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Hashem Hears Every Prayer, No Matter What Level You Are On

According to the *Nussach Sefard* version in Shemoneh Esrei, towards the end of the blessing **שמע קולינו**, we say: **כי אתה שומע תפילת כל פה עמך ישראל ברחמים** - "For You hear the prayers of every mouth of Your nation, Yisrael, with compassion."

Hashem hears the prayers of the Jewish people, in general; and more specifically, He hears the prayer of each individual Jew.

Tefillah (prayer\davening) is called the "avodah (service\inner work) of the heart". However, *tefillah* does not just remain in our heart; it is expressed through our mouth. It is rooted in the heart, but it is actualized through the mouth.

Our mouth that speaks to Hashem is therefore a holy tool that must be guarded and protected. It is the place where the 22 letters of the holy *Aleph Beis* exit from, and therefore, its holiness must be protected.

The *Talmud Yerushalmi* brings from the holy Sage, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who said that had he been by Sinai, he would have asked Hashem for two mouths - one mouth for words of Torah, and the other mouth to speak mundane words with. Hashem has decreed in His wisdom that we have the same mouth for both uses - for the holy, and for the mundane; the same mouth which we use for Torah and for *tefillah* is also used for having regular conversations with.

Chas v'shalom, a person can misuse his mouth to speak forbidden kinds of speech, such as *lashon hora* (gossip) or *rechilus* (peddling) or *avak lashon hora* (conversation that can lead to *lashon hora*), or *motzi shem ra* (slander). This mouth is not holy.

We would think that Hashem should not accept the prayers of those who misuse their mouth. After all, Yeshaya HaNavi said to Hashem, "I dwell in a nation with impure lips." But from the words **כי אתה שומע תפילת כל פה ישראל ברחמים**, we see that Hashem has mercy on us and He accepts the prayers of all people, even if their mouths are used to speak evil with.

However, it is clear that the purer one's mouth is - the more he guards his mouth from forbidden speech - the more readily his prayers are accepted. But even if one's mouth is not so holy, his prayers are still heard - for Hashem hears every prayer.

So on one hand, we must make sure our mouths stay pure, so that our mouth can properly speak with

Hashem. Yet, *tefillah* is also from our heart, for it is “*avodah* of the heart”; therefore, the heart is also something we must properly use in our *tefillas*.

The Roles of Intellect and Heart In Prayer

The *Nefesh HaChaim* says that when one *davens* and he wants to concentrate, he should think of the meaning of the words as the letters escape his mouth, and in this way, he is connected to the letters emerging from his lips. One’s thoughts, in this way, are connected to his words. This is one aspect of *tefillah*: that the thoughts be in line with what one says, that his thoughts be orderly.

Understandably, it is a very high spiritual level if one can concentrate like this for the entire time of *Shemoneh Esrei*. But the more a person orders his thoughts more often, his thoughts are connected to his words. That is the beginning part of *tefillah* - and it is the external part. But the inner part of *tefillah* is that *tefillah* is “*avodah* of the heart”, meaning, that the words should be emanating from our heart.

We need to know the meaning of the words, and we should also pronounce the words correctly, just like with *Kerias Shema*. We should certainly think about the words before we say them, so that our thoughts are in line with the words coming out of our mouths. But that is all just the outer part of *tefillah*! The inner part of *tefillah* is that the “*avodah* of the heart” is being expressed through our mouths. This means that we need to leave our intellect and let our heart take over.

If one only has proper thought and intellect while he is davening, but his heart isn’t being accessed, he is missing the “*avodah* of the heart” that is *tefillah*. He is still using his mind, but he’s not using his heart, so he is missing the essence of *tefillah*!

Our Rabbis asked: What is the reason that we need to *daven*, if Hashem knows everything and He knows what’s on our hearts and minds? There are many answers, but we will say the answer that pertains to this discussion: It is because our requests in *Tefillah* are not just about putting our minds into it.

If *Tefillah* was about using our intellect, then indeed, there is room to ask such a question: Why do we need to *daven*, when Hashem knows exactly what we need and what we want...? One can debate these kinds of questions back and forth and he can come up with all kinds of logical give-and-take discussions about it.

But when a person realizes that *tefillah* is “*avodah* of the heart” and he approaches his *tefillas* with that perspective, and from that recognition, he *davens* - his requests of his heart are not stemming from intellectually debating if he should daven for something or not.

Although a person must use his intellect to wonder if he should daven for something or not, one must believe in the words of our Sages that there is a mitzvah to *daven* (either according to the Ramban or the Rambam...) therefore, it doesn’t matter if we have what to *daven* about, or not. When we *daven*, the point is not about verbalizing what’s going on in our thinking mind; it is about expressing the yearnings of our heart. As the prayer goes, “Answer the requests of our **hearts**, for good.”

How The Intellect and Heart Can Come Together In Our Prayers

Here we come to a subtle point.

Our prayers are verbalized; the elementary aspect of *tefillah* is to know the meaning of the words, and this involves using our thinking mind. On the other hand, *tefillah* is called “*avodah* of the heart”, not “*avodah* of the *seichel* intellect”. Our *tefillas* are supposed to emanate from our heart, not from

our intellect.

The Sages state, "*Rachmana liba ba'ee*", "Hashem wants the heart." And it is written, "*My son, give your heart to Me.*" There is clearly an emphasis on the "heart" when it comes to *tefillah*. Isn't this a contradiction? Is *tefillah* mainly about using our minds (to know the meaning of the words), or is it mainly about using our hearts (since *tefillah* is called *avodah* of the heart)?

One simple answer is that one has to fuse together his intellect and heart together, and then he verbalizes that request – he wants something in his heart, thinks about it through his intellect, and then davens for it. That is one answer.

But the inner answer is as follows. *Tefillah* is the soul's cry to Hashem; as it is written, "*Their hearts cried out to Hashem*". *Tefillah* is about the heart dominating the intellect.

When one totally focuses on the external part of *Tefillah*, he davens superficially; his heart is not with him. This is indeed the reason why most people are spacing out in middle of *Shemoneh Esrei*, for the most part.

A more focused kind of person will think about the meaning of the words before he utters them. His intellect and mouth are being used, but that is where his *Shemoneh Esrei* begins and ends. Maybe he gets a mitzvah of "Talmud Torah" for thinking about the words, but...this does not resemble *Tefillah* in any way. This person is concentrating on what he's saying, but he is not really davening!

For example, a person takes a *sefer* that explains the meaning of the *tefillos*, or he learns *mefarshim* (commentaries) that explain the words of *davening*, learning it *b'iyun* (in-depth); we can call this "*iyun tefillah*" (learning about *davening*, in-depth) which definitely has its merits, but, it's merely "*iyun tefillah*", not ***tefillah***!! This kind of person *davens* with the same approach he has towards his learning. He has a *seder* in learning and a "*seder*" of davening, as if it's part of his "*seder*" of learning...

But the truthful approach is for a person to awaken his heart when he *davens*. He thinks what the words are about before he says them, and his heart is awake to feel and yearn for what his mind is thinking about. When a person *davens* in such a way, the yearnings and desires of his heart are in line with his intellect.

With this approach, the **heart** here does not dominate over the intellect - rather, the **intellect** dominates the heart.

Inner Prayer: Letting The Heart Dominate

But there is an even more inner perspective towards *tefillah*.

Tefillah is called "service of the heart", meaning, when we *daven*, it is a time in which one should let his **heart** dominate his intellect to a certain extent.

On one hand, we know that the mind is supposed to dominate the heart, meaning that your intellect should be in control of your emotions; this refers to developing a strong intellect which can help one control the passions of the *yetzer hora*. Generally, our intellect should be dominating our intellect.

But during *davening*, it is a time to let our heart dominate; to let the purity in our heart be awakened. There is a prayer in which we daven that Hashem "should purify our hearts to serve You in truth", but during *Shemoneh Esrei* especially, one needs to awaken the purity of his heart.

Although the rest of the day is not the time to let our heart dominate, *Shemoneh Esrei* is a time in

which one should awaken the pure point of his heart (not the *yetzer hora* present in the heart) and let it dominate over the intellect. It is written, “*Their hearts cried out to Hashem*” – their hearts overcame their intellect, thus they cried out to Hashem in prayer.

Normally, the intellect should be dominating, not the heart. If one lets his heart dominate his intellect all the time, he won't be able to understand the Torah, because the Torah requires the use of the intellect. His emotions will weaken his intellect and mental comprehension, preventing him from the subtle discerning that is required in order to plumb the depths of the Torah.

But when it comes to *Tefillah*, the rule is: “There is a time to learn Torah, and a separate time to pray.” *Tefillah* is the time in which one speaks to Hashem, from his feelings, and this requires the heart; during *tefillah*, one needs to let his heart dominate his intellect. This is the depth of “*avodah of the heart.*”

When one *davens* in this way, all the questions about *davening* fall away. Questions only come from the understanding of our intellect. When the purity in our heart overcomes our intellect as we daven, the heart simply cries out to Hashem, as it naturally can. This is the depth of *tefillah*.

(There is a more subtle approach as well towards our davening: that when we daven, our davening should emanate from our point of *temimus* (simple earnestness) which is above our intellect.)

So firstly, one has to be clear that *tefillah* is not merely about standing in front of Hashem and asking for things. It is to enter, with your soul, the situation that is “*tefillah*”. Just as you can be awoken or asleep in the physical world, *tefillah* is about your soul entering *tefillah*.

When one learns Torah, he needs to let his intellect overpower his emotions, otherwise, his emotions will weaken his thinking mind and won't let him learn with clarity. But when one is *davening*, it is the time to use the heart and let it dominate. It is the time to let the heart go free and express its feelings.

When one is self-aware of his soul and he absorbs this perspective towards *tefillah*, the yearnings of his soul will be allowed to be expressed, and the intellectual mind will not get in the way. When the heart dominates, the questions of the intellect about “why we need to daven” are silenced.

When one merely concentrates on the words and he has emotion too, his *tefillos* are not emanating from his feelings, but from his intellect. But when one lets his heart express itself freely, he pours out his heart to Hashem.

When a person is only concentrating on the meaning of the words, he actually limits his feelings in the process, because he is so focused on “concentrating” that he muzzles his actual heart; it is very difficult for one's heart to pour itself out in prayer to Hashem like this.

But when one lets his heart flow during *tefillah*, letting it overpower the intellect (and of course, his intellect should still remain intact and functioning; but he should let his soul express itself, whereupon the heart overpowers the intellect), his heart pours itself out to Hashem as it should.

Davening From Your Temimus (Earnestness)

To go deeper with this, earlier, it was mentioned that “*avodah of the heart*” is not defined as mere inspiration and emotion. The inner essence of it is: “You shall be ***tamim*** (“simple”) with Hashem your G-d.” The power of ***temimus*** – your simple earnestness and trust in Hashem – is the power that resides deep in your heart, and it is the root of all your inner abilities.

Our intellect is not capable of *temimus*. Our intellect rationalizes back and forth, and it is capable of trickery, deviousness, and all kinds of “cleverness”. Our inner power of *temimus*, which is the true essence of the Jewish people, has nothing to do with being intellectual and clever.

It is mainly from our *temimus* that our *davening* should be coming from.

Tefillah is to be “*nochach pnei Hashem*”, to be opposite Hashem and facing Him; how can one be “facing” Hashem? It is by being “with” Hashem, which is through being a “*tamim* with Hashem.” When you let your soul enter into *temimus*, that is called being “*with Hashem your G-d*” - and then you can feel how you are “*nochach pnei Hashem*”.

It is from that place of perception in your soul that the depth of *tefillah* is reached. To feel that “one is standing in front of the King”, one has to first be a *tamim*, to feel simply that he is “with Hashem” in the first place. From that recognition one can come to speak with Hashem and feel that this conversation taking place is as real as can be, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* describes. It can only feel real when one is *davening* from his *temimus*.

The *Mishna Berurah* writes in the name of *Maharash Kino* that when he *davened*, he did not think about lofty spiritual concepts; rather, he prayed to Hashem simply like a child. This is describing the idea here: *temimus*.

Levels of Tefillah

The depth of the *avodah* of *tefillah* is that we are speaking with Hashem, but from which place in our soul are we speaking with Him? This is a matter that requires one to make introspection and look deeply into himself.

When a person speaks to Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei*, he might just be talking only superficially, doing a lip service. Even if a person doesn't daven superficially, it could still be that he is merely concentrating on the words and using his intellect alone, but he is still missing emotion. And even if a person is *davening* from his emotions like he should, it must be integrated with the intellect. Even more so, a person needs to let his heart totally dominate during *Shemoneh Esrei*, so that he can pour out his heart properly as he should.

Finally, though, there is a deeper kind of *tefillah*, as we have just explained: To *daven* from the very innermost depths of the heart, which is one's *temimus*. When one enters his *temimus* during *Shemoneh Esrei*, he speaks to Him simply, and not out of mere emotion.

These are two totally different ways to *daven*. The outer layer of our heart is our emotions, and from there, a person can *daven* to Hashem. But this is still just the external part of the heart. When one *davens* in the deeper way, he doesn't even need feeling and external movement; he can be totally still and silent, yet his *tefillas* to Hashem are emanating from his *temimus*. He is not lethargic at all, *chas v'shalom*; he is 'tamim' with Hashem, thus he speaks to Him 'like a man talking to a friend', as the *Mesillas Yescharim* states.

Temimus: Davening From Inner Silence

The Kotzker Rebbe zt"l said that the non-Jews of Ninveh cried out to Hashem with screams, which teaches us that a non-Jew can only daven to Hashem when he screams out to Him. The power of a Jew, by contrast, is that he can daven silently to Hashem, with the same level of emotion. A Jew has the unique power to speak simply with Hashem - with the more inward he becomes.

On a deeper note, each Jew has both an external and inner layer to his heart; part of the prayer

emanates from the external part of the heart, and part of the prayer can emanate from the inner layer of the heart, as long as one has attained inner refinement.

Tefillah on one hand is verbalized through our mouth, and indeed, Hashem hears the prayers of every mouth, even a mouth that is impure. He hears even the most superficial kind of prayer uttered – even a *tefillah* that begins in the mouth and ends with the level of the mouth. Even such a prayer Hashem hears – for He hears every prayer.

The more desired kind of *tefillah* is when the heart and intellect are fused together, and even more so, when the *tefillos* are emanating entirely from the heart. The most desired kind of *tefillah* is when the *tefillah* is emanating from one's *temimus*.

If one reaches a connection of mind and heart when he *davens*, and if one merits to penetrate even deeper and he reaches his point of *temimus* when he *davens* – his *tefillah* becomes alive, and even more so, it will become a source of life to him.

When one speaks to Hashem but his heart is not with him, or if he is spacing out in his thoughts – he can still feel alive from such *tefillos*, but the *tefillah* itself will not become a source of vitality to him.

But the more a person lets his heart dominate when he *davens* and he is filled with emotion when he *davens* – and surely with the more he *davens* from his *temimus*, which emanates from a deep inner silence – his *tefillah* becomes both a yearning of the heart as well as a simple audience with Hashem in which one talks to his beloved Friend. His soul will feel joy just from the very act of talking to Hashem, and it will become a source of vitality to him.

In Conclusion

Davening from one's *temimus* is the truthful way to *daven*. It is an even deeper perspective than being aware that Hashem answers us with His *ratzon* and not just His *rachamim*[\[1\]](#), and it is deeper than how we explained what it means to ask Hashem that we not remain empty-handed[\[2\]](#).

The depth of *tefillah* is to reach the depth of our soul – which is to realize that just conversing with Hashem brings joy to Hashem. And therefore, it is hard to part from Hashem when we finish *Shemoneh Esrei*, because our soul was enjoying it so much.

Davening in this way helps a person converse with Hashem all the time, not just during *tefillah*. It shows a person that he can always speak with Hashem, verbally or mentally, because it is the delight of the soul to always converse with Him.

This perspective helps a person accept that the point of *tefillah* is not to wonder if Hashem will answer our prayers or not, and even more so, it is not mainly about concentrating on the words.

It is about *revealing our heart* as we *daven*. It is to realize with clarity that we stand in front of Hashem, to truly feel “*nochach pnei Hashem*”, “opposite Hashem.”

[\[1\]](#) See ***Tefillah #0135- Finding Favor By Hashem***

[\[2\]](#) See ***previous shiur***

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