

Rabbi Ariel Mizrahi

Inspiring our Souls with the words of Torah

בס"ד

But our rabbis tell us that the world stands on three things: תורה (*Torah*; *Torah study*), עבודה

(*avodah*; *service*), and גמילות חסדים (*gemilut chasadim*; *acts of kindness*).

We know תורה (*Torah*; *Torah learning*), what that means — learning.

And גמילות חסדים (*gemilut chasadim*; *acts of kindness*), we know is חסד (*chesed*; *kindness*).

And then there's עבודה (*avodah*; *service*).

And עבודה (*avodah*; *service*) means prayer.

The פסוק (*pasuk*; *verse*) says:

ולעבדו בכל לבבכם
(*u'le'ovdo b'chol levavchem*; *to serve Him with all your heart*).

You have to serve השם (*Hashem*; *God*) with all your heart.

And what does עבודה (*avodah*; *service*) mean?

Work.

עבודה (*avodah*; *service*) is work.

Work is hard.

תפילה (*tefillah*; *prayer*) is not something that comes easy.

If you struggle with תפילה (*tefillah*; *prayer*), you shouldn't feel like something is wrong with you, that you're the anomaly.

"I don't connect."

Either:



תפילה (*tefillah*; *prayer*) is a big part of a Jewish person's life.

Our rabbis tell us something very famous in the beginning of פרקי אבות (*Pirkei Avot*; *Ethics of the Fathers*). They say:

על שלושה דברים העולם עומד
(*al shlosha devarim ha'olam eivomd*; *the world stands on three things*).

The Jewish world — our rabbis tell us — stands on three things: money.

No, I'm kidding.

עבודה על התורה (*al haTorah*; *on Torah*), next עבודה (*avodah*; *service*), and גמילות חסדים (*gemilut chasadim*; *acts of kindness*).

Definitely a good idea to take notes.

I don't expect everything that we say tonight to resonate with everyone. But if you take maybe one idea, and it could help your תפילה (*tefillah*; *prayer*), I think we would all benefit — myself included. I'll try to take something from tonight as well.



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Rabbi Wolbe's Radical Perspective

- I don't pray because I don't feel it or
- I do pray but I still don't feel it

or everything in between.

So we have to realize number one that תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) is עבודה (*avodah; work*).

It's not an easy thing.

It takes work.

Our rabbis tell us that the חסידים ראשונים (*chassidim barishonim; the early pious sages*) used to sit for an hour before תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) just to get into the frame of mind.

Because you can't just walk in and pray.

Even the greatest חסידים (*chassidim; pious sages*) in the time of the גמרא (*Gemara; Talmud*) had to sit and meditate and prepare themselves before praying, because it's not something that comes easily — תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*).

So the first thing that we have to know about תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) is that תפילה works.

תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) is real.

השם (*Hashem; God*) created in the world a כוח (*koach; power*) called תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*), just like He created something called fire.

And when you put fire on wood, what happens to the wood?

Part of the laws of nature is that they catch on fire.

השם (*Hashem; God*) created — as part of nature — prayer.

on Prayer

There is a very powerful line I want to start with.

רב וולבה (*Rav Wolbe*).

Anyone here ever heard of רב וולבה (*Rav Wolbe*)?

עלי שור (*Alei Shur*).

He says something that can change how you pray for the rest of your life.

One line.

שהבורא יתברך (*shehabore; יתברך; that the blessed Creator*)

The fact that השם (*Hashem; God*) לנו (*hirsha lanu; allows us*)

לחוות דעת (*l'chavot da'at; to express our opinion*)

על הנהגת העולם (*al hanhagat ha'olam; about the running of the world*)

The fact that God allows us to express our opinion on how the world should run.

The fact—

No problem, come late, you have to sit in the front.

The fact that השם (*Hashem; God*) allows us to pray.

רב וולבה (*Rav Wolbe*) says we often view תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) as:

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"I have to pray."
"Ugh, what time is
שקיעה (*shbekiyah*;
sunset)?"
"Ah, I have to pray."

No.

No, no, no.

You **get** to pray.

השם (*Hashem*; *God*) allows us to express our
opinion:

על הנהגת העולם בכלל ובפרט
(*al hanbagat ha'olam b'klal u'b'prat*; *about how the
world should run generally and individually*)

והוא גם מקבל את דעתנו
(*v'hu gam mekabel et da'atenu*; *and He also takes
into account our opinion*)

That the Creator of the world decided:

Maybe this year should be a rainy year.
Maybe a snowy year.

And that He allows **me** to say:

"God... I'm not sure... but maybe it should rain a
little less."

"I have a wedding coming up. I'd really like outdoor
pictures."

That השם (*Hashem*; *God*) allows me to decide:

רופא חולים
(*rofeh cholim*; *who should be healed*)

מברך שנים
(*mevarech hashanim*; *who should receive blessing for
livelihood*)

מונע אסונות
(*monea asonot*; *who should be spared tragedies*)

וחונן הצלחה בזכות
תפילתנו
(*v'chonen hatzlacha
b'zchut tefilatenu*;
and grants success

through the merit of our prayers)

It's a wild thing.

רב וולבה (*Rav Wolbe*) says:

אין זה אלא רצונו
(*ein ze ela retzono*; *this is simply His will*).

He says:

"I have no idea why God chose that it should be
this way."

But God created a world where He allows us to
pray.

He allows us to share how we think the world
should run.

I know You're God Almighty.

I know You're much smarter than me.

I know You have much wider vision.

Just saying...

"I would've liked it if I bought that house."

"I would've liked it if I married that person."

"I would like it if..."

That's a wild concept.

He says it **doesn't make sense** that השם (*Hashem*;
God) should allow us to pray.

Do you see how he's viewing תפילה (*tefillah*;
prayer)?

That's the first idea.



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The Story of Moshe and Korach — The

We have to stop thinking about prayer as an **obligation**.

It's an **opportunity**.

It's a זכות (*zechut; privilege*).

Imagine if I told you:

"I have right now in my house a big רבי (*Rebbe; great rabbinic leader*) from Israel."

"The רבי ביאלא (*Biala Rebbe*)."

"This one from Canada."

"This one from somewhere else."

And I told you:

"You know what? I like you."

"I'll give you thirty seconds."

"If you want, come up to my house in Manhattan."

"I'll give you thirty seconds with the rabbi."

Would you go?

"Rabbi — I'm there."

תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) is an opportunity to talk to your Creator.

Forget a rabbi.

Forget a president.

You get to talk to השם (*Hashem; God*).

It's an opportunity.

If you want it — it's here.

Power of Prayer

But we have to realize something.

תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*), for whatever reason, השם (*Hashem; God*) decided:

Prayer works.

I'll give you a few examples.

We know the story in the תורה (*Torah*) about משה (*Moshe; Moses*) and קורח (*Korach*).

Remember the story?

משה רבינו (*Korach*) started a revolution against משה רבינו (*Moshe Rabbeinu; Moses our teacher*).

He felt Moshe was taking too much power.

Nepotism.

So he starts a whole revolution.

Moshe has to stop it.

He says:

"You think I made this up?"

"You think I gave my brother the position?"

"You think anything was from me?"

"It was all from השם (*Hashem; God*)."

So he says:

"You know what? Let's do a test tomorrow."



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He tells קורח (Korach) and his men:

“Each of you bring a frying pan.”

“Put the קטורת (ketoret; incense) on it.”

“Whichever one השם (Hashem; God) accepts — that’s the truth.”

Now think about this.

What does משה (Moshe) do **that night**?

He prays.

And he says:

אל תפן אל מנחתם (al tefen el minchatam; do not turn to their offering)

“God, please don’t answer their prayer.”

Think about that.

Me and you — we know history.

Obviously who was right?

Moshe.

Moshe **knew** he was right.

Moshe knew he did nothing on his own.

Moshe was the most humble man in history.

והאיש משה עניו מאוד (v’ha’ish Moshe anav me’od; and Moshe was exceedingly humble)

He knew God spoke to him.

He knew God told him to choose אהרן (Aharon; Aaron).

He knew קורח (Korach) was lying.

And nonetheless...

משה רבינו (Moshe Rabbeinu) feels he has to pray:

“God — please don’t accept their prayer.”

Those wicked people who are trying to destroy the whole system.

Moshe needed to **counter their prayer**.

Because Moshe knew something:

תפילה works.

And even wicked people — like Korach and his men — their prayer can still have power.

So Moshe had to pray **against their prayer**.

Just to give you a glimpse into how powerful תפילה (tefillah; prayer) is.

The Story of Rabbi Akiva Eiger — Absolute Belief in the Power of Prayer

Just to give you a little glimpse into how powerful תפילה (tefillah; prayer) is, let me tell you an amazing story brought about רבי עקיבא איגר (Rabbi Akiva Eiger).

One time, רבי עקיבא איגר (Rabbi Akiva Eiger) was asked to pray for someone who was sick.

They asked him to pray for the person to get better.

So he prayed.

After some time passed, the people sent him a letter.



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And the letter said something shocking.

They wrote to him that the prayer **was not working**.

They said:

“The person is still sick.”

Look at רבי עקיבא איגר (*Rabbi Akiva Eiger*).

Do you know what he answered?

He wrote back to them and said:

“It must be that the name that you gave me was the wrong name.”

That was his answer.

He said there’s no way that if he prayed for the right person that the person wouldn’t get better.

That’s how strongly he believed in the כוח התפילה (*koach ha-tefillah; the power of prayer*).

He said:

“If I prayed this long and the person is still not better, something must be wrong in the details.”

Maybe the name was wrong.

Maybe I’m praying for the wrong person.

Because the **system works**.

The concept of תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) works.

The Kohen Gadol’s Prayer on Yom Kippur

Let me give you one more example.

The כהן גדול (*Kohen Gadol; High Priest*) entered the קודש קדשים (*Kodesh HaKodashim; Holy*

of Holies) once a year.

The holiest man.

On the holiest day.

In the holiest place.

What does he pray for?

We actually know what his prayer was.

We say it ourselves in the תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) of יום כיפור (*Yom Kippur*).

When we stand in front of the ארון (*Aron; Holy Ark*) during the מוסף (*Musaf; additional prayer*) repetition, we describe the עבודה (*Avodah; Temple service*) of יום כיפור.

I don’t know if you sell it here.

By the Syrians we sell everything.

We sell עבודה (*Avodah; the Temple service section*).

We sell someone to pull the rabbi’s chair out.

Whatever זכות (*zechut; merit*) we can sell to raise money — we sell it.

Anyway.

That’s not the time to talk about that.

So we open the ark and we describe the עבודה (*Avodah; Temple service*) of יום כיפור.

And one of the things the כהן גדול (*Kohen Gadol; High Priest*) prayed for was something fascinating.



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After סוכות (*Sukkot*; the festival of booths), the Jewish people begin praying for rain in Israel.

We say:

משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם
(*mashiv haruach u'morid hageshem*; He causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall)

Israel needs rain.

Israel lives on rain.

Rain means food.

Rain means livelihood.

Rain means survival.

But imagine a man traveling by wagon.

He's traveling home after the holiday.

And he lives very far away.

He needs a few weeks of dry weather to make it home.

So what is that man going to pray?

He's going to pray:

"Hashem, please don't let it rain yet."

"Please wait."

"Let me get home first."

Imagine the selfishness.

עם ישראל (*Am Yisrael*; the Jewish people) needs rain.

The whole nation is depending on rain.

Agriculture depends on rain.

Livelihood depends on rain.

And this one guy is praying:

"Hashem, please hold the rain because I'm still traveling."

So what does the כהן גדול (*Kohen Gadol*) pray on יום כיפור (*Yom Kippur*)?

He prays:

"Hashem, please don't answer the prayer of that man."

Now think about this.

Why would the כהן גדול (*Kohen Gadol*) even worry about such a prayer?

You think Hashem is going to answer the prayer of a selfish person who is holding back rain for the whole nation?

The answer is:

Yes.

Absolutely.

Even that prayer has power.

That's why the כהן גדול (*Kohen Gadol*) needed to counter it.

Just take a picture of that idea.

That's how powerful תפילה (*tefillah*; prayer) is.

The Story of the Woman Who Finally Prayed

I had a girl come to me a few months ago.



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She and her husband were having a major disagreement.

There was a certain issue between them.

She wanted something.

He was completely against it.

She was pushing for the more religious option.

They had been fighting about it for months.

She came to me and said:

“Rabbi, we’ve been fighting about this issue since the day we got married.”

“What do I do?”

“This is the last chance.”

“We’re almost out of time.”

“What can I say to him?”

“Can you talk to him?”

“Can we phrase it a certain way?”

She was asking me for advice.

So we tried to come up with a way she could present it to him.

But then I said something to her.

I said:

“Before you go home tonight, go upstairs to the שול (shul; synagogue).”

“Talk to Hashem.”

Tell Him in your own words.

Say:

“Hashem, I’m trying.”

“I need Your help.”

And then I asked her a question.

“You’ve been fighting with your husband for months.”

“Did you once ask Hashem for help?”

She stopped.

And she said:

“The truth is... no.”

“I never asked Hashem.”

“I just thought it was between me and him.”

I told her:

“Ask Hashem.”

She said:

“Really?”

I said:

“Why not?”

That night she sent me a text.

She wrote:

“It is a miracle.”

“I didn’t even have to beg.”

“I can’t believe it.”

“The second I said whatever he said — do it.”



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And she wrote:

“תפילה (*tefillah*; *prayer*) is very powerful Rabbi.”

“Thank you.”

Why Do We Pray If God Already Knows?

So let's talk about another question.

Why do we pray at all?

Doesn't Hashem know what I need?

Think about it.

He knows if I need to get married.

He knows if I need health.

He wants me to be healthy.

So why pray?

It's a good question.

What is the purpose of תפילה (*tefillah*; *prayer*)?

The simplest answer is this:

Hashem created a system.

In that system:

You pray.

You receive.

Just like in life you have to do השתדלות (*hishtadlut*; *effort*).

You cannot sit back and expect things to come to you.

You can't sit on the couch and expect money to arrive at your door.

You can't sit back and expect a spouse to knock on your door.

I always have someone every summer who tells me the same thing.

“Rabbi, this summer I'm taking the בטחון (*bitachon*; *faith and trust in God*) approach.”

What does that mean?

They say:

“I'm not going to go to parties anymore.”

“I'm done with the dating scene.”

“I'm not going to שדכנים (*shadchanim*; *matchmakers*).”

“I'm not doing anything.”

“Whatever happens, happens.”

“If it's meant to be, it's meant to be.”

I tell them:

“I love you.”

“But if it's meant to be — and you don't get off your תחת (*tachat*; *backside*) and do something — it's not going to happen.”

מלך עוזר (*Melech ozer*; *the King helps*).

Hashem helps.

But you have to make the first step.

If someone is having a heart attack and says:

“I trust Hashem.”



“I have בטחון
(*bitachon; faith*).”

You still have to go
to the hospital.

You have to go to the doctor.

You have to go to the שדכן (*shadchan;*
matchmaker).

You have to apply for the job.

You have to be proactive.

So Hashem created a system.

Part of השתדלות (*bishtadlut; effort*) is prayer.

The same way you work.

You also pray.

Prayer is part of the effort.

So the simplest reason we pray is:

Because Hashem created a system where we pray in
order to receive.

Prayer Also Means Judging Yourself

But there is another element to תפילה (*tefillah;*
prayer).

The word תפילה (*tefillah*) comes from the word פלל
(*palal; to judge*).

In the תורה (*Torah*) it says:

ונתן בפלילים
(*v'natan b'plilim; the matter goes before judges*)

פלל (*palal*) means to judge.

So what does להתפלל (*lehispalet; to pray*) mean?

To judge yourself.

The goal of תפילה
(*tefillah; prayer*) is
to evaluate myself.

To grow.

Often we think prayer is about changing God.

Changing His mind.

But really תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) is about changing
me.

When I take three steps back at the end of the עמידה
(*Amidah; standing prayer*), I should be a different
person than when I took the three steps forward at
the beginning.

Prayer should transform me.

The words of the עמידה (*Amidah; standing prayer*)
were written by very holy people.

אנשי כנסת הגדולה
(*Anshei Knesset HaGedolah; the Men of the Great
Assembly*)

One hundred and twenty of the greatest leaders in
Jewish history.

עזרא הסופר (*Ezra HaSofer; Ezra the Scribe*).

מרדכי הצדיק (*Mordechai HaTzaddik; Mordechai the
righteous*).

Legends.

They wrote the prayer.

And if it's hard to connect to תפילה (*tefillah;*
prayer), there is something very practical you can
do.

Spend five minutes a day on one line of the עמידה
(*Amidah*).



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Just one line.

Translate it.

Understand it.

The next day — another line.

It sounds small.

But within one year you will understand the entire עמידה (*Amidah*).

Imagine someone told you:

“In one year you will fully understand the most important prayer in Judaism.”

It’s a bargain.

How Prayer Changes the Person

Prayer is meant to transform a person.

הרב עובדיה יוסף (*Harav Ovadia Yosef; Rabbi Ovadia Yosef*) asks what seems like a very obvious question.

How could it be that five minutes ago I prayed, and before I prayed השם (*Hashem; God*) decided that I should be sick, or that I should experience something difficult?

And then five minutes later I prayed — and suddenly everything changes?

Did I change God’s mind?

What exactly did I tell Him in the עמידה (*Amidah; the standing prayer*) that He didn’t already know?

What did I say?

Did I suddenly inform Him of something new?

“God, please heal my grandmother, she’s a צדקה (*tzaddeket; righteous woman*).”

“You know she lit candles when she left Iran.”

“She was always righteous.”

“She deals with my grandfather.”

“You know she puts up with my brother-in-law.”

What exactly did I tell God that He didn’t already know?

Did He suddenly say:

“Oh wow, I never knew that.”

“That’s a good point.”

“Maybe I should give you what you’re asking for.”

הרב עובדיה יוסף (*Harav Ovadia Yosef*) says something very powerful.

Nothing.

You didn’t tell Him anything new.

So then why did the prayer work?

Here is the answer.

Your prayer worked because **you are not the same person anymore.**

The decree — חס ושלום (*chas v’shalom; Heaven forbid*) — that may have existed was placed on **you version 1.0.**

But after you prayed, you became **you version 2.0.**

You are new.

You are upgraded.



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You are the **17 Pro Max**.

You are no longer the same person.

And therefore the decree that existed before does not apply anymore.

God says:

“That decree was on the old you.”

“You are not the old you anymore.”

“I never decreed that sickness should exist on this new person.”

“I never decreed sadness on this new person.”

“I never decreed difficulty on this new person.”

Prayer changes the person.

When I pray, I am growing.

When I pray, I am becoming someone new.

Why the Matriarchs Were Unable to Have Children

Our rabbis tell us something very interesting.

השם (*Hashem; God*) made the אמהות (*Imahot; the Matriarchs*) barren.

שרה (*Sarah*).

רבקה (*Rivkah*).

רהל (*Rachel*).

One after the other.

Why?

חז"ל (*Chazal; the Sages*) say:

שהקדוש ברוך הוא מתאוה לתפילתן של צדיקים
(*sheHaKadosh Baruch Hu mit'aveh*

l'tefilatan shel tzaddikim; the Holy One desires the prayers of the righteous)

God desires the prayers of the righteous.

When I first heard this teaching as a child, I had a problem with it.

It sounded almost selfish.

Here is a woman who wants a child.

She is suffering.

And God makes her barren so that she should pray?

It sounded strange to me.

But the explanation is something very different.

If you are going to raise:

אברהם (*Avraham*).

יצחק (*Yitzchak*).

יעקב (*Yaakov*).

The שבטים (*Shevatim; the twelve tribes*).

You cannot be an ordinary parent.

You must become extraordinary.

The אמהות (*Imahot; the Matriarchs*) were already great women.

But they still had spiritual work to do.

They needed more תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*).

They needed more עבודה (*avodah; spiritual work*).



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They needed to grow.

Every prayer elevated them.

Every prayer refined them.

Until eventually they became the kind of women capable of raising the future of the Jewish people.

Because raising someone like יצחק אבינו (*Yitzchak Avinu; Isaac our forefather*) requires a mother of extraordinary spiritual strength.

Everything comes from the parents.

Especially the mother.

The mother is the בית (*bayit; home*).

If she has strong אמונה (*emunah; faith*), the children inherit it.

If she has patience, calmness, strength — the children receive it.

If she is not ready, the children suffer.

You see parents sometimes destroy their children because they were not ready to be parents.

If you want to raise a יעקב אבינו (*Yaakov Avinu; Jacob our forefather*), you must become someone capable of raising such a child.

And therefore prayer was not for God.

Prayer was for them.

Prayer shaped them.

Why Leah Was Different

By the way, there is one of the אמהות (*Imahot; the Matriarchs*) that we did not mention.

לאה (*Leah*).

Why?

Because לאה (*Leah*)

had already prayed.

She prayed for decades not to marry עשו (*Esav*).

The מדרש (*Midrash; rabbinic teaching*) tells us that her eyes were soft.

Why were her eyes soft?

Because she cried constantly.

She prayed and prayed that she would not fall into the hands of עשו (*Esav*).

Because of that, she had already developed tremendous spiritual strength.

She was already prepared.

My Personal Story — The Forgotten Tefillin Bag

I want to tell you a personal story from my childhood.

Growing up in the Syrian community, many families spent the summer in Deal.

Anyone heard of Deal?

The famous “Deal וייעבור” (*Deal v'ya'avur; humorous rhyme referring to the place*).

Everybody goes to Deal in the summer.

S-U-M-M-A.

Summer.

But my parents didn't go.

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They loved
Brooklyn.

My father used to
quote the פסוק
(*pasuk; verse*):

אשרי יושבי ביתך
(*ashrei yoshvei veitecha; fortunate are those who
dwell in Your house*)

He said:

“I love Brooklyn in the summer.”

“Everyone leaves.”

“There’s parking everywhere.”

But I didn’t like Brooklyn in the summer.

So what did I do?

I had friends who had houses in Deal.

Throughout the summer I would get invited to
different שבתות (*Shabbatot; Sabbaths*).

That’s how I got my Deal experience.

One Friday my friend Isaac invited me.

I was very excited.

This was going to be the big weekend.

Obviously when I arrive they’re going to have a big
sign:

“Welcome Ariel Mizrahi.”

So the plan was simple.

My friend’s father was driving from Brooklyn to
Deal on Friday.

Perfect.

My mother would
drop me off at his
warehouse where he
worked in
downtown

Brooklyn.

I would get in the car with him.

He would take me to Deal.

Then Monday morning he would bring me back.

Perfect plan.

I had just turned thirteen.

I was pumped.

My mother drops me off.

I open the trunk to take my duffel bag.

And suddenly my mother asks:

“אריאל (*Ariel*), where is your קוראצ'ה (*koracha;*
tefillin bag)?”

The moment she asked, I already knew.

I forgot it.

“אריאל (*Ariel*), where is your קוראצ'ה (*koracha;*
tefillin bag)?”

Immediately my mind started racing.

How do I get out of this?

I said:

“I think I have it.”

I open my bag.

Maybe under the socks.

No.

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Maybe the other sock.

Maybe it's a small קוראצ'ה (*koracha; tefillin bag*).

Nothing.

"אריאל (*Ariel*), where is your קוראצ'ה (*koracha; tefillin bag*)?"

Finally I said:

"Ma... I think I left it at home."

She looked at me.

"You left your תפילין (*tefillin; phylacteries*) at home?"

At that moment I knew.

There was no way I was going to Deal.

For my parents, תפילין (*tefillin*) was non-negotiable.

My father never went anywhere without them.

When we traveled, the first thing in his carry-on bag was his תפילין (*tefillin*).

My mother said:

"Back in the car."

I tried negotiating.

"Ma, Isaac has תפילין (*tefillin*)."

"I'll borrow his."

"Friday is already done."

"Tomorrow is שבת (*Shabbat*)."

"Sunday morning I'll wear his."

"I'll even pray נץ (*netz; sunrise prayer*) before he wakes up."

"I'll send you a selfie."

She said:

"You don't go anywhere without your תפילין (*tefillin*)."

"Back in the car."

I said:

"But Ma, he's leaving in twenty minutes!"

"We don't have time to go home and come back!"

She said:

"Then you won't go."

"You'll go next week."

I can't tell you how broken I was.

I was yelling.

Crying.

It was the worst שבת (*Shabbat*) of my life.

I called my friend's father.

"Solomon, I can't come."

He said:

"Why?"

I said:

"I forgot my קוראצ'ה (*koracha; tefillin bag*)."

He said:



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"You can borrow Isaac's."

I said:

"You see Ma?!"

But she said no.

And that was it.

I stayed home.

It was the worst weekend.

But it taught me a very powerful lesson.

Sometimes if you want to raise great children, you must make difficult decisions as a parent.

If you want to raise an אברהם (*Avraham*), צחק (*Yitzchak*), יעקב (*Yaakov*), you have to be strong.

You Are Never in a Waiting Phase

Sometimes people think life has a waiting room.

"I'm waiting until I get married."

"I'm waiting until I get the job."

"I'm waiting until things start."

But Judaism doesn't believe in waiting rooms.

Wherever you are in life, you are supposed to be there.

You are supposed to grow there.

You are supposed to become something there.

So תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) is not only about asking for things.

תפילה is about becoming.

When I pray, I am judging myself.

The word להתפלל (*lehitpalel; to pray*) comes from פלל (*palal; to judge*).

To judge myself.

To ask:

Who am I?

Am I happy with where I am?

Could I be better?

When I finish the תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*), the real question is not whether I changed השם (*Hashem; God*).

The question is:

Did I become the person that השם wants me to be?

Prayer Reminds Us What Is Important

Another idea about תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) is that it reminds us what is important.

We often forget what matters in life.

Look inside the עמידה (*Amidah; the standing prayer*).

You will not find anything there about Turks and Caicos.

You will not find anything about a three-and-a-half-carat diamond.

You will not find anything about a BMW.



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It's not there.

But what do we see there?

אברהם יצחק ויעקב

(Avraham Yitzchak v'Yaakov; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)

Am I living like the אבות (Avot; the Patriarchs)?

אתה גיבור

(atah gibor; You are mighty)

Am I a strong person?

אתה קדוש

(atah kadosh; You are holy)

Am I living a holy life?

תקע בשופר

(teka b'shofar; sound the shofar)

Am I thinking about משיח (Mashiach; the Messiah)?

Or am I only thinking about my house and my renovation?

What about בית המקדש (Beit HaMikdash; the Holy Temple)?

What about the צדיקים (tzaddikim; the righteous)?

What about שלום (shalom; peace)?

עושה שלום במרומיו

(oseh shalom bimromav; He makes peace in the heavens)

Peace is one of the highest values in the עמידה (Amidah).

When I say these words, I realize that many of the things I fight about are not actually important.

Because the things I fight about are not in the עמידה.

Peace is.

So prayer realigns our priorities.

Prayer Reminds Us Where Blessings Come From

There is another important idea in תפילה (tefillah; prayer).

Prayer reminds us that what we have comes from השם (Hashem; God).

Earlier we spoke about השתדלות (hishtadlut; human effort).

A person must put in effort.

But effort carries a danger.

The more effort you put into life, the easier it becomes to believe that you succeeded because of yourself.

When something falls into your lap, it's easy to say:

"Hashem did this."

But when you worked hard and succeeded, it becomes easier to say:

"I did this."

השתדלות (hishtadlut) and ביטחון (bitachon; trust in God) are like a seesaw.

When you do very little effort, it's easy to see that God helped you.

But when you do a lot of effort, it becomes easier to forget that Hashem is behind everything.

תפילה (*tefillah*;
prayer) reminds us
of the truth.

Even when you are
successful, even when you worked hard, you are not
where you are today because of yourself alone.

There are many people smarter than you.

Many people more talented than you.

Many people with better backgrounds than you.

And yet they did not receive what you received.

Often in life we take credit for our blessings.

But blessings are not ours.

Blessings belong to השם.

In life we should not brag about our blessings.

We should brag about our accomplishments.

Accomplishments are what we worked for.

Blessings are gifts.

Your intelligence.

Your talents.

Your family.

Your opportunities.

Those are blessings.

You did not create them.

You were born with them.

תפילה (*tefillah*; *prayer*) reminds a person where their
blessing comes from.

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My Story — How I Got the Job at Safra

I want to share a personal story.

ברוך השם (*Baruch Hashem*; *thank God*) I am very
blessed.

I work in an amazing place with amazing people.

When I applied for the assistant rabbi position at
the ספרא שול (*Safra Shul*; *Safra Synagogue*) in
Manhattan, everything seemed straightforward.

I interviewed.

I spoke.

I thought I did very well.

They seemed to like me.

In my mind the story was simple.

I interviewed well and they hired me.

A few months later, before I started the job, I met a
friend of my father-in-law named שעייה (*Sbaaya*).

He asked me:

“Did you start the job yet?”

I said:

“No, I start in September.”

He said:

“Wow, it’s an amazing story how you got the job.”

I said:

“What do you mean amazing story?”



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"I interviewed well and they hired me."

He said:

"You don't know the story?"

I said:

"No."

He explained what actually happened.

After the synagogue decided they wanted to hire me, the Safra foundation in Geneva wanted to verify that I was a good rabbi.

So they contacted a rabbi in Israel named רב שרם (*Rav Sheram*).

They asked him:

"Do you know Rabbi Ariel Mizrahi from Brooklyn?"

Now רב שרם had never heard of me.

He had no idea who I was.

So he asked:

"Rabbi Mizrahi from Brooklyn?"

At that moment he had a group of Americans standing near him.

He turned to one of them and asked:

"Where are you from?"

The man said:

"Brooklyn."

He asked:

"Do you know Rabbi Ariel Mizrahi?"

The man said:

"Of course."

"He's my friend's

son-in-law."

He asked:

"Is he a good rabbi?"

The man said:

"He's excellent."

"He works with young people."

"He runs minyanim."

"He's up and coming."

That conversation lasted maybe thirty seconds.

And that thirty seconds is what secured the job.

You can prepare.

You can interview.

You can work hard.

But sometimes success comes down to a moment that Hashem arranges.

That man could have been anywhere in the world.

But at that exact moment he happened to be standing in that room.

תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) reminds us that success ultimately comes from Hashem.

The Mitzvah of Bikurim

In the times of the בית המקדש (*Beit HaMikdash; the Holy Temple*), there was a mitzvah called ביכורים (*bikurim; first fruits*).



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A farmer would bring the first fruits of his harvest to the Temple.

He would stand there and say:

“Hashem, thank You.”

“These fruits are not mine.”

“You are the source of this blessing.”

Today we no longer have the בית המקדש (*Beit HaMikdash*).

We cannot bring ביכורים (*bikurim*).

משה רבינו (*Moshe Rabbeinu; Moses our teacher*) asked:

“What will the Jewish people do when there is no Temple and no ביכורים?”

Hashem answered:

“They will pray.”

Prayer replaces ביכורים.

Prayer reminds us that our blessings come from above.

The Goal of Prayer Is Connection

Another idea about תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*).

The word תפילה appears in the name of one of the tribes.

נפתלי (*Naftali*).

The word נפתלי means connection.

Prayer is about connection.

Hashem wants a relationship with us.

He wants to hear from us.

Often we think prayer is a means to an end.

I need money so I pray.

I need health so I pray.

I need a job so I pray.

But sometimes the opposite is true.

Sometimes Hashem sends the need so that we will pray.

The Parable of the Credit Card

Let me explain with a parable.

A son goes to Miami.

He has his father’s credit card.

He is living the life.

Restaurants.

Clubs.

Everything.

The father calls him.

The son declines the call.

The father texts him.

The son ignores it.

The father misses his son.

So what does the father do?



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He shuts off the credit card.

The next day the son tries to swipe the card.

Declined.

Immediately he calls his father.

"Dad!"

"Hi son!"

"I missed you!"

The son says:

"Yeah Dad, I missed you too."

"How's Mom?"

"How's everything?"

Then he says:

"By the way... something strange happened with the credit card."

The son's goal was to fix the credit card.

But the father's goal was the conversation.

We approach God the same way.

"Hashem, I need money."

"I need health."

"I need a job."

"I need a spouse."

But Hashem wants something deeper.

He wants the conversation.

He wants the relationship.

Two Famous

Prayers in the Torah

Think about the two most famous prayers in the תורה (*Torah*).

אברהם (*Avraham*) praying for סדום (*Sodom*).

משה (*Moshe*) praying to enter Israel.

Neither prayer was granted.

סדום was destroyed.

Moshe did not enter the land.

Why would the Torah include those prayers?

Because the prayer itself was the success.

Even when the request is not granted, the connection is achieved.

The Final Teaching of Rav Wolbe

We started tonight with רב וולבה (*Rav Wolbe*), and we will end with רב וולבה.

On תשעה באב (*Tisha B'Av; the ninth of Av*), we do not say תחנון (*Tachanun; supplication prayer*).

Why?

Because the פסוק (*pasuk; verse*) says:

קרא עלי מועד
(*kara alai moed; He called against me an appointed time*)



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באב תשעה is called a מועד (*moed; meeting or appointed time*).

But how could that be?

פסח (*Pesach*), שבועות (*Shavuot*), סוכות (*Sukkot*) — those are holidays.

How could באב תשעה also be called a מועד?

Because מועד means meeting.

רב רב וולבה explains:

The פסוק says:

קרוב ה' לכל קוראיו לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת (*karov Hashem l'chol kor'av l'chol asher yikra'uhu be'emet; Hashem is close to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth*)

We think a person must be a צדיק (*tzaddik; righteous person*) to be close to God.

But the verse says something different.

God is close to anyone who calls Him.

There is only one condition.

באמת (*be'emet; in truth*).

If a person says:

“Hashem, I don’t feel like praying.”

“I’m struggling.”

“I’m not connected.”

But they say it honestly.

That is אמת (*emet; truth*).

And when a person calls out with truth, Hashem comes close.

Closing

We should be זוכה (*zocheb; merit*) בעזרת השם (*be'ezrat*

Hashem; with God’s help) to strengthen ourselves in תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*).

To remember that prayer is עבודה (*avodah; spiritual work*).

It is not easy.

But it is a gift.

And that no matter where we are in life, we can always turn to השם (*Hashem; God*).

And תפילות (*tefillot; prayers*) בעזרת השם (*be'ezrat Hashem*) should all be answered לטובה (*letovah; for good*).

אמן (*Amen*).

Takeaway from the Lecture

תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) is often misunderstood. Many people think of it only as an obligation, or as a tool to obtain what they need. But the deeper message of תפילה is much greater.

First, תפילה is עבודה (*avodah; work*). It is not supposed to be easy. Even the ראשונים (*chassidim barishonim; early pious sages*) needed time to prepare themselves before praying. Struggling with prayer does not mean something is wrong with you — it means you are engaging in real spiritual work.

Second, תפילה truly **has power**. From משה רבינו (*Moshe Rabbeinu; Moses our teacher*) praying against the prayer of קורח (*Korach*), to the הגדול



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(*Kohen Gadol; High Priest*) praying that a selfish traveler's prayer should not delay rain, the Torah teaches that prayer can influence the world.

But the deepest purpose of תפילה is not to change God — it is to **change the person praying**. As explained by הרב עובדיה יוסף (*Harav Ovadia Yosef; Rabbi Ovadia Yosef*), when a person prays sincerely they become a different person. The decree that may have applied to them before prayer no longer applies to the person they have become after prayer.

Prayer also reminds us of our priorities. The עמידה (*Amidah; standing prayer*) does not focus on luxury, status, or possessions. Instead it centers life around holiness, redemption, peace, and connection with God.

Finally, תפילה is about **connection**. The goal is not always to receive something. Sometimes the goal is simply to speak with השם (*Hashem; God*). Like the father who shuts off his son's credit card just to get him to call, sometimes life's challenges are what push us to reconnect with our Creator.

And the most important condition of prayer is אמת (*emet; truth*). As דוד המלך (*David HaMelech; King David*) teaches:

קרוב ה' לכל קוראיו לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת
(*karov Hashem l'chol kor'av l'chol asher yikra'uhu*
be'emet; Hashem is close to all who call Him, to all
who call Him in truth).

A person does not need to be perfect to pray. They only need to be honest.

Five Shabbat Table Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think תפילה (*tefillah; prayer*) is described as עבודה (*avodah;*

work)?

What makes prayer difficult, and what does that tell us about its purpose?

2. **If prayer is meant to change the person praying rather than change God, how might that affect the way we approach תפילה?**

3. **Which idea from the עמידה (*Amidah; standing prayer*) most challenges the way we usually think about success or priorities in life?**

4. **The lecture described תפילה as an opportunity rather than an obligation.** What practical changes could help someone start seeing prayer that way?

5. **What does it mean to pray באמת (*be'emet; truthfully*)?** How can honesty in prayer deepen a person's relationship with השם (*Hashem; God*)?