

Praying WITH Passion

GIVING MORE MEANING TO OUR TEFILLAH - ONE WEEK AT A TIME ISSUE NO. 4

Tefillah Focus Of The Week: **MA TOVU**

'None Other Than The House Of G-d'

מה טבו אהליך יעקב,
 משכנתיך ישראל. ואני
 ברב חסדך אבוא ביתך, אשתחוה
 אל היכל קדשך ביראתך...

Meaning: The simple translation of the prayer

How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel. As for me, through your abundant kindness I will enter Your House, I will prostrate myself toward Your Holy Sanctuary in awe of You...

Theme: An essential concept of the prayer

The shul is an exalted place of holiness.

Insight: Deeper meanings of the theme

The Sages interpret the phrase אהליך יעקב as a reference to its “tents of prayer and learning.” The Gemara teaches that the *Shechinah* resides in places of holiness: the Holy Temple, Jerusalem, and in a *shul* when ten men pray together. Therefore, when one enters the *shul*, he is entering into a place where the *Shechinah*'s presence can be more vividly felt.

However, this sense of holiness does not come automatically. The Ramchal teaches that although the *Shechinah*'s influence manifests itself in certain holy places, it is only there for those who seek to connect to Hashem.

“...When one enters the shul, he is entering into a place where the Shechinah's presence can be more vividly felt.”

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This issue includes Torah content and should be treated accordingly.

Word to the Wise: Meaning within the meaning



The word “mah” is traditionally translated as “what”. However, Rabbi Meir Schuck, z”l offers a more penetrating definition based on three well-known uses of the word “mah.” The first is when Yaakov Avniyu, upon reaching the place of the future Beis Hamikdash, exclaimed: “Mah nora hamakom hazeh - What an awesome place this is!” Secondly, on the Seder night, the young child calls out “Mah nishtana halayla hazeh - what is so different about this night?” Both of these instances are exclamations of stunning

realization. The third instance is the verse of “mah tovu” itself, which comes from בלעם’s reaction when he perceived the holiness of the Jewish homes. The word “mah,” then, can indicate a remarkable realization, appreciation of a place or event, as if it were brand new. So too, when we enter shul for the first time each day, we can experience anew feelings of joy and trepidation. The mere recitation of the word “mah” can then instill within you a wonderful appreciation of the moment!

“..When we enter shul... we can experience anew feelings of joy and trepidation.”



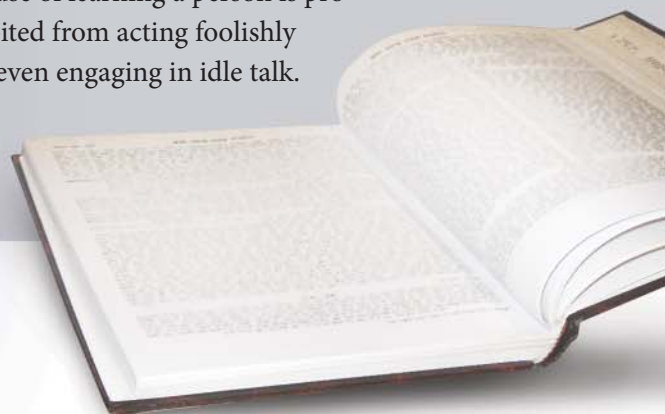
Origin: The source of the prayer

“מה טבו” is a collection of verses from Bamidbar 24:5 and Tehillim 5:8; 26:8; 95:6; and 69:14. The Scriptural portion comes from the blessing pronounced by the gentile prophet, בלעם, who was sent to curse the Jewish nation. When he came upon their encampment, arrayed in all its holiness, G-d caused his planned curse to emerge as a blessing.

Halacha:

“מה טבו” is said upon entering the synagogue in the morning to pray. Although it is not cited in the Gemara and Tur, Seder Rav Amrom Gaon and Siddur Rashi state that it is recited in praise and reverence of the shul, which we have in lieu of the Beis HaMikdash.

The Mishnah Berurah (Siman 151:1) explains that the verse “and My Sanctuary shall you revere” applies to every shul, each of which has the halachic status of kedushah. Therefore, in shul or in a house of learning a person is prohibited from acting foolishly or even engaging in idle talk.



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“...An arduous journey solely to have the opportunity to pray at Har Moriah”

Visualize:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Yaakov, our forefather, sets out on the road from Beersheva to Haran. On his long journey, he passes Har Moriah – the exact spot upon which his father, Yitzchak, was brought to be sacrificed by Avraham. Through this seminal event, the mountain was imbued with a great emanation of G-d's presence. Despite that, Yaakov did not stop there.

But when he arrived in Haran, he was troubled by a nagging thought: “Is it possible that I passed the place where my fathers prayed and I did not pray there?” He turned around and headed back out on the road, burning with desire to pray in that holy place.

As a reward for his willingness to re-embark on an arduous journey solely to have the opportunity to pray at Har Moriah, G-d performed a mira-

cle and shortened the way. Upon arriving at the mountain, Yaakov was overcome with reverence and declared, “How awesome is this place. This is none other than the Home of G-d and this is the gate of the heavens.” It is partly in the merit of Yaakov's recognition of the holiness of this spot on earth that it became the site of the two Holy Temples.

By entering *shul* in the spirit with which Yaakov approached *Har HaMoriah*, longing to deliver our *tefillos* in a place imbued with holiness, we too can awaken our recognition that “This is none other than the Home of G-d.”

“By entering shul... we too can awaken our recognition that “This is none other than the Home of G-d.”

Take It With You:

Your personal connection to the prayer

I you are like most people, you can pass by stunning scenery every day on your way to work, and not notice a thing. You can come home to a house full of active, healthy, beautiful children and not really register what a blessing this is. You can sit down to a full plate of hearty food and eat it so fast that you barely taste it.

What happens when you walk into shul? If you're like most people, you're just happy to have made it on time. **מה טוב** is your moment to relish the experience of entering your shul. "How good!" you must say in this tefillah...and "How good!" is the feeling that you can, at that exact moment, really experience.

How good that we're free to practice our religion without fear in a public venue. How good to have enough Jews to make a *minyan*. How good to have this thrice daily opportunity to stand before G-d in a place where the *Shechinah* dwells. **How good to enter a beis medrash and see the 3,300-year-old Torah still being learned with vigor.**

As Rav Yechezkiel Levenstein said,

"Tefillah is not merely the fulfillment of a commandment: Rather, tefillah is a Jew speaking with his Creator, may He be blessed, enabling him to approach Hashem Yisbarach and cling fast to Him, and this is the reason why Hashem desires our prayers."

מה טוב!



Your Personal Tefillah Trainer:

Exercising mind, memory and imagination to carry kavannah into your davening

Think about one aspect of your shul that arouses your sense of awe; the sound of everyone saying "Yehai Sh'mai Rabba" together; the facial expression of someone who prays with a great deal of kavannah; the physical appearance of the Torah scroll or the holy ark, or some other sight or sound. Imagine it vividly and let the image arouse your emotions. This week, when you recite the words "מה טוב" as you enter the synagogue, flash upon this image and let it awaken your heart.

Try This!

To track your progress, give yourself a check for each day you have Kavannah in Ma Tov

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Did You Know:

An insight for the week ahead.

Q I'm a little confused about the laws relating to entering a shul for non-religious purposes. I've learned in the past that a person is not allowed to use a shul just for the purpose of warming up or cooling off or getting out of the rain. But what if there's no other shelter available nearby? And also, my 15-year-old son often goes to shul during *bein hazmanim* to learn with his friends. If I need to reach him, am I allowed to enter the shul just for that purpose?

Entering Shul for Non-Religious Purposes

A The shul itself must be treated with reverence. A person may not enter a shul to take shelter from inclement weather if there are other unholy buildings available (Mishnah Berurah, 151: 4). He may not use a shul as a shortcut or enter it for personal use (Siman, 151:5). If someone is searching for a friend in shul, he should not call the person first before he has said some words of Torah (i.e. a pasuk, Mishnah or a halachah) inside as it would appear that the saying of the words of Torah is only secondary to his needs (Ibid, Se'if 1, Mishneh Berurah, Ibid 12).

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The mission of the V'Ani Tefillah Foundation is to increase awareness of the importance and power of tefillah and to provide education, inspiration, and tools for more sincere, powerful, and effective tefillah.