

CHAPTER 5

SHIMON'S *SHMONEI ESREI* IS CONTAMINATED

Rabbi Shimshon D Pincus, begins his sefer “Shearim B’Tefillah” (Gates of Prayer) with the notion of “avodas hatefillah”¹ and states that “The foundation of our success and the pillar of our avodat HaShem is the knowledge that everything depends on tefillah....This is a universal principle: nothing comes without tefillah.”

Although tefillah is a pillar of our avodat HaShem, the specific impact of hatred on tefillah has not been described. This chapter explains the corruptive effect of hatred on the daily recitation of Shmonei Esrei. To do so, it introduces the service of HaShem with the “nefesh” and its implication based on the teachings of Rabbi Chaim Volozhin.²

TEFILLAH IS *AVODAH SHEBALEV*

Commenting on the first verse of the second paragraph of the Shema, “And you shall serve Hashem with all your heart,” Rashi explained that “serving Hashem with all our heart” is synonymous with prayer, establishing a direct equation where “*avodah shebalev*” equals tefillah.³ The expression *avodah shebalev* highlights the fact that “kavannah” translated as “the intentions of the heart,” is especially relevant for tefillah.

Tefillah is “a mechanism to activate the spiritual realms⁴....This power to activate the spiritual realms emanates from the Beit HaMikdash,” and although its gates were locked following its destruction, there is another type of tefillah that was not affected, it is “the tefillah of tears, of

¹ Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus Shearim B’Tefillah Gates of Prayer (Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem Israel, 2013), 14-20.

² See Chapter 14 Second Gateway of Nefesh Hachaim “Service of the soul with spoken prayer to cleave to G-d,” as explained by Rav Avinoam Fraenkel in his magnum opus Nefesh HaTzimtzum.

³ Rashi Devarim 11:13

⁴ Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemonei Esrei (Targum Press, Southfield, 2008), 3-4.

submission and subjugation”....These are not “tears of depression, dejection, or despair;” they are “tears of hope, trust, and faith—tears of confidence that G-d will help.”

What is meant by tefillah of “tears, submission and subjugation?”

This criterion applies to our daily tefillot. For example, in the first *bracha* of the Shmonei Esrei, we bow our body twice because it is a statement of dependence, subjugation and submission, which proclaims that:

- “You, G-d are the Source of all blessing,”

- “It is You, G-d, and not I, who can provide for my very existence and for my most basic needs.”⁵

Similarly, in the first three *brachot* of praises, “we aren’t praising HaShem, we are saying HaShem’s praises ...in order to inculcate in ourselves the absolute realization that everything we have or will ever need comes from HaShem, and that only He can provide and do anything and everything. The more we understand and express our complete reliance on HaShem, the more He provides for us.”⁶

AVODAH SHEBALEV INCLUDES MERCY AND SACRIFICE

Avodah Shebalev has two dimensions:

(i) It is a plea for mercy because we are powerless to satisfy our needs, be they spiritual or physical, and we express our complete reliance on HaShem.

(ii) *Avodah Shebalev* has also the dimension of sacrifice: not only that prayers are substitutes for sacrifices, but that prayers are like actual sacrifices. As a result, “service of the heart” means not only service through and within the heart, but also sacrifice of the heart.”⁷

The “sacrifice” character of prayer is made evident in two successive blessings of the Shmonei Esrei, *Shema koleinu* (the 16th Bracha) and *Retzeh* (the 17th Bracha). The bracha *Shema koleinu* concludes the middle section of petitionary blessings and is “the general, all-embracing entreaty to HaShem to hear and accept all our tefillot.”⁸ That’s why “it is the place to insert

⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶ Rabbi E L Abish, Portraits of Prayer 2 (Israel Bookshop Publications, Lakewood NJ, 2022), 228.

⁷ Rabbi Joseph B Soloveichick, Blessings and Thanksgivings (OU Press New York, NY, 2019),153.

⁸ Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemonei Esrei (Targum Press, Southfield, 2008), 378.

personal prayers (anything one needs including begging for forgiveness for a sin). The bracha *Retzeh*, on the other hand, is called *Birkat HaAvodah*, the Blessing of the Service. It is the first of the last three *brachot* which constitute a unit that is similar to the unit of the first three *brachot*. The bracha *Retzeh* transforms the prayer into a sacrifice because the concept of “causing G-d to be pleased” relates to sacrifices.” Thus, the 16th bracha (*Shema koleinu*) and the 17th Bracha (*Retzeh*) which refer to “mercy” and “sacrifice” respectively, constitute two distinct aspects, each of which requires its own plea for acceptance.

Rav Shimon Schwab addresses the notion of “sacrifice”⁹ directly saying “from the viewpoint of Israel, the highest form of *avodas HaShem*, ...is the *korban*...(*korban* comes from *karov*, meaning to come close)...Through the *korban*, an individual—or Klal Israel as a nation—can come as close to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, as is humanly possible. The highest form of tefillah, the essence of which is Shemonei Esrei, is when one offers himself as a *korban* to HaKadosh Baruch Hu,” and...”in the absence of *korbanos*, tefillah itself is the *korban*.” That happens when our level of *kavanah* is such that when we begin reciting the first blessing of Shemonei Esrei, we mean “I am offering to You, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, my body and soul—I am Your *korban*.”

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin expresses the notion of sacrifice as follows: “Prayer to G-d at the proper time is the essential “food” for the upper worlds and for one’s own soul. As the Zohar says: G-d’s food is tefillah; it takes the place of a sacrifice [in the Beit HaMikdash].¹⁰

ROLE OF THE “NEFESH”

What is the Nefesh?

The word “*Nefesh*” is generally translated as soul, but the word “*neshama*” also refers to soul.

That’s because there are three levels of a person’s soul, *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah*.¹¹

Nefesh has several related meanings. It appears in the Torah when Adam was created: “and the

⁹ Rabbi Shimon Schwab Rav Schwab on Prayer (Mesorah Publications, Ltd. Rahway, NJ, 2021), 402-403.

¹⁰ Rav Chaim Volozhin, *Nefesh Hachaim*, translated by Rabbi A. Y. Finkel (The Judaica Press, Brooklyn, 2020), 87.

¹¹ Rabbi Pinchas Winston <https://torah.org/torah-portion/perceptions-5767-vayikra/>

man became a “*nefesh chayyah*,” meaning a “living *Nefesh*,”¹² which Unkelos translates as *Ruach Memalelah* “a speaking spirit,” where the two words *Ruach Memalelah* refer to speech. Rav Fraenkel comments: “G-d constantly creates with His Speech. To parallel this, for us who are in His Image, our *Nefesh* creates with our speech.”

For Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, the word *nefesh* refers to “the living and striving individuality” and “*bechol nafshecha*” means “the whole of one’s living being, with all the spiritual and physical aspects of one’s personality.”¹³

TEFILLAH AS AN EXPRESSION OF ONE’S PERSONALITY

Rabbi Yehuda Amital indicates that “*Vaani tefilla*” (Psalm 109:4) which is translated as “I am prayer” can be interpreted to mean that tefillah is expressed in the personality of the individual.¹⁴ Our prayer expresses our character. This implies that tefillah requires “openness toward oneself” because in order to “open up” in front of G-d, a person first has to “open up” to himself. Similarly, at the beginning of the Shmonei Esrei “O my Master, open my lips ...” means open my heart. A person’s ability to “meditate with his heart (as in Psalm 77:7) is an art which reveals much about him. “A person has to be capable of holding an honest dialogue with himself, in complete privacy (Rabbi Soloveichick called it “self-discovery”).

SERVING HASHEM WITH “ALL OUR NEFESH”

To understand the role of the soul (*nefesh*) in *Avodah shebalev*, Rabbi Chaim Volozhin contrasts the first paragraph of the *Shema*¹⁵ which commands us to love Hashem with all our heart, all our soul, and all our resources, with the second paragraph¹⁶ of the *Shema* (“*ulovdo bechol nafshechem*”) which commands us to serve Hashem also “with all our soul.”¹⁷ There, he

¹² Bereshit 2:7

¹³ Devarim 6:5

¹⁴ Rabbi Yehudah Amital, *Fundamentals of Prayer* (The RCA Avodat Halev Siddur, 2019), E53

¹⁵ Devarim 6:5-9

¹⁶ Devarim 11:13-21

¹⁷ See Chapter 14 Second Gateway of *Nefesh Hachaim* “Service of the soul with spoken prayer to cleave to G-d,” as explained by Rav Avinoam Fraenkel in his magnum opus *Nefesh HaTzimtum*.

enunciates an important principle that “the complete service of prayer must be with the *Nefesh*, and that it “is a tremendous concept for those who know and understand a little.”¹⁸

NEFESH , BLOOD, SACRIFICE, ARE SYNONYMOUS

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin relates *nefesh* to the notion of sacrifice because *nefesh* refers to blood in the context of sacrifices: the *pasuk* in Devarim 12:23 states “*Ki Hadam Hu Hanafesh*” meaning “..for the blood, it is the life.” Since the service of prayer (*Avodat Hatefillah*) replaces the service of sacrifices (*Avodat Hakorbanot*) nowadays, “just as the purpose of the sacrifices was to elevate the animal’s *Nefesh* Above, with the main atonement achieved through the sprinkling of its blood which is the *Nefesh*,¹⁹similarly, the main purpose of prayer is to elevate, give over and attach one’s *Nefesh* to G-d.”²⁰

“Therefore, when standing in prayer before G-d, one should detach one’s body from one’s *Nefesh*—such that one’s service of prayer will be solely with one’s *Nefesh* and its elevated will.....becoming as if the body no longer exists and that it is only the *Nefesh* which speaks in prayer.”²¹ This is consistent with the use of *Nefesh* in several Tehillim chapters: “My *Nefesh* should bless G-d”²² and “My *Nefesh* should praise G-d”²³

NEFESH MEANS “WILL”

In Chapter 15, while discussing Chana’s prayer, Rabbi Chaim highlighted another dimension of the word *Nefesh*, where *Nefesh* is equated to “will.” In her prayer, Chana states “and I will pour out my *Nefesh* before G-d”²⁴ By outpouring her entire soul in prayer before G-d, “there was no residual “will” for her to be attached to any matters of this world.”

¹⁸ *Nefesh HaTzimtzum*, Vol 1, G2:14, p. 410

¹⁹ Devarim 12:23 states “..for the blood it is the life” (“*Ki Hadam Hu Hanafesh*”)

²⁰ The sacrifice is in place of the one who sinned,.. and atonement is achieved with the recognition that the sacrifice is taking his place. Therefore, intellectually focusing on the elements of the offering and how they correspond to and are in place of oneself, is a tool which enables one to relate to the complete giving over of oneself to G-d during prayer

²¹ Note that when Rabbi Chaim cites the Chazal statement that “one who prays ...must focus his heart upwards, Rab Fraenkel has a footnote reminding us that the use of the word “heart” refers to what we call the “mind.”

²² Tehillim 103:1, 103:2, 103:22, 104:1, 104:35.

²³ Tehillim 146:1

²⁴ | Shmuel 1:15

The notion of equating *Nefesh* with “will” is already found in Parashat Chaye Sarah when Abraham spoke to the Hittites to acquire the Machpelah burial site for Sarah.²⁵ There he said: “*Im yesh et nafshechem,*” Rashi translates the word “*nafshechem*” as “your will (“*retzonechem*”).²⁶

SELF-NULLIFICATION

Consistent with the above meaning of the word “*Nefesh*,” in Chapter 18 entitled “Methodology for Advanced Prayer,” Rabbi Chaim brings up the notion of “nullification” which means that a person becomes “absolutely nullified in his own eyes” (“*yitbatel beeinav*”). As a follow up to the notion of nullification, in Note 39, Rabbi Chaim addresses the Tachanun prayer as follows: “Therefore, it was instituted that immediately after the Amidah, a person should [have in mind to] totally give up his *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshama* [as if to put them and therefore himself] to death when reciting the first verse of Tehillim 25: ‘To You G-d, I raise my soul,’ (*Eleicha Hashem Nafshi Essah*”). This chapter of Tehillim is recited in Nusach HaArizal and Nusach *Eidot HaMizrach*. Rabbi Chaim adds: “This is the main principle related to all instances of “falling on one’s face in supplication, as mentioned in the Torah” in the case of Moshe and Aharon.²⁷

SELF-NULLIFICATION LEADS TO CLOSENESS TO HASHEM

In Volume 2 of *Nefesh Hatzimtzum*,²⁸ Rav Fraenkel has an enlightening explanation regarding Self-Nullification (footnote 206):

The idea that self-nullification is the medium through which a person can come close to G-d is expressed by Chazal in their definition of a Tzaddik—as one who is ruled entirely by his Good Inclination only. Chazal support this statement with the verse stated in connection with King David “my heart/mind is Chalal/empty space within me” (Berachot 61b, quoting Tehillim 109:22). The Chalal/empty space in this verse is understood to mean that King David had succeeded in emptying himself completely of his Evil Inclination and of his ego, and as a result,

²⁵ Bereshit 23:8

²⁶ I learned this from Rabbi Yaakov Maimon

²⁷ Bamidbar 16:22

²⁸ Volume 2, Essential Concepts in Nefesh Hachaim, part 2 Tzimtzum , section 10 Methodologies of Nefesh Hachaim and Sefer HaTanya

he achieved a state of self-nullification where his Good Inclination entirely prevailed. It was this quality of self-nullification that enabled King David to achieve the highest level in prayer to the extent that the verse states about him that “*VaAni tefillah*” “I am prayer” (Tehillim 109:4). Self-nullification is therefore associated with the ultimate effectiveness in prayer.....”the process of self-nullification through prayer, causes a *Tzimtzum* process to take place which reveals a heightened perception and revelation of G-d in a person’s mind and by extension, in this physical world.”

Rabbi Z. Leff writes that “*avodah* is essentially self-negation and total subjugation to HaShem. In order for us to become a conduit through which HaShem’s will is conveyed to this world, we must totally negate and subjugate ourselves to HaShem so that we become an extension of HaShem’s will. That is the mark of a true *eved*—the ben, the son: he is an extension of his master’s (father’s) will. All that he does, both in performance and accomplishment, is done as an extended arm of the master.”²⁹

WITH SELF-NULLIFICATION PRAYER IS ANSWERED

Rabbi AC Feuer explains how self-nullification works:

“Where there is prayer, nothing else exists –only man and G-d....All that matters is the plea of man and the will of G-d. Prayer is not a duel, a struggle between two opposing wills, rather it is an attempt to achieve a merger of wills. Indeed, our prayers are an opportunity to yield ourselves to His will, but by virtue of our submission to G-d, we can hope that He will grant our plea. As our Sages taught: ‘Treat His will as if it were your will, so that He will treat your will as if it were His will. Nullify your will before His will, so that he will nullify the will of others before your will’ (Avot 2:4). The first part (Treat His will ...) is explained as “Do what G-d tells you to do, as if you want to do it yourself without G-d’s instruction. As a result, G-d will cause you to want the path that He knows is best for you, so you will end up living the best possible life.” The second part (Nullify your will ...) is explained as: “Disregard what you personally want in favor

²⁹ Rabbi Zev Leff, *Shemonei Esrei* (Targum Press, Southfield, 2008), 395.

of what G-d wants for you. This will cause G-d to not allow others to take advantage of you because their desires will be nullified in favor of what you want.”³⁰

TEFILLAH IS A SINGLE COMMUNAL PRAYER

Many think that tefillah is exclusively about our relationship with HaShem and that other Jews who are present are there just to constitute a minyan. That is not the case for a main reason: “Our belonging to the Jewish people is a major component of our personal identities.”³¹ That component of our identity finds its expression in the text of the Shmonei Esrei blessings which are in the plural. We don’t pray just for own welfare, but for that of each and every one of our people and also for our people as a whole. Wherever we might be geographically, we pray together with (meaning at the same time) thousands of other Jews, reciting the same blessings: “all the prayers of the congregations of Israel, in all their dwelling places become co-mingled into a single communal prayer, in which all Israel is enmeshed, and that one united prayer is accepted as a single and unique regular daily offering, morning and evening...Only a single prayer, parallel to the single regular daily offering, rises up from Israel as a whole.”³²

TEFILLAH AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

We learn from the Arizal that, at the onset of tefillah, we must know that our interpersonal relationships should be emphasized and strengthened. The siddurim that follow that tradition include the following declaration: “Behold, I accept upon myself the mitzvah of “Love your neighbor as yourself,” and behold, I love each and every one of Israel as my soul and essence. And I hereby prepare my mouth to pray before the King who reigns over kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He.”³³

This tradition is mentioned by Rabbi D. Feldman³⁴ who indicates that the Shulchan Arukh recommends giving tzedakah before prayer. Beyond the moment of prayer, the personal experience of an encounter with HaShem leaves a lasting impact of solidarity which propels the

³⁰ Alden Tabac and Ben Spilg Conquer Yourself To Change The World (Shikey Press, Cambridge, 2022), 54.

³¹ Rabbi David Mescheloff, A More Meaningful Prayer Experience. Ibid., E105

³² Rabbi Joseph B Soloveichick, Blessings and Thanksgivings (OU Press New York, NY, 2019),155.

³³ The ArtScroll Sephardic Siddur The Schottenstein Edition (Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn NY, 2019),35.

³⁴ Rabbi Daniel Feldman Prayer and Interpersonal Halacha (The RCA Avodat Halev Siddur, 2019), E33.

individual into social and moral action. “For Rabbi Soloveichik, prayer as an encounter, as discovery of G-d as Thou, is consummated only in moral action. In prayer, the powers of love and solidarity become so intense that the prayerful individual must become an active being within the social and political reality.”³⁵

CONCLUSION OF THIS CHAPTER

Shimon, the intricate analysis in this chapter was needed to uncover how your hatred feelings contaminate and corrupt the three daily Shmonei Esrei prayers:

1. Regarding the role of the heart,” the Chafetz Chaim writes: “If one uses a part of his body to do an *aveirah*, it becomes contaminated by that action”³⁶ and Rabbeinu Yonah includes the following explanation:³⁷ “For a heart filled with hatred cannot experience happiness or gratitude, which are essential for serving Hashem.”
2. Regarding the role of the *nefesh*, Rabbi Chaim Volozhin’s interpretation of *avodat Hashem* which highlights the role of the *nefesh* as representing your “will” shows that while you harbor hatred-like feelings, you are unable to submit your will which is consumed by hatred. And as long as you don’t submit your will, harboring hatred inhibits you from coming close to HaShem and from having your prayers answered.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE FROM CHAPTERS 3, 4, & 5

Dear Reader,

1. The first consequence of Shimon’s violation of the Torah prohibition is loss of *rachmanut* as explained in Chapter 2.
2. The second consequence is the violation of four additional Torah prohibitions (Chapter 3).

³⁵ David Hartman Love and Terror in the G-d Encounter (Jewish Lights Publishing. Woodstock VM, 2001), 177.

³⁶ As translated by Rabbi Yehudah Yonah Rubinstein in “Building Tomorrow” (Lakewood NJ Israel Bookshop Publications, 2018), 140.

³⁷ Shaarei Teshuvah, Shaar 1:39 Note 5 p.289

(i) *B'Tzedek Tishpot Amitecha*, "With righteousness shall you judge your fellow." This commandment required David to judge Shimon favorably, giving him the benefit of the doubt and assume a priori that he had good intentions. Unfortunately, David's reaction shows that he considered Shimon guilty.

(ii) *Lo Titor Et Bnei Amecha*, "You shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people." This commandment forbids us to keep in our heart any ill-feeling over the harm that any Jew did to us. Even if we have no intent to take revenge, the mere remembrance of the offense in the heart is forbidden. David violated that commandment since he avoided speaking to Shimon

(iii) *Vehalachta Bidrachav*, "You shall walk in His ways." In this commandment, Hashem is bidding us to work to develop in ourselves the qualities (*middot*) of Hashem that He uses in His behavior toward us such as being merciful and gracious. Perfecting our character is an essential aspect of achieving connection to HaShem. However, David lost that battle because his hatred unleashed negative *middot* such as anger and resentment.

(iv) *VeAhavta LeReecha Kamocha*, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We are commanded to love every one of Israel as ourselves. It means that we should show concern for their money and seek their honor. Even if it can be established that Shimon insulted David with his comment about David's *tzitzit*, he did not forfeit his basic right to dignity and love, yet David deprived Shimon of that right.

3. The third consequence of Shimon's violation of the Torah prohibition is the impact of hatred on *avodat HaShem* through *Limmud HaTorah* (Chapter 4).

We learned that the Torah was given to Bnei Israel precisely to help us repair our flawed *middot* such as hatred and jealousy. When we harbor and tolerate hidden hatred, we impair our *avodat HaShem* through *limmud Torah* because we become unable to be "osek" in Torah. Shimon, instead of repairing your *middot*, your hatred unleashed several additional negative *middot* such as anger, contempt, resentment, and especially "cruelty" called "*achzariyut*." In addition, hatred impaired your ability to be self-aware and engage in *Tikkun Hamiddot*. Your devotion to *limmud Torah* does not address the contamination of your heart by hatred.

4. The fourth consequence of Shimon's violation of the Torah prohibition is the impact of hatred on *Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim* (Chapter 4).

Another path of avodat HaShem that's corrupted by hatred is *Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim* during the recitation of Kriyat Shema. By judging David guilty and harboring hatred toward him, you Shimon "took the law in your hands" which is equivalent to rejecting HaShem's will, control, and guidance. You thus became unable to fulfill the requirement of "sublimating every facet of your personality to HaShem" which is required during the recitation of Kriyat Shema. Also, hatred made you unable to effectuate the change from *HaShem Elokeinu* to *HaShem E Chad*. In addition, when we recite 'Shema Israel,' in truth we unite with all other Jews of the world and make an active demonstration of the "*achdut*" of Klal Yisrael. When hatred is present, Jewish unity or *achdut* is not achievable.

5. The fifth consequence of Shimon's violation of the Torah prohibition is the impact of hidden hatred on the daily recitation of Shmonei Esrei (Chapter 5). We learned that the Shmonei Esrei requires our "lev" and our "nefesh," and these two dimensions are affected. Regarding hatred in the heart," the Chafetz Chaim writes: "If one uses a part of his body to do an *aveirah*, it becomes contaminated by that action,"³⁸ while Rabbeinu Yonah explains³⁹ "For a heart filled with hatred cannot experience happiness or gratitude, which are essential for serving Hashem." Regarding the *nefesh*, Rabbi Chaim Volozhin brings up the notion of "nullification" which means that a person becomes "absolutely nullified in his own eyes" ("*yitbatel beeinav*"). Since the *nefesh* represents your "will," while you harbor hatred, you are unable to submit your will which is consumed by hatred. When Chana prayed and said "and I will pour out my *Nefesh* before G-d,"⁴⁰ "there was no residual "will" for her to be attached to any matters of this world." While harboring hatred, you are unable to submit your will which inhibits you from coming close to HaShem and having your prayers answered.

³⁸ As translated by Rabbi Yehudah Yonah Rubinstein in "Building Tomorrow" (Lakewood NJ Israel Bookshop Publications, 2018), 140.

³⁹ Shaarei Teshuvah, Shaar 1:39 Note 5 p.289

⁴⁰ I Shmuel 1:15

6. As soon as we decide to be honest with ourselves and are prepared to accept responsibility for our decision to ignore hatred feelings, we find out that violating this one Lo Taasei commandment in Vayikra 19:17 includes a plethora of other violations which preclude us from achieving Kirvat HaShem (closeness to HaShem) through our daily *avodat HaShem*. We learn that a commandment which appears to be strictly "*bein adam lachaveiro*" (Vayikra 19:17) causes far-reaching damage to our individual relationship with HaShem. Being an *eved Hashem* does not pertain only to our relationship with HaShem through *mitzvot* which are *Bein Adam LaMakom*. It is critical to know that all *mitzvot* we consider *Bein Adam Lachavero* have an intrinsic *Bein Adam LaMakom* dimension since they express the will of HaShem.