



The Words and the Thought Process

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E27)

Inspiring us to upgrade our relationship with Davening.

The עבודה of Davening

The Gemara¹ asks on the פסוק of בכל לבבכם, what is the עבודה that is in one's heart? The Gemara answers that the פסוק is referring to Davening. תפילה is therefore called עבודה שבלב – heart-service.

Of course, the Yetzer, the Great Deceiver, wants us to think that it is a service of the lips – saying words of תפילה. But the Torah teaches us that he is wrong. It is a service of the heart, and that is how we must relate to תפילה. Empty words, bereft of thought and intent, only play into the hand of the Deceiver; they are not תפילה.

The word תפילה refers to thinking

The מהר"ל demonstrates that the word תפילה is a reference to thought, not to recited words. The word has its origins in the declaration of יעקב אבינו who, in his joy at seeing the children of יוסף הצדיק, says וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל יוֹסֵף רְאֵה פָנַיךָ לֹא פָלַתִּי – I did not allow myself to even *think* about seeing you, let alone about seeing your children. רש"י spells it out –

לא פללתי – לא מלאני לפי לחשב מחשבה שאראך פניך עוד.
פללתי – לשון מחשבה

The key of תפילה is the thought that goes into it. And thought requires understanding.

Make your Siddur your Friend

I suggest that you get your own siddur and start making it really yours. As you understand more of the תפילות, take notes, highlight, or underline the words and thoughts that speak to you. Your connection to תפילה will intensify because you will be seeing yourself and your thoughts as you Daven.

*He yearned to have
the sort of
connection with the
Creator that this
Jew had. What
does it take? How
is it done?*

As a young בעל שחרית for the ימים נוראים, I learned with my Zayde, Rav Chanoch Henoch Krohn זצ"ל who was not only an accomplished בעל תפילה in the Scranton and McKeesport area, but he was also a ג"ך in בקי. He would ask me, as we practiced, if I knew the meaning of this word or that. Often, I did not.

He reminded me that as the representative of the ציבור I must know what I am saying. I noted many of the translations that he taught me into מחזור. That made the מחזור mine and it turned the Davening into a personal experience, not just a recitation.

¹ תענית ב.



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And do not be afraid of using a siddur with translation. Distinguished תלמידי חכמים do so. It comes from a desire to understand the תפילות.

A Shiur in תפילה

Rav Sheftel Horowitz (1592-1660, son of the 'של"ה הקי), in his role as a Dayan in Frankfurt, set up a סדר לימוד where they learned the פירוש התפילות. Perhaps that is a practice that should be revived. In any case, how does that contrast with the all-too-popular current notion that saying the words is 'more than enough.'

Less, but with כוונה

The Gemara² (citing the Zohar and the Midrash) teaches that רחמנא ליבא בעי – Hashem wants and seeks out our hearts. Words and songs are only as useful as they bring out the sincerity of our thoughts. Alone, without devotion of the heart, words and songs are but a reminder of our distance from Hashem.

This is codified in הלכה. The מחבר rules³ that quality of כוונה is more valuable than quantity without כוונה. And while quantity with כוונה is the ideal, one who must choose between the two should opt for less with כוונה than to sacrifice כוונה. The same, adds the משנה ברורה, applies to לימוד התורה. When the issue is an eternal relationship with ה', it is not the time to check your watch. It is the time to check your כוונה. And that, as we have said, is a real עבודה. And especially on שבת קודש, when we set aside more

time than on a weekday to Daven and connect, we should focus our attention on our כוונה.

Examples

Surely, as you study the תפילות, you will discover insights that speak to you. As we mentioned, try to collect them in your Siddur so that you can recall them while you are Davening. In the meantime, here are some thoughts that can get your collection started:

Dovid HaMelech describes הרופא לשבורי הקב"ה as לב – He heals the brokenhearted. I recall being struck when I was first shown that the first letters of those words spell הלל. The greatest praise for Hashem is His encouragement. It prompts me to reflect on how I am doing with encouraging others. Am I emulating Hashem and taking that role seriously? That is an important underline for me, and it might be meaningful for you, as well.

In להמשיל לו, אדון עולם we say that there is none להחבירה. What do those words mean? When I realized that להחבירה comes from the word חבר, I understood why ArtScroll translates it to mean 'to compare to Him, to declare as His equal.' There is no משל that can capture His Unity.

Every word that we do not understand is a window, an opportunity to discover what חז"ל are showing us. Do we know what רצה והחליצנו means (the addition for Shabbos in ברכת המזון)?⁴ Or, do we know what the Aramaic words ביה אנא mean in בריך שמיא ('In Him I trust.')

² סנהדרין קו:

³ או"ח סימן א' סעיף ד'

⁴ See the footnote in the ArtScroll Siddur which points us to ויקרא רבה לד:טו which explains that והחליצנו has several connotations.



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חזרת הש"ץ

Speaking during Davening is always forbidden. However, when speaking about חזרת הש"ץ, the מחבר reserves a rarely-used language for one who speaks during חזרת הש"ץ. He says⁵ that not only is the speaker committing a grave חטא, but that the sin is גדול עונו מנשוא – greater than one can bear. This language alludes to Kayin's claim after having murdered הבל. He asked ה' if his sin is too great to be borne.

I heard Rav Matisyahu Solomon shlita⁶ wonder how speaking during חזרת הש"ץ could earn a description which is otherwise reserved for the first murderer?! I found myself thinking how this sin could be so grievous?!

Consider a person who is on trial for serious matters. His lawyer is pleading his case before the judge. And while this drama is unfolding the defendant notices his friends and starts catching up with this one and that one on the latest. Is it hard to imagine how the judge would react? Is it a stretch to then say that this offense is too great to bear before the heavenly court? At stake are the things that are most precious to us! Our 'lawyer' is presenting our case on our behalf, and we are doing what?!

A story: Echoes of Davening into Eternity

This story has two main characters and one hidden one. You decide which is main one. It was shared with me by Rabbi Aryeh Rodin shlita, Rav of the Ohev Shalom Shul in Dallas. At the time the story began, Rabbi Rodin was

the Rav of the Young Israel of Dallas, before the new Shul was built in the north.

With a knock on Rabbi Rodin's door Leonard Frohman was welcomed into his home. The two had not met previously but the visitor was interested in learning more about Yiddishkeit and Rabbi Rodin was only too happy to spend time trying to answer his questions. A bond was quickly formed. Leonard was touched by Rabbi Rodin's refined character and authenticity, and he began attending Davening, eventually changing his life to come closer to Torah and Mitzvos.

When it became clear that Rabbi Rodin was going to move north to reach out to an underserved neighborhood in Dallas, Leonard jumped in to help. He did not just move to the new neighborhood; he donated generously to the construction of the new Shul, and he even convinced his friends to move and do the same.

In time, the secret behind that first meeting became known. Leonard had just come back from a tour of Israel. Their last evening was going to be the 'religious' part of the tour and included an evening visit to the Kosel.

Not knowing what the protocol was, Leonard copied the actions of others who were writing notes and placing them in the wall. But as he approached the wall to put in his note he was struck by the simple, sincere prayers of the Yerushalmi Jew who was pouring out his heart next to where Leonard stood. He did not know how to respond. He would have liked to help the man if money were what was needed, but more

⁵ אור"ח סימן קכ"ד סעיף ד'

⁶ מתתיהו חיים בן עטל לרפ"ש בתש"י



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than anything else, he yearned to have the sort of intimate connection with the Creator that this Jew had. What does it take? How is it done?

Upon his return to Dallas, he turned to his friend who worked at the Kosher Bakery there. He described the sincere, connected Jew to his friend behind the counter and asked one question: If that man came to Dallas, where would he go to pray? Without hesitation his friend said that he would go to Daven with Rabbi Rodin. And with that background, Leonard made his way to Rabbi Rodin's door.

Sadly, Leonard had not married before he suffered a heart attack and passed away at 49. But at his Levaya, his mother thanked Rabbi Rodin for being the conduit through which her son found his way back to authentic Judaism. Indeed, she undertook to match all her son's

donations to the Shul and those funds allowed the project to be completed.

At the Shloshim, Rabbi Rodin reflected on that Yerushalmi Yid who was Davening at the Kosel. At the end of his life, at his Heavenly Review, he will be told that he is being credited with building a Shul in Dallas. He will surely be puzzled beyond words. I built a Shul?! Where?!

But they will be telling him the power of sincere prayer. Apart from whatever answer they showed him from Heaven at the time of his prayers, in שמים they will show him the power of a simple prayer. You cannot put too much effort into building an authentic relationship with Hashem and giving that expression in your Davening. And you cannot imagine the ripple effects of that sincerity.

Takeaway: I will try to upgrade my relationship with Davening.