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[Home](#) > Tefillah - 005 Revealing Hashem

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The first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* is called *Birkas Ha'avos* — we mention the blessings of our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Contained in this first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* is the entire concept of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

There is a concept in *sefarim hakedoshim* that everything is contained in its beginning point. For example, a son begins with his father. The Jewish people are contained in the three forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov; in them, we can find the entire essence of the Jewish people. In the same vein, the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* contains the entire *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Chazal say that each person should say to himself, “When will my actions touch upon those of my forefathers?” We are charged to aspire to go in the ways of our great forefathers. Simply speaking, this means that we have to touch upon the level of their great *middos*. We need to do *chessed* that resembles a spark of Avraham Avinu’s great *chessed*. We need to have *yirah* that resembles the *yirah* of Yitzchak Avinu. We need to touch upon the level of *rachamim* that Yaakov Avinu personified.

That is the simple meaning of the concept, but there is a deeper understanding. *Chazal* say that “the Avos are the holy chariot” — they represent all of Hashem’s handiwork, because they reached perfection. The entire purpose of Creation is for the Creation to recognize the greatness of Hashem, and the Avos succeeded in revealing this. They implanted the ability in the world to recognize and reveal Hashem. Because of the Avos, we are able to continue revealing Hashem into the world.

Avraham Avinu personified *chessed*. He didn’t just reach the most perfected level of *chessed*. Rather, he revealed Hashem in the world, through utilizing the *middah* of *chessed* to its fullest. Yitzchak Avinu had a different way of revealing Hashem onto the world: through the trait of *yirah*. Yaakov embodied the trait of compassion, but he didn’t just reach the most perfect level of compassion; he did this to reveal Hashem onto the world.

In other words, the *middos* that each of the Avos excelled in were just the tools they used in order to reveal Hashem into the world. The Avos did not just work on themselves to reveal these *middos* to their fullest; they revealed Hashem into the world by way of these *middos*. Their *middos* were the tool to bring about a greater goal, which was to reveal Hashem’s existence into the world.

Chazal say that if not for the Torah, we would learn good *middos* from observing the animals. What indeed is the difference between the good *middos* that the Avos had and the good *middos* that we can find in animals? If we would just learn how to have good *middos* from animals, we would learn simply how to have those good *middos*, and there would be no difference between the good *middos*

of a Jew and the good *middos* of a non-Jew. Our good *middos* would just be “*derech eretz*” — proper mannerisms. But the Torah taught us how to have good *middos* through the actions of our Avos. These are different kinds of good *middos*; they were *middos* that revealed Hashem into the world. This is the kind of good *middos* we strive to embody.

We must see the entire Creation and everything that goes on in it as a way to reveal Hashem in the world. Since the purpose of Creation is to reveal Hashem, it must be that everything in Creation somehow serves to reveal Him in the world. Our Torah learning must be seen as a tool that reveals Hashem. Our *middos* must be viewed as a tool that reveals Hashem. Our acts of *chessed* must be done with the awareness that we are trying to reveal Hashem into the world.

This is the meaning of the statement that the Avos are the holy chariot — the *middos* that the Avos personified held up the entire world, because each of their *middos* served to reveal the purpose of the entire Creation: to recognize Hashem.

These are really very simple words to anyone who lives a life in which he strives to reveal Hashem.

Chazal say that when a person davens, he should daven to Hashem, and not to His Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. Although Hashem has Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, we are not supposed to turn to His attributes, but rather to Hashem directly. We are not turning to the *chessed* of Hashem or to the *rachamim* that Hashem has on His Creation, but rather, we are supposed to turn to Hashem Himself. *Tefillah/prayer* is to “stand in front of the King.” We must strive to resemble Hashem in our *middos*, or else there is a barrier between us and Hashem as we stand before Him.

There are generally two kinds of barriers that get in the way between a person and his relationship with Hashem. One kind of barrier is when we are entrenched in materialism and sins. The other kind of barrier is when we have bad *middos*. Either of these two factors can hold back a person from feeling that he is standing in front of Hashem, and they act as barriers between the person and Hashem.

Our soul naturally senses Hashem, but these two barriers can put a hold on the soul’s natural senses. Before the sin of Adam, Adam was able to see from one end of the world to other, but after the sin, he lost this special power. This was because the sin dulled his spiritual senses.

We need to feel the spirituality that lays in something. For example, when we recite *Korbonos*, we need to actually feel that they are atoning for our sins. It is only after we actually feel spiritual realities that we can truly feel like we are standing before Hashem as we daven *Shemoneh Esrei*. When we daven *Shemoneh Esrei*, we need to feel that Hashem is actually here, in front of us, now, as real as can be.

Dovid Hamelech says, “And I will walk before Hashem in the land of the living.” In other words, even as we walk on this physical planet Earth, we can still feel that we are in front of Hashem, as long as we feel that He exists.

In our original state, when Adam lived in *Gan Eden* before the sin, there was no death in the world. There was only life, and that was the true “land of the living” that Adam walked in, where he felt utterly in front of Hashem. After the sin, death came upon the world, and this sense of feeling Hashem in front of us was ruined, but when we stood at Har Sinai, the impurity of sin was removed from us, and we returned to the pre-sin state. After the sin with the Golden Calf, we returned back to the post-sin state, in which we don’t always grasp the reality of Hashem in our life.

But we have a mitzvah to remember the day we stood at Har Sinai. The depth behind this is that we must remember the state of being at Har Sinai, which was that we felt totally how we were in front of

Hashem. In fact, the only way we are able to stand in front of Hashem during *Shemoneh Esrei* is because we once stood at Har Sinai and felt as if we were standing in front of the King. That was engraved onto our souls, and it was really there already before, through the Avos, who bequeathed to us this inheritance — the ability to palpably feel and recognize Hashem.

The prophets were able to see a vision of Hashem, but it was like a cloudy kind of glass, not totally clear. Moshe Rabbeinu, however, saw Hashem through a clear kind of glass. When we daven *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are standing in front of the King — we need to feel Hashem in front of us as if we're looking at Him through clear glass! We need to feel that Hashem is in front of us, without any dividers. This is when we realize that all of life is about revealing Hashem. Nothing in our life serves any other purpose other than to reveal Hashem.

Shemoneh Esrei is the time that is called "*tefillah b'tzibbur*," when the entire congregation fulfills their obligation of prayer, in unison, through a quorum. *Tefillah b'tzibbur* is mainly defined by *Shemoneh Esrei*, because *Shemoneh Esrei* is the time in which we reveal Hashem — which the entire congregation is charged with.

What we need to understand is that davening *Shemoneh Esrei* is not about "me." It is not about what "I" need from Hashem, what "I" daven for, etc. It is about revealing Hashem into the world. (On a deeper note, the *sefer Shomer Emunim* writes that a person should daven that he merit to become part of the "holy chariot" in Creation, just like the Avos did).

It is written, "All my bones speak of this [about Hashem]." In other words, all the bones of our body exist to reveal Hashem!

The entire *Shemoneh Esrei* is to stand in front of the King. This was a power that was implanted in us through the Avos. In *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are supposed to aspire to become like the Avos, who became the "holy chariot" of the world — by revealing Hashem into the world through their acts.

In all of our life we need to keep cleansing ourselves internally, but we must not lose sight of the goal of life, which is to recognize more and more the reality of Hashem's existence. It's not an "avodah" to recognize Hashem's existence — it is rather the very perspective we need to have on life! When you breathe, it's not an "avodah"; it's necessary for your life. It is your very life, because it is reality. To sense Hashem is not an "avodah" — it is reality, and thus, we need to realize how it is reality....

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