

Ask Hashem for His Help

My son inherited his grandfather's love of riddles, word play, and dry jokes. His favorite joke is:

How do you keep someone in suspense...?

(Take a moment...let it register.) His second favorite is:

Why is it when you lose something it's always in the last place you'd look...?

Ok... The point I'd like to bring out here is that in order to find something you need to look for it. If you want to accomplish something, you must take the first step. If you just stand idly by nothing will happen, other than remaining in suspense...

During this time of year when we're trying to improve and get closer to Hashem, we need to take advantage of one of our greatest tools in doing so – *tefilla*. We are supposed to desire growth to the point that we beg Hashem to help us do it. Someone who's trying to improve and doesn't ask Hashem for help is working from a disadvantage.

The Gemara says towards the end of Niddah that it is impossible for a person to become wise in Torah without asking Hashem to help him. The Gemara says in Gemara Kiddushin that in order to overpower our evil inclination, we need Hashem's assistance.

We could accomplish anything spiritually if we want it badly enough. Hashem loves when we request His help to get closer to Him and He's waiting to help us do it.

In our parsha Nitzavim, Moshe explains that the Torah is accessible. The goal of knowing and fulfilling the Torah may seem to be beyond human attainment, but this is actually not so.

To the contrary, Moshe told B'nai Yisrael that the Torah is not at all beyond their reach. Far from requiring superhuman efforts or supernatural revelations to be equal to Hashem's expectations, that goal is very much within reach – if they make a sincere effort to grasp it.

בִּי־קְרוֹב אֵלַיִךְ הַדְּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ: (Devarim 30:14) – *Rather, the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it.*

Rashi explains בִּי־קְרוֹב אֵלַיִךְ (*Rather, the matter is very near to you*) that B'nai Yisrael was given both the written Torah (*Torah She'bichtav*) and the oral Torah (*Torah She'baal'peh*).

Ibn Ezra explains that this pasuk speaks of the mouth, heart, and deed. Hashem wants primarily the sincerity of the heart. Some commandments involve speech which inspires the heart, whereas some involve deeds which inspire speech.

The Sforno says that the heart recognizes where one has sinned, and the mouth confesses it. Both recognition and confession of sin are prime ingredients for repentance.

Gemara Niddah 30b teaches that a fetus is taught the entire Torah while in the womb, but forgets it upon birth. The question is asked if a baby will not remember it, why is it taught in the first place?

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik comments that due to this prenatal teaching, every Jewish person has an affinity for the Torah, and even someone who never had the privilege of studying the Torah may be inspired with intuitive wisdom. When such a person is given the opportunity to study, the Torah will not be something foreign to him, but something he once knew. This is what Moshe meant when he said that the Torah is not hidden or distant, but that it is in every Jewish mouth and heart.

The Ramban explains that our pasuk means repentance is not hidden and distant from us. *Rather, the matter is very near to you ... to perform it* – meaning at any time and in any place.

Repentance is not some “thing” that might be physically distant from you and to which you might have difficulty obtaining access because you are located at the far ends of the world or because there are other physical obstructions.

The Ramban continues that the meaning of *in your mouth and in your heart* in our pasuk refers to the two facets of national repentance. First, B’nai Yisrael will confess their sin and the sin of their forefathers *with their mouth*. Second, they will return to Hashem *with all their heart* and they will accept upon themselves the obligation of fulfilling the Torah for all their future generations.

The Baal HaTurim teaches that *in your mouth* means that those who utter the words of the Torah with their mouth (Eruvin 54a) bring life to themselves (Mishlei 4:22). And that *and in your heart* teaches that the reward for discussion of Torah law is dependent upon the reasoning. Rashi in Gemara Berachos 6b explains that the reward a person receives for participating in a Torah discussion is commensurate with the effort and concentration that he exerts to understand the rationale of the matter under discussion.

The Tanya in Chapter 17 explains that our pasuk 30:14 is central to the Tanya. At first glance, the statement *in your heart* is contrary to the experience of our senses. Who could honestly say that that his heart is not drawn to things outlawed by the Torah?

The entire Torah, the Tanya writes, is eternally relevant to us.

The Sefer HaChinuch (mitzvah 418) states that one who focuses his thoughts on physical matters and the futilities of the world, not for the sake of Heaven, but merely to enjoy them or to achieve illusory honor, not intending to assist and strengthen good and upstanding people, violates the positive commandment to love Hashem.

The Tanya further explains the meaning behind our pasuk stating that serving Hashem is *in your heart*, but only sufficiently that you can *perform it*, no more than that. The pasuk is not suggesting that a consistent emotional bond to Hashem is possible *in your heart*. Rather, it teaches that to conjure enough feelings for Hashem to *practically observe His commandments* is within reach for you. Inside you may still be torn emotionally, but generating the minimal arousal necessary for disciplined control of your actions should be manageable.

You can control what you think, and using your mind you can think about whatever you want. If you think about the greatness of Hashem, you will inevitably generate, at least in your mind, a

love of Hashem, sufficient to inspire you to attach yourself to Him through practical observance of the mitzvos and studying His Torah.

Rabbi Manis Friedman teaches that a person is what he thinks. The heart is like a submarine and the mind is like the periscope telling the heart what it sees.

You can't choose to have feelings for Hashem, but you can choose to think about His awesomeness. Even if your thoughts don't succeed in generating a strong emotional connection with Hashem, you will be able to generate at least enough motivation to obey His will, i.e. to observe His commandments.

So, while loving Hashem intensely may not be very much within reach, generating a minimal feeling for Hashem, sufficient to observe the mitzvos, is within your control.

The Eshed HaNechalim says that Moshe was pointing out that one does not have to walk in any streets or anticipate any locked doors, or even get out of bed to engage in Torah learning. All he needs to do is open his own mouth and heart and allow the words of the Torah to emanate from them.

The Midrash Rabbah (7) relates that where our pasuk says *the matter is very near to you* it is as if Hashem is saying to B'nai Yisrael, "See how cherished you are to Me! For no other being in My palace knows the true essence of My Torah and yet I have given it to you!"

Moreover, the Midrash says that Hashem said to B'nai Yisrael, "My children, if you see to it that the words of the Torah will be near to you, then I shall refer to you as near to Me as well."

This concept teaches that B'nai Yisrael was chosen to enjoy that which is hidden even from the angels and that the giving of the Torah to B'nai Yisrael indicates the great closeness Hashem feels for us.

Rabbi David Ashear relates the following in his Living Emunah email #1521.

The *Sefer Chassidim* writes that if a person asks Hashem for something that will be a praise to Him, like for help learning Torah or help making other spiritual improvements, and he pours out his heart sincerely, Hashem will help him even if he is not worthy of it.

Hashem wants to help us spiritually more than we want to be helped. All He is waiting for is our desire to do it, our request for His help and our *hishtadlut* in getting it done. We have to remember Hashem could help us in any spiritual need we have. Nothing is too small.

Rabbi Biderman told that a man from Israel related to him that he was on a bus one day to go visit the home of one of his friends who was in mourning. While he was on the road, his father called him from a doctor's appointment that he was at and he asked if he could come help him where he was in Ramat Gan.

The man was very far from Ramat Gan at that time. To go back to help his father and then come all the way back to visit his friend would take him a few hours, but to honor his father he said, "Okay, if you need me, I'll be there as soon as I can."

He got off the bus, he waited for a different bus going in the opposite direction and when he finally arrived in Ramat Gan, his father called him back and said, "Thanks anyway, I don't need you anymore, I'll be okay."

The man couldn't believe what he just heard. He just wasted hours of his time. He went into a restaurant to pick up something to eat before he started his journey back. After he made his order, he asked the cashier if he would hold his bag while he uses the men's room.

The cashier then asked him why he couldn't just take the bag with him to the men's room. He replied that he had his tallis and tefillin in it.

Hearing that, the cashier asked him if he would mind waiting a few minutes and allow him to use his tallis and tefillin. The man said, "Of course, go ahead."

Afterward, the cashier explained, he said, "Although I'm not the most religious person, I make sure to put on tefillin every single day. This morning, however, I woke up late and I had to run out of the house in order to make it to work on time. I have to be here all day and I was in jeopardy of missing putting on tefillin today."

He continued, "I turned to Hashem earlier and I begged him to please make it that somehow I'm able to put on tefillin today. When you told me you have tefillin in your bag, I began singing inside of me. Hashem is great, I thought. He brought me tefillin right to my hands."

The man then told him, "You don't know half the story. I was an hour away from here. My father called me to come help him out and, when I finally got here, he told me he didn't need me anymore. I thought I came here for nothing. Now I see I was Hashem's messenger in bringing you tefillin."

A heartfelt tefilla for something spiritual is very precious and Hashem is eager to help us. Let us use this wonderful gift of tefilla and ask Hashem to help us in all areas of religion.

Imagine davening to Hashem and having your prayers answered. What would that feel like?

With Hashem's help, may we merit to have our prayers answered for a year ahead of health, happiness, peace, and prosperity.

What would you like to ask Hashem for as we enter the New Year?