

Davening & Talmud Torah: Are they One and the Same?

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Please consider the following passages of Rav Hirsch and Rav Miller then next time you find yourself thinking about how many *blot Gemara* you could be learning if you didn't have to *daven*. (We, of course, are not accusing any *Yidden* of these thoughts, but rather offer them up as a reflection of our own thoughts – at least from time to time.)

Rav Hirsch Commentary, Bereshis 20:7 (“*Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for you [ויתפלל בעדך], and you shall live; and if you restore her not, know you that you shall surely die, you, and all who are yours.*”) – “...התפלל means: to perform this task (פלל) upon oneself, to infuse every aspect of one's being and existence with G-d's truth, and thus attain for oneself harmonious integrity of all of life by the light of G-d's Countenance.

“Jewish תפלה, then, is antithetical to the common conception of ‘prayer.’ תפלה is not an outpouring from within, an expression of what the heart already feels – for that we have other terms: תחנה, שיח, and the like. Rather, תפלה means *infusing the heart with truths that come from outside oneself*.

“תפלה is עבודה שכלב; מתפלל means to work on refining one's inner self, to elevate one's mind and heart to the lofty heights of recognition of truth and desire for serving G-d.

“If this were not the case, if תפלה were but an outpouring of our emotions, it would make no sense to have fixed times and fixed texts for our prayers. How could we assume that all the members of the community would be imbued with the same thoughts and the same emotions at certain predetermined times?”

Ben Avraham – Now it makes sense to us the teaching we find on *Meseches Shabbos 11a* (based on *Mishlei 28:9* “*He who turns away his ear from hearing the Torah, even his prayer shall be abomination.*”): “...[I]t was taught in a *Baraisa*: **SCHOLARS WHO ARE STUDYING TORAH have to INTERRUPT their studies FOR THE RECITATION OF THE SHEMA, BUT THEY DO NOT INTERRUPT their studies FOR PRAYER.**” This makes sense because if the codified davening is – as Rav Hirsch teaches us – in reality something that we are pouring into ourselves, rather than an out-pouring to HaShem, why would we interrupt one mode of learning for another mode? We do understand that the Gemara is referring to “Scholars” of the caliber that no longer exist today, but there is a fragrance of this concept found within *Kollels* and *Yeshivas* today who often *daven* an abbreviated *Minchah* in order to get back to their *Talmud Torah* with as little delay as possible (as if it can be said that *davening* is a “delay,” but that – of course – is an application supported by the lesson of Rav Hirsch!).

This teaching of Rav Hirsch, that davening is in actuality a learning experience, is amplified in the following except from Rav Avigdor Miller's “*Praise, My Soul: Ideology of the Morning Prayers*”:

“...[T]he third purpose of prayer ... is the recognition of His greatness, i.e. His Power and Wisdom and Kindness ... Praise and thanks for HaShem's kindly deeds and attributes. This actually includes the aforementioned Recognition of His Greatness ...

“...These [above] statements are true of the function of *T'filah* in itself. But when we speak of the *Siddur*, we no longer are considering the mere *service* of Prayer, as important as it is. The *Siddur* constitutes a major Torah-compendium which includes a large portion of the Holy Scriptures. It includes also the compositions Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly, including

a number of the last prophets, who were the authors of the *B'rachos* (including the *Shemoneh Esrei*) (*B'rachos* 33a¹). The use of the *Siddur* is therefore the means of learning, and it is the study of the fundamentals of Torah-ideology in their most abstract and generalized form. By proper use of the regular prayers they can serve as a table of contents and an index to almost all of the general principles of the Torah and the Duties of the Heart and the ways of love and fear of HaShem. Thus the study of the *Siddur* (which is included in *Iyun T'filah*) is an important form of Torah-learning, and is also a major method of gaining greatness of soul and of acquiring the True Knowledge.

“...Therefore, in addition to the merit of Prayer, the *understanding* of the *Siddur* is in itself a major objective. Just the understanding of the great truths is the means of gaining the True Knowledge (“If this you possess, you possess everything – Nedarim 41a²), the *understanding* of the *T'filah* also is a gateway to greatness.

“...This eternal Perfection which is available from *T'filah* is the result of the five functions of Prayer ... On examination, we perceive that all five [functions of prayer] have a common purpose: *to gain a true sensory awareness of HaShem*. Let us therefore, both:

1) in our study of the *T'filah*, and:

2) in our saying the *T'filah*,

continue to keep in mind that we strive to gain more and more clarity of perception of HaShem. This clarity of perception is largely achieved by vocalizing the great ideas: our spoken words exert considerable influence upon our minds. “They are Life to those that utter them with the mouth” (Eruvin 54a). Our minds develop:

1) by studying these ideas, and:

2) by uttering them.”

Ben Avraham – Now why have we quoted the above teachings of Rav Hirsch and Rav Miller? Because we agree in totality with their views that *davening* should not be seen as a chore that must be “gotten through” three times a day, but rather *davening* is *Talmud Torah*, and it is an opportunity to imbue ourselves with Torah Truths codified by a group of Sages that included *Navi HaShem*. Rav Hirsch teaches us that during davening we are not satisfying a need of HaShem, but rather we are fulfilling a need of ourselves – to be a vessel that is ready to be filled with Torah HaShem. And Rav Miller teaches us that what we say aloud affects our minds, and, in turn, what we think affects what we say. This never-ending cycle of speaking, reinforcing and training our minds, and then speaking with even greater clarity and authority the next time we open our mouths is, in our opinion, the best way to utilize the gift of speech that came with the Neshamah that HaShem created and breathed into each of us.

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¹ **B'rachos 33a** – R. Shaman b. Abba said to R. Yochanan: *Let us see: It was the Men of the Great Synagogue who instituted for Israel blessings and prayers, sanctifications and havdalahs.*

² **Nedarim 41a** – R. Nachman said: *Without knowledge ... Abaye said: We have it on tradition that no one is poor save he who lacks knowledge.* In the West there is a proverb: **He who has this [knowledge], has everything; he who lacks this, what has he? Has one acquired this [knowledge], what does he lack? Has he not acquired this, what does he possess?**