

ב"ה



לעילוי נשמת אסתר בת נפתלי

IN MEMORY OF ESTHER BAS NAFTALI MEYER
ESTHER



משנה
For נשמה

MISHNA *For* NESHAMA

ברכות ה,א

אין עומדין להתפלל אלא מתוך כבוד ראש.
 חסידים הראשונים היו שוהים שעה אחת
 ומתפללים, כדי שיכינו את לבם למקום. אפלו
 המלך שואל בשלומן, לא ישיבנו. ואפלו נחש כרוך
 על עקבן, לא יפסיק.

Berachot 5:1

One should begin to pray only with a reverent feeling. There is a tradition that the early generations of pious men would wait one hour in order to reach the solemn frame of mind appropriate for prayer, and then pray, so that they would focus their hearts towards G-d. Standing in prayer is standing before G-d and, therefore, even if the king greets him, he should not respond to him; and even if a snake is wrapped around his heel, he should not interrupt his prayer.



Aleph

is the first letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'one'. The meaning of alef is aluf which means a master. The first letter impresses upon us how we need to be conscious that there is a Creator and that G-d is the Master of the universe. Knowing that there is a G-d and that all we experience is part of His Divine plan should offer us a level of comfort when we face the loss of a loved one.

Insights

Mr. and Mrs. Cohen decided it was time for their son, Moshe, to learn how to pray. They employed a teacher, but as much as he tried, Moshe couldn't learn how to read. Moshe was no fool; he knew all the football teams and their players. Moshe's teacher decided to teach him at least how to read the Kaddish.

A few weeks later, Mr. and Mrs. Cohen stormed into Moshe's teacher's home screaming, "What is this teaching our son Kaddish? We are only 30 years old." "Don't worry," replied his teacher, "I promise, you will live to 120 yrs. and your son, Moshe, still won't be able to recite the Kaddish."

Many people believe that they know how to pray if they can read. However, prayer is much more than simply reciting the words. Prayer affords us the opportunity of having the most important conversation of our lives. We are able to converse with the Creator of the universe, with the Al-mighty.

We recite 'to serve G-d with all your heart' three times a day. The Sages ask, what is considered service of the heart? They explain it means prayer. How does one serve G-d through prayer? Based on the writings of King David in Psalms, prayer consists of serving G-d with fear and serving G-d with joy.

How can we pray with two opposing emotions? When we prepare for prayer, we must recognize how distant we are from G-d and who are we to have the audacity to ask for our needs or even praise Him? However, once we begin to pray we should do it with gladness of the heart. We should rejoice that G-d is listening to every word we utter from our lips.

Let us pray with dignity and with decorum and, please G-d, our prayers should be answered.

תענית ב.א

סדר תעניות כיצד? מוציאים את התבה לרחובה של עיר; ונותנים אפר מקלה על גבי התבה ובראש הנשיא ובראש אב בית דין; וכל אחד ואחד נותן בראשו. הדיקון שבהן אומר לפניו דברי כבושין. אחינו, לא נאמר באנשי נינוה. "וירא האלהים את שקם ואת תעניתם", אלא (יונה ג, י) "וירא האלהים את מעשיהם, כי-שבו מדרךם הרעה"; ובקבלה "הוא אומר (יואל ב, יג) "וקרעו לבבכם ואל-בגדיכם."

Tannit 2:1

What is the customary order of fast days? They remove the ark to the main city square and place ashes upon the ark as a sign of mourning. And they also place ashes on the head of the Nasi, the head of the chief of the court, and each person places ashes upon his own head. The elder of the community says to the congregation words of reproof, for example: "Our brothers, it is not stated about the people of Nineveh, 'And G-d saw their sackcloth and their fasting.' Rather, the verse says, 'And G-d saw their deeds, that they had turned away from their evil way.' And in the Prophets, it says: "And rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the L-rd your G-d."

Insights

During the calendar year, we fast on six separate occasions. Four of those fasts are to memorialize the destruction of the two Temples. However, our Mishnah deals with laws of fasts implemented due to a particular crisis facing the Jewish people, for instance, when the Land of Israel had experienced an extended period of drought. The Rabbis would institute additional prayers and fasting to beseech G-d to bring rain to fill the wells and irrigate the parched land.

Our Mishnah clearly establishes that prayer and fasting are insufficient; we must also do teshuvah.

What is teshuvah?

The word 'teshuvah' is often mistranslated as 'repentance'. Teshuvah is better translated as 'return'. When we do teshuvah, we are returning to G-d.

Teshuvah is an opportunity for self-evaluation and self-improvement.

Rambam writes that there are three steps when doing teshuvah.

Regret: We must feel genuine remorse for what we have done in the past.

Commitment: We need to make a firm decision never to repeat our sin.

Confession: We need to verbalize our misdeeds.

According to Jewish tradition, teshuvah can only atone for sins against G-d. Sins against our fellow man can only be atoned once we have rectified our wrongdoing. For example, if we have stolen something, we must first return the stolen object and ask forgiveness from the aggrieved party.

We live in a world where we can only move in one direction - forward. We cannot go back in time, as the saying, 'time waits for no man'. There is one exception to that rule - teshuvah. The ability to do teshuvah is a gift from G-d. G-d is telling us, I am giving you the ability to go back in time and rectify the past sins. And by doing teshuvah, I will wipe your slate clean.



Samech

is the fifteenth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'sixty'. The design of the samech is a closed circle. The Talmud writes that a person's life is like a circle; there are times when we are on top of the world and times when we seem to be at the bottom of the curve. When we are at the top we should not take it for granted; we must appreciate and be thankful for our successes and not forget those at the bottom of the curve. And if we are at the bottom, we must remember that G-d can bring us up to the top of the circle in the blink of an eye.

ברכות דא

תַּפִּלָּה תַּפִּלַּת הַשַּׁחַר עַד חֲצוֹת; רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: עַד אַרְבַּע שָׁעוֹת. תַּפִּלַּת הַמִּנְחָה עַד הָעֶרֶב; רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: עַד פֶּלַג הַמִּנְחָה. תַּפִּלַּת הָעֶרֶב אֵין לָהּ קָבַע. וְשֶׁל מוֹסְפִין כָּל הַיּוֹם; רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: עַד שֶׁבַע שָׁעוֹת.

Berachot 4:1

According to the Sages, the morning prayer may be recited until mid-day. Rabbi Yehuda says: It may be recited only until four hours after sunrise. According to the Sages, the afternoon prayer may be recited until the evening. Rabbi Yehuda says: It may be recited only until the midpoint of the afternoon. The evening prayer may be recited throughout the night and is not limited to a specific hour. According to the Sages, the additional prayer may be recited all day. Rabbi Yehuda says: It may be recited only until seven hours after sunrise.

Insights

As outlined in our Mishnah, we are obligated to pray three times a day. Before the morning prayers, we recite a prayer as soon as we awaken and while still in bed. The prayer is called the Modeh Ani - 'I give thanks'. With this prayer we thank G-d for giving us another day of life. The prayer translated into English: 'I thank you, living and enduring King, for You have graciously returned my soul within me. Great is Your faithfulness.'

The Chassidic Masters offer two very profound insights into the deeper meaning of this prayer. Firstly, we don't simply thank G-d for giving us another day of life which is worth expressing gratitude to the Almighty. We explicitly thank G-d for returning to each and every one of us our own soul. By G-d returning our soul to us, G-d is telling us that we count and have a unique mission that no other human being can accomplish. What an uplifting and motivating idea!

The second idea that we need to contemplate: We acknowledge

that the night before, while sleeping, our soul returned to Heaven to give an account of our daily actions, and the soul was probably in less than pristine condition. G-d, in His infinite kindness, gave us another chance. And so it goes, every day we spend on Earth G-d is saying: I will give you the benefit of the doubt, and hopefully, today will be better than yesterday.

We, therefore, thank G-d for giving us another opportunity to get things right. We thank G-d for giving us a second chance.

Imagine if we treat everyone we encounter in the same manner and give them the benefit of the doubt, a second chance. What an impact it would have on our family, community, and perhaps whole nations! If we feel it is too much to expect, remember the only reason we are alive today is because that is how G-d related to us.



Taf

is the twenty-second letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'four hundred'. It is the final letter of the aleph-bet. It is, in a sense, the culmination of all existence. Not by chance is it the first letter of the words techiyat hameisim, the resurrection of the dead, when the souls of all our departed loved ones will be reunited in their physical bodies here on earth. May it be soon in our time.

אבות ב,א

רַבִּי אומר: איזוהי דרך ישרה שיבר לו האדם? כל שהיא תפארת לעושה ותפארת לו מן האדם. והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצוות. והוי מחשב הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה, ושכר עברה כנגד הפסדה. והסתכל בשלשה דברים, ואי אתה בא לידי עברה; דע מה למעלה ממך: עין רואה, ואזן שומעת, וכל מעשיך בספר נכתבין.

Avot 2:1

Rebbi would say: Which is the proper course for man to choose for himself? Whatever is harmonious for the one who does it and harmonious for humanity. And be careful with a minor commandment as with a major one, for you do not know the rewards for fulfilling commandments. Consider the loss through fulfilling a commandment against its reward and the gain of a transgression against its loss. Contemplate three things and you will not come to sin: Know what is above you: an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are inscribed in a book.



Reish

is the twentieth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'two hundred'. Reish means 'poverty'. It's interesting to note that, in the Talmudic era, a person who had less than 200 coins was considered below the poverty level and was entitled to receive tzedakah from the synagogue. The Sages teach us that in G-d's eyes, tzedakah and acts of kindness are equivalent to all the mitzvot of the Torah. Elsewhere they write, "Great is tzedakah, for since the world was created until this day the world exists upon tzedakah". It has always been the custom that every Jewish home should have a tzedakah pushka (a charity box).

Insights

Ethics of the Fathers is the only section of the Mishna devoted exclusively to the ethical and moral statements of the Sages. It contains timeless wisdom and advice.

Our Mishnah shares the wisdom of Rebbi, Rabbi Yehudah the Prince. His contemporaries called him 'our Holy Teacher', and he attained the ultimate level of wisdom and greatness. He was responsible for committing the Oral Tradition to a text known as the Mishna thereby preserving Jewish law for all time.

There are approximately 7.9 billion people who populate the planet Earth. The world has existed for over 5780 years. Who knows how many humans have lived since the time of Adam and Chava. Our time here is transient even if we live till 120. We may begin to question our very existence. Do we really make a difference? Or posed slightly different, would the world be any different if we were never born?

This is a very sobering thought.

The Baal Shem Tov (1698 – 1760), the founder of the Chassidic movement who stressed the importance of serving G-d with joy and happiness, offers a unique insight into the phrase 'Know what is above you'. He writes that everything we say and do has an impact in heaven. If we act in a benevolent and kindly fashion to our fellow human beings, G-d's attribute of compassion will be revealed through the supernal worlds.

The phrase reads, know that what occurs above in the celestial worlds is from you.

The next time we are feeling down, remember that we do count; our actions do make a difference. And what we do down here on earth impacts all the way up to the upper spiritual worlds.

שבת כא,א

בְּיָטֵל אָדָם אֶת בְּנוֹ וְהֶאָבֶן בְּיָדוֹ, וְכִלְכְּלָהּ וְהֶאָבֶן
 בְּתוֹכָהּ. וּמִטְּלָטְלִין תְּרוּמָה טְמֵאָה עִם הַטְּהוֹרָה וְעִם
 הַחֲלִין. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: אֶף מֵעֲלִין אֶת הַמְּדֻמָּע
 בְּאַחַד וּמֵאָה.

Shabbat 21:1

On Shabbos, one may take his son into the house, even though there is a stone, which is muktzeh (cannot be moved), in the child's hand. And it is permissible to take a basket with a stone inside on Shabbat. And one may move ritually impure teruma (food designated for the Cohen), which may not be eaten and is muktzeh (cannot be moved), with ritually pure teruma, as well as with non-sacred produce. Rabbi Yehuda says: One may even lift a measure of teruma that was nullified from a mixture of one hundred measures of non-sacred produce and one measure of teruma.

Insights

There are thirty-nine categories of work prohibited on Shabbat by Torah Law. Many have the misconception that Jewish law prohibits labor on the Shabbat and, therefore, they don't understand why we cannot turn on a light that takes no effort. Or driving a car to the synagogue, which takes less effort than walking.

The mistake lies in the inaccurate translation of one word in the Torah. When the Torah discusses the prohibition of not working on Shabbat, it does not use the word 'avodah' which is translated as work or labor. Instead, it uses the word 'melacha' which means a creative activity that demonstrates man's mastery over nature. By refraining from such actions, we acknowledge that G-d is the ultimate Creator and Master.

The Sages also enacted edicts whose purpose are to preserve the spirit of Shabbat as a day of rest and holiness. One such law is called muktzeh - certain objects must be set aside and not moved on Shabbat.

Some reasons for this law are: Since it is forbidden to work on Shabbat, one might utilize the free time to rearrange the items in their home and carry them from one place to another, in contrast to the spirit of Shabbat as a day of rest.

The Sages restricted the handling of items whose primary function is for an activity forbidden on Shabbat. Writing on the Shabbat is one of the thirty-nine Torah prohibitions. If we were permitted to hold a pen, inadvertently we may come to write with it. To safeguard this law, the Sages decreed that handling a pen is prohibited.



Nun

is the fourteenth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'fifty'. Nun means 'fish' in Aramaic, the language of the Talmud. When we stand by the sea and look down, all we see is water. Yet, we know beneath the surface there are thousands of different species of fish, coral, and vegetation. The fact that we can't see it does not negate its existence. Similarly, there is a spiritual world where the soul of the departed resides. Our inability to see it does not mean that it doesn't exist.

ש

Shin

is the twenty-first letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'three hundred'. On the tefillin worn on the head are two shins - one with three vertical lines protruding from the base and one with four. They symbolize our three forefathers and our four mothers. When one loses a parent, mourning is for twelve months. For all other blood relatives, mourning is for thirty days. When we lose a parent, we have lost the golden link in the chain that takes us all the way back to Abraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel, and Leah. Hence, the mourning is more intense.

שקלים וא

נְשִׁינָה שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר שׁוּפְרוֹת, שֶׁל שָׁה עָשָׂר
שְׁלֹחָנוֹת, שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה הַשְׁתַּחֲוִיֹּת הָיוּ בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ.
שֶׁל בֵּית רֶבֶן גַּמְלִיאֵל וְשֶׁל בֵּית רַבִּי חַנִּינָא סֵגֶן
הַכֹּהֲנִים, הָיוּ מְשַׁתַּחֲוִין אַרְבַּע עֶשְׂרֵה. וְהִיכָן הִיטָה
יְתָרָה? כְּנֶגֶד דִּיר הָעֵצִים, שָׁכָן מַסֶּרֶת בִּידָם
מֵאַבוֹתֵיהֶם שֶׁשָּׁם הָאָרוֹן נִגְזַר.

Shekalim 6,1

In the Temple there were thirteen chests, thirteen tables and thirteen prostrations. Members of the household of Rabban Gamaliel and of Rabbi Chanina, the chief of the priests, would prostrate fourteen times. And where was the additional prostration? In front of the wood storage yard, for they had a tradition from their ancestors that the Ark was hidden there.

Insights

King Solomon built the First Temple in 827 BCE, and it lasted for 410 years until the Greek Assyrian Empire destroyed it. The Jewish people were sent to exile in Babylonia for 70 years. It was during this period that the miracle of Purim happened. The Jewish people then returned to the Land of Israel, and under the guidance of the Prophets Ezra and Nechemya the Second Temple was built. It was completed in the year 349 BCE and lasted for 420 years. During this period the miracle of Chanukah occurred. It was destroyed by the Roman Empire in the year 69 CE. The third and final Temple will be built by Moshiach speedily in our days.

Three times a year - Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot - all males would make a pilgrimage to the Temple. There were ten constant miracles in the Temple. One of them was that even though the altar was outside and exposed to the heavens, the rain never extinguished its fire. Similarly, even though the altar was open to the elements, the winds never disturbed the smoke from rising straight upward

like a pillar.

The Temples were the center of Jewish life. Our prayers focus on beseeching G-d that He should bring the Jewish people home and rebuild the Temple.

There is a fascinating discussion concerning the actual construction of the Third Temple: Either Moshiach and the Jewish people will build it, or as others say, it will descend from heaven. The Lubavitcher Rebbe suggests that the two opinions are not necessarily contradictory. One of the suggestions he offers is that the Temple will initially be built by Moshiach together with the Jewish people. And then, a spiritual covering will descend from heaven and enclose the Temple, thereby ensuring that the structure will be eternal.

ברכות ג:א

מ

Mem

is the thirteenth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'forty'. The word mem stands for mayim, which means water. A human being cannot survive without water.

Torah, the most vital element in our spiritual lives, is referred to as water, as it states: "Water refers to Torah." Just as a human being cannot survive without water, a Jew cannot survive without Torah. By studying the mishnayot in this booklet, you will receive spiritual sustenance.

מי שמתו מטל לפניו פטור מקריאת שמע, ומן התפלה, ומן התפלין. נושאי המטה וחלופיהן וחלופי חלופיהן, את שלפני המטה, ואת שלאחר המטה: את שלמטה צרך בהן פטורין, ואת שאין למטה צרך בהן חיבין. אלו ואלו פטורין מן התפלה

Berachot 3:1

One whose deceased relative is not yet buried is exempt from reading the Shema and the Amida prayer, and from the mitzvah to wear tefillin, until the deceased has been buried. Concerning the pallbearers and their replacements and the replacements of their replacements, those located before the coffin who have not yet carried the deceased and those located after the coffin: Those who are needed to carry the coffin are exempt from reciting Shema; while those who are not needed to carry the coffin, are obligated to recite Shema. However, both are exempt from reciting the Amida prayer.

Insights

Caring for the dead is referred to as Chesed Shel Emmes – genuine kindness. When our forefather Yaacov was on his death bed, he instructed his son Yoseph to ensure that he would be transported from Egypt and buried in Israel. Yaacov said to Yoseph, "If you fulfill my request, you will have performed an act of kindness and truth."

It is called genuine kindness because when you do a favor for a living person, in the back of your mind, there is always the thought that perhaps the recipient of my favor will repay me later. However, when doing something for the deceased there is no expectation of ever receiving anything in return.

Why do we observe "kavod ha-met", respect for the dead?

When a person passes away, the neshama (the soul) still feels a connection to its body and stays near it until the burial. During this time period, the soul is aware of how its body is being treated and derives comfort knowing that its body is being given the ultimate respect.

Another reason is the very core of existence and why G-d created the universe.

G-d wanted a home in the physical world. According to the Chassidic masters, this is why the soul descended from heaven and partnered with its physical body. Only the combined effort of body and soul can reveal G-d's presence in this material world. Therefore, when the soul returns home to its Maker, we must offer the greatest level of respect to the soul's worldly partner.

It is worth mentioning that even after the burial, a part of the soul resides permanently at the gravesite. This explains why we visit our loved ones at the cemetery. We are not just visiting a slab of marble and lifeless remains, but rather, part of the eternal spirit of our beloved departed relative.



Hay

is the fifth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'five'. The soul has five levels: nefesh, ruach, neshama, and yechidah Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Chabad Rebbe and the founder of Colel Chabad, writes that the soul is 'truly a part of G-d above'. Therefore, there is no such thing as a distant Jew as our souls are always bound and one with G-d.

ברכות ט,א

הַרוּאָה מְקוֹם שֶׁנֶּעֱשׂוּ בוֹ נִסִּים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, אוֹמֵר
"בְּרוּךְ שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה". מְקוֹם
שֶׁנֶּעְקְרָה מִמֶּנּוּ עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה, אוֹמֵר "בְּרוּךְ שֶׁעָקַר
"עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה מֵאַרְצֵנוּ".

Berachot 9,1

One who sees a place where miracles occurred on Israel's behalf recites: "Blessed... Who performed miracles for our forefathers in this place." When in a place where idolatry was eradicated, one recites: "Blessed... Who eradicated idolatry from our land."

Insights

What is the secret of Jewish survival? Throughout our history we have lived through pogroms, the crusades, the inquisition, and the holocaust, and somehow, we have survived. And not only have we survived, but we have also flourished.

There is only one explanation we can offer, and that is Divine intervention. Our existence is truly miraculous.

In truth, our very beginning was miraculous. The first Jew to be born was Yitzchak, the son of Abraham and Sarah. Both were of an age where they could no longer bear children. G-d performed a miracle and they were blessed with the first Jewish child. From that moment on, our survival has been nothing short of miraculous.

A great Rabbi who lived in the middle-ages wrote: Every time I wake up in the morning and see myself in the mirror, I am witnessing a miracle far greater than the splitting of the sea. I see a Jew who has lived through the destruction of Two Temples. I

see a Jew who has been dispersed to the four corners of the globe and has been exiled for over 1500 years. I see a Jew who has lived through the crusades, the inquisition, and the pogroms.

We can add that when we look in the mirror, we see a Jew who lived through the holocaust and lost 6 million family members. And yet, we are still here. Is this then not the greatest miracle of all? People often say that if we saw miracles like the Jews who left Egypt, we would believe.

If you saw freedom for 8 million Jews from the Former Soviet Union, then know you saw the freedom of 3 million Jews from Egypt.

If you saw our soldiers at the Western Wall on June 7, 1967, then know you have seen a shepherd boy slaying the mighty giant Goliath.

And if you saw the whispering embers rebuild the Jewish world, then know you saw the dry bones of Ezekiel come back to life.