



# Avodas Hatefilah IN DOR HASHVT'I



*WHO ARE YOU  
TALKING TO?*

לזכות  
אליהו צבי יהודה בן רייזל שיחי'  
לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

ענן





When the Alter Rebbe was approaching his twentieth birthday, he decided to travel away from home in order to grow in Torah and *avoda*.

“I was debating where to go,” he said later, “and couldn’t decide. My brother, the Maharil, is a man of common sense, and he advised me to go to Mezrich.

“I knew that in Vilna I could learn how to learn, and in Mezrich I could learn to daven. I already knew how to learn a little, but about davening I knew very little, so I went to Mezrich.”<sup>1</sup>

The foundation of Chassidus Chabad was to learn how to daven. Interestingly, the Alter Rebbe had already been learning the Chassidus of the Baal Shem Tov with his teacher Reb Yissachar Ber for a number of years before he went to Mezrich. In addition, he was fluent in the *siddur* Shaar Hashamayim of the Shal”a and knew all the *kavanos* of the *mekubalim*. Yet he still insisted that he knew almost nothing about davening. For that he had to go to Mezrich and study by the Maggid himself.<sup>2</sup>

From this we see that knowing how to daven is not necessarily a result of how much Chassidus one knows. A person can be *baki* in every *sefer Chassidus*, yet still be totally ignorant when it comes to davening.

To know how to daven, you have to go to the Rebbe.

With that in mind, let us delve into the Rebbe’s Torah to discover how a Chossid in *dor hashvi’i* should daven. Authentic *avodas hatefilah* is not something that belongs only in the olden days, while we must make due with a cheap imitation. Even today, in the year 5779, a Chossid can daven the way Chassidus Chabad truly demands.

## Yes You Can

The idea that davening is “*avoda*”—work—is not unique to Chassidus. In fact, *tefilah* is introduced in the Torah as “*avoda*” right from its conception. The Torah says

*I already knew how to learn a little, but about davening I knew very little, so I went to Mezrich.”*

לעבדו בכל לבבכם, and Chazal explain that “service (work) of the heart” refers to davening.

When a Yid davens, he is doing “*avoda*,” even if he has never learned a *maamar* in his life.

The Rebbe once told<sup>3</sup> the story of a Chossid of the Alter Rebbe who barely knew



*pirush hamilos*, yet he davened for many hours with intense concentration. When asked by Chassidim what he thinks about for so long, he said that he once heard a Torah from the Alter Rebbe on 'זכור ושמור' 'בדיבור אחד'.

*Zachor*, the Alter Rebbe said, means always remember. *Shamor*, keep (guard) in your mind. *B'dibur*, in every *davar*—thing. *Echad*, the oneness of Hashem. And with this *vort* he davened for 40 years.

The Rebbe concluded:

*This is the response to those who claim that proper avodas hatefilah does not apply to them because they lack a deep background in*

*Chassidus, and maybe they don't even know the meaning of the words.*

*From this story we see that a full and comprehensive hisbonenus is to contemplate that everything comes from Hashem. The avoda of a Yid is to find the 'Echad' in everything.*

*This story is a perfect example that even someone with very little knowledge, if he thinks about the 'Echad' in everything, he can daven with this for 40 years.*

One shouldn't postpone *avodas hatefilah* until they have the proper knowledge and background; to do so would be falling for another trick of the *yetzer hara*. As the Rebbe told a *bochur* in *yechidus*<sup>4</sup>:





*Just like we listen to the Rema when it comes to the halachos of בשר וחלב, we have to listen to the Rema when it comes to this as well!"*

*To daven slowly and patiently is a proper thing, but the nefesh habehamis and the yetzer hara don't want and don't let. The nefesh habehamis says that since it's not completely genuine, you shouldn't daven ba'arichus. Yet the opposite is true, one must certainly daven, what's the other option? To sit and wait for the davening to be genuine?! To wait until you have the kavanos of the Ramak and the Arizal?! You have to simply do it!*

*The Rema says clearly, that before davening 'contemplate the greatness of Hashem.' It doesn't mean to think a whole maamar... even a few lines would suffice. Just like we listen to the Rema when it comes to the halachos of בשר וחלב, we have to listen to the Rema when it comes to this as well!*

*Avoda doesn't mean breaking mountains and turning over the world. If during davening it takes effort just to keep in mind 'לפני מי אתה עומד'—that you're standing before Hashem—and yet you manage to do so, you have successfully accomplished avodas hatefilah!<sup>5</sup>*

*Avodas hatefilah means to work; for some, it may be work just to pretend to daven. The Rebbe once suggested at a farbrengen<sup>6</sup> that if a person absolutely cannot daven, he should at least sleep under the tallis so it looks like he's davening and that will inspire other people.*

*When asked if avodas hatefilah is for everyone, the Rebbe responded in a letter that indeed it is for everyone; the difference is only in quality and quantity.<sup>7</sup>*

In this context, davening is quite different than learning. An ignorant person cannot be expected to jump right into a sugya. Even if he is well versed in other areas, that won't help him. Learning Torah is a step-by-step process.

With davening however, you can jump right into it. No prior knowledge is needed to start. As long as you are willing to work, you can start davening immediately.<sup>8</sup>

There is no such thing as someone who can't daven.

## Before Davening

Tefilos were established in place of korbanos.<sup>9</sup> Just as korbanos required a Beis Hamikdash, so too davening requires a structure, and that is the hachanos for davening.<sup>10</sup>

*Everything has to be with an order, therefore davening must also be a process. The first step is to enter a spiritual mode through the hachanos before davening. Namely—mikvah, tzedakah, and learning Chassidus.<sup>11</sup>*

These days, there is an additional hachana: It is impossible to daven on an empty stomach, so one should also eat before davening.

As the famous adage of the Tzemach Tzedek says, "It's better to eat in order to daven then to daven in order to eat."

Eating before davening is not a compromise or something to feel bad about. It's a positive thing, we are infusing our davening with chayus!<sup>12</sup>

By eating before davening we demonstrate that for us, food is just another tool in serving Hashem. Like the famous story with the Rebbe Maharash, who asked Ivan the wagon driver why he eats, and he answered that it's in order to live another day and eat more. When Bentzion the meshares was asked the same question, he replied that he eats in order to have strength to serve Hashem.<sup>13</sup>

## Mikvah

Before performing the *avoda* in the Beis Hamikdash, a *kohen* would *tovel* in the mikvah.

Likewise today, before our *avodas hatefilah*, which is in place of *korbanos*, a prerequisite is to go to the mikvah.<sup>14</sup>

## Tzedakah

Another important *hachana* for davening is giving tzedakah. In the Hayom Yom of Beis Kislev, the Rebbe brings an explanation from the Frieddiker Rebbe for this:

*My grandfather (the Rebbe Maharash) once explained in a maamar why "Rav Elazar would give a pruta to a pauper and then pray." He explained that davening must be*

*with chayus, and by giving tzedakah before davening and giving chayus to the pauper, we bring a lot of chayus into the davening. While saying this, he raised his hands to express that tremendous addition of chayus.*

*Many times before davening, my father would search for a poor person to give them food.*

## A Perek Tanya

On several occasions the Rebbe instructed people to learn a *perek Tanya* before davening.<sup>15</sup>

## Who Are You Talking To

It's not always easy to daven, that's why it's called *avoda*, work. Some people



may find themselves identifying with the following description from the Frierdiker Rebbe:<sup>16</sup>

*He goes to shul and converses his fill with everyone around him. Then, when the minyan has finished, he starts thinking about avoda, about davening at length. By this point es davent zich nit—he's not feeling it. So he mouths the words and is yotze.*

*The reason is simply that he skipped all the hachanos. For starters, he's missing the basic condition: "One should only get up to daven with a serious frame of mind."*

*The most basic preparation requires to at least consider who is praying, and to Whom he*

*is praying. Even such a meditation is enough to infuse a little chayus in one's davening.*

*But if, instead, one's prayers are preceded by conversation, so that he misses an amen, or an amen yehei shmei rabba, or a barchu—that is the absolute opposite of davening. Obviously, as a result, when he finally does start davening, es davent zich nit. Yet he still deludes himself into thinking that since he davened late, that's avoda, and that is what makes him a Chossid...*

## The Solution

What this person is missing is one thing: to realize that he is talking to Hashem. If he would just stop for a moment and think,



“I’m about to talk to Hashem,” that would be davening!

This mindset is the most important part of davening. Much more integral than even understanding the meaning of the words.

A person can understand every word of davening, and even know multiple explanations for every word. He could appreciate the depth and the beauty of the *nusach*, and spend hours in *hisbonenus* thinking deep concepts, but could still be missing the most important ingredient: talking to Hashem.

On the other hand, a person could not understand a single word of *pirush hamilos*, and maybe even have trouble pronouncing some words, but by knowing Who he is talking to, his simple davening is true “*avodas hatefilah*.”<sup>17</sup>

The Mezritcher Maggid had an old friend from before he became a *talmid* of the Baal Shem Tov. This friend once met the Maggid and asked him why he davens for so long. “I also think all the *kavanos* of the Arizal,” he said, “yet my davening is not nearly as long as yours.”

Instead of answering his question, the Maggid asked him what he does for a living. He answered that his wife owns a store and earns a comfortable living, so he is free to learn Torah. Once a year though he has to travel to the wholesale market and buy products to keep the store stocked.

Of course, even while on the road, he never misses his regular *shiurim* so the journey ends up taking a few weeks.

“I don’t understand,” said the Maggid, “why travel all the way to the market and go through all the trouble? Wouldn’t it be easier to just imagine you were travelling, and then imagine you were buying the merchandise, and imagine you were coming home. That way, you can be done in a couple of hours instead of a few weeks!”

“But I need the merchandise!” his friend answered.

The same applies to davening, explained the Maggid. “I need the merchandise.”<sup>18</sup>

To think *pirush hamilos* or deep *kavanos* without דע לפני מי אתה עומד—knowing that you are talking to Hashem, is considered pretending to daven. It’s like thinking of a beautiful eloquent speech to say to the president, but not actually saying it; or rehearsing the speech that you plan on saying to the president, without realizing that he’s right there!

## Who Are You Really Talking To

Once a person is aware of the fact that he is standing before Hashem, he is then ready for the next step: to spend a moment thinking about **and admiring** Hashem and His greatness.

This process is not just for those with deep knowledge of the *eser sefiros* and various esoteric concepts—although that knowledge is very important as well, but for that one must study Chassidus at great length—but as we have already established, davening is for everyone, regardless of background.

We are referring to what is called in *halacha* לחשוב מרוממות הא-ל—to think about the greatness of Hashem.<sup>9</sup>

Yes, you read that correctly, **halacha**. This is not something that Chassidus came up with, or something reserved for the *eltare Chassidim*. As the Rebbe wrote to the Igud Harabbanim:<sup>19</sup>

*I have been disturbed by this matter for a number of years. Everything written in the Shulchan Aruch is clear halacha that must be followed. Even when there is a machlokes in Shulchan Aruch, there are rules to determine what the actual halacha is.*

*Yet, among certain groups of Jews, even those who are scrupulous in mitzvos, they*





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*make an exception regarding a clear halacha about which there is no machlokes.*

*I am referring to the din that before davening every person must think about “the greatness of G-d Almighty and the lowliness of man, and remove all mortal pleasures from his mind” (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim siman 98, end of seif 1).*

*Why and for how long will the rabbanim, poskim, roshei yeshiva, and teachers, be silent about this halacha? A halacha that has been so neglected that most people don’t even know about it!*

*This hisbonenus, meditation, is not a determined amount of time. It is adjusted*

*for each person based on his abilities but it cannot be abandoned entirely.*

The Rebbe Maharash once told a Chossid that if he cannot learn Chassidus for longer than 15 minutes a day, he should divide these 15 minutes over the course of the day.<sup>20</sup> The Rebbe explained<sup>21</sup> that the goal was for this Chossid to learn five minutes at a time, three times a day, before every *tefilah*.

You could ask, said the Rebbe, why are we demanding so little? The answer is that in order to daven properly, and for the davening to effect the whole day, even five minutes is enough.

*‘Why are we demanding so little? ...In order to daven properly, and for the davening to effect the whole day, even five minutes is enough...’*

Of course this is the lowest limit, a minimum of five minutes. For those who are able to, the Rebbe demanded much more:<sup>22</sup>

*He should make a true cheshbon tzedek, when was the last time that he was misbonen before davening?*

*He should sit in front of a mirror, point to himself, and say: when is the last time that you were misbonen in Chassidus before davening, as outlined in Kunteres Hatefila and in the countless maamarim from Nesi Doreinu since then?*

*He should think about when was the last time that he davened after a hisbonenus of at least an hour, a full hour of 60 minutes, or at least a half hour.*

*We’re not talking about during the week, it could be even on Shabbos.*

It’s worthwhile to note, that when we speak of **removed** Hashem is from us. That type of *hisbonenus* would be counterproductive to דע לפני מי אתה עומד. The Rebbe explained<sup>23</sup> that we mean the G-dliness which is within us, our *nefesh Elohis*. We think about how great it is and how distant it is from our *nefesh habehamis*—that is the second part of the *halacha*, ‘שפלות האדם’ the lowliness of man.

## What is Hisbonenus

The very mention of the word “*hisbonenus*” may scare some people away. Really? *Hisbonenus*? That’s not for me, I’m a simple person.

But this attitude comes from a lack of understanding of what exactly *hisbonenus* is.

*Hisbonenus* simply means to think about the Chassidus that you learned before davening in your mind. If for some reason you didn’t learn any Chassidus that day, there’s surely something that you are able to think about, the first *perek* of Tanya for example. Most people are familiar with that. In fact, this is exactly what the Rebbe advised a *bochur* to do:<sup>24</sup>

*Hisbonenus before davening is not the same as thinking words of Tanya in the street to purify the air. Rather, before tefilah one must think about a concept that you can relate to. Even in Tanya there are enough such concepts. Like the idea that אחר פנוי—there is nowhere that He is not. עובד אלקים—to be a true “servant” of Hashem. כי כל אחד יכול להיות בינוני בכל עת. ובכל שעה—any person can be a beinoni at any moment.*

*Even in the first perek of Tanya, which seemingly appears to be a “dry” perek: there are the five levels, tzadik v’tov lo, tzadik v’ra lo, etc. It’s all Torah shebiksav, and you can be misbonen in any part of it; how Hashem gives a person five levels to choose from, and through hard work, or even in an instant, he could reach higher levels.*

In other words, *hisbonenus* means to think Chassidus in your mind. Everyone is capable of doing that, at least on some level.

The Rebbe advised many *bochurim* to say and think specifically the beginning of *perek mem aleph* of Tanya, until the word “*hamelech*.”<sup>25</sup>

To someone who asked how to think about something for an extended amount of time, the Rebbe answered:

*As with all matters of holiness, this is something that can be achieved in stages. In other words, first get used to hisbonenus for a few minutes at a time, and slowly build up to a substantial amount of time. To make this*



*easier, you should have the sefer Chassidus or a siddur open in front of you.*

## I'm Just Not Feeling It

On several occasions the Rebbe was asked by Chassidim how do daven with more *chayus*, with more passion. What should I do if I'm just not "feeling it," not connecting with what I'm saying?

The Rebbe always answered that it's a matter of time. The more frequently you think about it, the more likely it is that you will start feeling passion towards it.

For *hisbonenus* to make an impression and really affect us we need to spend some time on it. The problem is that most people just don't seem to have the required time. The Rebbe recommends stretching the thought over a period of days and even weeks, each day continuing the thought from where we left off.

*Advice for hisbonenus and to feel excited and moved by pirush hamilos—it is obvious that the longer you do it the more passion you will feel. Another thing, when it's not possible to increase in time, you can divide the hisbonenus over a period of time. There is a well-known story that my father-in-law told, that some groups of Chassidim would be misbonen every day on a different part of davening, a deep hisbonenus, and the next day they would continue from the next section.<sup>26</sup>*

## True Greatness – Pirush Hamilos

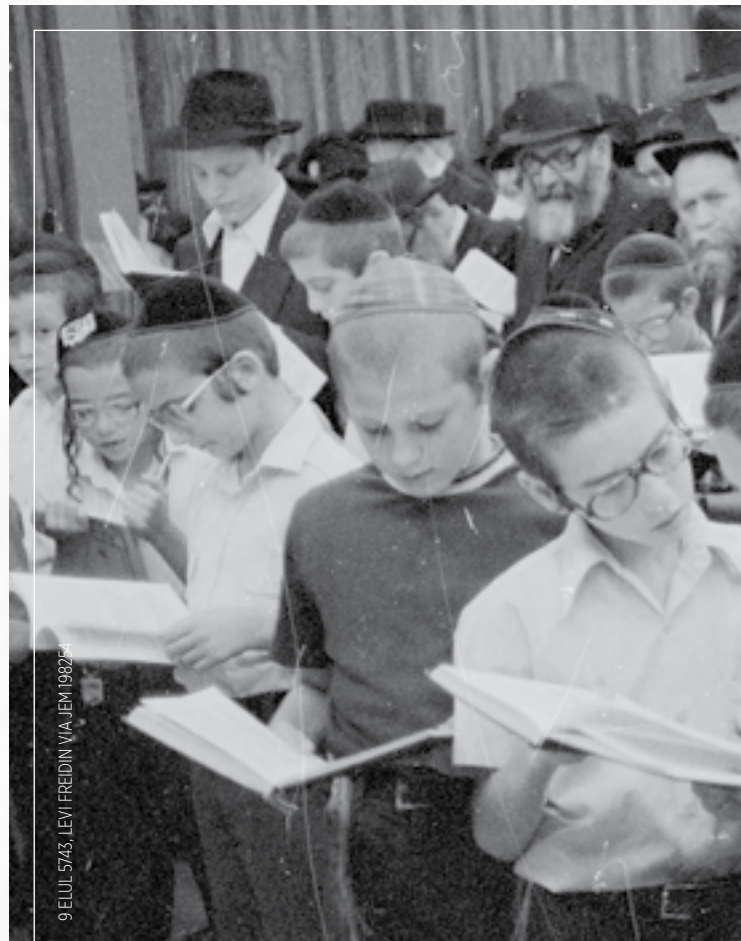
The famous Chossid Reb Shmuel Ber Borisover, known as Rashdam, once asked the Rebbe Maharash at the conclusion of a long and deep discussion on the nature of Chassidus, "*Un vos iz fort a Chossid*—after all that, what is a Chossid, really?"

The Rebbe Maharash replied, "Go observe my son," referring to the Rebbe Rashab, who was very young at the time.

Reb Shmuel Ber was confused by this answer. He was from the older Chassidim and had even been by the Mittlerer Rebbe. What could he learn from the Rebbe Rashab?

The Rebbe Maharash explained that one time, very early in the morning, he sent his assistant to report on what his son was doing. The assistant returned and said that he was sitting in front of a *siddur*, and had an Avudarham open (a *sefer* that explains the meaning of many parts of davening) and a *Nach*, and was studying davening. "*This is a Chossid, with all his greatness he can limit himself to simply translating the davening.*"<sup>27</sup>

Once we are davening with the feeling of דע לפני מי אתה עומד, the next step is to know what we are saying.



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The Frierdiker Rebbe related<sup>28</sup> how his father, the Rebbe Rashab, taught him the *pirush hamilos* twice. Once as a child, and then again starting from his bar mitzvah.

*When my father began teaching me pirush hamilos, he said, "Davening without knowing what you are saying is not an option." He then taught me the basic meaning of the words.*

Of course, there are also deeper meanings in davening. But simply knowing the translation of the words is the first step.

### It's Not About Time

*Years ago, not hundreds of years but just a few decades, avodas hatefilah did not take many hours. It was only 15 or 20 minutes, but it was real davening. Beforehand a person would learn a few lines of Chassidus, not a*

### The History of Davening

In the times of the Alter Rebbe, all religious organizations were regulated by the government.

We know that the *misnagdim* slandered the Alter Rebbe with various lies and unfounded claims, but the heart of the issue was that Chabad is a new and unauthorized religious movement. As such, the recognized "Jewish establishment" formally requested that the Czar's government declare the new movement to be illegal.

One of the proofs they offered is that Chassidim daven differently than all other Jews. The differences ranged from changes to the *nusach*, to the amount of time they spent davening.

In a fascinating deposition to the Russian authorities, the Alter Rebbe provided a rebuttal to the claims of Avigdor, the chief plaintiff on behalf of the *misnagdim*. The Alter Rebbe went into the history of davening to prove that Chassidus did not invent something new; on the contrary, Chassidus brought back authentic davening.

*The custom in all Jewish communities throughout our entire history was to have two large centers of worship in every city. One for davening and one for learning Torah [beis haknesses u'beis hamedrash].*

*The beis haknesses was for the masses who worked. Most of these people were unlearned and did not know how to daven as our sages demanded. All they could do is recite the words three times a day.*





*The beis hamedrash was for the learned class, to daven with the proper kavanos and at length, each person according to his own knowledge and capabilities. In the sefarim written until 200 years ago, it is clearly described how they would daven Shacharis for up to two hours every day.*

*After that, however, [starting 200 years ago] there rose amongst us unscrupulous rabbis, who purchased their titles from the local governments in every city. The king turned a blind eye, and the ministers, in return for money, issued a document called a “concession” to the local ‘rabbi.’ This allowed them to rule over the local Jews in all religious matters, and also to issue rulings in civil matters, although they did not have the necessary knowledge of the halachos.*

*It was also prohibited to start davening until the ‘rabbi’ arrived, sometimes even waiting until noon. The local community was forced to recognize these rabbis by order of the local governments.*

*These rabbis could not be bothered to daven properly, and in order to save face, they began to downgrade the importance of davening. They claimed that learning was more important, and should be done even during davening.*

*They would daven quickly and mindlessly, eager to get back to learning and lecturing on the Talmud in order to impress their students and make a name for themselves with their depth and sharpness.*

*All the learned students followed in their path, davening quickly and mindlessly, either because they were afraid of the rabbi or to flatter him, for he was the ultimate authority in the city.*

*Only a small handful of people in every generation continued the tradition of davening slowly with concentration, and these people were known as ‘Chassidim’ since time immemorial.*

*It is understood in every religion in the world, that it is impossible for all people to be equal in their observance of the religion and in their spiritual conviction. This is true for us Jews as well. For although by now we have been freed from the reign of those ‘rabbis,’ many people who are capable of davening with concentration choose not to, due to laziness. The truth is that this is very difficult even for very learned people, much harder even then toiling over the Talmud.*

*Therefore, those who make the effort to concentrate on their davening, whether they are young or old, are a tiny minority compared to the masses of our people. The masses call these people ‘Chassidim’ in all the regions of Russia, Poland, and most of Lithuania. They are called Chassidim just like the ancient Chassidim that I described before, even though they cannot be compared to the Chassidim of those earlier generations.*

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*lot—only four or five lines, but he was totally immersed in them. While his tallis was on his shoulder, he would meditate on those lines, and then when davening, he really davened. But today...<sup>29</sup>*

*Davening doesn’t have to take many hours. In Tanya<sup>30</sup> the Alter Rebbe writes that davening should take an hour and a half. For our generation, the Rebbe told Reb*



Nissan Nemonov in *yechidus* that weekday davening should take an hour.<sup>31</sup>

## The Siddur

The question can be asked, if davening is a personal conversation with Hashem, then why is there a “script” that we read from? It is only natural that after a while it will become boring and repetitive. How can people be expected to say exactly the same words three times a day, every day, without eventually davening on autopilot and just mouthing the words without thinking.

The truth is that this question can only arise from a lack of true *דע לפני מי אתה עומד*.

Consider that you are about to daven. You, a human being, are about to address

G-d Almighty Himself. Is there really anything you can say? Is anything in your life, your simple desires and needs, important enough to say to Hashem? The very idea sounds ridiculous. In fact, the moment you consider that you are standing before *Melech Malchei Hamelachim*, the creator of all things, all words should escape you.

Ultimately, however, it is this feeling of *bitul* that we are working towards. If you don’t feel this way, then in truth you really do not have anything to say. Once this feeling is achieved, when you are speechless before Hashem, then the gates of heaven are opened and you can daven.



But what can you say if you are speechless? For that, the *Anshei Knesses Hagedola* established a *nusach hatefilah*.<sup>32</sup>

The Zohar tells us that davening is like a ladder. Every step we take brings us higher, closer to reaching our goal of connecting to Hashem.

This *mashal* enables us to understand the unique role that the *siddur* and *nusach* play. When trying to climb somewhere, one can attempt to invent his own ladder, or even try out a new ladder every day in order to keep things interesting. Alternatively, he can use the tried and tested ladder, one that he knows will take him to his destination.

The ladder that we use for davening was created by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedola*. We say the same words three times a day because those are the words that work. Every *tefilah* presents a new opportunity to climb. Should we waste our time complaining that the rungs are boring because we already know them? On the contrary, we should be happy that we're on a solid footing!

## All Inclusive

Another reason we don't use our own words to daven, is because anything we could say is already included in the *nusach*. The *nusach* is incredibly precise, down to the number of words.

Therefore we don't repeat words in davening, even in places where a *hefsek* is allowed. We also don't add details to our requests for health or livelihood.

In response to a suggestion to add a certain *tefilah* to the *nusach*, the Rebbe responded that by looking deeper into the current *tefilos*, we will discover that it is already there.<sup>33</sup>

## Davening With A Niggun

At one *farbrengen*<sup>34</sup>, the Rebbe recalled his time in Paris over 30 years earlier, when

*When we davened together on Shabbos, I noticed some of them davening ba'arichus, while singing a chassidisher niggun and snapping their fingers.*

he traveled to accompany Rebbetzin Chana to the United States.

*Over 30 years ago, I witnessed something, and I never imagined that it would become relevant so many years later.*

*When my mother left Russia, I travelled to Paris to greet her and bring her back to America.*

*During my time in Paris, I met Chassidim who had also recently left Russia. When we davened together on Shabbos, I noticed some of them davening ba'arichus, while singing a chassidisher niggun and snapping their fingers.*

*True, I can't know for sure what their motivations were but when you see someone learning Chassidus before davening, and after that he is davening ba'arichus with a chassidisher niggun, you can assume that it's connected with avodas Hashem.*

*Some of those Chassidim that I saw davening ba'arichus in Paris are here with us now. And just this very day I saw them davening with no chayus and no shturem in avodas hatefilah!*

*In the state they were in then, recent immigrants, they were busy with avodas hatefilah. But after they came to the United States with Hashem's help, and were blessed with parnasa, healthy families, and even with wealth, suddenly there is no avodas hatefilah anymore!*



*When I saw this 30 years ago, I never imagined that this would become relevant in the year 5742\* in 770.*

Davening with a *niggun* was always the hallmark of a *chassidisher* davening. On Chof Av 5723\*, when the Rebbe was *chazzan* for his father's *yahrtzeit*, by א-ל אדון the Rebbe sang from פאר וכבוד until the end to the tune of "Shamil."

Even when not singing a *niggun*, you can always hear the Rebbe davening with a rhythmic tune.

There is a bit of a misconception that a *niggun* during davening must burst forth spontaneously, as a natural expression of the inspiration. Otherwise, the thinking goes,

it's *chitzonius*, i.e. you're fooling yourself and others by forcing a *niggun* that didn't come naturally.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Singing a *niggun* during davening is not an expression of one's inspiration, rather it is a means to become inspired.

On the last Motzei Shabbos before the *histalkus* of the Alter Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek was davening Maariv next to the Alter Rebbe. Understandably, given the state of the Alter Rebbe's health, the Tzemach Tzedek was davening with a *niggun* of *mara sh'chora*—a serious and gloomy *niggun*.

The Alter Rebbe immediately stopped him and told him to switch to a *freilicher*





A MORNING SHIUR CHASSIDUS IN 770.

*niggun*. He explained that whatever mood one expresses in this world is reflected back from Heaven.<sup>35</sup>

In Reshimas Hayoman<sup>36</sup> the Rebbe records the Frierdiker Rebbe wondering why Chassidim don't daven *ba'avoda*, "especially considering that they can sing a *niggun* and become inspired."

The Frierdiker Rebbe also said once,<sup>37</sup> "Moshe Rabbeinu was a Lubavitcher. How do we know this? Because when he davened, he did it with a *niggun*, אז ישיר משה—Moshe sang!"

### Also for Women

Davening with a *niggun* is not limited to men. In a farbrengen in 5752\*,<sup>38</sup> the

Rebbe mentioned that women should also daven with a *niggun*. The only difference is that they must take precautions not to be overheard by men.

We could learn from here that everything discussed here about *avodas hatefilah* applies to women as much as to men. Although they are not obligated to daven three times a day, they are certainly not exempt from *avodas hatefilah*!<sup>39</sup>

### Arichus vs. Minyan

*With regards to your concern that you daven ba'arichus, thereby missing saying kedusha with the minyan, and you ask whether to continue this practice, or to daven quicker and say kedusha.*

*No matter the lofty level of one's davening, without a siddur in front of you it is very unlikely that your thoughts won't wander.*

*Obviously, based on the principle that the kavana is the most important element of davening... you should not skimp on the hisbonenus or davening ba'arichus, even to hear kedusha.<sup>40</sup>*

In this letter, the Rebbe lays out an integral principle in the discussion of davening.

Every element of davening that is not directly related to having more kavana, is tangential, and can be changed in the quest for enhanced kavana.

A prime example of this is eating before davening, which we discussed earlier. Abstaining from eating used to be considered a vital preparation for davening but when it will negatively affect the kavana, it's better to eat.

*Regarding how to daven, the directive is known that if it will help with kavana, which is the most integral aspect of davening, then you should at least start with the minyan, but afterwards you can go as long as is necessary.<sup>41</sup>*

It must be stressed that the Rebbe says to start with the *minyan*. Delaying davening indefinitely is not the way to go, but once you start with the *minyan*, there is no need to keep pace, even if it means sacrificing *kedusha* and *barchu*.

In another letter,<sup>42</sup> the Rebbe even advises someone to take a rest during davening if it becomes tiring!

## **Davening From The Siddur**

*Since during davening one must think only about Hashem, and in addition, one must*

*think the pirush hamilos, the simplest way to accomplish this is to daven from the siddur. Then it is easier not to get distracted, and certainly to not miss any words.*

*My father-in-law the Frierdiker Rebbe was careful to daven every tefilah from the siddur (besides for some specific parts), even though he surely knew all the tefilos by heart. This is my custom as well, to behave as the Frierdiker Rebbe did.<sup>43</sup>*

No matter the lofty level of one's davening, without a *siddur* in front of you it is very unlikely that your thoughts won't wander. Indeed, this is one practical thing that all levels of davening have in common, aside for the general kavana of *דע לפני מי אתה* דע עומד as discussed above.

*Regarding kavana in davening, you are correct that not everyone is equal in this, and even the advice to the same person may change with time. However there are some basic ideas which help in every time and situation. They are: giving tzedakah before davening... observing טבילת עזרא, and having a siddur open in front of you. Meaning even if your eyes are closed because of your passion or introspection, the very fact that the siddur is open keeps your thoughts focused.<sup>44</sup>*

## **It Doesn't Work for Me**

A common problem people seem to have is that they don't see any results from their davening efforts.

What's the point, they say, if my life and Yiddishkeit were not changed by investing in davening? It's obviously not for me, it must be for people much more refined and holier than myself. I took the dive, I invested, and it just didn't work.

To respond to this, it is important to know what changes we are expecting from davening, and how to detect them.

First of all, if you davened the way Chassidus lays out, then something good must have come from it. It is quite different to search for something you already know is



## Hot and Cold

I remember one time in *cheder*, two children were debating; one came from a *Litvishe* family, and the other was a *Poishisher Chossid*. The *Litvisher* was bragging that he davens slowly, relishing each word. His *Poishisher* friend answered him, “For me it’s the opposite; davening is so precious that I grab it quickly because I can’t wait. But you don’t appreciate it so you take your time.”

The *Litvishe* child then brought a proof from the *melamed*, that he surely appreciates davening, yet he davens slowly.

“How can you bring a proof from the *melamed*?” said the *Poishisher*. “His davening is fiery and hot, and something that hot can’t be grabbed quickly. But our davening is not as warm, and is possibly even cold, so it can be snatched quickly.”

(*Toras Menachem* 5747  
v. 3 page 418)

there, than searching for something to see if it’s really there. There is no doubt that a change has occurred, now we just need to find it.

The result of davening is to behave like someone who just spoke with the king himself, with Hashem. This is certainly different than the behavior of someone who has not seen the king in months and has but a vague recollection of him.

To someone who complained that they did not see results from davening, the Rebbe wrote, “Just imagine how things would look if you stopped investing in davening...”

The Rebbe concluded, that it is certain that davening made a difference in him, but for whatever reason his eyes are not picking

it up. So the Rebbe gave him some direction on how to enhance his “eyesight.”<sup>45</sup>

## In conclusion

The bottom line of all the above is that at the very least davening is a peaceful and enjoyable experience, a solemn moment between you and Hashem.

During davening a Yid gives himself over to that which transcends his understanding.

During davening a Yid feels like a child standing before his father.

Ultimately, davening should be a special moment, to a point that while caught up with the hustle of the day, you look back at it with desire, longing, and nostalgia.<sup>46</sup>

For additional insight on davening, see Derher, Teves 5778 p. 44. **❶**

- 1 Sefer Hasichos 5705 page 132. Sefer Hasichos 5708 page 197.
- 2 See Sefer Hasichos 5708 ibid.
- 3 Toras Menachem vol. 22, p. 121.
- 4 Yechidus following Simchas Torah 5714, Tzaddik L'Melech vol. 7, p. 250.
- 5 Hayom Yom 2 Adar I.
- 6 Likkutei Sichos vol. 5, p. 288 (Parshas Noach 5725).
- 7 Igros Kodesh vol. 26, p. 32.
- 8 Sichos Kodesh 5731 vol. 2, p. 285
- 9 Brachos 26b.
- 10 Toras Menachem vol. 25, p. 84.
- 11 Toras Menachem v. 16 page 341.
- 12 Toras Menachem v. 25 page 36. Hayom Yom, Yud Shevat. Igros Kodesh v. 6 page 142.
- 13 Igros Kodesh of the Friediker Rebbe vol. 7 p. 70. Also printed in Kovetz Michtavim in back of the Tehillim.
- 14 Toras Menachem vol. 9, p. 169.
- 15 Toras Menachem 5749 vol. 3 p. 68, 75. 5750 vol. 2, p. 161.
- 16 Sefer Hasichos 5691 p. 151.
- 17 Toras Menachem vol. 29, p. 47. Igros Kodesh vol. 15, p. 239. Sichos Kodesh 5736 vol. 1, p. 518, et. al.
- 18 Toras Menachem vol. 3, p. 239. Reshimas Hayoman p. 391.
- 19 Igros Kodesh vol. 11, p. 230.
- 20 Sefer Hatoldos Admur Maharash, (authored by the

Rebbe) page 66.

21 Sichos Kodesh 5732 vol. 1, p. 28.

22 Toras Menachem 5748 vol. 3, p. 214.

23 Sichos Kodesh 5736 v. 1 page 518

24 Yechidus following Simchas Torah 5714, *ibid.*

25 See Derher, Iyar 5777 p. 51 in sidebar. Igros Kodesh vol. 17, p. 111.

26 Igros Kodesh vol. 18 p. 126; vol. 10, p. 58; vol. 19, p. 195.

27 Sefer Hasichos 5699 page 305.

28 Sefer Hasichos 5707 page 140.

29 Sefer Hasichos 5705 page 113.

30 Igeres Hakodesh *siman* 1.

31 Sefer *Reb Nissan*.

32 See Toras Menachem vol. 22 p. 262. Sichos Kodesh 5732 vol. 2, p. 3.

33 Toras Menachem v. 35 page 60. M'beis Hamalchus page 133.

34 Toras Menachem 5742 v. 2 page 1108.

35 Igros Kodesh Tzemach Tzedek p. 325.

36 Page 220.

37 Sefer Hasichos 5702 p. 134.

38 Sichos Kodesh 5752 vol. 2, p. 594.

39 Toras Menachem 5747 vol. 2, p. 517. See also Toras Menachem 5745 p. 2509.

40 Igros Kodesh vol. 11 p. 176. See also Toras Menachem vol. 2, p. 113.

41 Igros Kodesh v. 20 page 133.

42 Igros Kodesh v. 10 page 396.

43 Toras Menachem 5743 v. 1 page 144.

44 Igros Kodesh v. 18 page 121.

45 Lekutei Sichos v. 38 page 135. Igros Kodesh v. 9 page 295. V. 12 page 149-150.

46 Toras Menachem v. 32 page 125. Hayom Yom 26 Tammuz. Sefer Hamaamarim Kuntreisim v. 1 page 230.

