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Davening Properly

The Concept of *Davening*

There is an old saying that conveys a very powerful message. “Hashem doesn’t need your *davening*, you yourself need your own *davening*.” If one would bear this concept in mind during *davening*, one would *daven* differently. The problem is, that although one is subconsciously cognizant that he is *davening* to Hashem, one does not actively bear this in mind as he *davens*. The *ba’alei mussar* suggest that if a person realizes that he has neglected certain *halachos*, one of the methods for him to improve, is to learn the *halachos* of that matter. The reason for this is because by learning through the *halachos*, one will come to have a constant awareness of the *halachos* of the matter. One should make a commitment to try to place a little more emphasis on *davening*, and in that merit may our *tefilos* be answered, and may we be *zoche* to see the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash* בימינו.

Chazal tell us that there is nothing greater than *tefilah*,¹ and that *tefilah* is even greater than doing מעשים טובים.² There is even a מאן דאמר who holds that *tefilah* is greater than learning *Torah*.³ The *Rokeach* writes⁴ that

1. עי' מדרש תנחומה פר' מקץ סי' ט.
2. עי' ברכות ל"ב.
3. עי' מגילה כז. לפי סברתו של ר' יוחנן.

if one skips *davening* to learn *Torah*, it is as if he has not learned a thing, even if he spends the whole day learning with others. The *Medrash Tanchuma*⁵ tells us that even one who does not deserve to have his *tefilos* answered, if he *davens*, Hashem will hear his *tefilah* and Hashem will treat him righteously. The *Gemara* tells us that if a person wishes to become wise, he should *daven*, since Hashem is the one who controls wisdom.⁶

Having Proper Concentration During *Davening*

It is very important to concentrate properly during *davening*. The word תפלה, has the same גמטריא (numerical value) as the expression בכונת הלב (both are equal to 515) which means ‘with the concentration of one’s heart’.⁷ When one *davens* he should realize to Whom he is speaking and in front of Whom he is standing. One should not allow his mind to wander while beseeching Hashem to answer his *tefilos*, just as one would not allow his mind to wonder while asking a favor from a human king. The *Gemara* states that if one wants his *tefilos* to be heard, one must *daven* with proper *kavana*. Some say that one is required

4. הובא במ"ב סי' ק"ו.
5. פר' וירא סי' א'.
6. עי' גדה דף ע.
7. עי' תפילה בכוונה (פרחי אגודת ישראל) בשם אבודרהם.

to bear in mind throughout the entire *tefilah* to Whom he is *davening*.⁸ The *Medrash Tanchuma* says that when a person *davens* he should not have two 'hearts' (i.e. his mind in two places); one 'heart' for *Hashem* and a second 'heart' for other matters.⁹ One should devote his entire heart to *Hashem*. The *חסידים הראשונים* used to set aside nine hours a day for *tefilah*. Although we spend less than a quarter of that time on our *davening*, we should definitely try to concentrate and have patience for the short period of time that we do spend on *davening*.¹⁰ Proper concentration is achieved when one has the proper understanding of what *davening* is all about. Knowing the translation of the words also helps in achieving proper concentration. A person once asked the *Vilna Gaon* how to avoid having foreign thoughts during *davening*. The *Gaon* replied that one should *daven* from a *siddur*, since when one sees the words of a *tefilah*, one will concentrate on them and *daven* with greater *kavana*.¹¹ The *Gemara* says that it is possible for two people to be ill with the same deadly disease, and one will be cured while the other won't survive *chas veshalom*. This can happen when one person *davens* with *kavana* while the other one does not.¹²

Talking During Davening and in Shul

Aside from the issue of having proper concentration during *davening*, there is an *issur* which prohibits one from talking in *shul* during *davening*. The *kol bo* writes that throughout history we find numerous *shuls* that have been destroyed for the grave sin of talking in *shul* during *tefiloh*. The *Shulchan Oruch* states that one who talks during

chazaras hashatz has sinned 'a sin which is too great to bear'.¹³ The same terminology is used in the *Torah* when referring to *Kayin* after he killed his brother *Hevel*.¹⁴ Do we want to be compared to a murderer who killed his own brother?! The *Chachamim* say that one who does not talk to others during *davening* merits long life. One should be especially careful not to talk idle gossip while wearing *tefilin*, as we see that the requirement *Mideoraisah* of wearing *tefilin* all day was waived, since it was difficult to control one's conduct all day. Therefore, we should definitely try not to profane our *tefilin* for the short time that we do wear it.¹⁵

The Most Preferable Time to Daven Shacharis

The most preferable time to *daven Shacharis* is at sunrise. *Chazal* guarantee one who *davens* at sunrise that no harm will befall him during that day.¹⁶ *Rabino Yehonatan Mefrag* wrote that had *Klal Yisroel* *davened* at sunrise on the day of the *churban Beis Hamikdash*, it would not have been destroyed.¹⁷ One who cannot wake up as early as sunrise to *daven*, should wake up as early as possible for *davening*. One who arrives early to *davening* and leaves late, merits the special *bracha* of long life. One who comes late will be referred to as a *פושע ועצל* (lit. a lazy person) in the World to Come.¹⁸ One who misses saying *krias shema* even for one day may be considered as if he had missed saying it his entire life.¹⁹ Even if one will be able to *daven* prior to the latest *z'man*, it is still an *issur gomur* to procrastinate *davening Shacharis* or saying *krias shema* until the end of the *z'man*.²⁰

8. עי' חידושי ר' חיים הלוי על הרמב"ם.
9. פר' כי תבא סי' א'.
10. ועי' מ"ב בסי' צ"ג סי' ק' א' שעכ"פ לשער בני אדם צריכים להשות קודם התפילה שיעור כדי הילוך ח' טפחים כדי שיתישב דעתו ע"ש.
11. עי' קונטרס תפלה בכונה שם. ועי' מ"ב שם בסי' ב' שהאריז"ל היה מתפלל מתוך הסיודור, ועי' בשע"ת סי' צ"ו סי' ק' א' שבתפילת שמו"ע היה האר"י מתפלל בעניו סגורות.
12. עי' ראש השנה דף י"ח.

13. עי' שר"ע סי' קכ"ד סעי' ז'.
14. בראשית פרק ד' פסוק י"ג.
15. עי' אורחות יושר (מהגר"ח קניבסקי שליט"א).
16. עי' תוס' במס' ברכות דף ט'.
17. מובא באורחות יושר.
18. שם.
19. עי' מס' ברכות דף ס"ג, כמו שמביא באורחות יושר, ועי' מהרש"א שם, אכן עי' שפתי חכמים.
20. עי' סי' נ"ח סי' ג'.

Davening With a Minyan

One is required to *daven* every *tefilah* with a *minyan*. Even if one is not worthy of having his personal *tefilos* answered, the *tefilah* of a *tzibbur* never goes unanswered, even if the individual *davened* without the proper *kavana*.²¹

In addition, when *davening* with a *minyan* one is able to respond ברוך הוא וברוך הוא, אמן, and שמו, אמן, which are of major importance.

R' Yechezkal Levenstein said in the name of R' Simcha Zissel of Kelm that it is worth suffering 70 years of difficulties such as *Iyov* experienced, in order to answer אמן to just one bracha in a lifetime.²²

In a similar vein, R' Eliyohu Lopian said in the name of the *Alter* from *Kelm* that it was worthwhile for *Hashem* to create the world and to have it exist for 6,000 years, just so that one Yid can answer שמו ברוך הוא וברוך שמו. Yet, a thousand such responses are not equal to even one response of אמן, and one thousand responses of אמן do not even add up to one response of אמן יהא שמיה רבה.²³ One who does not *daven* with a *tzibbur* is viewed in the eyes of *Chazal* as a בעל ביזוי ובעל גאווה.²⁴ One may not miss *tefilah betzibbur* even for the sake of learning *Torah*.²⁵

One is also required to *daven* in a *shul*. One who has a *shul* in his neighborhood and does not attend is referred to as a 'bad neighbor', and his punishment is that his children will have to go into exile *chas veshalom*.²⁶ Furthermore, one who does not enter a *shul* on this world will not be permitted

to enter one in the World to Come.²⁷ *Davening* in the courtyard in front of a *shul* or in a neighboring room may not be considered as having *davened* inside the *shul*.²⁸

There is a story told of two 'friendly' competitors who planned to attend an estate sale together. As they prepared to leave, they were asked to complete a *minyan* for *Mincha*. One of the businessmen stayed long enough for the *kaddish* before *shemonah esrei*, and then hurried off after the other businessman. However, by the time he arrived at the sale, all objects of value had already been snatched up by his "friendly" competitor, leaving him only a few worn items. He purchased these items, and among them was a frayed pillow. When he opened the pillow to extract the feathers he discovered a jewel hidden inside. He immediately brought the jewel to a dealer and sold it for 50 *zhevrim* (gold coins). When he told his wife the story, she expressed distrust for the appraisal and insisted that he return the money to the dealer and get the jewel back. The man was uncomfortable about renegeing on the deal, but was equally uneasy about what to tell his wife. He decided to ask the *Ben Ish Chai* for advice. After listening to the entire story, the *Ben Ish Chai* told him that the *Gemara* in *Bava Kamma* (91b) places a value of 10 *zhevrim* on every *mitzvah*. Since he had answered *amen* 5 times during the *חצי קדיש* before *shemonah esrei* prior to leaving, his reward was appropriately 5 x 10, or 50, *zhevrim*. The man joyously went home and informed his wife that the jewel's value was appraised correctly.

Wearing Respectful Clothing While Davening

One should only *daven* while being properly dressed. One must wear clothing that covers one's entire body, just as one would be dressed while speaking to a human king.²⁹ There are no exceptions regarding this

21. עי' מס' ברכות דף ו'. ודף ח', ומס' תענית דף ח', ועי' מ"ב בס"י צ' ס"ק ל"ג, ועי' בילקוט שמעוני תהילים רמז תת"א, ועי' במדרש רבה דברים פרשה ב' ד"ה י"ב. ומש"כ שיש חיוב להתפלל במנין כן איתא באג"מ א"ח ח"ב סי' כ"ז, וח"ג סי' ז', ומש"כ המחבר בלשון ישתדל עי' בשו"ת מנחת יצחק ח"ז סי' ו' שהוא רק שישתדל ללך להתפלל בבהכ"ז ולא בביתו בעשרה.
22. ספר לשכנו תדרשו ח"א דף ס"ט.
23. שם, דף י"ח ודף ס"ט.
24. עי' אורחות יושר.
25. עי' מ"ב סי' צ' ס"ק כ"ז.
26. עי' ברכות דף ח', ועי' במ"ב סי' צ' ס"ק ל"ח ול"ט.

27. עי' ירושלמי ברכות פ"ה ה"א.
28. עי' אורחות יושר, ועי' מ"ב סי' צ' ס"ק ס"א.
29. עי' סי' צ"א ס"ע א' ומ"ב שם.

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halacha, even during the summer.³⁰ It is preferable for one not to *daven* while wearing a T-shirt or colorful sneakers, since such attire is disrespectful while *davening* to *Hashem*.³¹

³⁰. עי' אורחות יושר.

³¹. עי' מ"ב ס"ק י"א, ועי' תפלה כהלכתה פ"ז הע' ע"ח וז"ל ודע שלגרי"ש אלישב שליט"א כדאי להדר במידת האפשר ולא להתפלל שמר"ע בחלוק בית. וגם עי' שם בשם ר' אלישב לגבי לבישת חליפה וכובע שאין להפסיד תפילה בציבור משום זה. אמנם אם יוכל ללבושם ולהפסיק להתפלל עם הש"ץ – עדיף בפרט במקומות שכולם רגילים בכובע ויתבייש ולא יכוון כראוי.

One who would be embarrassed to talk to an important person while barefoot or while wearing shoes without socks may not *daven* that way either.³² One should always wear a hat and jacket during *davening*, even when one is *davening* without a *minyan*.³³

³². עי' ס"י צ"א סע' ה'.

³³. שם. ועי' ס"ק י"ב, ואין לומר שאין דין זה נוהגת בזמנינו משום שאין הדרך ללך ברחוב בכובע אעפ"כ, עי' באר היטב סי' קפ"ג ס"ק י"א שזו מביא לידי אימה ויראה שמעורר הכוונה ע"ש.