

KAVANNAH: THE SOUL OF PRAYER

Kavannah, intent of the heart, has been called the neshamah, the soul and spirit of prayer (*Chovos HaLevovos, Sha'ar Cheshbon HaNefesh, 3:9*). Without it, prayer is considered merely a *guf*, the lifeless body of *tefillah*.

Like a diamond, a prayer's value is far more dependent on its internal purity than its mass. The small, flawless diamond is worth far more than the larger, imperfect one. Its purity not only defines its value, but it also expresses the purity of devotion with which it is being tendered.

The words of *Tehillim* (145:18) hold out the promise of a true, deep connection to Hashem for those who pray with their hearts: *Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him sincerely*. The *Radak* says this verse refers to those whose prayers are a unified harmony of mind, heart and words. Fueled by *kavannah*, these are the prayers with the power to reach their destination.

Just as an arrow's power and distance depends on the pressure exerted by the archer on the bow, the effectiveness of prayer depends on the power of the supplicant's thought behind his prayers.

The word *lev*, heart, in all its variations, appears in the Torah a total of 113 times; this is also the total number of words found in the final sentences of all the *berachos* of *Shemoneh Esrei* (e.g. "*Baruch Atah Hashem Magen Avraham*" is five words). From this connection, we learn that the concentration of our *lev*, (*kavannah*) is what draws into our lives the many aspects of Hashem's goodness expressed by the *berachos* of *Shemoneh Esrei* (*Baal HaTurim, Shemos, 40:21*).

So great is the power of Kavannah that it can be the difference between life and death.

Two patients lie in their beds suffering from the same ravaging disease. The first patient recovers, rises from his bed and resumes a healthy, vigorous life, while the other grows weaker each day.

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 18a) asks, "Why was one patient cured while the other was not? The Gemara answers that the patient who was cured prayed a 'complete prayer' and was answered, while the patient who was not cured did not pray a 'complete prayer' and was not answered.

Rashi (Ibid) defines a "complete prayer," as one prayed with *kavannah*. Thus, the one who was answered and lived — prayed with *kavannah*.

Kavannah in Shemoneh Esrei

How a person approaches someone is an immediate indicator of their relationship. In approaching Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei*, the *kavannah* can make or break the effectiveness of the entire *tefillah*. Either it tells Hashem that He is our King and we are standing humbly before Him, or it tells Him that we have no awareness of the gravity of the occasion.

There are two forms of *kavannah* necessary in *Shemoneh Esrei*. The first *kavannah* (Rambam, *Hilchos Tefillah*, 4:1), obligates a person to view himself as standing before the Master of the Universe. This *kavannah* is required during the entire *Shemoneh Esrei*, and is based on the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 22a): "One who prays must view himself as if Hashem's Divine Presence is opposite him as it says, *Place Hashem before you always.*" Thus, one's thoughts and intentions when reciting *Shemoneh Esrei* must reflect a steadfast awareness that one is directly beseeching Hashem. (Note: There is disagreement among *halachic* authorities as to whether a lack of this *kavannah* would invalidate the *tefillah*.)

The other essential *kavannah* involves the *peirush ha'milim*, understanding the meaning of the words, which is required, at a minimum, during the first *berachah* of *Shemoneh Esrei*. According to the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Siman* 98, *Se'if* 1), "One who prays must concentrate in his heart regarding the explanation of the words (that come) from one's mouth." However, "...if one cannot concentrate (on the meaning of the words) in all the *berachos*, at a minimum (he must have proper *kavannah*) during (the first *berachah* called) *Avos*." See **Praying With Fire, Day 28 – 30** for a word by word explanation of the first *berachah* of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

By praying with *kavannah* each of us has the opportunity to feel the overwhelming reality of standing before a King of infinite majesty. The Gemara (*Berachos* 28b) promises that by fulfilling our role as Hashem's reverent subjects in this world, we earn a place as the King's beloved servants in the World to Come.

Unlocking the Gates

"From the day the (Second) Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the Gates of Prayer are locked," says the Gemara (*Berachos* 32b). The Satmar Rebbe posed two questions: First, why do we pray if the gates of prayer are locked? Furthermore, Chazal tell us that our prayers rise to "the pinnacle of the heavens." What purpose do they serve there if they cannot pass through the gates?

The Satmar Rebbe returns to the Gemara (*Ibid*), to offer a beautiful answer: "Even though the gates of prayer are locked, the gates of *dim'ah*, tears, are not locked." A person's *tefillos*, standing at the "pinnacle of the heavens," cannot penetrate the locked Gates of Prayer until he weeps with emotion during prayer. At that moment, the Gates of Tears open. All the *tefillos* standing in wait, including those previously said without tears, can then be swept through to the Throne of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

This inspiring thought has one drawback: It is highly unlikely that the average person would be able to command this intensity of emotion in the absence of any real emotional upheaval. How

then, does this concept equip us on a practical level to open Heaven's gates to our daily prayers?

Rav Yonasan Eibeshutz (*Yaaros Devash*, Volume 2, *Drash* 11) offers an astounding insight that resolves the problem. The numerical equivalent of the word *b'chi*, crying (which can be substituted for *dim'ah*, tears) is 32, the same as the word *lev*, heart. This teaches that the tefillos of the one who prays with *kavannah*, enter Heaven through the ever-open Gates.

Kavannah transforms our daily prayers into heartfelt supplications able to reach the Throne of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. It not only propels our present *tefillos*, but reaches back in time to "repackage" the distracted, rushed and mumbled prayers of our past and send them Heavenward with renewed power.

For additional inspiration on *kavannah* see **Praying With Fire, Chapter 3, Gaining a Proper Understanding of Kavannah (Days 20-25); Chapter 4, Kavannah in Shemoneh Esrei; The Pinnacle of Prayer (Days 26-32); and Chapter 6, Thirteen Practical Strategies to Achieve True Kavannah (Days 46-69).**

10 DAYS OF PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE TRUE KAVANNAH

The Next Step

Between knowing and feeling lies an ocean. Anyone who has given even a little thought to the concept of prayer knows that it is a conversation with the Almighty. Anyone who has pondered the concept of the Almighty knows that He is a King before Whom a person must stand in utter awe. Nonetheless, even with that knowledge, many people are perfectly capable of speaking the sacred words of *tefillah*, specifically the *Shemoneh Esrei* without feeling a thing. We become expert at the mind-boggling feat of mouthing prayers while thinking about anything from the dinner menu to the weather.

Nevertheless, the requirement for *kavannah* still stands; a key axiom of the Torah says that Hashem does not demand the impossible, and therefore, *kavannah* must be within our reach. According to Rav Yehudah HaChassid (*Sefer Chasidim, Siman 784*) there is no single magic formula; each person must implement the ideas that attract him, based on his desires and abilities.

Spiritual growth can be compared to ascending a mountain in a wagon. As long as there is forward movement — even if progress is marked by spurts and stops — the wagon is still considered to be advancing. However, if the wagon stops straining forward, it will not stand still; it will slide back down the slope.

Kavannah provides the life-force of *tefillah*, and one must strive to understand how to activate this “vital organ” of our souls. The following **10 strategies**, to be completed one day at a time during the **Aseres Yemei Teshuvah**, is a small step along an upward path, designed to bring your individual prayers, and the prayers of the Jewish nation as a whole, to new depths of emotion and new heights of power.

QUIETING THE MIND



The mind is never still. Either it focuses on the sounds and words spoken around a person, or on the words he himself is speaking, or on the thoughts running through his head. Even in one's sleep, his mind is still busy producing words and images.

The first imperative for building concentration in prayer is get the chatter, both internal and external, to stop.

If a person begins praying immediately upon entering the synagogue, his mind is often preoccupied by other thoughts. He is not settled, and consequently, he will be unable to concentrate properly and focus on his prayers.

It is not uncommon to "catch up on the news" by listening to the radio in the car. However, if a person does this on the way to shul, he may hear the news replaying in his head as he tries to pray. Perhaps the stock market dropped, or a political scandal has unfolded or — to his deepest chagrin — his favorite team lost a big game. It is nearly impossible to digest such information, and then, minutes later, speak directly to Hashem.

For this reason Dayan Dunner of London advised his congregation several years ago not to listen to the radio on the

Today's learning is dedicated:

לע"נ פייבל בן ליבל ראודין ז"ל
נפטר ה' מר-השון תשס"ד

לע"נ רחל בת אברהם יעקב ראודין ע"ה
נפטרה כ"ד מנחם אב תשס"ה

Dedicated by the Rodin Family

**Points
to
Ponder**

- ▶ *Pausing to reorient oneself and clear one's head helps a person to embark upon tefillah with concentration.*
- ▶ *Distractions prior to praying should be avoided.*

way to shul. With this simple, practical recommendation, he offered a prime example of something anyone can do toward removing the distractions that interfere with avannah.

The Shulchan Aruch (*Siman 90, Se'if 20*) recognizes the need for a person to reorient himself before praying. It rules that one should not hurry to pray immediately upon entering [*the beis haknesses*]; rather, "One should enter the Synagogue to the extent of two entrances and after that he may pray." As the *Mishnah Berurah* (*Siman 90, Se'if Katan 62*) explains, the purpose of this halachah is to allow one to be settled and calm, and ready to pray with *kavannah*, "For when one begins to pray precipitously, immediately on entering, he is not yet composed."

The Rambam also advises (*Hilchos Tefillah 4:16*), "How does one concentrate and what constitutes proper intentions? One should divert and empty his heart from all (foreign) thoughts and view himself as if standing in front of the *Shechinah*. Therefore, one must settle in a little before the *tefillah* in order to concentrate his heart..."

This is an investment of just a few minutes, but they are minutes that establish the success of the entire venture. Like a diver who takes a few deep breaths before he goes under water, one who pauses before immersing himself in tefillah will have what he needs to make the rest of the effort worthwhile.

For additional inspiration, see
Praying With Fire, Day 48

See center of booklet for *kavannah* calendar.

TAKE TIME TO PREPARE



Rachel's future in-laws were coming to visit her parents' home. Rachel looked around the house and decided it was a complete embarrassment. "The curtains are dusty. The kitchen cabinets have fingerprints on them. There are piles of papers on every table and shelf. This is a disaster!"

Rachel dusted, polished, organized, and bought a huge bouquet of fresh flowers for the fireplace mantel. Her mother baked a wonderful variety of cakes, and her father purchased a bottle of fine schnapps. Meanwhile, Rachel's younger brother looked on in bewilderment. "You know, they're going to find out sooner or later that our house doesn't always look like this. I'll bet their house doesn't look like this either."

"No matter," his mother replied. "When you prepare for people, you make them feel important. How would they feel if they walked in and everything was flying? Like we didn't even care enough to make a good impression."

Preparing to pray not only shows Hashem that one values the opportunity to speak to Him; it instills in oneself a sense of the importance of the occasion. It helps a person internalize what he knows to be true — that this is an opportunity not to be wasted.

Pausing to empty one's mind of foreign thoughts is the vital first step in preparing to pray. There is a second step as well, and that is to refill the mind with thoughts that arouse a person's longing to connect to Hashem. The Rambam (*Hilchos Tefillah*, 4:16) says

Today's learning is dedicated:
לכבוד האשה אשר חיל אסתר בת יהודית
For her sincerity of heart, her purity, and her tzinius.

pausing before praying provides an opportunity to focus on the idea that one is about to stand in front of Hashem. Apparently, the Rambam is informing us of a halachah that a person must prepare properly in order to have *kavannah*.

The spirit of this halachah would therefore be violated by arriving late for *Shacharis*, or by arriving at the last minute to “catch a *Minchah* or *Maariv*”. A late arrival simply rules out a properly prepared *tefillah*.

In 2001, several rabbis from the New York metropolitan area were granted a meeting with President George W. Bush. One rabbi later described the great amount of careful thought that went into preparing meaningful remarks that could be conveyed to the President in the few moments they had. Would only a fraction of that preparation go into coming before Hashem, one could not even imagine the massive increase in the power of the words of tefillah.

If a person wishes to enhance his preparation in order to improve upon his *kavannah*, there are techniques he can develop. He might find it helpful to summon certain thoughts, words and images.

Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk would say the following words before entering the synagogue to pray: “Know where you are entering; what you will do there; Who is in this house; Whose house it is; and Who empowered you to enter this house.”

Even in the midst of prayer, preparation is necessary. For each of the *berachos* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, a person should pause before *Baruch Atah Hashem* (at the end of the *berachah*) and think into the

blessing he is about to recite. For example, before ending the *berachah* of 'binah', understanding, one should reflect on the fact that Hashem is a 'chonein hada'as', gracious Giver of knowledge.

The Chofetz Chaim wrote that he personally used the following method of preparation: "Zimein li HaKadosh Baruch Hu k'tzas eitzah she'yesader beda'ato heiteiv techilah mah ledaber" — Hashem granted me a little advice that in the beginning [of each berachah] one should arrange well in his mind what he is about to say."

In his will, Rav Naftali Amsterdam left several suggestions for preparing to recite Shemoneh Esrei: One method is to think about the sequence of the berachos. Another is to stop periodically at appropriate points to focus on the fact that one is standing before Hashem, Who can grant any request. He suggested Atah Chonein (fourth berachah), Teka B'Shofar (tenth berachah) and Retzai (seventeenth berachah) as berachos particularly suited to this thought.

It is true that preparation takes time — even if it is just a few minutes. This small investment of time, however, is crucial in insuring that the rest of the time spent on *tefillah* is not undermined by a rushed, inattentive approach. By taking the time to prepare, we not only change our state of mind, we change our state of heart. From there, our true *kavannah* — our soul's deep desire to feel connected to Hashem — can freely flow.

For additional inspiration, see
Praying With Fire, Days 49 and 50.

See center of booklet for *kavannah* calendar.

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *A person who prepares for tefillah becomes attuned to its importance, which enhances his kavannah.*
- ▶ *Preparing to pray includes directing one's mind to thoughts that enhance kavannah.*
- ▶ *One should take time before praying to focus on what he is trying to accomplish, before Whom he is standing and where he is standing.*



FEELING THE NEED

A young boy was straying from the path of Torah. His parents' terrible distress transformed their Shemoneh Esrei into a daily, tear-soaked plea to their Father in Heaven. Previously, the words "Who resurrects the dead" carried no relevant meaning. Now their heart cried out that their wayward child's soul be revived. When they prayed for wisdom, they desperately begged Hashem to show them which way to turn, what to say. When they prayed for salvation, they pleaded that every Jewish parent be spared such anguish. When they said "grant peace," they said it with a longing for peace in their home, in their son's heart and their own. Suddenly, this age old liturgy had become their own fervent prayer.

Need is one of prayer's most potent fuels. A person with no needs is crippled in his efforts to connect to Hashem. As explained in **Praying With Fire Day 16, Filled With Dust**, Hashem cursed the serpent more than all the animals and beasts of the field — *and you shall eat dust all your life* — for convincing Chava to eat the forbidden fruit (see *Bereishis*, 3:14). The Rebbe, Rav Bunim of P'shische points out that this curse was particularly severe because the serpent, supplied with a constant food source, no longer need-

Today's learning is dedicated:

L'zecher nishmas Menachem David ben Kolonimus Katzenstein z"l
Niftar 11 Tamuz, 5766.

L'zecher nishmas Miriam bas Yechiel Michel HaKohen Katzenstein a"h
Niftarah 16 Av, 5764.

Dedicated by Andrea Yochanan and Elisha Abitbol Family

ed to connect with and beseech Hashem.

In contrast, the curse of man (the need to earn a livelihood) and woman (the pain of childbirth) was not as severe, because these struggles cause a person to seek Hashem and to come before him in prayer.

The Gemara (*Yevamos* 64a) states that our Patriarchs were infertile because Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous. Rav Dessler explains that their difficulties were ultimately for their benefit, since their inability to have children inspired them to reach more deeply into the depths of their souls to cry out to Hashem.

The *Shelah Hakadosh* teaches that when a person strongly feels a need — especially when he faces immediate danger — prayer becomes more relevant and filled with *kavannah*. On the other hand, a person who does not feel any need will find it difficult to pray with *kavannah* because he has no internal drive to reach out to Hashem.

The motivating power of real need becomes clear when one contrasts the usual mode of daily prayer with the emotion that is aroused on Yom Kippur, or when there is a crisis in Israel, or when a loved one is sick. The piercing sensation of need spurs us to pray with greater *kavannah*, expressing our heartfelt hope and belief in Hashem's powers.

The Mishnah (*Taanis* 16a) tells us that when a fast day is proclaimed to pray for rain, "they send down to lead the prayers an elder, well-versed in prayer, who has children, and whose house is empty of food, so that his heart should be completely devoted to his prayer." Rabbeinu Nissim (*Raan, Taanis* 16b) explains that because the elder is afflicted by his family's desperate need, he will pray with greater intensity.

**Points
to
Ponder**

- ▶ *Hashem desires our prayers and provides us with motivation to reach out to Him.*
- ▶ *The sense of pressing need brings heartfelt passion to one's prayers by assuring that we reach out and seek a connection with Hashem.*
- ▶ *Even without pressing problems, one can fortify kavannah by recognizing that he needs Hashem's compassion simply to live his normal, everyday life.*

The disciples of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked him why the manna did not fall just once a year for the Jews in the desert, in the same way that rain falls in a single season to make the crops grow. He answered with a parable:

The king's only son, whom he loved dearly, visited his father once yearly to collect his allowance. Longing to see his son more frequently, the king decided that henceforth, the funds would be distributed on a daily basis. He was then able to have the pleasure of his son's company each and every day. (Yoma 76a).

Similarly, Hashem longed for the pleasure of the prayers of his chosen people, and so He provided just one day's portion of *manna* at a time. Klal Yisrael was thus motivated to pour out their hearts in prayer every morning and evening.

Need strips away our illusions of self-sufficiency and causes us to feel acutely our dependence upon Hashem. Through it, the true potential of our *prayers* is revealed to us thereby awakening the "need" to pray with intense *kavannah*.

The Gemara (*Berachos* 12b) refers to *prayer* as "compassion." By calling prayer "compassion," we remind ourselves that need is not just an occasional, dramatic occurrence, but rather, the human condition. The bottom line is that it is only because of Hashem's steadfast compassion that we have anything at all.

For additional inspiration, see
Praying With Fire, Days 52 and 53.

See center of booklet for *kavannah* calendar.

UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING



A small child doesn't know the difference between a hundred dollar bill and a scrap of green paper. If he were given the currency to hold, he might drop it out the window or cut it into pieces; he would never understand what he had lost. To value something, you have to know what it is and how much it is worth.

As early as the 14th century, the *Abudraham* recognized that understanding the words of prayer is vital to having our prayers answered: "...Most of the masses raise their voice in prayer before Hashem but are going about it like a blind man in darkness and they do not understand the words they are saying. . .When I saw that the gates of *tefillah* are locked, I decided to write this (his) sefer explaining *tefillah*..."

If a person had no sense of taste, what would motivate him to bite into a juicy rib steak? What would entice him to tackle a messy bowl of spaghetti? Why would he subject his mouth to the freezing sensation of ice cream? If people ate for the sake of nutrition alone, simply because "it's good for you," most people would be wasting away. This is born out by research that indicates that many people neglect to take important medication because the medicine has no taste.

continue on page 24

Today's learning is dedicated:

In Honor of Our Dear Parents & Grandparents
David & Odette Abitbol and Allan & Ettie Lowy
Eliyahu (z"l) & Hannah Abitbol, Maklouf (z"l)
& Simy Kadoche, Israel & Sonia Rosenberg
Dedicated by Eric and Sara Abitbol

RAV SHLOMO ZALMAN AUERBACH WAS ONCE ASKED WHAT RESOLUTIONS HE MADE ON ROSH HASHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR. HE REPLIED,
“To recite the first blessing of Shemoneh Esrei with kavannah.”

From Inspiration to Action

The calendar below is designed to help you take a practical step toward achieving kavannah in tefillah. It is imperative that a person acts immediately when inspired – otherwise, the inspiration will dissipate.

When davening during Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, use this calendar to bolster your efforts to increase kavannah in every tefillah you daven. *Success breeds success! Connecting to Hashem one tefillah at a time!*

Please check the box* next to each Shemoneh Esrei in which you have kavannah for the **first blessing – Birchas Avos.**

SHABBOS ROSH HASHANAH I (Tishrei 1/Sept 23) <input type="checkbox"/> SHACHARIS <input type="checkbox"/> MUSSAF <input type="checkbox"/> MINCHA <input type="checkbox"/> MA'ARIV	SUNDAY ROSH HASHANAH II (Tishrei 2/Sept 24) <input type="checkbox"/> SHACHARIS <input type="checkbox"/> MUSSAF <input type="checkbox"/> MINCHA <input type="checkbox"/> MA'ARIV	MONDAY FAST OF GEDALIAH (Tishrei 3/Sept 25) <input type="checkbox"/> SHACHARIS <input type="checkbox"/> MINCHA <input type="checkbox"/> MA'ARIV	TUESDAY ASERES YEMEI TESHUVAH (Tishrei 4/Sept 26) <input type="checkbox"/> SHACHARIS <input type="checkbox"/> MINCHA <input type="checkbox"/> MA'ARIV	WEDNESDAY ASERES YEMEI TESHUVAH (Tishrei 5/Sept 27) <input type="checkbox"/> SHACHARIS <input type="checkbox"/> MINCHA <input type="checkbox"/> MA'ARIV	THURSDAY ASERES YEMEI TESHUVAH (Tishrei 6/Sept 28) <input type="checkbox"/> SHACHARIS <input type="checkbox"/> MINCHA <input type="checkbox"/> MA'ARIV	FRIDAY ASERES YEMEI TESHUVAH (Tishrei 7/Sept 29) <input type="checkbox"/> SHACHARIS <input type="checkbox"/> MINCHA <input type="checkbox"/> MA'ARIV
SHABBOS SHABBOS SHUVAH (Tishrei 8/Sept 30) <input type="checkbox"/> SHACHARIS <input type="checkbox"/> MUSSAF <input type="checkbox"/> MINCHA <input type="checkbox"/> MA'ARIV	SUNDAY EREV YOM KIPPUR (Tishrei 9/Oct 1) <input type="checkbox"/> SHACHARIS <input type="checkbox"/> MINCHA <input type="checkbox"/> MA'ARIV	MONDAY YOM KIPPUR (Tishrei 10/Oct 2) <input type="checkbox"/> SHACHARIS <input type="checkbox"/> MUSSAF <input type="checkbox"/> MINCHA <input type="checkbox"/> MA'ARIV <input type="checkbox"/> NEILAH	<p><i>May the power of your tefillos and those of all Klal Yisrael combine to arouse Hashem's compassion for His children.</i></p> <p><i>*Shabbos and Yom Tov tefillos can be checked off on the following day.</i></p>			

continued from page 21

In prayer, the “taste” is in the meaning.

For example, much is added to a person’s recitation of the *Baruch She’amar* prayer if he has knowledge of its meaning and origin. This prayer, recited at the beginning of *Pesukei D’Zimrah*, was instituted by the Men of the Great Assembly almost 2,400 years ago. The text is based on a script that literally dropped down from the Heavens. Knowing the lofty origin of *Baruch She’amar*, one can easily understand why one is required to stand when reciting it.

After the *Pesukei D’Zimrah*, which speak of the glory and wonder of nature, we recite the blessing *Yotzair Ha’Meoros*, *Who creates the luminaries*. We then proceed to proclaim ‘*Ahavas Olam*’ (or ‘*Ahava Rabbah*’) in which we express our eternal love for Hashem, leading to a proclamation of Hashem’s Oneness in *Shema*. Progressing along this path, we build a connection with Hashem that culminates in the recitation of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Rav Shmuel Auerbach testified about the way his father Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach recited Shemoneh Esrei: “Every tefillah was recited with hislahavus, fervor...His prayers were pleas, not rote utterances...From beginning to end he recited them with kavannah... And he said that what counts most is understanding the meaning of the words.”

Among the closing prayers is ‘*Aleinu LeShabei’ach*’, which, according to the *Kolbo* (*Siman* 11 and 16), is one of the first prayers ever composed. It was established by Yehoshua when he captured Jericho. The *Chidah* comments that after the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai

instituted it as part of our daily prayer to strengthen the Jews faith in Hashem at a time when they were dishonored and heartbroken.

The *Mateh Moshe* says that when one stands to recite *Aleinu*, Hashem also stands with all the angels in Heaven and all say, *Praiseworthy is the people for whom this is so, praiseworthy is the people whose G-d is Hashem (Tehilim 144:15)*. This holy prayer, said at the conclusion of prayer, serves as protection over all our prayers by declaring our faith in Hashem's Oneness.

Rav Sheftel Horowitz, in Vovey Ha'Amudim (Amud HaAvodah, Chapter 10) wrote: "When I was the head of the beis din (Jewish Court) and the yeshiva in Frankfurt, I instituted a great establishment whereby groups would gather to study all of the tefillos from beginning of the year to the end. They learned at least the meaning of the words so that their prayers would go up to the One Above. Praiseworthy is the one who listens to my words and sees to it that the meanings of the tefillos are fluent in his mouth."

Of the many means to find inspiration in one's prayers, understanding their meaning is among the most easily accomplished in our times. The book stores and *shuls* are filled with beautifully translated and annotated prayer books that offer everything from simple translation to mystical insight. Taking one word at a time, one verse at a time, anyone can learn to speak the language of prayer .

For additional inspiration, see
Praying With Fire, Days 54 and 55.

See center of booklet for *kavannah* calendar.

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *Understanding the meaning of the words of prayer is a key to kavannah.*
- ▶ *Understanding the origins and purposes of prayers also increases kavannah.*
- ▶ *Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach said that understanding the meaning of the words in Shemoneh Esrei is of utmost importance.*



PRAYING FROM A SIDTUR

Having driven the roads of his town hundreds of times, the man became bored with the road signs. Stop. Yield. Left Only. No Passing. He knew what to expect at each corner. He decided to stop paying attention to the signs and just drive according to the dictates of his heart. Naturally, he soon caused an accident. "I guess you really do have to pay attention each and every time," he surmised.

Prayer is no less demanding a skill. To maintain one's focus, absorb the meaning of the words and form a live connection to them, one has to pay attention each and every time. The road signs in this journey are the words of the *siddur*, and surprisingly, the more expert the "driver," the more careful he is to read the signs.

The Vilna Gaon recommended reciting every word of the prayers from a *siddur*. He finds an interesting allusion to the importance of praying from a *siddur* in Megillas Esther (9:25) which states: "*Ub'voah lifnai hamelech amar im hasefer yashuv machashavtoe.*" Literally, *When she [Esther] appeared before the king [Ahasuerus], he commanded by means of letters that [Haman's] wicked scheme should be overturned.* Homiletically, the Gaon translates these words as follows: "When one appears before the King [Hashem] in prayer, he should recite the words from a *sefer (siddur)*, [for in that way] he will cast aside any inappropriate thoughts."

Today's learning is dedicated:
לענין ר' משה בן ר' יוסף דוד ז"ל
לענין מלכה מחלה בת ר' מרדכי זיסקינד ע"ה
Dedicated by Mordechai and Lois Hager & Family

Similarly, the *Magen Avraham* (*Orach Chaim, Si-man 93, Se'if Katan 2*) tells us that the Arizal davened exclusively from a *siddur*. This practice was also exemplified and advised by the Maharal, the Chofetz Chaim, and more recently, by Rav Moshe Feinstein. In fact, the Chofetz Chaim, stated that using a *siddur* was one of the foremost priorities for proper *tefillah*.

While davening from a siddur, the Alter of Kelm once walked to the back of the shul to glance into another siddur and then returned to his regular place. When questioned, he explained: "A word was missing from the siddur I was using. Because I always daven from a siddur, I felt compelled to find the missing word and to read it from a siddur".

The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Yehudah Zev Segal, who was known for the power of his tefillah, was a compassionate messenger for thousands of Jews who, throughout his lifetime, asked him to beseech Hashem on their behalf. He not only prayed from a siddur, but was often seen pointing with his finger to each word he uttered, in order to guarantee his exclusive focus on the meaning. Even the berachos he recited were always read from either a siddur or a printed card.

By praying from a *siddur*, one discovers new shades of meaning in the words of the *tefillos*. In addition, seeing the words provides another sensory channel through which the words can penetrate the heart. Simply put, praying from a *siddur* enhances *kavannah*.

When a person looks at the words in a *siddur*, he is literally keeping Hashem's Name before his eyes. That alone can create a noticeable impact on the power of his prayer. The Steipler Gaon says that praying from a *siddur* helps a person recite Hashem's Name with *kavannah* befitting to this momentous utterance, and also enhances concentration in the vital first *berachah* in *Shemoneh Esrei*.

So often, using a *siddur* reveals itself to be the tool of the intellectual giant, not the crutch of the intellectually weak. The more one understands and masters *tefillah*, the more one demands the constant reinforcement of the *siddur*.

During the ominous years leading up to World War II, one of the key figures in Europe at that time, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, wrote down his resolutions for the New Year. The following words, written on Erev Yom Kippur 5694 (1934), were found among his writings: "To concentrate deeply when praying or reciting blessings; especially, to recite from a text."

Did Rav Chaim Ozer need the siddur to jar his memory? Rav Schach, relates the following telling incident: Rav Chaim Ozer kept a notebook listing all the deposits and expenditures made for various orphans and widows. Once, the ledger was misplaced and could not be found. Rav Chaim Ozer's wife became distraught, worrying about the loss of so much information that was vital to so many people. When Rav Chaim Ozer heard about the loss, he said to his wife, "Don't worry about it! Please bring a new empty notebook." Within several hours he had reconstructed the entire

record book, with all its numbers and information, all from memory.

The original book was found a short time later, and all the information in it corresponded exactly to Rav Chaim Ozer's reconstructed ledger. Rav Schach observed, "One who never met Rav Chaim Ozer can have no idea how phenomenal his memory was."

Rav Schach drew a lesson from this episode: "Despite his tremendous memory, Rav Chaim Ozer never davened or bentched without looking in a siddur."

Praying from a *siddur* is not of minimal importance since this was what the great Rav Chaim Ozer chose to focus on in the face of the gravest of circumstances. The world needed the full force of prayer then, as it does now; this requires not only pronouncing the holy words and understanding their meaning, but keeping them before one's eyes.

For additional inspiration, see
Praying With Fire, Days 56 and 57.

See center of booklet for *kavannah* calendar.

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *Torah luminaries throughout the ages prayed from a siddur.*
- ▶ *Seeing the words helps maintain a person's focus.*
- ▶ *The sharpness of a person's memory does not mitigate his need to use a siddur.*



REVISE OLD HABITS

A person who prays three times a day says *Shemoneh Erei* almost 1,100 times a year. This constant repetition can breed a mindless recitation that becomes deeply ingrained in a person's habits of prayer. As a result, a person might even have difficulty praying with *kavannah* when pleading for life.

Understanding the tremendous benefits one reaps by praying with *kavannah*, most people want dearly to achieve it. Force of habit, however, can create a mighty impediment to that goal. A person's mind naturally clicks into a neutral mode as the familiar words rattle off his tongue, and even a plea for his own life manages to transport itself from the *siddur* page to his mouth, without passing through his heart.

These old habits, however, do not have to reign forever. They can be overthrown and replaced with new habits of care, attentiveness and emotional involvement in the words of prayer. Just as habit can drain a person's prayer of life, it can be the tool that refills it to overflowing—it is in fact a tremendous force

Today's learning is dedicated:

לזכות רפואה שלמה ר' נוטא צבי בן שרה מרים
לע"נ שושנה ויטא בת ר' ישראל הלוי ע"ה

Dedicated by Nafshenu



516-371-6660
www.nafshenu.com

with which every person must reckon whenever he sets out to improve himself.

In the realm of prayer, the first step is for a person to recognize the negative impact of habit. Until he understands the problem, he cannot attempt to find practical solutions. Even with recognition, however, he may not be able to see any escape route leading away from the habits in which he has become entrapped.

One solution is to harness the power of habit and use it to serve Hashem. In fact, one prays for such a habit every day after the morning blessings: “She’targileinu b’sorasecha” — *that you accustom us to study Your Torah.*

Positive habits, while more difficult to acquire, are every bit as powerful as their negative counterparts. Setting a goal is the first step. A person can then begin taking small steps toward that goal, repeating each step until it becomes a new habit. For example, a person who wishes to avoid speaking *lashon hara* can begin by purposefully refraining for as little as fifteen minutes daily. If he is consistent, restraint will gradually become second nature, and he can then incrementally expand his new practice into a greater portion of his day. The key to success lies in tackling the project gradually.

Many have attempted to learn the entire Talmud and have been defeated by the scope of the project after a very short while. Rav Meir Shapiro, the innovator of learning ‘Daf Yomi’ advised that one who aspires to study the entire Talmud (with its voluminous commentaries) and undertakes to learn one folio a day and then another the following day and so on, will attain his goal. Little could Rav Shapiro

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *Habits can be reworked to become the tool to more meaningful prayer.*
- ▶ *Habits must be changed gradually.*
- ▶ *To develop kavannah in prayer, start with the first berachah of Shemoneh Esrei, once a day.*

have envisioned that 80 years later his seemingly simple idea has taken the Jewish world by storm.

Applying this principle to *tefillah*, a person who wishes to overcome difficulties with *kavannah* should cultivate positive habits of prayer gradually. The process requires a great deal of patience, but the success it generates is immensely rewarding.

To begin, a person can recite the first *berachah* of *Shemoneh Esrei* with *kavannah*, just once a day. Once this habit takes root, it will strengthen with every passing day. He can then extend his new habit to the same *berachah* during the other two daily *tefillos*. Each new step may be difficult, but after repeating it day after day over time, it will become ingrained. Through this gradual progress, a person can eventually reach the great goal of saying every *berachah* with *kavannah*.

Momentum is the element that gives habit its strength. Each time a person repeats an action, he builds a driving force behind it that moves it forward on its own power. Like a strong wind at a sprinter's back, momentum can propel a person to the finish line with far greater speed and ease than his own efforts could produce. For both good and bad, *Chazal* teach, '*hergel na'aseh tevah*' — habit becomes second nature. It can be the malady or the remedy. We make the choice.

For additional inspiration, see
Praying With Fire, Days 59 and 60

See center of booklet for *kavannah* calendar.

FIND JOY



Joy and boredom cannot coexist. If a person is filled with joy at the prospect of being received by his Father with open arms, he cannot possibly be mumbling distracted praises to Him at the same time.

The Gemara (*Berachos* 31a) describes the right frame of mind for prayer: “One should not rise to pray *Shemoneh Esrei*, neither from sorrow, nor from laziness, nor from laughter, nor from previous conversation, nor from levity, nor from idle chatter, rather from the joy, *simchah*, of performing a mitzvah.”

The *Iyun Yaakov* (*Ibid*) explains that all these moods — sorrow, laziness, laughter, conversation, and levity — cause a person’s mind to wander during prayer, resulting in a complete loss of *kvannah*. According to Rabbi Yehudah HaChasid (*Sefer Chasidim, Siman* 158), a person should refrain from conversation even before the start of *davening*.

As the Gemara explains, a person should enter *Shemoneh Esrei* filled with the “joy of performing a mitzvah.” Tosafos (*Berachos, Daf* 31a) says that the requirement to feel joy explains why the order of *tefillah* starts with the exultant words of *Pesukei D’Zimrah* and *Ashrei*. The *Rema* (*Siman* 93, *Se’if* 3) concludes: “One should refer...to approach to pray with a feeling of happiness, for the injunc-

Today’s learning is dedicated:

לענ”ג ישראל בן חיים אלטר ז”ל

נפטר כ”ה כסלו תש”מ

לענ”ג לאה בת יצחק אייזיק ע”ה

נפטרה ז’ סיון תשס”ד

Dedicated by their Children

tions of Hashem are just and gladden the heart.”

The *Mesilas Yesharim* (*Chelkei Ha'Chasidus*) explains that anyone who feels truly privileged to be able to pour out his heart in prayer to Hashem will naturally experience the desired sense of joy.

While standing in a corner praying, people overheard the Bendiner Rav, Rav Hersh Henach Levine, saying in Yiddish: “Oy, Ribono Shel Olam, ich hob Dier azoy lieb,” meaning, “O Master of the Universe, I love You so very much.”

Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus, comments that a person untouched by joy as he prays must be lacking in his perception of Who Hashem is. On the other hand, a person who truly feels in his heart that he is addressing the One Who has the answer to all his problems and the desire to fulfill his needs, rises to his feet with enthusiasm, joyful at the opportunity he has been given.

How does one understand the joy a person is to experience upon approaching Hashem in prayer? Imagine:

☞ A person is stricken with an illness, and all the doctors in his small town have given up hope. Suddenly, word spreads that a world-renowned specialist in this disease has arrived in town for a visit. Knowing that someone is there within reach, someone who has healed others like him, ignites a great surge of optimism within the patient.

☞ In a last ditch effort to find a livelihood, a person seeks a substantial loan to implement his plans to start a business. He believes that if he could present his proposal to the bank manager, he could convince him to grant it. Unfortunately, the manager's secretary will not put through his calls.

One day, a casual conversation with a stranger on the bus leads to an impassioned description of his business proposal. Upon reaching his stop, the stranger exclaims, "Thank you for speaking to me about this! I am the bank manager and I would like to finance your plans." The man feels his heart swell with joy, as he marvels at the opportunity he had been handed to bring his case before the one person who could help him.

When a person recites *Shemoneh Esrei*, he must realize that he is praying to the One and only One Who can, and will, help him. If he consciously connects to that truth, he will be overwhelmed with joy at having been handed the longed-for opportunity to express his needs to the One Who can answer them. In the words of Rav Pincus:

"So it is, when a person speaks to his Creator, and mentions His Name, if he only would think for a moment about the meaning of Hashem's Name, at that moment an enormous happiness would shine inside...Specifically, the One he 'meets' in *shul* in the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, the One to Whom he is now speaking, He has the ability to help the person who is about to *daven Shemoneh Esrei*. And He (Hashem) assists all who sincerely ask Him for help."

Our quest is to see Hashem's Presence, hear His message and feel His loving guidance in every aspect of our lives. When we develop this perspective, we infuse ourselves, our lives and our prayers with the indispensable ingredient of joy.

For additional inspiration, see
Praying With Fire, Days 61 and 62.

See center of booklet for *kavannah* calendar.

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *Joy is an essential ingredient in reciting Shemoneh Esrei.*
- ▶ *Understanding Who Hashem is and what prayer achieves, creates a sense of joy.*
- ▶ *The opportunity to approach Hashem with one's needs is the source of the joy a person must feel when he prays.*



A SPIRIT OF EXCITEMENT

It's a day before the boy's thirteenth birthday. His father comes home bearing a package. Finally! They came! His tefillin were completed. He opened the package and reverently removed the smooth, polished leather boxes from their case. The next morning, with his father by his side, he carefully donned his new tefillin, feeling as if he were already standing upon a whole new, higher rung of spiritual life. He knew this tefillah had to be different. He wasn't a little boy any more. Now it was 'for real'.

It was, of course, equally real two years later. However, the inspiration emanating from those sacred boxes had long ceased to move him. He could put the tefillin on as mechanically as he would don his socks. The newness was gone, and with it went the tefillin's power to move him.

Newness has a unique power to excite one's heart, and that excitement provides the power for higher levels of achievement. In fact, Rav Dessler explains: "The root of enjoyment by mankind is built on newness and change.... The greater the change or newness the greater is one's satisfaction and pleasure."

The Gemara (*Yoma* 29a) reveals this concept through a statement that seems to contradict common sense. It states that to relearn

Today's learning is dedicated:

לע"נ שרה דינה ע"ה בת שלום דוד נ"י

In memory of our beloved Seri

who taught us by example how to seek רחמי שמים

and connect with the תפילה בורא עולם through

and carried so many to higher levels of עבודת השם.

The Rosenblum, Friedman, Ellman and Kleinman families

something that has already been studied and forgotten is more difficult than to learn something new.

The *Chochmah U'Mussar* (Volume 2, *Ma'amar* 219) poses the obvious question: Should it not be easier to relearn familiar material than to tackle something completely new? The answer offers insight into human nature. A person naturally experiences a sense of excitement when striving to comprehend a new lesson or skill, and therefore, he does not need to expend great effort. Relearning old lessons, on the other hand, is devoid of the thrill of newness. It is an act of pure self-discipline and will, which require tremendous effort.

Even miracles can seem routine. The *Midrash (Devarim Rabbah, 1:11)* notes that Avraham Avinu was not told that his descendants would miraculously subsist on *manna* in the desert. Had Avraham been given this information, it would have been passed down through the generations and been known by the Jews who were redeemed from Egypt. When it finally came to fruition, it would have failed to impress them. "We already knew about the *manna* while in Egypt by the table of Pharaoh," they would have said. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that the lesson in this *Midrash* is that even an open miracle loses its impact if it is not perceived as something new and unanticipated.

Because of the innate desire for newness, *prayers that one recites* regularly are prone to losing their vitality. To the extent that a person can perceive his daily prayers — each day anew — he can inject the spirit of freshness into his prayers. Otherwise, he becomes like the boy in the opening story, listlessly regarding a precious gift that has been given to him with love — a gift that truly is the best thing he has.

How can one counteract the powerful tendency to become overly accustomed to words that are repeated three times a day, every day? How can verses and phrases this familiar take on the quality of newness in a person's eyes?

To reinforce this sense of newness, a person can make some occasional, practical changes. Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky suggests that one change his *siddur* every once in a while to feel a freshness when praying. The *Mekor Chayim* (90:4) comments that while it is better to pray from a *siddur* ... once in a while the best way is to pray by heart because the habit of using a *siddur* will eventually cause a person's *kavannah* to lessen. Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mirrer *Mashgiach*, suggested to his students that they consider changing their regular place for prayer in order to regenerate enthusiasm.

The most basic change, however, is an internal one. That is to bring to mind every time we pray that we are asking Hashem for compassion; literally praying for our lives. If we would take this fact to heart and truly believe it, then every new day of life would give rise to a fresh, impassioned, new day of prayer.

Rabbeinu Yonah explains the Mishnah (*Avos*, 2:13) that "Every person must plead for his life because there is no person who does not sin." Even though things may be fine today, this does not prove that all will be well tomorrow.

Rav Matisyahu Salomon explains Rabbeinu Yonah as follows: "We are all living on credit. Our Creditor can call in the loan at any time and force us into bankruptcy in a moment, not only in business but in everything else as well, Heaven forbid. We have no choice but to beg Him for an extension."

“If we would realize this, that we are not living by our own account but on credit G-d has extended to us, we would not be complacent when we pray. We would grasp that we are in a crisis situation....If we understand this, we would pray like beggars standing at the door.”

For additional inspiration, see
Praying With Fire, Days 63 and 64.

See center of booklet for *kavannah* calendar.

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *The element of newness stirs excitement in the human heart.*
- ▶ *The enthusiasm that newness generates gives us power to achieve.*
- ▶ *Changing the way one prays, either by moving to a new place or by some other means, can invoke a sense of newness.*
- ▶ *Focusing on the life-and-death nature of prayer assures freshness in one's tefillah.*



PERSONAL REQUESTS

A person who needs a job doesn't pray for his livelihood in a distracted manner. His heart aches with need. His mind focuses sharply on the words he speaks. His prayer is saturated with sincere emotion. Personal needs move one's prayers from the abstract to the concrete, providing a powerful connection to the person's innermost self.

The blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei* relate to every area of human aspiration, both material and spiritual. Each blessing offers an opportunity to present one's personal requests to Hashem. Rabbi Yehudah Ha'Chasid (*Sefer Chasidim, Siman 158*), states, "When you pray, add to each *berachah* which is relevant that which pertains to it for your needs, because that will prepare the heart to pray with proper concentration."

There are places in *Shemoneh Esrei* in which one may insert personal requests: in each of the middle blessings, in the *berachah* of *Shema Koleinu* or in *Elokai Netzor*. See '**Praying With Fire**', Days 65-66 for the specific halachos regarding how to add these per-

L'zechus L'refuah Shelaima for Daniel Dov HaLevi ben Rashke
Dedicated by Moshe and Devora Smith

לע"נ צבי דוד בן הרב שמעון פנחס ז"ל - נפ' כ"ד תמוז
לע"נ ניסים בן אברהם ז"ל - נפ' י"ד אדר
לע"נ בתיה רחל בת משה יוסף נ"י - נפ' כ"ב שבט
לע"נ הילד חיים דוד בן יצחק ז"ל - נפ' ה' ניסן
לע"נ מרים בת יצחק ע"ה - נפ' כ"א אדר ב'
לע"נ הרב ניסים בן הרב יעקב ז"ל
לע"נ הרב יעקב בן ניסים ז"ל

Dedicated by Abe and Tamar Rosenthal & Moshe and Venezia Zakheim

sonal requests and for the preferred place to insert personal requests.

These places in Shemoneh Esrei are essentially an open letter to Hashem. In these places, a person can pour his heart out regarding any matter that is of importance to him, present or future, personal or communal, spiritual or material. Those who utilize these opportunities to their full potential do not have to force themselves to engage in prayer, on the contrary, they bemoan any occasion for *tefillah* that they miss.

Once a person learns how to tap into the opportunity to add personal requests to his prayers, he will find that each occasion to pray takes on new meaning. It is his time to unload his burdens, speak his heart and find the inner peace that Hashem provides to all who trustingly turn to Him.

Personal requests warm the heart with all the emotions of human need and longing. This warmth can turn rock-hard ice into a flowing river of spiritual feeling. Every word of prayer is carried along this powerful current, imbuing one's entire *tefillah* with an intensity and sincerity that might otherwise remain out of reach.

For additional inspiration, see
Praying With Fire, Day 65 and 66.

See center of booklet for *kavannah* calendar.

Points to Ponder

► *The kavannah inspired by personal requests impacts the rest of one's Shemoneh Esrei.*



THE POWER OF VISUALIZATION

The Gemara (*Berachos 61b*) relates this incredible scene: As Rabbi Akiva was being tortured to death by the Romans, he calmly began to recite the *Shema* with complete joy. His students were astounded by Rabbi Akiva's serenity and exclaimed, "Our teacher, how can you remain so calm and concentrate on *Shema* when you are being tortured?" Rabbi Akiva answered, "My entire life I was troubled by the verse "You shall love Hashem...with all your soul". I said to myself, when will the opportunity arise that I may fulfill this verse? And now that it has come to pass should I not fulfill it?"

Rav Dessler explains that Rabbi Akiva reacted with such flawless composure because he had perfected the capacity to transcend all pain for the sake of his love of G-d. His method for achieving this level was to visualize himself being tortured to death for the sanctification of Hashem's Name, giving up his life with joy for his love of the Creator, every time he recited this verse in *Shema Yisrael*.

Indeed, had this (torture and execution) been forced upon me suddenly, said Rabbi Akiva, I would have been unable to recite the *Shema* properly. That is what he meant by "My entire life I have

Today's learning is dedicated:

As a *zechus* to those who lost their lives during the recent Israeli Lebanon war, to those missing in action, to the injured, and to the special three still in brutal uncivilized captivity, *Gilaad ben Aviva, Ehud ben Malka, and Eldod ben Tova*
Dedicated by the V'ANI TEFILLAH FOUNDATION

been waiting for this moment." Ultimately, this exercise of daily visualization gave him the strength to withstand the ultimate final test.

The technique of visualization is so powerful that it can help a person overcome a great many obstacles. Rabbi Zelig Pliskin relates the following story to illustrate the practical results that this mental exercise can achieve, even for a trivial pastime:

During the Vietnam War, an American prisoner of war spent several years in solitary confinement. In order to preserve his sanity, he spent four hours of every day visualizing himself mastering his game of golf, with every swing of the club pictured in minute detail.

After his release, he eventually returned to the golf course and found his score greatly improved. All those years of visualization had actually succeeded in improving his game.

This potent mental capacity is there for a person to use in his effort to develop the ability for the most important and difficult daily tasks as well.

Rabbi Pliskin describes an eye surgeon who mentally visualizes each operation in advance of the procedure. He reviews the entire process in his mind and imagines various difficulties that may arise and how to deal with them.

We, too, can utilize this approach to overcome the obstacles we face in reciting *tefillah* with *kavanah*. The following are some suggestions:

1. Visualize possible obstacles to *kavannah* that you may encounter during *davening*. Then imagine yourself as having the necessary conviction and persistence to meet the challenge.

For example, picture a friend approaching to engage you in conversation during *davening* and mentally practice how to deflect him without hurting his feelings. Or, imagine that you are reciting *Shemoneh Esrei* and your mind begins to wander. Then envision how you would force away the foreign thoughts so that you may continue the *tefillah* with *kavannah*.

2. The *Mesillas Yesharim* (*Chelkei Ha'Chasidus*) writes that as no human eyes have seen Hashem, it is difficult for us to internalize the fact that we are standing before the Creator. To overcome this impediment, visualize a telephone conversation; although you cannot see the person to whom you are speaking, you know that he is listening. Summon this image to perceive the sense that Hashem listens to you when you pray. For example, in *Shemoneh Esrei*, all agree that "*Atah*" — You, Hashem — recited a total of thirty-three times — refers to the fact that we beseech Hashem directly.

The Chazon Ish offers the following technique for arriving at the correct kavannah: "The task of a person during tefillah is to visualize that Hashem is listening to every word of the prayers that are uttered by human lips and scrutinizing the thoughts of those who pray to Him."

3. Most people find it difficult to summon the self-discipline needed to stick with a productive routine. Distractions and temptations inevitably throw them off track. If a person practices visualizing himself arriving at *shul* on time, avoiding extraneous conversation, preparing before prayer and looking inside the *siddur* while praying, these behaviors will gradually become a part of his routine.

Visualization is a means through which a person can see himself as he wishes to be — as he *can* be. It's not just wishful thinking, it's purposeful thinking that helps a person establish high expectations for himself, and then fulfill them.

For additional inspiration, see
Praying With Fire, Day 69.

See center of booklet for *kavannah* calendar.

Points to Ponder

▸ *A person can develop a desired behavior or skill by visualizing it.*

▸ *One can improve tefillah by imagining himself praying with kavannah and overcoming distractions and obstacles.*