

תְּפִילַת יִצְחָק *Tefillat Yitzhak* -- Rabbi Jon's commentary on words of prayer

The worshipper must direct his heart to each and every word. He is like a man who walks in a garden collecting roses and rare flowers, plucking them one by one, in order to weave a garland.... Every word seizes hold of him... entreats him not to abandon it, not to break their bond, saying: *Consider my light, my grace, my splendor.*

--Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, quoted in Rabbi A. J. Heschel, "Quest for God", p. 34

As you are learning the prayers, one goal is to find a word or a phrase here and there that is meaningful to you to add to your "repertoire". If you find one, stop and try to say it to yourself in Hebrew, whether you are reading the Hebrew or the transliteration. Say it slowly, or more than once, or in a quiet chant that your ears can just hear. Let whatever meaning or feeling sink in, you needn't rush to move on with the congregation.

Siddur Sim Shalom, p.111

וְהִבִּיאֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ

va'ha'vee-aynu l'shalom may'arba kan'fot ha'aretz

Bring us to peace/wholeness from the four corners of the earth

These are the words we say as we gather the four *tzitzit* together and bring them into our hand before the Shma. One *kavvana* (focus) as we say these words is to use the act as a way of bringing to mind people who are connected to us in every direction, in our presence in the Sanctuary or far away. These are people whose connections to us we may even need to remind ourselves of.

We are naturally inclined to center our praying on the self, and rightly so. We also need to make other people the subject of our prayers, or to include them in the circle of our own words. The *tzitzit* are attached to us but not a part of us. They come into our hand however they do, not perfectly aligned or in the same direction. As we feel them, or adjust them, we make a whole out of them, we bring the farther *tzitzit* behind us together with the closer *tzitzit* of the front -- the *shalom* the line of the prayer. That whole is the "us" whose peace and wholeness we pray for in these particular words.

We then place our hand with the *tzitzit* over our eyes, touching our face, closer even than what we usually see with our eyes open. Then, as we say the Shma, we bring the self and all those connections together into our recitation of the Shma. The Shma itself speaks of love, Torah, and mitzvot, so it is not only a prayer of personal need but a hope that all of us live that dedication together.