

It is now **חדש אלול** and the **ימים נוראים** are fast approaching. This time of year is filled with moments when **תפלה** plays a special role. Yet, how many of us really understand the words of the **תפילות**? How many of us know the reason for the order of the **תפילות**? Do we know when the **תפילות** were authored and when each **תפלה** was introduced into the **סידור**? Before answering these questions, a short detour is needed.

כונה בתפלה

Since we were young, we have regularly heard how important it is to have **כונה בתפלה**. But has anyone taken the time to explain how to attain it. Some of us might even believe that **כונה** is an act that few are capable of performing. But a quick look at the **שולחן ערוך** reveals that having **כונה בתפלה** is not difficult to achieve.

שלחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן צח
צריך שיהיה לו כוונה בתפלתו.

א] המתפלל צריך שיכוין בלבו פירוש המלות שמוציא בשפתיו ויחשוב כאלו שכינה כנגדו ויסיר כל המחשבות הטורדות אותו עד שתשאר מחשבתו וכוונתו זכה בתפלתו ויחשוב כאלו היה מדבר לפני מלך בשר ודם...

In this **סימן** the **שולחן ערוך** lays out the first four steps to achieving **כונה בתפלה**;

1. המתפלל צריך שיכוין בלבו פירוש המלות שמוציא בשפתיו;

One who prays must concentrate on the simple meaning of the words that are being expressed by his lips.

2. ויחשוב כאלו שכינה כנגדו;

And he must think that the presence of G-d is before him.

3. ויסיר כל המחשבות הטורדות אותו עד שתשאר מחשבתו וכוונתו זכה בתפלתו;

And he shall remove all the thoughts that burden him until his only thoughts and concentrations are focused on his prayer.

4. ויחשוב כאלו היה מדבר לפני מלך בשר ודם.

And he shall think that he is speaking with a mortal king.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The first known **סדר תפילות** was compiled by Rav Amrom Gaon in the 9th Century, C.E. He did so as a **תשובה** to a question posed by the community of Barcelona. As a sign of gratitude, the community sent 20 pieces of gold for Rav Amrom's yeshiva, 5 gold pieces for **קופת** and 5 gold pieces for Rav Amrom himself. The **סדר תפילות** in the modern **סידור** is remarkably similar to Rav Amrom's version.

The purpose of this newsletter is to improve the ability to perform step 1- an understanding of the פירוש המלות שמוציא בשפתיו - the meaning of the words that we express. But to gain a full understanding of פירוש המלות, the definition needs to be broadened to include an understanding as to why the prayers were arranged in the order they are in the סידור and to know under what circumstances each תפלה was included in the סידור.

Reaching the first step in attaining כונה בתפלה requires the individual to make a commitment not to ever recite a prayer if he does not understand the simple meaning of the words of the prayer. Studying the English translation of the words of the תפלות therefore needs to be encouraged. It is particularly important at this time of the year when we recite תפלות that we recite only once a year, such as סליחות and the פיוטים של ראש השנה ויום כיפור that we prepare in advance to understand the simple meaning of the words in those תפלות.

PRAYING IN ENGLISH

If understanding the words of prayer is so important, why do we not pray in English. In fact, the משנה in מסכת סוטה דף לב עמ' א' קריאת שמע teaches us that we can recite תפלה in whatever language we wish. When we will study the prayer of קדיש, we will learn the reason it was written in Aramaic. At that time, we will try to uncover the reason that תפלה בציבור should be conducted in Hebrew.

תפילת שחרית THE STRUCTURE OF

The second aspect of פירוש המלות that needs to be understood is the structure of תפילת שחרית. The easiest way to understand the structure of תפילת שחרית is to study how one proceeds if one comes late to shul but before the קהל has reached קריאת שמע. It can be found in שלחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן נב. A synopsis of the rule can also be found in the Halachot of תפלה listed in the Artscroll siddur.

Your editors hope that this newsletter will inspire our readers to develop a sensitivity to the words and structure of the prayers. Whenever possible, the issues will be presented in question and answer form. References will be given so that you can independently learn more about תפלה. It is our hope that many of you will suggest questions and issues concerning תפלה that your editors have not considered. In that way, this can be a learning experience for teacher and student alike. **שבת שלום!**