



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 18 | Pinchas | Sichah 4

Ashrei

Translated by Rabbi Shmuel Kesselman

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

Content Editor: Rabbi Zalmy Avtzon

© Copyright by Sichos In English 2022 ◦ 5782

A note on the translation: Rounded and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; curly brackets are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in curly brackets are those of the translator or editors and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Bolded words are italicized in the original text.

Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation, while at the same time maintaining readability. The translation, however, carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

Your feedback is needed — please send all comments to: info@projectlikkuteisichos.org

1.

THREE TIMES *ASHREI*

The *Zohar*¹ on our *parshah* quotes the statement:² “Anyone who recites the psalm entitled, ‘A Psalm of David,’³ three times daily is assured of a place in the World to Come.” The *Zohar* explains we **must** recite *Ashrei* “twice a day as a request for our food and sustenance every day.” However, the third time, it is said “**not** as an obligation (to ask for our needs, as mentioned) but as **praise**.”

My father,⁴ in his gloss on *Zohar*, explains⁵ that the recitation of *Ashrei* three times is analogous to the three daily prayers. In fact, Rashi writes this explicitly in his commentary on the Gemara⁶ (“*three times* — corresponding to the three prayers”). And just as {the first} two prayers (*Shacharis*⁷ and *Mincha*)⁸ are obligatory, whereas *Maariv*⁹ is optional,¹⁰ the same applies to reciting *Ashrei*: “twice... it is an **obligation** upon people,” and once, it is said “as praise,” “like *Maariv*, which is optional.”

¹ *Zohar*, “*Pinchas*,” 226a.

² *Berachos* 4b; *Zohar*, vol. 3, 119b.

³ Psalm 145. {This chapter of *Tehillim* is commonly known as *Ashrei*, because when it is recited in our daily prayers, we preface the psalm with a verse whose first word is *Ashrei*. Throughout the translation, for ease of reading, we will simply refer to this psalm as “*Ashrei*.” In the original, at times the word *Ashrei* is used to refer to it, and at times, “A Psalm of David,” the opening words of the psalm, are used to refer to it.}

⁴ {The Rebbe’s father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, of Nikolayev / Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine.}

⁵ *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak* on *Zohar*, vol. 2, 444a.

⁶ *Berachos* 4b.

⁷ {Morning prayers.}

⁸ {Afternoon prayers.}

⁹ {Evening prayers.}

¹⁰ *Berachos* 4b.

2.

REB LEVIK AND THE TZEMACH TZEDEK

In his notes on *Tehillim*,¹¹ the Tzemach Tzedek quotes the above-mentioned words of Rashi that the three times *Ashrei* is recited corresponds to the three prayers. The Tzemach Tzedek then asks: On this basis, *Ashrei* should also be recited during *Maariv*? Why do we recite *Ashrei*, these three times, twice during *Shacharis* and once during *Mincha*?

Some commentators answer: *Maariv* is an inappropriate time for reciting *Ashrei*.¹² (This is because “night is not the time for *tefillah* {prayer} (*tehillah*¹³ {a psalm}).”¹⁴ Alternatively, the reason is that “*kedushah*¹⁵ is not recited in *Maariv*, and *Ashrei* is contingent on *kedushah*.”)¹⁶ Therefore, we recite *Ashrei* a second time during *Shacharis*, in place of reciting it during *Maariv*.

The Tzemach Tzedek, however, does not accept this answer, because however we look at it, a difficulty remains: If the Sages enacted that *Ashrei* be recited a third time because of *Maariv*, it makes no sense to recite it in (in a **different** prayer —) *Shacharis*. On the other hand, “if *Ashrei* does not belong in *Maariv*, then let us recite it only **twice**?”

Therefore, the Tzemach Tzedek maintains that the Gemara’s statement, “Anyone who recites *Ashrei* **three** times every day...,” holds true only according to the authorities who maintain that *Maariv* is **obligatory**¹⁷ (and we recite *Ashrei* for the third time in *Maariv*). However, “we, who have established the *halachah* in accordance with the opinions who maintain that *Maariv* is optional,”¹⁸ do not recite *Ashrei* at the beginning of *Maariv*.

¹¹ *Tehillim Yahel Or*, “*Miluim*,” p. 672, ff.; see *ibid*, p. 541.

¹² See the authorities quoted in the *Yahel Or*, *ibid*; see also Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 108, par. 5 (quoting *Magen Avraham*, *ibid*, sub-par. 5).

¹³ See *Levush*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 132, par. 1.

¹⁴ See *Elya Rabbah*, ch. 132, subsection 8, quoted by *Yahel Or*, *ibid*.

¹⁵ {Lit., “holy.” A reference to the prayer “*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh, holy, holy, holy*,” etc., recited several times throughout *Shacharis* and *Mincha*.}

¹⁶ *Elya Rabbah*, *ibid*, quoting *Maharsha* on *Berachos*, *ibid*, quoted by *Yahel Or*.

¹⁷ *Berachos* 4b.

¹⁸ *Berachos* 27b; *Tur*, *Orach Chaim*, sec. 235; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 106, par. 2.

On this basis, it emerges that according to the authorities who maintain that *Maariv* is optional (and the *halachah* follows those authorities), a person would only need to recite *Ashrei* **twice** a day (to deserve a share of the World to Come). As the Tzemach Tzedek continues to explain¹⁹ (according to *Chassidus*): *Maariv* **automatically** accomplishes the same thing as reciting *Ashrei* in *Shacharis* and *Mincha* (according to those who maintain that *Maariv* is optional).

[The reason we recite *Ashrei* (three times {including}) twice in *Shacharis* is (**not** in order to be deserving of a share in the World to Come, but) only in order “to not neglect the recitation of *Ashrei* three times,”²⁰ as will be explained.]

We need to clarify:

My father explained that reciting *Ashrei* the third time is “analogous to *Maariv*, which is **optional**.” (This means that even according to those who maintain that *Maariv* is optional, we must recite *Ashrei* three times a day in order to deserve a share in the World to Come; however, the third time it is recited “as **praise**,” similar to how *Maariv* is optional.) How does his explanation harmonize with the Tzemach Tzedek’s view that according to those who maintain that *Maariv* is optional, we would only need to recite *Ashrei* **twice** a day (in order to deserve a share in the World to Come)?

¹⁹ *Yahel Or*, p. 674.

²⁰ *Yahel Or*, p. 673.

3.

TO NOT SKIP

Additionally, we need to clarify:

According to the Tzemach Tzedek's explanation that according to the viewpoint that *Maariv* is optional (and the *halachah* follows this opinion), we would only need to recite *Ashrei* **twice** a day to deserve a share in the World to Come, why, in fact, do we recite *Ashrei* three times daily, {including} twice in *Shacharis*?

The Tzemach Tzedek writes that the reason is “to not neglect the recitation of *Ashrei* three times.” (Or, in the terminology of *Kabbalah* and *Chassidus*, as he writes afterwards: “They instituted that it be recited in *Shacharis* twice, similar to the verse, ‘Yaakov who redeemed Avraham.’²¹ Meaning, *tiferes*²² turns toward *chesed*.”)²³ Here, too, we need to clarify: If by reciting *Ashrei* twice a day, a person becomes deserving of a share in the World to Come (since during *Maariv* the accomplishment of reciting *Ashrei* happens **automatically**, as mentioned), what then is missing, that requires us to recite it a third time?

4.

ZOHAR AND GEMARA

Perhaps, the essence of the explanation is that there is a difference between the Talmud and the *Zohar*:

The Tzemach Tzedek discusses (as he says there) the **Talmud's** opinion. Based on the revealed dimension of Torah, according to the viewpoint that *Maariv* is optional, it makes no sense to recite *Ashrei* during *Maariv* (or during *Shacharis* in place of *Maariv*). In contrast, my father sought to explain the

²¹ *Yeshayahu* 29:22 (albeit with a slight change in wording).

²² {Lit., “kindness”; the first of the ten *sefiros*.}

²³ {Lit., “beauty”; the third of the ten *sefiros*.}

Zohar's opinion in accordance with the inner dimension of Torah. Thus: (a) even according to the viewpoint that *Maariv* is optional, there is still room to recite *Ashrei* (but, “as praise,” which is “similar to... it being optional”). Additionally, (b) even though reciting *Ashrei* **this** third time corresponds to *Maariv*, we actually recite it in *Shacharis*.

[Therefore, the Tzemach Tzedek also concludes, “in order to not neglect the recitation of *Ashrei* three times... we recite it in *Shacharis*” (as he then continues on to explain the connection between *Shacharis* and *Maariv* (based on *Kabbalah*) because, “*tiferes* turns towards *chesed*.”)]

Here, the Tzemach Tzedek (does not discuss the crux of the enactment, which is to recite *Ashrei* only **twice**, but) explores this topic according to the **inner dimension** of Torah. In this regard, even the authorities who maintain that *Maariv* is optional would agree that we recite *Ashrei* three times daily.]

5.

SO JUST RECITE IT IN MAARIV?

We will clarify this issue by first explaining the Tzemach Tzedek's wording: “We, who have established the *halachah* in accordance with the opinions who maintain that *Maariv* is optional, do not recite *Ashrei* before *Maariv*.” This is because whatever the recitation of *Ashrei* effects “will certainly be drawn down **automatically**.”¹⁹

From this statement we understand that the reason *Ashrei* is not recited in *Maariv*, according to the viewpoint that *Maariv* is optional, is that **from the outset**, we do not need to recite it a third time (in *Maariv*) since it “will certainly be drawn down **automatically**.” (In other words, the reason is *not* that enacting the recitation of *Ashrei* a third time, during *Maariv*, would be pointless, since frequently, we would not do so regardless, since *Maariv* is optional and “in situations of need, they would cancel it.”)²⁴

²⁴ *Kolbo*, sec. 12, “*Din Ashrei*”.

This is difficult to understand:

Just as we say that *Maariv* is optional because the “Heavenly unification” accomplished by *Maariv* is accomplished automatically (after a person prepares adequately for this unification by praying *Shacharis* and *Mincha*), nonetheless, the Sages enacted that we pray *Maariv*, at least, voluntarily. The same should apply to the recitation of *Ashrei* — it should be **optional** (at the very least). [Furthermore, “nowadays, they instituted it (*Maariv*) as **obligatory**.”²⁵ Thus, reciting *Ashrei* in *Maariv* should also be enacted as obligatory.]

Also, why should saying *Ashrei* during *Maariv* be untenable?

6.

FOR BLESSING

To explain:

There are two general categories regarding those matters that are beyond the reach of a person’s *avodah*²⁶ and are accomplished automatically — after a person prepares adequately and makes himself a fitting vessel to receive the Divine outflow:

- a) Spiritual planes that are completely beyond the reach of a person’s *avodah*. These planes cannot be affected by a person’s deeds and *avodah*. This is analogous to what happened at the Splitting of the Sea. Hashem told the Jewish people, “You remain quiet.”²⁷ At that moment, there could be **no** prayer. The ability to wage this war derived from a place and plane On High where a person’s *avodah* is immaterial. (Moreover, sometimes a person’s *avodah* might complicate matters).

²⁵ *Tur*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 235, par. 1; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 106, par. 2.

²⁶ {Divine service.}

²⁷ *Shemos* 14:14.

b) Spiritual planes that a person's *avodah* can reach, but the *avodah* is not obligatory, only optional. In this instance, a person does an action, but not in order **to elicit** a Heavenly outflow, because if a person's *avodah* could accomplish this, it would have been obligatory. Rather, the person does the *avodah* so that the Heavenly outflow (which descends as a gift) from On High should have the desired impact (down here) in a complete sense.

[As in the illustration (that the Tzemach Tzedek cites²⁸) concerning the mentioning of the dew.²⁹ “The Sages did not obligate one to mention the dew {in prayer}” (for the bestowal of dew emanates from a place higher than an *isarusa dilesata*³⁰ can reach — “dew is never withheld”). But if one wants to mention it, he may.”³¹ — “So that it will be for **blessing.**”]³²

Therefore, it is optional. Since this is something **beyond** the reach of a person's *avodah*, it is an “optional” matter. Meaning, we cannot **force** (so to speak) the Heavenly outflow (to be as it should). As a result, a person is not obligated to mention the dew {in prayer}.

The same applies to the optional *Maariv*. Although the Heavenly unification is accomplished automatically, there is still a place for the *Maariv* prayer (optionally, at least) so that the unification will be for a blessing, or the like.

²⁸ *Biurei HaZohar*, vol. 1, p. 93.

²⁹ {The acknowledgement that Hashem provides dew, recited, in summertime, during the second blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei*.}

³⁰ {“*Isarusa dilesata*,” in the original Aramaic; lit., “an awakening from below.” This term refers to divine service initiated by the person.}

³¹ *Taanis* 3a.

³² *Magen Avraham*, ch. 114, sub-par. 4; Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 114, par. 3.

7.

WE'RE NOT CREATING IT

On this basis, we can understand why this only applies to praying *Maariv* and not to reciting *Ashrei*:

The Tzemach Tzedek explains³³ that reciting *Ashrei* arouses the level from where “the **source** of the awakening of the unification (of *zeir anpin*³⁴ and *nukva*)³⁵ **begins.**” Thus, we can appreciate why this has no place in *Maariv*. The reason we pray *Maariv* (as an optional prayer, at least) pertains only to the manner in which the unification **functions**, etc. (but not in order to stimulate the unification itself), as noted. In contrast, reciting *Ashrei* arouses “the source where the awakening of the unification begins.” Meaning, it effects the unification. **This** is outside the realm of a person’s *avodah*, as discussed above.

8.

VESSELS

However, all the above holds true from the perspective of the revealed dimension of Torah, which “reaches” only Hashem’s revealed dimension,³⁶ the externality (of *keser*), so to speak.³⁷ As a result, a person cannot instigate the unification through his action, for the unification stems from the **inner dimensions** (of *keser*).

This is not the case, however, from the perspective of the inner dimension of Torah, which accesses the **hidden dimension** of Hashem,³⁸ the **inner**

³³ *Yahel Or*, p. 673.

³⁴ {*Zeir anpin*, lit., “the small face”; the configuration of the six *sefiros* from *chesed* to *yesod*.}

³⁵ {*Nukva*, lit., “the female”; a reference to the *sefirah* of *malchus*, lit., “kingship,” the last of the seven *sefiros*.}

³⁶ *Zohar*, vol. 3, p. 73a; *Likkutei Torah*, “*Vayikra*,” 5a; *ibid.*, “*Nitzavim*,” 46a.

³⁷ {*Kesser* — literally “crown,” is the highest level of the *sefiros*, similar to the crown, which sits on the top of the head. See Rabbi J.I. Schochet, *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism* (Kehot Publication Society, Brooklyn, 1988), pp. 59-71.}

³⁸ See *Zohar*, vol. 3, 73a; *Likkutei Torah*, “*Vayikra*,” 5a; *ibid.*, “*Nitzavim*,” 46a.

dimension (of *keser*).³⁹ Within this realm, there is a sort of *avodah* that can effect the unification. However, the *avodah* in **this** realm is not obligatory but optional. Since, in general, a person's *avodah* does not "reach" this level, and at this level, a person's *avodah* cannot **have an impact**, therefore, the *avodah* is not obligatory. (This would indicate that the person compels and "forces the issue," meaning, his *avodah* has an impact.) Rather, the person performs an action that merely affords him an association with whatever spiritual occurrences that follow.

Therefore, from the perspective of the inner dimension of Torah, there is a place to recite *Ashrei* also at *Maariv*. But, reciting it at *Maariv* is only "as **praise**," i.e., "like... optional." The purpose of reciting *Ashrei* is not to create (force) a Heavenly outflow (of sustenance, etc.) but to praise and laud Hashem.

To emphasize that **this** recitation of *Ashrei* is optional only (unlike the recitation of *Ashrei* during *Shacharis* and *Mincha*), our Sages instituted that *Ashrei* be recited (not in *Maariv*, but) in *Shacharis*.

More specifically, it is recited in *Pesukei DeZimra*,⁴⁰ which **precedes** the *Shemoneh Esrei*⁴¹ of *Shacharis*. It stands to reason that the ability to praise Hashem with hymns and acclamations, even before praying *Shemoneh Esrei* in *Shacharis*, extends from the unification effected through the preceding *Maariv*.

[On this basis, we can also understand the *Zohar*'s statement there, viz., "it is only befitting to ask for sustenance after prayer, after we provide sustenance to the Master." (For this reason, we recite *Ashrei* after *Shemoneh Esrei* in *Shacharis*.) And in *Mincha*, the reason we recite it before praying {*Shemoneh Esrei*} is that the period **after** the *Mincha* (prayer) is a time of "harsh judgment."⁴²

³⁹ See *On the Essence of Chassidus*, sec. 2, et passim.

⁴⁰ {Lit., "verses of praise." The section of *Shacharis* service in which we recite numerous psalms praising Hashem.}

⁴¹ {Lit., "the eighteen (blessings)," referring to the weekday *Amidah* prayer, which originally contained eighteen blessings.}

⁴² *Zohar*, loc. cit., 226b; see *Magen Avraham*, loc. cit., sub-par 5), and Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, sec. 198, par. 5.

Ostensibly, however, this is difficult to understand: True, we cannot ask for sustenance after *Mincha* because that time is one of “harsh judgment.” But how can we ask for our sustenance **before** praying, before we “provide sustenance to the Master”?

Based on the above, we can posit: The reason is that we have already prayed *Shacharis*, and an impression of that prayer persists. With this power, we go ahead and recite *Ashrei* before *Mincha*.]

Concisely, the Tzemach Tzedek alludes to this: “They instituted that it be recited in *Shacharis* twice, similar to the verse, ‘**Yaakov** who redeemed Avraham.’ Meaning, *tiferes* turns towards *chesed*.” In saying this, the Tzemach Tzedek alludes to the connection of the recitation of *Ashrei* in *Shacharis* {Avraham} with the prayer of *Maariv* {Yaakov}.

— Based on talks delivered on *Shabbos, parshas Pinchas*, 5731 (1971) and *Motzei Shabbos, parshas Pinchas*, 5738 (1978)