

Alei Shur - T'fila

Week 3 – Summary

In Masechet Bava Kama (3,2) – Man is called “Mva’eh” – “Requester”. Why is that the specific action used to identify Man? After all, Man has many actions and attributes associated with him – why this one?

The Alei Shur explains: Because the ability to stand before HKBH and to speak with Him face-to-face – to call him “Ata” (“You”) – that belongs only to Man. And that action is found in “requesting” – in T’fila. The whole idea of T’fila is to stand before HKBH. “Da Lifnei Mi Ata Omed” (“*Know before Whom you stand*”)

The Essence of T’fila – Standing before Hashem

HaRav Chaim M’Brisk (Hilchot T’fila, 4, Halacha 1) brings down a contradiction in the Rambam. It seems that in the beginning of Chapter 4 the Rambam writes that without having kavana in daavening, one has not fulfilled his obligations (not yotzeh) – and it sounds from his words that he is referring to the entire Shemoneh Esrei. However, in the beginning of Ch. 10, he writes that the obligation to have kavana refers only to the first Bracha of Shemoneh Esrei .

Rav Chaim explains: There are two types of “kavana”: 1) Understanding the words 2) Feeling as though we are standing before the Shechina. The obligation to understand what we are saying applies only to the first Bracha. However, the obligation to know that we are standing before HKBH – that applies throughout the T’fila. Because that IS the essence of T’fila – without that, it is not T’fila.

T’fila – Chessed

In Masechet Shabbat (127), it explains that “Iyun T’fila” (reflecting on T’fila) is included under the category of “G’milut Chassadim”. Rashi explains this according to the Pasuk in Mishlei “Gomel Nafsho Ish Chessed” (“*The Man who does Chessed, does for his soul*”); meaning, **when we daaven we are doing Chessed with ourselves** – our own souls. We have to understand how that Chessed is expressed via T’fila.

The Alei Shur says: “*Most of the spiritual development of Man is connected to T’fila*”. One who truly lives his T’fila sees that there is no one instance of daavening that is the same as any other; like a man traveling on a train, where the scenery going by is constantly changing. So too our T’filot – because a man is never at the same place in his life, as he was even the minute before – so his T’filot are changing along with him, minute by minute.

Example: The T’fila of “V’tetzezna Eineinu” – sometimes the T’fila comes from a place of Emunah – “*The Geula is truly coming any minute!*” And sometimes from a place of Musar – “*Were the Geula to come right now, would my eyes really be worthy of seeing it?*” etc...

Kavana in Daavening

How do we have Kavana while Daavening?

The Alei Shur says: Be careful with 3 things:

1. We must put aside all of our other business, and just daaven (Orchot Chaim of the R'ash). But how? By connecting our business to our T'fila. By remembering that in order to succeed in the various activities of our daily lives, we need to daaven for that success. (The opposite of haughtiness is the submission necessary for T'fila: Instead of seeing ourselves as the center of the world, and as in control of all of our daily business [that's why it becomes hard to separate from them, and stand in T'fila before Hashem!], we should understand ourselves to be submissive to HKBH and a mere part of His world. We should understand that our successes depend on His will, and on our T'filot to Him.)
2. Serenity – We should be careful not to daaven under pressure (when we're upset or hurried)
3. *"Hashem is close... to those who call out to Him honestly"*. Hashem's closeness to us depends on how honestly we call out to Him. Not necessarily on how close we are to Him, rather on our ability to turn to Him honestly regarding our spiritual situation. Even if we are feeling far away from Him, when we are honest about that, Hashem is very close to us.