
INTRODUCTION FOR TEENS

“But I Don’t Do Davening!”

(“OK, I do davening, but I don’t enjoy it!”)

OK, I get that. That is actually the most common comment made by young people who struggle with davening. “Did you daven this morning?” “No.” “Why not?” “I dunno.” “I dunno is not an answer!” “I dunno—I just don’t DO davening.”

So we need to figure out **why** you don’t do davening, or even if you do daven, why you find it so hard and not enjoyable. You’ve heard all the *mussar shmoozes*, speeches, guest speakers, Yom Iyuns, workshops, and *Biur Tefillah* classes. You’ve read all the books, tried all the workbooks, workshops, methods, and surefire tricks. You’ve been offered prizes—and threatened. Yet, for some reason, you look at the siddur and freeze! Or worse—you open it, try your hardest to daven, and mess up! Then you feel even more guilty than you did before, and you’re more convinced than ever that “Hashem certainly will not answer a mess-up like me!” Now you’re even further from your goal! And you **do** want to daven and enjoy davening (or at least you want to **want** to daven and enjoy it). You see that bachur *shokeling* away with his face contorted with emotion, or that girl with her siddur stuck right up to her face crying, and you wonder, “Why can’t I be like them? What’s the matter with me?”

But maybe **that’s** the problem! Perhaps you’re trying to be **them**. Perhaps you’re trying to be someone else. That’s not how *tefillah* works! ואני תפילתי—my *tefillah* is a reflection of the real “me.” As we explain in this siddur, first we proclaim, “זה א-לי”

ואנוהו—This is my G-d (*I will create my own personal relationship with Hashem*),” and then we say, “אלוקי אבי וארממנהו—He is the G-d of my father (*and that unique relationship will be built on the foundations of our ancestors*).” You need to be yourself—and being yourself can be quite scary and difficult. If you can’t learn to have a sincere conversation with yourself, then you’ll certainly find it difficult to talk to Hashem! So maybe it’s not the siddur; maybe it’s you! But the more you learn to be open with yourself, the easier it will be to talk to Hashem! And while this won’t always be easy, recognizing the issue is half the battle. And now you have something to ask Hashem: “Please, Hashem, help me become accepting of myself, able to see my potential, to recognize what I need to improve, and to have the courage to ask for help to become the best me possible!” That is certainly a good starting point!

Perhaps there are other possible reasons you “don’t do davening.” Perhaps you have questions—Hashem doesn’t seem fair, He never answers anyway, etc. OK—the FAQs section in this book addresses those questions. Perhaps you don’t understand the Hebrew? OK—there are translations. Perhaps you don’t understand the English? OK—so use this siddur; it’s easy to understand! Perhaps you’re afraid that if you actually daven, it will make the adults in your life happy, which will cause them to start demanding more of you (like when you suddenly get an 80 instead of your usual 65 and they respond: “Great! If you can get an 80, then next time you can get a 90!”). Or maybe—even worse—you’re afraid of your reputation! You’ve created this persona of a “non-davener” and you’re comfortable with that since it is safe and doesn’t demand much from you (you can’t mess up being a non-davener!). If you start davening, what will the *chevrah* say? What will all your BFFs say?

OK—I hear that. So don’t “daven” then. Talk to Hashem. When? On your way to yeshiva or school. In English. No

siddur required—just have a conversation with Him about your life, what’s going on, and where you could use some help. (You won’t even look weird—people will assume you have a Bluetooth!)

I once walked into my ninth-grade Chumash class when I was giving a test. I saw a girl mumbling to herself and assumed that she was reviewing *Rashi*. When I got closer, I heard she was saying, “Please, Hashem, let Mashiach come before Rabbi Feigenbaum gives this test!” I told her that it looked like that wasn’t going to happen. When her face fell, I suggested she ask Hashem that Mashiach should come before I grade her test! Her face lit up and she blurted out, “Oy, Hashem, please let Mashiach come before Rabbi Feigenbaum grades this test!” **That** was a 100 percent true, heartfelt **conversation** with Hashem. (Unfortunately for her and for all of us, what she wanted didn’t happen. So why did Hashem turn down her request? See the FAQs.)

But I would like to suggest one last possible reason why it is hard for you to daven. Davening is a *middah*, like patience, generosity, social skills, or organization. Hashem creates people different. Everyone has stuff that is naturally difficult for them, and they must work really hard to get it right. Take me: I have poor math skills, sloppy handwriting, and I struggle with knowing when to stop talking and start listening. Everybody has things that are easier for them and things that are harder: Some boys have *zitzfleish* and can sit for hours concentrating on a *sugya*. Others lose their place after a few seconds—even though they can fix every broken desk in five minutes! Some girls by their nature love going to visit old ladies in old age homes. They find it fun—“Oh, they’re so cute”—and naturally do that *chessed*. Others find it painful: Old age homes make them nervous, they don’t know what to say, and they feel like dorks.

The same is true with davening. Some people, by their G-d-given nature, enjoy davening. They were born with good language skills, and the words speak to them—it's just their thing! For others, it's simply a battle. Just like some kids always seem to know what to say and the *chevrah* are always crowding around them, and others find themselves constantly in awkward social situations. Or for some girls, *tz'niyus* comes naturally, and for others it's a struggle. That's how Hashem created us; we each have our own strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, and battles.

It is self-understood that Hashem expects you to do the best you can—not less. But He also doesn't expect you to be someone else! So what to do? I can't help you with your school rules or your parents' expectations. Forget those for a moment. More important is your relationship with Hashem. It's a slow process. That's OK. Start slow. How about **one** *Asher Yatzar* in the morning. Read it slowly and really think about how lucky you are that you can go to the bathroom and say thank you—in English! Take **one** *brachah* of the *Shemoneh Esrei* each week and stop, read the English explanation, and think about what it means to you—and tell Hashem what you're thinking.

One *brachah*! All growth is in stages.

Be wary of what the *mussar sefarim* call the “*frum yetzer hara*.” He gets you to jump too fast, too far, too quick. Then you fall and thus convince yourself that you're a loser—and give up! They say that Rav Shach, *zt”l*, on Rosh Hashanah accepted upon himself that **once** a day he would be careful to say *bentching* from a siddur rather than by heart. And he didn't promise himself to do this forever but until Chanukah! Something doable so you feel you accomplished something. Then on to the next step.

Will this be a steady climb up? Nope! Not at all! You'll have bad days and crash. We all do. (Remember, an EKG that's a

straight and smooth line means you are dead!) I too have found myself walking backward and saying, “Oh, I guess I just finished *Shemoneh Esrei*”—and I wrote this siddur!

The Satmar Rebbe, zy”a, used to say the following: “*Eileh va’rechev v’eileh va’susim*”—when the non-Jew wants to travel, he needs horses and chariots. But “*anachnu b’sheim Hashem Elokeinu nazkir*”—if we want to “travel,” all we need to do is start davening and our minds are all over the place!

So don’t be afraid to join the club of those who struggle every day to focus, think seriously, and actually have a heart-to-heart talk with our Creator.

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 in order to help you talk to Hashem. In addition, it deals with the common questions we all have when we take our davening and relationship with Hashem seriously.

Of course, whenever possible, you should say the *tefillos* in the original Hebrew and use this merely as an aid in understanding what you are saying. Chazal have infused our *tefillos* with many very special meanings. There’s a reason why it’s called *Lashon Hakodesh*! But remember, Hashem understands all languages as long as the person speaking is sincere and honest! (BTW, throughout this siddur I use Hebrew words written in Ashkenazic transliteration, and generally did not translate them in order not to mess up the flow. But there is an extensive glossary in the back—don’t be shy to use it!)

Of all the “Instant Insights” in this siddur, the following is my favorite, on the *pasuk* in *Ashrei*:

“לכל קוראיו—Hashem is close to all who call to Him”;
 “לכל אשר יקראו באמת—but one must call out to Hashem with
 אמת—honesty and sincerity.” It doesn’t say that Hashem is
 close to all “קראו באמת,” who now call to Him with honesty

and integrity. Rather, “אשר יקראו באמת—who **will** call (in the future tense) to Him with honesty.” This means that if right now you have a very up-and-down relationship with Hashem, you struggle with being 100 percent sincere 100 percent of the time, and at times you’re a bit of a hypocrite as far as what you promise Hashem and what you end up doing—still, as long as you are committed to being “יקראו באמת,” i.e., your goal is to be completely sincere, honest, and genuine in your relationship with Hashem, then already **now** He will listen to Your requests for help to get there!

If used properly, honestly, and diligently, this siddur will help you take **your** *tefillah* to a higher level, help you get back up when you’ve had “one of those days,” and give you the tools to be the best davener **you** can be. And that is all Hashem asks of us.