

Baltimore Community Tefillah Initiative

Praying With Fire – Week 2 Supplement

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Three Small Words, Three Big Ideas

An essential ingredient in our relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* – as is the case with all relationships – is communication. Any relationship that lacks meaningful and heartfelt communication is, at best, limited and superficial.

Tefillah is the way we communicate with *Hashem* and is therefore an essential ingredient in our relationship with Him. If we want to have that close and loving relationship then we have to constantly strive to work on our communication through *davening*.

Understood in this light we can better appreciate why “*Biur Tefillah*,” understanding the words of our prayers, is so critical. Even if one fulfills the minimum obligation of *Tefillah* without full comprehension of the words – a fascinating *halachic* question in its own right – certainly from the perspective of having an intimate relationship with the Almighty, knowing what you are saying to Him is a basic prerequisite.

In that spirit, let us focus on the meaning of three critical words that are part of every *Shemoneh Esrei* that we say.

In the opening *beracha* we describe *Hashem* as a “*melech ozer, moshiah, u-magen*,” a King who helps us, saves us, and protects us.

The difficulty with this phrase is that all of these descriptions appear synonymous, or at least of one basic theme: *Hashem* is the “Helper-in-Chief.”

The Vilna Gaon explains that there is a slight, but important, difference between all three descriptions, the sum total of which describes the multifaceted ways in which we pray that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* helps us.

“*Ozer*,” says the Vilna Gaon, is when *Hashem* helps us be successful in our endeavors. We work hard for *parnossoh*, we are working hard at *shidduchim*, and we are working hard various worthy causes, and we pray that He will bless these efforts with success.

“*Moshiah*” refers to those situations in which we need help, we need a *yeshuah*, and the source of that salvation is beyond our capabilities. When we are reliant on others then, ultimately we are relying on the Almighty as a “*moshiah*.” When we don’t have a job, when we don’t even have good prospects for a job, that’s when we pray for God to be a “*moshia*.”

Finally, suggests the Vilna Gaon, “*magen*” refers to those situations when we think we know what we want and we think we know what is best for us and when we are working

hard to achieve those goals but really, in truth, if we could only see two weeks, or months, or years into the future we would realize that, in fact, it's no good at all. That new job we were desperate for, the one we worked so hard to get an interview for, which unfortunately ... we got – and lo and behold, it was a disaster. We look back and painfully ask ourselves, “What was I thinking?” So we pray for *Hashem* not only to be an *ozer* and *moshiah*, but also to be “*magen*,” to shield and protect us – from ourselves.

We must remember that while we have a multi-faceted relationship with *Hashem*, the “glue” that holds it together is *tefillah*; it's our regular and real line of communication with Him. The more we understand the words that use in *davening* the more meaningful the communication is. And the more meaningful the communication is, ultimately, the more intimate the relationship will be with our “*melech ozer, moshiah, u-magen*.”