

THE PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM ROADMAP TO PRAYER PROJECT

The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson 28

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Rehov Kahanamin 54, Bnei Brac 03.616.6340
164 Village Path, Lakewood NJ 08701 732.370.3344 fax 1.877.Pirchei (732.367.8168)

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Lesson

28

Ashrei

The significance of Ashrei: Three times a day

Ashrei is recited in our daily prayers 3 times each day. The prayer of *Ashrei* actually begins with the verse *Tebilla le'David Aromimcha Elokeye Hamelech va'Avorcha Shimcha le'Olam Va'ed* (A praise of David; I exalt you highly my G-d the King; I praise you to eternity...) The beginning 2 verses of *Ashrei* are not part of the same chapter. Rather they were added at its beginning like the verse of *Va'anachnu Nevaresh Kab etc.* is an addition at the end of this prayer; ending with the word *Hallelukah*, to fit with the remaining chapters of *Tehillim* that all begin and end with the word *Hallelukah*.

Ashrei Yashvei Veisecha (Fortunate are those who dwell in Your house)

The 3 places we recite *Ashrei* are once at the beginning of *Pesukei De'Zimra*, again here by *Ashrei-U'rab Le'Tzijone* (also known as *Kedusha De'Sidra*). A third time is at the beginning of *Tefillas Mincha* (the Afternoon Prayer).

The *Gemara* in *Berachos*¹ states that one who recites *Ashrei* three times a day will merit *olam Haba* (the World to Come). The *Gemara* goes on to explain why *Ashrei* is so important. One reason is because each of its verses begins with another letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Another reason why *Ashrei* is such an important prayer is because of the verse *Pose'ach es yadecha u'masbiah le'chol chai ratzone* (You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing).

The *Abudraham* explains the significance of these 2 points. The fact that each verse begins with another letter of the Hebrew alphabet is to signify that we sing G-d's

By Shemoneh Esrei we learned that one of the benefits of praying with a Minyan is that even if one did not concentrate fully when reciting Shemoneh Esrei, still it is most likely that their combined tefillas have an entire Shemoneh Esrei said with concentration. Similarly, an individual that recites these verses 3 times a day will more than likely have succeeded in reciting the entire set of verses at least once with Kavanah

¹ *Berachos daf* 4b

praise in all manners of expression. The specific verse of *Pose'ach es Yadecha* expresses our recognition that *Hashem* is omnipotent and the *Merciful One* (i.e. the source of all mercy) who sustains all forms of life. For these reasons, one should, make a concerted effort to recite this chapter with utmost *Kavanah* (concentration) and especially when saying the verse *Pose'ach es Yadecha*. We recite these verses 3 times a day to ensure that we at least concentrate one time.

The guarantee that saying these verses merits one a portion in *Olam Haba* (the World to Come) means that if one would be considered to have a balance of 50/50 between fulfilling *Mitzvos* and transgressing *Aveiras* at the end of his life, the *Mitzvab* of *Ashrei* will tip the scale if it is amongst the *Mitzvos* that already had fulfilled in one's lifetime. The reason for adding the 2 verses of *Ashrei* as an introduction to *Tehilla Le'David* is because the *Gemara* in *Berachos*² derives from here that before praying, one should take time to prepare oneself and appease one's mind so that one will concentrate well in prayer. Therefore, it serves as an introduction to *Pesukei De'Zimra* in preparation for *Shemoneh Esrei*, the main part of prayer. The verse at the end which begins with *Va'anachnu Neva'rech Kab* (and we bless You, G-d) was also added on to *Tehilla Le'David* because it speaks of *Olam Haba* and one that recites these verses is performing a special *mitzvab* that can potentially help him gain entry into *Olam Haba*. Once this arrangement was configured, we recite the same by all prayers as a matter of uniformity.

Ashrei: A Plea or Praise?

The *Zohar* explains the three times we recite *Ashrei* as follows. The first time we recite *Ashrei* in *Pesukei De'Zimra* it is meant to be praise to *Hashem* Who sustains the entire gamut of creation. *Ashrei* is the essential section of *Pesukei De'Zimra* which is meant to be verses of praise to *Hashem*. What's more is that it would be considered inappropriate to entreat *Hashem* before we recite *Shemoneh Esrei* with the arrangement of 3 blessings of praise before we ask for our personal matters. The next two times that we recite *Ashrei*; here towards the end of prayer and again later in the afternoon by *Tefillas Mincha*, it is intended as a supplication and entreaty to *Hashem* to sustain us and provide for us by giving us our daily needs. We should have in mind a prayer not only for our personal financial well-being, but for the financial well-being of the entire nation. This corresponds to the two daily meals that the Torah describes that *Hashem* gave to the *Bnei Yisrael* in the *Midbar*.

² *Daf* 30b

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה, בְּתַת הַשָּׁם לָכֶם בְּעֶרְבַּי בָּשָׂר לֶאֱכֹל וּלְחֶם בַּבֹּקֶר לְשִׂבְעַ³

8. And Moses said, When the G-d gives you in the evening meat to eat and bread in the morning [with which] to become sated

The placement of this supplication fits with the order of *Tefilla* as this part of davening is where we start our descent from the higher spheres of *Kedusha* to the more ordinary and mundane. This supplication enlisting *Hashem's* blessings for providing our needs is a means of integrating our physical pursuits into a context of spirituality⁴.

Some people have a *minhag* (custom) to touch their *Tefillin* (both of them) while reciting the *pasuke* (verse) *Pose'ach es yadecha* as a prayer for *Parnassah* (sustenance). The *sefer Ta'amei Haminhagim*⁵ writes that this indicates that our request for *Hashem* to provide us our sustenance is only so that we can continue to keep His *Torah* and *Mitzvos* as symbolized by the *mitzvah* of *Tefillin*.

Eating to Serve the Creator

The lesson of integrating our physical pursuits into a context of spirituality is explained by the *Sforno* about the above-mentioned episode in the desert after the Exodus where the Jews complained to Moshe Rabbeinu about their food situation. Moshe responded to them that *Hashem* will provide them with meat in the evening “to eat” and with bread in the morning “to become satiated”. The *Sforno* explains Moshe’s response as follows. *Hashem* was teaching them a lesson about eating habits. As part of their education in becoming a G-dly nation, removed from the culture of the Egyptians where they lived so many years, *Hashem* was to give them two meals a day. In the evening, they would eat the meat of the quail not to be satiated, for that would be indulging in their own pleasurable experience like the Egyptian culture of indulging in food. Likewise, in the morning they would receive bread to eat “to be satiated”. This would teach them proper eating habits, which are befitting to a G-dly nation. Unlike their neighbors of over 200 years ago who would indulge in excessive eating and would eat at any opportunity “as chickens that peck for food all day long”. Instead, the Jews were expected to curb their physical desire to indulge in eating and they were to set their meals to specific times of the day, to create an

³ *Shemos* 16

⁴ Please refer to Lesson 2, the four spheres of *Atzilus, Briyah, Yetzirah and Assiyah*

⁵ *Mishna Berura* 132:2

attitude of eating to maintain one's health in order to use one's energy to serve *Hashem*. With this we can understand another verse that is stated in the context of this story. And [by *Hashem* giving you food] you will know that I am *Hashem* that took you out of Egypt. This seems to be out of place. What does food have to do with *Hashem* being the One Who took the Jews out of Egypt? Rather, the Torah is saying that by *Hashem* setting the standard for the Jews on how to eat properly, He will be taking them further away from the culture of Egypt. The Exodus was not complete by just physically freeing us from Egypt, but it was just the beginning of a process of freeing us from the influence of the culture of the Egyptians.

The Fundamental Principle of Tehilla Le'David

Rav Yechezkel Levenstein זצ"ל asks: What is the secret behind saying *Tehilla Le'David* thrice daily that it merits one a place in *Olam Haba*? How can it be that reciting these verses automatically gains someone who is not that righteous to be worthy of entering the World to Come solely for davening *Ashrei* three times a day, every single day?

Rav Yechezkel זצ"ל answers that indeed, it's not the recital alone that brings one to *Olam Haba*. Rather, the poignant lesson of *Ashrei* is what has the ability to make an indelible mark on the soul of a person that makes him the very fiber that is *Olam Haba*. One who lives his life by the notion that he directs his own fate and that his accomplishments are commensurate to his talents and abilities is living a deceitful life devoid of G-d. True he may pray and even study Torah, but it is no more than superficial lip-service that he's exhibiting. In his inner person he believes in himself more than in G-d. The lesson of *Ashrei* and *Tehilla Le'David* is that G-d sustains the entire creation from big to small; from the tiniest insects to the biggest and most powerful elephants. G-d sustains and supports the entire "system" of nature. *Einei chol eilecha yesabeirnu veatta nossen labem es ochlom be'itto* - all eyes turn to *Hashem* with hope [to receive their nourishment] and You provide them their food in a timely manner. One who lives his life with this recognition will gain entry into *Olam Haba* even if from time to time he errs and is influenced by his *Yetzer Hara* (Evil Inclination), but he remains steadfast in his belief that *Hashem* maintains all of nature and provides all that it needs to exist. Such an individual appreciates *Hashem* and deserves *Olam Haba* where this fundamental concept that G-d sustains all is revealed and recognized by all.

Intimations זמז

The first 2 verses that were added on to *Ashrei* contain the word *Ashrei* (fortunate) 3 times. This is to intimate that one who says these verses 3 times a day will merit a portion in the World to Come.

The *Abudraham* adds another remark. Each *pasuke* in the chapter of *Tehilla Le'David* has the letter *Vav* (ו) connecting the second half of the verse to first half. E.g. בְּכָל יוֹם וְגִבּוֹרֹתֶיךָ יְדַבְּרֶרְךָ; וְאֶהְלֵלָה שְׁמֶךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. There are two exceptions; the letter *Heh* and the letter *Kaph*. The second half of the *pasuke* that begins with a *Heh* is *Erech Apayim u'gedol chassed* אֵרַךְ אַפַּיִם וְגָדֹל חֶסֶד. Likewise, the *pasuke* that begins with the letter *Kaph* starts the second half with the words *Lechol asher yikra'ubnu be'emmes* (for all those who call to Him truthfully) לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרְאוּהוּ בְּאֵמֶת. The letters ל**א spell the word *Chok Keil*, i.e. it is a Divine Law to recite these verses daily.

The *Lemsh* writes that the reason for reciting *Ashrei* during *Pesukei De'Zimra* is for itself as it is the main theme of *Pesukei De'Zimra*. Later on we repeat it to distinguish between the *Kedusha* of *Shemoneh Esrei* and the *Kedusha* of *Kedusha De'Sidra*. Likewise, we recite it again by *Mincha* as it is joined with *Kedusha*. By *Ma'ariv* we don't recite *Ashrei* since by nighttime it is not fitting to say praise to *Hashem* according to *Kabbalistic writings*.

הלכות Laws

Any important announcement that needs to be announced during prayer should not be announced before the start of *Kedusha De'sidra*, so as not to interfere with one's concentration during this important part of davening⁶.

We should note this *Halacha* so that we should be careful not to distract ourselves by rushing through this part of davening, by removing and wrapping one's *Tallis* or *Tefillin*. Nor should one be busy

switching one's *Tefillin* from *Rashi* to *Rabbeinu Ta'am*. Not because these things are forbidden, but simply because it detracts us from

An additional merit is gained as the Chafetz Chaim writes that one who is meticulous in performing a Mitzvah that most people are lax in fulfilling properly, merits great reward; for in a sense he's taking care of a Meiss Mitzvah⁷ (caring for the dead) which is regarded as an extremely lofty Mitzvah.

concentrating properly on this important section of *Tefilla*. One who is meticulous in this will merit great reward as is promised by the *Gemara*.

One who did not at least concentrate during the recital of the verse *Pose'ach es yadecha* (Open Your hands) must repeat it starting from those words until the end⁸.

⁷ Lit. a dead person who doesn't have anyone to take care of interring his remains

- ☞ The *Birchei Yosef* is quoted by Rav Ovadiah Yosef *shlit"l* that only the verse of *Pose'ach es Yadecha* needs to be repeated and not the whole chapter from there to the end.
- ☞ If during *Pesukei De'Zimra* one doesn't have time to go back to that point to recite it again because the congregation is starting the next section of davening (prayer), he should at least recite it after davening⁹.
- ☞ Rav Moshe Feinstein¹⁰ *z"l* suggests that it is better for one to recite the phrase *Pose'ach es yadecha* alone¹¹ while still in the midst of *Pesukei De'Zimra*, since *Ashrei* is the main section necessary for reciting *Pesukei De'Zimra*.
- ☞ One who hears the congregation reciting *Ashrei*, should recite it along with the *Tzibbur*¹². The *Aruch Hashulchan*¹³ notes that in practice, people do not follow this ruling.

The Beis Hamikdash

The *Gemara* in *Berachos* tells us that there are 3 points during the nighttime hours where *Hashem* weeps for the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* and the exile of the Jewish Nation. At those times, a heavenly voice is heard where *Hashem* laments the sorrow state of the *Beis Hamikdash* and of the Jewish Nation. Corresponding to these 3 cries we say *Ashrei Yoshevei Veisecha* (fortunate are those who dwell in Your houses) that mentions the word *Ashrei* 3 times. Today, the *shul* is the closest we get to a place where there is some level of Divine Presence. A *shul* or *Beis Knesses* is described by our Sages as a *Mikdash Me'at*, a miniature *Beis Hamikdash*. In a world of *Galus* - Jewish exile, we find some form of refuge within the walls of a *shul* where people gather to pour their hearts out in prayer and for the return of *Hashem's* Divine Presence at the

⁸ *Mishna Berura* 51:16 quoting *Chayei Adam* from *Levush*

⁹ *Mishna Berura* 51:15, 16

¹⁰ *Orach Chaim* Volume 2:16

¹¹ I.e. as in the case of the *Mishna Berura* who mentioned to say it after davening if he has no time to recite it all over again from *Pose'ach es yadecha* until the end and through the order of *Pesukei De'Zimra*

¹² *Ibid.* 62:9

¹³ 62:6

Beis Hamikdash. Fortunate are those who make the *shul* - *Beis Knesses* their home away from home; until *U'vah leTziyone Go'eil* (when the Redeemer will come to Zion).

טז לכן אמר כה אמר השם כי הרחקתי בגוים וכי הפיצותים בארצות ואהי להם למקדש
מעט בארצות אשר באו שם¹⁴:

16. Therefore, say; So said the Lord God: Although I have removed them far off among the nations and although I have scattered them in the lands, I have become for them a minor sanctuary in the lands where they have come.

The *Gemara* in *Megillah*¹⁵ states - *Rebbe Yitzchok* that מעט למקדש מהם ואהי להם And I will be *there* for them in their synagogues and their places of study.

Rava learns the same from the verse

א. תפלה למשה איש האלקים השם מעון אתה היית לנו בדר ודר:

1. A prayer of Moses, the man of G-d. *O'Hashem*, You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.

Abaye commented that originally he would study at home and pray in the synagogue (House of prayer). After hearing the above mentioned verse, I started to study in the House of prayer.

Thus we see that the House of prayer is a place where the *Shechina* (the Divine Presence) resides.

And finally, the *Gemara* there concludes with *Rebbe Eliezer Hakapar* saying that there will come a time in the future when all the synagogues and Houses of Study will be transported to the Land of Israel in them Torah was studied and disseminated.

Lamnatzei'ach Mizmor Le'Dovid:

Ya'anacha Hashem Bayome Tzara

Rebbe Yeboshua ben Levi said, there are 9 *pesukim* in this chapter corresponding to the 9 months of childbirth. This alludes to the fact that *Hashem* watches over a woman in

¹⁴ *Yechezkel/Ezekiel* 11:16

¹⁵ *Daf* 29a

childbirth, helping her through the dangers involved. People say [to someone in distress] “May *Hashem* protect and save you as He does for a woman in childbirth.

Rebbe Shimon bar Abba says, there are 18 chapters of Psalms up until this chapter of *Ya'ancha Hashem bayome tzara* (*Hashem* should respond to you in times of trouble). Although this is chapter 20, the first two chapters of *Tehillim* are really one, making this the one after 18. [Likewise, after we pray *Shemoneh Esrei*, the 18 blessings, *Hashem* will respond to your needs]. (*Medrash Shochar Tov, Tehillim 20:2*)

The Era of the Messiah

The *Abudraham* writes that this chapter alludes to the time right before the coming of *Mashiach*. *Yom tzara* (A day of trouble) refers to a verse in Daniel 12:1 – *Ve'haysab eis tzara le'Yaakov* (it will be a time of trouble for Jacob). Then, *Yishlach ezrecha mikodesh* (Send Your deliverance from holiness) refers to *Mashiach ben David* (the son i.e. seed; of David). This dovetails with the next portion of davening, *U'rab Le'Tziyone goeil* (and the Redeemer will come to Zion). The *sefer Maggid Tzedek* adds that just as we recite the verse *Yibyu le'ratzone imrei fi* at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei* as *David Hamelech* said this verse at the 19th chapter of *Tehillim*, so too we say it right at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*. Likewise, we continue the same theme here that *Hashem* will answer *David's* prayers of 18 psalms – *Ya'ancha Hashem bayome tzara* (*Hashem* will answer you at a time of distress). After this we begin the next portion of davening (prayer) with *U'rab Le'Tziyone Go'ail* (and the Redeemer will come to Zion).

*Aruch Hashulchan*¹⁶ writes that the chapter of *Lamnatzei'ach* refers to *Yaakov Avinu* (Jacob) who had a difficult life raising his family and earning a livelihood. Still, *Hashem* stood by him and answered his prayers. Likewise, we pray that *Hashem* should answer our prayers just as He did with *Yaakov Avinu*. *Ya'ancha Hashem Bayome Tzara* (*Hashem* should answer you in a day of trouble) - May *Hashem* answer all our *Tefillos* too.

Lamnatzei'ach: When to say it

There are two customs regarding the days this chapter is omitted due to the fact that it alludes to times of trouble. The *Rama*¹⁷ writes that we don't recite it this chapter of *Tehillim* on the eve of major Festivals or on the day after a major Festival. Likewise, we do not recite it on Purim days. However, on the other days which *Tachanun* is

¹⁶ 131:3

¹⁷ 131: 1

omitted, we still say *Lamnatzei'ach*. The custom of *Sephardim*¹⁸ is not to say *Lamnatzei'ach* on any day we omit *Tachanun*¹⁹. The *Mishna Berura*²⁰ writes that on any day we don't recite *Lamnatzei'ach* we also don't recite *Keil Erech Apayim* before removing the *Sefer Torah* from the *Aron Kodesh* on Mondays and Thursdays.

If there will be a Bris Milah (circumcision)

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ז"ל rules that one who is celebrating a *Bris* of a son, or the *Mobel* and the *Sandek*²¹ are all considered to be celebrating a private Yom Tov. Even though in the case of *Lamnatzei'ach* they do not exempt the entire congregation from saying it as they exempt the entire from reciting *Tachanun*, still they themselves should not say it. Likewise, if the congregation wishes to recite the chapter of *Lamnatzei'ach* after davening (prayer) for the *Refuah* (healing) of someone who is ill, as is the custom of many synagogues during weekdays, one may recite this same chapter for that purpose without hesitation²².

Lamnatzei'ach is customarily not recited in the House of a mourner.

In Siman 108²³ there's another interesting *Halacha* that relates to *Ashrei*. It is discussing someone that missed one of the daily prayers that one should daven at the next prayer the first prayer for the next prayer one becomes obligated to pray for. If for example one missed davening *Ma'ariv* the night before, then after reciting the *Shemoneh Esrei* for *Shacharis* one should pray *Shemoneh Esrei* again for the missed *Tefilla* of *Ma'ariv*. The *Mechaber paskens* (rules) that one should recite *Ashrei* between the two *Shemoneh Esreis*. Afterwards, when he reaches the point that he would normally recite *Ashrei* again before *U'vah Le'Tzyone*, he may omit it since he already recited it earlier. The *Rama* adds that the same law applies when davening two *Shemoneh Esreis* by *Ma'ariv*, he should first recite *Ashrei* even though we never recite

¹⁸ *Kaf Hachaim* 131:37

¹⁹ See *Orach Chaim* 191: 6 for a list of days we omit *Tachanun*

²⁰ 131:35

²¹ The individual who is given the honor of holding the baby on his lap during the actual circumcision procedure

²² See *Tefilla Ke'Hilchasa* Chapter 17 footnote 2 for a dissenting opinion

²³ *Se'if* 2

Ma'ariv before davening (praying) *Ma'ariv*. The *Mishna Berura*²⁴ brings that there are opinions that rule according to *Kabala* one never recites *Ashrei* at night. However, if it is not yet dark, one may recite *Ashrei* according to all opinions. This is true despite the fact that one can argue that the entire *Ashrei* is just to make up for the *Ashrei* missed by *Mincha*.

²⁴ S"K 14

Questions:

- 1) What makes *Ashrei* such a significant prayer?
 - 2) Explain the significance of each point according to the *Abudraham*.
 - 3) What does the *Gemara* promise for reciting *Ashrei* and for how many times? (according to the *Abudraham*)
 - 4) Why was *Ashrei Yashvei Veisecha* (fortunate are the one's who dwell in Your house) added to the chapter of *Tebilla Le'David*?
 - 5) How does the *Zohar* distinguish between the first *Ashrei* and the subsequent two *Ashreis*?
 - 6) How does the *Sforno* explain the verse "And [by *Hashem* giving you food] you will know that I am *Hashem* that took you out of Egypt"?
 - 7) How does saying *Ashrei* automatically make one merit *Olam Haba*?
 - 8) What are the two main *Halachic* points regarding reciting *Ashrei* properly?
 - 9) What should one do if he does not have the time to repeat the entire section from *Pose'ach es yadecha*, according to the *Mishna Berura* and according to Rav Moshe Feinstein ז"ל?
 - 10) What connection is there between *Ashrei* and the *Beis Hamikdash*?
 - 11) Is the rule regarding reciting *Lamatzei'ach* the same as for *Tachanun*?
 - 12) What is the rule regarding when to omit *Keil Erech Apayim* that's usually said before taking the *Sefer Torah* from the *Aron Kodesh*?
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Answers:

- 1) It contains the entire Hebrew alphabet in the beginning of each verse. It also contains the verse *Pose'ach es yadecha u'masbiab le'chol chai ratzone* (You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing).
 - 2) The fact that *Ashrei* begins with each letter of the alphabet signifies our desire to praise *Hashem* through every kind of expression we can express ourselves with.
 - 3) One who recites *Ashrei* thrice daily will merit gaining entry to *Olam Haba* (the World to Come).
 - 4) It was added since although the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, we are at least fortunate to have the Divine Presence in the synagogue and the *Beis Hamedrash*.
 - 5) The first one we recite solely as praise to *Hashem*. The latter two we also concentrate that *Hashem* should provide us with sustenance.
 - 6) The *Sforno* explains that after the Exodus we needed to be weaned off of the Egyptian culture. By doing so, *Hashem* was taking us further away from *Mitzrayim* and its culture.
 - 7) It doesn't. Rather one who says it sincerely and understands how He sustains all the creatures and is the all Merciful One, deserves to enter into *Olam Haba*.
 - 8) One should try hard to concentrate on the entire chapter. One should especially concentrate on the *pasuke Po'sei'ach es yadecha*.
 - 9) According to the *Mishna Berura*, he should recite it later after davening. Rav Moshe Feinstein ז"ל.
 - 10) *Ashrei* praises those who make their place of study as their home. They are fortunate to at least have the synagogue in place of the *Beis Hamikdash*.
 - 11) According to *Sephardim*, they do not recite *Lamatz'ei'ach* on a day that *Tachanun* is not said. According to *Ashkenazim* (Rama) it is not said on festival days but it is not the same as for saying *Tachanun*.
 - 12) *Keil Erech Apayim* that's usually said before taking the *Sefer Torah* from the *Aron Kodesh* is omitted whenever *Lamatz'ei'ach* is.
-