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Finding MEANING in Tefillah

by Moshe Proctor ('17)

What does Tefillah mean to me today?

Ever since my mom passed away 8 years ago, my views on Hashem and Tefillah have always been adapting. I experienced times in my life when I didn't believe there was a higher power in this world than myself. I went through times when I believed in Christianity. I went through times when I thought everything happened randomly. I was all over the place. However, there was one thing that I felt during each and every one of these developmental stages: I was not happy. Deep down I knew that there was a God that loved me more than anyone could possibly imagine, and I was determined to find that happiness and love from him. Sadly, it took so long for me to find this out. But I can look back and smile because it was all part of Hashem's plan for me.

Tefillah is the most beautiful thing in the world. Just the idea that we can speak to our Creator 24/7, we don't need to wait on a long line to approach Him is amazing. All we have to do is start talking and he begins to listen. How can someone not love that? How can anyone not appreciate that VIP access? It truly pains me to see people talk during Tefillah. The Creator of the world, the Creator of you is standing right in front of you; He is eagerly waiting for you to start talking to him. But you decide to blow Him off and talk to your friend instead. How can anyone do that??

I once approached my friend after davening one day and I asked him, "How come you talk during davening?" and he gave me an answer that is unfortunately way too common and present in our community. He said to me "Mo, davening has no meaning to me. We are just expected to read off a script every single day that we don't understand. To top it off, I can't see Hashem in front of me. I don't feel his presence when I'm in Shul. Why should I not talk with my friends?"

I felt just like this boy for many years until I finally understood what Tefillah really is.

Tefillah is "Service from the heart." Not reading off a script, but in fact having a conversation with Hashem. Tefillah for me is done way more than 3 times a day. Just stopping and thanking Hashem for all our blessings is a form of prayer. Whenever I'm feeling down, or I begin to get upset or frustrated, I always

remember what my dad once told me: "Whenever you begin to lose happiness or faith in God, just look at children with special needs." These are children who grow up with limited cognition, missing limbs, disjointed body parts. They may never be able to walk, or talk, or marry. How lucky I am and how thankful I am to Hashem for allowing me to be healthy. How can I not be happy? How could I possibly be upset about anything?

Now one might respond, "Why should I remain happy and optimistic when things aren't going my way? How can I be expected to thank Hashem for the problem He's caused me?"

My answer comes in my 3 Principles of Faith:

1. God is good.
2. God will never give you a challenge unless he is 100% sure you can handle it.
3. Whenever God closes one door, He is doing that *only* to send us through a greater door, and the reason why we can't understand it is because he is God and He is on a higher level than us.

I read a book every night before I go to sleep called *Living Emunah* by Rav David Ashear. My favorite line from the book, something that helps me through my darkest of times, is "Hashem loves you a million times more than your father loves you." Let me tell you, I know how much my father loves me. He is the greatest father in the world. If someone or something can love me a million times more than my father loves me, how could I possibly not love Him and be happy with whatever He prescribes for me.

How could I love Hashem when something isn't going my way? Not possible, because everything Hashem does is going my way. I like to say that we are walking through the maze we call life. We think the best way to go from Point A to Point B is to walk in a straight line. However, what we cannot see is the blockade that is in front of Point B. If we walked straight from Point A, we wouldn't be able to get where we wanted to go. But Hashem Almighty is our eagle eye above. He sees ahead of the maze and recognizes the blockade in front of Point B. So in His everlasting kindness, he diverts our track to circumvent Point B and go through Point C first - ultimately leading us back to Point B. Since we are so blocked and blinded from the truth, we look at this diversion as a step back as opposed to a leap forward!

Hashem is leading us through the maze of life. He knows what is best for us. He is only doing things in our best interest.

All Hashem wants is for his children to call out to him, not off a script, but from their Heart.

What does Tefillah mean to me today? Tefillah means an unconditional love and binding agreement between us and Hashem. He will never leave us, no matter what! Whether we sin, whether we talk during davening, His love is eternal! All He asks is that we talk to Him, asking him and thanking him for all the incredible things he provides for us in our lives.

I'm proud to say that there will be no more negative adaption in prayer and belief from me. I have finally found happiness and truth.

Kol Torah is dedicated by Ilana and Moshe Wertenteil in memory of Louis Wertenteil A'H, Yehuda Baruch b. R. Dovid Z'L, father of Moshe Wertenteil, grandfather of Tzvi ('12), Judah ('14) and Joshua ('17) Wertenteil.

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I pray that each and every one of the Jewish people find happiness, find Hashem, and continue to fulfill his or her purpose in this world!

HACHNASAT ORECHIM

by Shmuel Ross ('18)

Our Parashah, Parashat VaYeira, presents two stories of Hachnasat Orechim, welcoming guests. However, these two events are extremely divergent from one another. The Parashah begins with the famous story of the three angels visiting Avraham Avinu. Before the arrival of the angels, the Torah records "VaYeira Eilav Hashem," "and Hashem appeared to him" (BeReishit 18:1), from which Chazal learn that Hashem visited Avraham in his sick state, engaging in the Mitzvah of Bikkur Cholim. While at first glance Avraham's disruption of his conversation with Hashem to tend to the angels may seem selfish, in reality Avraham's actions were exactly the opposite. Hashem had sent the three messengers to deliver Avraham an important message which Avraham Avinu recognized immediately. Before greeting the angels whom Avraham perceived as people, Avraham Avinu asks Hashem for permission to end their meeting, saying "Al Na Ta'avor MeiAl Avdecha," "Please, do not pass away from your servant" (18:3 with Rashi). Although he was three days removed from a Berit Milah and approaching 100 years old, Avraham Avinu rises and springs into action. He offers them water to rinse off their feet, a place for them to rest, and food for them to eat. The story of Avraham and the three angels is the epitome of Avraham's character – his love and respect for Hashem and his kindness and unselfishness toward others. There is yet another story in these week's Sidrah about Hachnasat Orechim that is nearly the opposite of Avraham's. That is the story of Lot in Sedom. Lot, Avraham's nephew of questionable character, greets two angels who arrive at the city. He brings them into his house, an act of Hachnasat Orechim which was similar to that of his uncle Avraham. To this point, Lot has done no wrong. But it was when the angry inhabitants of the city encircle his house asking Lot to hand over the men that Lot falters. He tries to make peace with the angry Sedomites by offering them his two daughters, allowing them to do whatever they want with them. Lot's selfless act of welcoming the angels now seems like a distant memory in light of this egocentric event. Although Lot was originally trying to help others, and even though offering his daughters to the Sedomites was an attempt to save the angels, Lot misses the entire point of Hachnasat Orechim.

When one welcomes guests, he must take the initiative. Avraham Avinu does not merely sit and watch the angels enter his home, take food, and rest. Rather, he makes his kind offer even before they even reach his tent. In Sedom, as Lot is trying to save the angels, he doesn't stand up for them by protecting them with his body. He tries to put others, namely

his daughters, into an extremely difficult situation rather than bravely doing it himself. And that's exactly where Lot stumbles.

Later on in the Sidrah, Avraham Avinu is rewarded for his actions in an indirect fashion, while Lot is punished for his actions in a very direct and licentious manner. As we know, the message which the angels communicate to Avraham is that he will have a son in exactly one year. Exactly a year later, Avraham's wife Sarah gives birth to their first and only child together, Yitzchak. Lot, on the other hand, is forced to flee Sedom prior to its destruction. His wife turns into a pillar of salt because she disobeys Hashem's command of not turning around to witness Sedom's destruction.

We should look at the characters of Avraham and Lot as diametrically opposed personalities from whom we can learn a great deal. Hopefully, we will be able to emulate Avraham's selfless ways and distance ourselves from Lot's selfish ways.

Kol Torah proudly presents this second part of a groundbreaking Halachic piece written by Rabbi Dr. Ephraim Rudolph, a TABC alumus. Last week, we raised the concern that tooth brushing might violate the rabbinic prohibition of Refuah, taking medicine on Shabbat, in light of recent research indicating the therapeutic nature of teeth brushing. This issue will begin by discussing possible reasons to permit brushing teeth on Shabbat for the sake of preventing illness.

BRUSHING TEETH ON SHABBAT: A REEVALUATION IN LIGHT OF RECENT RESEARCH – PART TWO

by Rabbi Dr. Ephraim Rudolph DDS (TABC '98)

Prevention of Future Illness

Despite the recent research indicating the therapeutic benefits of brushing teeth, it is possible to argue that it should not be classified as *refuah* because remineralization may be considered a dynamic process rather than healing, and the "white spots" that are "cured" by fluoride are not actual cavities that would classify someone as a *choleh*. Furthermore, some professionals and scientists still question the validity of the idea that the remineralization process can reverse caries. They maintain that the regression of the white lesion may be due to brushing the biofilm off the teeth or that the fluoride in toothpaste cannot positively affect the demineralization-remineralization struggle¹. Additionally, not all scientists agree that the bactericidal capabilities of fluoride have any direct effect on the reduction of cavities². Also, some studies have shown that only certain toothpastes have the ability to reduce bacteria³. Given all of this, it may be possible to argue that toothpaste does not provide *refuah*.

However, there still may be an *issur* of fluoride use on Shabbat. This is due to the fact that all agree that fluoride at the very least prevents future decay. Therefore, this becomes an issue of whether or not a healthy person may engage in an act on Shabbat that will fortify his wellbeing and thereby prevent future illness.

¹ L.L. Tathiane, Anelise Fernandes Montagner, Fabio Zovico Maxnuck Soares, and Rachel de Oliveira Rocha, "Are Topical Fluorides Effective for Treating Incipient Carious Lesions? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *JADA* 147:2 (February 2016): 84-91.

² Cesar R. Reyes, Raphael Hirata Jr., and Paulo P. Sergio, "Evaluation of Antimicrobial Activity of Fluoride-Releasing Dental Materials Using a New In Vitro Method," *Quintessence International* 34(6) (June 2003): 473-7.

³ V.I. Haraszthy, J.J. Zambon, and P.K. Sreenivasan, "Evaluation of the Antimicrobial Activity of Dentifrices on Human Oral Bacteria," *J Clin Dent.* 21(4) (2010): 96-100.

The *Magen Avraham* argues that a healthy person may not take medicine on Shabbat for the purpose of *refuah*⁴, whereas the *Beit Yosef* writes that it is permissible⁵. R. Ovadia Yosef writes that even the *Magen Avraham* would permit tooth-brushing because toothpaste is not a medicine; the purpose of tooth-brushing is to remove the food and plaque from the teeth before they cause the teeth to rot. As noted above, R. Yosef classifies this as “*mavri’ach ari*,” not as *refuah*.

However, as we further noted, this is not how brushing prevents cavities. Even if we do not consider remineralization to be “healing,” it is indisputable that the prevention capabilities of fluoride go beyond simply the removal of plaque. Since this form of prevention is more than just *mavri’ach ari*, the *Magen Avraham* might indeed maintain that it is prohibited on Shabbat.

One might argue that even given its extensive preventative qualities, brushing teeth is similar to taking vitamins, which in general are not taken to cure illnesses, but rather to strengthen healthy individuals⁶. The permissibility of taking vitamins on Shabbat is subject to dispute among the *Poskim*.

R. Moshe Feinstein explains that the *Magen Avraham* is referring to people who are healthy but have weak dispositions, and they want to take medicines that will help them fortify their constitutions. In such individuals, the medication leads to some sort of physiological change, and it is therefore prohibited for them to take medication on Shabbat. However, if a healthy person has no health concerns but nevertheless wants to take the medication in order to further strengthen himself, even the *Magen Avraham* would allow him to do so on Shabbat. R. Feinstein writes that vitamins fall into the latter category. They do not create any real change in the body or alter a person’s overall constitution; they only minutely fortify a person, in the same manner as does eating fruits and vegetables. Therefore, he concludes, it is permitted to take vitamins on Shabbat even according to the *Magen Avraham*⁷.

R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, in contrast, is of the opinion that it is forbidden to take vitamins on Shabbat. They are permitted only if they are taken as a food supplement, not in order to strengthen oneself⁸. According to this view, any vitamin, no matter the degree to which it will strengthen a person, is prohibited⁹.

Fluoride in toothpaste should at the very least be viewed as akin to a vitamin, and therefore it is subject to this disagreement between R. Feinstein and R. Auerbach. However, one could argue that even according to R. Feinstein, toothpaste is problematic according to the *Magen Avraham*. In his responsum, R. Feinstein concludes that if a person is truly weak in his nature and the vitamins actually cause the body to become strong, the scenario is subject to the disagreement between the *Beit Yosef* and the *Magen Avraham*, and we should be strict in this case because the *Pri Megadim* and the *Levush* seem to agree with the *Magen Avraham*’s view. Since, as explained above, most people’s teeth naturally become weak through demineralization and fluoride

“strengthens” the tooth by either reducing and inhibiting demineralization or by enhancing remineralization, perhaps even R. Feinstein would maintain that tooth-brushing is prohibited on Shabbat.

Furthermore, the very comparison to vitamins is questionable. As presented earlier, fluoride and other ingredients act directly on bacteria. This is more than what a vitamin is capable of doing; vitamins enhance and strengthen the body but do not act directly on bacteria.

However, according to those scientists who maintain that the bactericidal effect of fluoride does not play a role in the reduction of cavities, or for those toothpastes that do not have disinfecting abilities, fluoride is indeed comparable to vitamins. It therefore could be argued according to this scientific understanding, and if fluoride is viewed as simply fortifying but not strengthening the teeth, then according to Rav Moshe tooth brushing should be allowed on Shabbat, at the very least if one uses non-bactericidal toothpaste.

With regard to gingivitis, a conscientious brusher would most likely not have the disease. In his case, brushing will solely help prevent future gingivitis. However, the prevention of gingivitis is different from the prevention of cavities. The ingredients in toothpaste prevent gingivitis by killing the bacteria before they can become harmful or by preventing the colonization of the bacteria. Thus, use of toothpaste may be more similar to the case of using a bandage to cover a healed wound, and the *Magen Avraham* permits this type of prevention¹⁰. The act of brushing itself also prevents gingivitis, as frequent brushing removes plaque, which is used by the bacteria to cause harm, and also disrupts the biofilm, thereby preventing colonization on the teeth¹¹. This would be classified as *mavri’ach ari*, and not *refuah*.

In summary, given the recent research, it is difficult to classify fluoride’s anti-cavity prevention powers as purely *mavri’ach ari*. Furthermore, the prevention that takes place is for someone who is in a weakened state, i.e., the demineralized enamel, in which case even R. Feinstein would be strict. Finally, according to many researchers, toothpaste has antibacterial properties which would remove toothpaste from being classified as a preventative material¹².

⁴ *Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 328:43. The *Pri Megadim* quotes the *Levush*, who agrees with this view.

⁵ *Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim* 328:37. The *Bach* concurs with this view.

⁶ There may be some vitamins that are capable of *refuah* as defined by Halakha.

⁷ *Iggerot Moshe, Orach Chaim* 3:54. R. Feinstein claims that the *Pri Megadim* is also in agreement with his *chiddush* (novel approach), but he points out that the *Machatzit HaShekel* is not.

⁸ *Minchat Shlomo* 2:34:37, *Shulchan Shlomo* 3:328:1; *Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata*, ch. 34, note 85.

⁹ See *Yalkut Yosef* 328:55:63, who cites this debate. See *Pitchei Teshuvot* 328:62 notes 496 and 499.

¹⁰ *Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 328:31.

¹¹ Richard H. Nagelberg, “Understanding Advances in Oral Rinse Technologies,” *Compendium of Continuing Education in Dentistry* (October 2011).

¹² The only remote possibility of allowing fluoride on Shabbat even if one compares fluoride to vitamins is if one follows the view of the researchers who don’t believe that toothpaste has significant antimicrobial properties, to reject the notion that demineralization equals a weakened state and to follow Rav Moshe’s leniency.

Possible Leniencies:

Common Sense Perception

Rav Asher Weiss responded in a teshuva addressed to this author that the prohibition of *refuah* is based on a common sense perception and not based on science¹³. People brush their teeth in order to maintain a healthy mouth. They do not brush with the perception that they are healing their teeth with toothpaste¹⁴. Therefore, even if remineralization is *refuah*, there would still no **prohibition** of *refuah* on Shabbat¹⁵.

Sakanat Ever

In a personal conversation, R. Hershel Schachter *shlita* concurred that it is possible that given the recent research on the therapeutic benefits of fluoride and antimicrobial agents, there is a concern that brushing one's teeth should be considered a prohibited act of *refuah* on Shabbat¹⁶. However, R. Schachter suggested that brushing teeth on Shabbat is still permitted – even for people with cavities and gingivitis – because if the cavity is not treated properly, no matter how small it is at present, the damage may progress and potentially result in tooth loss and diminished function of the jaw¹⁷. Similarly, gingivitis can progress to periodontitis, a gingival inflammation coupled with bone loss, and severe periodontitis can result in tooth loss¹⁸. Thus, neglecting to brush one's teeth on Shabbat raises a concern of *sakanat ever*, loss of the proper function of a limb¹⁹. Although not all neglected cavities and gingivitis result in tooth loss, there is at least a doubt of *sakanat ever*, and we treat a *safeik sakanat ever* as a *vadai sakanat ever*²⁰. Since one is allowed to violate a *din derabbanan* in order to prevent *sakanat ever*, R. Schachter maintains that brushing one's teeth is permitted on Shabbat despite its therapeutic benefits.

R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach rules that if a person is not currently sick but he will become a *choleh she'ein bo sakana* if he does not take medicine, he is allowed to take medicine on Shabbat²¹. This is true even if the person will get sick only after Shabbat if he does not take the medication on Shabbat²². Similarly, R. Schachter notes, even though cavities and gingivitis will not progress to the point of tooth loss on Shabbat itself, and indeed will take years to reach that level, it should be permitted to brush teeth on Shabbat in order to prevent *sakanat ever* in the future.

R. Schachter points out that although in theory missing one day of brushing and rinsing will not cause tooth loss, however many people are busy during the week and take care of their teeth properly on the weekend. Therefore, in reality brushing teeth on Shabbat is critical to prevent a person from *sakanat ever*.²³

There is a big difference between Rav Weiss's leniency and Rav Schachter approach. The foundation of Rav Weiss's leniency is based on the current perception of brushing teeth. However, due to the push in the dental and oral health care community to educate people about this new understanding of fluoride, it is possible that the perception of brushing teeth will change. While many people may not fully understand remineralization they may still in the future come to perceive fluoride as a vitamin that they are using to re-harden their teeth. If this possibility occurs one may need to rely on Rav Schachter's leniency.

We will, God willing, continue this piece next week. We will begin the next part of this series with other possible reasons to permit brushing teeth on Shabbat, including the leniency applied to sick people on Shabbat.

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This publication contains Torah matter and should be treated accordingly.

¹³ Rabbi Yitzchok Zilberstien offered a similar oral response to a friend of the author; that people brush with the intention of removing plaque, not to heal teeth. Rav Weiss concurs.

¹⁴ Or that they are even strengthening their teeth with some sort of vitamin.

¹⁵ It is possible that not everyone agrees to this distinction. The *Shulchan Shlomo* quoted Rav Shlomo Zalman as debating whether or not based on new scientific insight brushing is prohibited due to the *issur of refuah* and Rav Shlomo Zalman never mentions this leniency.

¹⁶ It is possible that Rav Schachter gave a different leniency because he does not agree with Rav Weiss's distinction.

¹⁷ O. Fejerskov and E.A.M. Kidd, eds, *Dental Caries: The Disease and its Clinical Management* (Copenhagen: Blackwell Monksgaard, 2003).

¹⁸ M. Schatzle, H. Loe, W. Burgin, A. Anerud, H. Boysen, and N.P. Lang, "Clinical Course of Chronic Periodontitis: Role of Gingivitis," *J Clin Periodontol* 30(10) (2003): 887-901; A. Hugoson, B. Sjodin, and O. Norderyd, "Trends Over 30 Years, 1973-2003, in the Prevalence and Severity of Periodontal Disease," *J Clin Periodontol*. 35(5) (2008): 405-14.

¹⁹ See *Ketzot HaShulchan* 138 : *Badei HaShulchan* 18

²⁰ *Minchat Shlomo (Tinyana)* 60:15.

²¹ *Ibid.* 60:16. The Radbaz writes that *refuah* is forbidden on Shabbat even if one thinks that he will become sick in the future. R. Auerbach clarifies that this is true only when there is a *safeik* if one will become sick; if he certainly will (*vadai*), then *refuah* is permitted. Our case is also only one of *safeik*; if one

does not brush his teeth, he may lose his teeth. However, the *Pitkei Teshuvot* (328, n 24) suggests that the Radbaz is referring only to *refuah* that violates a *melacha*. Taking medication is a lesser prohibition, so he might agree that it is permitted even if there is only a *safeik* that one will become ill in the future otherwise. Alternatively, one could argue that the Radbaz was speaking about a *choleh she'ein bo sakana*, while our case is one of *sakanat ever*.

²² *Pitchei Teshuvot* 328, n. 514

²³ After speaking with other *Rabbanim* about this leniency a few questions were raised. Is it really true that many people only brush properly on the weekends and that if they would forgo brushing on Shabbat they would be in jeopardy of losing their teeth? Also is it true that brushing only on the weekends will prevent tooth loss? As will be presented later in the article, remineralization requires a constant level of fluoride and if remineralization is the key to retaining teeth than brushing teeth only on Shabbat may not be successful in preventing decay and future tooth loss. Additionally, it is interesting to note that the earlier *poskim* did not utilize this *heiter*. While they may have not been aware of the remineralization aspect of brushing, they did know that brushing prevents the decay that results in tooth loss. Yet no one applied the leniency of *sakanat ever* to permit brushing on Shabbat.