

# Rav Kook on T'hilim

*from an unpublished work  
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## T'hilim 19 - Elevating Life Through Prayer

**Summary:** More important than the spiritual heights reached while praying is the practical impact that prayer should exert on our lives.

YIHYU L'RATZON IMREI FI...

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable before You, HaShem – my Rock and my Redeemer (T'hilim 19:15).

We add this verse to the end of the Amida, the central prayer recited three times each day.

Yet initially, the Sages were uncertain: should this verse be recited at the start of the Amida, or at its conclusion? Is it a prelude to the words of prayer we are about to say? Or is it a closing statement regarding the prayer that we have just offered?

### A Tool to Elevate Life

The meaning of this request – “May the words of my mouth... be

acceptable” – hinges on this very question.

If recited at the start of the Amida prayer, then it refers to the prayer about to be said. It expresses our fervent wish that the prayers which follow will engage our soul and uplift our heart. We hope that we will succeed in directing our prayers with deep kavana. It is, in essence, a prayer for a powerful, meaningful Amida.

If, on the other hand, the verse belongs at the end of the Amida, then it speaks to the result of our prayer experience.

The twelfth-century philosopher Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, in his classic work - The Kuzari, explains that each prayer is meant to uplift and refine our lives. As we inevitably become entangled in the mundane affairs of daily life, the spiritual impact of our prayer wanes. This continues until it is time for the next prayer, when we rekindle the light of the soul. Spiritual life is thus a constant, cyclic pattern, with gradual descents halted by swift climbs of spiritual ascent through prayer.

Thus, when recited after the Amida, the request of “May the words of my mouth... be acceptable” takes on a deep significance. It reflects our desire that our Amida prayer should uplift and enlighten our lives even

after we have finished praying. The soul's outpouring during prayer should not be limited to the hour of prayer but serve as a practical tool to sanctify life.

## **Chai Blessings**

How did the Sages resolve this question? They noted that this verse appears in the nineteenth psalm, following eighteen chapters of prayer. Accordingly, the proper place for this verse is at the end of the Amida, after its Sh'moneh Esrei (eighteen) blessings.

This insight reveals the primary benefit and purpose of prayer. More important than the spiritual elevation experienced while praying is the practical impact that prayer should have on our lives. We can now understand the connection of prayer to the number eighteen – corresponding to the Gematria of the word CHAI (CHET-YUD), meaning 'life'.

This is the message of this verse. It exhorts us to elevate our lives to match the lofty feelings of holiness and closeness to God that we experience during the hour of prayer. "May the words of my mouth", as well as my conduct and my life, "be acceptable L'FANECHA – before You, HaShem."

*Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 47  
on B'rachot 9b, pp. 220-221*