

Parashas
Matos-Masei

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כ"ו תמוז תשפ"ו

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י"ל ע"י

קהלת שבתי בבית ד'

בנשיאות מורנו ורבנו הר"צ

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טיב הקהילה

English edition

באנגלית

טיב הפרשה

טיב המערכת

נקמת בני ישראל

The vengeance of the Children of Israel

Chazal relate in Maseches "Derech Eretz" about Hillel HaZakein, that one day he asked his wife to prepare a meal in honor of a distinguished guest who had arrived. The woman indeed prepared a fine meal: she baked bread and cooked choice dishes. When she had finished preparing everything, a poor man came to her home and told her that he needed to get married that very day, but he had nothing with which to feed the guests who would come to his wedding. Immediately, she gave him all the food that she had prepared and began to prepare everything again from the beginning. Of course, the renewed preparation took a long time, and Hillel and the guest waited for a long time. She baked new bread and cooked a new dish, and when everything was ready, she served the food to her husband and the guest. Hillel asked her: "My daughter, for what reason did you not bring it immediately?" She told him the entire incident that had occurred. Hillel said to her: "My daughter, I too did not judge you unfavorably but rather favorably, for all the deeds that you did, you did only for the sake of Heaven."

We still remember what happened to the people of Israel after they sinned with the daughters of Moav and Midian, and behold, HaKadosh Baruch Hu commands Moshe Rabbeinu (31:2) - "נקום נקמת בני ישראל מאת המדינים" - "Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael from the Midianites," and we are astonished—only the Midianites? And what about the Moavites? They began the entire episode; they were the primary ones! Rashi explains: "From the Midianites—and not from the Moavites, for the Moavites entered into the matter out of fear, for they were afraid of them, lest they plunder them... but the Midianites entered into a quarrel that was not theirs."

We are accustomed to issuing judgments. We see someone behaving improperly, doing something that is not in accordance with the law, and immediately we judge him and determine his fate. Then, even if afterward we attempt to rebuke him—it is clear that he will not accept our rebuke. But the holy Torah teaches us what the correct path is: first, to judge favorably. We saw something improper? First let us consider what the reason for this behavior is. The Moavites indeed caused Israel to sin, but they had a reason—they were afraid, and therefore consideration is given to them. But the Midianites had no reason; they "became involved in a quarrel that was not theirs," therefore "harass the Midianites." Even if you are a prince of Israel and the meal was not served to you on time, and perhaps you even feel uncomfortable because of the guests, first you must judge favorably.

Tiv HaTorah - Matos

הזרז ימיו כפולים

The diligent, his days are doubled

וְאִם הִנִּיא אָבִיהָ אֶתָּה בְּיוֹם שָׁמְעוּ כָּל כְּדִרְיָהּ וְאֶסְרֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר אָסְרָה עַל נַפְשָׁהּ לֹא יָקוּם וְהָ יִסְלַח לָהּ כִּי הִנִּיא אָבִיהָ אֶתָּה: (ל, ו)

And if her father restrains her on the day that he hears, all her vows or prohibitions that she has imposed upon herself shall not stand, and Hashem will forgive her, for her father has restrained her. (30:6)

The section of "annulment of vows" ought to awaken us to utilize every moment of our lives for Torah and mitzvos. For in this section we see that if the father or the husband is lax and does not annul the vow of his daughter or his wife on the day that he hears it, he no longer has the ability to come on the following day and annul it, for the time that was given to him to annul it is no longer present. Since he did not utilize it properly, it is no longer possible to do with it what could have been done at that time. It is self-understood that a wise person will not delay from utilizing the moment that stands at his disposal.

This matter is a lesson regarding all the days and years of a person's life. A person must know that all of his times are designated for the service of the Creator, and if he utilizes them properly, he will merit and acquire through them eternal acquisitions for the World that is entirely good. But if he gives rest to his soul during some of his times, he will no longer have the ability to restore them, and he will no longer be able to gain what he could have gained had he utilized them properly. It is impossible to estimate the magnitude of the loss, which is for eternity. It is well known is the statement of one of the tzaddikim regarding the posuk (Shemos 17:9) - "צֵא וּהָלַח בְּעַמְלֶךְ מָחָר" - "Go out and fight against Amalek tomorrow"—that a person must go out to wage war with the yetzer, which is like Amalek [in that it seeks to cause Israel to stumble like Amalek]. Its counsel is "tomorrow"—that when a Jew seeks to serve his Creator, it attempts to burden him with all kinds of distractions that weaken his resolve from fulfilling the avodah, and thereby it succeeds in persuading him to postpone his will to "tomorrow," for it gives him hope that tomorrow his mind will be clearer to perform that avodah. Against this yetzer a person is obligated to wage war. He must understand and recognize that all of this is a stratagem of the yetzer, which seeks to rob his times and the good that can be acquired through them. It is the one that devised all the distractions, and in order that he not attempt to overcome them, it combines with them also the "consolation of tomorrow," so that the distractions and the consolation together accomplish their aim and steal his time so that he does not utilize it properly. The wise person, whose eyes are in his head, will have compassion upon his time and will overcome all the difficulties in order to utilize it as much as possible, for in truth there is no consolation in the statement "tomorrow," for tomorrow is an independent gain and is not connected at all to that hour that he lost. This is what Chazal intended when they said (Mechilta, Shemos 18): "A mitzvah that comes to your hand—do not allow it to become leavened." These words are not said only regarding a mitzvah for which there is concern that tomorrow he will no longer be able to fulfill it, but even regarding a mitzvah that can be postponed to tomorrow or to a later time. Nevertheless, it is not proper to delay it, for tomorrow is a gain unto itself, and tomorrow is not a reason to forfeit the present

moment.

In addition to this, a person must know that he is not assured that on the following day he will indeed be able to fulfill the service that he wishes to fulfill, for he is not assured that the yetzer will leave him at rest on the following day. The truth is that Chazal have already informed him that even tomorrow it will come to cause him loss, as they said (Kiddushin 30b): "A person's yetzer overpowers him every day and seeks to kill him, and were it not that HaKadosh Baruch Hu helps him, he would not be able to overcome it." This statement reveals to us that every day the yetzer seeks to strike at a person and take from him his day, and this is a form of "death," for it seeks to cause a person to lose the purpose of life contained within that day. From now, if this person today is not able to overcome it and does not prevail over his distractions and his impediments, how will he be able to overcome it tomorrow? For by agreeing to the counsel of his yetzer he reveals that he is not prepared to gird his loins in order to fight it, and if so, also tomorrow he will submit before it—unless he understands that one who wishes to utilize his days and his years has no alternative but to exert himself against his yetzer and to overcome all the difficulties that present themselves before him. Only in this manner does one merit to gain the hours and the days and

to merit through them eternal reward. Since this is so, there is no reason to prefer tomorrow; rather, already today he should exert himself to utilize his day, and after he exerts himself somewhat, Hashem will be at his help, and he will easily conquer his yetzer.

This is the intent in the statement of Hillel the Elder (Avos 2:4): "Do not say, 'When I will be free I will study,' lest you never become free." In his words he revealed that the yetzer constantly troubles a person and presents before him all kinds of impediments in order to prevent him from the service of his Creator. Therefore, he should not console himself and say, "When I will be free I will study"—meaning, he should not view the impediments that befall him as technical circumstances that happened to occur only today, and that are not at all connected to the yetzer that seeks to cause him to stumble. For then he will console himself and hope that tomorrow it will be easier for him and he will be free for the service of the Creator. Rather, he should understand that this is from the stratagems of the yetzer, and therefore he must be concerned that "perhaps you will not become free," for the yetzer will always invent "justified" reasons to delay him from fulfilling his obligation. Since we are dealing with the counsel of the yetzer, one must not listen to it at all. Rather, already today, even while he is preoccupied, he must gird his

loins and remove his mind from all the troubling and burdensome thoughts, and direct himself to the service of his Creator. He should understand that this is the way of service—that one is always required to exert oneself in order to merit it. Only in this manner does one merit the statement of the wise, "The diligent—his days are doubled," meaning that the sharper he will be to understand the stratagems of the yetzer, and the more diligent he will be to bypass them, so will he merit that his days be increased.

טיב המעשיות

The Power of Tefillah

והצילו העדה את הרצח בו אל עיר מקלטו
אשר נס שמת, וישב בה עד מות הכהן הגדל,
אשר משה אתו בשמן הקדש (לה, כה)

The congregation shall save the manslayer... to his city of refuge to which he fled, and he shall dwell there until the death of the kohen gadol, who was anointed with the sacred oil (Bamidbar 35:25).

Regarding the reason that one who fled to a city of refuge must remain there until the death of the kohen gadol, Rashi zt"l, explains (in his second interpretation): "Because the kohen gadol should have prayed that such a mishap should not occur in Yisrael during his lifetime."

The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel on this pasuk, states this more explicitly: "The kohen gadol is held accountable because he did not pray on Yom Kippur, in the Kodosh Hakodashim, that Bnei Yisrael should not stumble in the three severe transgressions—idolatry, immorality, and the shedding of innocent blood. Since it was within his power to annul these through his prayers, yet he did not pray, he was therefore punished."

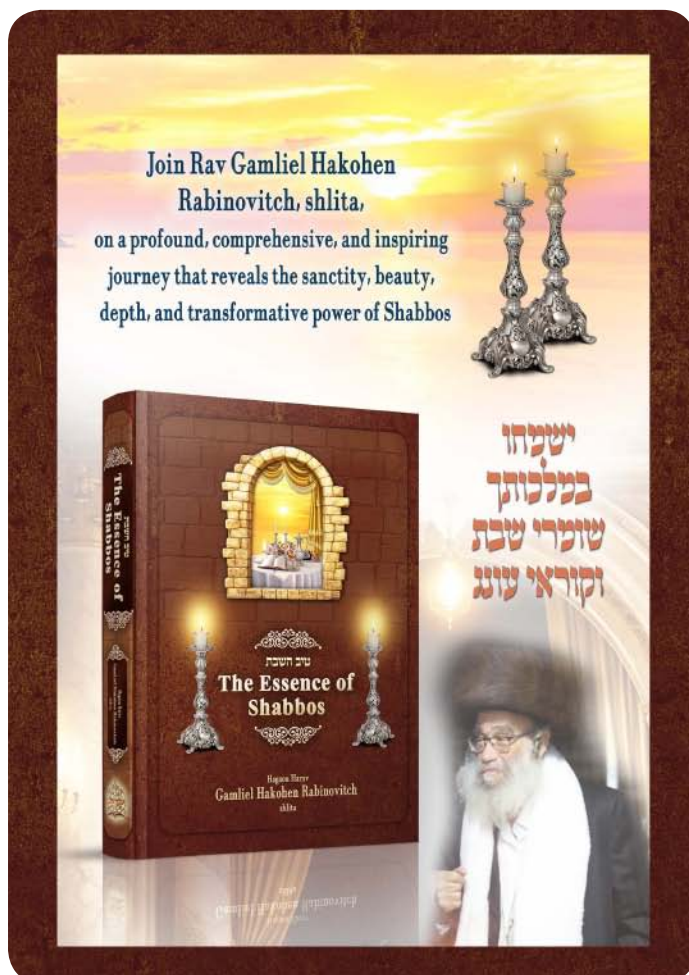
From here we learn the extraordinary potency and efficacy of tefillah: that in the hands of the kohen gadol through prayer alone, lies the capacity to protect all Klal Yisrael from the gravest sins in the Torah. Through his supplication, immense salvation could be effected for the entire nation.

Moreover, from the opposite end of the spectrum, we find an equally striking demonstration of the power of prayer. The Gemara (Makkos 11a) teaches that not only the exalted prayer of the kohen gadol—on Yom Kippur, in the innermost sanctum—has the power to achieve great things. Even the prayers of murderers are accepted before the Heavenly Throne.

As the Mishnah teaches: "Therefore, the mothers of the kohanim would provide the manslayers in the cities of refuge with sustenance and clothing, so that they should not pray for their sons to die." According to another version: "so that they should pray that their sons should not die."

We thus see the astonishing value of tefillah: that the prayer of a murderer, seeking the death of the kohen gadol so that he may return home, could bring about the death of the kohen gadol himself. Alternatively, their prayers could preserve him from death.

The Gemara explains the underlying reason: since the kohen gadol should have prayed



for his generation and did not, he bears responsibility. As stated by the elder sage there, "It was incumbent upon them to seek mercy for their generation, yet they did not do so."

Just as we find that murderers employ the power of prayer, so too do even lowly thieves. As the Gemara states (Berachos 63a): "A thief, at the entrance to his tunnel, calls out to the Merciful One." Even one who comes to steal—prepared, if necessary, to kill—pauses to pray for success.

This demonstrates that even such a supplication is halachically recognized as a form of tefillah; otherwise, the Gemara would not attribute significance to it.

From here, one must reflect deeply. This is a kal vachomer of the highest order: if the prayer of base individuals—murderers and thieves—possesses such potency, capable of bringing about profound consequences, how much more so the prayer of a righteous Jew! Even an ordinary individual, who is neither a murderer nor a thief, how precious and powerful is his tefillah, capable of effecting wondrous salvations in Heaven and on earth. May the prayers and supplications of all Yisrael be accepted before their Father in Heaven—Amen.

When the time came for the wedding and joyous celebration of the holy Rebbe, Rav Yisrael of Stolin, zt"l—known as the Yenuka—there was immense rejoicing in the sacred court of Karlin. Having been orphaned in childhood from his holy father, Rav Asher (the second) of Karlin zt"l, the community had remained like sheep without a shepherd. Now, as he ascended in his youth to assume the illustrious mantle of his saintly forebears, the wedding was celebrated with great splendor and grandeur, attended by multitudes, in fulfillment of (Mishlei 14:28), בָּרַב עַם הַדֹּרֶת מֶלֶךְ - In the multitude of people is the King's glory.

The wedding was held, as was customary, in the town of the bride, in the home of his father-in-law, the holy Rav Dovid of Zlatipoli zt"l. Many righteous figures gathered from across the land to participate in this great celebration, uniting distinguished lineages—"grapevines entwined with grapevines." From the groom's side came the noble houses of Karlin and Kozhnitz, and from the bride's side the illustrious dynasty of Chernobyl. At their head sat the bride's grandfather, Rav Yochanan of Rachmistrivka zt"l, son of the holy Maggid Rav Mordechai of Chernobyl, grandson of the Ma'or Einayim, along with many other exalted tzaddikim.

The Karliner chassidim who had arrived in large numbers gathered to pray together in their own minyan. They prayed according to their unique nusach and melody, as was their

holy custom—raising their voices in powerful cries, pouring out their hearts and souls with intensity. This manner of prayer, passed down through generations, was rooted in the well-known potency of tefillah, and their voices could be heard from afar.

These thunderous sounds reached the ears of the venerable Rebbe of Rachmistrivka, who was deeply stirred, for such a manner of prayer was not customary in the courts of Chernobyl. He requested to go and witness this fervent service with his own eyes. He entered quietly from the side into the house of prayer and stood observing with longing the Karliner chassidim, aflame with the fire of their devotion.

After the prayer, the chassidim approached him with reverence. Having blessed them for the joyous occasion, he smiled and remarked with gentle grace: if the intention of the heart were equal to the intensity of the cry of the mouth, then surely this would be a most elevated prayer—beautiful beyond compare. Among those present stood an elder chassid who had merited to dwell in the presence of the earlier Karliner Rebbes. Upon hearing the Rebbe's words, he respectfully requested permission to respond, which was graciously granted.

The elder opened and said: Thus did our holy master, the author of Beis Aharon, teach us in explaining the pasuk (Devarim 30:14), כִּי קְרוֹב אֵלַי הַדְּבָר מֵאֵד בְּפִי וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת - For the matter is very near to you—in your mouth and in your heart—to do it. The Borei Yisbarach, in His kindness, arranged the order as in your mouth, before, in your heart. For had the pasuk first mentions the heart, who would dare open his mouth before the King Who examines hearts? Therefore, Hashem graciously allowed us to begin with the mouth—so that through verbal expression, the words will ultimately penetrate and awaken the heart.

As is established for us as a halachic principle in many places: "the voice arouses the intention," as is explicitly ruled in Be'er Heitev (Orach Chaim 643:1) and in Eliyah Rabbah (185:3), based upon Reishis Chochmah (Shaar Hakedushah, ch. 15) and the holy Shelah (Shaar Ha'osiyos, Kedushas Ha'achilah, os 92; Maseches Sukkah, Ner Mitzvah, os 6). The holy Rebbe of Rachmistrivka greatly appreciated this profound teaching and accepted it, and his mind was at ease.

The lesson emerging from this account is clear: the proper approach to prayer is to begin—even when one feels that he has not yet attained the proper state of elevated awareness, and his heart is not fully engaged, and his prayer seems to be only verbal.

Nevertheless, if one simply begins to pray properly, with sincerity and willingness, his heart will eventually be

aroused, and he will come to taste the sweetness of prayer. As the pasuk testifies: לֹא נִפְלְאָת הִיא מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא רִחֵקָה הִיא, לֹא בְשִׁמּוּם הִיא, וְלֹא מֵעֵבֶר לָיִם הִיא, כִּי קְרוֹב אֵלַי הַדְּבָר מֵאֵד בְּפִי וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת - It is not beyond you, nor is it distant... for the matter is very near to you—in your mouth and in your heart—to do it.

A remarkable story is brought in Sefer Chassidim:

There was once a shepherd who did not know how to pray. Each day he would say: "Ribbono Shel Olam, it is revealed and known before You that if You had animals and entrusted them to me to guard, I would guard them for free—for I love You!"

One day, a talmid chacham passed by and heard him praying in this manner. He rebuked him: "Fool! Do not pray like this!"

The shepherd asked: "Then how should I pray?" The scholar taught him the proper order of berachos, Shema, and tefillah, instructing him not to continue his former way.

But after the scholar left, the shepherd forgot everything he had been taught. And now he refrained from his original prayer as well, fearing to say it.

That night, the scholar was shown in a dream: "If you do not go and tell that shepherd to resume his previous prayer, know that harm will come upon you—for you have deprived Me of one soul from the World to Come."

The scholar immediately returned and asked the shepherd what he was praying. He replied: "Nothing. I forgot what you taught me, and I am afraid to say what I used to say." The scholar then recounted his dream and instructed him to return to his former way of prayer.

Here we see: no Torah, no formal deeds—only a simple desire to do good—and it was regarded as something of the highest order. It is further recorded that a tzaddik would pray for every distress. When he himself later fell into trouble, the ministering angels pleaded on his behalf: "This tzaddik prayed for others—he is worthy to be saved!" And indeed, he was delivered.

Such is the wondrous power and preciousness of sincere prayer.

A distinguished talmid chacham once asked my revered father zt"l, author of Maadanei Hashulchan, how one may overcome the foreign thoughts that intrude during davening and disturb one's concentration.

My father answered him: "I will give you a simple piece of advice, which is also a tried and tested segulah: pray specifically from within a siddur, and focus carefully on the words of the tefillah, word by word. In this way, you are assured that all foreign thoughts will be banished from your mind."

Those who expound Scriptural allusions found a basis for this idea in a pasuk concerning Queen Esther (Esther 9:25): וּבִבְרָאָה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ... אָמַר עִם הַסֵּפֶר יוֹשִׁיב מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ הֶרְעָה—when one comes before the King (as one stands in prayer before the King), and speaks with the book, i.e., from the text, then, his evil thought will return, meaning it will depart from him and be nullified.

The holy Rebbe, Rav Klonimus Kalman zy"a, author of Ma'or Va'shemesh, once asked the holy Rav Tzvi Hirsch HaKohen of Rimanov zy"a, for guidance on overcoming distracting thoughts during prayer (in accordance with his lofty level).

The Rebbe of Rimanov replied simply that he did not know any specific counsel for this. For as soon as he opened the siddur and began to say Adon Olam, and placed upon his heart before Whom he stood—before the Ribbono Shel Olam—immediately all foreign thoughts fled from his mind.

In a similar vein, a certain talmid chacham once asked the gaon Rav Zundel Kroizer zt"l, author of Ohr Hachamah, to reveal the method he employed to attain proper concentration in tefillah.

Rav Zundel answered with characteristic simplicity and humility: "I have never required any special techniques for this. When a person knows and understands that he is standing in tefillah before the King, he will naturally concentrate properly."

Let the wise hear and increase in understanding, to appreciate the precious greatness of the quality of prayer.

I wish to present before you an incident that I personally witnessed, illustrating the immense power of the quality of prayer to bring about salvation—and that at times the salvation arrives immediately upon one merely resolving to pray for something.

This reflects the pasuk (Yeshayahu 65:24): וְהָיָה טָרֶם יִקְרְאוּ וְאֲנִי אֶעֱנֶה, עוֹד הֵם מְדַבְּרִים וְאֲנִי אֶשְׁמָע—And it shall be, before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

A certain precious young man had remained confined at home for an extended period, for, to our great sorrow, it had not been possible to arrange a suitable yeshivah for him. The pain and distress in such situations need not be described.

In an effort to assist him and uplift his troubled spirit, I met together with his father at the home of an experienced communal activist. With Hashem's help, a suitable solution was found to guide the boy onto a proper path and bring this painful episode to a positive conclusion. After we left, the father said to me with

deep emotion, tears streaming from his eyes: "This is truly wondrous! I have been pursuing this activist for several months and could not manage to meet with him. Therefore, I resolved in my heart to travel to the holy places and pour out my soul in prayer before the Borei Yisbarach, that He illuminate my path as to what to do. And see—before I even managed to go and pray, Hashem, in His great kindness, already brought the salvation!"

I rejoiced together with him and said, "Do not abandon your intention—go now to those holy places, but to offer praise and thanksgiving to the Borei Yisbarach, Who hastened to bring you your salvation."

From here we learn that even the mere resolve—the inner resolution—to pray, already brought Divine assistance.

A clear support for this is found in the Gemara (Ta'anis 8a):

"In the days of Rabbi Zeira, when decrees were issued forbidding even fasting and prayer, he instructed that they at least accept the fast upon themselves—and that acceptance alone would be effective. He derived this from the pasuk (Daniel 10:12): וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי, אֵל תִּירָא דְנִיָּאל, כִּי מִן הַיּוֹם הֶרָאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּ אֶת לִבְךָ לְהִבִּין וּלְהַתְעַנּוֹת לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ נִשְׁמָעוּ דְּבָרֶיךָ - From the first day that you set your heart to understand and to afflict yourself before your God, your words were heard."

Thus we see explicitly that the very act of setting one's heart—נָתַתָּ אֶת לִבְךָ—already activates the power and efficacy of prayer to annul harsh decrees and draw down salvation and consolation.

The holy Rebbe, Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk zy"a, writes in Noam Elimelech: "One should strengthen himself to be swift like a deer, not refraining from praying over every single matter. Let him not say: 'Who am I to pray for such things?'—rather, both great and small should always pray."

In this regard, the holy Divrei Shmuel of Slonim relates about Rav Pinchas of Koritz zt"l, that his disciples once heard him praying quietly after Shemoneh Esrei, before stepping back, beseeching Hashem to grant him: "to see the maidservant return to her home."

The eminent disciples, who were well-versed in the esoteric secrets of the wisdom of chein, could not comprehend the meaning of that exalted prayer. They delved deeply in inquiry to uncover this lofty mystery, attempting to interpret the concept of the "maidservant" according to the profundities of the hidden Torah. Each one offered his own explanation—this one in one manner, and that one in another.

This was in line with what is known in the mystical interpretation of the pasuk (Shmuel

18:13): וְאֵת בְּנוֹתֵיכֶם יִקַּח לְרִקְחֹת וּלְטַבָּחוֹת - And your daughters he will take for perfumers, for cooks, and for bakers—which alludes to those wisdoms that serve the holy Torah. As is further hinted in the Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 4:4), regarding the permissibility of concubines for a king on a higher plane, "that he takes into his palace cooks, bakers, and perfumers, etc.," as is well known to those versed in chein (kabbalah).

After davening was over, while the tzaddik sat together with his circle of holy disciples, they approached him and requested that he explain to them the secret of that prayer which he had offered that day in the service of the King, in the aspect of the exalted "maidservant."

The holy Rebbe smiled and answered them with simplicity: "There is no 'lofty secret' here, nor any special intention from the esoteric meditations of those who meditate on their tefillah. Rather, the story is exactly as it occurred. The maidservant who worked in my home became upset and angry and left her job, and my wife, the Rebbetzin, requires assistance due to the burden of the household work. Therefore, I asked Hakadosh Baruch Hu to place in the heart of the 'maidservant' a feeling of goodwill to return to work in my home... for otherwise I would need to assist her myself, and thereby be drawn away from Torah and avodas Hashem."

[In other sources, a different version is recorded: The holy Rebbe suddenly entered the beis midrash, opened the aron kodesh, and poured out his supplication with a stirred and trembling heart—that peace be made between the maidservant and her mistress. Upon this, the disciples were astounded and sought to understand the meaning of that lofty unification.]

At that same occasion, the holy Rebbe further explained: just as a son turns to his father to request everything—whether he needs something costly, such as a new coat worth a considerable sum, or whether he desires something small, like a simple beigel worth but a few coins—so in both cases alike he turns to his father, who loves him, sustains him, and bestows goodness upon him, asking him for all his needs.

So too, we—beloved children of Hakadosh Baruch Hu—must accustom ourselves, in every need and matter, whether great or small, whether of the body or of the soul, even in the most minor detail, to take hold of the craft of our forefathers, the precious segulah of the quality of prayer, and to ask of our Father, our King, like a child who entreats his father and seeks to fulfill his will.

We have thus expanded, with the help of Heaven, upon the concept of prayer and its many facets elsewhere, in the sefer Tiv HaTefillah.

וְאֲנִי תַפְלִיתִי לָךְ הֵי עַת רְצוֹן - אֵלֵקִים בְּרַב חֶסֶדְךָ עֲנֵי בְּאַמְתִּי וְשִׁעֲרָךְ - But as for me, my prayer is to You, Hashem, at a favorable time; O God, in the abundance of Your kindness, answer me with the truth of Your salvation." (Tehillim 69:14)