

THE PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM ROADMAP TO PRAYER PROJECT

The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson 9

Concentration in Prayer

Before we proceed with the main section of the daily prayer, let us examine some laws regarding the prerequisites for Prayer.

The Mechaber in *Orach Chaim, Simon 5 se'if 1* states:

A person must concentrate on the simple meaning of the words when reciting blessings. When one mentions Hashem's Divine Name one must have in mind the meaning of the Name as we read it (i.e. Adonoy) which means Master over all existence, as well as its meaning according to the way it is spelled with the letters yud and hey etc. The meaning according to the spelling is that G-d always existed, exists now and will always continue to exist. When reading the Divine Name Elokim, one should concentrate that Hashem is the Master of all powers.

הלכה Halacha

Preface: Whenever referring to G-d's Name, one must take care not to recite the name in vain (i.e. outside of a bracha, prayer or entire verse). Commonly, one substitutes the letter Hey or Yud with sound of the letter "K". E.g. Kah instead of Yah. Elokim instead of Elohim. Adonoy is referred to a Hashem.

The Names of G-d (A partial list)

Tetragrammaton (Hashem): (Yud י' Kaye ה' Vav ו' Kaye ה') Pronounced *Adonoy*. Contemplate that G-d always existed, exists and will continue to exist. He is Master of all existence

Adonoy (אדוני) - Concentrate He is Master of all existence

Elokim - All Powerful G-d

Y(k)'ah, (K)'ell, Tzeva'(k)os, are a few more examples of Divine Names.

The Tetragrammaton

G-d's Name of Four Letters is written with the letters *Yud* and *Hey* and *Vav* and *Hey* (*Sheim Havayah* - הויה²). One must never pronounce it the way it is written. Rather, the correct pronunciation is *Adonoy*. Even this pronunciation of G-d's Name may never be said in vain. It may only be recited in the context of a blessing or a prayer.

Whenever one pronounces G-d's Name (Tetragrammaton) one must meditate on two thoughts.

1) Adone hakole - Master of All existence

2) Hayah, Hoveh ve'Yihyeh - G-d always existed, He exists and He will always continue to exist. In Hebrew this translates *Hayah* (was) *Hoveh* (is) and *Yihyeh* (will be), each word being from the letters of the Tetragrammaton.

The *Biur HaGra* maintains that it is only necessary to meditate on both meanings of *Hashem's* Name when reading the first verse of *She'ma*. Otherwise, it is sufficient just to meditate on the meaning of the way we pronounce *Hashem's* Name (*Adonoy*). The *Mishna Berura* in Orach Chaim³ agrees with the *Gra's* interpretation of this law.

When G-d's Name is written with the letters *Alef, Daled, Nun* and *Yud*, (אדני) - Name of *Adnus* (אדנות) it is pronounced as it is written *Adonoy*. Only the first meaning *Adone hakole* – Master of All existence must be meditated.

When uttering G-d's Name *Elokim* (אלוקים), one must meditate that G-d is All-powerful and omnipotent.

¹ The "k" sound is inserted to avoid reading *Hashem's Name* in vain.

² We refer to it as such in order not to say *Hashem's Name* in vain

³ *Simon* 5 s"k 3

One who finds it difficult to always keep in mind these meditations should at least declare at the beginning of each day that he means to have these meditations whenever he utters the Name of G-d. (Introduction sefer *Afikei Yam*)⁴

When fulfilling a Mitzvah

One must have specific intent when fulfilling a Torah obligation that he is doing it in order to fulfill his obligation (*Lotzeis yedei chovasso*).

There is an argument on this point in the Gemora whether one can fulfill a *mitzvah* without specific intention. There is no clear conclusion as to the final ruling on this matter. Therefore, the *Halacha* is to be strict with regard to Torah obligations (*mitzvos de'oraissa*) while for Rabbinic instituted mitzvos (*mitzvos de'Rabbanan*) one fulfills the *mitzvah* even if one forgot to do it specifically for the purpose of fulfilling one's obligation.

Practical Applications

The *mitzvah* of *Krias She'ma* is a *mitzvah de'oraissa* (a Torah command)⁵ to recite the Torah portions once in the morning and again in the nighttime. Since it is a *mitzvah de'oraissa*, one must have specific intent when reciting it, that it is for this purpose that he is reciting it. On the other hand, *Amidah She'moneh Esrei* is a *mitzvah de'Rabbanan* (a Rabbinic statute) according to some opinions. Therefore, if one davens without specific intent to fulfill his obligation, he fulfills it nonetheless.

The *Mishna Berura* adds that many times it is obvious that one performs the *mitzvah* solely for the purpose of fulfilling one's obligation. In such situations the very fact that one goes through the effort of performing the *mitzvah* shows that one is doing it to fulfill the obligation. Hence, no explicit intent is necessary in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* obligation.

For example, if one wears *Tefillin*, it is obvious that one is doing so in order to fulfill the obligation; especially since one recites the blessing *Asher kidshanu be'mitzvosav ve'tzivanu lehani'ach Tefillin* (Who sanctified and commanded us to don *Tefillin*). In such a case, one fulfills his *mitzvah* obligation automatically even

⁴ Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt"l* is quoted in the *Sefer Halichos Shlomo* as saying that nowadays that many people do not have proper *kavanah* when reciting *Hashem's Name*, it is very reasonable to rely on the condition set forth by the *Afikei Yam* as well as by the *Aishel Avraham* of Butchatch. This ruling relies on the opinion of the *Gra* that doesn't require one to concentrate more than that G-d is the Master of all and not the specific intent that G-d existed always, now and forever.

⁵ See Magen Avraham *Simon* 63:8 for different opinions on this matter

without explicit intent to fulfill his obligation. Likewise, by *She'moneh Esrei* anyone praying is presumably doing so because in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* obligation. However, the *mitzvah* of the Shema Reading (*Krias She'ma*) is different. *Krias She'ma* is many times recited not for the sake of the *mitzvah* as when it is read when it's not the proper time for its recital. When *Ma'ariv* prior to the correct time for *Krias She'ma* of the evening; we recite the Shema even though it's not the proper time for the *mitzvah*. Thus, it's never obvious by *Ma'ariv* that we are reciting it for the purpose of fulfilling the *mitzvah* obligation. Additionally, the blessings for *Krias She'ma* are not specifically for the *mitzvah* of *Krias She'ma*. As the Rashba puts it, we don't say a blessing stating *Asher kidshanu be'mitzvosav vetzivanu likros ess She'ma*. Technically, one can recite the blessings and omit *Krias She'ma* entirely if one said it beforehand⁶. Therefore it is imperative to have specific intention when reciting *Krias She'ma* to fulfill one's *mitzvah* obligation.

If one did not have intent to fulfill the *mitzvah* obligation by a *mitzvah de'oraissa* (Torah command) where the intent is not obvious, one must perform the *mitzvah* again; this time with intent to fulfill the *mitzvah* obligation.

She'moneh Esrei

As for *She'moneh Esrei*; there is another important aspect. Since during this prayer we are considered to be speaking directly to G-d and standing before Him in prayer, there are two additional aspects to keep in mind. One must bear in mind -

1. That one is standing in prayer in front of G-d
2. That one needs to understand the words he's praying to G-d

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik *zt"l* of *Brisk* explains that the first *kavanah* is to have an awareness that one is standing in front of his Creator in prayer. This awareness is necessary to continue throughout the prayer of *She'moneh Esrei*, for without it one is not considered doing an act of prayer at all; it's considered just a rehearsal of words.

On the other hand, the second level of *Kavanah* is to understand the words of prayer. This is only absolutely necessary during the first *bracha* of *She'moneh Esrei*. Rav Chaim derives this from the Rambam who rules that the latter *Kavanah* is

⁶ We recite the *Birkas Krias She'ma* even past the time for the *mitzvah* to read *She'ma*

necessary only during the first *bracha* of *She'moneh Esrei* while implying that the former *Kavanah* is necessary during the entire *She'moneh Esrei*.

The *Chazon Ish* in his notes to Rav Chaim *zt"l* essay suggests that the Rambam maintains that if one just starts the prayer of *She'moneh Esrei* with the awareness that one is about to be standing before G-d in prayer and beseeching Him, it is sufficient *Kavanah* (intent) to consider his prayer valid even if one loses this concentration during the course of the prayer of *She'moneh Esrei*.

The *Chazon Ish* concludes that his own point of view is that the Rambam just means to stress the importance of *Kavanah* (concentration) during prayer and does not mean to imply that one's prayer is invalid without it. Rather, we assume that every Jew that prays has at least a subconscious level of awareness that he is praying to his Creator, which is sufficient to validate the *She'moneh Esrei*.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt"l* also has a difficulty understanding this concept of considering the entire *She'moneh Esrei* as having *Kavanah*, of standing before G-d in prayer, just because one started with that intent. He doesn't understand why when someone recites *She'moneh Esrei* by rote while thinking about other things we still consider the prayer valid? By all other *mitzvos* we consider someone who is performing it without deliberation to fulfill one's obligation as not performing it all. For example, if someone performs the *mitzvah* of ritual slaughter (*shechita*) while his mind was totally preoccupied with another issue, the *shechita* is invalid. Why then should davening be any different? Nonetheless, we find references where the Gemora mentions that it was common for people to daven by rote, and yet their *Tefilos* were not invalid. The *Yerushalmi* (Jerusalem Talmud) in Rosh Hashanah mentions that Rebbe Masnaya said: Let's thank our head for knowing to bow upon reaching *Modim*⁷. Likewise, the Gemora in *Berachos*⁹ mentions that someone who is not sure where he reached up to in *Krias She'ma*, if he already started reciting *Lema'an yirbu*, we assume that he said everything up to that point without omitting anything. *Ve'tzarich iyun* - this requires further study.

⁷ *Berachos Daf 17b*

⁸ Tosefos Rosh Hashanah 16b

⁹ *Daf 16a*

The Main Points of Intent by the Amidah

It is important that we concentrate on what we are saying in prayer. Nevertheless, if one is having a difficult time concentrating on the *Amidah She'moneh Esrei* prayer, one should at least concentrate on the first *bracha* (blessing) of *Amidah (Avos)*. The significance of the first *bracha* of *She'moneh Esrei* is that it is a *bracha* with an opening and a closing using G-d's Divine Name. Additionally it mentions the merit of the Patriarchs, *Avraham, Yitzchok* and *Yaakov*. Additionally, this *bracha* is recited immediately after the *bracha* of *Go'al Yisrael* which refers to G-d as the Redeemer. This theme is repeated in the *bracha* itself – *U'maivee go'el livnei ve'neihem lema'an She'mo be'ahavah* (And He brings salvation to their children's children for the sake of His Name with love).

Intimation רמז

One should make a conscious effort to concentrate on the ending of each *bracha*. There are 113 words in total in all the endings of the blessings of *She'moneh Esrei*. Likewise there are 113 words in the Prayer of *Hannah*, when she beseeched G-d to grant her a child. Her prayer is used by the Gemora as the paradigm for our *Amidah She'moneh Esrei*. Her prayer of 113 words culminated in her giving birth to a baby boy named Shmuel who grew up to be one of the greatest prophets and leaders of Jewry. He installed both King Saul as well as King David as kings¹⁰.

Furthermore, in the Torah the word *Lev* (לב) – Heart appears exactly 113 times, alluding to the importance of concentrating on the 113 words in the endings of the blessings of *She'moneh Esrei*.¹¹

If one did not have Intent by *She'moneh Esrei*

The Tur and the Mechaber require one who doesn't have the minimum concentration necessary for *She'moneh Esrei* to repeat it. The Rama exempts him from repeating the *She'moneh Esrei* since it is very likely nowadays that one will not have proper *Kavanah* (intent/concentration) the second time as well.

The *Aruch Hashulchan* wonders why the Shulchan Aruch doesn't explicitly state as the Rambam does, that one who knows in advance that he cannot concentrate on his prayer that he shouldn't recite the *She'moneh Esrei* until he can focus and

¹⁰ Aruch Hashulchan 101: 3

¹¹ Ibid.

concentrate on prayer? He suggests that apparently, the Shulchan Aruch maintains that even if one cannot concentrate properly on his prayer of *She'moneh Esrei*, one is permitted nowadays to proceed to pray as usual. This is based on the Gemora that puts forth an argument to exempt us from prayer altogether, since the troubles of living in Exile make it difficult to concentrate. Although this is not reason enough to exempt us from prayer, it may be the reason why we pray even when we don't concentrate properly. *Ve'tzarich iyun* – this requires further study.

Modim – Giving Thanks

The prayer of *Modim* thanks G-d for providing for us and sustaining us every day of our lives. It is very important to specifically concentrate when saying this prayer since one who gives thanks without sincerity is insulting *Hashem*; not praising.

Hearing One's Own Prayer

The Gemora in *Berachos*¹² deduces from the prayer of *Hannah* that one should not raise one's voice when praying *She'moneh Esrei*. The *Halacha* is that one must at least hear oneself when praying; only it should not be so loud that others will hear him.¹³

If one finds it difficult to concentrate without raising one's voice louder, one may raise his voice as long as one is careful not to disturb others. Therefore, at home one may definitely pray (daven) in a loud voice if necessary. Also one may raise his voice a little louder when davening *She'moneh Esrei* at home if he wishes to teach his children how to daven.

A Time to be Loud; A Time to be Quiet

The *Halacha* of being quiet applies specifically to the *Amidah She'moneh Esrei* which is derived from *Hannah's* prayer. However, when reciting other prayers or when reciting verses of praise to G-d, it is appropriate to raise one's voice to daven loudly.

The *Aruch Hashulchan*¹⁴ explains that when one is davening *She'moneh Esrei* it is as if one is standing before G-d. Therefore, it is considered inappropriate to raise one's

¹² *Daf*31a

¹³ Magen Avraham 101: 3

¹⁴ *Simon* 102:3

voice; acting as if *Hashem* can't hear him. On the other hand, the Ramban writes that when we pray we should specifically raise our voices to beseech G-d for our needs as the *pasuk* states *Va'yikra'u el Elokim be'chazaka* בחזקה אל אלקים ויקראו (And they called out to G-d, forcefully¹⁵). This refers to personal prayers which require more emotion and passion. Likewise, when we exalt *Hashem* with words of praise, we also should raise our voices, demonstrating our excitement and joy.

Cleanliness and Hygiene

There are specific rules of cleanliness and hygiene necessary for prayer. Some are strict that they actually invalidate the prayer while others do not invalidate the prayer.

- § If one prays in the proximity of excrement, the prayer is invalid¹⁶.
- § If one prays in the proximity of one who is in the midst of passing water, the prayer is invalid.
- § If one prays in the presence of an unclad individual, the prayer is invalid.
- § If one prays with excrement on one's body, even if when covered by one's clothing, the prayer is invalid.

Additional laws are:

- § One should not pray without washing one's hands in the morning.
- § One should not pray without washing one's hands after defecating, urinating, bathing, manicuring etc.
- § One should not pray where there is urine on the floor.
- § One should not pray where there is a foul odor.

¹⁵ *Yonah* 3: 8

¹⁶ Unless it was totally unexpected to be there.

Proper Dress

Proper dress and a head covering for males are also necessary for *Tefilla* (Prayer). A married woman is required to wear a head covering.

Men are required to gird their waistline with a belt or some other means of separating between their heart and the lower portion of their body.

Hee'kone: Preparing Oneself in Service of Hashem

The Gemora in *Shabbos*¹⁷ explains that a person is obligated to *daven* in attire befitting for *Hashem's* service. For example, a person should wear a belt or a hat to be appropriately dressed for his encounter with *Hashem* when davening *She'moneh Esrei*. The Gemora's source for this *Halacha* is from the prophet *Amos*¹⁸. The *pasuk* (verse) states *Hee'kone likrass Hashem Elokecha*. *Rashi* explains the word *Hee'kone* to mean to beautify. This means one must present himself in proper dignified attire when davening to *Hashem*. Another aspect of this is with relation to hygiene and cleanliness.

Tosefos Yeshanim

Tosefos Yeshanim in *Yoma*¹⁹ writes that when one passes water avoiding touching anything unclean, one should wash his hands even on *Yom Kippur*²⁰. This is because when someone has just passed water, it's necessary to ready oneself for Prayer by washing one's hands, even though there is no tangible dirt. This is derived from the above verse - *Hee'kone*.

¹⁷ *Daf*10a

¹⁸ 4: 12

¹⁹ *Daf*77b

²⁰ On *Yom Kippur* one is not allowed to wash or bathe for pleasure. However, one may wash in order to remove dirt.

Ritva²¹

The Ritva also follows the opinion of the Tosefos Yeshanim. He says that one should wash his hands even on *Yom Kippur* before engaging in Torah study or in preparation of Prayer. This is permitted just as one is allowed to wade through a stream of water to greet his *Rebbe* (Torah teacher), despite the general prohibition of bathing and washing on *Yom Kippur*. Although only a moist towel or moist fingertips are used on *Yom Kippur* to wipe one's eyes clean in the morning, in this case one may wash his hands completely as usual, since it's done as a fulfillment of *Hee'kone*; not for one's own pleasure which would be forbidden on *Yom Kippur*.

The Ritva in *Mesechta Ta'anis*²² writes that both on *Tish'a B'Av* and on *Yom Kippur* one may wash one's hands after passing water because of *Hee'kone*. One does not have to resort to using some other means to cleanse his hands. Since one does this only for *Hee'kone*, it's permissible, as it is not done for personal pleasure. (See *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim Simon 613 se'if 3* and related commentaries where this *Halacha* is discussed²³).

Pri Megadim²⁴

The Pri Megadim in Simon 7²⁵ concludes (*paskens*) that after relieving oneself, even if one didn't touch any excrement or other unclean things, one still may not recite the *bracha* of *Asher yotzar* (the blessing said after relieving oneself) unless one first washes his hands. However, when just passing water outside of a bathroom²⁶, according to strict *Halacha* one is allowed to recite *Asher yotzar* without washing one's hands. It's only because of *Hee'kone* that it is preferable to wash one's hands

²¹ Ritva – R' Yom Tov Ben Avraham Ashbili -**Born:** Seville, Spain, 1250. **Died:** Seville, Spain, 1330. **Notes:** Talmudist. Student of the Raah and the Rashba. Author of a very concise commentary on the Talmud, **Chidushei HaRitva**. Author of **Sefer HaZikaron/The Book of Remembrance** in defense of the Rambam.

²² Daf 30b

²³ The Shulchan Aruch Harav 613: 4, 5 brings that there is a distinction if he needs to daven or if it's at night and he will not be returning to davening. If he didn't touch anything dirty and he's not returning to davening he may recite *Asher Yotzar* without washing. However if he will return to his davening he should wash up until his knuckles in order to fulfill *Hee'kone*.

²⁴ Pri Megadim – R' Yoseph Ben Meir Teomin - Notes: Author of Pri Megadim a two-part commentary including Mishbatzos Zahav, commentary to the Taz and Eshel Avraham, commentary to the Magen Avraham. Author of Rosh Yosef, Chidushim on several Talmud treatises.

²⁵ *Eishel Avraham S"K 1*

²⁶ If he were in a bathroom, he would be required to wash his hands, even if he just enters without using the facilities.

before reciting any *bracha*. The Shulchan Aruch Harav also mentions just the reason of *Hee'kone* with regard to this *Halacha*.

One Should Wash One's Hands

The Rama states in *Simon* 47:13 that one should preferably wash one's hands prior to reciting the *Birchos haTorah* and before engaging in Torah study. However, if one doesn't have water, one may study Torah even without washing.

The Biur HaGra explains that this *Halacha* is based on the concept of *Hee'kone*. In order to prepare oneself for the lofty *mitzvah* of Torah study, one needs to wash one's hands in honor of the *mitzvah*. The Gra cites that the source for this *Halacha* is from *Simon* 7 se'if 2.

Understanding the Concept of Hee'kone

In *Simon* 7 se'if 2 the Mechaber writes:

If one passes water but does not wipe oneself, although one is required to say the blessing of *Asher yotzar* one doesn't need to wash his hands. However it is still preferable to do so

1. because of cleanliness or
2. because of *Hee'kone*.

The Biur Halacha rules that if one wipes oneself by hand in middle of a meal, one would have to wash that hand according to the *Halacha* of washing for a meal of bread as mentioned in the Gemora *Yoma*²⁷. He would then only need to wash the second hand before resuming the meal because of *Hee'kone*.

Aruch Hashulchan

The Aruch Hashulchan²⁸ explains that the two reasons given by the Mechaber are similar in nature. He says:

3. The first reason is because of sensitivity to human dignity.

²⁷ *Daf* 30 *Tannu Rabbanan Halacha ba'se'udah etc.*

²⁸ *Simon* 7: 3

4. The second reason that the Mechaber gives about *Hee'kone* is explaining that the need to wash is because our sensitivity to act dignified when davening to Hashem.

Both of these ideas are extrapolated from the Gemora in Shabbos²⁹ that one needs to don appropriate attire before proceeding to daven as the Gra also points out. The Biur Halacha³⁰ points to the Mechaber in Simon 91: 2, which states that a man must wear a belt for davening, but it is not necessary for reciting *brochos*. This seems to contradict the *Halacha* here that one should wash for *brochos* too because of *Hee'kone*.

The Aruch Hashulchan explains that although the Gemora in *Shabbos* is only speaking with regard to *Tefilla*, we apply it to *brochos* in general. That's because the Gemora in *Shabbos* is discussing the law of presenting oneself in a dignified manner when beseeching *Hashem* in prayer. However, here we're discussing matters that are repulsive such as uncleanliness which falls into another aspect of *Hee'kone* that applies to all *brochos* as well as to Torah study.

²⁹ *Daf*10a

³⁰ *Simon* 7 d"h *Oh mishum Hee'kone*

Questions:

1. What is the difference between the Tetragrammaton and the Name of *Adnus* i.e. Lordship (*Adonye*³¹)?
2. What does the Name *Elokim* represent?
3. If one performs a *mitzvah de'oraissa* without specific intent to fulfill his Torah obligation, when must he redo the *mitzvah* and when not?
4. What two thoughts must one keep in mind when praying *She'moneh Esrei* as explained by Rav Chaim Soloveitchik zt"l of *Brisk*?
5. What does the *Chazon Ish* maintain regarding about the way one start *She'moneh Esrei*?
6. What is the significance of the number 113 in *She'moneh Esrei*?
7. From where do we learn that it's better not to raise one's voice during *She'moneh Esrei* and why is it inappropriate particularly then?
8. What types of uncleanness invalidates one's prayer?
9. Give two examples for the need to wash one's hands before Prayer.
10. What type of required dress is important particularly for a man for Prayer?

³¹ This Name should only be pronounced when reciting a verse in full or when reciting a blessing. Otherwise we refer to it as Name of *Adnus*.

Answers:

1. When uttering the Tetragrammaton one should concentrate that G-d is the Master over everything and that His existence spans from eternity to eternity. While saying the Name of *Adnus*, it is sufficient just to have in mind that G-d is the Master over everything.
2. *Elokim* represents that G-d is All-powerful.
3. If it is self evident that the *mitzvah de'oraissa* is being performed only for the sake of the *mitzvah*, it is valid even when there was no specific intent to fulfill the *mitzvah*. If however the *mitzvah* is sometimes performed when one is not fulfilling a Torah command then one is required to repeat the *mitzvah* with the appropriate intent.
4. (1) That he is standing now in front of G-d
(2) That he should understand the words of his prayer to G-d
5. The *Chazon Ish* maintains that as long as one starts *She'moneh Esrei* with the intent that he is standing before G-d in Prayer that is sufficient even if he forgets this while reciting the rest of *She'moneh Esrei*.
6. There are 113 words in the endings of the brochos of *She'moneh Esrei* corresponding to the 113 words in *Hannah's* heartfelt prayer to G-d for a son. There is also 113 times that the word *Lev* (heart) appears in the Torah.
7. We learn this from the quiet but verbalized prayer of *Hannah* for a son. Since during *She'moneh Esrei* one is considered to be standing in front of *Hashem*, one need not raise his voice.
8. If there is excrement, flowing urine or someone that is unclad.
9. One is when one's hand's touched something unclean, after waking up in the morning, after bathing or manicuring.
10. A belt.