

# The Weekly Daf



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Berachos 30-36

Week of 26 Tishrei - 2 Cheshvan 5758 / 27 Oct. - 2 Nov. 1997  
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud  
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

## In the Mood for Prayer

"One should not enter into prayer from amidst sorrow, nor indolence, nor laughter, nor idle talk, nor frivolity, nor nonsense — only from amidst the joy of a mitzvah."

This is the Talmudic formula for preparing to stand before Hashem in the prayer of *Shmone Esrei* three times daily.

What produces this mood of joy which must serve as the preface to prayer?

We subsequently learn that there is an equation between "words of praise and comfort" and "joy of a mitzvah." Rashi spells out how we recite such words of praise and comfort to achieve this joy in each of our three daily services.

In the morning we precede our *Shmone Esrei* with a recounting of the Exodus from Egypt. At *Mincha* we say "*Ashrei*" which contains the passage "Hashem protects all that love Him." In the evening we again have the Exodus theme, and even outside of *Eretz Yisrael* where a long blessing separates it from the *Shmone Esrei*, that blessing contains such words of praise and comfort as the passage "For Hashem will not abandon His people."

In order for a person to sincerely come before Hashem to petition Him for all his personal and national, material and spiritual needs, he must be filled with confidence that his Creator both cares about his creations and that He is absolutely capable of providing their needs. Only by recalling the Exodus in which Hashem so powerfully demonstrated both His profound concern and His unlimited ability, or in reciting biblical passages which echo this comforting message in their praise of Hashem, can one achieve that "joy of a mitzva" which puts him into the proper mood for prayer.

*Berachos 31a*

## Woe to the Serpent

A dangerous serpent threatened the residents of a certain community. When a number of people had been stricken by this creature it was brought to the attention of Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa.

There are different versions in our Babylonian Talmud and in the Jerusalem Talmud as to how the sage eliminated this menace.

In the version before us Rabbi Chanina asked to be shown the hole in the ground which served as the serpent's lair. He then placed his heel upon the opening of the hole and the serpent bit it. Rabbi Chanina remained unaffected but the serpent died. He then carried the dead serpent on his shoulder to the *Beis Midrash* where he declared:

"See, my sons, it is not the serpent which kills. It is sin that kills."

The reaction of people who learned of this incident was to exclaim: "Woe to the man who encounters a serpent and woe to the serpent which encounters Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa."

The Jerusalem Talmud version is that Rabbi Chanina was standing in prayer in his regular spot when he was struck by the serpent. He did not interrupt his prayers, and when he had completed them he discovered the body of the dead serpent next to him.

Maharsha points out that the first version is problematic because a person is not permitted to put himself into a dangerous situation and to rely upon a Heavenly miracle to save him. The resolution proposed by Iyun Yaakov is that the sage felt that the security of the community was dependent on his utilizing his exalted standing which had already been acclaimed in a Heavenly echo which declared "The entire world is nourished in the merit of My son Chanina." (*Berachos 17b*) He decided that the communal need justified risking his own safety and it was the combined merits of the community and Rabbi Chanina which made the miracle possible.

*Berachos 33a*

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