kippur) and they base this on the *Midrash Rabba* (Parshas Va'eschanan): "When Moshe ascended

⁴⁷⁷ Rabbi Yechiel Heller (author of *Responsa Amudei Ohr*) in his book *Ohr Yescharim* on the Pesach Haggadah.

⁴⁷⁸ So, for example, we find in Rambam (*Hilchos Ta'aniyos* 4:15): When they would pray in this order in Jerusalem they would enter the Temple Mount... and when the *shaliach tzibur* came to say... "Blessed are You, who redeems Yisrael," they would answer, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever."

⁴⁷⁹ Look below that this is how Targum Yerushalmi substitutes the sentence of "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever" with the sentence of "May His great name be blessed forever and ever." Indeed, let us compare the two sentences:

Blessed is (ברוך)	be blessed (מברך)
the name (שם)	His name (שמייה)
of His glorious kingdom (כבוד מלכותו)	be great (רבא)
forever (לעולם)	forever (לעלם)
and ever (ועד)	and forever (ולעלמי עלמיא)

They are the same!

to Heaven he heard the ministering angels praising the Holy One, blessed is He, 'Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever' and he brought it down to the Jewish people." To what can this be compared? To a person who steals a beautiful item from the king's palace and gives it to his wife. He says to her, "Do not wear this except in private, inside the house." Therefore, all year long we say it silently. But on Yom Kippur we say it aloud because we are like angels.⁴⁸⁰

4. If so, it is clear that one may not recite the words, "May His great name" in Hebrew, because that would be like saying, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom" and these are words which may not be recited aloud, lest the angels hear. Because this is praise which originally belonged to them, and the wording is appropriate for them. Moshe "stole" it from them. Therefore, since one must recite, "Amen, may His great name" in a loud voice, it must be said in Aramaic so that the angels do not understand.⁴⁸¹
5. Along similar lines we can understand the words of the Talmud that when Yisrael recite "May His great name..." the Holy One, blessed is He, remembers the destruction and says "Fortunate is the King Whom they praise thus in His house. What did a Father see fit that caused Him to exile His children? And woe to those children who were exiled from their Father's table." Nowadays, in the minor sanctuary of the Synagogue, these words are recited in Aramaic in order that the angels

⁴⁸⁰ It seems that perhaps the meaning of the matter is this: The prayer, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever" refers to the concept of eternity. How can a person, carved from matter, whose days number seventy years, or with strength eighty years, describe the name of HASHEM in terms of eternity? Therefore, this text of praise is appropriate for the angels and not for people. For this reason, we say it silently throughout the year. Because if not, it would be too depressing for a person to confront his physical temporality. Only on Yom Kippur, when a person is purified from his sins and removes from himself the physicality which causes his end, can a person say this aloud. We may also distinguish between reciting these words as a prayer, which is possible from the side of humanity, but not as praise or an expression of what is before him, for a person cannot speak in terms of eternity. Another answer is offered by Rabbi Eliyahu Munk, in his book *The World of Prayer* where he explains that the Jewish people were commanded to establish the kingdom of HASHEM and to overpower the evil in the world. So, it is not praise of the Jewish people when they pray for what they are supposed to accomplish. Therefore, they recite it in Aramaic, which is a more profane language, to allude to the fact that they request that the Divine Presence and holiness will complete their mundane lives and grant them through this to achieve the goal of sanctifying the name of HASHEM throughout the world.

⁴⁸¹ In contrast, see the Zohar on Parshas Terumah 129b that one should recite *kaddish* in Aramaic, because that is the language of the other side. We must respond, "Amen, may His name be great," in a strong voice in order to break the other side – in its own language. And elevate the Holy One, blessed is He, in His glory over all the worlds through destroying the power of the husks that the evil inclination distributed through them.

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should not understand, "May His great name..." or as a prayer and a request, according to *Machzor Vitri*. But in the major sanctuary of the Temple these words were recited aloud, publicly in Hebrew, as praise, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever."

In Pesachim (56a) we find that when Yaakov summoned his sons and said to them, "Gather and I will tell you that which will happen to you at the end of days." – Yaakov wanted to reveal to his sons the end of days, but the Divine Presence departed from him. He said, "Lest, Heaven forbid, there is some blemish in [the descendants of] my bed, like Avraham, from whom Yishmael descended, or my father Yitzchak, from whom Esav descended." His sons said to him, "Hear, Yisrael, HASHEM is our God, HASHEM is one." They said, "Just as in your heart there is only one, so too in our hearts there is only one." At that moment, Yaakov declared, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever."

1. These words of our Rabbis are also brought in the Targum Yerushalmi (in Aramaic) at the beginning of Bereishis chapter 49. There it says: The twelve tribes of Yaakov gathered around the golden bed on which our father Yaakov was lying. They asked that he teach them when the end of blessings and consolations will be. But the secret that had been revealed to him was hidden from him... Our father Yaakov answered and said to them, "Avraham, my father's father, had a blemish that Yishmael, and all the children of Keturah descended from him. Yitzchak, my father, had a blemish in Esav, my brother. I am afraid that there should not be anyone among you whose heart disagrees with his brothers to go and pray before other gods. The twelve tribes of Yaakov all answered as one and said, "Hear us, Yisrael our father, HASHEM is our God, HASHEM is one." Yaakov our father answered and said, "May His great name be blessed forever and ever."
2. Behold, the words cited in the Talmud, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever" are translated by Targum Yerushalmi as "May His great name be blessed forever and ever." The words of *Ohr Yesharim* are precise and clearly maintained by the words of Targum Yerushalmi.

Following the approach of *Ohr Yesharim* we understand that after the destruction of the Temple, the Holy One, blessed is He, is upset, as it were, when the *kaddish* is recited, because *kaddish* reminds Him of the public, explicit recitation that was said in the Temple about the greatness of His name.

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Now we also have an explanation as to why the Men of the Great Assembly inserted the *kaddish* into the text of communal prayer. Based on what we explained in previous chapters, communal prayer was established in place of the Temple service, in keeping with the verse, "We will render bullocks with our lips," (Hoshea 14:3). In the Temple service the priests would bless using the explicit name of God and the people would answer after them, "May the name of His glorious kingdom be blessed forever and ever." From the time the Temple was destroyed they ceased praising Him with the explicit name, as Rashi explains in Eruvin (18b): "From the day the Temple was destroyed the priests ceased blessing with the explicit name, as the Talmud states (Hagigah 16a) that they would bless using the explicit name. It is sufficient for the world to use the two-letter name, whether for offering praise before God or for people to bless one another. As the verse states, "Every soul shall bless God (*Yah*)," (Tehillim 150:6). In other words, this is the name that every soul is worthy to use, implying that the four-letter name and the explicit name cannot be used by every soul, but only by the priests, as the verse states, "And bless in His name," (Devarim 10:8). And it states, "They shall place My name," (Bamidbar 6:27) – this refers to My special name. In reciting *kaddish* and answering, "Amen, may His great name...", our Rabbis replaced this great praise that the people would offer when they heard the great name uttered by the priests in their Temple service.

From here we also begin to understand that this praise is something which must be recited in the microcosm of the Temple, the Synagogue. The Synagogue takes the place of the Temple as known that from the day that the Temple was destroyed, the Synagogue is all that is left for HASHEM in His world. Even though it is possible to recite the *kaddish* with ten men, because the Divine Presence is among them, it is certainly preferable to say it with a large community, like the Temple service.

Our Rabbis also explained in *Midrash Mishlei* (Buber: *Parshah* 14:28) on the verse, "In the multitude of people is the splendor of the King." Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said, "Come and see the praise and greatness of the Holy One, blessed is He, for even though there are thousands of thousand and myriads of myriads of groups of ministering angels who serve Him and praise Him, he does not want their praise, but rather the praise of Yisrael, as the verse states, "In the multitude of people is the splendor of the King." And "people" can only mean the Jewish people, as the verse states, "This people I formed for Me; they will relate My praise," (Yishaya 43:21) meaning, in order that they relate My praise in the world. Likewise, it says, "The great among the people gathered, the people of the God of

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Avraham, for the shields of the earth belong to HASHEM, He is exceedingly exalted," (Tehillim 47:10). Rabbi Simon says: When is the Holy One, blessed is He, exalted in His world? When the Jewish people gather in their Synagogues and Houses of Study and offer praise before their Creator. Rabbi Yishmael says, "When the Jews gather in their Houses of Study and hear *Aggadata* from a wise teacher, and afterwards answer, "Amen, may His great name be blessed." At that moment the Holy One, blessed is He, rejoices and is exalted in His world, and says to His ministering angels, "Come and see this people who I formed in My world, how they praise Me." At that time, they dress Him in glory and splendor. For this reason, the verse states, "In the multitude of people is the splendor of the King."

Kaddish: The Act of Sanctifying HASHEM

We must still explain the essence of this prayer to magnify His name. Why does the Holy One, blessed is He, require us to pray for His name to be magnified? How is this prayer connected to His abbreviated name and the redemption?

Let us try to answer this while thinking about the popular name for the prayer, "*kaddish*." We pray that the name of HASHEM should be blessed, and some say that it should also be complete. But the name of the prayer is *kaddish* meaning "sanctity."

To answer this question, let us first examine another difficulty that comes from the fact that there is a special concept of reciting *kaddish* when a person suffers a bereavement.⁴⁸² Why is *kaddish* recited specifically when a person is mourning and in pain over the loss of one of his relatives? Mourning is a personal issue, even an intimate one, when a person withdraws into his pain and experiences his own private, personal pain and his aloneness. What does this have to do with a prayer for the name of the Holy One, blessed is He?

Rabbi Tukachinsky in *Gesher Hachayim* (vol. 1 chapter 30 section 4; p. 268) brings an explanation that the *kaddish* is similar to *tziduk hadin*, admitting HASHEM's justice after suffering a bereavement. In his bitterness and depression, a mourner may question HASHEM's justice, but when he recites

⁴⁸² In *Pardes Yosef* (Shemos 35:3) many sources for why mourners recite *kaddish* are brought. Among them are *Maseches Sofrim* 19:9; *Zohar Parshas Noach* 62b and *Zohar Parshas Vayechi* 238b; *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 132:2 and *Yoreh De'a* 376:4; Rabbi Yitzchak Abuhav *Menoras Hama'or* 1:1:2:2; *Tanna Devei Eliyahu Zuta* chapter 20; *Rivash* §115; *Kol Bo* §114; *Rabbeinu Bachaye* at the end of *Parshas Shoftim*; and the introduction to the book *Yesh Nochalin* (9).

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kaddish he accepts the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, that all His judgements are true and just. Admitting HASHEM's justice sanctifies His name. Thus, the *kaddish* is directed at the mourner and not the deceased. However, even if *kaddish* is an act of admitting HASHEM's true justice, we have other prayers in which a person proclaims HASHEM's justice explicitly and clearly. Why should we only allude to it in *kaddish*. Furthermore, if the purpose is for the mourner and not for the deceased, it is not clear why he must continue to recite *kaddish* for eleven months. Similarly, in the Zohar, and in books of *halakha* we find that reciting *kaddish* gives benefit to the deceased himself and is not only for his children. For example:

1. *Beis Yosef* (on *Tur*, *Yoreh De'a* 376) brings the words of *Kol Bo*:
"Regarding the *aggadic* statement that once a certain Rabbi met someone who was gathering wood... He said to him, "There is no one who can save me unless my son recites one *kaddish* or recites the *Haftara*." Based on this it became the widespread custom for a son of the deceased to recite *kaddish* after prayers for twelve months (from the time of the death) and to recite the *Haftara*. Some lead the evening service every Saturday night, because at that time the wicked return to Gehinom and it is possible that the prayer will protect them. This incident is recorded in the Zohar [Chadash] vol. 1 (Torah) on Parshas Acharei Mos p. 81a."
2. In Zohar (ibid.) we find:
Come and see, a person was walking between the mountains of Ararat, he and two other wise men with him. He saw pits and rifts in the ground out of which fire and smoke were rising. He heard one man crying and groaning. That person said, "Certainly this is one of the places of Gehinom."

That person fell asleep there. He saw in a dream a certain man and a haystack of thorns on the man's shoulders, and two appointees of Gehinom placing fire under the thorns that were on him, and he was being burned and shouting out in his pain...

(The man dreaming) asked him if he had a son left in the world. He replied that he had left a youngster in the world... When the man awoke he went and traveled to Upper Galilee and asked someone if he had seen a youngster who was the son of the butcher who had died at such-and-such a time. He replied that this child he was asking about hangs out in the slaughter house and he was as wicked as his father. The man went to the slaughter house and saw that child playing there with youths. He said to him, "My son, come with me." He went with

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him, dressed him, and gave him a teacher to teach him Torah until that child grew and knew how to learn Scripture. He taught him to recite the *Haftarah* in the Synagogue and how to lead the prayer service. He taught him more until he became a sage and received the title "Rabbi."

The deceased man appeared to the wise man in a dream and said to him, "Rabbi, May HASHEM have mercy on you just as you had mercy on me. At the time my son recited the *Haftarah* in the congregation, he exempted me from the judgement of Gehinom. When he led the community in prayer and recited *kaddish*, they tore up my sentence completely. And when he became a Torah scholar, they gave me a portion in the Garden of Eden. This is the portion of the World to Come that every single righteous person has for himself and he raised me to sit with the righteous in their yeshiva."⁴⁸³

⁴⁸³ Rabbi Yitzchak Abuhab in *Menoras Hama'or* (1:1:2:1) similarly writes, "There was an incident with Rabbi Akiva who was walking in a cemetery when he met a certain man who was as black as coal. He was carrying wood on his shoulders and running with them like a horse. Rabbi Akiva decreed upon him to stop. He said to him, 'My son, why do you have such difficult labor? If you are a slave and your master gave you such a heavy burden I will redeem you from him and free you. And if you are poor, I will make you rich.' He said to him, 'Leave me be, my master, because I am unable to stop.'... He said to him, 'I am dead, and every day they place a task on me to cut wood and then burn me on the firewood.' [Rabbi Akiva] said to him, 'What was your job when you were alive?' He replied, 'I was a tax collector and I would show favor to the rich and kill the poor. And furthermore, I raped a betrothed maiden on Yom Kippur.' [Rabbi Akiva] said to him, 'My son, have you heard from those who oversee you if there is any way to correct this?' He replied, 'Do not detain me. Perhaps the masters of suffering will get angry with me.... I heard from those in charge who say, 'If you would have a son who would stand in public and say, "Blessed is HASHEM who is to be blessed," they would free me from the punishment. But I have no son. However, I left my wife pregnant, but I do not know if she gave birth to a son or a daughter. And if she gave birth to a son, who would teach him Torah?' [Rabbi Akiva] asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'Akiva.' And what is your wife's name?' He replied, 'Shomirah.' 'And the name of your city?' He replied, 'Alduka.'

At that moment Rabbi Akiva took pity on him and went from city to city until he found his city. He asked where his home was. They said, 'Let his bones rot in Gehinom.' He asked after his wife. They said, 'May her name and memory be blotted out from the world.' He asked after his son. They said, 'He is uncircumcised – they did not even fulfill the mitzvah of *bris milah*.'

Immediately Rabbi Akiva grabbed the son and circumcised him. He sat him down to teach him Torah, but he would not learn, until he fasted for him for forty days. A voice came out of Heaven and said, 'Are you fasting for this one?' He said, 'Yes.' He taught him aleph, beis, until he took him to his home and taught him Grace after meals, the recital of *Shema* and the *Shemoneh Esrei*, and stood him before the community where he recited, 'Blessed is HASHEM who is to be blessed forever and ever.' At that moment they released [the father] from his suffering. That man appeared in a dream and said to him, 'Akiva, may you rest in the Garden

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The question is asked: Why is it so important to recite *kaddish* for the deceased, to the extent that it can mitigate his sentence even after he transgressed such serious sins?⁴⁸⁴

An additional reason for reciting *kaddish* brought in *Gesher Hachayim* (ibid.) brings us closer to the holiness hidden within it. Through *kaddish*, "His great name is sanctified in the supernal worlds and atones for all the sins of desecration of His name, which is more serious than anything else. For the Talmud (Yoma 86a) says that there are four types of atonement: 1. A person who transgressed a positive mitzvah – his repentance atones immediately. 2. A person who transgressed a negative mitzvah – his repentance suspends judgement and Yom Kippur atones. 3. If he transgressed a negative mitzvah for which one is liable to the Heavenly or earthly death penalty – his repentance and Yom Kippur suspend his punishment and suffering removes it. 4. If he desecrated HASHEM's name – repentance, Yom Kippur and suffering all suspend his punishment and his death removes it. Perhaps the deceased did not merit to repent. If so, his son reciting *kaddish* comes to atone for his sin of desecrating HASHEM's name."

These words of Rabbi Tukachinsky explain that the essence of the *kaddish* is that it sanctifies HASHEM in the world, and this act of sanctifying His name atones for the sin of desecrating His name. This explains why the prayer is referred to as *kaddish*, meaning sanctification, and explains how it can help fix the sin of desecrating HASHEM's name, since it is a "balanced repentance" of an act of sanctifying HASHEM's name to balance its desecration. However, the words of the Zohar explain that *kaddish* helps not only for the sin of desecration of HASHEM's name, but also for all sins that a person may have committed. It says there that when a son leads the prayers and recites *kaddish* he tears up the sentence of the deceased person completely. How can that be? Even though it is true that every sin also contains an element of desecration of HASHEM's name in the world, yet how can reciting *kaddish* atone for the sin itself? And more generally, how can an act of the son alter the decree of the father? Even if the son sanctifies the name of Heaven, does that in any way

of Eden, for you saved me from the judgment of Gehimom.' Immediately Rabbi Akiva declared, 'HASHEM, Your name is eternal, HASHEM, the memory of You is for every generation.'"

⁴⁸⁴ In *Pardes Yosef* (ibid.) the author asks why we recite *kaddish* on Shabbos, a time when *Gehinom* is resting regardless. And why do we recite *kaddish* on the anniversary of the death (Yahrzeit)? In Mishna Eduyos (2:10) we find that the judgment of the wicked in *Gehinom* is only for the first year. He answers that, "There is benefit in *kaddish* to elevate from the lower Garden of Eden to a higher Garden of Eden, as the kabbalists wrote."

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change the desecration of HASHEM's name that the father committed during his lifetime?

'Your Great Name – Will Stand for Us in Times of Trouble'

To understand this issue, we must plumb the depths of the matter of understanding the unique merit of "the great name" of HASHEM, which is able to bring salvation to His people, Yisrael. Following that, we will understand the essence of *kaddish* as an act of sanctifying HASHEM's great name which is able to save in times of trouble.

Already in the Jew's first redemption from Egypt, we find the connection between HASHEM's name and the redemption of Yisrael. When HASHEM sent Moshe to redeem the Children of Yisrael, Moshe said to HASHEM that when he goes to the Children of Yisrael, "And they say to me, 'What is His name?' what should I say to them?" (Shemos 3:13). HASHEM's response is, "God said to Moshe, 'I Shall Be That I Shall Be.' And He said, 'Thus should you say to the Children of Yisrael, I Shall Be sent me to you.' And God said further to Moshe, 'Thus should you say to the Children of Yisrael, HASHEM, God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, God of Yitzchak and God of Yaakov sent me to you. This is My name forever, this is My remembrance in every generation.'"

Rashi explains there that this response of HASHEM has power also for redemption from all future exiles. He writes, "I shall be with them in this suffering just as I will be with them in the subjugation to the other kingdoms."

What was the question of the Children of Yisrael and what was HASHEM's answer?

Ramban there explains:

Their intent in this when Moshe said before HASHEM, "They will say to me, 'What is His name?'" was that He should say to them the name that teaches clearly about His existence and His providence. But the Holy One, blessed is He, replied, "Why will they ask for My name? They have no need for any other evidence, for I will be with them in all their suffering. They will call to Me and I will answer them. This is the greatest evidence that there is a God of Yisrael who is close to us whenever we call out to Him, and that HASHEM judges the earth. This is the correct explanation of this *Aggada*."

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In other words, the "name" of HASHEM is the revelation of His existence and His providence in the world. Moshe asked on behalf of the Jewish people for unmistakable evidence of HASHEM's existence and His providence over the world. HASHEM answered him that the fact that HASHEM is with them in every suffering, answers their cries and redeems them is the best proof of this, and there is no need for any other evidence. It turns out that HASHEM's answer to the prayers of the Jewish people for redemption in all of their suffering is the greatest proof that Yisrael has a God and that God judges the world. HASHEM concludes that exchange by saying, "This is My name forever and this is My remembrance in every generation."

Even after this, when they were in the desert, when Moshe asked HASHEM to forgive the Jewish people, he used the expression, "And now, may the power of HASHEM be great, as You spoke, saying." The unique relationship HASHEM has with the Jewish people is magnifying His name and His power in the world.

To explain more fully:

In the *shacharis* prayer we say (in *tachanun* for Monday and Thursday):

Save us for the sake of Your name, our Father, our King, our Rock and our Redeemer. Have mercy, HASHEM, on Your people and do not give Your heritage to shame to have nations rule over them. Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" We know, HASHEM, that we have sinned, and there is none who can stand up for us except Your great name shall stand for us in the time of trouble. We know that we have no good deeds. Perform righteousness with us for the sake of Your name.

Truly, the name of HASHEM stands for the Jewish people and brings them to be saved at the time of suffering. This is even if they have no good deeds.

The claim which justifies this is, "Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Indeed, we find this in many places.

1. In Parshas Ki Tissa (Shemos 32:11-12) it states, "Moshe entreated the face of HASHEM, his God, and said, 'Why HASHEM should Your anger burn against Your people who You took out from the land of Egypt with great might and a strong hand? Why should Egypt say that with evil He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and destroy them from the face of the earth? Return from Your anger and reconsider on the evil to Your people.'"

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2. Similarly, we find in Bamidbar (14:15-20) Moshe claimed before the Holy One, blessed is He, "And if you kill this people as one man, the nations who hear of your deeds will say, 'Due to lack of HASHEM's power to bring this people to the land which He swore to them, He slaughtered them in the desert. But now, please let the power of HASHEM grow great as you spoke, saying, 'HASHEM is slow to anger, great in kindness, bears iniquity and sin, and cleansing He will not cleanse, visits the sins of the fathers on their children until the third and fourth generation. Forgive the sin of this people in Your great kindness and as You bore this nation from Egypt until now.'" This argument was accepted, and HASHEM answered Moshe, "HASHEM said, I have forgiven according to your word." Rashi explains there, "According to your word" – due to what you said, "Lest they say that due to lack of HASHEM's power."
3. Similarly, we find in the book of Yehoshua (7:8-9) after the people were defeated in the war against the city of Ai, Yehoshua prayed to HASHEM and said, "Please, HASHEM, what shall I say after Yisrael turns their backs on their enemies? And the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear, and they will surround us and destroy our name from the land, and what will become of Your great name?"
4. Furthermore, not only Moshe and Yehoshua make this claim on behalf of the Jewish people and ask HASHEM to save them for the sake of His great name. HASHEM Himself makes this point as a reason to mitigate the judgement of His people. So, we find in Devarim (32:26-27), "I said I will scatter them, I will make their memory cease from humanity. Were it not for the pent-up anger of the enemy, lest their enemy misunderstand, lest they say our hand was raised in strength and it was not HASHEM who did all this." Rashi explains there: "I said I will scatter them" – I said in My heart, I would make them as the ownerless corners of one's field [*pe'ah*]. "Were it not for the pent-up anger of the enemy" – If it were not for the anger of the enemy pent up against them to destroy them and if the enemy would defeat them and destroy them they would attribute the greatness to them and their gods, and not ascribe the greatness to Me. This is why it states, "lest their enemy misunderstand," -- lest they misunderstand and attribute their strength to another who does not have that greatness.
5. Similarly, it says in Yechezkel (36:22-23), "Therefore say to the house of Yisrael, thus says HASHEM, God. Not for your sake O house of Yisrael, am I doing this, but for the sake of My holy name which you have profaned among the nations who you have come amongst. And I shall sanctify My great name which is profaned among the nations who have profaned it among them and the nations will know that I am

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HASHEM, says HASHEM, God, when I will be sanctified through you before their eyes."

The question is: Do the Jews have no other merit to be saved from total, utter destruction, other than the concern of what the non-Jews will say? And if that is the case, how can this act as a defense for the Jewish people to save them? Does it make sense to ask HASHEM not to act with balanced, proper justice according to the actions of His creations only because the gentiles will say bad things about the Holy One, blessed is He? Why does He care what the non-Jewish nations say?

The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that a complete attack on the Jewish people is also actually an attack on HASHEM's name. The salvation of Yisrael is necessary for the sake of HASHEM's name, which is imprinted within the Jewish people, no matter how they behave. HASHEM redeems His people, because they are called by His name,⁴⁸⁵ and so just as the name of HASHEM is eternal and cannot be erased, so too His people can never be erased.

Based on this, the phrase we recite at the beginning of the *Shemoneh Esrei* makes perfect sense. "He brings redemption to their children's children for the sake of His name in love." The question is whether this is love when the redemption is only for the sake of His own name? But according to what we explained, HASHEM is required to bring redemption to His people because He loves His people just as a person loves himself, because they are called by His name and His name is imprinted within them.

'These Are the People of HASHEM'

However, what is the meaning of the statement that the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, is not something separate from the Jewish people but something imprinted in them?

Here we reach the basic principle according to which the Jewish people are the people of HASHEM, being those who testify to the existence of the Holy One, blessed is He, in His world. For this reason they have a task to testify and show the name of Heaven in the world, as the prophet Yishaya said, "You are My witnesses, says HASHEM, and My servants whom I have chosen in order that you will know and believe in Me and understand that I am He, before Me there was no God and after Me there will be none. I am, I am, HASHEM and there is no savior other than Me," (Yishaya 43:10-11). Our Rabbis

⁴⁸⁵ Based on the words of the prophet Yechezkel (36:20), "They profane My holy name when they are addressed, 'These are the people of HASHEM.'"

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learn from here (*Yalkut Shimoni* Yishaya 455), "When you are My witnesses, I am God; but when you are not My witnesses, it is as if I am not God." This is also what we recite in our *tachanun* prayer on Mondays and Thursdays, "Quickly may Your mercy herald us in times of our trouble, not for our sake but act for Your sake... And remember our testimony every day, constantly, when we say twice with love, 'Hear Yisrael, HASHEM is our God, HASHEM is one.'"

Ramban (Devarim 32:26) explains the verse, "I said I will scatter them, I will make their memory cease from humanity" :

The verse says that according to the attribute of strict justice we should have remained in exile forever... for in our exile now all the merits of the Patriarchs have ended, and we have nothing to save us from the nations except for the sake of His name... therefore, Moshe mentioned in his prayer, "The nations who hear of Your deeds will say..." (Bamidbar 14:15). And HASHEM agreed with him in this, "And HASHEM said, 'I have forgiven according to your word,'" (ibid. 20). The meaning of this claim is not like one who wants to show his powers among his enemies, because all the nations are like nothing before Him, they are considered worthless and empty to Him. Rather, HASHEM created mankind on earth so that it should recognize its Creator and give thanks to His name and empowered him to do bad or good. And when all of them sinned willingly and denied Him, there remained nothing but this nation for His name, and He made known through them with signs and wonders that He is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is known as such to all the nations. If He would retract and destroy their memory, the nations of the world would forget His signs and His deeds and would no longer speak of them. And if a person does remember them, he will think that it was the astrological powers of the constellations and stars which has passed. Then the intent of creation would be completely nullified, for there would be none remaining who know the Creator, and they would only anger Him. Therefore, it is appropriate and justified by the will that willed the entire creation of the world, that it should be His will to establish for Himself this people for all time, for they are close to Him and know Him more than all the other nations...

I already alluded to this lofty secret above in the creation of Adam that He needs us to be a nation for Him and He will be our God. This is like that stated in the verse, "All who are called by My name and for My glory I created him," (Yishaya 43:7).

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In other words:

1. Indeed, the Holy One, blessed is He, does not save His people solely to demonstrate His power to His enemies, for "all the nations are as nothing compared to him, as naught and vanity are they considered to Him."
2. However, the purpose of creation of all the people in the world is in order that they recognize its Creator and give thanks to His name. However, a person has free choice, and all the nations rebelled against HASHEM and forgot their Creator.
3. The Jewish people remain the only nation that recognizes their Creator. And the signs and wonders that HASHEM does for His people are the only way that His name is disseminated in His world.
4. Therefore, if the memory of the Jewish people would be erased from the world, there would no longer be any memory of the name of HASHEM in the world. The people would forget all the signs and deeds and would no longer speak of them, and if a person would remember them, someone would explain that they did not come from God but were caused by the power of constellations and stars.
5. In this case, it would turn out that the purpose of the creation of humanity would be nullified and completely ruined. Furthermore, within the creation of humanity is the lofty, deep secret that obligates us to be for HASHEM as His people and He will be for us our God.

In explanation of the secret mentioned above, Ramban in his commentary on the verse in Shemos (29:46) writes:

" 'That I dwell among them' – on condition that I dwell among them." This is what Rashi says, but the use of the letter *lamed* as a condition does not appear anywhere else. Rather, it is plausible that the verse is saying that they will know when I dwell among them that I am HASHEM, their God, who took them out of the land of Egypt, for they will know My glory and will believe that I took them out from the land of Egypt. This [usage of a *lamed* as a *beis*] is like, "And David was wise in all his ways," (I Shmuel 18:14), "For You chose the son of Yishai," (ibid. 20:8), "Because you rebelled against My mouth at the waters of Meriva," (Bamidbar 20:24), and many others.... If so, there is here a great secret, for according to the plain meaning the Divine Presence in Yisrael is necessary for humans, and not necessary for the Most High. However [according to my explanation], it is like the verse states, "Yisrael through whom I will become beautified," (Yishaya 49:3), and Yehoshua said, "And what will You do for Your great name," (Yehoshua 7:9), and many other similar verses. "He wanted it for His

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dwelling," (Tehillim 132:13), "Here I will dwell for I desire it," (ibid. 14), and the verse states, "And I will remember the land," (Vayikra 26:42).

The Chavel edition of Ramban cites an explanation of Ramban's words from his students who studied kabbalah, who explained:

According to the plain meaning of the words it would appear that the Divine Presence in Yisrael is necessary for humans. But according to Kabbalah it is not so. Rather it is necessary for the Most High, as the verse states, "Israel, through whom I will become beautified," ... and Yehoshua said, "And what will You do for Your great name." In other words, if the enemies destroy our names, Your loss would be greater than ours, for what would become of Your great name. If we are not here, then I am also not here.

In other words, the existence of the Jewish people is essential for the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, Himself, and not only for us. Therefore, it is the need of the Most High, and not only for the sake of humans, for the name of HASHEM would be removed and lost if it were not expressed by the Jewish people.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains similarly, in his commentary on Shemos (13:8), the reason for the Jews' redemption from Egypt.

"Because of this HASHEM did for me." According to the plain meaning the verse is saying: Because of this *that* HASHEM did for me, I will perform this service for Him. But according to the Kabbalistic meaning, the verse is stating what HASHEM did for me in Egypt, that I came out of Egypt, was for the sake of His name and His glory... The intent is that the Divine Presence in Yisrael is not necessary solely for humans but is also necessary for the Most High.

In other words, we would apparently have said that the Divine Presence among the Jewish people expressed the fulfilment of our human needs, and was not necessary for the Holy One, blessed is He, as it were. However, from the kabbalah we learned that the Divine Presence dwelling among the Jewish people is "necessary for the Most High," as if it fulfills a Divine need, so to speak.

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‘Behold I Join My Great Name with Them’ (Yerushalmi Ta’anis 2:6)

How is the unbreakable connection between the Jewish people and the name of HASHEM expressed?

Here we reach the essence of the concept of “name.” Rabbi Shimshon Pincus in *Tiferes Shimshon on the Torah* (Bereishis p. 452) explains that,

A name is essentially in terms of relations to others. If one of us would live on a deserted island, many years would pass, and he would forget his name. For a person does not recognize himself by his name. He also hardly ever uses his name. He is only known to others by his name, and others use his name to connect with him. “The name of HASHEM” is known in the world when His awesome greatness is expressed in His world and revealed publicly to His creatures. That is “Blessed is the name.” In other words, when we do not recognize someone and do not relate to him, there is no meaning to his name. Whereas, “Everything that Adam called it... that was its name.” A name which is not used is not a name at all.⁴⁸⁶ But when someone recognizes someone and wants to define him and relate to him, he calls him by his name.

HASHEM is the creator of the entire world, but He is “a hidden God.” It is impossible for creatures of the world to see Him or recognize him, except either through belief, or through recognizing and becoming convinced of His existence through seeing His miracles and supernatural actions in the world. HASHEM chose the Jewish people to be a light to the nations insofar as through them the world will recognize the existence of HASHEM. In the days of glory of the Jewish people they were the treasure of all the nations because they were a sign and an example to the world, or through the miracles that were performed for them. However, when the Jewish people are not fulfilling this role and HASHEM is forced to conceal His face from them, HASHEM’s name and His existence are recognized through the fact that He is with the Jewish people in all their suffering. He answers their calls and eventually He redeems them. The only way that the miracles

⁴⁸⁶ The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, in *Likutei Sichos* on Parshas Shemos clarifies that in Hasidic teachings “A name represents the external realm of a person and does not relate to his true internal essence. The person for himself does not need a name. A name is designed for others, so that they can call him and connect with him. In other words, a name is aligned with that part of the soul which has a connection with others. We learn this also from the statement, ‘A King, His name is called upon them.’ Only the name of the king spreads throughout the kingdom, whereas the king himself is more elevated than the people.

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of the Holy One, blessed is He, can be perceived is when due to the Jewish people, with whom and in whose merit the miracles are performed, those signs and miracles are spoken about. However, if the Jewish people would be totally destroyed, Heaven forbid, the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, would also be lost. The name of HASHEM is imprinted in the existence of the Jewish people like someone who reflect the Divine experience. If HASHEM would not save His people there would be nobody to use the name of HASHEM, and His name would be lost.

The depth of the matter is alluded to also in the fact that the name of HASHEM is imprinted in the name of the Jewish people in both the way it is written and the way it is pronounced. In the Yerushalmi Ta'anis (2:6) it says: Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said in the name of Rabbi Yannai, "The Holy One, blessed is He, shared His great name with Yisrael (the two last letters of the word "Yisrael" are one of the names of God). To what can this be compared? To a king who had a small key to his palace. The king said, "If I leave the key as it is it may get lost. Rather I will make a chain for it, so that if the key gets lost, the chain will remain attached to the key." Similarly, the Holy One, blessed is He, said to the Jewish people, "If I leave the Jewish people as they are, they will disappear among the nations. Rather I will share My great name with them, and they will live. (This is related to the concept that "The Holy One, blessed is He, Yisrael and the Torah are all one.⁴⁸⁷). What is the proof text? "The Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear, and will turn on us, and our name will be destroyed from the earth and what will You do with Your great name?" (Yehoshua 7:9). Immediately [afterwards the verse states,] "Hashem said to Yehoshua, Arise."

These ideas are explained by the *Maharal* in *Netzach Yisrael* (chapter 10):

The explanation of this idea is that this world is the palace of the King, and Yisrael are the key to the palace. For if there were no Jews then it would look as though the palace was shut. When the palace is closed it serves no purpose and is not called a "house," because it has no doorway. So too, if there were no Jews, the palace, which is the world, would serve no purpose, and would be closed. It would be as if there was no palace at all. Therefore, the Jewish people are called a small key, because they are a small nation, and they are the key to the great palace... And therefore, the Jews are compared to a key, because a key opens the gate until it is opened. When there is no key, and the palace

⁴⁸⁷ Rabbi Waldenberg in *Tzitz Eliezer* vol. 16 §37 concludes this from the words of the Talmud Yerushalmi.

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is closed, and it is like a useless wooden vessel, which is sealed up and cannot contain anything, and does not have the form of a gateway, which is open.

It says there that if the Jewish people would remain as they are they would be lost among the nations. For Yisrael is a nation separate than all other nations and it is a nation alone and unique as will be explained. There is no doubt that all other nations oppose the Jewish nation, and all that opposition would overpower the Jews and nullify them when they are in exile under their rule. Therefore, HASHEM added His name to them. In other words, they are attached to the name of HASHEM, blessed is He, and in this way the nations cannot defeat them, because they have HASHEM's name in their name.

This is called a "chain" because a chain contains links to the key so that it will not be lost. Therefore, when HASHEM adds His name to them, He links and connects them to HASHEM, blessed is He, so that they will not be lost among the nations. And they are attached to Him, as the verse states, "And you who cleave to HASHEM, your God, are living all of you today," (Devarim 4:4).

Indeed, the verse states, "Our name will be destroyed from the earth and what will You do with Your great name?" (Yehoshua 7:9). Since HASHEM added His name to their name, if they are wiped out from the earth, "What will You do with Your great name," because it would affect His name too.

[‘All the Peoples of The World Will See That The Name of HASHEM Is Called upon You’ \(Devarim 28:10\)](#)

It is also taught in Berachos (6a):

Rabbi Avin bar Rav Adda said that Rabbi Yitzchak said: from where do we know that the Holy One, blessed is He, dons *tefillin*? As the verse states, "HASHEM swore by His right hand and the arm of His strength." ; "By his right hand" – this refers to Torah, as the verse states, "From His right hand the fire of law to His people." "And the arm of His strength" – this refers to *tefillin*, as the verse states, "HASHEM gives strength to his people." And where do we know that *tefillin* are strength for the Jewish people? Because the verse states, "And all the peoples of the world will see that the name of HASHEM is called upon you and they will be afraid of you." It was also taught that Rabbi Eliezer the Great said, "These are the *tefillin* worn on the head.

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Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak asked Rav Chiya bar Avin: What is written on the sections inside the *tefillin* of the Holy One, blessed is He? He replied, "Who is like Your people Yisrael, one nation on earth," (I Divrei Hayamim 17). Rav Nachman asked again, "Is the Holy One, blessed is He, praised with the praise of Yisrael? Rav Chiya replied, "Yes, as the verse states, "You have vouchsafed HASHEM today... and HASHEM vouchsafed you today." The Holy One, blessed is He, said to Yisrael, "You have made Me your single desire in the world, and I will make you My single desire in the world."

Maharsha explains in *Chidushei Aggados* there that certainly the concept of HASHEM's *tefillin* has some deeper meaning according to kabbalah.

But I see in it an understanding close to its plain meaning. For the mitzvah of *tefillin* is that we should cleave to Him, blessed is He, and placing them on our bodies allows the Divine Presence to rest upon us with His name. The four sections which are written in them demonstrate that the purpose of the mitzvah of *tefillin* is that Yisrael should have the closeness and holiness of HASHEM with all their souls, all their hearts and all their possessions. Correspondingly, the Holy One, blessed is He, cleaves and desires Yisrael, as the verse states, "I am for my Beloved and my Beloved is for me," (Shir Hashirim 6:3). As the Talmud points out here, "The Holy One, blessed is He, is praised and made glorious with Yisrael and Yisrael glory and are praised with HASHEM. As the verse states, "You have vouchsafed HASHEM today... and HASHEM has vouchsafed you today." For this reason, *tefillin* are called "glory." The Holy One, blessed is He, puts on *tefillin* to cleave and glory in His lot, Yisrael, as the verse states, "Place Me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm..." which shows His attachment to us, like *tefillin* which are on the arm near the heart.

If so, the role of the Jewish people in this world is to make HASHEM their single desire in the world. And HASHEM, from His side, cleaves and glories in the Jewish people, His portion. The name of HASHEM is sanctified, truly, through the Jewish people, and everything that happens to them reflects the name of the Holy One, blessed is He.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁸ Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook in *Oros* ("Oros Yisrael" 1:4) implies that just as a person does not appear outside his house except when he is dressed, so that clothing is a tool which allows him to appear in public, so *Knesses Yisrael* clothes the divinity and allows it to be revealed in the world. He writes, "*Knesses Yisrael* at its deepest essence is not separate at all from divinity. It clothes the divinity which is revealed to the world at large."

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‘In All Their Suffering He Suffers’

So now the verse is clear to us according to its plain meaning. Harming the Jewish people is harming the name of HASHEM and the revelation of His kingdom in the world. This is why the suffering of Yisrael is also suffering for the Holy One, blessed is He, so to speak. For the name of HASHEM is sanctified in the world only through the Jewish people. Therefore, the suffering of Yisrael harms the glory of Heaven.

Indeed, in Megillah (29a) we find:

It was taught: Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says, "Come and see how dear Yisrael are before the Holy One, blessed is He. For everywhere that they were exiled, the Divine Presence was with them. They were exiled to Egypt, the Divine Presence was with them... they were exiled to Bavel, the Divine Presence was with them... And also, when they will be redeemed in the future the Divine Presence will be with them, as the verse states, "HASHEM, your God, will return your captivity," (Devarim 30:3). The verse does not say "He will return" using the verb's transitive form meaning "bring back", but rather uses the intransitive verb form for "returns" meaning "come back".⁴⁸⁹ This teaches that the Holy One, blessed is He, will return with them from the exile.⁴⁹⁰

Rashba there explains:

We have already written that when the group of servants of HASHEM, blessed is He, is downtrodden it causes an increase of heresy among the nations. It seems to them as though HASHEM has no power to save them. As Moshe said, "The nations who hear of your deeds will say, 'Due to lack of HASHEM's power,'" (Bamidbar 14:15-20). That is what the verse (II Shmuel 7:23) says, "Who You redeemed for Yourself from Egypt," and it says, "In all their suffering He has suffering." And the Sages said, "They were exiled to Egypt – the Divine Presence was with

⁴⁸⁹ We say this in the Shabbos song of "*Baruch HASHEM Yom*": "He shall return with us, gathering the outcasts. It does not say 'He will bring back' but 'He will return' and gather in."

⁴⁹⁰ Look in *Rashba's Commentary on Aggadah* where he asks about the meaning of the phrase, "Even when they will be redeemed in the future." Is that not obvious? If He is in exile with them, then certainly He would return with them when they are redeemed. Rashba answers that when it says, "And when they are redeemed He will return with them from the exile," it means that the Divine Presence not only accompanies and helps the Jews in their exile, but is itself present, as it were, in their suffering and pain when the Jewish people are exiled and suffer. This is the point of the Talmud, that there will be, as it were, a redemption for the Divine Presence itself when the Jewish people are redeemed.

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them. They were exiled to Eilam -- the Divine Presence was with them." And when the people of HASHEM are saved He is saved with them, like our Rabbis (Eicha Rabbasi 2:7) taught on the verse, "May Your right hand save and answer me," (Tehillim 108:7) – it is as if when You answer me You will have saved Your right hand (which is a euphemism for the actions of the Holy One, blessed is He, as the verse states, "Your right hand, HASHEM."). And as the Rabbis said in the *midrash*, "For the hand is on the throne of HASHEM," – as if to say that as long as Amalek exists, the throne is not complete.

This concept is thoroughly explained in the words of the *Maharal* in *Gur Aryeh* (Shemos 3:2):

"I am with them in their suffering" – this does not mean that HASHEM is suffering. Heaven forbid to say such a thing. However, the explanation is that HASHEM is "Bound in chains" to Yisrael and He is constantly with them. Therefore, when Yisrael suffers, His reign is not complete. And therefore, HASHEM appeared to Moshe in a thorn bush – which teaches that His reign is not complete.

This is the meaning of "I am with them in their suffering." It means that HASHEM is with Yisrael in their suffering, and since He is with them in their suffering, His reign is not complete and therefore He appeared from a thorn bush. Indeed, it is fitting for you to know that this entire concept is from the viewpoint of this world, because Yisrael are in this world, and when they suffer, then His kingdom is not complete in this world. However, His actual glory, "Blessed is the glory of HASHEM from His place." Only when we look at His reign in this world does it appear as if it is not complete.

In other words, a "name" is expressed according to the relation between the owner of the name and others. Similarly, the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, is made known and honored in this world based on the way in which the Jewish people make Him known. Therefore, when the Jewish people suffer, the "name" of the Holy One, blessed is He, is also damaged, because it is profaned among the nations. Indeed, the Holy One, blessed is He, fills the entire world with His glory. But the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, is profaned and exiled when His people suffer.

This is the meaning of the concept called "the exile of the Divine Presence" which expresses that the Divine Presence is in pain because of the suffering of Yisrael. This also leads to the requirement to be upset and pray primarily for the pain of the Divine Presence and not for our own pain. As follows:

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1. In the *Siddur Hagra* ("Introduction to Rosh Hashanah") it says:
Look and see how our early Rabbis established for us the prayer of Rosh Hashanah which was instituted solely as a request for the honor of the Divine Presence to be revealed and to show His reign. For it would seem that we should have gathered and prayed for ourselves on this great and awesome day of judgement, to pray for forgiveness and atonement, life, food and children, for who is not remembered on this day. Why did our Rabbis say not to mention any sin or iniquity on Rosh Hashanah in order not to awaken the attribute of judgement? It should be the opposite, for our Rabbis said that "one who admits to a penalty is exempt," and it also says, "He who admits and forsakes [sins] will gain mercy," (Mishlei 28:13).

Furthermore, if we do not mention our sin, is there no one else to mention them? There are many prosecuting angels for every single sin!

But the concept is as it says in the holy Zohar on the verse, "Now it came upon that day when the angels came," (Iyov 1:6) – this refers to the judgement of Rosh Hashanah. "And the angels came to stand before HASHEM," – to claim His affront, because the people all cry out "Give! Give!" "Give us life; give us food; give us forgiveness and atonement," and nobody pays attention to ask for the affront caused to the Master of the Universe and His name which is profaned among the gentiles, as the verse states, "For the hand is on the throne of HASHEM." The name is not complete, and the throne is not complete...

2. In "The Will of the Baal Shem Tov" (§73) it states that prayer must be directed for the pain of the Divine Presence, and anyone who does not pray for the pain of the Divine Presence will not have his prayer accepted.
3. Rabbi Boruch Ber Leibowitz explains the verse, "Can the throne of wickedness be associated with You?" (Tehillim 94:20). He writes that the phrase, "Be associated with You (*Haychavrecha*)" is related to the phrase, "Bruise and wound (*petza vechabura*)," (Yishaya 1:6) and the word "throne" refers to the throne of the Holy One, blessed is He. The word "wickedness" is an expression of pain. The verse means that since the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, is not complete and His throne is not complete until the Mashiach comes, one must be in great pain out of empathy for the exile of the Divine Presence and its suffering.
4. It is related that when the *Chofetz Chaim* grew old and it was difficult for him to sit on a wooden bench, that his grandson brought an

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upholstered chair from Vilna with a back, so that he could sit comfortably. However, the *Chofetz Chaim* refused to use this chair, because our Rabbis said that the Holy One, blessed is He, swore that His name would not be complete nor His throne complete until the memory of Amalek was destroyed. So, the *Chofetz Chaim* pointed out to his grandson, "You were not concerned about the honor of the Holy One, blessed is He, Whose throne is not yet complete. But for my honor you were concerned to bring me a whole chair with four legs?" To him the pain of the Divine Presence and its exile due to the suffering of the Jewish people was tangible.

5. In Tehillim (23:4) it states, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear not evil for You are with me." The plain meaning of the words is that a person should not fear suffering which he experiences because HASHEM accompanies him in every situation. However, Rabbi Yisroel of Ruzhyn, when he was locked up in jail for seven months by the Tsar, explained the verse in a different, Chasidic, way. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will not fear," – When I sit in the valley of the shadow of death it does not bother me and "I will fear I not." But all my pain and suffering is only for the fact that "You are with me." And that is "evil – for You are with me." For even the Divine Presence suffers from this.
6. It is clear that a person must remove his mind from his own worries and focus on the pain of the Divine Presence and its exile, and for the name of HASHEM which is publicly desecrated as a result of his own suffering.

Redemption of The Divine Presence

We have seen that the pain of Yisrael is the pain of the Divine Presence, which is identified with the Jewish people. So, the redemption of Yisrael is, so to speak, also the redemption of the Divine Presence. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Brisk writes beautiful words on this in *Beis Halevi* on the verse, "Do not fear from going down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there; I will go down with you to Egypt and ascend, I will also ascend with you" (Bereishis 46:3-4).⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹¹ Another explanation by the *Beis Halevi* there is that, "Yaakov understood and knew that when he went down to Egypt it would be the beginning of the exile which was decreed on his children at the Covenant between the Pieces and his children would need to be enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years. He was, therefore, very afraid to go down... lest his children will not be able to remain enslaved in Egypt for so many years while retaining their holiness. Perhaps, Heaven forbid, they would sink down to the impurity of Egypt until they were no

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Beis Halevi explains the double language of "ascend, I will also ascend." He explains that it means that HASHEM guarantees Yaakov, "I will bring you out" and also "I will also ascend" Myself. He writes, "This is the greatest promise of all the promises, that He will be called by the name of Yisrael."

He explains:

1. "His name is never made known in the world through any supernatural miracle – except due to the need to redeem the Jewish people. Through the redemption of the Jewish people the name of His glory is made known throughout the world."
In other words, HASHEM does not perform miracles in the world and His reign over the world is not visible, unless it is necessary for the sake of the salvation of the Jewish people.
2. "In every action and every time that Yisrael are at the lowest depths – Heaven forbid – that is where His glory will be hidden and concealed."
In other words, when the Jewish people are in exile and suffering, the result is that the Divine rule is not revealed in the world, and HASHEM's glory is concealed.
3. This is what HASHEM says to Yaakov, "I will go down with you to Egypt." Every time that you are going down, My glory is not revealed in the world, and this is called euphemistically that HASHEM went down with him to Egypt, as the verse states, "I am with him in his suffering," (Tehillim 91:)
4. "'And ascend, I will also ascend with you' – When I raise you up, then through your ascendance My name will also become known among the nations and My glory will be raised up. This is also the meaning of the statement of our Rabbis cited earlier (Yerushalmi Ta'anis 2:6) who said that the Holy One, blessed is He, shares His name with Yisrael. They compared it to a king who was afraid to lose a key, so he attached a chain to it. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed is He, attached His name to the Jewish people so that they will not become lost. This sharing means that His name is only made known through the salvation of the Jewish people."
In other words, when the Jewish people are redeemed from their exile, the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, becomes known and is raised

longer worthy of redemption ever. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed is He, answered him, 'Do not be afraid... I will go down with you to Egypt and ascend, I will also ascend with you.' This guarantee was that He would not leave them to become corrupted completely, and if necessary he would take them out before the time was up."

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up, and it is as if there is also a redemption for HASHEM, who comes with them from a state of exile where the Divine Presence was until that time.

5. "And this is the absolute guarantee that they will not be destroyed, Heaven forbid."

In other words, HASHEM attaches the redemption of His own name to the redemption of the Jewish people, and when the Jewish people ascend out of exile, the name of HASHEM also comes out with them. So, it is clear that the Jewish people can never be totally destroyed, Heaven forbid, because if such a thing would happen, HASHEM's great, awesome and eternal name would remain in exile.

6. HASHEM's promise to be with the Jewish people, to go into exile with them, and be redeemed with them, is therefore an eternal promise to the Jewish people.

Indeed, we find in midrash that the redemption of the Jewish people from exile is, as it were, the redemption of the Holy One, blessed is He, Himself.

For example: The verse states, "Who is like you, like Yisrael, one nation on earth; whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people, and to make Himself a name, and to do for you great and awesome things for your land, for Your people whom You redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, peoples i.e. the twelve tribes and their God," (2 Shmuel 7:23). Concerning this verse *Yalkut Shimoni* (Parshas Bo 210) states, "Rabbi Akiva says: If it were not written it would be impossible to say, it is as if Yisrael said before the Omnipresent, "You redeemed Yourself."

Since the Divine Presence itself is in pain and requires redemption and is redeemed, as it were, only when Yisrael is redeemed, a person needs to hope for the redemption of the Divine Presence and not to focus on his own suffering or his own redemption.

The Midrash supports this idea with explicit verses in Tehillim where we find that King David rejoiced at the redemption of HASHEM and the sanctification of His name. So, for example, we find, "So that I may tell of all Your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion, that I may rejoice in Your salvation," (Tehillim 9:15); "But as for me, I trust in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation," (Tehillim 13:6); and "We will rejoice in Your salvation," (Tehillim 20:6).

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Midash *Shochar Tov* (9) explains, "I will rejoice in Your salvation," – Rabbi Abbahu said: This is one of the five most difficult verses, [because it implies] that the salvation of Yisrael is the salvation of the Holy One, blessed is He. The verse does not say, "Our salvation," but "Your salvation." King David said, "Our salvation is Your salvation." Rabbi Berachya the kohen said: What is the meaning of the verse, "He is righteous and redeemed," (Zechariah 9:9)? It does not say, "He redeems," but rather "He is redeemed" (meaning that HASHEM is redeemed by redeeming His people). Similarly, when the Jewish people will return in the future the Divine Presence will return with them, as the verse states, "HASHEM, your God, will return your captivity," (Devarim 30:3). The verse does not say "He will return" using the verb's transitive form meaning "bring back", but rather uses the intransitive verb form for "returns" meaning "come back."⁴⁹²

We find this concept in greater detail in the Zohar (Parshas Emor 90b):

[Rabbi Shimon] began [to expound the verse] "To HASHEM is the salvation, Your blessing for Your people, Selah," (Tehillim 3:9) and said: "To HASHEM is the salvation" – fortunate is Yisrael, for in every place that they were exiled the Divine Presence was exiled with them (as it states in Megillah 29a). If so, when Yisrael comes out of exile, "Who is redeemed? Yisrael or the Holy One, blessed is He?" For they are both in exile! The Zohar answers, "This is explicit in several verses, including here, as the verse states, 'To HASHEM is the salvation,' – the salvation will certainly be also for HASHEM. When? "Your blessing for Your people, Selah." In other words, when the Holy One, blessed is He, attends to His blessings for Yisrael, to bring them out of exile and do good for them, then it will also be the certain salvation of HASHEM, for the Divine Presence will go out of exile.

Here we return to the explanation of the verse, "For the hand is on the throne of God," which our Rabbis explained to mean that as long as Amalek exists neither the throne nor the name is complete. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that when Yisrael are in suffering and evil grows strong in the world, and HASHEM is, as it were, unable to save them, this is a blemish in the name of HASHEM. For it is as if there is another power which is stronger than Him. Amalek's war with Yisrael is also a battle against the Holy One, blessed is He, and as long as there is a war between HASHEM and Amalek, HASHEM's throne and

⁴⁹² See *Shnei Luchos Habris* ("Toledos Adam" – *Hasha'ar hagadol*) where he relates to the exile of the Divine Presence. He cites the words of this midrash and concludes, "There is no need to discuss this at length, because it is well known throughout the length and breadth of all the books of the kabbalists."

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name are not complete. The correction of this blemish will not occur until the Jewish people merit a complete redemption and destroy the memory of Amalek. Then the name and throne of HASHEM will become complete. As follows:

The oath here that says, "For the hand is on the throne of God," and the concept that it is as if the throne and the name are lacking means that when He removes the power from His throne it appears as if it is incomplete, and the name appears to be lacking. For it appears as if He is not fulfilling everything and something else has power, Heaven forbid. Therefore, the letter *aleph* is missing from the word "throne," for the primordial power departed from the throne for the sake of Amalek, and the letters *vav* and *heh* are lacking from HASHEM's name. But in the messianic era, when HASHEM will exact punishment from the heavenly host and the supernal intermediaries will be removed, as the verse in Daniel says, "And it became great, even to the heavenly host; and it cast some of the host and the stars down to the ground, and it trampled upon them," (Daniel 8:10). The nations will be destroyed easily with the destruction of the ministering angels watching over them. And there will be many of the nations who will turn to our religion... And then the name and the throne will become complete. For the three letters, which are *aleph*, *vav* and *heh* will complete the throne and the name. Regarding this King David said, "For HASHEM chose ["*iva*" – spelled *aleph*, *vav*, *heh*] Zion, He desires it for His dwelling place," (Tehillim 132:13). That is to say that in the future, when the Holy One, blessed is He, will choose Zion, then He will sit on the complete throne. This is the meaning of the word "*iva*" which is the completion of the throne and His name... And it is written, "Then HASHEM shall forever dwell, ready for judgment is His throne," (Tehillim 9:8). "HASHEM will dwell forever," means that the name is complete, "ready for judgment is His throne," means His throne is complete. And then HASHEM will reign alone, as the verse states, "HASHEM alone shall be exalted in that day," (Yishaya 2:11), and it is also written, "And saviors will come up on Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be HASHEM's," (Ovadia 1:21). "And HASHEM will be king over all the earth, on that day HASHEM will be one and His name will be one," (Zechariah 14:8).

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In other words, the throne is an expression for HASHEM's rule over the gentile nations, and the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, is an expression for His control of the world. When a nation, Amalek, comes and fights against HASHEM, this hides HASHEM's rule over the world (the throne) from sight, and conceals His control of the world as the one and only power in all the worlds, which expresses the name of HASHEM. This is the meaning of the verse, "For the hand is on the throne of God." The throne is missing the letter *aleph* and the name of HASHEM is lacking the letters *vav* and *heh*. The glory of HASHEM and His rule and control over the world are hidden.

This is alluded to in the verse, "For HASHEM chose ["*iva*" – spelled *aleph*, *vav*, *heh*] Tzion, He desires it for His dwelling place," (Tehillim 132:13). The lack of the letters, *aleph*, *vav* and *heh* which embodies the exile of the Divine Presence, will end only once the Mashiach returns to Tzion, to redeem the Jewish people. He will also cause the entire name of HASHEM to be seen and revealed to everyone, so that He alone will be exalted on that day. Hence, the redemption of Tzion and Yisrael is what will also bring the Divine Presence out of its exile and cause the name and the throne to be complete.

Prayer for The Completion of HASHEM's Name and His Redemption

The meaning of the phrase in *kaddish*, "May His great name be magnified and sanctified," is therefore a prayer for the redemption of the Divine Presence for the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, is the expression of His control over the world. HASHEM does not publicly depart from the fixed control and nature of the world. After the destruction of the Temple, where the Divine Presence dwelt, HASHEM is hidden, and cries over the exile of the Divine Presence. It will only be redeemed when the Jewish people overpower the evil and become worthy of redemption. A person prays and wishes for that time when the name of HASHEM will become magnified and sanctified in the world. The Jewish people hope for redemption and seek the redemption of the Holy One, blessed is He, from the Divine Presence's exile which has existed since the destruction of the Temple. The miracle that the Holy One, blessed is He, will perform for his people to save them, is therefore the miracle that will also redeem the Divine Presence itself from this state of exile in which it currently remains.

Prayer for the salvation of HASHEM and His people is also found in the words of *Tosafos* (Sukkah 45a) on the Mishna, which says that on the festival of Sukkot the priests would surround the altar every day and say, "Please, HASHEM, save please, Please, HASHEM, succeed please." Rabbi Yehuda says

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that when they would surround the altar they would say, "I and He (*bahu*) please save."

What does the phrase, "I (*ani*) and He (*vahu*)" mean?

Rashi explains that the words "*ani*" and "*vahu*" refer to the explicit 72 three-letter names of HASHEM which are derived from three verses in Parshas Beshalach ("An angel travelled," "He came between the camp" and "Moshe stretched out his hand," Shemos 14:19-21) beginning with the first letter of the first verse, the last letter of the middle verse and the first letter of the last verse.

It would seem that this prayer means: HASHEM, Who is also called by the names "*Ani*" and "*Vahu*", please save. However, *Tosafos* there clarify this prayer using the explanation of our Rabbis in *Eicha Rabbasi* on the verses, "And I was among the captives," (Yechezkel 1:1) and "He was bound in chains," (Yirmeyahu 40:1) that "I" and "He" are two names of HASHEM used when He is, so to say, in chains in captivity. *Tosafos* say: "It is as if it refers to HASHEM Himself, and it means 'Save – that He should save Himself.'"

In other words, the Holy One, blessed is He, requires salvation, in a manner of speaking. The Divine Presence is present in exile and the explicit name of HASHEM is, as it were, in chains. We pray therefore to HASHEM that He should save the "I, Myself, and He, Himself." The salvation of the Jewish people will be a sanctification of the Divine name and a redemption of the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, for until this redemption the Divine Presence itself is in exile and the King Himself, as it were, is bound in chains and needs to be released. Therefore, we pray to the Holy One, blessed is He, that He should save us and Himself.

The intent of our Rabbis when they say that HASHEM is bound in chains is that even the Holy One, blessed is He, who is omnipotent, is nevertheless forced by the actions of the Jewish people to bring destruction upon them and to exile them and to be exiled with them. This takes away from Him the possibility of redeeming the Jews and it is as if our sins turned the Holy One, blessed is He, as it were, into a King bound in chains, and so "a captive is unable to free himself from prison."

Here it requires the essential task of the Jews themselves to cause the ropes to be removed and break the chains. Sanctifying HASHEM's name and overpowering the evil are the tools which will cause HASHEM to be able to be redeemed.

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In *Yemei Zicharon* which is a collection of letters of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Boston, we find the following astounding words:

When I was a small child I learned with a teacher who was Chassidish. Once, on the day before Tisha B'Av we learned statements of our Rabbis about the destruction of the Temple; we then reached the story told in the 24th introduction to *Eicha Rabbasi*:

The enemies entered the sanctuary and burned it. Once it was burned, the Holy One, blessed is He, said: I no longer have a dwelling place on earth. I will remove My Divine Presence from the earth and I will ascend to My original Heavenly dwelling place. At that time the Holy One, blessed is He, cried and said, "Woe to Me, what have I done? I rested My Divine Presence for Yisrael, but now that they have sinned, I have returned to My original place. Heaven forbid, I have become a laughing stock among the nations and an object of jest among people."

At that time the angel Metatron came and fell on his face and said before Him, "Master of the Universe, I will cry, but You should not cry."

[The Holy One, blessed is He] said to [the angel Metatron], "If you do not allow Me to cry now, I will enter a place where you have no permission to enter, and I will cry there, as the verse states, 'If you will not hear it, My soul shall weep in secret,' (Yirmeyahu 13:17)."

When I heard this description I asked my tutor, in my naivety, a simple question. "For what reason and why does the Holy One, blessed is He, cry and mourn for the destruction of the Temple? He could rebuild it as it was in a moment."

My tutor answered me then: "If you were an expert, my dear one, in matters of Chassidus, you would understand that in many areas there has to first be an awakening from below." Certainly, at that time I did not fully understand my teacher, but after many years the question and the answer became clear to me. The Master of the Universe is omnipotent in every area, but when His great name itself is desecrated, it is up to *Knesses Yisrael* to be jealous and fight for His name. Sanctification of the Divine name always begins below, and not in Heaven.

Rabbi Soloveitchik wants to explain through this the words of the *midrash* that the angel Metatron – which represents the rule of the laws of nature in our

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world, and therefore was surprised at HASHEM – “Why are *You* crying?” It makes sense that Metatron should cry, because nature, is bound by strict rules. But *You*, HASHEM, Who is omnipotent, *You* created the Heavens with *Your* word and all its host with the breath of *Your* mouth – why do *You* not rebuild the Temple and return the crown to its former glory, and everything else to how it was, and end *Your* exile? The Holy One, blessed is He, answered him: “I must cry because the Divine Presence does not change the nature of the world or its laws and cannot be revealed publicly except when the Jewish people need a miracle. Until then the Divine Presence remains concealed, and about that the Divine Presence cries for its exile. The redemption of the Divine Presence will come, therefore, only when it is time for the Jewish people to be redeemed. Until then, the Divine Presence is also in exile, and the Holy One, blessed is He, as it were, cries.

So, we learn that HASHEM requires salvation, as it were. Despite the fact that He is omnipotent, the Holy One, blessed is He, will not redeem Himself from His exile but decreed on Himself to identify with the Jewish people. As long as they remain in exile, the Divine Presence also suffers, as it were.⁴⁹³ People

⁴⁹³ Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg in his wonderful essay, “May His great name be magnified and sanctified” published by *Yeshivas Kerem Beyavneh* in Elul 5760, brings in this context the story of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Shargai, who was the head of the Aliya division of the Jewish Agency and which was published in *Amudim* 5740. He related:

When I was leaving Poland for the second time... when I entered the train carriage, I paid attention to the Jew who was with me. I noticed that his face was waxy yellow, his beard was white, his eyes were jittery, and he was full of nerves. When I began to ask him what, who, he remained silent and wouldn't answer a single word. So, I also remained silent. Sometime later, he asked me to help him open his suitcase. Inside I saw a shofar, candlesticks, *havdalah* spices, a *tallis* and *tefillin*, several books and several garments and a few other items. He took out the book *Noam Elimelech* and started reading it. I did not attempt to converse with him because I felt that he did not want to talk. Before I lay down to sleep, I took something to drink and asked him if he also wanted to drink something. He nodded his agreement. I poured him a glass. After he had drunk, he began to speak with me, and told me briefly that he was from Galitzia. He was a Belzer Chasid, old but filled with suffering. He revealed to me everything that happened under the rule of the enemy. How he had lost his wife and several of his children, and how he had been saved. Now he was going to “The land of life.” Suddenly he stopped and was silent. He did not continue. He remained sitting with his eyes closed. After this depressing silence of several minutes, I left the carriage. When I returned I found him stretched out on the bench. I also lay down on the second bench. But, I was unable to close my eyes and all my thoughts were focussed on this man opposite me and everything I had heard from him.

At dawn, I arose to pray before non-Jews boarded the train. The man opposite me did not rise or move even though he was not sleeping. After praying, I took out something to eat and drink. I asked him if he wanted something to drink. He did not answer. Some hours later, I asked him again, and he nodded that he was ready to drink. In this way, he drank several times during the day. However, he did not utter a word. He looked at little at his book, sat,

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need, therefore, to bring about an “awakening from below,” not only so that the Jewish people will be redeemed from their suffering, but also in order to end the exile of the Divine Presence and its pain.

Praying on HASHEM

We discussed in earlier chapters the meaning of prayer in general and its power to help the worshiper or another person. Now, as we come to the end of the book, we are faced with praying of a new type – “praying on HASHEM.” What is the meaning of “praying on HASHEM?” Perhaps if we discuss the secret of praying on HASHEM we will gain a new, deeper and more general understanding of prayer.

We learned that prayer is standing before HASHEM. The essence of this standing and its power is the nullification before Him, and a person’s recognition that, “There is nothing beside Him.” This act of faith joins with the merit of fulfilling the mitzvah, is the power and reason that prayer works for the worshiper himself, or for someone else. Service of the heart through prayer is the recognition and feeling a person has that everything comes from the hand of the HASHEM, and the more this feeling is true for the worshiper and comes from the depths of his heart, so its power is greater. “A prayer of the poor when he is feeble and prayer for a sick person when no human has the power to save, is the prayer which is closest to being heard and accepted, as it says, “You hear the pleading of the poor, the cries of the destitute you

lay down and remained silent. His silence was terrifying and sent me into a terrible depression. I was lost.

After midday he opened up and said, “After everything that happened to me and after everything that my eyes had seen, and HASHEM had no mercy or kindness, I will not pray to Him. I will also anger Him.” I remained silent and said nothing. The man returned to his silence. In the afternoon, when it was nearly dark, he suddenly asked me to take down his suitcase. He took out his *tallis* and *tefillin*, wrapped himself in his *tallis*, put on his *tefillin* and stood up to pray. I was dumbfounded by this sudden change, but I was silent and did not say anything. After he had finished praying, he said to me, “It is the right thing to pray. Is HASHEM, as it were, not deserving of mercy? What has He left now in the world? What remains for Him? If He showed me mercy and left me alive, He deserves that I should have mercy also on Him. Therefore, I got up and prayed.”

He finished speaking and tears flowed from his eyes, as he began to cry aloud, “Woe, mercy also for the Master of the Universe, who is He left with?”

I also cried with him. We separated in tears and with the blessing to meet again in Jerusalem and to merit the arrival of Mashiach.

I never forgot this shocking picture. Even today those words, “Woe, mercy also for the Master of the Universe, who is He left with?” still ring in my ears. This is the power of faith... this is the power that the Jewish people has towards God. The Divine soul within this Belzer Chasid is what announced, “Mercy also for the Master of the Universe.”

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will heed and You will save," (*Nishmas Prayer* according to the *Edot Hamizrach* rite).

After we have seen that the Divine Presence is in pain every time that the Jewish people are in pain, and that human prayer is essential, as it were, for the Divine Presence to be redeemed from its exile, a believing person must nullify himself before his Creator and remove from his mind all his own personal troubles, in order to focus on the pain of the Divine Presence. A believing person expresses his faith through his prayer when he is in pain and suffering but does not become absorbed and focused on himself. But rather wants the redemption in order to bring redemption to the Divine Presence that suffers with him. His concern is for the honor of Heaven that is damaged every time he suffers. The purpose of a person's prayer, therefore, is the redemption of the Divine Presence and the honor of Heaven.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin discusses this in *Nefesh Hachayim* (*sha'ar* 3:11-12) and explains as follows:

1. The purpose of a person's prayer should not be on himself, but on the honor of Heaven, "To add power to the holiness." Therefore, a worshiper should not ask at all for his own, personal needs and wants, but should have intent in his prayer on behalf of the Holy One, blessed is He. "Just as a soldier casts off his own needs and wants so he can dedicate himself to the honor of the king, so that he gain the crown of that kingdom that they are fighting and so his kingdom will be upraised, similarly it is very appropriate for an upright person to focus his intention and pure thoughts in prayer solely on adding power to the worlds of holiness... to remove the impure spirits from the world and to perfect the world through the kingdom of HASHEM, blessed is His name."
2. An example of this is found in the prayer of Rosh Hashanah established by the Men of the Great Assembly which is arranged from beginning to end only for the honor of His kingdom, blessed is He, so that he will ascend to how He was initially, before the sin of Adam. The Rosh Hashanah prayers contain no personal requests for the needs of a person, even though it is the day when each person is judged.
3. Indeed, the text of prayer for the rest of the year seems to be different, for the plain text implies that a person is praying for his own, personal, needs and wants. "However, it is certainly clear to anyone who understands... that the Men of the Great Assembly did not have intent only for what appears according to the plain meaning of the words, because 'The prayers were instituted to correspond to the sacrifices,'

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(Berachos 26b). The daily sacrifices were entirely consumed on the altar... and had no portion eaten by individuals at all." One who prays must therefore ignore his personal suffering and have intent in his prayer solely for preventing a desecration of HASHEM's name.

4. Is there a desecration of HASHEM through the suffering of an individual and is the Divine Presence pained for him? For the suffering of the Jewish people we have shown that there is a desecration of HASHEM's name, as the verse states, "They profaned My holy name, when people said of them, 'These are the people of HASHEM,'" (Yechezkel 36:20). Therefore, we are obligated to beseech and pour out our hearts before Him for the desecration of His name and pray that HASHEM act solely for the sake of His name.

But even in the pain of an individual, which does not have desecration of HASHEM's name, the Holy One, blessed is He, feels the pain. He shares the pain of an individual and suffers with him, as we find in Sanhedrin (46a); Rabbi Meir said, "When a person is in pain (Rashi: That he suffers due to his sins) what does the Divine Presence say? 'My head is heavy, My arm is heavy,' (Rashi: Like a person who is exhausted and tired, who says, 'My head is heavy, my arm is heavy')."

If so, a person is required to ignore his own suffering and pray for the suffering of the Divine Presence, even when it is not the suffering of an entire group but only of an individual. For even in this pain, the Holy One, blessed is He, joins and suffers with him.⁴⁹⁴

5. *Nefesh Hachayim* writes that this is the meaning of the Mishna in Rosh Hashanah (29a) which explains the verse describing the battle against Amalek, "And it was when Moshe raised his hand and Yisrael grew stronger," (Shemos 17:11). The Mishna asks: "Did Moshe's hands make the battle victorious or defeated? Rather this teaches you that whenever Yisrael would look upwards and subjugate their hearts to their Father in Heaven they would grow stronger, but if not, they would fail."
- "Looking upwards" means that the main purpose was to bring salvation to the suffering of Heaven. The war against Amalek was a clear example of the suffering of Yisrael which contained desecration of

⁴⁹⁴ *Nefesh Hachayim* continues and explains this topic in a note there. He writes that the concept, "Woe from my head, woe from my arm" is directed at the tefillin of the head and of the arm, as we find in Berachos (6a) that the Holy One, blessed is He, wears tefillin. The concept of His tefillin is the attachment of God to do good with us in everything. The secret of God's tefillin is that tefillin is called, "beauty" (see Zohar, Parshas Beshalach beginning of 62b) and when a person is upset it is as if there is no connection or attachment between the person and God in the necessary completion.

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HASHEM's name. There is a well-known statement of our Rabbis in *Pesikta* on the verse, "That chanced upon you [*korcha*] on the way." "This [word *korcha*] means cold. He cooled you down and weakened you from your boiling. For all the nations were afraid to wage war against you, but this one came and began, and showed the way to others. This can be likened to a boiling bathtub which nobody could enter. One wild person came and jumped into it. Even though he was scalded, he cooled it down for the others."

Regarding this suffering it says that Moshe raised his hands, "And Yisrael would look upwards." This means that the Jews had intent in their prayers solely for the pain of the Divine Presence. "The cries of their prayers were not on their pain, but only on the desecration of the name of their Father in Heaven." When they would do so, "They would grow stronger."

6. The Mishna in Rosh Hashanah (29a) continues: Similarly, you say [regarding the verse] "Make for yourself a serpent and place it on a banner and anyone who is bitten will look at it and live," (Bamidbar 21:8). Does the serpent cause death or does a serpent give life? Rather, when Yisrael would look upwards and subjugate their hearts to their Father in Heaven they would be healed. But if not, they would be wasted.

This second example, according to *Nefesh Hachayim* is that the suffering of a person who has been bitten by a snake is a personal pain, not a national one. It does not involve desecration of HASHEM's name to the gentile nations, but certainly any sin which caused the pain involved a desecration of HASHEM's name and rebellion against Him. "There, too, the verse alludes to us the way and manner of the proper prayer before Him, may He be blessed... When they would cast their pain away from themselves completely and would look upwards, pouring their entreaties and requests solely on the great pain of Heaven, which was caused when they sinned, and the pain now that was caused in Heaven because they were suffering from the punishment of their sins, then they would be healed."

7. When a person prays for the pain of the Divine Presence caused by his personal pain which came about due to the punishment he must suffer for his sin, he must have intent for the double suffering of the Divine Presence: The pain of a Father sympathizing with His son when He sees him in pain; and an additional, greater pain, as a result of the sin that the person committed which caused him this suffering.

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Nefesh Hachayim compares this to “a beloved son who became drunk and fell to the ground, breaking his neck and putting his life in danger. He himself doesn’t realize the danger he is in... but his father is extremely worried. When the doctors set the break and put bandages and dressing on him with painful ointments and the son screams in pain... then his father is upset about the pain and the screams, but there is no comparison between the pain he feels now compared to the initial worry and concern the father had when the son fell and broke his bones, which nearly cost him his life.”

Similarly, when the son is lost and sins, “He causes tremendous, unending pain in Heaven, but the person himself does not feel it at all, and does not know that his soul is in danger... There are some sins which cause his soul to be cut off, Heaven forbid, completely from its connection to holiness. But HASHEM, the merciful Father, suffers with the person in his pain, as it were. From His great mercy and kindness, blessed is His name, He sends suffering which is a salve and bandage to heal the sin. Then the person feels the pain of his suffering and is upset, and in this way, he also realizes the pain that was in Heaven. However, there is no comparison between this pain and the initial pain that he caused in Heaven when he committed the sin.” Therefore, even when we are involved with the suffering of an individual, which does not include desecration of HASHEM’s name, he is required to have intent in his prayer for the pain he caused the Divine Presence, both at the time he committed the sin, which caused his Father to bring suffering upon him and also for the suffering itself – for the Father brings it upon His son and suffers as a result. If he would only do so, the suffering would be removed from him.

8. Someone who has intent in his prayer for these two types of pain, that he caused the Divine Presence, and now that he regrets it, he is measured with his own measure – HASHEM doubles his reward, as our Rabbis said, “Anyone who joins the name of Heaven to his pain has his reward doubled,” (Berachos 63a).⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁵ *Nefesh Hachayim* explains in this way the Talmudic discussion (Berachos 31b) of Hannah’s prayer. It says of her, “Her soul was bitter, and she prayed on HASHEM,” (I Shmuel 1:10). The Rabbis learn from the phrase “prayed on HASHEM” (as opposed to “prayed to HASHEM”) that she hurled words toward the one Above. In other words, “Even though her soul was bitter, nevertheless she cast her pain away and did not care to pray for herself at all, rather she threw the words of her prayer before HASHEM for the Heavenly pain caused by her being now in pain.” In other words, she prayed on HASHEM, and had mercy on the pain of the Divine Presence but not on her own pain.

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Prayer over the pain of the Divine Presence is therefore the strongest possible expression that a person understands there is nothing besides HASHEM, and that there is no other purpose in the physical world except to perfect it for the Kingdom of HASHEM and ensure that HASHEM's name is magnified and sanctified in the world.

Mourners' *Kaddish*

Based on this we can now understand the reason that our Rabbi instructed us to recite *kaddish* for someone who has passed away. When a person leaves this world and his relatives see that nobody takes any of their possessions with them to the next world, when the futility of mankind is exposed, that is the time when a person seeks more spiritual meaning for his world. The more a person is aware of his own nothingness, the more he is drawn to HASHEM and is able to stand before Him with true humility. At that time, he seeks spirituality and the One who stands behind everything that occurs in the world. That is the time when he finds HASHEM and he is most suitable to seek the sanctification and magnification of His name.

Furthermore, a person's mourning is a time of extreme pain. Losing a close relative, the sense of being an orphan, "For my father and mother abandoned me," (Tehillim 27:10) is the appropriate time to feel strong faith -- when a person is able to experience the sense of "Yet HASHEM will gather me up," (ibid.).

This is also the greatest time for a believer, when he has the potential to reach the greatest heights in his prayer. At this time of heartbreak and tremendous pain and personal loss, at this time the person senses the need to look inside himself and focus on his pain. This is a time when a person yearns to find consolation for his spirit and a cure for his soul. Specifically and particularly at this time, if he would only understand the great potential of the moment and take his mind away from himself and his pain and would truly pray for the suffering of the Divine Presence, because he is not alone in this pain -- for when he is suffering it also causes pain to the Holy One, blessed is He -- he would be offering the most authentic prayer possible. Therefore, the Rabbis instituted that mourners should recite *kaddish* specifically at this time and

Similarly, the Talmud (Berachos 31b) says that Moshe also cast words Heavenward. *Nefesh Hachayim* explains that these words were said in praise of Moshe, who had intent in his prayer for the pain of the Divine Presence and not on the pain of the Jewish people themselves. In this way he also explains what the Rabbis say there, that Eliyahu Hanavi also cast words Heavenward. See Zohar on Parshas Terumah beginning of 125b and *Pri Etz Chayim*; *Sha'ar Hakeriyas Shema* chapter 8.

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with this intent, each and every person, according to his level. In this way, he will merit to elevate the spirit and perfect the soul of his departed relative.

However, at this time he also perfects the world. When a person confronts death, his heart yearns for complete salvation, for the revelation of the control of the One who will say "Enough" to the pain, and to the time when HASHEM will remove tears from all the faces and "He will swallow up death forever," (Yishaya 25:8). However, this redemption is not a personal redemption for that person. This redemption is by of necessity a worldwide redemption, a perfection of the entire world under His reign. Therefore, at this time a person must pray that the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, be magnified and sanctified and that His throne and His name should be complete, when the Divine Presence will be redeemed from its exile. Indeed, this redemption of the Divine Presence is what will bring the redemption to the individual and save him. But the essence and goal of the prayer is not his personal redemption, rather "May His great name be magnified and sanctified."

We can further add that not only does the person's possibility of praying better stand at as the foundation of the *kaddish* prayer, but also the practical concern to perfect the world caused our Rabbis to establish saying *kaddish* at the death of a Jew. When a person departs this world, it turns out that HASHEM loses a soldier in His army, and the legion of the King becomes smaller. This is a loss to the honor of Heaven.

Every Jewish person is not one of many, but a unique individual. He is not a number but a name. Every person with his personal abilities, his life story and his unique environment contributes in his own way to the honor of heaven. A person's role in his lifetime is to increase the honor of Heaven to the best of his ability in his actions and through his life's path. There is nobody who can do his task because everyone else has a different life and another path. Therefore, he is not a merely a simple soldier in HASHEM's army, but every soldier is considered to be absolutely unique. If so, his death is a great loss to the honor of Heaven. The Divine Presence is pained by this loss, and this is the greatest pain which comes as a result of a Jew's passing. We stand, therefore, at this difficult time and attempt to fill in some way the gap that was created. We pray for the honor of the Holy One, blessed is He, that it should not be harmed, but instead be magnified and blessed in the world.

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Our prayer, with the longing for sanctity it creates, in some way repairs the world's loss.⁴⁹⁶

Now we can come to the secret of the *kaddish* prayer and answer the questions we raised, in order as follows:

1. The total and complete dedication before HASHEM occurs when a person strives to magnify HASHEM's name and His actions, Who is omnipotent and there is nothing beside Him. This is the purpose of the *kaddish* prayer. The *kaddish* is the essence of a person's entire actions throughout his life and it is a call to direct the intention of his prayers. For this reason, it was chosen to begin every prayer service and to end it. People stand up when it is recited, because everyone strives and works towards the perfection of the kingdom of HASHEM and every increase in sanctity is a small step towards its perfection.

⁴⁹⁶ It is worth citing the words of the author S.A. Agnon in his poetic language in his book "*Near and Seen*" in an essay serving as an introduction to *kaddish* entitled, "Following the coffins of those killed for the Land of Israel." He writes:

A human king who goes out to war against his enemies sends his soldiers to kill and to be killed. It is uncertain whether he loves his soldiers or not, it is uncertain whether they are important to him or not. Even if they are important to him, they are as if they were already dead, because anyone who goes out to war has the Angel of Death wrapped around his heel and accompanying him to kill him. If an arrow, spear, sword or any other weapon hits him, and he is killed, they send another in his place and the king does not feel the loss. For the nations of the world are numerous and their armies are large. If one is killed, the king has many others to replace him.

However, our King, the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, is a King who desires life. He loves peace and pursues peace, He loves His Jewish people and chose us from all the nations. Not because we are the most numerous does HASHEM desire us, for we are the smallest of all nations. But because of His love that He loved us and because we are few, each and every person of the nation is as important before Him as an entire legion, because He does not have many others to put in our place.

If a single Jew is killed, the King's army is lessened, and weakness comes, as it were, before his Kingdom, because His reign is lacking one of its legions and His greatness is lessened, Heaven forbid.

Therefore, we pray and say after every Jew who dies, "May His great name be magnified and sanctified." May HASHEM's power be made great and may there be no weakness before Him. May He be sanctified in the worlds that He created according to His will, and may we not be afraid, but beautify the splendor of His holiness. May His kingdom rule, so that His kingdom will be revealed and seen in its completeness and nothing will be lacking from it, Heaven forbid. In our lives and in the lives of all the house of Yisrael, speedily and soon. For if His kingdom is revealed in the world, there will be peace and blessing in the world, singing and praise in the world, and great consolation in the world. Yisrael will be holy and beloved in the world and His greatness will continue to increase and grow and will never become less.

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2. The congregation answering, "May His great name be blessed," has greater strength than the entire prayer service, for it contains the secret of all the service of the heart, which is prayer to HASHEM for the perfection of His name and His throne. *Kaddish* is part of communal prayer because it comes in place of the praise that they would say in the Temple when they heard the explicit name of God, and its meaning is like the plain meaning of "blessed -- to increase -- the honor of the Kingdom of Heaven forever."
3. Preventing the desecration of HASHEM's name in the suffering of the Jewish people, whether as a whole or for every individual Jew, is the defense that protects the Jewish people. It protects them with the basic claim of, "Why should the non-Jews say..." The loss of any Jew is a loss of his special abilities that are irreplaceable, for the honor of Heaven. The pain of the Jewish people, or of any of its individuals, weakens the honor of Heaven and "pains" the Divine Presence. The proclamation of this cleaving of the people to their God and the close connection of love between them is the greatest of the words of defense that can be spoken, and it is the most elevated cause to save Yisrael from their suffering, which is synonymous with the suffering of the Divine Presence.
4. Based on this we also understand why we say in prayer that the Holy One, blessed is He, brings the redeemer to the children of the Patriarchs, "For the sake of His name, in love." For the fact that His name is implanted within us and forces our redemption is the greatest possible sign of HASHEM's love for us and the complete connection between HASHEM and His people, expressed in the phrase, "the Holy One and Yisrael are one."
5. This is the reason for the statement of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that: Anyone who answers, "Amen, may His great name be blessed" with all his strength has his evil decree torn up. For such a person forgets his pain and instead focuses on the pain of the Divine Presence, and its identification with his pain. This is one of the strongest expressions that one can give of a person's faith in God. The purpose of the evil decree is to bring a person to the service of HASHEM or to sanctify His name when He punishes those who oppose Him. When a person prays for the honor of the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, and increases the honor of Heaven, he obviates the need for punishment. This reward comes specifically to a believer based on the principles of reward and punishment. Because it is always preferable to find an alternative to carrying out the punishment so that it will not cause an even greater desecration of HASHEM's name through the punishment itself. For the suffering of an individual Jew is the pain of his Father in

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Heaven, and especially when referring to a son who cleaves to his God and prays for His pain, as it were.

6. Similarly, the words of Rabbi Yochanan are clear. He said: Anyone who answers, "Amen, may His great name be blessed," with all his might, even if he has a smear of idolatry, is forgiven. For this prayer is entirely the opposite of thoughts of idolatry. This is also the reason for the statement in *Gesher Hachayim* that reciting *kaddish* is the way to atone for the sin of desecration of HASHEM's name (which the deceased perhaps committed and did not repent before his death, so he is lacking atonement) because *kaddish* increases the honor of Heaven.
7. Publicly sanctifying HASHEM's name is obviously an even greater sanctification of HASHEM. It is what *Tosafos* mean that it is important to recite this prayer "with all one's might" which is "aloud" and in public gathered in Synagogues and houses of study, because we are referring to an act of honoring Heaven. The more public the act is, the greater is the sanctification of HASHEM's name it causes.

Based on what we said above, the explanation of the dispute between *Tosafos* and *Machzor Vitri* about whether *kaddish* is only prayer that HASHEM's great name should be blessed forever or whether it is also a prayer that HASHEM's name be made great and compete.

1. *Tosafos* hold that a person does not pray for the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, to become great because the name of HASHEM is an expression for His governance and revelation in the world. A person, made of physical matter, is unable to pray for the greatness of the governance of God. He cannot get involved in the secrets of the Holy One, blessed is He. The name of HASHEM remains great and never lacks anything at all, but we desire to sanctify that name in our world. Reciting *kaddish* after the death of a person comes to say that even though a soldier from HASHEM's legion is missing, this does not harm, Heaven forbid, the honor of Heaven. Quite the contrary, a person prays that HASHEM's great name will continue to be blessed forever and ever, because the Holy One, blessed is He, oversees eternity, whereas the person who passed away was only for a fleeting moment. One must therefore stress the eternality of the Divine Presence compared to the temporariness of creation in order to express the greatness of the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, that it should not be harmed, Heaven forbid, ever.

Similarly, *kaddish* is a form of validating HASHEM's justice. When reciting it the person justifies the judgment of HASHEM in the death of

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his relative and stresses the fact that a person does not understand the ways of the Divine Presence that are lofty against the background of the eternity of HASHEM. Not only is the person's heart not bitter over HASHEM's judgment, but even though his dead relative is lying before him he publicly blesses HASHEM.

2. *Machzor Vitri* explains *kaddish* based on the verse, "And now, may the power of HASHEM be great, as you spoke." Like the first explanation given in *Gesher Hachayim*, it is called an action whose purpose is to increase the honor of Heaven. A person indeed blesses the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, that he should become magnified and complete. The prayer is that HASHEM should redeem us from among the nations and bring the completion of His name and the throne of HASHEM.
3. The Holy One, blessed is He, requires, as it were, this prayer because it comes as an "awakening from below" – which allows the King to awaken, as it were, and redeem Himself. Because until then it is as if He is like a king bound in chains. The concept of "a complete name" means the Divine governance in which "I, Myself, and He, Himself, save please." This means the governance through which HASHEM redeems Himself and increases His honor in a way that will be undisputed. The throne is complete when "HASHEM shall be King over all the earth," without any disagreement about this from anyone at all. This is what a person prays with all his heart and in public, and this is the essence of the *kaddish* prayer.

This prayer has importance as an act of increasing the honor of Heaven in every prayer that a person recites. However, it reaches its especially highest peak when a person is in the depths of personal tragedy, amidst dismal sorrow, he calls out and throws off his personal pain, and believes in HASHEM with all his heart and recognizes HASHEM's identification with his pain and His love for him. He focuses in his prayer on the pain of the Divine Presence and the increase of the honor of Heaven. No wonder that this prayer atones for any desecration of HASHEM's name that the deceased committed, Heaven forbid, and opens for him the gates of the Garden of Eden.

However, once the essence of the *kaddish* prayer is clarified, a person is forced to ask, what should someone do if he has no son, Heaven forbid, who will recite *kaddish* for him, and have all of the intent that we discussed? The answer to this is found again in the understanding of the essence of the *kaddish* prayer. Since the entire essence of the prayer is the honor of Heaven, there is no need that it should be done specifically by the

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person's son after his death. Any sanctification of HASHEM's name fills the lack and the void created when the deceased departs the world. On the contrary, true sanctification of HASHEM's name is done during the person's lifetime. Someone who hopes for the redemption of HASHEM's name can serve HASHEM and sanctify His name during his lifetime and not only after his death. What, then, should a person do who has no son and is worried that there will be nobody to recite *kaddish* for him? His entire existence must be to increase the honor of Heaven.

Indeed, Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov writes in his book *The Eye of a Needle*, his description of the Kotzker Rebbe, his actions and his followers. He cites the actions of one of the Rebbe's great Chasidim, who was poverty stricken and barren of child, Rabbi Elazar Bialystoker:

Once his friends found him dancing on the roof of the Kotzker Rebbe's home, with a cabbage leaf stuck on his head (for lack of a *yarmulke*) and a girdle of straw around his waist (for lack of a belt), and wooden sandals on his feet (for lack of shoes). He danced there for a long time in joy and tremendous devotion. His feet floated in the air and his palms were spread out to Heaven, his voice was heard from one end of the city to the other, "To HASHEM belongs the earth and all that is in it, the world and its inhabitants – there is none beside Him." His voice shattered the sky and melted the hearts until everyone who saw him then, and anyone who heard his song, froze in his place and joined together with him in his song, "To HASHEM belongs the earth and all that is in it."

The elderly Rebbe also came out of his room and stood, looking at the face of Rabbi Elazar without removing his eyes from him for a long time.

Eventually he called to Rabbi Elazar on the roof and said, "When is it a time of favor? When the Holy One, blessed is He, is crowned in all the worlds! Come, Elazar, I will now bless you that you shall have a son in your old age..."

Rabbi Elazar without interrupting his dance replied to his Rebbe, "Rebbe, I am not lacking your *veyatzmach*." That is, I am not lacking anything, not even your promise of a son who will recite the phrase of *veyatzmach purkanei*... of the *kaddish* for me. For it is better to have a single moment of complete subservience to the Kingdom of Heaven on this roof than all the life of the World to Come which a son can bring

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for his father after his death by reciting for him, 'May His great name be magnified and sanctified.'"

Why does Elazar need to prepare a *kaddish* for himself for after his death, when he already now stands before his Creator, he and not his son, and says with every part of his body, "May the great name be magnified and sanctified," and everyone answers with all their might, "Amen, may the great name be blessed forever..."