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# OVERVIEW OF THE AMIDAH II

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## The Way to Pray – In Thought and Action

In the first Morasha class on the Amidah, we focused on the historical background of the Amidah, the structure of its blessings, and the advantages of standardized prayer. In this class we will turn our attention to the details of how to pray the Amidah: how we articulate our prayers, which way we face, and how we show our deference to God. The shiur also examines why the silent prayer is repeated by the *Chazzan* (prayer leader) in the *shacharit* (morning) and *minchah* (afternoon) prayers with important consequences for when our prayers are actually answered. Finally, we will understand the importance of concentrating on the prayers.

This class will address the following questions:

- If the Amidah is a “silent” prayer, why then do we still quietly say the words? Why not just “think” them?
- How should we stand during the Amidah and why?
- Why do we face Jerusalem when we pray the Amidah?
- Why does the Chazzan (prayer leader) repeat the Amidah out loud after everyone has already recited it privately?
- What level of concentration is required while reciting the Amidah, and how does a person achieve it?

### Class Outline:

- Section I. How to Pray
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## SECTION I. HOW TO PRAY

### PART A. SILENT PRAYER, MOVING LIPS

In Judaism, prayer must be verbalized. But when it comes to the Amidah, we are to recite it quietly so that no one else can hear. Below we explore the reason behind both requirements, to verbalize and yet to do so quietly.

The rules of how we conduct ourselves during prayer are derived from the account of Chanah's earnest prayer. Chanah (Hannah), the wife of Elkana, was barren for many years and caused her anguish. She traveled to the Tabernacle in Shilo and prayed to God that He grant her a child, and she later gave birth to the prophet Shmuel (Samuel).

#### 1. **Shmuel I 1:9-15 – Chanah poured her heart out in prayer.**

And Hannah arose after eating and after drinking, and Eli the priest was sitting on the chair beside the doorpost of the Temple of the Lord. And she was bitter in spirit, and she prayed to the Lord, and wept...And it was, as she prayed long before the Lord, that Eli watched her mouth. But Hannah was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, and her voice was not heard, and Eli thought her to be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her: Until when will you be drunk? Throw off your wine from upon yourself. And Hannah answered and said: No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit, and neither new wine nor old wine have I drunk, and I poured out my soul before the Lord.

ותקם חנה אחרי אכלה בשלה ואחרי שתה ועלי הכהן ישב על הכסא על מזוזת היכל יקוק: והיא מרת נפש ותתפלל על יקוק ובכה תבכה: ... והיה כי הרבתה להתפלל לפני יקוק ועלי שמר את פיה: וחנה היא מדברת על לבה רק שפתיה נעות וקולה לא ישמע ויחשבה עלי לשכרה: ויאמר אליה עלי עד מתי תשתכרין הסירי את יינך מעליך: ותען חנה ותאמר לא אדני אשה קשת רוח אנכי ויין ושכר לא שתיתי ואשפך את נפשי לפני יקוק:

#### 2. **Talmud Bavli Berachot 31a**

Rav Hammuna said: How many important laws can we learn from the verses of Chana's prayer (Shmuel 1:1). "Chanah spoke in her heart": from here we learn that someone who prays must concentrate their heart. "Just her lips moved": from here we learn that when someone prays they must recite the words with their lips. "Her voice was not audible": from here we learn that it is forbidden to raise your voice in prayer.

אמר רב המנונא כמה הלכתא גברוותא איכא למשמע מהני קראי דחנה (שמואל א א) וחנה היא מדברת על לבה מכאן למתפלל צריך שיכוין לבו רק שפתיה נעות מכאן למתפלל שיחתוך בשפתיו וקולה לא ישמע מכאן שאסור להגביה קולו בתפלתו

#### 3. **Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner with Lisa Aiken, The Art of Jewish Prayer, pg. 11 – Verbalizing our prayers helps to create a deeper relationship with God by making His reality more concrete to us.**

One of the tenets of Jewish prayer is that it is not enough simply to "think" a prayer, or to have a certain feeling in one's heart toward God. Jewish prayer requires that people actually say the words that they think or feel. Why do we have to verbalize prayer? Why can't we just feel something in our hearts and communicate it to God through our thoughts?

When two people have a relationship with each other, one of the greatest challenges of the relationship is in communicating effectively with each other ... In the same vein, it's not enough for us to worship God in our hearts. We must also communicate our thoughts and feelings verbally, or they cannot enable us to develop a deeper relationship with God. When we say what we feel, God becomes more of a reality for us, and we show a deeper level of sincerity about the relationship. No normal person speaks out loud unless someone is listening. Our verbalization concretizes for us that God really hears what we say.

Verbalizing our prayers helps us to pray better in another way as well.

#### 4. **Ibid. – Verbalizing helps us to concretize our thoughts.**

Once we verbalize our feelings, they attain a reality that is much stronger for us than had we not committed these feelings to words ... When we say something, the power of our words crystallizes our feelings in a way that demands inner clarification. Until something has been committed to words, it can remain a nebulous feeling. Our relationship with God requires that our inner feelings become clear to us and that we use words to express our feelings to connect with Him.

Prayer is not recited aloud, yet it is not enough to merely meditate the words of the Amidah.

#### 5. **Siddur HaRav, Sha'ar haTefila 18c- d – When you're close, you don't have to shout.**

It says "His left hand is under my head" (Song of Songs 2:6) - this refers to the Amidah. In the Amidah "His right hand embraces me" (Ibid.)... because this is analogous to someone who speaks to the king and whispers secrets in his ear; he speaks to him of very deep secrets. In such a case he certainly nullifies his own existence and doesn't feel his existence, since he has come so close to speak in the ears of the king... This is the meaning of "His right hand embraces me."

כתיב "שמאלו תחת לראשי" וזהו עד שמונה עשרה, ובשמונה עשרה "וימינו תחבקני" ... לפי שזהו כמשל המדבר עם המלך ולוחש לו באזנו בסוד, שמדבר בחשאי מאד, שאז הוא בוודאי בתכלית הביטול במציאות בלתי הרגשה במציאותו, אחר שניגש מקרוב לדבר באזני המלך ... והוא ענין "וימינו תחבקני".

The sense of proximity to God overshadows our own existence as we are overcome by being in the presence of the Almighty. The silent prayers reflect the special intimacy with God that we enjoy during prayer.

### **PART B. FACING JERUSALEM DURING PRAYER**

One prays directly to God. Nevertheless, during our prayers we face toward Jerusalem, the site of the Holy Temple, since from there, our prayers "ascend" to Heaven.

#### 1. **Bereishit (Genesis) 28:16-17 – After fleeing from his brother Eisav (Esau), Yaakov (Jacob) spends the night at the site of the future Temple in Jerusalem, the gateway of all our prayers.**

Yaakov awoke from his sleep, and said: "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I didn't know." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place. This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven."

ויקץ יעקב משנתו ויאמר אכן יש ה' במקום הזה; ואנכי לא ידעתי. ויבא ויאמר מה-נורא המקום הזה: אין זה כי אם-בית אלהים וזה שער השמים.

Jerusalem was designated as the Gate of Heaven from the time of creation, even before the building of the Temple.

**2. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 30a – Wherever we find ourselves, we should strive to face toward Jerusalem during prayer.**

If someone is outside of Israel he should direct his heart toward Israel, as the verse states, “They will pray to You through their land” (Melachim/Kings I:8:48). If he is standing in Israel he should direct his heart toward Jerusalem as the verse states, “They will pray to God via the city that You chose” (Ibid. 44).

If he is standing in Jerusalem he should direct his heart toward the Beit Hamikdash (the Holy Temple), as the verse states, “they will pray toward this house” (Divrei Hayamim/Chronicles II, 6:32)... In this way all the Jews are directing their hearts to a single place. Rav Avin, or others say it was Rav Avina, said: What is the proof text? (Shir HaShirim/Song of Songs 4:4) “Your neck is like the tower of David built with turrets (*talpiot*)”: *talpiot* means the hill (*tal*) that all mouths (*piot*) turn toward.

היה עומד בח"ל יכוין את לבו כנגד ארץ ישראל שנא (מלכים א, ח:מח) והתפללו אליך דרך ארצם.  
היה עומד בארץ ישראל יכוין את לבו כנגד ירושלים שנאמר (מלכים א, ח:מז) והתפללו אל ה' דרך העיר אשר בחרת.

היה עומד בירושלים יכוין את לבו כנגד בית המקדש שנאמר (דברי הימים ב, ו:לב) והתפללו אל הבית הזה... נמצאו כל ישראל מכוונים את לבם למקום אחד א"ר אבין ואיתימא ר' אבינא מאי קראה (שיר השירים ד:ד) כמגדל דויד צוארך בנוי לתלפיות תל שכל פיות פונים בו:

**3. Rabbi Yeshayahu Halevi Horowitz, Kitzur Shnei Luchot Habrit, p. 46b – Before a person begins praying, he should actually envision himself standing in the Temple.**

When a person gets up to pray he should turn his face towards the land of Israel as if he were standing in Jerusalem before the Holy of Holies.

בקומו להתפלל יחזיר פניו כנגד ארץ ישראל כאלו עומד בירושלים נגד קדשי הקדשים.

**PART C. THREE STEPS FORWARD, THREE STEPS BACK**

When we begin the Amidah, we step forward to stand before God; when we conclude, we take three steps back. In a sense, we are stepping up to the plate to pray before God.

**1. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 53b – After a person has finished standing before God in prayer, he takes leave by stepping back.**

Rabbi Alexandri said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: Someone who prayed must take three steps backward and then take leave [of his Master]. Rav Mordechai said to him: After he has stepped three steps backward, he should remain there a few moments.

אמר רבי אלכסנדר רבי יהושע בן לוי המתפלל צריך שיפסיע שלש פסיעות לאחוריו ואחר כך יתן שלום אמר ליה רב מרדכי כיון שפסע שלש פסיעות לאחוריו התם איבעיא ליה למיקם.

2. **Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Ramah), Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 95:1 – A person should step forward before he begins to pray the Amidah.**

When a person is about to pray [the Amidah], he should take three steps forward, like someone approaching and drawing near to something that must be done.

כשעומד להתפלל ילך לפניו ג' פסיעות דרך קרוב והגשה לדבר שצריך לעשות.

Jewish thinkers have seen in this practice of taking three steps allusions to various Biblical events.

3. **Rabbi Yeshayahu Halevi Horowitz, Kitzur Shnei Luchot Habrit p. 46a – The three steps forward before prayer are symbolic of what Moshe did before he prayed.**

The Rokeach writes that when beginning the Amidah a person must take three steps forward. In other words, he must first take three steps back so that he can take three steps forward. The reason is that when Moshe approached before his prayer he entered into three areas – darkness, cloud and smoky darkness. This is also the reason that we take three steps backward at the end of the Amidah, to return from the three areas.

כתב הרוקח קודם שמתחילין שמונה עשרה צריך להפסיע לפניו ג' פסיעות ר"ל ילך לאחוריו ג' פסיעות כדי שיפסיע אחר כך פניו ג' פסיעות והטעם שנגש משה רבינו ע"ה קודם תפלתו לתוך ג' מחיצות חשך ענן וערפל. וזהו גם כן הטעם לאחר סיום תפלת י"ח פוסעים ג' פסיעות לאחוריו לחזור מתוך אותן ג' מחיצות.

4. **Rabbi Avraham Eliezer bar Isaac, Minhagei Yeschurun – Three Biblical figures made an approach in prayer.**

The reason (for taking three steps before the Amidah) is because there are three "approaches" in prayer (found in Tanach): "And Avraham approached," "And Yehudah approached," "and Eliyahu approached."

הטעם משום דכתיב ג' הגשות לתפילה, ויגש אברהם; ויגש אליו יהודה; ויגש אליהו.

## PART D. FEET TOGETHER

When we pray, we should adopt the position of standing straight, with our feet together, like the angels. Man alone was granted the privilege of serving God like the ministering angels.

1. **Zohar, Reiya Mehemna, Bamidbar (Numbers) 229b – While praying, one stands in one place with his feet together, like the angels**

Furthermore "And their [the angels'] feet were straight feet" (Yechezkel/Ezekiel 1:7). The masters of the Mishnah said that someone who prays must have their feet straight [together] like the heavenly angels.... And God said to these who have prepared their feet for prayer by putting them together, "I will open for you the gates of the sanctuary so that you can enter in this

ועוד רגליהם רגל ישרה אמרו מארי מתניתין דמאן דמצלי בעי לתקנא רגלוי בצלותיה כמלאכי השרת... ואמר קודשא בריך הוא אלין דאינון רשימין בצלותיהו הכי לכוון רגלוי כוותיכו אפתחו לון תרעי היכלא לאעלא במראה דא.

2. **Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, pg. 430 (based on teachings by Rabbi Moshe Shapiro) – Standing is a form of prayer through body language.**

Prayer instills a sense of rest and tranquility, because as the individual prays he increases his awareness that everything is in the hands of God. It is for this reason that our central prayer, the Amidah, is recited while standing with our feet together: This stance is identified as being similar to the angels, whom the prophet Ezekiel describes as having “one straight foot.” It is a posture that denoted immobility and demonstrates our belief that without God we are completely powerless and unable to move... The very fact that we stand with our feet together, as if immobilized, is a form of prayer through body language. We are saying that all we are really capable of doing is asking God for life, health, sustenance and everything we need. Our effort alone, without God’s blessing, will accomplish nothing.

**PART E. BOWING**

A person must bow at the beginning and end of two of the blessings of the Amidah. The first takes place at the beginning of the Amidah and comes as an expression of submission before God. The second instance of bowing takes place during the “Modim” (Thanksgiving) section in which we acknowledge God’s kindness to us.

1. **Talmud Bavli, Berachot 12a-b – We bow at the beginning of the blessing and rise when reciting the name of God.**

Rabba bar Chanina the elder said in the name of Rav: Someone who prays - when they bow they should bow at [the word] “Blessed,” and when they stand up they should stand up at God’s Name. Shmuel said: What is Rav’s reason for this? — Because it is written: “God raises the bowed” (Tehillim/Psalms 146)...

ואמר רבה בר חנינא [סבא] משמיה דרב המתפלל כשהוא כורע כורע בברוך וכשהוא זוקף זוקף בשם אמר שמואל מאי טעמא דרב דכתיב (תהילים קמו) ה' זוקף כפופים...

2. **Zohar, Reiya Mehemna, Pinchas 229a – Bowing at the appropriate times enables a person to draw close to God.**

God said, “Someone who doesn’t prepare themselves before Me, to bow at ‘Baruch’ and stand straight at ‘God;’ his prayers will not enter into My sanctuary.”

אמר קב"ה מאן דלא הוי רשים קדמיכו למהוי כורע בברוך וזוקף בה' בקומה דגופא לא ייעול צלותיה בהיכלא דילי.

3. **Siddur Harav- External bowing and internalized bowing**

The idea of bowing in the Amidah is this concept of total nullification of will. This is what our Sages have said, “nullify your will before His will.” It must be also with the body, to bend the head but the main concept is the nullification of one’s will, and this impression will remain after prayers for the rest of the day.

וענין הכריעות בשמונה עשרה הוא בחינת ביטול הרצון מכל וכל כמו שאמרו חז"ל בטל רצונך מפני רצונו, אלא שצריך להיות גם זה בעצם הגוף להרכין הראש. אבל העיקר הוא ביטול הרצון, וזה הרשימה נשאר אחר התפלה על כל היום.



4. **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary on Siddur, Mosad HaRav Kook edition, pg. 76 – Why do we bow and straighten up at these particular words?**

We bow when we say “Blessed.” In this way we express our promise to be disciplined [servants] of God. We stand straight when we say “God,” as if to say that God is not bent, but that He straightens us. Therefore we only bow in the blessing of the Patriarchs at the beginning and end, and in Modim (Thanksgiving) at the beginning and end.

אנו שוחים בשעה שאומרים 'ברוך'. בזה אנו נותנים ביטוי להבטחתנו להיות ממושמעים לה'. ואנו שוב מזדקפים כשאומרים 'ה', לאמור אין הקב"ה כופף, אלא זוקף אותנו. ולפיכך אין אנו כורעים אלא באבות בתחילה ובסוף ובהודאה, במודים בתחילה ובסוף.

5. **Bava Kamma 16a – The Talmud warns against failing to bow during Modim.**

The spine of a person turns into a snake seven years after burial, but that only happens to someone who fails to bow during Modim.

שדרו של אדם לאחר שבע שנים נעשה נחש; והני מילי דלא כרע במודים.

6. **Rabbi Avraham Chaim Shor, Torat Chaim, Bava Kamma 16a – One who denies God's goodness is going in the way of the primeval snake.**

One who maintains an upright posture and does not bow while stating his gratitude is essentially denying any gratitude. We see this in Scriptures concerning Datan and Aviram (Bamidbar 16, 27); they are depicted as standing upright. Similarly, the Midrash depicts the primeval serpent as approaching Chava (Eve) in an upright posture. In fact, this is why the serpent's punishment was “on your belly shall you crawl” (Bereishit 3, 14). As Rashi teaches us, it had legs which were removed. We can suggest that this is why the spine of someone who fails to bow down during “Modim” turns into a serpent; he is espousing the philosophy of the primeval serpent from which all denial and ingratitude follows.

שכל העומד בקומה זקופה ככופר בדבר הוא ואין הודאתו הודאה כדאשכחן בדתן ואבירם שכפרו בתורת משה כתיב בהו יצאו נצבים בקומה זקופה ואמרו במדרש רבה על הנחש כשבא לפתות את חוה בא בקומה זקופה לפי שבא לכפור בו יתברך ולכך נענש במדה ללכת שחוח שנאמר על גחונך תלך דרגלים היו לו ונקצצו ואפשר לומר דמהאי טעמא מי שאינו כורע במודים שדרו נעשה נחש דכיון שעומד בקומה זקופה ואינו כורע ומתכוין להודות לו יתברך על כל חסדיו הרי הוא ככופר בו יתברך ואומר לא הוא והרי הוא כמודה לדעת הנחש הקדמוני אשר כל הכפירות והדעות החיצוניות נמשכין ממנו.

**KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:**

- ⇒ A specific protocol is followed when praying the Amidah. We recite the words quietly, standing with our feet together facing Jerusalem.
- ⇒ We recite the words aloud to show ourselves that we are speaking to God, but we do so quietly because we know God is listening.
- ⇒ Before we begin, we take three steps forward, in the spirit of Avraham, Yehuda and Eliyahu who approached God in prayer; when we conclude, we bow and take three steps back.
- ⇒ We stand straight like an angel, in recognition that God is in control, and we bow in submission and gratitude before our Maker.

## SECTION II. REPETITION OF THE AMIDAH (COMMUNAL PRAYER)

Once a minyan has finished silently praying the Amidah during the morning and afternoon services, it is then repeated out loud by the *Shaliach Tzibur* (agent of the community). Why should this be necessary?

### PART A. FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T PRAY

At a time when prayer books were not readily available, it was necessary to assist those who did not know how to pray. Listening to the Amidah recited out loud was in lieu of a person himself praying, since by following the communal prayer it is considered as if he prayed.

#### 1. Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 34b – The Repetition aloud of the Amidah by the cantor is for those who are unable to pray the silent prayer.

It was taught: The Sages said to Rabban Gamliel, "According to you, why does the congregation pray a silent Amidah?" He said to them, "So that the leader can arrange his prayer." Rabban Gamliel said to them, "According to you, why does the leader repeat the Amidah?" They replied, "In order to fulfil the obligation of someone who isn't an expert."

תניא אמרו לו לרבן גמליאל לדבריך למה צבור מתפללין אמר להם כדי להסדיר שליח צבור תפלתו אמר להם רבן גמליאל לדבריכם למה שליח צבור יורד לפני התיבה אמרו לו כדי להוציא את שאינו בקי

#### 2. Rabbi Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 124:1 – A person who does not know how to pray must listen to the communal prayer and thereby fulfil his obligation

After the congregation has finished its prayer, the leader repeats the Amidah so that if there is someone who doesn't know how to pray, he can concentrate on what the leader says and thus discharge his obligation.

לאחר שסיימו הצבור תפלתן יחזור ש"צ התפלה שאם יש מי שאינו יודע להתפלל יכוין למה שהוא אומר ויוצא בו.

### PART B. ONLY IN SYNAGOGUES

The Repetition of the Amidah was instituted with the Synagogue in mind and not the Study Hall.

#### 1. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, Emet L'Yaakov on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim note 152 – The repetition of the Amidah was enacted primarily for Synagogues and not for Study Halls

It seems that the main decree of the repetition of the leader was only in Synagogues where there were people who didn't know how to pray. But in the *Beit Midrash* (Study Hall) where only Torah scholars pray, they did not institute a repetition, because there was nobody there who was not already an expert.

נראה שעיקר תקנת חזרת הש"ץ היתה רק בבהכ"נ ששם התפללו ע"ה שלא ידעו להתפלל, אבל בביהמ"ד ששם התפללו רק הת"ח לא תקנו חזרת הש"ץ כלל, דהתם לא היו האינם בקיאים.



The need to repeat the Amidah did not arise from the learned population who pray in a Beit Midrash. It should be noted that despite the fact that the practice to repeat the prayer was directed mainly at synagogues, we do not distinguish between the two today.

### PART C. HIGHER LEVEL OF HOLINESS

The repetition of the Amidah on behalf of the community is at a higher level than the community's silent Amidah. This has a significant consequence for when our prayers are actually answered.

#### 1. **Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, Shearim B'Tefillah, p. 14 – Our prayers are answered through the merit of the communal repetition of the Amidah!**

It is known from the writings of the Arizal that there is a tremendous advantage of the communal repetition of the Amidah over that of the silent prayer, as well as an astounding difference in the respective level and quality of these prayers. The Sages alluded to this in the Talmud, (Brachot 32b) "One who prays and is not answered, should repeat one's prayers." The Gra explains that this is referring to the communal repetition of the Amidah, and through it our prayers are answered.

Regarding this it is written (Iyov 36:5), "Behold, God does not despise the numerous," upon which the Sages stated, (Brachot 8a), "God does not despise communal prayer," for the communal repetition of the Amidah is the essence of communal prayer.

ידוע מכתבי האר"י ז"ל, דענין חזרת הש"ץ יש בה מעלה עצומה על תפילת הלחש, ויש הבדל בין שני חלקי תפילה אלו מדרגות בלי שיעור וערך, ועל זה רמזו חז"ל (ברכות לב:) התפלל ולא נענה יחזור ויתפלל, ומפרש הגר"א דהיינו חזרת הש"ץ, דבה תלויה עניית התפילה.

ועל זה נאמר (איוב לו:ה) הן א-ל כביר לא ימאס, ודרשו חז"ל (ברכות דף ח.) אין הקב"ה מואס בתפילתן של רבים, דחזרת הש"ץ במהותה היא תפילה של ציבור.

The reason for the profound impact of communal prayer is based on the Kaballah.

#### 2. **Rabbi Yosef Chaim (of Baghdad), Ben Ish Chai, Terumah, Year 1, #2 – The deeper reason behind the repetition of the Amidah is that it reaches a higher spiritual plane.**

Even though the simple reason that we repeat the Amidah aloud is for those who are unable to say it themselves, this is not the main reason. For nowadays that reason is almost irrelevant, since everyone can pray from a siddur (prayer book), and is therefore able to say it...

However, the real reason is explained in the writings of the Arizal based on kabbalistic (mystical) secrets, and explained in *Sefer Hakavanot*. In the repetition of the Amidah we again do all the spiritual rectifications that were accomplished in the silent Amidah, but the repetition reaches a higher place [in Heaven] than the silent Amidah.

אע"ג דטעם הפשטי של החזרה הוא להוציא מי שאינו בקי. אין זה עיקר הטעם דבזה"ז כמעט בטל טעם זה דהכל מתפללין בסידורים, והמתפלל בע"פ בקי הוא...

אך באמת טעם העיקרי של החזרה הוא שמבואר בדברי רבינו האר"י ז"ל ע"פ הסוד ומפורש בספר הכונות דבחזרת התפילה חוזרים ונעשים כל התיקונים שנעשו בתפילת לחש, אלא דהחזרה היא מגעת במקום עליון וגבוה יותר ממקום שמגעת שם תפילה דלחש.

The silent Amidah may only be recited silently because it is more limited spiritually than the Communal Amidah, which is repeated aloud.

### 3. **Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer, Kaf Hachaim Orach Chaim 124:2 – The repetition of the Amidah is greater than the silent Amidah.**

In the days of the Arizal, permission was granted to reveal the [kabbalistic] secrets, and he revealed the secrets of the repetition of the Amidah, that it is a higher level than the silent Amidah, and that both of them are obligatory... therefore the Arizal during the repetition of the Amidah would close his eyes and listen and concentrate on every word of the leader.

בימי רבינו האריז"ל ניתנה רשות לגלות וגילה הסוד של החזרה שמעלתה יותר גדולה מן הלחש ושניהם חובה... ולכן האר"י ז"ל בחזרת הש"ץ היה עוצם עיניו ושומע ומתכוין לדברי הש"ץ.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ∞ The Sages enacted the repetition of the Amidah in a communal setting to aid those who do not know how to pray. When they listen to the words of the repetition, it is considered as if they recited it.
- ∞ The repetition of the Amidah on behalf of the community is at a higher level than the community's silent prayer and through the communal repetition one's prayers are answered.

## SECTION III. THE IMPORTANCE OF CONCENTRATION

*On the Eve of Yom Kippur, Professor Shmuel Hugo Bergman visited the sainted Jerusalem Rabbi Aryeh Levine, and told him that the approaching evening was the onset of the great holiday and yet he did not feel any spiritual arousal for prayer [the focal point of the approaching day]. Reb Aryeh stood up, took hold of his hand and told him: "I am jealous of you, because you are on a lofty spiritual level. You are upset about the prospect of not being able to pray properly, while I pray like someone who prays out of habit..." (From Simcha Raz, A Tzaddik in Our Time, pg. 291).*

Rabbi Aryeh Levine was certainly being humble when he said that he prayed by rote; nevertheless, he was able to appreciate the virtue in the question being posed to him. When we think of what prayer means – the opportunity to converse with our Creator – it only makes sense to be concerned about doing it properly. And doing it properly means concentrating during prayer. In this section we will explore the role of concentration in praying the Amidah and how to achieve it.

### PART A. THE POWER OF PROPER CONCENTRATION

Our Sages have praised the virtues of concentrating during prayer.

#### 1. **Talmud Bavli, Berachot 28b – Concentrating during prayer is a ticket to the World to Come.**

It was taught: When Rabbi Eliezer was ill his students came to visit him. They said to him, "Rabbi, teach us the path of life." He said

ת"ר כשחלה ר' אליעזר נכנסו תלמידיו לבקרו אמרו לו רבינו למדנו אורחות חיים ונוכח בהן לחיי העולם הבא

to them, “Be careful with the honor of your friends, and when you pray, know before Whom you stand. In this way you will enter into the life of the World to Come.”

אמר להם הזהירו בכבוד חבריכם... וכשאתם מתפללים  
דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים ובשביל כך תזכו לחיי העולם  
הבא.

When we concentrate, our prayers are as valuable to God as sacrifices in the Temple.

2. **Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshutz, Yearot Devash, Volume 1, Drush 1 s.v. V'lechen – It is true that the Amidah is replete with esoteric allusions, but there is still great value in paying attention to the more down to earth meaning of the words.**

When we stand in prayer we should strive to do [what is needed so] that God will want the voice of our prayers, and particularly the Amidah... Happy is the person who prays with concentration in the Amidah, since this is more desired by God than the altar and sacrifices.

יש לנו לראות בעמדנו לתפלה איך לעשות אשר ירצה  
ה' בקול תפלתנו והעיקר בשמונה עשרה ברכות...  
אשרי האיש המתפלל בכונת הלב שמונה עשרה  
ברכות, וזה יותר לרצון לפני ה' מזבח ומנחה.

3. **Rabbi Eliyahu E. Dessler, Michtav Me-Eliyahu, Volume 3, pp. 64-65 – Proper concentration helps us cleave to God.**

“God is close... to those who sincerely call out to Him” (Psalms 145), and when God draws near to whoever calls out to Him, then you have an *encounter*, meaning, cleaving [to God]... This cleaving is not done by man by himself, but rather the One Above comes toward him until the *encounter* is completed.

This is the meaning of what the Sages said regarding the Amidah that even if a snake is wrapped around one's heel, he should not interrupt his prayers. This means that he can reach such a level of cleaving [to God] that even mortal danger will not interrupt his concentration, and he will not sense it at all.

The Rabbis said: The original pious ones used to wait one hour, pray for an hour, and then wait another hour (Talmud Berachot 32b). And Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm explained that before prayer they would meditate and prepare themselves for prayer itself; and after [prayer], due to the effect of their high level of cleaving to God, they were only able to return to the mundane after an interval of waiting – such was the great level of their cleaving to God.

“קרוב ה'... לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת”. וכאשר הש"ית  
מתקרב אל הקורא אליו- שם יש פגיעה, זו היא  
הדביקות. נמצא שאין הדביקות נעשית על ידי האדם  
לבדו אלא שמלמעלה באים לעומתו עד שנשלמה  
הפגיעה...

זהו גדר אמרם רז"ל בענין תפילת שמונה עשרה  
שאפילו נחש כרוך על עקבו לא יפסיק. פירוש, שיגיע  
לדביקות כזו אשר אף ענין של פקוח נפש לא יפסיק  
את כונתו ולא ירגישנו כלל...

אמרו רז"ל “חסידים ראשונים היו שוהים שעה אחת,  
ומתפללים שעה אחת, וחוזרין ושוהין שעה אחת”  
(ברכות לב:). ופירש הגרש"ז זצ"ל שקודם התפילה  
היו מתבוננים ומכינים את לבבם אל התפילה עצמה.  
ואחר כך, הנה מפאת גודל רושם דביקותם, לא יכלו  
לשוב למטה אלא לאחר שהייה מסוימת, כל כך גדלה  
דבקותם.

## PART B. THE SPECIAL ROLE OF CONCENTRATION DURING THE AMIDAH

Proper concentration is of particular importance when it comes to the Amidah because in it we present all of our needs before God.

### 1. Rabbi Menachem HaMeiri, Beit HaBechirah, Berachot 30b- The degree of concentration required when reciting the Amidah differs from that required when reciting the Shema.

The concentration required for the Amidah is not like the concentration required for the Shema, because a person's life and the requests of his needs are dependent on [the Amidah]. These are the things that put true vital knowledge into our hearts, based on our recognition that everything comes from God, and He alone is the Master of everything, to do good for us when we are good, and to repay us according to our deeds, for bad or for good.

אינו דומה כוונה הצריכה בקריאת שמע, לכוונה הצריכה בתפלה, שחיי האדם ובקשת צרכיו תלויים בה, והן הן הדברים המסבבים בלבנו דעת אמיתית ועיון הכרחי על כל מה שיגיענו שהכל מאתו, והוא לבדו אדון הכל, להיטיב לנו בהטיבנו, ולגמלינו כפי מעשינו להרע או להיטיב.

The Shema (the recitation of *Hear O Israel*) that is recited before the Amidah during the morning and evening prayers is a highly significant commandment that represents acceptance of the yoke of Heaven. Still, during the Amidah when we are petitioning God for our most basic needs, it is only natural that the level of concentration that we have be of unique intensity.

### 2. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch – Commentary on the Prayer Book p. 74- The Amidah is the core of the daily prayers

This prayer, Amidah, has prime importance among all the prayers. Everything that precedes it is only introductory preparation in order to teach us proper thoughts and to fill our hearts with appropriate concentration fitting for the content of this prayer.

לתפילה זו, שמונה עשרה, נודעת חשיבות ראשונה במעלה לתפילותינו. כל הקודם לה אינו אלא הכנה פותחת, ללמדנו את המחשבות הנכונות ולמלא לבנו בכוונות נכונות ההולמות לתוכן תפילה זו.

## PART C. TWO KINDS OF CONCENTRATION

What do we mean by concentration? On the one hand, concentration can mean understanding and paying attention to the words that you are uttering during prayer. But there is another level of concentration as well, one that relates to the essence of what it means to pray.

### 1. Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah 4:15-16 – Prayer without proper concentration is not considered prayer.

What is the [required] concentration for prayer? Any prayer which is not said with concentration is not [considered as] prayer. If a person prayed without concentration, he should go and pray again...

What is proper concentration? He should remove

כוונת הלב כיצד: כל תפילה שאינה בכוונה, אינה תפילה; ואם התפלל בלא כוונה, חוזר ומתפלל בכוונה.

כיצד היא הכוונה? שיפנה ליבו מכל המחשבות, ויראה

from his mind all distracting thoughts and picture himself as if he is standing before the Divine Presence. Therefore a person must sit for a short while before prayer in order to concentrate his heart. Afterwards he should pray with gentleness and supplication.

עצמו כאילו הוא עומד לפני השכינה; לפיכך צריך לישב מעט קודם התפילה, כדי לכוון את ליבו, ואחר כך לתפלל, בנחת ובתחנונים.

2. **Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah 10:1 – Ideally one is required to maintain concentration throughout all the blessings of the Amidah; however, if he only concentrated during the first blessing he has successfully fulfilled his obligation.**

Someone who prayed without concentration should go and pray again with concentration. But if he concentrated for the first blessing (Patriarchs) he doesn't have to pray again.

מי שהתפלל ולא כיוון את ליבו, יחזור ויתפלל בכוונה; ואם כיוון ליבו בברכה ראשונה, שוב אינו צריך.

Here Rambam seems to imply that there is such a thing as prayer without concentration, for it is only the first blessing of the Amidah that has concentration as an essential requirement. So which is it? Is concentration essential to prayer or is it not?

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik tells us that there are indeed two kinds of concentration. One is concentration on the words and understanding what you are saying. That kind is only absolutely essential for the first blessing of the Amidah. But concentration on the fact that one is standing before God in prayer – that is the very essence of the act. Without that one is just not praying at all.

3. **Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk, Chiddushei Rabbeinu Chaim HaLevi, Hilchot Tefillah 4:1 – The contradiction between the two passages in the Rambam is resolved by positing that there are two types of concentration – one that is absolutely essential while praying, and the other that is not.**

It seems that there are two kinds of concentration required in prayer. One is concentration on the meaning of the words, and this is the essence of concentration. The second is for a person to concentrate on the fact that he is standing before God, as explained in chapter 4 (See above source 1). It seems that this concentration is not merely a requirement for concentration, but is an essential part of prayer. If a person doesn't empty his heart and view himself as standing before God then he has not prayed... Therefore this kind of concentration is a requirement for the whole prayer... Certainly this is a requirement for all nineteen blessings...

נראה לומר דתרי גווני כוונות יש בתפלה, האחת כוונה של פירוש הדברים, ויסודה הוא דין כוונה, ושנית שייכוון שהוא עומד בתפלה לפני ה' כמבואר בדבריו פ"ד שם ז"ל ומה היא הכוונה שיפנה את לבו מכל המחשבות ויראה עצמו כאלו עומד לפני השכינה. ונראה דכוונה זה אינה מדין כוונה רק שהוא מעצם מעשה התפלה, ואם אין לבו פנוי ואינו רואה את עצמו שעומד לפני ה' ומתפלל אין זה מעשה תפלה... וע"כ מעכבת כוונה זו בכל התפלה... והלא ודאי דלענין עצם התפלה כל הי"ט ברכות מעכבין...

The minimal level of concentration, essential throughout the Amidah, is the most fundamental aspect of the act of prayer: awareness that one is standing before God. If one lacked this concentration at any point in the Amidah he must repeat it. It is as if he did not pray. On the other hand, attention to the words one recites is necessary throughout the Amidah, yet if after the fact one discovers that he only paid attention to the words of the first blessing, he need not repeat the Amidah.

**PART D. ADVICE FOR PROPER CONCENTRATION**

We prepare ourselves for the Amidah by reciting prayers that put us in the proper frame of mind to meet God.

**1. Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polono'ah, Toldot Yaakov Yosef, Shelach s.v. Ach shelo – The introductory prayers that precede the Amidah are akin to preparations made before the arrival of a king.**

There is a metaphor cited in Sefer Yerai'im (Rabbi Eliezer of Metz) about one's concentration during prayer. It is likened to a person who requested to host the king in his house, and the king promised him that he would and fixed a time, so that he would know when the king was going to come to his house. He had time to clean the house, and slaughter the meat and prepare the meal. Similarly the meaning of the metaphor in terms of prayer – the [reciting of the] sacrifices is the food which is slaughtered, *pesukei d'zimra* (verses of song) is the musical accompaniment, the Amidah is when the king comes to his house, as the Sages have said that service of the heart is prayer ... "Then I will come to you and bless you."

משל המובא בספר יראים בענין כוונת הלב בתפלה, לאדם אחד שביקש מהמלך שיתאכסן בביתו והבטיחו על זה, וקבע לו זמן שידע באיזה זמן יבוא המלך לביתו, לפנות ביתו ולהכינו טבח וטבח והכן וכו'. כך הנמשל בענין התפלה, הקרבנות הוא טבח וטבח והכן, ופסוקי הזמרה הוא הכלי שיר, ובתפלת י"ח יבוא המלך לביתו זה הלב, כמו שאמרו חז"ל עבודה שבלב היא התפלה... אז אבוא אליך וברכתך.

In preparation for prayer, it is important to meditate upon the opportunity that the Amidah affords us to beseech all our needs from God. By personalizing prayer and realizing that God always hears our prayers we can achieve a higher level of concentration while praying.

**2. Siddur Yeshuot Yisrael, Laws of Amidah pp. 35-36 – A useful tool for achieving a high level of concentration during prayer is being aware that we beseech God for all our wishes in the blessings of the Amidah and that He hears our prayers.**

Regarding the concentration for prayer, a person must know that all the good things in the world, whether in wisdom, repentance, good deeds, salvation, wellness and health, prosperity and anything else, everything is included in the words of the Amidah. Through concentrating on the words a person can achieve all of these things. God is full of mercy and hears the prayers that are uttered with concentration, as we see many times from experience. Therefore a person should prepare himself before the Amidah [saying] "why should I think of foolish useless things at such a propitious time. It is better for me to fulfill the mitzvah of my Creator, to remove all thoughts of this world, and instead connect myself and attach my thoughts and concentration to the words of the prayer to make my Creator, blessed is He, happy. [In this way] I will merit all good spiritual and physical things. May this be His will."

בענין כוונת התפלה צריך לידע דכל הטובות שבעולם, הן בחכמה, הן בתשובה ומעשים טובים, הן בהצלחה, הן ברפואה ובריאות הן בפרנסה וכל הענינים, נכלל הכל בתיבות התפלה דשמונה עשרה, ועל ידי הכוונה בהתיבות יכולין לזכות לכל הנ"ל, כי השי"ת מלא רחמים ושומע תפלת המתפללים בכוונה, כמו שרואים לפעמים בחוש. וכן יש להתיישב את עצמו קודם השמונה עשרה, מזה לי לחשוב בשטותים והבלי עולם הזה בעת גילוי רצון כזה, טוב לי יותר לקיים מצות בוראי, להסיח דעתי עתה מכל המחשבות שבעולם רק לקשר ולדבק מחשבותי וכוונתי בתיבות התפלה לעשות נחת רוח לבוראי יתברך, ואזכה לכל טוב ברוחניות ובגשמיות וכן יהי רצון.



In a way, every moment is an opportunity to prepare for prayer. This is so because the closer we are to God in our thoughts the easier it will be to appreciate that He is listening to our prayers.

3. **Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, She'arim B'Tefillah, pp. 22-23 – The more God is a part of your life on the whole, the easier it is to concentrate.**

If we think about it, we will see that the matter is astounding and wonder-provoking, how we can pray with the sincere belief that we are literally standing before the Creator and dealing with Him, beseeching from Him and knowing that He hears us and listens to our words just as a person speaks with his friend [who is] listening and hearing him – all this and yet it is still difficult for us to maintain concentration consecutively even for a short duration?! If one were speaking with his friend from behind a fence, even if his friend would not participate with him in the conversation, just knowing that he is listening to his words, he would be able to converse with him for a long time. However, when we speak with God, our thoughts are interrupted in the middle.

However, the explanation of this phenomenon is as the Rambam wrote in *The Guide for the Perplexed* (Section 3, Chapter 51), that thinking about God is actually closeness, cleaving to, and being with Him (throughout the day, not just at the time of prayer).

הנה כאשר נתבונן נראה שהדבר הוא תמיהה ופליאה, היאך בזמן שרובינו באים להתפלל באמונה כנה שאנו עומדים ממש לפני הבורא יתברך ונושאים ונותנים עמו, ולפניו אנו מתחננים ומאתו אנו מבקשים, והוא מאזין לנו ומקשיב לדברינו כאשר ידבר איש אל רעהו מקשיב ושומע אליו, ולמה אם כן אי אפשר לנו להחזיק רציפות המחשבה אפילו לזמן קצר מאוד, והרי אם מדבר עם חבר מאחורי הגדר, ואפילו לא ישתתף חברו בשיחה, אבל אם רק יודע הוא שיש מאזין לדבריו, יכול לספר על עניניו שעות ארוכות, ואילו כשמדברים עם הקב"ה נפסקת המחשבה באמצע.

אמנם פשר הדבר הוא [כמו שכתב] הרמב"ם במורה נבוכים חלק ג' פרק נ"א... שעצם המחשבה על הקב"ה היא הקירוב והידבקות וההימצאות עמו בפועל.

The Rambam explains that the degree of God's closeness to us is proportionate to our mental focus on Him *throughout the day*. If we are removed from God, then He is not near us, and that explains the difficulty we have at times concentrating on prayer.

Thinking about God and developing our concentration in prayer is an undertaking that takes years, if not a lifetime, of devotion.

4. **Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim 3:51 – It takes years to develop one's concentration in prayer.**

When you pray, the first thing you must focus on is to clear your head from everything [else] when you read the Shema and when you pray [the Shemoneh Esrei]. The concentration and intent that you had in the first verse of the Shema and the first blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei is not enough [i.e., do not think that the level of concentration you have attained in the opening verse of the Shema and the opening blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei is sufficient. Rather, you should work on attaining a greater level of concentration throughout].

תחלת מה שתתחיל לעשות שתפנה מחשבתך מכל דבר, כשתקרא ק"ש ותתפלל, ולא יספיק לך מן הכונה בק"ש בפסוק ראשון ובתפלה בברכה ראשונה, וכשתרגיל על זה ויתחזק בידך שנים רבות, תתחיל אחר כך כל אשר תקרא בתורה ותשמענה

And when you accustom yourself to this and it becomes reinforced by many years [of doing so], you will then be able to approach [with the same concentration] everything else you read in the Torah.

5. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Prayer: Creating Dialogue with Hashem, pg. 31 – Even Rambam worked hard on improving his concentration in prayer.**

We see from these words that the Rambam worked on his *kavanah* (concentration) in the first verse of the Shema as well as in the first blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei for many years, and still he was not complacent with his level of *kavanah*. He constantly strove to achieve a greater *kavanah* and deeper understanding in the Shema and the Shemoneh Esrei. The Rambam mentions specifically these two places because in these verses we see things from God's perspective, where a lack of *kavanah* renders the prayer invalid.

There are also short-term practical tools to aid concentration. A *siddur* (prayer book) is the most useful. Even if one knows the words by heart, focusing on the text of the *siddur* will help concentration. All the more so if one is not so familiar with the Amidah, a prayer book is an essential tool.

6. **Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (Chofetz Chaim), Shem Olam, Volume 2 (end) – In order to avoid distracting thoughts while praying, it is helpful to use a siddur (prayer book) and to focus on our own personal needs for which we beseech God.**

A person must pray from a *siddur*, at the very least the Amidah. Nevertheless, even in this prayer a person is still not immune, and all the tricks of the *yetzer* (evil inclination) are at work. It distracts a person so that he will not be able to concentrate. God granted me some good advice in this matter...

Regarding the Amidah in which the Sages established many types of praise and many types of requests which apply to the body and soul: In each blessing to God, a person should contemplate beforehand what he wants to ask from God, and which blessings he has received, and only afterwards recite the blessing.

צריך להתפלל מתוך הסידור, ועל כל פנים תפלת י"ח, ומכל מקום גם בזה איננו משומר עדיין מכל וכל מערמת היצר שמפיל טרדות על האדם כדי שלא יוכל לכוין. והזמין לי הקב"ה קצת עצה בזה...

בענין תפלת י"ח ברכות שקבעו חז"ל בהם הרבה עניני שבח המקום והרבה עניני בקשות הנוגע לגופו ונפשו, ובכל אחת ברכה לה' צריך להתבונן מתחילה מה הוא רוצה לבקש מה', ועל מה יברכנו, ואחר כך יאמר אותה ברכה.

**KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:**

- ⌘ There is a minimal threshold of concentration necessary for prayer. A person who is not aware that he stands before God while uttering the Amidah is performing a mechanical act that cannot be defined as prayer.
- ⌘ Attention to the words of the Amidah should be maintained throughout the prayer, but is absolutely needed during the first blessing at least.
- ⌘ The prayers that precede the Amidah should be used as a means to prepare for the concentration required. A person can take steps to make prayer more meaningful by considering that all of his needs become within reach through proper concentration during prayer.
- ⌘ True concentration in prayer is a discipline that takes years to develop, but we should make use of practical tools like prayer books to help us along the way.

## CLASS SUMMARY:

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### IF THE AMIDAH IS A “SILENT” PRAYER, WHY THEN DO WE QUIETLY SAY THE WORDS? WHY NOT JUST “THINK” THEM?

We recite the Amidah silently in awareness of the fact that God is listening. However, it is not enough to just think the words; they need to be verbalized. The reason for this is that it helps us to concretize the ideas behind the words when we speak them, and it further impresses upon us the fact that we are speaking to “Someone.”

### HOW SHOULD WE STAND DURING THE AMIDAH AND WHY?

We stand with our legs straight when we pray the Amidah. This stance resembles that of the ministering angels whom the prophet describes as having “one leg.” The symbolism here is that of immobility before God: He has the ability to bring about all these things that we pray for and our success or failure is in His hands.

### WHY DO WE FACE JERUSALEM WHEN WE PRAY THE AMIDAH?

The Torah describes Jerusalem as the “gate of Heaven”; the place from which our prayers ascend upon high. It was the site of the Holy Temple and indeed a person should envision himself as standing at the Temple when he prays.

### WHY DOES THE CHAZZAN (PRAYER LEADER) REPEAT THE AMIDAH OUT LOUD AFTER EVERYONE HAS ALREADY RECITED IT PRIVATELY?

The repetition of the Amidah was instituted for the sake of those not well versed in Hebrew and unable to recite the Amidah on their own. Listening to the Amidah and responding “Amen” to its blessings is counted as reciting it oneself.

The *kabbalists* saw deep significance in the repetition of the Amidah and viewed it as tremendously holier than the individual’s silent recitation. Through the communal repetition of the Amidah are one’s prayers actually answered.

### WHAT LEVEL OF CONCENTRATION IS REQUIRED WHILE RECITING THE AMIDAH, AND HOW DOES A PERSON ACHIEVE IT?

There are two types of concentration: understanding the words, and the general awareness of the fact that one is standing before God in prayer. Both are required and are preferable to have throughout the Amidah. But concentration on the words is only absolutely crucial during the first blessing of the Amidah, whereas if one is not aware of God throughout the Amidah, then he simply has not prayed at all.

Aside from having a siddur and paying attention to the words of the Amidah, it helps to prepare beforehand by meditating on the significance of this prayer.

The more we are aware of God in our lives in general, the easier it is to concentrate on the fact that we are speaking to God. God cannot be compartmentalized.