

אֶחָד מֵאַנְשֵׁי שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ סִפֵּר לִי, שֶׁהָיָה מְדַבֵּר

The Plain Meaning of the Words

THE TEACHING

What should we have in mind when we pray? One of the Rebbe's followers was praying with kavanos (כַּוָּנוֹת), the Kabbalistic meditations of the Arizal. The Rebbe was very strict with him: stop this, and just mean "פְּרוּשׁ הַמְּלוֹת כְּפִשּׁוּטוֹ", "the plain meaning of the words." This was a man the Rebbe himself had told to study the Arizal's writings.

The heart of prayer (תַּפִּלָּה) is clinging to Hashem, דְּבִקּוּת: standing before Him and asking Him for each thing, in words you mean.

MAIN POINTS

- For someone not fit for it, praying with kavanos is like sorcery (כַּשּׁוּף), about which the Torah says "לֹא תִלְמַד לַעֲשׂוֹת" (דְּבָרִים יח:ט), "do not learn to do."
- Chazal explain: "לֹא תִלְמַד לַעֲשׂוֹת, אֲבָל אֶתָּה לָמַד לְהִבִּין וּלְהוֹרוֹת" (שבת עה.), "learn in order to understand and teach, but not to do." So too, I'havdil, the kavanos: learn them to understand, not to use in prayer.
- It would even be better to pray in the language one speaks, where the heart is close to the words. But the Men of the Great Assembly (אַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוֹלָה) arranged our prayers, so we pray in the Holy Tongue (לְשׁוֹן־הַקֹּדֶשׁ) as they set it, and mean the plain words.
- One who speaks the Holy Tongue every day only needs to listen to what he says.
- For the great true tzaddikim (צַדִּיקִים), all the kavanos of the Arizal are simply the meaning of the words: "בְּפִרוּשׁ הַמְּלוֹת שְׁלָהֶם כָּל הַכַּוָּנוֹת", "their plain meaning holds all the kavanos."

A PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY · OUR OWN REFLECTION

Depth in prayer starts with sincerity. Before reaching for secrets, say one line of prayer slowly: know what the words say, mean them, and speak them to Hashem.

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