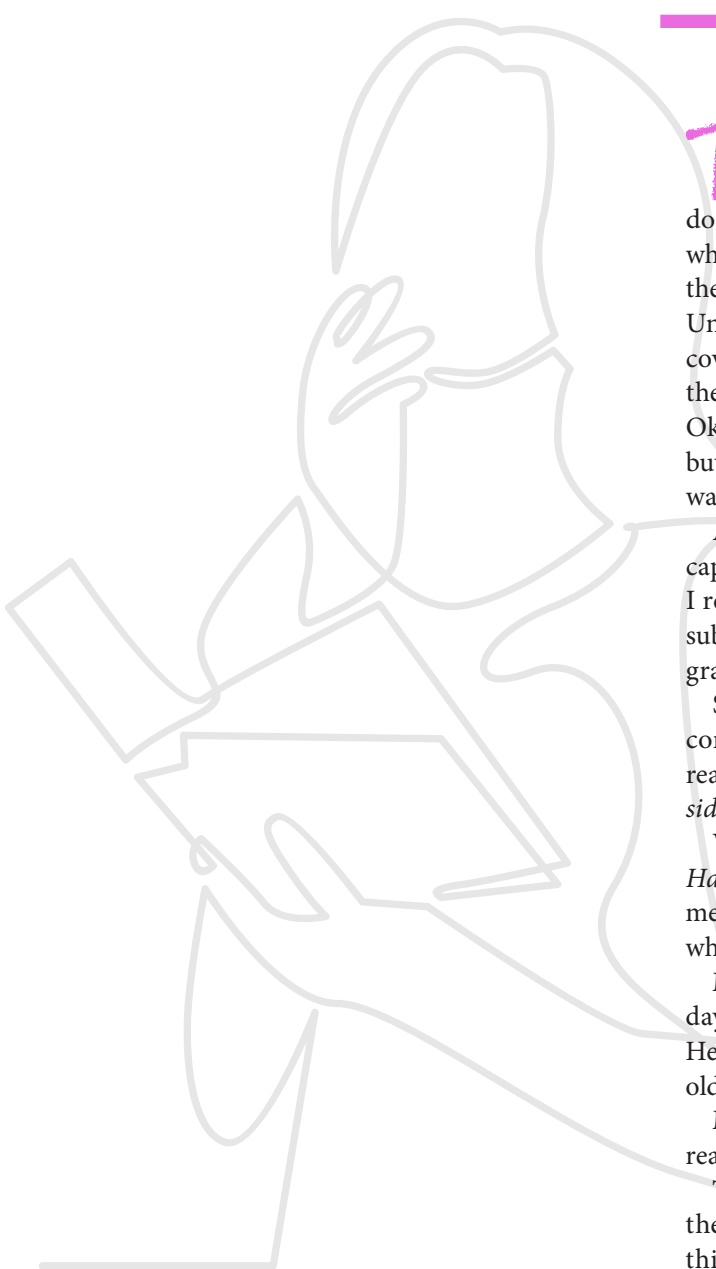


THE *Davening* DILEMMA & TEN TIPS

GOLDIE TENNENHAUS



This morning I opened a new bottle of eye drops. The doctor prescribed it for my dry eyes. I figured I should follow the doctor's orders at least once before my follow-up appointment—which is later today. It took me a few minutes to figure out how to use the drops (just as the Amazon reviews had warned), but I triumphed. Unfortunately, the victory was short-lived: the small plastic bottle cover promptly vanished into thin air. I stripped the bed, searched the floor, and turned my room upside down looking for it. Nothing. Okay, okay, it's only a matter of money, I comforted myself. I can buy another \$23 bottle of eyedrops. This is obviously what Hashem wanted. I should have given the \$23 to *tzedakah*.

A few hours later, I took another look at the bottle and realized the cap was actually screwed on. It had never been lost in the first place! I reminded myself what *Tanya* explains: A small aggravation is a substitute for a harsher punishment that was intended for me. I am grateful it was this and nothing serious. Thank You, Hashem.

So, you see, I spend a lot of time talking to Hashem. We have a continuous dialogue flowing throughout the day. But for some reason, it's never during *Shacharis* or *Minchah*. It's never when the *siddur* is open before me.

What is it about the organized ladder of *davening*—*Birchos Hashachar*, *Pesukei D'zimra*, *Shema*, *Amidah*—that is so difficult for me? Why does it feel like every particle of my being is resisting prayer when it's so much easier for me to talk to Hashem in my own words?

Maybe it's the repetition. Maybe it's saying the same words every day. But when it comes to compliments, I never get tired of repetition. Hearing "I love you" from a loved one or saying it in return never gets old or stale.

Maybe it's because I'm too busy. But is anything on my to-do list really more important than being present with Hashem?

This is my *davening* dilemma. It might sound familiar to you. Over the years, I have found a few tactics which help me connect with this *mitzvah*.



Goldie Tennenhaus

Tip #1

Invest in your *siddur* collection.

When I see a *siddur* I like, I buy it. I've got *siddurim* with big text, with small text, with English translation, without, with short Chassidic bits of wisdom on the side, and with lengthy commentary. I buy different colors—lime green, hot pink—with no guilt. After all, I have quite a collection of shoes in my closet!

This makes choosing a *siddur* every morning fun. It changes things up. Eventually, I did settle on one *siddur* which is my absolute favorite (blue one). But all the others get used too. There are *siddurim* in every room of my home.

Tip #2

Remember, you are purifying the world.

I admit I don't recycle. (In my neighborhood the local authorities decided it was too expensive.) But I *am* doing my part to get rid of global pollution. Instead of clouding the atmosphere with *lashon hara* or *shtus*, I am clearing the air with words of holiness and purity. This knowledge adds another layer of purpose to my *tefillah*.

Tip #3

Win over your *yetzer hara*.

The more I *daven*, the more subdued my ever-present *yetzer hara* becomes. Finally, some moments of peace! It still does catch me off guard sometimes, ambushing me mid-*tefillah*. But I push ahead and think to myself, "Wow, my *davening* must be so good and worthwhile that he is trying to distract me again."



Tip #4

Remember who you really are.

Before embarking on my day, *davening* reminds me who I am. I am special. I am loved by Hashem like an only daughter. I am chosen. I take that confidence with me into my day.

Tip #5

Allow your *neshamah* to integrate.

When we wake up in the morning, our *neshamah* reenters our body through the nose. And then it just stays there. Only once we *daven* can our *neshamah* spread throughout the rest of our body. Would you want to eat a slice of toast with butter piled in the corner, or would you prefer it spread evenly all over? Of course, we all want our *neshamah* to be fully integrated in every limb and organ so we can have a victorious day.



Inside of one of Goldie's siddurim.

Tip #6

Slow down.

In the hustle and bustle of our lives, we are always rushing. *Davening* reminds us to slow down. During *davening*, I make an effort to read the words slowly and intentionally. I don't want to wonder, did I just say that paragraph or not?

The best is when I *daven* out loud when my husband is close by. He's a stickler for pronunciation. (They used to call him "the guillotine" during *krias haTorah* in shul.) When I *daven* near him, he corrects my pronunciation and it pushes me to read even more slowly and clearly. After all that practice, I now feel comfortable reading a *perek* of *Tehillim* out loud in front of a group of women.

Tip #7

Ask yourself: Where am I rushing?

I'm huffing and puffing to accomplish all that I need to do today. But don't I realize that I need Hashem's *brachah* for everything that I do? Do I really think I can do it on my own?

Tip #8

Impact your children and grandchildren.

It's important for children and grandchildren to see their mother/grandmother *davening*. Or to know that I *davened*

(and I'm not about to lie about *davening* if I didn't, right?). To see my *siddur* lying around. To know that I couldn't answer the call when they tried me because I was in middle of *Shemoneh Esrei*. I know it changes their perspective on *davening*. It makes it something everyone does, not just school-aged kids whose *morahs* or *rebbeis* said they have to.

Tip #9

Daven to Hashem to be able to *daven*.

In plain English, during my regular dialogues with Hashem, I often ask, "Dear Aibershter, please help me *daven* to you."

All these tips have helped me, and I hope they will help you too.

I am still far from perfect. I still struggle to connect to Hashem with the formal structure of the *siddur*. So, my final piece of advice is this:

Tip #10

Thank!

Sometimes my *davening* is just about saying:

Thank You, Hashem!

Thank You, Hashem!

Thank You, Hashem!

I love singing *Hallel*.

And stopping at *Modim* in *Shemoneh Esrei* to say slowly and with a complete heart, "...for the miracles [You do for us] every day and Your wonders and goodness that are always [with us] because Your mercy never ends and Your kindness never stops!" ❧



Goldie with her husband, Rabbi Raphael Tennenhaus, *shluchim* in Hallandale Beach, FL, enjoying their blessings.