



SEVENTY YEARS WITHOUT PRAYING?!

What is prayer all about?

What should a person who lacks
nothing pray for?

An exploration of the four rungs
of the prayer ladder.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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In this week's Torah reading we read the paragraph of "Now, if you will listen," where the commandment to "serve G-d" appears (Source 1). The Talmud explains that "service" means prayer. (Source 2)

Prayer in Biblical times: the Patriarchs and the prophets prayed to G-d when they had a specific need, such as praying for children or to be saved from an enemy.

Prayer in Jewish law: Maimonides codifies prayer as a Biblical mitzvah to pray for one's needs every day (Source 6). Nachmanides maintains that there is no Biblical obligation to pray; the Torah is simply informing us that G-d, in His kindness, hears and answers human prayers. (Source 7)

The Rebbe cites questions on Maimonides' opinion: (a) From where does Maimonides derive a Biblical obligation to pray, and (b) why is it a daily obligation? The popular explanation is that Maimonides maintains that there is a mitzvah to pray when one has a need, and logically, that would happen daily (Source 8). This ruling is unclear, the Rebbe summarizes.

(What is certain, according to all opinions, is that there is a Biblical obligation to cry out to G-d and blow trumpets during a time of war. Maimonides details the parameters of this mitzvah (Source 9) and emphasizes that it is an explicit mitzvah in the Torah (Source 10).)

According to the above, one who does not feel any specific lack has no Biblical obligation to pray. Conceivably, such a person may have prayed their entire life but would still not have fulfilled the Biblical obligation of prayer, only the Rabbinic requirement.

B. A True Need.....11

When we look at our material lives, we can see how poor our circumstances are and how dependent we are on others. Spiritually as well, we can contemplate on how our soul descended from under the Heavenly throne down to this world, where it is under the sway of the evil inclination. After such contemplation, we realize how much we're lacking. Then, our prayer will be a Biblical prayer. This idea is alluded to in the Code of Jewish Law. (Source 11)

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In order to reach this mental state, the siddur has a lengthy prelude to the Amidah prayer: four rungs in the ladder of prayer. (Source 12)

Step One: gratitude and humility. (Sources 13-14)

Step Two: Meditating on the greatness and beauty of creation, which arouses love for the Creator. (Source 15)

Step Three: Meditating on the greatness of the angels, who nullify themselves before G-d, which in turns effects our own nullification. (Source 16)

Step Four: Face-to-face conversation with G-d, an existential nullification. (Source 17)

After praying with the right mindset, as taught in Chassidic philosophy, we realize how much we're lacking, and we cry out to G-d from the depths of our soul over our great thirst for Him, like Rabbi Aizik of Homil was bothered to his core trying to understand a deeper level in Torah (Source 18). Doing this leads to fulfilling a Biblical mitzvah, because it leads to awareness of what we are lacking.

Story: The letter that wasn't delivered

Introduction

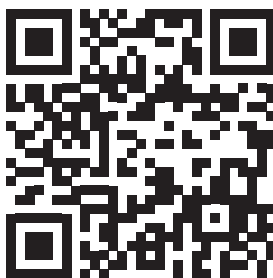
So much of Judaism revolves around prayer and the synagogue. But what does it mean to pray? Is prayer a Biblical commandment or an enactment of the Sages? Is it possible to be exempt from prayer?

A glimpse into the essence of prayer from Biblical times, through the lens of Jewish law and Chassidic thought.

השיעור לפרשת עקב

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תורת מנחם ה'תשי"ז חלק א' עמ' 280

[לשמיעת השיחה:](#)



A. The Obligation To Pray

In this week's Torah reading, we read the second portion of the Shema: "Now, if you will listen," one of the better-known Jewish prayers.

Source 1 Deuteronomy 11:13-15

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Now, if you will diligently obey My commandments that I command you this day, to love the L-rd, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, I will give the rain of your land at its time, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather your grain, your wine, and your oil. I will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat and be sated.

וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ אֶת צִוֵּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְאַהֲבָהוֹ וּלְעָבְדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְכֶּם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם וּבְכָל אֲרָצְכֶם יוֹרֶה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאֶסְפֶּת דִּגְגָךְ וְתִירֹשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהָרְךָ. וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדֶךָ לְבִהֶמְתֶּךָ וְאָכְלָתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ.

The Torah commands us to "serve" G-d. What does "serve" mean? The Talmud explains:

Source 2 Talmud, Taanit 2a

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It was taught: "Love the L-rd, your G-d, and serve Him with all your heart." What is the "service" of the heart? They taught: This is prayer.

דְּתַנְיָא: "לְאַהֲבָהוּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּלְעָבְדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְכֶּם", אִיזוּ הִיא עֲבוֹדָה שֶׁהִיא בְּלֵב – הֵיאֵל אֹמֵר: זֶה תַּפְלָה.

As we will soon see, Maimonides understands these verses as an obligation to pray to G-d. But before we learn what he says, let's look into the Tanach for examples of people praying and learn from them what the "service" of prayer is.

Prayer In Biblical Times

Source 3 Genesis 25:21

Isaac and Rebecca weren't blessed with children for many years. Isaac prayed to G-d to be blessed with children:

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Isaac prayed to G-d opposite his wife because she was barren. G-d accepted his prayer, and his wife Rebecca conceived.

וַיַּעֲתָר יִצְחָק לַה' לְנִכַּח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עָקְרָה הִוא, וַיַּעֲתָר לוֹ ה' וַתַּחַר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ.

Source 4 Genesis 32:10-11

Esau leads an army of four hundred men to fight his brother Jacob and his family. In addition to other necessary preparations for war, Jacob turned to G-d and prayed for deliverance from his brother.

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Jacob said, "G-d of my father Abraham and G-d of my father Isaac, the L-rd, Who said to me, 'Return to your land and to your birthplace, and I will do good to you.' Deliver me now from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him, lest he come and strike me, and strike a mother with her children."

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי אַבְרָהָם
וְאֱלֹהֵי אָבִי יִצְחָק, ה' הָאֵלֹהִים אֵלַי
שׁוּב לְאֶרְצְךָ וּלְמִוְלַדְתְּךָ וְאִי־טִיבָה
עִמָּךְ. הֲצִילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו,
כִּי יֵרָא אָנֹכִי אֹתוֹ פֶּן יָבוֹא וְהִכָּנִי אִם
עַל בָּנָיִם.

Source 5 I Samuel 1:9-11

Chanah, the wife of Elkanah, was childless for many years. She came to the Mishkan to pour out her heart before G-d, asking for children. She vowed that she would give her son to G-d; she would dedicate his life to serving in the Holy Temple.

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Chanah arose after eating and after drinking, and Eli the priest was sitting on the chair beside the doorpost of the Temple of G-d. And she was bitter in spirit, and she prayed to G-d, and wept. And she vowed a vow, and said: "L-rd of Hosts, if You will look upon the affliction of Your servant, and You will remember me, and not forget Your servant and give Your servant a son, I will give him to G-d for all the days of his life."

וַתָּקֶם חַנָּה אַחֲרֵי אֲכֹלָהּ בְּשִׁלָּה וְאַחֲרֵי
שָׁתָהּ, וְעָלִי הַכֹּהֵן יֹשֵׁב עַל הַכִּסֵּא
עַל מְזוֹזַת הַיֵּכָל ה'. וְהָיָא מֶרֶת נַפְשָׁהּ
וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל ה' וּבְכָה תִּבְכֶּה. וַתִּדְרֹךְ נֶדֶר
וַתֹּאמֶר ה' צֶדֶק-אוֹת אִם רָאָה תִּרְאֶה
בְּעֵינֵי אֲמָתְךָ וּזְכֹרְתָנִי וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּח אֶת
אֲמָתְךָ וְנִתְּתָה לְאֲמָתְךָ זֶרַע אֲנָשִׁים
וְנִתְּתִיו לָהּ כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהָ.

These examples, from the Patriarchs through to the Prophets, demonstrate that prayer at its core is requesting one's needs. When we lack something, we turn to G-d in prayer and ask Him to help us.

Prayer In Jewish Law

Now let's move from history to Jewish law, and examine the practical obligation to pray.

Source 6 Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer 1:1-2

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It is a positive commandment to pray daily, as it is written: "You shall serve your G-d." Oral tradition teaches that this "service" means prayer, as it is written, "And serve Him with all your heart." The Sages taught: "What is the service of the heart? This is prayer."

The obligation of this mitzvah is as follows: One must beseech and pray each day. First one must speak G-d's praises, then request and beseech for their needs, and then thank G-d and express gratitude for all the good that He grants to each person according to their needs.

Maimonides writes that it is a Biblical mitzvah to pray and ask for our needs from G-d. He states that the mitzvah is to pray daily.

The examples we saw in the Tanach were that occasionally, when facing great need, people prayed to G-d to fill that need. Where does Maimonides find an obligation to pray, and to do so daily?

Nachmanides actually disagrees with Maimonides:

Source 7 Nachmanides on Sefer Hamitzvot, Positive Mitzvah 5

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This is incorrect ... Prayer is certainly not an obligation. Rather, it is an expression of G-d's kindness that He hears our prayers and answers our call.

Nachmanides disagrees with Maimonides and maintains that there is no Biblical obligation to pray. The Torah teaches that when facing a need, there is Someone who hears us and answers our call. We can choose whether to pray or not. According to Nachmanides, our daily prayers are not Biblical, but Rabbinic in nature.

מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכָל יוֹם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וַעֲבַדְתֶּם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם". מִפִּי הַשְּׁמוּעָה לְמַדּו שֶׁעֲבֻדָּה זוֹ הִיא תְּפִלָּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְכֶּכֶם", אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים: אִי זוֹ הִיא עֲבֻדָּה שֶׁבִּלְבּ זוֹ תְּפִלָּה.

חַיִּיב מִצְוָה זוֹ כֶּן הוּא: שִׁיְהֵא אָדָם מִתְחַנֵּן וּמִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכָל יוֹם, וּמִגִּיד שִׁבְחוֹ שֶׁל הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, וְאַחֵר כֶּן שׂוֹאֵל צָרָתוֹ שֶׁהוּא צָרִיךְ לָהֶם בְּבִקְשָׁה וּבִתְחִנָּה, וְאַחֵר כֶּן נוֹתֵן שִׁבְחַ וְהוֹדָיָה לַה' עַל הַטּוֹבָה שֶׁהִשְׁפִּיעַ לוֹ כָּל אֶחָד לְפִי כָחוֹ.

וְאִין נִכּוֹנָה בְּזֶה... אֵלֹא וְדָאֵי כָּל עֲנִין הִתְפַּלָּה אֵינּוּ חֻבָּה כָּלֵל, אֲבָל הוּא מִמַּדַּת חֶסֶד הַבּוֹרָא יִתְבָּרַךְ עֲלֵינוּ שֶׁשׁוֹמֵעַ וְעוֹנֶה בְּכָל קְרָאָנוּ אֵלָיו.

>> The Rebbe

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Maimonides writes in the Laws of Prayer that it is a positive Biblical mitzvah to pray every day. This statement has been questioned on two points: (a) there are a number of passages in the Talmud that indicate that the obligation to pray is of Rabbinic origin, and (b) even if the obligation is Biblical, what is Maimonides' source that it is a daily obligation?

These questions have been discussed at length. The commentators explain that Maimonides' statement that prayer is a Biblical mitzvah is referring to when people feel they are lacking something. At such a time, there is a mitzvah to request one's needs. Regarding Maimonides' stipulation that prayer must be performed daily, the commentators explain that it doesn't make sense for this mitzvah to only be observed once in a while, so it must be that the obligation is daily. But the above notwithstanding, Maimonides' ruling still isn't fully clear.

Later authorities discuss the mitzvah of prayer at length. The popular explanation is that Maimonides maintains that it is a Biblical mitzvah to pray to G-d when a person feels they are in need. Since it doesn't make sense that this mitzvah should only be observed seldomly, Maimonides states that the mitzvah is to pray every day.

Source 8 Kesef Mishneh, Laws of Prayer 1:1

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Maimonides' opinion is that there is a positive, Biblical command to pray daily, based on the verse "You shall serve G-d" and this service is daily. If it wasn't daily, perhaps it's once in a lifetime? That is irrational. The obligation is certainly daily, but the amount of daily prayers is not specified, and Biblically, once a day suffices.

As the Rebbe notes, this isn't sufficiently clear.

הובא ברמב"ם בראשית הלכות תפלה: "מצות עשה להתפלל בכל יום". והקשו עליו¹ מכמה וכמה מקומות שתפלה היא מדרבנן. ועוד זאת, שגם לדעת הרמב"ם שהתפלה היא מצות עשה - מניין המקור שהחיוב להתפלל הוא בכל יום.

וכבר שקלו וטרו בזה - שממה שכתב הרמב"ם שהתפלה היא מצות עשה, הרי זה בשעה שמרגיש חסרון בצרכיו, שאז המצוה היא שיהיה "שואל צרכיו שהוא צריך להם כו"². ובנוגע לחיוב התפלה בכל יום - הרי כיון שלא מסתבר לומר שמצוה זו תתקיים פעם אחת במשך זמן רב, על כרחך צריך לומר שחיובה בכל יום³. ולאחרי כל זה - אין הדברים מחוורים די צרכם.

וְדַעַת רַבֵּנוּ, שֶׁמִּצְוַת עֲשֵׂה מִן הַתּוֹרָה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכָל יוֹם, מִמָּה שֶׁכָּתוּב וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֶת ה', וְעַבֹּדָה זוֹ צְרִיכָה שֶׁתִּהְיֶה בְּכָל יוֹם. שְׂאֵם אֵינָהּ בְּכָל יוֹם, אוֹלֵי נִבְּא לֹמֵר שֶׁהִיא פֶּעַם אַחַת בְּכָל יָמָיו? וְזֶה מִמָּה שֶׁלֹּא יִסְבְּלוּ הַדְּעִת! וְאִם כֵּן עַל כְּרַחֲךָ הַחַיִּיב הוּא לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכָל יוֹם, אֲבָל אֵין מִנֵּין הַתְּפִלוֹת מִן הַתּוֹרָה אֲלֵא בְּפֶעַם אַחַת בְּיוֹם סָגִי.

3. ראה כס"מ שם (ד"ה ודע), שאג"א שם (ד"ה עוד).

2. רמב"ם שם ה"ב. וראה קרית ספר - הובא בלח"מ ה"א כאן.
קנאת סופרים בסהמ"צ שם.

Complete Agreement

>> The Rebbe

Student's
pg. 6

There is one form of prayer that all authorities agree is counted as a Biblical positive mitzvah: to call out to G-d and blow trumpets during a time of war. As the verse states, "When you go into battle in your land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a *teruah* blast on the trumpets."

אמנם, ישנו ענין שלדעת כל מוני המצוות הוא בודאי מצות עשה - לזעוק ולהריע בחצוצרות בעת מלחמה⁴, כמו שנאמר⁵ "וכי תבואו מלחמה בארצכם על הצר הצורר אתכם והרעותם בחצוצרות גו".

Praying to G-d at a time of war is clearly a Biblical mitzvah, because it is stated explicitly in a verse.

Source 9 Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Laws of Fasting 1:1

Maimonides defines this mitzvah

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pg. 6

There is a Biblical commandment to cry out and blow trumpets for any calamity that befalls the people, as the verse states: "against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a *teruah* blast on the trumpets." This means to say that you shall cry out and blow trumpets over anything that oppresses you, whether famine, pestilence, a plague of locusts, etc.

מצות עשה מן התורה לזעק ולהריע בחצוצרות על כל צרה שתבוא על הצבור. שנאמר: "על הצר הצורר אתכם והרעותם בחצוצרות". כלומר כל דבר שיצר לכם כגון בצורת ודבר וארבה וכיוצא בהן זעקו עליהן והריעו.

Source 10 Numbers 10:1-9

The Biblical commandment

Student's
pg. 6

G-d spoke to Moses saying: Make yourself two silver trumpets of a solid piece of silver. You should use them to summon the people and to announce the departure of the camps. When they are sounded, the entire people should assemble to you, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. If one of them is sounded, the princes, the leaders of Israel's thousands, shall convene to you. When a *teruah* blast is sounded, the camps which are encamped to the east shall travel.

וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר. עשה לך שתי חצוצרות כסף מקשה תעשה אתם והיו לך למקרא העדה ולמסע את המחנות. ותקעו בהן ונועדו אליך כל העדה אל פתח אהל מועד. ואם באחת ותקעו ונועדו אליך הנשיאים ראשי אלפי ישראל. ותקעם תרועה

5. בהעלותך י"ד, ט.

4. ראה רמב"ם ריש הל' תעניות. רמב"ן ומג"א וקנאת סופרים. לשהמ"צ שם.

Student's
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When a second teruah blast is sounded, the camps encamped to the south shall travel; a teruah shall be sounded for traveling. But when assembling the congregation, you shall sound a tekiah blast, not a teruah. The descendants of Aaron, the priests, shall sound the trumpets; this shall be an eternal statute for your generations. When you go into battle in your land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a teruah blast on the trumpets. By this you will be remembered before G-d, and be saved from your enemies.

וְנִסְעוּ הַמַּחֲנֹת הַחֲנִיִּים קִדְמָה.
וְתִקְעֶתֶם תְּרוּעָה שְׁנִית וְנִסְעוּ
הַמַּחֲנֹת הַחֲנִיִּים תִּמְנָה
תְּרוּעָה יִתְקְעוּ לְמִסְעֵיהֶם.
וּבְהִקְהִיל אֶת הַקָּהָל תִּתְקְעוּ
וְלֹא תִרְיעוּ. וּבְגִי אֶהְרֹן
הַכֹּהֲנִים יִתְקְעוּ בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת
וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם. וְכִי תִבְאוּ מִלְחָמָה
בְּאֶרְצְכֶם עַל הָעָר הָעֹצֵר
אֶתְכֶם וְהִרְעֵתֶם בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת
וְנִזְכַּרְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וְנוֹשַׁעְתֶּם מֵאִיְבֵיכֶם.

>> The Rebbe

A Lifetime Without Biblical Prayer

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Based on the above explanation of the halachic definition of prayer, people that feel they lack nothing and have no wars etc., have never prayed on the Biblical level for their entire lives! Even if they pray all day long, this is only considered prayer on a Rabbinic level.

ונמצא, שמצד ענין התפלה כפי שהוא על פי תורת הנגלה, הרי, מי שנמצא במצב שאינו מרגיש שיש לו חסרון שנוגע לו לבקש ולהתחנן שימלאו את חסרונו, ואין לו מלחמות וכו' - יתכן "שיתפלל כל היום כולו", ואף על פי כן, לא התפלל מימיו תפלה מן התורה, כי אם מדרבנן בלבד!

The upshot of the halachic discussion is clear. When a person feels a need for something - such as a livelihood, children, or to be saved from an attack - he or she has a Biblical mitzvah to pray. But a person blessed with wealth and living in peace has no positive Biblical mitzvah to pray (according to most opinions). In other words, they can spend all day in the synagogue in prayer, but they will only be performing a Rabbinic mitzvah, because the Biblical mitzvah of prayer only applies when a person is in need of something.

B. A True Need

>> The Rebbe

This is a topic where the need for the teachings of Chassidut is clear, because it transforms one's prayers into a Biblical mitzvah.

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Material Lowliness

When we contemplate G-d's greatness we realize how lowly our human existence is, how limited and constrained we are. When we are lacking some food it affects our mind, when we are missing sleep we can't focus, and our entire existence is dependent on forms of life inferior to us, animals, plants, and inanimate objects.

A brief contemplation about the human condition shows how fragile and unstable we are. We aren't self-sufficient. If we are missing food and sleep even for a short time we can't think straight. We are reliant on the other elements of creation - animals, plants, and inanimate objects.

Spiritual Lowliness

The same is true about our spiritual state. When we consider the greatness of G-d, and how our soul has fallen from great heights to great depths, we realize how pathetic our state is. This is especially true when we make an honest appraisal of ourselves, which of our two inclinations is in control, the positive or the negative. We are unable to reach the goal of "you should exit this world as clean as you entered it."

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First we think about how our soul was once under G-d's throne, and is now very far from that closeness to G-d. In addition, we know that all too often it is our negative inclination that is dictating our lives. We remember all of the mistakes we have made as a result, and realize that when we're all done down here our soul won't be going back up as clean as it was when it descended.

ובענין זה מודגש ההכרח שבתורת החסידות - כיון שעל ידה נעשים התפלה וקריאת שמע מצוה מן התורה:

כאשר יהודי מתחיל להתבונן בגדולתו יתברך, ומזה בא להבנה והכרה בשפלות האדם, שרואה עד כמה הוא בצמצום מדידה והגבלה; כאשר חסר באכילתו אזי נעשה מיד חלישות בכח שכלו, וכאשר חסר בשינתו נעשה אצלו בלבול המוחין, ובכלל זקוק הוא למין החי הצומח והדומם, ובלעדם אינו יכול להתקיים -

וכמו כן בנוגע למצבו הרוחני - כשמתבונן בגדלות הבורא שממנו נלקחה נשמתו, "מאיגרא רמה" [= מגג גבוה], ומשם ירדה "לבירא עמיקתא" [= לבור עמוק]⁶, ובפרט כשיודע בעצמו מי הוא המושל ושולט עליו מבין שני אלו שעליהם אמרו חז"ל "זה וזה שופטן" - שלפעמים זה קם וזה נופל ולפעמים זה קם וזה נופל⁸, כך, שאינו יכול להגיע למעמד ומצב "שתהא יציאתך מן העולם כביאתך לעולם"⁹ -

כח, כג.
9. ב"מ קז, סע"א.

6. ע"פ לשון חז"ל - חגיגה ה, ב.
7. ברכות סא, ב.
8. ראה מגילה ו, סע"א. וש"נ. הובא בפרש"י עה"ת תולדות

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When we feel our sorry state we feel a great need. In the words of the second Chabad Rebbe, "when the poor person is reminded of his impoverished state he immediately bursts into bitter tears."

הנה כשמרגיש את שפלות מצבו - אזי מרגיש את עצמו במצב של חסרון עצום, ובלשון אדמו"ר האמצעי¹⁰: "כשנזכר העני ואביון על רוב דחקו . . יבכה במר נפשו תיכף כו" -

After such a meditation we are sure to feel a great need. Like a poor person who is moved to cry bitterly because of his impoverished state, so too, a person who realizes how fragile and unstable he is, both materially and spiritually, is moved to feel a need and want for improvement.

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Since this feeling of lowliness and need is deep and personal, we become obligated to pray on the Biblical level, and when we go ahead and pray we fulfill the Biblical mitzvah.

וכיון ששפלות מצבו והחסרון שלו נוגעים לו באמת - אזי נעשה אצלו החיוב מן התורה לבקש צרכיו, וכאשר מתפלל, אזי מקיים מצות עשה מן התורה.

Now that we feel that we are truly in need, our prayer is a Biblical mitzvah.

Biblical Prayer

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This obligation also incorporates the Biblical mitzvah to cry out to G-d and sound the trumpets at a time of war. For we are calling out to G-d and asking Him to "stand at the right hand of the needy, to save their lives from those who would rule them," referring to the internal battle described in *Tanya* as "two souls . . . that battle each other for control of the body and its limbs." Our negative inclination, "the foreign god in your midst" wages a "war in your land," attempting to conquer all of our limbs and sinews, as well as our thought, speech, and action - the three garments of our soul.

ואז נכללת בזה גם המצוה מן התורה לזעוק ולהריע בעת מלחמה - שזעק להקב"ה ש"יעמוד לימין אביון להושיע משופטי נפשו"¹¹, "זה וזה שופטן", כמבואר בתניא¹² ש"שתי הנפשות . . . נלחמות זו עם זו על הגוף וכל אבריו כו", והיינו, שהיצר הרע, ה"א-ל זר אשר בקרבך"¹³, גורם ל"מלחמה בארצכם", שרצונו לכבוש את רמ"ח האברים ושס"ה הגידים ושלוש הנפש שיהיו שייכים אליו בלבד.

Not only do we have a Biblical mitzvah to pray for our needs, we also have the mitzvah to cry out to G-d in a time of war. Understanding that we are engaged in a constant battle between our positive and negative inclinations, we call out to G-d to assist us in this battle and help the positive inclination prevail.

We see that in order for our prayer to attain a Biblical level of obligation we need to meditate on our state and reach the deeply felt conclusion that we indeed have critical material and spiritual needs.

12. פ"ט.
13. ראה שבת קה, ב.

10. דרך חיים פ"ב (ה, ד).
11. תהלים קט, לא.

When we realize that, we truly have what to pray for, and our prayer reaches the Biblical threshold.

Source 11 Code of Jewish Law, Orach Chaim 91:1

After studying this Chassidic teaching, we find that this idea is already mentioned in the Code of Jewish Law:

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Before prayer one should meditate on G-d's greatness and the lowliness of man.

וְקִדְּםֵהוּ הַתְּפִלָּה יִחְשַׁב
מְרוֹמָמוֹת הָאֵל יִתְפַּרֵּךְ
וְשִׁפְלוֹת הָאָדָם.

Why is it important to think about man's lowliness? It can be understood based on what we learned: only after understanding our own low state do we realize how much we're lacking, and then we can pray.

All that's left is for us to be able to reach such an understanding. Why should it bother us that our souls aren't as pure as they were when they left the heavenly throne? How can we feel that our battle with the evil inclination is as fraught as an enemy advancing on a city to conquer it?

C. The Ladder of Prayer

>> The Rebbe

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In order to reach this feeling of great need so we can cry out to G-d from the depths of our hearts, there is a specific process we must follow. We must begin with the prayer of *mah tovu*, and continue with *hodu*, *pesukei dezimrah*, and the Shema blessings. We must follow this order without skipping anything, despite the fact that there are halachic grounds to skip various parts under certain circumstances.

אמנם, כדי לבוא למעמד ומצב שהתפלה תהיה מתוך הרגש גודל החסרון וזעקה להקב"ה כו' - צריכה להיות ההקדמה של אמירת כל פרטי הענינים: "מה טובו", "הודו", פסוקי דזמרה וברכות ק"ש - ומבלי לדלג¹⁴, למרות ההיתרים שבזה שמצינו בדברי האחרונים ושלפניהם¹⁵.

In order to reach the state we described, feeling our spiritual needs as acutely as our material needs, we need to follow the full process of prayer leading up to the Amidah, the main prayer.

Why are all these preparatory stages required? Why can't we go straight to the main part, the Amidah prayer?

To understand this we will learn about the "ladder of prayer," as explained in Chassidut.

Prayer Is A Ladder

Source 12 Derech Mitzvotcha 177b

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Prayer is called a ladder. Like a ladder is comprised of many rungs which bring one higher and higher, prayer brings us from the world of action to the world of emanation. These are the four steps of prayer: 1) Until Baruch Sheamar we rise from the world of action. 2) From there until Yotzer we rise through the world of formation. 3) From Yotzer to the Amidah is the world of creation. 4) The Amidah is the world of emanation. Each of these worlds has several sub-levels as well; these are the various chapters of Psalms in *pesukei dezimrah* and the multiple blessings before the Shema.

כִּי הִנֵּה הַתְּפִלָּה נִקְרָאת "סֵלָם" — כְּמוֹ הַסֵּלֶם שֶׁעָשׂוּי מִמַּדְרָגוֹת, וְעַל יָדוֹ עוֹלִים מִלְּמַטָּה לְמַעְלָה, כִּי עַל יְדֵי הַתְּפִלָּה עוֹלִים מִעֲשִׂיָּה לְאַצִּילוֹת. וְהֵיכָן עֲנִין אֲרֻבַּעַת חֻלְקֵי הַתְּפִלָּה: עַד בְּרוּךְ שְׁאָמַר הוּא עֲלִית הַעֲשִׂיָּה. וּמִבְּרוּךְ שְׁאָמַר עַד יוֹצֵר הוּא עֲלִית הַיְצִירָה. וּמִיוֹצֵר עַד שְ�מוֹנָה עֶשְׂרֵה הוּא עֲלִית הַבְּרִיאָה. וּבְשִׁמּוֹנָה עֶשְׂרֵה — הָאַצִּילוֹת. וּבְכָל עוֹלָם מַעוֹלָמוֹת אֵלּוּ יֵשׁ גַּם בֵּין עֲלִית כְּמָה פְּרָטִי מַדְרָגוֹת, וְהֵן הֵן כָּל פְּרָטִי הַפְּרָשִׁיּוֹת וְהַמְזֻמּוֹרִים שֶׁבְּפִסְקֵי דְּזִמְרָה וּבְכֻכּוֹת קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע שֶׁבְּיוֹצֵר.

15. ראה שו"ע אדה"א או"ח רס"ב. וש"נ.

14. ראה גם מכתב כ"ה אייר שנה זו (אג"ק חט"ו ע' קע). שיחת י"ט כסלו תשי"א סכ"ה (תור"מ ח"ב ריש ע' 134). וש"נ.

In the mystical teachings, the four rungs of prayer correspond to the four spiritual worlds: Action, Formation, Creation and Emanation. Many prayer books have these sections captioned with the appropriate world.

Chassidic teachings explain that these four worlds are also levels of our own soul. Prayer is a journey into the soul, and each step of the prayer liturgy activates the corresponding level of the soul.

Step One: Gratitude And Humility

Source 13 The Rebbe, Ani Ledodi 1952

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The morning prayers begin with "Offer praise to G-d, proclaim His name," which is a general acknowledgment.

הַתְחַלַּת הַתַּפִּלָּה הִיא "הוֹדוּ לָהּ"
קְרָאוּ בְשֵׁמוֹ, שֶׁהִיא הוֹדָאָה
בְּלִילִית בְּלִבָּהּ.

Step one, until Baruch Sheamar, corresponds to the world of action. Gratitude and humility are a cornerstone for our entire day, and the first rung of prayer. Before we can have a conversation with G-d, we need to recognize before Whom we are standing. We need to nullify ourselves before G-d before attempting to delve into His greatness.

Source 14 Siddur Im Dach, p. 203c

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We cannot comprehend the magnitude of G-d's greatness and wisdom, but we can recognize that He is very wise, and we must express great gratitude and praise to Him. This is analogous to a pauper acknowledging the king's wealth, despite not having any comprehension of its value. The pauper acknowledges that even if he doesn't understand it, he must still be thankful for it and praise it.

כְּאִשֶּׁר אֵין בִּיכְלֵת הַשְׁגָּתוֹ לְהַשִּׁיג
וּלְהַפִּיר כָּלֵל בַּעֲצָם הַגְדֻלָּה
וְהַחֲכָמָה כְּמוֹ שֶׁהוּא, רַק שְׂיוּדָע
וּמִפִּיר שֶׁהוּא מְפַלֵּא בְּחֲכָמָה, וְצָרִיךְ
לְהוֹדוֹת לוֹ בְּהוֹדָאָה וְשִׁבְחָה גְדוֹלָה.
וְכְמוֹ שְׂיוּדָה גַּם הָעָנִי בְּגִדְלוֹת
הַמֶּלֶךְ, אֵף עַל פִּי שְׂאִינוֹ מִפִּיר
בְּמַהוּת הַגְדֻלָּה כְּמוֹ שֶׁהִיא, אֲלֵא
שְׂמוּדָה שְׂצָרִיךְ לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְשַׁבַּח
לְגִדְלָה זוֹ הַגָּם שְׂאִינוֹ מְשִׁיגָה.

When a student goes to study in college, they need to go with the understanding that the professors are wiser than them, and can teach them something. If the student challenges everything with "I don't believe that" or "that's not true," they won't advance in their studies.

The same applies when speaking with G-d. Where one to approach G-d while saying "I don't believe" or "that's not true," they cannot begin to pray. The first step is basic humility - believing in a G-d who created the world and believing in His power, even before delving into the wonders of His creation.

Step Two: Awe and Love

The second stage - from Baruch Sheamar until Yishtabach - corresponds to the world of formation. In this stage, the wonders of creation are described in great detail, beginning with the meditation

of “Blessed is He who spoke and the world came into being,” in general terms, and continuing with a more detailed description of the beauty of creation. This stage arouses our emotions to be visibly moved by the wonders of the universe, and generates a feeling of love for the Creator.

Source 15 Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Yesodei Hatorah 2:2

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How does one develop love and reverence for G-d? When one meditates on the wonders of G-d's awesome creation, and sees how His wisdom is infinite and unparalleled, they will immediately love, praise, and glorify Him and deeply want to know more about G-d, as David said, “My soul thirsts for the L-rd, the living G-d.”

וְהִיאֵךְ הִיא הַדֶּרֶךְ לְאַהֲבָתוֹ
וְיִרְאַתוֹ? בְּשָׁעָה שִׁתְּבוּנָן הָאָדָם
בְּמַעֲשָׂיו וּבְרוּאָיו הַנִּפְלְאִים
הַגְּדוּלִּים, וְיִרְאֶה מֵהֶם חֲכָמָתוֹ
שֶׁאֵין לָהּ עֶרְךָ וְלֹא קֶץ, מִיַּד הוּא
אוֹהֵב וּמְשַׁבֵּחַ וּמְפָאֵר וּמְתַאֲנֶה
תְּאוֹהָה גְּדוּלָּה לְדַע הַשֵּׁם הַגְּדוֹל,
כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר דָּוִד "צִמְאָה נַפְשִׁי
לְאֱלֹהִים לֹאֵל חַי".

Step Three: Self-Nullification

Source 16 Shelach Lecha Anashim 1961 | Torat Menachem, vol. 31, pg. 61

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pg. 12

This is the idea behind meditating on the nullification of the angels before reciting the Shema. Even the loftiest angels, the Seraphim who reside in the world of creation, are completely and existentially nullified because of their understanding of G-d's greatness. Contemplating the nullification of the angels causes even our animal soul to be nullified before G-dliness.

This is analogous to a physical king and his relationship with his simple subjects. Even a simpleton, incapable of understanding the king's greatness and appreciating it, will still be moved by seeing the ministers bowing and nullifying themselves before the king, and will have a similar reaction.

וְהוּא עֲנִין הַהִתְבּוֹנְנוֹת שֶׁבְּתַחֲלַת בְּרִכּוֹת
קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע בְּעֲנִין בְּטוֹל הַמַּלְאָכִים
לְאֱלֹהִיּוֹת, וְהִינוּ, שְׁגָם הַמַּלְאָכִים הַיּוֹתֵר
נְעֻלִים שֶׁהֵם הַשְּׂרָפִים שֶׁמַּעֲמִידִם
בְּעוֹלָם הַבְּרִיאָה, הֵנָּה מִצַּד הַשְּׂגָתָם
שֶׁמִּשְׁיָגִים הַפְּלֵאָת אֱלֹהִיּוֹת הָרִי הֵם
מִתְּבַטְּלִים מִמְּצִיאוֹתָם... וְהַתְּבּוֹנְנוֹת זֹאת
בְּבִטּוֹל הַמַּלְאָכִים שְׂרָפִים וְאַפָּרִימִים כו',
פּוֹעֵלֶת גַּם בְּנַפְשׁ הַבְּהֵמָה, שְׁגָם הִיא
תַּהֲיָה בְּטוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִיּוֹת.

וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ מָשַׁל בְּמֶלֶךְ בָּשָׂר וָדָם, שְׁגָם
אִישׁ הַמוֹנֵי, שֶׁלְּהִיּוֹתוֹ פָּשׁוּט בְּיּוֹתֵר
אֵינוֹ שֶׁיֵּשׁ שִׁשְׁיָג גְּדֻלַּת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְיִתְפַּעַל
מִזֶּה, לְפִי שֶׁאֵין לוֹ שׁוּם מְשַׁג כָּלֵל
בְּגִדְלַת הַמֶּלֶךְ, מְכַל מְקוֹם, כְּאִשְׁרֵי רֹאֶה
אִיךָ שֶׁשְּׂרָרִים רַבִּים וְנִכְבְּדִים מְשַׁתַּחֲוִים
וּבִטְלִים לְמֶלֶךְ¹⁶, הֵנָּה הִיא גּוֹפָא שְׂרֹאֶה
אֶת בְּטוֹל הַשְּׂרָרִים כו', הָרִי זֶה פּוֹעֵל
בְּטוֹל גַּם בְּאִישׁ הַהִמּוֹנֵי.

16. ראה גם תניא פמ"ב בהגדה (סא, א).

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This is what happens to our animal soul as well. Although it cannot comprehend G-dliness at all, through reflecting on the understanding and nullification of the angels, it too is nullified.

ועל דרך זה גם בנפש הבהמית, שהגם
שמצד עצמה אין לה משג באלוקות
כלל, מפל מקום על ידי שמתבוננת
ומשיגה את בטול המלאכים, הרי זה
פועל גם עליה.

After meditating on the wonders of nature, we go up a level and meditate on the greatness of the angels. We see their nullification before G-d and that arouses the same feeling within us. This is like a simple person who sees the ministers bowing before the king, and that causes him to nullify himself before the king, even prior to understanding the king's greatness.

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In addition, the root of the animal soul is from the angels called ofanim. Therefore, when we understand how our root is nullified, that effects the same in us. Knowing that the angels are the root of the animal soul creates an even stronger nullification.

ולכך זאת, הרי ידוע ששרש נפש
הבהמית הוא משמרי האפנים, ולכן
בשמשג איך ששרשו בטל, הרי זה
פועל בטול גם בו, ואדרבה ידיעה זו
שהמלאכים הם שרש נפש הבהמית,
פועלת חזק יותר בבטול של הנפש
הבהמית כו'.

There's another idea here. The root, or source of the animal soul is the angels. Therefore, when we think about how they act, it arouses the same feeling in us.

Step Four: Face-To-Face Conversation

After expressing gratitude in Hodu, marveling at the wonders of creation which aroused a love for G-d, and then examining the nullification of the angels which implanted the same nullification within us, we arrive at the Amidah prayer. This is the climax of the service, the highest rung of the ladder. Here, we at our closest point to G-d and speak with him "face-to-face."

Source 17 The Rebbe, Ani Ledodi 1952

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After the preceding prayers comes the Amidah, where we stand like servants before our master - existential nullification.

ואחר כך בא הענין של שמונה עשרה,
שעומד בעקב לפני אדוניו¹⁷, שהוא
ענין בטול במציאות.

After strolling through the palace, we stand at the king's chamber. We grasp the door handle and tremble with emotion. When we pray the Amidah, we ask: "G-d, open my lips," we can barely open our mouths. At the beginning of the service we didn't stop speaking, but now we're at a loss for words. Because when we stand before a king, we're completely nullified. Unlike the rest of the service, the Amidah is recited in a whisper. Standing before G-d there's no room for external displays of emotion. Deep inside the heart the waves are calm.

17. שבת י"ד, א.

Now that we've learned about the ladder of prayer, we'll continue with the Rebbe's address:

>> The Rebbe

The Four Rungs Deepen The Feelings Of Need

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The teachings of Chassidut guide us in how to meditate, beginning with the meditation on "Offer praise to G-d, proclaim His name, make His deeds known among the nations."

Then comes the *pesukei dezimrah*, in which we meditate on "He shall raise the glory of His people," "for His name alone is exalted, His splendor is on the earth and the heavens."

We then reach the blessing of Shema, in which we talk about the angels—the *seraphim*, *chayot*, and *ofanei hakodesh*—who constantly bless G-d and proclaim His sanctity. We contemplate the fact that our animalistic soul contains elements from these angels, yet we completely lack their angelic passion for G-d, and only feel our relationship to the material world.

This causes us to cry bitterly, feeling the great desire and thirst, standing as we do in "a dry and parched land where there is no water." With this feeling we turn to G-d and pray that He satiate our thirst and hunger, because we can't take it any longer... .

וכפי שתורת החסידות מבארת ומורה את הדרך להתבוננות בענינים אלו - החל מההתבוננות ב"הודו לה' קראו בשמו", "הודיעו בעמים (שאפילו בכל העמים יודעים) עלילותיו"¹⁸.

ואחר כך מגיע לפסוקי דזמרה, ומתבונן בענין של "וירם קרן לעמו"¹⁹, כיון שבכל הבריאה "נשגב שמו לבדו הודו על ארץ ושמים"²⁰.

ואחר כך מגיע לברכות קריאת שמע, ששם מדובר אודות השרפים וחיות ואופני הקודש²¹, שעומדים בתנועה של אמירת קדוש וברוך כו'²², ומתבונן בשרש נפשו הבהמית שנלקחה מהמלאכים הנ"ל, ואילו אצלו הענין של עבודת המלאכים הוא בהעדר לגמרי, כיון שנמצא במעמד ומצב ששייך רק לעניני עולם הזה.

ואז - בכה יבכה במר נפשו... מצד גודל התאוה והצמאון להיותו "בארץ ציה ועיף בלי מים"²³, ובתנועה כזו מתפלל לבורא העולם ומבקש ממנו שירוה וישביע את צמאונו ורעבונו, כיון שאינו יכול לסבול יותר...

22 ראה חולין צא, סע"ב ואילך. ובתוד"ה ברוך שם.
23 תהלים סג, ב.
24 ראה בית רבי ח"א פכ"ו.

18 דברי הימים-א טז, ח.
19 תהלים קמח, יד.
20 שם, יג.
21 ראה לקו"ת ויקרא ב, ב. ובכ"מ.

Vital Needs

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An example of this can be found in the note sent by the chasid Rabbi Aizik of Homil to the Alter Rebbe, asking him to answer his question because it was a vital need for him.

על דרך ה"פתקה" ששלח החסיד ר' אייזיק מהאמיל לרבינו הזקן, שמבקש ממנו להשיב על שאלתו כיון שהדבר נוגע בנפשו ממש²⁴.

Source 18 Beit Rebbe, vol. 1, chapter 26

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Rabbi Aizik of Homil was a close student of the Alter Rebbe. He was an exceptional scholar in the revealed and hidden parts of Torah, and his thirst for studying Chassidic teachings was so great that it affected his very life. His teachers encouraged that thirst ... He would visit them often, writing requests that they reveal more to him, because it affects his life. When he succeeded, he could not be more elated. He delved into the depths of Chassidism and authored valuable books on it.

הרב הקדוש ר' יצחק אייזיק הלוי
עפשטיין נשמתו עדין מהאמיל, תלמיד
מבוק לרבנו נשמתו עדין, היה גאון
גדול בגולה ובחסידות, וצמאנו
לדברי אלוקים חיים היה גדול מאד
עד שהיה נוגע זה לחיות נפשו ממש.
ורבותיו הקדושים היו מגדילים אצלו
הצמאון... והוא היה מרבה לבקשם
בפתקאות שיגלו לו יותר, כי זה נוגע
לו עד הנפש ממש, ואם היה מצליח
בקשתו היה לו נפשו לשלל ממש.
והוא העמיק הרחיק בדברי אלוקים
חיים, עד להפליא, וחיבר ספרים יקרים
בדברי אלוקים חיים.

Like Rabbi Aizik of Homil who wrote to the Alter Rebbe asking him to teach him more because it "affects his life," so too every Jew can – after meditating on the rungs of prayer – understand their great spiritual lack and feel as though it affects their very life.

>> The Rebbe

A Thrice-Daily Biblical Mitzvah

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This is relevant for every Jew, even the most simple person, and even in the era of exile. The Men of the Great Assembly standardized the prayers in a form that works for all of us. Through meditating on all the stages of prayer, from *ma tovu* until the *Amidah*, as explained in Chassidut we can reach a true feeling of all-encompassing need, and then when we pray to G-d we are fulfilling a Biblical mitzvah, three times a day.

By contrast, a person who doesn't study Chassidut can go through a life of seventy years without ever having a taste of true prayer!

וענין זה שייך לכל אחד ואחד מישראל, אפילו לפשוט שבפשוטים, וגם בזמן הגלות - שהרי אנשי כנסת הגדולה תיקנו את נוסח התפלה באופן השווה לכל - שעל ידי ההתבוננות בכל חלקי התפלה, מ"מה טובו" עד שמונה עשרה, כפי שנתבארה בתורת החסידות, יוכל לבוא למעמד ומצב שירגיש את החסרון שלו בכל הענינים, ואז, כאשר מתפלל להקב"ה, מקיים מצות עשה מן התורה שלוש פעמים ביום.

ובה בשעה, יהודי שאינו לומד תורת החסידות - יכול לחיות שבעים שנה מבלי לטעום טעמה של תפלה אמיתית!

Chassidut gives us the ability to make our prayer a Biblical mitzvah, because Chassidut makes us recognize our spiritual needs. A person who doesn't recognize this, and, thank G-d enjoys a good material life, can live an entire life without feeling any pressing need. In that case, most opinions maintain that such a person's prayer is not a Biblical mitzvah.

משיחת מוצש"ק פ' וישב, כ' כסלו,
הנחה בלתי מוגה
תורת מנחם ה'תשי"ז חלק א' עמ' 280

Story The letter that was never delivered

Some three hundred years ago, there lived an affluent man named Avigdor. He once brought a large sum of money to Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, to be distributed to the poor on his behalf.

Accepting the contribution graciously, the Baal Shem Tov (literally, "Master of a Good Name") inquired if perhaps Avigdor would like a blessing in return. After all, the Baal Shem Tov was renowned not only as a great Torah scholar, but also as a righteous individual who had the power to give blessings.

"No thanks!" replied Avigdor arrogantly. "I am very wealthy; I own many properties, and I have servants, plenty of delicacies and everything else I want. I have more than I need!"

"You are very fortunate," replied the Baal Shem Tov. "Perhaps you would like a blessing for your family?"

"I have a large and healthy family of which I am very proud; they are a credit to me. I don't need—or want—anything."

"Well, then perhaps you can help me. May I request one thing of you?" inquired Rabbi Yisrael. "Can you please deliver a letter to the head of the charity committee in Brody?"

"Certainly," responded Avigdor. "I live in Brody and would be happy to assist you in this matter."

The Baal Shem Tov took out a pen and paper, wrote a letter, sealed it in an envelope and gave it to Avigdor. Avigdor took the letter, placed it in his jacket pocket and returned home. But he had so many projects on his mind that by the time he arrived in Brody he had completely forgotten about the entire encounter with Rabbi Yisrael.

Sixteen years passed, and the wheel of fortune suddenly turned. All of Avigdor's assets and properties were lost or destroyed. Floods ruined his fields of crops; fires destroyed his forests. Calamity after calamity. He was left penniless.

Creditors took his house and everything he owned. He was forced to sell even his clothing to feed his children. One day, while cleaning out the pockets of an old jacket he planned to sell, he found a letter—the letter that he had received from the Baal Shem Tov 16 years earlier! In a flash, he recalled his visit and his haughtiness when he thought he had everything. With tears in his eyes, he rushed to finally fulfill his mission and deliver the letter. The envelope was addressed to a Mr. Tzadok, chairman of the charity committee of Brody.

He ran into the street and encountered one of his friends. Grabbing his arm, he said, "Where can I find Mr. Tzadok?"

"Mr. Tzadok? You mean Mr. Tzadok, the chairman of the charity committee?"

"Yes, I must see him immediately!" replied Avigdor.

"He is in the synagogue," said Avigdor's friend. "I was there only a few minutes ago. Mr. Tzadok is indeed a lucky man. Just this morning he was elected chairman of the charity committee."

"Tell me more about Mr. Tzadok," insisted Avigdor.

Willing to oblige, Avigdor's friend continued, "Mr. Tzadok was born and raised here in Brody. A tailor by profession, he was always down on his luck, never able to make a decent living. He was hardly able to support his family, and they always lived in abject poverty. He sat in the back of the synagogue, and no one ever took notice of him. Despite working many hours, he never earned much; it was hard for him to scrape together enough money for even a loaf of bread for his family.

"Recently, however, the tide changed. Mr. Tzadok was introduced to a local nobleman, and he made

uniforms for all his servants. The nobleman was very satisfied with Mr. Tzaddok's craftsmanship, and his business started to pick up. He even received an order for 5,000 uniforms for the army. He became a rich man and gained respect in the eyes of the community. He did not forget his former poverty, and gave generously to many, taking an active role in communal affairs. Just this morning, he was unanimously elected chairman of the charity committee."

Hearing this story, Avigdor hurried to the synagogue and found Mr. Tzadok busy perusing the many requests for financial assistance. He handed Mr. Tzadok the letter. Together they read the words of the Baal Shem Tov, penned 16 years earlier:

Dear Mr. Tzadok,

The man who brought this letter is named Avigdor. He was once very wealthy, but is now very poor. He has paid for his haughtiness. Since just this morning you were elected chairman of the charity committee, I request that you do all you can to assist him, as he has a large family to support. He will once again become successful, and this time he will be more suited to success. In case you doubt my words, I give you the following sign: Your wife is expecting a baby, and today she will give birth to a boy.

They had hardly concluded reading the letter when someone burst into the synagogue and exclaimed, "Mazel tov, Mr. Tzadok! Your wife just had a baby boy!"

Thanks to the Baal Shem Tov's foresight, Avigdor once again became very affluent. This time, he remained humble and was admired by all.