

Lesson 11- Introduction To Pseukei D'Zimra

Welcome to this session of Take 5 for Tefila, a program sponsored by the Orthodox Union, as part of their Tefila Education Initiative. In this session, I would like to provide an introduction to the section of Tefilas Shacharis known as Pseukei D'Zimra.

The words: Pseukei D'Zimra literally mean: verses of song. They represent the section of Tefilas Schacharis that begins with Baruch Sh'Amar and ends with Yishtabach. In between we recite many verses and chapters from Tehillim. The verses and chapters were chosen because they represent words of praise of G-d. The basis for reciting excerpts from Tehillim as part of Tefilas Shacharis is found in the Gemara as follows: Rav Yossi said: may I be among those who finish Hallel each day. The Gemara challenged Rav Yossi: did we not rule that one who recited Hallel each day was a heretic? The Gemara answered: Rav Yossi was speaking of Pseukei D'Zimra; verses of song. Rashi explained that Rav Yossi was referring to reciting the last chapter of Tehillim and chapter 148. The Rif explained that Rav Yossi was referring to the last 5 chapters of Tehillim beginning with Tehila L'Dovid to which we add two verses that begin with the word Ashrei.

The purpose of reciting these verses is to prepare ourselves to recite Shemona Esrei. The verses help us focus on the grandeur of G-d so that when we approach G-d in Shemona Esrei, we do so with the right frame of mind. The fact that Pseukei D'Zimra is preparation for reciting Shemona Esrei reminds us that our primary purpose in coming to synagogue joining together as a group of ten men is to be able to recite the silent Shemona Esrei with nine other men. The primary reason is not to recite Kaddish. It is not to recite Kedushah nor is it to recite Barchu. It is to recite the silent Shemona Esrei in a group of ten men. When ten men congregate to recite Shemona Esrei, they represent not only themselves, not only the ten men present but they represent all of the Jewish people. That is the power of ten men congregating together. In the words of the Torah, these ten men constitute an Edah. The Torah employs the word: Edah to mean Klall Yisroel, all of the Jewish people. When ten men congregate together, it is as if all of the Jewish people are present in that room praying to G-d.

For that reason it is imperative to arrive in shul early enough to be able to recite the silent Shemona Esrei with the others present. That is further the reason that every Jew needs to know that he may skip portions of Pseukei D'Zimra so that he will be joining with the others in reciting the silent Shemona Esrei as a group. The rules that outline what a person may skip within Pseukei D'Zimra also teach us the order of importance of what is contained within Pseukei D'Zimra. The minimum that a person must recite includes: Baruch Sh'Amar, Ashrei and Yishtabach. If he has more time, he should add Tehillim Chapters 148 and 150. If he has even more time, he should recite all of the chapters of Tehillim beginning with Ashrei until Kol Ha'Neshama. If he has even more time, then he should add the verses from Va'Yivarech Dovid to L'Shem Tifartecha as well as Hodu until

Take 5 for Tefila- The Tefila Education Initiative of the Orthodox Union

V'Hu Rachum. Lastly, he should add Mizmor L'Soda and then the rest of Pseukei D'Zimra.

The portion of Tefila known as Pseukei D'Zimra is also a lesson on why the recital of Tehillim became such an important part of Jewish practice. The Sefer Match Moshe which was written in the 1600's, describes why we recite so many chapters of Tehillim as part of our preparation for Shemona Esrei. He relates that there are forces in the heavens that seek to interfere with our prayers reaching G-d. In his opinion, King David composed the book of Tehillim to provide us with the words that can combat the forces that interfere with our prayers and which open a path for our prayers to reach G-d. His view of Tehillim is based on what he believes to be the root of the word: Zemer, song. He claims that the root is the word Zamar; to prune or to cut. This view of Sefer Tehillim explains why people recite Tehillim in times of trouble. It is not that the words of Tehillim are themselves the prayer. Instead the words of Tehillim clear a path through the heavens so that our prayers that were the reason that we recited Tehillim travel directly to G-d and are not stopped in their path by the negative forces in heaven.

Pseukei D'Zimra consists of more than just Tehillim. It includes a significant excerpt from Sefer Shemos including the Shira, Oz Yashir. A question can be asked about that practice: in the Bracha of Baruch Sh'Amar we say: and with the songs of King David we will laud You. That explains why the bulk of what we say is borrowed from Tehillim, words composed by King David. But we also recite words that were recited by Moshe Rabbenu and the Jewish people at the splitting of the sea, particularly Shiras Ha'Yom, Oz Yashir. On what basis do we add such words? Are we not contradicting what we said in the Bracha of Baruch Sh'Amar? This issue troubled the Rambam. In his Siddur, he placed the words taken from the Book of Shemos including the Shira after the Bracha of Yishtabach. The rationale that others gave for including verses from Sefer Shemos including the Shira is that a tradition existed to recite the Shira each morning since the time of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. That practice fits in well with the theme of redemption which is a major theme of Tefilas Shacharis. We recall the splitting of the sea as part of our prayer that just as G-d rescued us at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, He should rescue us today as well.

On Shabbos we add additional chapters of Tehillim within Pseukei D'Zimra. That practice developed because we have more time to recite chapters of Tehillim since we are not concerned about missing time from work.