

The Aseres Yemei Teshuvah Tefillah Initiative

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Igniting the Power  of Your Tefillah

Praying With Fire

*A 5-Minute
Lesson-A-Day*

**A 10-day
sampler**

Rabbi Heshy Kleinman

Introductions by

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Igniting the Power of Your Tefillah

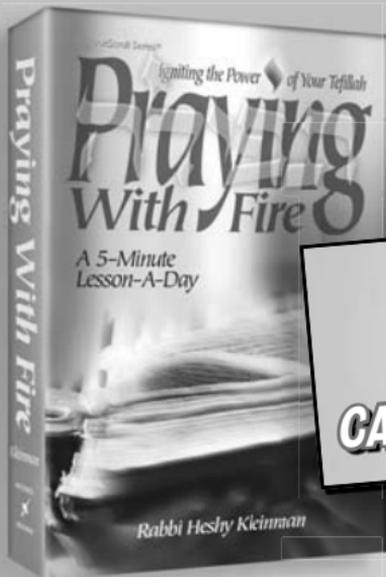
Praying With Fire

Tefillah (prayer) is a miraculous power each of us holds, yet most of us use only a fraction of its potential. It is the key to the Heavenly storehouse of blessing, and gives us the precise words that can release these treasures into our lives. And what treasures they are ... our health, our ability to find a spouse and build a Jewish home, our success in raising our children, our safety, security, livelihood. Everything.

Praying With Fire is a 5-minute-a-day program developed by Rabbi Heshy Kleinman, who has researched, taught and spoken on the topic of *tefillah* for many years. Now he brings his passion and knowledge to the printed page.

This work is a brilliant combination of in-depth scholarship and pure inspiration, all in an easy-to-use daily learning format. Day by day, step by step, you will find your *tefillah* becoming stronger, more meaningful and more effective.

Praying With Fire is the ultimate guidebook to enhancing your communication with Hashem.



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▶ Tap the Shechinah’s Presence ▶ Understand that every prayer is answered ▶ and much, much more**



A SWORD, A SHIELD, A WELLSPRING

As the century of horrific world war has ended, an era of heartless terrorism has begun. Alongside the tragedies playing themselves out on the public stage are myriad personal tragedies — young children mourning parents, parents mourning a child, marriages dissolving in turmoil, young people wandering from the path of Torah, and breadwinners struggling against formidable financial strain. Our sense of security is eroded daily with each new headline, each tragic loss, and each report of the dangers that seem to lurk everywhere. How should we, who strive to react to world events with *emunah*, respond in troubled times?

The *Midrash Rabbah*, in discussing the verse, “Va’eschanan el Hashem ba’eis hahee leimor,” *I exhorted Hashem at that time saying*, explains that the word *leimor* means: “say” to the generations that during troubled times they should pray.

The Rambam rules, “It is a mitzvah from the Torah to cry out to Hashem for help ... whenever trouble and persecution strike the community.”

When we pray during troubled times, besides performing a mitzvah from the Torah to pray to Hashem, we confirm our belief that only Hashem can help us. In this light, the *Sefer Halkrim* comments: “It is fitting and obligatory for every believer in Hashem’s overseeing of [our day-to-day] existence to believe that prayer is effective and can save him from an evil fate. Someone who does not pray in his hour of need must either be lacking faith that Hashem is watching, or lacking faith that Hashem is all-powerful, and both of these are utter heresy.”

The *Sefer HaChinuch* adds: "And someone who is in difficult circumstances and does not call out to Hashem to save him has violated this mitzvah of prayer ... for it is as if he has removed himself from the overseeing of Hashem."

Sometimes, however, a person does not refrain from praying because he lacks confidence in Hashem's power, but because he lacks confidence in his own worthiness. From a true perspective, however, Hashem is available to every person whether he is worthy or not. As the *Sefer Ha'Ikrim* explains, everything Hashem provides each day is not due to man's righteousness but rather to Hashem's benevolence and compassion. As the *pasuk* says: *Turn Your ear, Hashem, and listen; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city upon which Your Name is proclaimed. For not because of our righteousness do we pour out our supplications before You, but because of Your great compassion.*

We need not be perfect, or even close to it, to beseech Hashem in prayer. We simply need to reach for the lifeline He is extending to us, and to grasp it gratefully, confident that at the other end is the One Power Who can save us.

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *The Torah teaches that one should pray during troubled times.*
- ▶ *Failing to pray for Hashem's help reflects a lack of belief in His supervision and His power.*
- ▶ *One should not feel that it is futile for him to pray because he lacks merit. Hashem answers prayers out of His kindness, not the petitioner's worthiness.*



AROUSING THE HEART

She had everything for which to be thankful — good friends, wonderful parents, an interesting job, and excellent prospects for finding a marriage partner. When she opened her siddur each morning, she came to Hashem with a somewhat complacent heart. As time passed and no prospect of marriage seemed imminent, the young woman was beset by fears. “What if I never get married? What if I have to spend my life alone?” Now when she prayed, there was no trace of complacency. Her prayers rose up from deep within her and she reached out to Hashem with all her might. She needed to feel Hashem’s closeness. In her troubles, she found the key to her solution.

According to Rav Tzadok HaKohen, every problem is structured in such a way that *tefillah* can overcome it: “Anything that Hashem desires to bring to the world or to an individual ... can also have opposite effects, Heaven forbid ... and when the person feels an appropriate fear and prays, the result is that good occurs.”

Elaborating on this crucial point, Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, Mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshivah in Europe, says that it is our feelings of fear that cause us to pray, which in turn enable good to occur. Our usual way of thinking is that when trouble occurs, we must pray to Hashem; we would prefer, however, that the difficulty not arise in the first place.

Rav Yeruchem explains that this perspective indicates a lack of understanding as to what is actually taking place. In reality, the purpose of the trouble or pain is to rouse us to

pray and to pour out our hearts to Hashem, and for Him to then respond with the salvation. He conveyed this point with an analogy: Before a tree can bear fruit, the ground must be plowed and the sapling planted. Similarly, the afflictions that we must endure in life represent the plowing and sowing that compel us to pray to Hashem so that we can then reap the fruit of His salvation.

Thus, misfortune must be recognized as a necessary component of Hashem's deliverance, to the point that perhaps it should be referred to as "a part of our salvation."

When the Chazon Ish, the leader of his generation, was told of bad news or faced a troubling situation, he would often comment, "Nu, Hashem must be eager for us to daven!"

If we can see the troubles in our world and in our own lives in this light, the anxiety we endure will serve its purpose. Instead of draining us, it will energize and activate us, bringing us to call out to Hashem with all our might, which in turn will bring us the salvation for which we are so fervently longing.

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *Difficulties are designed to spur us to pray.*
- ▶ *Hashem wants us to pray so that He can answer our prayers with good.*



THE PRIMAL FORCE

The Gemara tells of a demonic spirit that frequented the beis midrash where Abaye taught. It was so brazen that it did not wait for the cover of night or seek out solitary individuals to attack. Even two people entering the beis midrash together in broad daylight were injured by this spirit. When Abaye heard that Rav Yaakov, the son of Rav Acha ben Yaakov, was coming to visit, he ordered, "Let no one provide him lodging (thereby compelling him to lodge in the beis midrash). Perhaps a miracle will happen" [the merit of Rav Yaakov's prayer would permanently banish the demon]. Rav Yaakov spent the night in the beis midrash, where the demon appeared to him as a seven-headed serpent. Each time Rav Yaakov bowed his head in prayer, one of the heads fell off.

The Maharsha questions how Abaye could place Rav Yaakov in danger by forcing him to remain overnight in the *beis midrash*. Why was he so sure that Rav Yaakov would merit this miracle? Furthermore, even if the miracle did occur, would it not diminish Rav Yaakov's merits in this world?

He explains that any benefit derived from *tefillah*, no matter how incredible it appears, can be considered natural, since prayer has been an innate part of existence since the time of Creation. Furthermore, such benefit, since it is not considered a miracle, does not diminish a person's merits.

Chazal teach that *tefillah* was woven into the very fabric of Creation and designed by Hashem to be a fundamental element of life. The Torah states, *And all the plants of the field were not yet on the earth and all the herbs had not yet*

sprouted, for Hashem had not brought rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil.

Rashi explains that the plants could not grow because rain had not yet fallen; and without man, there could be no rain. When Adam HaRishon was placed on the scene, there was a being who had both the capacity to understand that the soil needed water in order for the vegetation to sprout, and the ability to call upon Hashem to provide the rain. His prayers were answered, and the world became lush and green.

The entire Creation, everything on earth, was complete; all was in readiness. Yet the world remained barren and dry, awaiting Adam's prayers for the rain that would allow the natural world to spring to life and begin to function. Such is the paradoxical nature of prayer; nothing is more basic, and nothing is more powerful.

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *Prayer is an innate part of Creation whose function is to draw Hashem's goodness into this world.*
- ▶ *Every answered prayer is a "natural" phenomenon rather than a miracle.*
- ▶ *The world was in a barren state of preparedness until Adam prayed for rain.*



THE ULTIMATE WEAPON

The soldiers face a heavily armed enemy. The battle is a crucial one that they cannot afford to lose. Which weapon does the general choose for his forces to employ? The one that is most powerful, that hits its target most precisely, and that has proven itself time and time again.

For the Jewish people, *tefillah* is that weapon. It is what our leaders turn to during our nation's times of utmost challenge, because they know that it is the most precise and powerful weapon we have. The extent of its power, however, is greatly underestimated.

The Gemara says that prayer stands at the very heights of the world, yet it is "looked down upon and degraded by man." Rav Yechezkel Levenstein — the Mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshivah in Europe and Shanghai and later of Ponevezh Yeshivah in Israel — ascribes this lack of respect to an inadequate appreciation of *tefillah's* true value.

Elsewhere, the Gemara describes Torah learning as the key to eternal life and *tefillah* as the key to our temporal life; just as Torah study can bring a person to enjoy eternal happiness in the World to Come, prayer can provide all the necessities of this world, such as good health, a livelihood, peace of mind, and spiritual growth.

Hashem so treasures *tefillah* that he made the Jewish people's very existence contingent upon it. The Gemara explains that our Patriarchs were infertile because Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous. Had our Patriarchs not turned to prayer in their moment of need, they would not have been blessed with children and there would not have been a Jew-

ish nation. Only when they reached into the depths of their souls and cried to Hashem were they blessed with offspring.

Yaakov, too, turned to *tefillah* to fight the battle of his life. When he left Lavan and traveled homeward for an encounter with his brother Esav, Yaakov prayed: *Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav, for I fear him lest he come and strike me down, mother and children.* Hashem answered his prayer, as reflected in the verse: *Yaakov came intact (with his entire family) to the city of Shechem.*

When the Jewish people could no longer bear the oppression of Egypt, they followed the example of the Patriarchs, delving within themselves to find their most potent weapon. The Torah says: *The Jewish nation was groaning because of their subjugation and they cried out and their cries went up to Hashem because of the work.*

Their voices rose again when they faced what seemed like certain doom at the Reed Sea. The verse states: *They became very frightened and Bnei Yisrael cried out to Hashem.*

When the Jews committed the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe knew that the only means he could depend upon to bring them forgiveness was prayer: *Hashem, why unleash Your wrath against Your people whom You brought out of Egypt with great power and a show of force.* The Torah relates that Moshe's plea was answered: *Hashem reconsidered regarding the evil that He declared He would do to His people.*

Moshe's power of prayer was called upon again to save the Jewish people when the men

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *Prayer is recognized throughout Jewish history as the most potent means to overcome adversity.*
- ▶ *Our Patriarchs prayed for help when faced with the prospect of not having children.*
- ▶ *Moshe turned to prayer to bring forgiveness for the grave sin of the Golden Calf and for the sin committed by the spies.*
- ▶ *Although tefillah is just one of many mitzvos, it is unparalleled in its power to bring goodness and salvation.*

who were sent to spy on the Land of Israel prior to the Jews' entry came back with a slanderous report. Hashem warned Moshe: *I will smite them with the plague and annihilate them ...* Moshe set to work to avert this dire decree: *Moses said to Hashem ... Forgive now the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your kindness and as You have forgiven this people from Egypt until now.* His plea was answered with the words that have stirred Jewish souls every Yom Kippur since: *And Hashem said, "Salachti kidvarecha," I have forgiven in accordance with your words."*

Moshe so deeply understood the power of prayer that even though he knew Hashem had decreed otherwise, he prayed to be allowed to enter the Land of Israel. He did not rely on the boundless merit of his righteous life. He prayed!

Ramban observes that all the miracles performed by the prophets were a result of their prayers. When Joshua stopped the sun and Elijah and Elisha resurrected the dead, it was not because they were endowed with mysterious supernatural powers. Rather, their prophetic spirit brought them closer to G-d so that they could pray with greater intensity.

Tefillah is one mitzvah of the many the Torah has given us to bring us close to our Creator. The *Sefer Halkrim*, however, urges us not to make the mistake of viewing it in the same light as other mitzvos. In its unique capacity to arouse Hashem's mercy, save us from affliction, and bring us forgiveness and blessing, prayer is a mitzvah like no other.

OPENING HEAVEN'S GATES



In accessing the treasures stored for us in Heaven, *tefillah* is the key. Even though the treasures are there, and they are being held in store for each of us, they do not automatically flow into our lives. They remain locked in Heaven until we pray.

A person lives in unbearable poverty his entire life. He never has enough food. He can't pay his bills. He cannot help others in need. Everyone tells him that there is a treasure buried under the floorboards of his house, but he doesn't believe it. He gives the floor a half-hearted kick every so often, thinking maybe he'll hear the jingle of coins, but he only hears the thunk of his heel against the wood. Then, on the last day of this man's life, someone walks in, lifts up a plank and reveals an iron chest filled with gems and gold. All the wealth the dying man could ever have needed is in that chest. His whole lifetime of miserable struggle plays out before his dimming eyes; the stab of what could have been is the last sensation he ever feels.

That piercing remorse is the lot of one who does not believe in and utilize the power of prayer. The *Nefesh HaChaim* expounds this through the verse: *He recounts to a person what were his deeds.* This, he explains, refers to the revelation people will experience in the World to Come regarding the gifts that would have been theirs had they only believed in the power of prayer and used it.

Rav Pam explains: "These people will be shown how their

prayers could have made a difference had they been said with heartfelt concentration. The sick person *could* have been healed; the childless couple *could* have been answered, the person looking for a spouse *could* have found one. ”

This principle is dramatically illustrated by the Jewish nation’s redemption from Egypt, as we are told: *Hashem heard their moaning, and Hashem remembered His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Yaakov. Hashem saw the Children of Israel and Hashem knew.*

The Ramban asks why the Torah mentions the numerous factors that caused Hashem to redeem the Jewish nation; after all, their exile was predestined to end after 430 years, as the Torah states: *It was at the end of four hundred and thirty years, and it was on this very day that all the legions of Hashem left the land of Egypt.*

Rashi cites a *Mechilta* that explains the phrase, *it was at the end of four hundred and thirty years*. It tells us that once the preordained end of the exile arrived, Hashem did not delay the Jews from leaving for even the “blink of an eye.” But the arrival of the preordained time was not enough by itself to set the redemption in motion, the Ramban explains. It was when “Hashem heard their moaning” that He remembered His covenant. “They were not ... redeemed, except for the fact that their prayers were accepted with pity and mercy.”

Tefillah, along with repentance, will be the catalyst that sets in motion the Final Redemption as well. The *She’arim B’Tefillah* notes that even if everything is prepared and ready for

the Redemption, if the Gates of *Tefillah* are not opened, nothing will be accomplished. This is the meaning of the verse, *With weeping will they come, and with supplications will I lead them.* As the *Darchai Noam* comments, "One must be very careful with his *tefillos*, certainly in the time when the arrival of Mashiach is at hand ... for it is on them — those very *tefillos* — that the coming of Mashiach depends." Rav Yaakov Emden writes that if the Jewish people would pray even one *tefillah* properly in all aspects, they would be instantly redeemed.

Prayer is the natural cause of every effect in this world; just as rain causes flowers to grow, so does prayer cause Hashem to grant us His blessings. It is the key to all worldly good fortune. Incredibly, Hashem has entrusted us with the key to His storehouse; He waits only for us to use it.

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *Even rewards destined for us will not come to us unless we pray for them.*
- ▶ *Just as the redemption from Egypt was predicated upon the Jews' prayers, so is the Final Redemption.*
- ▶ *In giving us the ability to pray, Hashem has given us the key to His storehouse of blessings.*



OUTSHINING THE STARS

Returning to yesterday's allegory, what if the impoverished man never had access to the treasure chest buried under his floor? What if this particular person, due to bad *mazal* or his own dearth of merit, was not destined to have an adequate livelihood? Surprisingly, even then, prayer has the power to change the situation.

Throughout the Torah, however, reward appears to be completely dependent on merit: *If you will listen diligently to the voice of Hashem, and you will do what is just in His eyes, and you will listen to His commandments and observe all His statutes — then any of the diseases that I placed upon Egypt, I will not place upon you, for I am Hashem your healer.'*

The second paragraph of *Shema* also tells us: *And it will be that if you will listen to My commandments that I command you today, to love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul ...*

Then, we are told, the benefits and rewards will be: *And I shall provide the rain of your land in its time, the early rain and the late rain; and you shall bring in your grain, your wine, and your oil. And I shall provide grass in your field for your cattle and you will eat and you will be satisfied."* Rashi comments: [Hashem says:] Once you do what is incumbent upon you, I too will do what is incumbent upon Me. In view of these verses, the average person might come to believe that if he performs the mitzvos, blessing will come to him, even if he does not pray.

The Torah also pays heed to another powerful influence on a person's destiny — his *mazal*, the celestial signs that are

dominant at the moment of a person's birth. In the Gemara, Rava says that a person's children, life, and livelihood do not depend on the merit of mitzvos but rather on *mazal*. The Ramban explains that the influence of *mazal*, for good or bad, is integral to Hashem's Creation. If *mazal* holds this G-d-given authority over our lives, it would seem that prayer would be powerless to affect our destiny.

The Ritva reconciles these difficulties. He explains that neither the merit of one's mitzvos nor the influence of one's *mazal* has the power to fully determine a person's fate. *Mazal* is a mighty ruler, but it must contend for influence with other forces that can, under the right circumstances, overthrow it: "Heaven forbid that [our fate] should be dependent on *mazal* entirely, [first] because it is established that *mazal* does not control Israel, and [second] because otherwise you would invalidate all the blessings and curses of the Torah ... Rather ... [our fate] is not entirely dependent on meritorious deeds [doing mitzvos], as *mazal* also holds sway, except that a great merit can abolish [bad] *mazal*."

What is that great merit?

Tosafos Yom Tov reveals: "*Tefillah* is needed, since a merit by itself ... cannot always change [bad] *mazal*." In the same vein, Rabbeinu Bachya comments, "This is why our Sages mentioned that children, life, and livelihood are affected by *mazal*, in order that we realize how necessary *tefillah* is for these blessings ... with *tefillah*, *mazal* can be reversed and overcome."

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *The blessings of Heaven are not dependent upon good deeds alone or on mazal alone.*
- ▶ *Mazal has a powerful influence on one's life. However, through prayer, one's mazal can be changed.*

Rav Bunim of P'shis'che was a successful businessman in the years prior to his appointment as Rebbe. During that time, he once traveled to visit the Chozeh of Lublin. He had hoped to have the opportunity to learn with this holy man, and to receive a blessing from him.

The Chozeh, however, was not able to tell Rav Bunim what he wanted to hear. Instead, he foresaw financial disaster in Rav Bunim's future. "You are destined to lose all your money this year," the Chozeh told him.

The year progressed, and the Chozeh's prediction failed to materialize. At the end of the year, Rav Bunim returned to the Chozeh to report that he had not suffered a loss.

"What did you do to thwart the evil decree?" the Chozeh asked.

"I cried to Hashem the entire year," he answered.

"My words that you would lose your money were without [your] tears," the Chozeh explained. "However, when you prayed, everything changed."

Our destiny does not reside in the stars alone, or in our merit alone. Prayer can pluck us out of the mire in which we feel stuck, and open each person's life to blessings that are far beyond his due.

HASHEM ALONE



When one knows with all his heart that the solution for his desperate situation resides with one particular person, he will call, write, or bang down the door, if necessary, to solicit help for his plight. The ardent nature of his entreaties reflects his belief that this is his only avenue of salvation.

The Torah tells of numerous individuals whose deep faith that Hashem was their only Source of help brought them to “bang down the door” of Heaven. Their prayers, fueled by this total trust, are a template for our own *tefillah*.

The Midrash tells us that Chanah and Elkanah were childless for nineteen years, throughout which time Chanah prayed for children to no avail. It was only when her husband exclaimed, “Why do you weep, Chanah? Am I not better to you than ten sons?” that she realized he no longer had any hope of her having a child.

Alone, she then poured out her heart to Hashem, convinced that only a miracle would enable her to have a child. This time her prayers were answered, and Chanah gave birth to a child who grew up to be one of the greatest leaders of the Jewish nation, Shmuel HaNavi.

Rav Moshe Ahron Stern, Mashgiach of the Kaminetzer Yeshivah, probed further into this episode. Why, he asked, did Chanah receive so much more than she asked for? Her request was to be blessed with an ordinary child; nonetheless, her son became a unique leader who was instrumental in the establishment of the monarchy — he was the one who anointed David HaMelech whose dynasty will reign for all eternity.

Rav Stern explains that Chanah did not merely ask Hashem for help — she placed all her hope and trust in Him, knowing that only a miracle would produce results.

The remarkable potential with which her child, Shmuel HaNavi, was blessed, arose from the power of his mother's tearful entreaties.

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz was praying at the kever of Rachel Imeinu on her yahrtzeit, the eleventh of Cheshvan, when he heard a woman praying on the other side of the partition.

"Mama Rachel, you know what it means not to have children. You know the hardship of living many years without children. Can't you help me?" These were the only words he heard.

Rabbi Shmulevitz subsequently sent a talmid to the woman's home with the following message: "Your prayers have been accepted in Heaven. You will have a boy next year and I wish to be sandek at the bris." And so it was.

In telling this story, Dayan Aharon Dunner of England explained why her prayers were answered. "This woman was not a saint, but merely a simple person who felt that she needed something, that only Hashem could help her, and that she had absolutely no control over her life. Her prayer was relevant to her — she prayed with all her heart and soul and that truly made a difference."

The Torah not only instructs us to pray — it shows us by example how to make our prayers a true instrument of salvation.

When we tell Hashem, "You and You alone can help me," we turn wishes and hopes into answered prayers.

THE MEASURE OF A PRAYER



Adam prayed for the first rain; our Patriarchs pleaded for children; Moshe supplicated for his people; and other Torah giants throughout the ages have prayed for the needs of their fellow Jews. Prayer is indeed a powerful force in the hands of these men — but can such a force be harnessed by an ordinary person?

The answer is a resounding “yes.” Our prayers have the potential to do as much for us as the prayers of our great ancestors did for them.

David HaMelech taught us an everlasting lesson when he wrote in *Tehillim*: *Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him sincerely.* A prayer imbued with respect, dignity, and sincerity is a prayer that is filled with power. It is a prayer that Hashem will answer.

As previously mentioned, the Gemara states that Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous. This refers not to the person himself, but to the manner in which he prays. A sincere and dignified prayer is a prayer of the righteous.

The verse from *Tehillim* teaches us that our ability to draw close to Hashem in prayer, and thus make ourselves heard, depends upon the authentic quality of the prayer. This is true for “all who call upon Him.”

The *Talmud Yerushalmi* relates a story illustrating the capacity of a sincere prayer to find acceptance in Heaven:

A ship was sailing the sea when suddenly a storm began to rage. The many non-Jewish passengers cried out for help, but the storm's fury was unabated. They turned to the sole Jewish child on board saying, “Rise my son, call out to your G-d, because we heard that your G-d answers you when

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *Effective prayer is not the realm of the righteous alone.*
- ▶ *Every prayer offered with sincerity and respect is viewed as a prayer of the righteous.*
- ▶ *Sincere prayer always benefits the supplicant.*
- ▶ *Everyone has the potential to pray with sincerity.*

you cry out to Him, and He is mighty." The child immediately cried out to Hashem with all his heart, and the sea fell silent.

Upon reaching dry land, all the passengers except the Jewish child went to shop. When asked, "Isn't there anything you need to buy?" the child responded, "Why do you care what a worthless and forsaken guest needs?" They exclaimed, "We are worthless and forsaken! We are here and our idols are in Babylonia. However, wherever you go, your G-d is with you."

Even the idol worshipers recognized that Hashem is always with us, and that we are never forsaken. As long as we pray with sincerity and respect — as did the Jewish child — our prayers are accepted. Wherever we go, Hashem is with us.

Despite a person's doubts that his own prayers are worthy of Hashem's response, the following Midrash reassures us that no sincere prayer is wasted: Hashem said to Israel, "Be careful and prudent in your prayers, because there is no other measure more beautiful than this. And it [prayer] is greater and mightier than the animal offerings [in the Holy Temple]. And even if one is not worthy to be answered with his or her prayers, and for benevolence and favor to be done for the person, because the person prays and pleads many times, I [Hashem] will be benevolent with that person."

Sincerity turns an ordinary person's prayer into a prayer of greatness, and sincerity is a quality anyone can develop. It arises naturally from the recognition that Hashem alone has the power to help us, and that our words of prayer are our only means of setting this power in motion.

DAILY MIRACLES



T*efillah*, the invincible force that set in motion the Exodus from Egypt and the splitting of the Reed Sea, plays another, less dramatic but far more pervasive role as well: it keeps one's heart beating, one's paycheck coming, one's children growing and learning. *Tefillah* is not just the ultimate weapon in times of great need; it is the essential tool of daily living.

There are times when the need for Hashem's mercy is obvious, and prayer is the natural response. For instance, if a person is sick and in dire need of healing, the solution is *tefillah*. Many people do not, however, associate that same need for Heaven's mercy with the mundane details of life. As long as they are functioning smoothly, those aspects of life seem to require no Divine maintenance. This is an outright misconception.

The word *adam*, man, consists of the same Hebrew letters as the word *me'od*, much. The nature of man is that he needs "much." As *Chazal* tell us, a man who has one hundred desires two hundred. Clearly, it is only with Hashem's help that a person can achieve his goals. If every person requires Hashem's compassion in order to fulfill his desires, then every person is dependent upon *tefillah* — the most effective means for soliciting Heaven's mercy.

One such basic desire is a livelihood, or for some, a life of affluence. The Gemara advises those who seek financial success to pray for mercy from Hashem, the source of all riches. Even someone who conducts himself honestly in business must pray for mercy from Hashem in order to succeed.

One of the Chofetz Chaim's students asked him for a blessing for livelihood. The Chofetz Chaim answered, "It leads to an absurdity, that one poor man turns to a second poor man for help, at a time when both of them can turn to a rich Father. It is He Who proclaims and says, 'Mine is the silver, Mine is the gold,' and 'Salvation is from Hashem.'"

Another basic request is for the intelligence and understanding necessary to achieve success in life. The Gemara advises one who wants wisdom to pray for mercy from Hashem, the Source of all wisdom. "Engaging a lot in study ... without (prayer) does not suffice."

This concept was close to the heart of the Chazon Ish, who proved by his deeds that he knew well the source of his Torah wisdom. His older brother, Rav Meir Karelitz, credited the Chazon Ish's great stature as a renowned scholar, whom thousands sought for advice, to two sources: his diligent study of Torah, which he undertook with no motive other than service of Hashem, and the emphasis he placed on the berachah for wisdom in the Shemoneh Esrei (Atah Chonein).

This was not just a theoretical recognition of Hashem's essential role in endowing man with intelligence. Whenever the Chazon Ish or his brother encountered difficulty in their learning, they would close their books and turn to Hashem to pray for understanding.

The Chazon Ish knew on the deepest level that Hashem was not only behind the epic historic event of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, but also that He was behind the daily struggles of two men seeking clarification of the Torah's wisdom. In turning to Hashem for clarity in learning, success in a job — even pleasant weather on vacation — a person expresses his belief in Hashem's pervasive Presence and affirms his deepest faith that He is in charge of it all.

PARENTS' PRAYERS



More than money, more than wisdom, a person's deepest desire is for his children's welfare. How can a person realize his fervent desire to have children, and to help them thrive and grow into good, productive, Torah-observant Jews? Continuing the previously quoted formula, the Gemara answers, "Let him pray for mercy from Hashem, Who controls the birth of children."

The young kollel couple's happy anticipation of their first child quickly turned to fear, and then piercing pain. The little boy, born prematurely, lived for only 11 hours. Bewildered and heartbroken by their loss, they arrived at the home of the great Torah leader Rav Chaim Kanievsky to request a berachah. Beyond that, they wanted advice: What mitzvah could they take on, what practice could they adopt, that would serve as a great merit to help the next pregnancy proceed normally?

As they waited for the husband to be admitted into the Rav's presence, they discussed their readiness to take on whatever he would suggest. Even though money was tight, they would be willing to give more charity. Even though the young man learned Torah all day, he would add more learning somehow. Whatever it took, they agreed, they would do.

Finally, the husband was asked to come in to meet with Rav Chaim. "My wife and I want to accept upon ourselves something special, something especially unique as a segulah for our situation," the young man said. "We are willing to accept anything the Rav suggests."

Rav Chaim unhesitatingly responded with just two words “Zeit mispalle! (Pray!)”

Thinking that Rav Chaim had misunderstood their willingness to go “above and beyond,” he asked again, and again he received the same answer: “Zeit mispalle.”

“But is there anything exceptional we can do,” the young man asked again. After all, he already prayed. In fact, since the tragedy, he had prayed every day at sunrise (Vasikin) at the Kosel, which was in itself a special segulah.

This time, Rav Chaim answered, “Bracha VeHatzlacha (blessings and success),” and sent the young couple back out into the evening, confident that they were doing the one and only thing that Rav Chaim felt could truly help them bring a healthy child into the world.

Many great rabbis have stressed the importance of tefillah in successful child rearing.

Rav Avraham Pam, Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivah Torah Vodaath, spoke of two ingredients that bring success in raising children: tefillah and positive role models provided by the parents. The Chofetz Chaim often commented, “Success with children is 100 percent based on Hashem’s help.” Rav Chaim Kanievsky expressed in his advice to the young couple in the above true story his own firm belief in the singular power of prayer. He once stated, “One must pray a lot to succeed with children and no other advice is helpful.”

The Chasam Sofer was asked the secret of his success in raising a child such as his son, the K'sav Sofer. He responded, "Do you know how many tears went into davening for my son?" Similarly, when speaking of raising his son, the Brisker Rav said, "Success with raising children comes only with Tehillim and tears."

A man asked the Steipler Gaon, for a blessing in bringing up his child. The Steipler replied, "You must pray! What do you think? Until this day I still pray for my son's (Rav Chaim Kanievsky's) success." This episode occurred when the Steipler's son was 52 years old.

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz, Mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshivah in Europe, frequently described sincere prayer as "the only activity that can generate tremendous profit and yet does not consume any free time, as the person is praying anyway." With a nominal addition of feeling, a person can transform rote prayer into meaningful prayer, and in doing so, draw Hashem's mercy into the daily tasks and labors of love that fill his days.

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *A person who wants children and success in raising them must pray for Hashem's mercy.*
- ▶ *Tefillah is essential for success with one's children, even once they are grown.*
- ▶ *Small changes in one's prayer habits can make large changes in one's life.*



A THOUGHT FOR YOM KIPPUR

A person who is told that there may be gold buried in his backyard will dig and dig, but if he finds nothing, he eventually begins to doubt that the gold is there. He will then work a little less assiduously, and finally, he concludes that the rumor is false. He puts away his shovel, reseeds the lawn and puts his effort elsewhere.

In contrast, a person who knows for certain that there is gold buried somewhere in his backyard never stops trying. He digs up every inch of soil, and if that does not yield the treasure, he digs deeper and deeper. He feels that his unwavering effort is worthwhile, because he knows he will eventually succeed, and his payoff will be extraordinary wealth.

One who attempts to improve the quality of his *tefillah* — and thus, his entire life — is searching for the purest gold, and *Chazal* testify that it certainly exists. As he embarks on his search, he must realize that at times he may fail. If he begins to doubt that the potential is there within him, he will abandon the effort. One who knows for certain that he has the capacity to reach that higher level, however, will keep striving. He will delve within himself until he finds the treasure.

The Gemara teaches us that every person can be certain of finding the treasure. It is within each of us, without exception. There is never a true justification for the self-doubt that can cause us to lose sight of our goal.

The Gemara tells of Elazar ben Dordia, who is said to have visited every woman of ill repute in the world. Upon hearing of one in a distant city across the ocean,

he took a purse of gold coins and crossed seven rivers until he reached her ... She [then] expelled a breath and said, "As this breath will never return to its place, so will you (Elazar ben Dordia) never be received in teshuvah."

Elazar ben Dordia then sat between two mountains and requested that they ask for mercy on his behalf. They replied, "How can we plead for your mercy when we ourselves are in need of mercy?" He then asked the heavens and earth, the sun, the moon and the stars to plead for him, but they all replied with an identical negative response.

Finally, Elazar ben Dordia exclaimed, "The matter of teshuvah depends on me alone!" and cried aloud until his soul departed. A Bas Kol, Heavenly Voice, then declared, "R' Elazar ben Dordia is destined for life in the World to Come ..." Upon hearing this, Rebbi (R' Yehudah HaNasi) wept and said, "One may acquire eternal life in many years, and another may acquire eternal life in one moment."

Elazar ben Dordia's actions raise several questions: Did he expect the mountains and valleys, the stars and constellations, etc. to pray for him with no effort on his part? Furthermore, why would he proclaim, "It depends upon me alone," when it is obvious that *teshuvah* and self-improvement depend on the person who did wrong?

Rav Yonasan Eibeshutz explains that people who err have the tendency to blame other fac-

Points to Ponder

- ▶ *Every person has within himself the power to change and improve, and with consistent effort, this potential will be uncovered.*
- ▶ *Change is only possible when one accepts responsibility for one's actions.*
- ▶ *Improving one's tefillah operates on the same principles as all other areas of spiritual self-improvement.*

tors such as environment or inborn tendencies, and will not accept responsibility for their own actions. Elazar ben Dordia followed this pattern by first claiming that the environment caused his downfall and asking the mountains and valleys, and the heavens and earth to pray for him. He next turned to the sun and the moon, the stars and constellations — forces that influence human nature — and blamed them. Ultimately, Elazar ben Dordia accepted the truth and understood that *teshuvah* depended on him alone.

This is a powerful message for one who wishes to reshape his approach to spirituality, especially *tefillah*. Many people claim that they cannot pray properly or do not gain fulfillment from praying because it was never taught to them well. Some believe that the atmosphere in which they pray is not conducive to proper concentration. Others believe that their habits are too deeply ingrained — that it is not within their nature to change their ways and improve their *tefillah*.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz explains that the weeping of Rabbi sprang from his recognition that while each and every person has been given the ability to change for the better, this precious gift often languishes unopened. In daily life, people often overlook the opportunities that are placed before them.

Each of us must understand that the capacity to improve is indeed within us. Motivated by the certainty that, ultimately, we will find what we are seeking, we must continue to delve and explore until we unearth our full capacity to beseech the Heavens with sincere, powerful prayer.

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