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Tefillah Thoughts

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2 Langeries Drive Monsey, N.Y. 10952

Inspiring thoughts promoting appropriate decorum and kavanah during davening

Pirush Ha'Milos:

“הודו לה' קראו בשמו הודיעו בעמים עלילותיו.”
“Give thanks unto the L-rd, call upon His name; make known his doings among the peoples”.

“הודו לה' קראו בשמו”

To the level of “ה” it is only possible to give thanks. However, to the level of “His name” – אלקים – it is possible to call upon.

“הודיעו בעמים עלילותיו”

This is the mission of every single Jew, to make a dwelling place for Hashem in this world, and to publicize to all the nations His wondrous accomplishments.

“הודיעו בעמים עלילותיו”

“Amim” refers to the “Nefesh Ha'Bahamis”. By making him aware of Hashem’s doings it will help to frighten him.

(Ohr Ha'Tefillah vol. 3)

POINTS OF INTEREST:

The Alter Rebbe related: “I was contemplating to myself where to go, and I could not decide . . .

I knew that in Vilna one can learn how to learn, and in Mezritch one can learn how to daven. To learn I knew a little, and to daven I hardly knew, so I went to Mezritch.”

(Sefer Ha'sichos תשי"ה pg. 132)

Avodas Ha'Tefillah:

The first Avodah of Tefillah is the preparation beforehand. How can a person, finding himself in a limited body blemished through sin, begin to daven to Hashem who is above all limitations? The Rebbe explains that a person must first go out of his own self and limitations. This is achieved through the preparation for davening. Even before beginning hodu or mah tovu, just by putting on the gartel and readying oneself to daven, places a person on a level to address Hashem.

(Likutei Sichos Vol. 2 pg. 349)



Laws and customs:

“What is meant by preparing one’s thoughts? When praying, one must concentrate in his heart on the meaning of the words that he utters with his lips, as it is written “prepare their hearts; let your ear be attentive.” One should picture himself as if the divine presence abides before him and arouse his concentration and remove all the thoughts that disturb him, until his thoughts and concentration are clear while he is praying. He should consider that if he were speaking in the presence of a king of flesh and blood, he would choose his words and concentrate on them thoroughly so that he would not falter; how much more should he prepare himself when facing the king of kings, the holy one, blessed be He, before whom one must concentrate on one’s thoughts as well. For before him, thought is like speech, since he examines all thoughts.”

(Shulchan oruch ha'Rav sec. 98)

A Chassidische Story:

The Maggid of Mezritch spent many hours in Prayer. In the vicinity there lived a G-d fearing scholar who prayed according to the “kavanos” of the Ari Hakodosh. However, he did not spend as much time in his prayers, and the ways of the Maggid were a source of amazement to him. This man was a wealthy person, and once a year he traveled to the fair in Leipzig. He remained there until he finished all his business transactions, and then returned home, spending his time studying Torah.

Once he passed through Mezritch and remained there for a while in order to watch the Maggid praying. Afterwards the wealthy man asked for permission to see the Maggid personally and asked him: “I pray according to the “kavanos” of the Ari Hakodosh, but I do not spend that much time in my prayers. Why does it take such a long time for you to pray?”

The Maggid asked him: “what is your source of income?” the man replied: “I have a certain amount of capital at my disposal. Once a year I go to the big fair in Leipzig where I buy merchandise and sell it when I return to my home town. I make my living from the profits.” The Maggid asked him: “how do you know that you made a profit?” the man replied: “I write down all my expenses on a paper. After selling the merchandise, I subtract the expenditures from the total sum of income. The sum that remains is my profit.”

The Maggid asked him: “why do you spend so much time going to the fair and coming back? Instead of going, write down the sums of the initial capital and your expenses on a piece of paper. Then write down your income and calculate your profits!” the man began to laugh: “just from writing, without going to the fair, there will be no profits! You have to travel, you have to buy merchandise, you have to spend time selling your merchandise – and only then can you make a profit!”

The Maggid told him: “it is the same with praying. The “kavanos” are like merchandise. If you are not connected to them in your mind, as if you actually were there – it would be just like writing down the figures without any return. However, if you immerse your “neshama” in the “kavanos” and devote yourself to their inner meaning, then you will profit from these “Kavanos”. For this purpose, you need to invest a great deal of time during prayers.



Biur Tefillah

The Hebrew word “Tefillah” is generally translated into English by the word “prayer.” But this is not an accurate translation, for to *pray* means to beg, beseech, implore, and the like, for which we have a number of Hebrew words which more accurately convey this meaning. Our daily prayers are not simply requests addressed to Hashem to give us our daily needs, and nothing more. Of course, such requests are also included in our prayers, but by and large our prayers are much more than that, it is our connection to Hashem.

Prayer is a commandment of Hashem. Hashem commanded us to pray to Him and to Him alone. In times of distress, we must turn to Him for help; in times of comfort, we must express our gratitude to Hashem; and when all goes well with us, we must still pray to Hashem daily that he continue to show us his mercies and grant us our daily needs.

(My Prayer; Introduction)

Your comments and feedback are welcome: tefillathoughts@monseychabad.com