



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL TEFILLA

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Towards Meaningful Tefilla: Introduction

Over the past six years, I've had the privilege of writing for Torah Tidbits. I began with a column on Tefilla, continued with another series on the topic of Shabbos, and most recently completed a column on Chinuch. I gained tremendously from each of them, and Baruch Hashem, the feedback was always warm and encouraging. Yet there was something uniquely powerful about the response to the Tefilla column.

Writing the column affected me personally in a profound way. It pushed me to pay closer attention to my own Tefilla, to slow down and focus, even if only for a few moments each day. More than that, it opened my eyes

to the beauty of Tefilla itself: the depth of the words, the careful structure, and the incredible intentionality behind every section of davening.

And I discovered that these feelings were shared by many others as well. Wherever I went, people told me how much the articles were helping them in their own Tefilla. Some shared that they collected the cut-out boxes from the column and kept them as bookmarks in their siddurim, reminders of ideas they wanted to think about while they davened. I never expected the reaction to a Tefilla column to be so overwhelming. And as I continued on to write about other topics, I often found myself wondering - Why were people so particularly drawn to Tefilla?

That question resurfaced recently at a meeting of OU staff focused on Tefilla initiatives. One director shared that when participants were surveyed about which topic they most wanted to learn, the overwhelming response was Tefilla, more than Halacha, Machshava, Tanach, or any other area of Torah. Why would that be?



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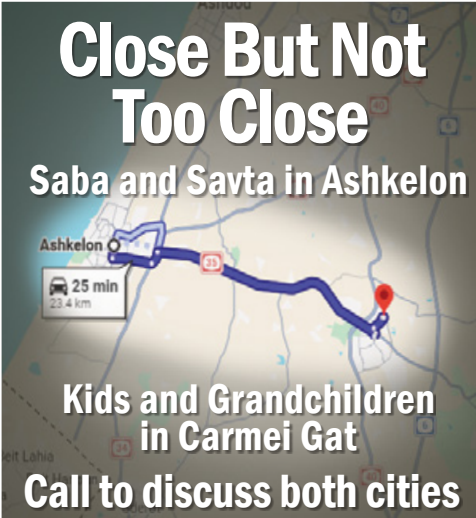
After thinking about it, I realized something profound. We are a generation searching for a deeper connection with Hashem. Of course, learning about Shabbos or Chinuch is important. Growth in every area of Avodat Hashem is important. But what our generation is seeking more than anything else is a real relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

Maybe in previous generations it was enough to come to shul, be part of a minyan, and say the words. But our generation longs for more than that. We are not satisfied with externalities alone, we have an existential need to get to the inner meaning, the פנימיות. We want to understand the words we are saying, to feel them, and to experience a real connection to Hashem through our Tefilla.

And yet, at the exact same time, we are also a generation of unprecedented distraction. In the age of technology, it has become harder than ever to actually focus when we daven. And so we are left with tension: we crave closeness to Hashem, yet our minds constantly pull us elsewhere.

Perhaps that is why people are so drawn to learning about Tefilla. Because understanding the structure, meaning, and depth behind the words gives us a way back in. Even if we can only focus on one phrase, one bracha, or one idea during davening, that itself becomes a real point of connection.

And so, after much thought, I've come to the conclusion that while the other topics were valuable, it makes the most sense to return to Tefilla in this column. Even though we already went through all of the sections of davening several years ago, it behooves us to do it again. Tefilla is not the kind of Avodah that remains in place on its own. When we actively work on it, it grows and impacts us.



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But the moment we stop paying attention, our concentration weakens and our Tefilla begins to slip. The level of one's Tefilla cannot remain stagnant without constant effort. If we stop working on it, we lose it.

Therefore, going back and beginning again is key. In some articles, we will review ideas from previous years and that itself is important, because meaningful growth always requires review. But I also hope to explore new meforshim, fresh perspectives, and deeper insights, so that our Tefilla never becomes static, but continues to develop and grow together with us over the years.

יְהִי רְצוֹן אֱמֹרֵי פִי וְהִגִּיּוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ — May Hashem grant us the siyata d'Shmaya to discover new depth and insight in Tefilla together, and may our learning inspire us to strengthen our Tefilla and grow in our Avodat Hashem. ■