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[Home](#) > Tefillah - 003 Hashem, Open My Lips

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## Tefillah - 003 Hashem, Open My Lips

### ***What Are We Asking Permission For?***

In all of *Shemoneh Esrei*, there are no private prayers. We either praise and thank Hashem, or we ask for general requests that affect the public. But in the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*, there is a personal prayer — “Hashem, open my lips.”

We don't start davening in *Shemoneh Esrei*; we daven as soon as we get up, saying *Modeh Ani*. So why do we have to ask Hashem in the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei* to open our lips, if we have already been davening as soon as we got up?

The answer to this is as follows: Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik *zt"l* said that there are two aspects of concentration in *tefillah*: to know the meaning of the words, and to “stand in front of the King.” We only stand in front of Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei*, and this is why *Shemoneh Esrei* is called the “*Amidah*.” This is a unique level, the level described by the Rema in the beginning of *Shulchan Aruch*: “A person's movements are not the same as when he sits in the King's Palace.” Of course, Hashem hears us even when we aren't actually standing in front of Him. But in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we stand in front of Him — we are in His place.

Before *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are talking, and Hashem is listening. We don't need to be in Heaven in order to talk. But when we stand in front of Hashem, we are in His place — and it is really unbecoming for us to talk now.

This is why we ask Hashem to open our lips — **to give us permission to talk**. We are not merely asking for permission to talk; we are asking for permission because really, this isn't the place to talk.

### ***“And Let My Mouth Speak of Your Praises”***

Then we ask, “And let my mouth speak of Your praises.” We are asking that all of our talking now should come from a lofty place, not from ourselves. We are asking Hashem to “talk” specifically because of Hashem's ability to let us talk here, and our talking now is not of the same source that we are used to. We are not talking like we are used to.

### ***Shemoneh Esrei Is to Daven for Klal Yisrael***

When we daven for personal requests, we are davening from only a private aspect in ourselves. We are davening each for our own personal welfare. When we request things from Hashem for ourselves, we are only using the outer parts of our soul.

*Shemoneh Esrei*, though is a prayer for the public. It is a prayer that emanates from a deeper place in our soul. Even the *chazzan's* repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei* is not personal, because it is only to fulfill others' obligation. *Shemoneh Esrei*, by essence, is not personalized — it is about praying for others.

Why is there no requirement for the *chazzan* to repeat *Pesukei Dezimrah* and the blessings of *Shema*? It is because there are two kinds of praying with the public (*tefillah b'tzibbur*): Praying silently with the public, and praying loudly with the public. Even when one prays *Shemoneh Esrei* alone, he is still praying a public prayer; it's not individual. Every *Shemoneh Esrei* is a public prayer.

There are two kinds of *tefillah* we find in *Tehillim*: *tefillah l'oni* (the poor person's prayer), and *tefillah l'Moshe* (the prayer of Moshe). These are two unique ways of davening.

*Pesukei Dezimrah*, the blessings of *Shema*, and the *Shema* itself are like the prayers of a poor person, who prays for himself. But *Shemoneh Esrei* is like the prayer of Moshe — Moshe represents the entire nation of Yisrael. Moshe's prayer is in essence a prayer on behalf of all of Klal Yisrael; he didn't pray for himself.

If one only davens for himself and is only worried about himself, he cannot enter the King's Palace in *Shemoneh Esrei*, because he's not really utilizing the idea of *Shemoneh Esrei*. *Shemoneh Esrei* is to daven on behalf of the Jewish people, to think about others — and it is not about oneself.

"Hashem, open my lips." What are we really asking? We are asking Hashem for help that the *tefillah* that we are now davening — *Shemoneh Esrei* — should be a prayer for Klal Yisrael, not for ourselves. It is not about me; it's about *Klal Yisrael*.

### **Summary of the "Hashem, Open My Lips" Prayer**

We have mentioned two reasons why we ask Hashem that He open up our lips. 1) Because really we have no permission to speak in Heaven, and we are asking permission. 2) We are asking to be helped that our prayers come from a truthful part of our soul, an inner part — a concern for *Klal Yisrael*, not for our own self.

### **Two Ways to Understand How We Relate to Hashem**

The kind of understanding of *Shemoneh Esrei* that we have just given applies to one who serves Hashem with *daas* — intellectual awareness of Hashem.

But there is an even simpler way to understand it: because we need to have a palpable kind of *tefillah*, a real sense of what it is.

*Tefillah* is how we perceive life! Hashem created the world and all of Creation. He created two kinds of ways in which we can perceive Him:

1) That He is "*Kel Mistater*" — a "hidden Almighty."

2) *V'Shochanti B'tocham* — "And I will dwell among them."

The fact that He is a "hidden Almighty" means for us that we know there is a Creator, and that He resides in Heaven while we are here on Earth. This represents the understanding based on our *daas*.

But there is also a view of "And I will dwell among them." This means that one literally feels Hashem's existence, and that he can feel it no less than the sunshine. It is a very real sense. This feeling is

granted only to one who truly seeks Hashem.

*Tefillah* is not defined as requests from Hashem. What we need and request are merely a means to achieve a greater goal. *Tefillah* does not exist to thank Hashem for everything and give praise to Him; that is also just a part of what *tefillah* is.

The essence of *tefillah* is to utterly realize *Who* we are praising, and from *Whom* we are asking. Although we give thanks and praise to Hashem, "*lehodos u'lihallel*," this is not the purpose. The purpose of thanking and praising Hashem is to realize to Whom we are thanking and praising.

When we request something of Hashem, or when we thank Him, it is only a means to a greater goal. It is not a purpose unto itself. The goal of all requests and thanks to Hashem is to come to a palpable sense of Hashem's existence.

This is really why we ask that Hashem open our lips — we are asking that we should realize that until now, all of our *tefillah* was only a means to a greater purpose, and that now in *Shemoneh Esrei*, all of our *tefillah* should come from a sense of Hashem's existence, the level of "standing before the King."

### ***With What Mindset Are We Davening Shemoneh Esrei?***

To give an example of this, when one davens *Refaeinu* — "Hashem, heal us" — what is the purpose? Is the purpose to ask that all of the sick be healed? Or to realize that Hashem is the true Healer of all? The purpose of this *tefillah* is not that He heal the sick. It is to reveal to all who the true Source of healing is: Hashem. That is what *Refaeinu* is about!

Some people are davening *Shemoneh Esrei*, but they are still on the level of the morning blessings. They are not davening from an inner place in their soul; they are only davening for themselves.

### ***The Intellectual Approach and the Simple Approach***

A person needs to clarify for himself what life is. In the outside world, the meaning of "life" is hidden to us. But the meaning of life can be clarified in the inner place of the soul.

The holy *sefarim* mention that there are two general ways to serve Hashem — through *daas* (lit. intellectual awareness) or through *p'shutus* (lit. simplicity). The ways to serve Hashem with *daas* are mentioned in *sefer Derech Hashem* and *Daas Tevunos*. But there is another way to serve Hashem — through the way of *p'shutus*. This means to live with a real sense of Hashem's existence.

### ***How Do You Come to Really Feel Hashem?***

The tools to achieve this are toiling to our utmost in Torah. When a person is connected to Torah and mitzvos, he will definitely come to have this real sense. But if one doesn't really feel Hashem's presence in life, it is a sign that something is missing from his learning and his mitzvos.