
INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS, MECHANCHIM, AND MECHANCHOS

Introduction for Teens on page XVIII

It was Friday morning at a Torah Umesorah convention. Principals of girls' high schools were sitting around a table (a "networking" breakfast, for those familiar), and someone posed a question: "We're having such a problem with davening in school! Does anyone have any ideas?" And someone responded, "Is there anyone who is **not** having a problem with the davening in school?"

Tefillah is the Achilles' heel of *chinuch*—both in school and at home. One can mandate putting on tefillin, and whether the boy is engaged with the mitzvah or not, he has nonetheless put on tefillin! If a girl's skirt is appropriate, she is *tzanua* whether she is wearing it that way out of love for the sanctity of *tz'niyus* or because she doesn't want to get a detention! But mumbling Hebrew words in order to avoid dirty looks from the "prison warden" who is wandering up and down the aisles glaring at people (or from your father sitting next to you)—that's not *tefillah*! It may look like a beautiful davening to the outsider watching, and you can boast, "See, our students/my children don't talk during davening!" But in reality, all it accomplishes is the creation of PTSD (post-traumatic siddur disorder). When that young person sees a siddur later in life, or walks into a shul as an adult, they'll have flashbacks and feel anxiety and pain.

Tefillah is "*avodah she'ba'lev*," and it is meant to be a very personal and heartfelt communication with Hashem. The siddur is supposed to help facilitate that connection. Chazal wove many deep, meaningful, and lofty ideas and concepts

into the *tefillos*. Much of *tefillah* is *Tehillim*, which are certainly meant to convey many layers of beauty and meaning. Unfortunately, in today's world, many young people (and adults) are not comfortable with *Lashon Hakodesh*, and even the English translations do not always “speak” to them; besides the fact that many phrases defy translation. In addition, teenagers (and adults—but we try not to let teens know that) have many complex and sticky questions about the *tefillos* and about their day-to-day relationship with Hashem. These questions get stuck in their brain and impede their ability to talk to Hashem honestly and openly.

So how will this siddur help? This is **not** a full and literal translation of all the *tefillos*. Rather, it is an overview of what I believe to be the basic main point of each part of the weekday siddur, written in simple English, using terms that are relevant to today's teenagers. The translations, explanations, and concepts were culled from a wide variety of sources (*mefarshei haTanach*, *mefarshei tefillah*, *sifrei mussar*, *hashkafah*, and *chassidus*), mixing, matching, and merging—even within the same *pasuk*—in order to create a work that is hashkafically sound, meaningful, and readable. In addition, it deals with the common questions we all have when we take our davening and relationship with Hashem seriously. My goal is to ease the “angst” of these questions, while helping teens (and us!) understand something of what the *tefillos* are meant to convey, thereby making it easier for all of us to pour out our hearts to Hashem on a daily basis.

Will this solve all *tefillah* problems? Nope! After spending months studying the *tefillos* and writing this commentary, I still find myself at times taking three steps backward and saying to myself, “Oh! I guess I just finished *Shemoneh Esrei*!” (Sound familiar?) For some people, because of their G-d-given nature, davening will always be easy (just like for some people, because of their nature, they will have an easier time being

patient or charitable). And for some, because of their G-d-given nature, davening will be hard (just like for some people, because of their nature, they will have a harder time being patient or charitable). We all have areas of *avodas Hashem* that are easier or harder. But if used properly, in conjunction with a positive atmosphere and healthy *chinuch*, this siddur will help your children and students be the best daveners they can be. And you will learn much in the process!

אמן כן יהי רצון

Note Regarding This “Translation”

First of all, this is **not** a literal translation. Nor does it explain every word or sentence of every *tefillah*. Many *tefillos* have multiple layers of meaning, and at times, a literal translation makes certain sentences appear repetitious when we know that in reality, they are not. My goal was to be brief, convey what I understand to be the essence of the *tefillah*, and facilitate a meaningful conversation with Hashem.

Thus at times, long paragraphs have only a few lines of English (e.g., *Hodu* and *Az Yashir*). In addition, you may find it difficult to see where what I have said is found in the specific words of a *tefillah* (especially *Tehillim*). That is because the *mefarshim* and *midrashim* I used to explain that *tefillah* add ideas based on the context of that chapter within the *Sefer Tehillim*, and within the context of David HaMelech’s life.

Tefillos that I felt are most central and are rarely skipped (e.g., *Ashrei*) I explained in greater detail and I tried to stick closer to the actual words. But even in such instances, I added words into the translation in order to make it more personal, readable, or convey the essence of the meaning as understood by the *mefarshim*. To denote that these words are not found in the text itself, they will be in italics: e.g., “אֲשֶׁר־יֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתָךְ—Happy are those who (*wherever they are*) are living in the house of Hashem.” That addition in italics is based on

the commentary of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, who explains that with the proper values and mindset, any home, wherever it is, can become “the house of Hashem” even if it is not situated in Yerushalayim or the Beis Hamikdash.

In addition, commentaries like the *Malbim* and Rav Hirsch stress time and time again that many words in *Lashon Hakodesh* have multiple meanings, but those meanings are all interconnected if one understands the depth behind them. My choice of translation of certain key words was based on what I felt fit the meaning in that context, using terms that teens could relate to, and would most create a sense of real conversation and connection with Hashem. A few examples of translations that do not fit the norm:

- ברוך as in ברוך אתה ה'—You, Hashem, are the Source of everything, as explained by *Derech Hachaim* quoting the Avudraham, Rabbi Munk, and others.
- קדוש as in אתה קדוש—You, Hashem, are separate and removed from this physical world, as *Rashi* explains קדושה at the beginning of *Parashas Kedoshim*.
- שם as in ישתבח שמך or ברוך שם—May the impact of all You do (שמך) be praised; or May the perception of Hashem’s Presence be increased, as in the *pasuk*: “טוב שם משמן טוב—A good reputation is better than good oil” (*Koheles* 7:1). שם refers to reputation or how someone is known.

Throughout this siddur I have used Hebrew words, terms, and concepts written in Ashkenazic transliteration. In order not to impede the flow, I chose in general not to translate them, but I have provided an extensive glossary at the end of the siddur so that this work will be accessible to all.