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[Home](#) > Bilvavi Part 4 - Chapter 11 Renewing Our Prayers

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Renewal - Returning To The Root of the Soul

It is human nature to love new things.

However, the possuk tells us that *“There is nothing new under the sun.”* [1] Chazal remark on this that only what is “underneath” the sun is never new, but above the sun, there are indeed new things. In other words, there are places which we find that have nothing new, and there are places that can have renewal.

Hashem *“renews in His goodness, every day, the act of Creation.”* Every second, Hashem is renewing the world, and a person’s soul is able to feel this. How indeed can we feel that universal renewal?

Once a month, when we sanctify the moon, we mention how Hashem renews the lunar cycle every month. How can say this, though, if the possuk tells us that there is nothing new under the sun? Isn’t the moon under the sun?

The answer to this is that normally, when the moon is under the sun, it can’t be renewed, but when Hashem crowns it anew each month, it becomes new.

What does it mean that the moon is renewed? If you think about it, the moon never gets renewed, it just returns to the beginning of its cycle.

This shows us that what we perceive as “new” is never really new, but just a *return* to the way things are supposed to be. In other words, when a person renews himself, he is returning to the way things are supposed to be, to the root of his soul. In the original state of things, before the sin wreaked havoc on the fabric of Creation, there was only man in Gan Eden, attached to Hashem in complete intimacy, with nothing to come in between. That is our root, and it is our perfected state which we are trying to return to.

Therefore, when we seek to make ourselves “new”, we need to understand that the meaning of “new” is not like how we normally understand it from the physical world we inhabit. Making ourselves “new” means that we are attempting to return to our original situation, to our soul’s root – to the perfected design of Creation.

Renewal of Prayer

One of the main tools which we are given to renew ourselves and return to our root is through *tefillah*

(prayer). It is one of the three pillars which the world stands on, and it is a power we have to renew ourselves. Let us explain.

From a simple perspective, it seems that there is nothing new to the three *tefillos* which we *daven* every day. The *tefillos* were established by Chazal to *daven* every day, and it appears to us that yesterday's *tefillah* is the same exact as today's *tefillah*. Superficially, there is nothing new to any of our *tefillos*.

Upon some thought, however, there is a way how our *tefillos* can be new every day: when we add our own personal *bakashos* (requests) into our *tefillos*. If so, a person can add something new to his *tefillah* today that he didn't have yesterday in his *tefillah* – a new request.

If this is all we can do to make our *tefillos* new to us every day, then *tefillah* only renews people who indeed add in their own personal *bakashos* every day; but if someone just *davens* regularly every day without adding any of his own private *bakashos* to his *tefillos*, then he does not experience any renewal through his prayers. Learning Torah, we all know, can have *chiddushim* (novel Torah insights), and we can always add onto the level of our understanding which we didn't have yesterday in Torah. So with learning Torah, we can all find renewal through it. But it seems that *tefillah* has no renewal to it unless someone has his personal *bakashos* every day.

If we reflect into this matter more, though, we can discover that *tefillah* can be a source of renewal even if we don't add our personal *bakashos*. If we get rid of our superficial notions of what “new” is and instead realize the inner meaning of “new”, we will be able to have a new *tefillah* every day! The only reason why we don't feel that *tefillos* can be new every day is because we are obviously only having superficial renewal. If we would leave the superficial renewal and search for the inner renewal, we will find the renewal of *tefillah*, every day.

Chazal say that “there is no prayer which is like another.” The book *Nefesh HaChaim* explains this at length.^[2] Although we are all saying the same words every day, that's only the superficial layer of *tefillah*. The inner layer of *tefillah* is unique to each person. In fact, there is nothing more new than one's personal renewal of *Tefillah*, because when you take the same old thing and you give it your unique expression - *that* is a novelty. We have the potential to find renewal through our *tefillos*, and we just need to connect to it.

“*New months You gave to Your nation, a time of atonement for all their offspring.*” Rosh Chodesh, the power of renewal, was given to us so we can be forgiven from sins; in other words, if we don't remove the sins that block us from our Creator, we cannot be renewed. Renewal, as we said, is for us to return to our root – utter closeness to Hashem, to simply be attached to Him. Renewal removes sin and draws us close to the Creator.

This shows us what the inner renewal of *tefillah* is. Every day, each individual *tefillah* we *daven* is about becoming close to Hashem – and this can be new each time, to each person. It is only the superficial layer of *tefillah*, the words we all say each day, that are never new. But the inner layer behind *tefillah* – our yearning to become close to Hashem – is a point that can be new and unique to every person.

Eighteen Separate Blessings, Or One Common Yearning?

Many people already feel this point we are saying, and they don't just *daven* superficially. They really *daven* with a feeling that each *tefillah* is a new *tefillah*. But there is still room to grow more, even after knowing this. It still might be just a form of inspiration (*hisorerus*) to a person. Inspiration alone isn't enough, because when a person just goes with inspiration, he will get enthused from one particular

possuk or one particular blessing in *Shemoneh Esrei*, and this causes a problem. Let us explain what it is.

It is a wonderful thing to feel enthusiasm from our *davening*, and it's definitely better than just *davening* superficially without having any feeling to our *davening*. But we must know that the feeling of closeness to Hashem, which is the renewal that *tefillah* affords us, is a feeling that has to get stronger every day. This is the main effect that *tefillah* is supposed to renew us with, and the feelings of closeness to Hashem have to intensify with each *tefillah*.

In *Shemoneh Esrei*, we have 18 blessings, and 12 of them are requests. On one hand, this helps us become closer to Hashem, but on the other hand, we must be aware of something about this. When a person gets immersed in his concentration during, let's say, the blessing of *Selach Lanu* (Forgive us) or in *Refoeinu* (Heal us), then he becomes self-absorbed! He becomes enmeshed in his physical needs. Although he is using his body's needs as a way to daven to Hashem, and there is some closeness to Hashem he reaches through this, still, in the end of the day the person is wrapped up in himself, in what he needs.

What is the *true way to daven*?

The soul in us wants closeness to Hashem, and in every *tefillah* we daven, in every blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we need to find how what we are davening about is holding back *our closeness to Hashem* is we don't have it. Thus, we are not just seeking to daven to simply fill our lacking situation, but rather *so that we can become closer to Hashem* through getting what we are missing. If we daven like this, the 18 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* will become full of life to us.

"Seeking desire separates."^[3] When a person davens the 18 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* as 18 separate requests that he has – he wants to do teshuvah, he wants to be forgiven for his sins, he wants to be healed, etc. – then each blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* to him stands by itself. This is not the true purpose of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Only when a person connects to the inner layer of *tefillah* – to the renewal of *tefillah*, a result of strengthening one's yearning for a connection with Hashem – does one's *tefillah* then become alive.

"If Only A Person Would Pray The Entire Day"

One of the Sages said, "If only a person would pray a whole day."^[4] How would it even be possible for a person to *daven* the entire day?! Is *tefillah* all that there is to do? What about learning Torah and doing *chessed*?

Also, people are busy. How would it be possible for people to *daven* the entire day?? And what does it mean "if only" a person would daven the entire day – where do we ever find a Sage who talks like this?

The depth of this matter is that there are two kinds of *tefillah*. There is a kind of *tefillah* which we say verbally, or even mentally (these are really two separate categories as well, but for the purpose of our discussion, they are both under one group of *tefillah*). But there is another kind of *tefillah* which emanates from our soul itself – its yearnings, its hopes, its aspirations. This source of *tefillah* is rooted in our innermost desires. It is a *tefillah* which we sometimes aren't even aware of consciously in our minds, and we definitely never come to verbalize it. It is our inner yearnings!

The statement "If only a person would pray the whole day" means that *tefillah* should be to a person as a yearning from within. This is not meant for a person to actually daven an entire day; rather, it means that a person should have this yearning all the time. This yearning, the will in a person to want

to connect to the Creator, is actually a kind of *tefillah* itself.

Anyone at his level can have this constant desire throughout the day – a desire to be close to Hashem. This is what the Sage meant in the words “if only” a person would *daven* all day.

If a person is missing this inner point, he is missing the root of *tefillah*. Only if it can be said of him that all day he embodies the possuk “*And I am prayer*”, can the three *tefillos* established by Chazal look the way they should.

All Our Ruchniyus Is Based on Tefillah

During the day, our Avodas Hashem generally consists of two parts: our physical matters and needs, and our spiritual matters.

Our spiritual work must be connected to the goal of it all. When we learn Torah, *daven* or do *chessed*, it must be with the attitude of “If only” – that a person should have a yearning for closeness with Hashem. This feeling has to accompany one throughout the entire day.

Tefillah is the basis of any *avodah* we do. Rashi^[5] states that nothing can come without *tefillah*, such as rain, which we *daven* for in order to come. Besides for the general three *tefillos* of the day, a “*tefillah*” must always accompany one’s learning, or his *chessed*, or any *mitzvah* he does – an inner yearning for the Creator.

Since this yearning in a person isn’t so revealed out in the open, a person needs many reminders to awaken it. The book *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that even when one is in middle of learning, he is allowed to think for a second about Hashem and to feel a yearning for Him. Any *ruchniyus* that a person is involved in which isn’t accompanied by this yearning is missing its base.

It is not practical for a person to immediately start having this feeling all day; like any other *avodah*, it must be worked on slowly and patiently. At first a person needs external reminders for it, and slowly but surely, the yearning will come from within his soul, until he eventually reaches a point in which his Torah learning and his *tefillah* are intertwined with each other.

Davening When You Go To The Doctor

Davening before you do anything certainly applies to all areas of our *ruchniyus*, but it also applies even when have to take care of physical matters.

For example, a person goes to the doctor when he doesn’t feel well; (Chazal indeed say that it is a *mitzvah* to go to the doctor, and that permission has been granted by Hashem to a doctor to heal patients). The doctor is in middle of checking him out. What is the patient thinking as he’s getting his examination? What are his thoughts? This situation is really an opportunity for growth in one’s Avodas Hashem. Although a person naturally spaces out all the time, he is able to develop a will-power that his thoughts will remain focused on Hashem. Thus, before he gets his examination, he should set aside some time now and think what he is about to do.

He is talking to his doctor, and the doctor is examining him. At that moment, he should not forget that doctor receives permission from Hashem to heal, and that Hashem could heal him all by Himself if He wants. When going to the doctor, a person should always remember this, and never forget it: A doctor is only the messenger of Hashem.

Thus, a person has to *daven* to Hashem that he be healed, and to remember that it’s not up to the doctor.

Usually, after a person goes to the doctor, he just goes back to routine. But one must know that even going to the doctor is *Avodas Hashem* – there is a way how a Jew goes to the doctor, and the way how a Jew leaves the doctor.

We only have given one example, but the point is that in whatever we do, we must never forget our yearning for Hashem.

When a person goes into the store to buy something and he's deciding between different items what to buy, he should also daven to Hashem, "Please help me buy what I need, and that it should be a good purchase." In this way, you take everything on this world and you connect it to the *Ribono shel olam*. (This is only true with buying things you need, not with unnecessary things).

When a person gets used to living like this – that through every step of his life, he is connected to Hashem and talks to Him, asking Him for help – he truly connects himself to Hashem.

"From the Narrow Straits, I Call Out To Hashem"

There is a well-known dispute if *tefillah* is a Torah-ordained commanded *mitzvah* every day, which is the opinion of the Rambam, or only in a time of distress, which is the opinion of the Ramban.

It is told of the Brisker Rov zt"l that whenever someone would mention to him something troubling, he would say a *tefillah*. He explained that according to the Ramban, there is a Torah-ordained *mitzvah* to daven whenever there is distress; if so, he is obligated in *tefillah* according to the Ramban whenever someone tells him something troubling, because it is like a time of distress.

According to the Brisker Rov, a distressful time is not necessarily when there is a war going on, nor is it limited to when something very troubling is going on either in a community or in an individual's life. The Brisker Rov viewed every problem as a time of distress.

There is a deeper point contained in this as well. It is written, "*From the narrow straits I call out to Hashem*". [6] The biggest *meitzar* (narrow strait) in history was Mitzrayim (Egypt). In Mitzrayim, it wasn't just a physical slavery, but a spiritual slavery, because Hashem has not yet revealed Himself until the actual redemption from Egypt, when it then became finally clear. Only after final plague, the plague of the first born, did Pharaoh realize the meaning of "*I am Hashem*."

In a person's own soul, it's possible that does not yet either realize "*I am Hashem*." As long as a person doesn't feel that Hashem is in front of him – "*face to face Hashem spoke with them*" – he is to some degree in his own personal Egypt, and he is confined to that *meitzar*.

Therefore, a person is always in a situation in which he must daven, because there is always a time of distress going on. Not only are there physical dangers we go through, but our very soul is constantly in a state of danger and distress – the fact that one's soul is far from the Creator.

If a person doesn't feel that he is in a spiritual *meitzar*, Hashem has no choice but to *chas v'shalom* send him physical reminders that will awaken him to realize that the true *meitzar* is for one to lack closeness with Hashem.

When a person realizes that he is a true *meitzar*, he can then feel as the Jewish people did when they were in Egypt, and he then be able to cry out to Hashem to redeem him from this personal exile. Then, just like Hashem heard the cries in Egypt and redeemed the Jewish people as a whole, so can Hashem hear our own cries when we realize the *meitzar* we are in – and take us out.

This is achieved when we merit to reveal Hashem in our heart.

[1] Koheles 1: 9

[2] Nefesh HaChaim, Gate III

[3] Mishlei 18: 1

[4] Berachos 21a

[5] Beraishis 2: 5

[6] Tehillim 118: 5

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-4-chapter-11-renewing-our-prayers>