

# Illuminating Man's Inner World

## THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PARSHA

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### Parshas VaYechi – Walking Armed into the Fray

There are few topics that receive as significant an onslaught of Rabbinic literature as that of tefillah. The amount of sefarim dedicated towards prayer is mind blowing. Yet at the same time, for many if not most, tefillah falls in the category of mitzvos anashim melomoda - an action that people do only from habit or out of a sense of obligation. While that type of tefillah undoubtedly still has great value and meaning it falls short of the exalted level of prayer that was imagined by Dovid HaMelech. While, I certainly have my days in which I can't even remember if I davened, let alone having any measure of kavana, my overall tefillah experience has been enriched by a simple thought from this week's parsha.

Yaakov charges Yosef to oversee his future burial in Eretz Yisroel. In retribution for this service Yaakov tells Yosef

וְאֲנִי נֹתֵתִי לְךָ שְׂכָם אֶחָד עַל־אֲחִיךָ אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיָּד  
הָאֱמֹרִי בְּחַרְבֵי וּבַקְשָׁתַי:

**And now, I assign to you one portion more than to your brothers, which I wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow.” (Breishis 48:22)**

At first blush this seemingly straight forward pasuk requires no explanation or explication. That said, based on the pasuk in Tehillim in which Dovid HaMelech expresses that it was not the weapons of war that accounted for his military victories, the Rishonim refuse to believe that ‘my sword and bow’ are only referring to kli milchama and provide alternate interpretations to the nature of this ‘battle’ with the Emori. As Chazal emphatically states:

**אלא חרבי זו תפלה קשתי זו בקשה  
(Bava Basra 123a)**

This is a theme that is picked up on by many of the Rishonim and is most identified with the Aramaic translation of Onkelos. Charbi u'kashti is not only the sword and bow says Onkelos but is also referring to **בְּצִלוֹתַי וּבְרַבְעוֹתַי** – Yaakov vanquished the Emori with his tefillos and entreaties.

While the aforementioned gemarah in Bava Basra and some of the Rishonim discuss why the Torah can't be understood on its most simple level (see Rabbeinu Bechai for a nice pshat) the more significant question is what do these words **בְּצִלוֹתַי וּבְרַבְעוֹתַי** mean and in what way is man's tefillah conceptualized or expressed as armor?

While the most well-known discussion about this Onkelos can be found in the Meshech Chachma I would like to discuss two approaches to this topic. The first is that of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (colloquially known as the Rav). The Rav, like many meforshim assume that the word **צלותי** is talking about immediate needs while **ברעותי** connotes something that is future oriented and ‘are prayers that relate to Jewish destiny and the ultimate redemption’. Tzlosi are personal and ba'usi are communal and global.

What is so profound and so relevant about this approach is the dualistic place that a human finds themselves in. In almost the same breath one is myopically focused on his own immediate concerns while also maintaining a broad consciousness. Rav Kook in his beautiful peirush on meseches Berachos writes that this duality is what informs the gemarah that one should ideally daven in a house that has windows (Berachos 31a) Man davens often alone in his/her own home but is deeply connected to the past, present and future of Klal Yisroel and to the world at large. The window so to speak serves as the reminder of that broader consciousness. **צלותי**

are my needs in the immediate and בעוֹתֵי are the tefillos and aspirations that are beyond the four cubits of my own life.

I thought of another pshat that perhaps adds a deeper dimension to Onkelos's translation. One of the most meaningful descriptions of tefillah is found in Rabbeinu Yonah in Berachos (23b in the pages of the Rif). Rabbeinu Yonah writes that:

**בענין המתפלל צריך שיתן עיניו למטה ולבו למעלה זה לשונם הקדוש שם כלומר שיחשוב בלבו כאלו עומד בשמים ויסיר מלבו כל תענוגי עולם הזה וכל הנאות הגוף. כענין שאמרו הקדמונים כשתרצה לכיין פשוט גופך מעל נשמתך.**

Rabbeinu Yonah is self-explanatory but the phrase that has always stuck out for me is פשוט גופך מעל - נשמתך - that when one davens, they should almost feel as though their physical self has somehow faded and that all that is left is the soul.

For those of you who are familiar with meditation you know that one of the key, if not the key, concept and expression is 'connecting with the breath'. The breath is the nefesh - the ruach chaim -and connecting with the breath allows a person to be focused on the eternal nature of one's being while allowing any of the heaviness of the physical self to gently fade and diminish. While I appreciate the ancient non-Torah wisdom that informs meditation, Rabbeinu Yonah, Nefesh HaChaim (פרק יד', שער ב', שער ב'), Rav Nachman of Breslov and others in explaining Chazal's conception of tefillah are describing prayer as an opportunity almost identical to what people seek in meditation. While in meditation the focus is on silence as opposed to tefillah that has a formal text, the true essence of both is פשוט גופך מעל נשמתך. Tefillah while both communal and formalized still boils down to ויצא יצא - man in his aloneness standing in front of the Ribbono Shel Olam.

Using the parameters of the meforshim that צלותי ובעוֹתֵי is a reference to both tefillos in the immediate as well as supplications for the long term, one can reflect on how the type of tefillah

described by Rabbeinu Yonah could impact both of those realms. A person who is able to stand somewhat meditatively in front of HKB'H feels genuine transcendence during those moments of tefillah. He is both here and, in a sense, 'כאילו עומד בשמים'. At the same time, this form of tefillah allows a person to feel differently about the future. One is able to be present in the moment. He or she are not driven by the continuous onslaught of worries and what ifs that relate to the moments beyond the here and now. There is a spirit of calm, acceptance and serenity that infuses the life of a person who can tap into this mode of פשוט גופך מעל נפשך.

In a way this type of alive tefillah is man's charbi u'kashti - it is his armor. Life will bring what it may. Illness and health, joy and suffering, pandemic and vaccine, prosperity and struggle, war and peace - the cosmic symphony continues unabated. Man deeply feels all of that, but can also, through the deep connection with the nefesh, exist peacefully at the center of that very existence. It is one's own charbi u'kashti that he silently carries with him through this magnificent and chaotic journey.