

תפלת יספה

Comments and Insights on
תפלת שמונה עשרה

Based on classes by
Rabbi Boruch Hirschfeld shlit"a

לעילוי נשמת
יספה בת ר' בן ציון ע"ה
Mrs. Yospa Fishman
נפטרה ו' אב, תשע"א
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Compiled and adapted by
L. Manies

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It has been my privilege to say shivrim on Tefilla for many years. Mrs Leebby Manies ^{ztl} has written down a summary of the shivrim on Shmoneh Esrei in a brief point by point manner. The sources are all from Chazal and Sifrei Kodesh.

Maximum benefit from this work can be gained by reading through slowly brocho by brocho, not during davening, but rather at other times as a preparation for davening. It can then be used during davening with the topics under each brocho acting as a reminder.

May we grow in Tefilla and may Hashem accept our prayers.

Boruch Hirschfeld

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My gratitude to my dear parents, Rabbi and Mrs. Calman Fishman *a"h*, knows no bounds. They instilled in us children *yiras Shamayim*, and gave us a wonderful Torah upbringing. Whatever I am able to accomplish is thanks to them. They were always true role models for us and living examples of *mesirus nefesh* for *shemiras hamitzvos*.

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PREFACE

It is with a heartfelt feeling of *hakaras hatov* that I pen these words at the completion of תפלה יספה. These thoughts and notes on *Shemoneh Esrei* are such a fitting way to memorialize my dear mother, יספה בת ר' בן ציון. To watch my mother daven was like watching a person daven *Ne'ilah*. My mother davened word by word aloud, neither rushing nor swallowing words or syllables. She was a living example of “*va'ani tefillah*.” Her *emunah* and *bitachon* in Hashem were so deeply ingrained within her and only strengthened as her illness progressed. She accepted all her suffering *b'ahavah* and never complained about her difficult challenge. Her only desire was to be a true *eved Hashem* and to connect with Hashem. During the last years of her life, when Hashem saw fit to remove most of her ability to speak, she was still able to daven. The words were somewhat slurred, but those who were privileged to hear her daven heard real *tefillah*, saw real *kavanah*, and felt the real devotion of an *eved* fulfilling the will of his Master. How appropriate it is that she was *niftar* on *leil Shabbos*, several hours after having davened her last *tefillah* of *Kabbalas Shabbos* with her granddaughter.

It would behoove us, who are privileged to have the *koach hadibbur*, to take her lessons to heart and use our mouths primarily for *dvarim sheb'kedushah* – especially in emulating the way she davened word by word with great *kavanah*.

May it be the will of Hashem that the many *shiurim* that I was privileged to hear from Rabbi Hirschfeld *shlita* (which my mother also attended for four years prior to her *petirah*) which have now been put into writing, be a *zechus* לעילוי נשמת יספה בת ר' בן ציון. As each person gains inspiration and *chizuk* in *inyanei tefillah* from reading this *sefer*, may my mother's pure *neshamah* rise higher and higher, reach the *Kisei Hakavod*, and accomplish *yeshuos* and *refuos* for all of Klal Yisrael.

הקדמה

When Yaakov was traveling, he saw in his dream a **סולם מוצב** ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה והנה מלאכי אלהים עולים ויורדים בו. It would seem that the *malachim* should first be descending from *Shamayim*, and only afterwards ascending the ladder. Why does it say that they first ascended? Rav Chaim Volozhiner answers this question. According to the *Zohar* when one does a mitzvah, he creates a *malach* which defends and protects him; when he does an *aveirah*, a prosecuting *malach* is created. The *malachim* created through our *mitzvos* ascend to *Shamayim* and report to Hashem the good deeds that created them. The one who performs a mitzvah creates them – they are his. Hashem gives each *malach* the *brachos* to bring down to the world commensurate to the quality of the mitzvah. An enthusiastic mitzvah or *tefillah* will create an enthusiastic *malach*. The more effort one puts in the greater and more effective the *malach* is.

A person can be a powerhouse generating *malachim* for Klal Yisrael. A mitzvah is an entity. It is able to be *melamed zechus* for a person. An *aveirah* is also a reality, a destructive force. *Charatah* and *teshuvah* can destroy bad *malachim*. The ladder in Yaakov's dream symbolizes the *malachim* created below that ascend to *Shamayim*. When one davens, he should feel that he is climbing up the ladder.

Tefillah is a spiritual ladder that affects the upper worlds. A *tefillah* is a force – a heavenly *malach*.

הכנות לתפלה

- Give *tzedakah* before *tefillah*. This creates a tremendous *zechus* because Hashem engages in *middah k'neged middah*. Opening one's hand to give, *k'vyachol*, prompts Hashem to open His hand. If one gives with a smile, Hashem will reciprocate with a smile, as it says ד' צלך.
- One should daven in a state of *menuchah*. He should not jump into *tefillah* right after a heated discussion or *limud*.
- Think about the incredible *zechus* one has to be able to daven. Some *malachim* are only able to sing *shirah* once in their lifetime. The praises that *Perek Shirah* attributes to the various creations are only proclaimed at certain times. Human beings are the only ones who can speak to Him at will, whenever they want. Furthermore, He is especially close to His *am krovo*, listening to them "בכל קראנו אליו". This is no small privilege.
- Have in mind to fulfill the *mitzvas asei d'Oraysa* of *v'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha*. This commitment unites one spiritually with everyone else forming a unique type of *tefillah b'tzibur*.
- Reflect for all there is to thank Hashem as well as the requests that only He can fulfill. Such contemplation puts a person in the proper mood for *tefillah*.
- Remember that the mouth's effectiveness in *tefillah* depends on what the mouth did throughout the day. Being careful with speech maximizes one's potency in *tefillah*. If one engages in improper conversation, the ensuing act of davening is akin to using a frying pan with a hole in it.
- While other *tefillos* have few limitations as to how one must dress, *Shemoneh Esrei* is different. One must dress appropriately in order to address the King.
- Someone who is drunk is forbidden to daven *Shemoneh Esrei*.
- Pray to Hashem for a worthy, effective davening. That is why one begins with תהלתך ופי יגיד תהלתך.

Shemoneh Esrei Overview

The first three *brachos* of *Shemoneh Esrei* are *shevach*, praising Hashem. These *brachos* are in all *Shemonei Esreis* throughout the year. In the weekday *Shemoneh Esrei*, the next six *brachos* are requests for the individual. The following seven *brachos* are requests for the *tzibur*. The final three *brachos* are *hoda'ah*.

The *tefillah* is called *Shemoneh Esrei* because originally it contained 18 *brachos*. Later, the *brachah* of ולמלשינים was inserted for a total of 19. This number corresponds to the 18 vertebrae in a person's back, plus the tailbone as the nineteenth. This signifies that all the bones of the spine were created to bow to Hashem.

Although the obligation to say *Shemoneh Esrei* is *d'Rabbanan*, one fulfills many *mitzvos d'Oraysa* in the process, including

- (1) ולעבדו בכל לבבכם,
- (2) אנכי ד' אלוךך,
- (3) *emunah*, and
- (4) ובו תדבק.

Shemoneh Esrei is the only *tefillah* that requires one to stand. That is why it is called "*Amidah*." A person stands to show that he is ready to serve Hashem and be His *eved*.

One must face the Har Habayis and the *Kodesh Kedashim*. He should try to mentally transport himself, picturing himself standing in the Beis Hamikdash. A person is where his thoughts are.

סמיכת גאולה לתפלה

One is required to connect *Geulah* to *tefillah*. In both morning and evening after mentioning the wonders of Krias Yam Suf and concluding with the *brachah* of גאל ישראל, one immediately starts *Shemoneh Esrei*. The Gemara (ברכות ד) rewards this practice with a guarantee of *Olam Haba*. Why is this so?

- When Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Mitzrayim, the purpose was for them to transform themselves from Paroh's slaves to *avdei Hashem*. The hard labor in Mitzrayim was a means to train them to be *avdei Hashem*, to cultivate an ability to serve Hashem under all circumstances with total

devotion. By remembering *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, one reinforces his subservience to Hashem. Davening in such a state of mind turns one into a true *eved Hashem*. This fulfills the purpose of the *Geulah* and one is thus *zocheh* to *Olam Haba*.

- True *bitachon* is to rely completely on Hashem. Klal Yisrael were redeemed from *Mitzrayim* in the *zechus* of their *bitachon*. Hashem helped them until then, and He would do more *nissim* for them in the future. Hashem was the only One to Whom they turned. He needed no assistance, and they relied upon none other. By connecting *Geulah* to *tefillah*, one demonstrates that he is maintaining the *bitachon* acquired in *Mitzrayim*. Such *bitachon* automatically merits a person *Olam Haba*.

Towards the end of the slavery of *Mitzrayim*, the *pasuk* says the Yidden davened – “יִצְעֲקוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל”. Where were their *tefillas* until now?

Bnei Yisrael did not have any time to daven properly. Paroh understood that if they were to daven, Hashem would listen. He purposely kept them busy for them not to have time or strength to daven. Pesach can be read as פה סח – the mouth talks. Until then they were not able to talk. With the dawn of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* came the *Geulah* of their mouth. Since ד' שפתי תפתח is in itself a *tefillah* that a person should be able to daven, it is not considered a *hefsek* between *Geulah* to *tefillah*.

Three steps backwards and forwards

Before starting *Shemoneh Esrei*, one takes three steps back and then three steps forward. A person should feel that he is leaving this world and entering another – the world of Hashem. It is like stepping into the quiet and private office of Hashem.

Why specifically three steps? When Moshe Rabbeinu went up to receive the Torah, he went through *choshech*, *anan*, and *arafel* – each thicker than the one before it. When davening, a person comes close to Hashem, in the same way that Moshe did at *Kabbalas HaTorah*.

Keeping our feet together

Why does a person keep his feet together when saying *Shemoneh Esrei*?

- A *malach* has only one foot, symbolizing that he has only one purpose – fulfilling Hashem's will. Standing with one's feet together symbolizes the *malach's* single foot. Although a person can never fully achieve *malachim's* level of *avodah*, there are moments in which one emulates them as much as possible. *Tefillah* is one of those moments. When a person lacks proper *kavanah*, it often results from his worries. In contrast, a *malach* has no worries. During davening, nothing should bother the person, just like a *malach*. He should be "כגמול עלי אמו" – like the nursing baby who has no worries, relying completely upon his mother for everything. Additionally, forgetting about one's uncertainties during *Shemoneh Esrei* is a *segulah* for those worries to be resolved.
- To demonstrate total dependence on Hashem – that without Him, one cannot even move.
- It is reminiscent of the *kohen* doing the *avodah* in the Beis Hamikdash. A *kohen* in the Beis Hamikdash never took big steps, as if he had only one foot.

כריעה והשתחוואה בתפלה

The act of bowing down during *Shemoneh Esrei* is an essential component of *tefillah*.

- Most people bow four times in *Shemoneh Esrei*. A *kohen gadol* bows at every *brachah* because he is liable to become haughtier. A king, whose risk of haughtiness is the greatest, must remain bowed throughout the entire *Shemoneh Esrei*.
- While bowing, a person is being *machnia* himself. This physical act of humility is the best way to engender an internal humility since an action makes a deeper impression than speech or thought. Words are conceptual, whereas actions are palpable. Humility is important for *tefillah* because Hashem favors the prayers of the humble. By bowing at the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*, one will achieve

humility throughout the *tefillah*.

- When a person is *machnia* himself, he saves himself from *tzaros*. Otherwise, Hashem would have to send him *tzaros* in order for him to learn humility. By practicing humility, one avoids the need for *tzaros*.
- Hashem is a זוקף כפופים. Hashem will make one who bows great in *Olam Hazei* and *Olam Haba*.
- The bowing takes place in those *brachos* where *kavanah* is critical because humbling oneself promotes *kavanah*.
- Bowing is a response to the awareness of Hashem's presence. This *kavanah* in turn intensifies the presence of the *Shechinah*.
- When a person davens to Hashem, he wants the abundance to come from the heavens. By bowing down, he symbolically asks Hashem to send down *brachos*.
- The destiny of every man is the earth, where he will be buried. On the other hand, after burial, the *neshamah* ascends to *Olam Haba*. When a person bows, he looks at the earth to remind himself of his material end. Then he rises, symbolizing the spiritual heights that he could achieve.
- Bowing represents one's demise, as mentioned above. The subsequent rising depicts *techiyas hameisim*.
- A slave carries heavy loads. By bowing down, a person demonstrates to Hashem that he accepts the *ol malchus Shamayim*.
- Chazal tell us that it was spiritually detrimental when the 11 brothers bowed to Eisav in *Parshas Vayishlach*. By bowing 12 times daily (four times in three *tefillos*) to Hashem and not to Eisav we negate the *koach* of Edom. A person should feel that, without Hashem's help, he cannot even hold up his head. He therefore bows, and then stands up by the name of Hashem, acknowledging that all his strength comes from Hashem.
- When one bows, he is saying, "I did not deserve any of Your kindness in the past. I have only received everything because You are such a *Rachaman*." *Shemoneh Esrei* begins

with ברוך אתה ד'. ברוך is from the root of ברך – a knee. The *brachah* of Hashem is dependent on the knee – whether one is humbled by all that Hashem has given him.

- What follows the bowing is also significant. After the words ברוך אתה, one immediately straightens up. This shows *bitachon*; now that he has humbled himself, he can feel secure enough to proceed. Straightening out at the mention of the name of Hashem shows this confidence.
- Animals walk with their heads lowered. The reason human beings hold themselves erect is because they represent the Master of the world. Being His representative gives one the right to stand erect. But in order to qualify for that title, one must first bow to show submission to Hashem. Only then can he resume the upright posture.

שמונה עשרה

(במנחה)

When I proclaim Hashem's name,
attribute greatness to our G-d

כִּי שֵׁם יי אֶקְרָא,
הִבּו גְדֹל לֵאלֹהֵינוּ

Hashem, open my lips
and my mouth will relate Your praise.

אֲדַנִּי, שִׁפְתֵי תִפְתָּח
וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ.

Prayer itself needs a prayer beforehand. One needs *siyatta d'Shmaya* in order to daven properly, to daven with *kavanah* without distractions. One needs help articulating one's thoughts. To help with *kavanah* one may say a special *tefillah* before davening: יהי רצון מלפניך ד' אלהי ואלהי אבותי שתהא תפלתי צלולה וזכה וברורה לפניך מכל ערבוביא המבטלת כונת התפלה *May it be Your will, Hashem, my G-d and G-d of my fathers, that my prayer be clear, pure, and free of any confusion that prevents proper concentration of tefillah.*"

It is also important not to be discouraged by the multitude of stray thoughts that so easily enter the mind when first starting *tefillah*. It is the result of an extra *koach* the *yetzer hara* has at this time. Every *tefillah* has ups and downs. Even if one missed concentrating on most of the words he should still say the remainder with *kavanah*, because every single word uttered with *kavanah* is worthwhile.

The power of speech is a wonderful gift that Hashem gave only to mankind. Therefore, one should designate it for Hashem, paying back in kind as it were, to Hashem through *tefillah*.

This *pasuk* is in *Tehillim* (51), where Dovid Hamelech says *vidui* to Hashem for his sin with Batsheva. Dovid is afraid his sin may have nullified his *zechus tefillah*. With this request, he asks Hashem to accept his *tefillah* regardless. He is also asking for forgiveness as a means of bolstering his *tefillah*. "Hashem, make

my mouth capable of producing an effective *tefillah*. Without Your forgiveness my *tefillah* has only minimal power.” The purity of the *tefillah* depends on the purity of the one saying it, which is attained through Hashem’s mercy. Even though we may not deserve to have our *tefillos* answered, Hashem can forgive us thereby making us worthy.

Dovid also mentions that Hashem won’t accept a *korban* for his *cheit*, but that the *tefillah* should take the place of a *korban*. In the daily davening, Shacharis is counted like the תמיד של שחר and Minchah is equated to the תמיד של בין הערביים.

אבות

Blessed

בָּרוּךְ

ברוך is both a praise and a request at the same time.

- Praise: You are the praiseworthy source of blessing. We recognize that everything we have is from Hashem.
- Request: *brachah* is a *lashon* of increasing. May the *brachos* that Hashem bestows and His presence in the world increase. People should praise You for this.

are You,

אֲתָהּ,

- One should feel that Hashem is right in front of him, listening closely to every word.
- It takes a lifetime of *avodah* to feel intensely that one is talking directly to Hashem.

Hashem,

יְיָ

This Name includes three meanings:

- אדון הכל – the Master of everything
- היה, הוה, ויהיה – Hashem is eternal
- The attribute of *rachamim*; Saying this Name of Hashem with the proper *kavanah* activates waves of *rachamim* in the world. The above three concepts can be summarized as “merciful, eternal Master.”

The possessive *our* Hashem conveys several ideas:

- He is our Almighty G-d. The only address we need to seek help, the Unlimited Power Who controls all of Creation.
- *Hashgachah pratis*. Hashem constantly monitors every person in every detail – their health, money, success or failure, whom they meet and when. Hashem knows exactly what a person needs.
- Our *Elokim* Who renews the existence of the entire Creation every moment. Hashem is behind every event in the entire world and is doing so as *Elokeinu*. He is interested in everyone. He loves everyone and desires their success. Everyone therefore needs to serve Him.
- We have a direct line to Hashem. There are no intermediaries, secretaries, or *gabbaim*. "קרוב ד' לכל" "קראיו". No appointments are necessary. Hashem is always accessible to us.
- He has placed His Name on us. Klal Yisrael are His representatives and salesmen. Our job is to make Him known as *Elokeinu*. Every good deed we perform in front of others is a *kiddush shem Shamayim*.
- Our Hashem and we are His servants. *Chazal* teach that the *Avos* were the chariots of the *Shechinah*. Just as a chariot goes right, left and straight according to the will of the driver, a person should similarly aim to follow Hashem's will. Klal Yisrael are the chariots doing what the Rider (Hashem) guides them to do.
- One cannot rely on *zechus Avos* alone. Aside from being אלהי אבותינו, Hashem also has to be אלהינו. Hashem is waiting for people to find Him on their own. One accomplishes this by looking in the Torah and studying the creation.