



Revealing the inner beauty of the Torah in a way that touches and inspires the Jewish soul

TRANSFORMING OUR PRAYERS (TEFFILOS)

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Have you ever found yourself praying (davening) mechanically - your lips mumbling through the familiar and soothing cadence of the liturgy (nusach) - as your mind wanders off the page and goes on an excursion of its own. Unfortunately, many of us have had this uncomfortable experience. When we do, we find ourselves fighting a battle on several fronts. We could feel inadequate and perhaps even hypocritical in our prayers (tefillos) thereby making it all the more difficult to achieve the joy, enthusiasm and sincerity we strive for. How can we experience renewal and joy in our tefillos when we daven almost the same words each day? One might think that our service of Hashem would be much more enthusiastic if we could pray simply in accordance with our emotions and thoughts. Of course, personalized prayer is not only permissible but very encouraged. However, here, we are exploring the need for and unique value of set prayer. It is the combination of personal and set prayer that allows us to maximize our potential to communicate with Hashem. Also as we properly understand and utilize set prayer, it becomes our own.

What we do not realize is that the words of our tefilloth are indeed different and unique every time we pray (daven), however, these delicately nuanced and subtle changes usually are not perceptible to us even though they have significant profound long term effects on a spiritual level.

Though we may understand these concepts intellectually, how can we better connect and relate to them? By recognizing that it is the Creator (Hashem) who renews these brachas every single day and not taking any peaceful, healthy moment for granted, we certainly will feel the need and value of every tefillah. One of the challenges with finding inspiration is not seeing the effect of our prayers. Ironically, this 'silence from Above' is one of the greatest blessings we have, albeit one that may be difficult for us to appreciate. This 'silence' can serve to inspire our emunah - belief. To appreciate the gap between belief and knowledge, take a moment to imagine how we would feel if we were actually able to see how our heart-felt tefillos for the recovery of a loved one, provided health and healing to unknown, countless others. Imagine how inspired we would be if we could see how our prayers for sustenance were bringing plenty into this world; how our blessings (brachot) provided spiritual nourishment for the fields of grain and the fruit orchards.

Consider the following (moshal) paradigm: You are the pilot of a hi-tech plane that is flown only with instruments without any windows. You are assigned to fly several missions, but are not told what precisely is being accomplished. You are highly trained to respond to all of the data that is fed back to you and you program in delicate course adjustments and press certain buttons and pull certain levers. At the end of the flight, you see that you have returned to your original point of take off.

If you would ask your flight director what value the flights had, he might tell you: You flew over the vast fields that provides much of the produce for that area. The first time you flew you seeded the fields. The next time you flew over the fields you watered the sprouting seeds and then finally you sprayed the young crops with a substance that protected them. If you had missed any of the flights, there would have been no produce available in the area. You served your country well by providing it with nourishing food.

We each have been sent here with specific missions, in which we often don't see the results of our actions and efforts. We can, however, be sure that by following our (Torah) Jewish teachings, we are helping to cultivate blessings throughout the world and the entire universe. Indeed, part of the definition of exile (galus), is to be "spiritually blind" to the relationship between our prayers, (mitzvoth) essential good deeds and the results that flow from them. However, our inability to see the cause and effect result of our efforts does not minimize their great importance and even increases the blessings and benefits for all mankind.



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Even during those moments that our tefillos seem imperfect, we can take strength from the knowledge that the holy nusach is working for us. This is because tefillah is an idealistic form of altruistic service. Even the self-importance we may feel when we have a "good davening" can jeopardize it. Thus when we humbly recognize that our tefillos are lacking, that very humility may serve as an impetus for their acceptance. Indeed, Hashem is close to the broken hearted and humble of spirit, and it is at that moment that we can pray (daven) for the Divine presence (Shechina) which is in galus with us sharing in our exile. Tefillah allows us the opportunity to pray (daven) sincerely for others, whether or not they are known to us. The opportunity to daven for others provides a profound lesson in unconditional giving. Another facet of prayer is its capacity for connecting us to the Divine Presence (Shechina), whose exile, so to speak, is reflected through the problems of this world. The difficulties we personally experience allow us to relate the exile of the Shechina. For, in the future when the Shechina will dwell among us in its full glory the world will reflect this revelation through health, happiness and all good things.

The set nusach, created by the Sages of the great courts know as the Anshei Keneset Hagedola during the time of the holy Temple in Jerusalem, is a beautiful astonishingly durable vessel which has remained constant in our service over the centuries in galus no matter where we have lived and what our needs were. It is universal in that it has been able to convey the heart felt appreciation, needs, dreams and hopes of a nation as diverse as ours, and yet sufficiently specific so as to effectively convey our uniquely personal connections with Hashem.

The nusach that many of us know so well, and indeed have even committed to memory, releases us from the need to overly concentrate on the pronunciation, grammar, word order or sentence structure and thus allowing us greater focus on the purpose and intentions of the tefillos. It is the nusach of our set prayer that specifically allows us to transcend our physical limitations and safely travel the beautiful "spiritual highway of prayer" created by our Sages, allowing us to offer our inner thoughts, needs, and emotional outpourings directly to Hashem. This then allows us to open the door to our higher consciousness which then aids us to peel off the superficial outer layers allowing us to reach our inner spiritual core. Through the perfectly crafted prayers that our holy Sages designed, we are able to enter a new realm of highly contemplative thought.

Thus, it is specifically through the set nusach that we can gain access to the innermost Palace. Not surprisingly the word nusach - contains the same four letters as chason - which means sturdy, strong and powerful. Our nusach is that sturdy, strong and powerful vessel that carries the soul's expression of praise and need up to the Heavenly throne.

May our unified tefillot awaken Divine mercy from Above, thereby bringing peace and harmony along with the long awaited final geula to all mankind soon in our days.

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