

Kindert Torah

בס"ד

Parashas Shelach

What do the Words Mean?

“Good morning, class! Everyone looks so bright and fresh this morning. That is good because today we are beginning a series of *shiurim* on *tefillah*. Please allow me to start by asking a few questions. What is the difference between ‘*deah*’, ‘*binah*’, and ‘*haskef*’ in the fourth blessing of *Shemoneh Esray*?”

The class is silent.

“Let us try another question. In the sixth blessing, we ask Hashem to ‘*selach*’ our ‘*chet*’ and ‘*mochel*’ our ‘*pesha*’. Why does ‘*chet*’ need ‘*selicha*’; ‘*pesha*’ need ‘*mechila*’ and not the opposite?”

No one offers an answer.

“Perhaps this question is easier. In the blessing, ‘*vi’lamalshinim*’ we ask Hashem to ‘*si’aker*’, ‘*si’shaber*’, ‘*si’mager*’, and ‘*sachnea*’. What is the difference between all of these types of destruction?”

The talmidim do not know what to say.

“One last chance. What is the precise meaning of the words ‘*Boruch Atto Hashem*?’”

The silence continues.

“Class, these questions are not so difficult. You do not know the answers simply because you have probably never taken the time to learn the *peirush* (explanation) of the words of *tefillah*. That is the purpose of this *shiur* and the ones to follow. Before we begin, let me share with you a few inspirational thoughts to motivate us all to learn the meanings of the words of our *tefillas*. Firstly, it is very worthwhile. We pray three times each day, for a total of two hours. That is quite a big investment of time. We surely want to use that time productively by understanding the words that we are saying during those two hours. Secondly, the gemora (Berachos 31a) states that the one who prays must direct his heart towards heaven. Rashi explains that he must know the meaning of the words that he is saying. We see that understanding the words is not just a good idea, rather it is an obligation. The Chovovos HaLevavos concretized this thought when he said that prayer without *kavannah* is like a body without a soul (Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh 3:9). Finally, Rav Chaim of Brisk zt”l related that there are two types

of *kavannah* that a person needs when he is praying. The first one is an understanding of the words. The second is that he must realize that he is standing before Hashem. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 98:1) rules that one who prays must concentrate on the meaning of the words that his lips are saying, and fix in his mind that the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) is in front of him. Therefore, class, we see that understanding the meaning of the words that we pray is an obligation, which stands at the very heart of *tefillah*. After 120 years, the angels may ask us the same questions that I asked you a few moments ago. How embarrassed we will be if we do not know the answers! We pray over 1000 times each year, saying the same words over, and over, and over again. If we do not know what we mean, we are saying va voy!



“Therefore, let us begin class, with the first words that we say each morning, ‘*Modeh Ani*.’ The first word that our lips utter each morning is ‘*modeh*’ – I am grateful to You Hashem. This is where it all begins. *Hacoras hatov* (gratitude) is the foundation of service to the Creator. He does everything for us. The first thing that He wants us to do in the morning is to recognize and appreciate Him. Our Sages left the Name of Hashem out of this expression of gratitude in order for us to say it as soon as we open our eyes, even before we wash our hands.

“Let us focus in to precisely what we are thanking Him for. We have just awoken from our sleep. The Gemora

(Brachos 57b) relates that sleep is 1/60 of death. Our *neshamos* have been partially removed and leave our bodies in a semi-deathlike state. We contemplate this before we go to sleep at night when we say the words of the brocho ‘*hamapil*’ – ‘And light up my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death.’ What happens to our *neshamos* during that time? Tanna Divey Eliyahu (as cited in Ahavas Chessed, chapter 4) relates that every day a person is sold and redeemed. He is ‘sold’ as his *neshama* is given over to the forces of *din* (strict judgment) when he goes to sleep at night. His deeds of the day testify on him. It is inevitable that he will be condemned. However Hashem, with endless *rachmonus* (mercy), ‘redeems’ him and returns his soul to his body. The siddur ‘*Iyun HaTefillah*’ adds that even if our *neshamos* are soiled with *aveyros*, Hashem still mercifully returns them. He has faith in us that we will do better today and the soul will empower the body to do *teshuvah* and many other mitzvos. So we see class, that when we awake in the morning, the first *chessed* (act of kindness) that Hashem does is to return our souls to our bodies. Thank you Hashem – *Modeh Ani!* ‘I am grateful to You, living and eternal King, for You have restored my soul with mercy – great is Your faithfulness.’ Our bodies have been refreshed from the sleep. Therefore, we are ready and able to fulfill the first *halacha* in Shulchan Aruch. ‘Be strong as a lion to arise in the morning to serve your Creator.’ *Modeh Ani!* This is the way that a Jew starts his day!

Kindertlach . . . What do the words mean? Do you understand the words that you say time after time, day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year? These are the words of tefillah – your private audience with the Almighty. Who sustains you. He is the One Who can fulfill all of your requests. Talk to Him! The purpose of tefillah is to form a deep relationship with Hashem. You can only do this if you understand what you are saying to Him. Take the time to learn the meaning of the words. Begin with Modeh Ani – a prayer of gratitude to the Almighty for returning your souls to your bodies each morning. Let your first thought in the morning be hacoras hatov. Then use that to motivate you to rise like a lion and serve Hashem all day with all of your might.

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