



Selichot: Keys To Forgiveness Part II #16

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Avishai David

The Gemara refers to *Selichot* as *sefer tefilla*, namely an order of prayer which parallels *Shemone Esrei*. *Shemone Esrei* consists of praise, requests, and thanks. In a similar vein, *Selichot* begin with praise, move on to requests and the thirteen attributes of mercy, and end with thanking Hashem for his beneficence.

Judaism views man as an incongruous being. On the one hand, he can rise to unbelievable heights, greater than angels. On the other hand, he is like dust and ashes in his helplessness and worthlessness and total dependence on Hashem. This paradox seems to be at the heart of what *Selichot* is about. We approach Hashem in an intimate way. We address Him in the second person. But then we move on to *bakasha*, as we cry and plead for forgiveness.

The Rambam says that the way of repentance is to shed tears and implore Hashem for forgiveness. We recite *Selichot* after midnight, a time of *eit ratzon* (favor). We invoke Hashem's mercy by reciting the thirteen attributes. The *halacha* is that someone praying alone doesn't say the thirteen attributes. Rav Soloveitchik explains that this is because it is tantamount to a *davar shebi'kedusha* (a holy prayer), which requires a *minyan* (quorum of ten men). A *davar shebi'kedusha* is defined by the poskim as a dialogue between the prayer leader and the congregation and with it we sanctify Hashem's name in public. The Rambam writes that although Hashem always accepts our

teshuva, it is most accepted in the days of grace, *yemei ratzon*, when Hashem comes down to be with us. This is why we recite *Selichot* during this period.

Selichot are comprised of three elements, which parallel the three elements of the soul: *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*. The Zohar says *nefesh* is a dark light rooted in the physical being, the source of emotion. It produces heat and relates to the lowest level of a person through the physical body. The next level, *ruach*, is a white light. It is the source of intellect, relates to our spiritual aspect, and not only provides heat, but also illumination. Finally there is the *neshama* which is a hidden incomprehensible light. *Teshuva* is possible because of this mysterious light that can never be corrupted. The *neshama* is the impetus for return.

The Rambam explains that *nefesh* is the source of feelings and physical drives. Its goal is pleasure and self-gratification. By nature it is limited. The *ruach*, the intellectual side, seeks higher truth. We need both the *nefesh* and *ruach* to serve Hashem. *Emuna* is defined in two ways, *l'haamin*, to believe, and *l'hodea*, to know. Belief stems from *nefesh*, the source of emotion, but there's also an obligation to understand and connect to Hashem intellectually with the *ruach*.

Jews throughout the millennium have given up their lives to sanctify Hashem's name. They were not necessarily great *talmidei chachamim*, but simple Jews who had pure *emuna*

stemming from *nefesh*. Giving charity, doing acts of kindness, and *deveikut b'Hashem*, all flow from *nefesh*. Yet *ruach* is also a critical factor in serving Hashem. Intellect plays a pivotal role in studying and understanding Torah in a profound way. The greater the understanding, the greater the *deveikut* (attachment) to Hashem.

The *Aseret Hadibrot* are repeated twice in the Torah. In Parshat Yitro they address the *ruach*. In Parshat Va'etchanan they focus on the *nefesh*, the fire of Torah. Both are necessary. *Selichot* addresses the *nefesh* state of *teshuva* with the goal of reaching the *ruach* and the *neshama*.

On Yom Kippur, the Torah commands us to afflict the *nefesh*. "*V'initem es nafshoseichem*. You shall afflict your *nefesh*." In this way, a person is motivated to experience the torment of his sins, which will in turn arouse him to pray and repent. In *Selichot*, we ask Hashem for mercy to bring us back to *teshuva*. We ask Him to help us rid ourselves of the *yetzer hara* so that our inner core will sparkle again. We focus on *nefesh*, then we move on to *ruach*, which in turn helps us bring our *neshama* to the fore. This is accomplished through *teshuva*, *tefila*, and *tzedaka* (repentance prayer and charity).

May the power of *Selichot* and the thirteen attributes, accompanied with the promise that no prayer ever goes unanswered, help us come back to Hashem.

Requests From Hashem #8

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Herschel Reichman

The second section of prayer in *Shemone Esrei* is *bakasha*, asking Hashem to fulfill our individual and communal needs. The thirteen requests contained in these blessing comprise all of our fundamental needs. Whether it's *panassa* (sustenance), health, tranquility, or friendship, we need Hashem's involvement and intervention in our lives.

There are several premises in the *bakashot* in *Shemone Esrei*. The first premise is that I am in need. The second says Hashem has power. The third premise tells us that Hashem desires to help us and that he is the essence of goodness and kindness. And the fourth premise says that through the power of prayer, we can arouse Hashem to help us.

When we pray in times of need, and we are always in need of at least one of the thirteen requests, we must pray with perfect faith that Hashem can and will aid us.

May all our requests be answered *l'tova* (for the good).



Tomer Devora-Real Truth#8

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The essence of Hashem is *emet* (truth) as the Gemara in Shabbat says, the signet of Hashem is *emet*. Hashem judges us with truth, justice, and straightforwardness. This *mida* of *emet* is actualized in every Jew. It is an inheritance from our forefather Yaakov of whom it says, "Titen *emet* l'Yaakov." Yaakov represents truth. The Rambam writes that Yaakov is called *tzaddik* because he worked for Lavan with honesty. Although Lavan did not appreciate him and tried to trick him many times, Yaakov continued to serve him faithfully.

On the one hand we say Hashem is *emet*, which should imply pure justice, yet we find that He also shows us mercy even if we don't deserve it. The evil inclination tries to convince a person that minor *mitzvot* and *aveirot* are not all that important. It tries to convince us that Hashem will overlook them. But this is not true. Hashem is "*Kel emuna v'ein avei*." His actions are perfect and just. If

so, where does mercy fit in?

The Mesilat Yesharim says that even if Hashem is compelled to chastise a sinner, he does so without anger and with pity. Similarly, the Tomer Dvora writes that Hashem is *emet* and *mishpat* but he is also *rachamim* and accepts our *teshuva*. Hashem doesn't punish out of revenge, but rather out of love and compassion. The punishment serves as a *tikun*, to atone for sins. A person can repent and the sin becomes as though it never existed. A human judge is limited and must follow the letter of the law. But Hashem looks at a person differently. Man sins because he has an evil inclination and so Hashem gives him the opportunity to do *teshuva* and doesn't punish him immediately. *Emet* means understanding a person's situation; not deviating from justice, but still merciful.

The tenth *mida* in Tomer Devora is *emet*, the eleventh is *chesed*. Avraham represents

chesed. He went *lifnim meshurat hadin* (beyond the letter of the law). Because Avraham exerted himself beyond his limits, Hashem dealt the same way with him. Similarly, if we restrain our natural inclinations, then Hashem too will go beyond the laws of nature with us.

Every Jew should try to reach a higher level in *avodat Hashem lifnim meshurat hadin*. We should attempt to be patient with others, understand their needs, and view every Jew as important in our eyes. We should love others even if they don't deserve it, just as a parent loves his children. This is acting *lifnim meshurat hadin* (above the letter of the law) and it is what Hashem wants of us. The unique attribute of *klal Yisrael* is *chesed l'avraham*. When we go beyond what the law requires, we emulate Hashem and come closer to Him.

Rebbetzins Perspective: Class#4

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

Question:

How can I increase my *kavana* (concentration) in *tefila*? Can you provide some practical ideas?

Answer:

Create an image that speaks to you and use it to guide you through prayer. I'll suggest one but you can use your own.

Close your eyes and picture yourself as a young child, way before you realized that your parents

didn't have much control over events. Imagine your father or mother telling you, "It'll be ok."

Take that moment of absolute trust and transfer that feeling to Hashem. Only He cares for you in the ultimate sense and only He can give you what you need. Any image that evokes a feeling of faith, love, reliance, and dependence will work. Take it along with you when you start davening.

It's difficult to move from an outside action-oriented world to an internal world where you have to feel absolute reliance on Hashem. Try to

concentrate on the meaning of the words.

When you say *Pisukei D'zimra*, visualize drawing Hashem's infinity into your heart. And when you get to *Shemone Esrei*, think about Hashem's omnipotence and recognize that it's only Hashem's life force and essence that can give you anything at all.