

## TERUMA 5768

I know it's not possible to ascribe human emotions to Gd, but in some sense, Gd must have been very excited when He presented the Jews with the 10 Commandments and the Torah at Mt. Sinai. They had shown such faith when they left Egypt—with just a few pieces of matzah and no water—to follow Gd into the desert. He must have had such *nachas* when they stood at Sinai pledging—as we learned in last week's Torah portion—*naaseh v'nishma*, “Whatever You tell us Gd, we will do and then try to understand.” It was a statement of complete trust and love. Never before had they felt so close to Gd.

In this week's Torah portion, Gd presents the Jewish people a path to maintain that closeness—the path of worship. It's a path that we have continued to this day 3300 years later—a path that has become part of the *kishkes*, the make up of every Jew.

Yitzchak Lev Peretz, the great Yiddish writer, has a touching story about Berel the tailor—a simple and pious Jew—and his son, who has just become a doctor. The young man comes to visit Papa in the *shtetl* and Berel asks him to come with him to shule on Shabbos morning.

The young man refuses, saying, “Father, if you knew that our neighbor, the widow, needed help, would you wait to give help until she came begging?”

“Of course not,” replies Berel. “I'd help the moment I knew her need.”

And the son says, “Well, Gd certainly knows when His creatures need help. He doesn't have to wait for us to come begging.”

“True,” says Berel, “but asking Gd's help is not the only reason we pray. We have to praise Him, too.”

“Father,” says the doctor, “how would you like it if someone were to keep praising you to your face all the time with, ‘Berel is a marvelous tailor, the only tailor, the greatest tailor!’”

“It would make me sick,” says Berel.

“You see, Gd is greater and wiser than we are. Do you think He needs or wants our constant praise?”

Berel nods thoughtfully, “You're right, absolutely right.” And then he brightens, “But a Jew has to *daven*, doesn't he?”

A Jew has to *daven*, a Jew has to pray! It's in his *kishkes*. It's a hunger of the soul...an outpouring of longing for Gd...a yearning to connect with our Creator, to feel that He is there listening and watching over us. The need to pray is, of

course, universal. Human beings are not only thinking creatures but also praying creatures.

We Jews have always prayed to Gd. Since the time of Abraham, we have cried out to Gd...thanking Him for His mercies...begging for His help...praising Him... confessing and confiding in Him...and pleading for His guidance. When we stand up before Gd and pour out our hearts, we are engaged in what the Torah calls *Avodah*, which we translate as, “worship,” and which literally means, “work,” and refers to our holy work, the service of the heart.

Let me ask you a personal question: What is your *Avodah*, your holy work, the service of your heart? What do you do to communicate with Gd and feel close to Him/Her? It’s sad, but so many of us don’t pray anymore. Unlike Berel the tailor, many of us don’t *daven*, because we’re not “at home” with Gd and are practically tongue-tied or even embarrassed in His presence. And I suspect that there is a place—even in the most ardent secularist—that still yearns for Gd, still wants to rediscover how to *daven*, how to connect with Him.

Most Jews today are raised in non-religious homes and don’t even know where to begin. They are so competent with everything they do—work, sports, hobbies—and feel so incompetent and, therefore, uncomfortable, when they walk into a shule. The Hebrew may be too difficult for them to read fluently, let alone understand. The structure of the prayers, the melodies, the length of the service can be overwhelming to anyone who doesn’t attend regularly. It can seem like an insurmountable wall in the path to Gd.

But if truth be told, you can go into the most orthodox shule, where the vast majority are so fluent in the *davening* that they know a good deal of it by heart, and yet few, if any, really make a connection with Gd when they pray. Now if Jews who are fluent with the services have difficulty in connecting with Gd, how can the vast majority of us who are not, ever hope of finding Gd? How can anyone find Gd?

The Kotzker Rebbe was once asked, “Where is Gd to be found?” His answer is as profound as it is instructive: “Gd can be found where ever you let him in!” Judaism insists that every human being can find a path to Gd. We are all created in Gd’s image. We are each given a *neshama*, a holy soul, by Gd that yearns to cleave to Him. But how?

Another Chassidic Rebbe was once asked, “What do you do before you pray?” The Rebbe replied, “I pray that I may be able to pray.” Maybe that’s what those of us who are uncomfortable *davening* need to do—just pray, just speak to Gd from our hearts and also ask Him for help that we may be able to pray.

Why is prayer so hard for many? It’s because prayer is a function of the heart—not of the lips, nor even the mind. To pray is to feel, and feelings cannot be mechanically manufactured by reading a script of prayers. While we yearn to feel Gd’s presence, we simply cannot expect to enter the synagogue immediately find Gd there. To find Gd in shule, we must 1<sup>st</sup> find Him in our hearts.

*V’asu li mikdash v’shacahanti b’tocham*, “And make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them,” commands the Torah (Exodus 25:8) in this morning’s parsha. Why doesn’t Gd say, “Make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in it—in the sanctuary?” The sages comment that Gd resides not within the sanctuary so much, but within the heart of every person, unless, of course, the Great Tenant is dispossessed!

But I don’t think that’s a problem for most of us. Most of us have not dispossessed Gd from our hearts. Most of us are desperately seeking Gd. If we can just take that desire and add our special energy and focus to it, we might just transform our prayers into a true *Avodah*, a true service of the heart.

Question: Does the *siddur*, the prayer book, our prepared script of prayers help or get in the way of connecting with Gd? Is there a point to sticking to a set scheduled *Amida* text—which is our main prayer—3 times a day? Why can’t we just pray spontaneously when we feel like it?

The rift between structured prayer and the need for spontaneous prayer is one of the oldest controversies in Judaism. On one side, we have Maimonides, who argues that the commandment in last week’s parsha (Ex. 23:25), *Va-avad’tem et Hashem Elokeychem*, “And you shall serve—*avad’tem*, do your *Avodah* for—the Lrd your Gd,” means that it’s incumbent on us to pray, to do our *Avodah*, our holy work, the service of our hearts, whether we’re in the mood or not. For Maimonides, the act of praying itself helps put us into a sacred frame of mind and opens us up to the possibility of connection.

**On the other side, Nachmanides believes the commandment to pray is rooted in the verse later in the Torah (Num. 10:9): “When you are at war in your own land against an aggressor who attacks you, you shall sound short blasts on the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the Lrd your Gd and be delivered from your enemies.” Authentic prayer is the voice that rises during times of crisis crying out for help.**

**For Nachmanides, prayer is, “I need you”—not unlike Giants fans who were praying Sunday night as Eli Manning escaped from—what looked like—a game-ending tackle at they end of the Super Bowl to throw an amazing pass to David Tyree—who no doubt, as a religious man—prayed for Gd’s help as he was rewarded with a miracle catch that saved the game. Obviously Giant’s fans’ prayers were answered.**

**And there’s the story of a Jewish grandma and her grandson are at the beach that made the rounds a couple of years ago. He’s playing in the water while she’s standing on the shore not wanting to get her feet wet. All of a sudden, a huge wave appears from nowhere and crashes directly onto the spot where the boy is playing. The water recedes and the boy is gone, swept away.**

**The grandma holds her hands to the sky, screams and cries: “Gd, how could you? Haven’t I been a wonderful grandmother? Haven’t I been a wonderful mother? Haven’t I kept a kosher home? Haven’t I been active in Jewish causes and given generously to charity? Haven’t I lit candles every Shabbos and Yom Tov? Haven’t I tried my very best to live a life that you would be proud of?”**

**She goes on and on till a voice booms from the sky, “All right already!”**

**Suddenly another huge wave appears out of nowhere and crashes on the beach. As the water recedes, the boy is sitting in the sand smiling and splashing around as if nothing had ever happened. The voice booms again. “I have returned your grandson. Are you satisfied?”**

**She looks at her grandson and then to the heavens and says, “He had a hat.”**

**Gd listens to our prayers and yes, He answers them—but not always in the way we expect. OK I haven’t won the lottery yet to build our new shule, but that doesn’t mean Gd isn’t listening and that I haven’t had amazing prayer experiences praying for the shule. For Nachmonides, prayer is, “I need you.” For Maimonides, prayer is “I serve you.”**

**Who's right? The Talmud (Berachot 4:4) says they're both right! Crisis can be a powerful incentive to pray, but you need not have a crisis in your life to find Gd. So, the Talmud tells us that although the *Amida* should be recited 3 times a day, we are told we must add our personal prayers from our hearts.**

**Why are we supposed to pray 3 times a day? There are 2 approaches in the Talmud, (Brachot 26b). Rabbi Joshua ben Levi argues that it replaces the 3 daily sacrifices commanded in the Torah that we can no longer offer because the Temple was destroyed. Rabbi Yossi ben Chaninah says that it follows the prayers of the 3 patriarchs, who each prayed at different times of the day—morning, afternoon and night. In fact, each had such a unique experience of Gd, that the *Amida* address Gd as, “the Gd of Abraham, Gd of Isaac and Gd of Jacob,” not the “Gd of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,” to show us that Abraham's experience of Gd was not the same as Isaac's or Jacobs. Every human being experiences Gd differently.**

**In case you're wondering which rabbi is right—does praying the *Amida* 3 times a day follow the sacrifices or the patriarchs? The answer is again, they're both right! The patriarchs instituted the 3 prayers, but it was through the Temple sacrifices that they evolved into the service of our hearts.**

**But shouldn't prayer be spontaneous? Of course! But without a formalized prayer service, we might never get around to praying; and if we really try to bare our souls before Gd during services together, who knows what power our collective prayers may have? Each of our souls can synergistically uplift the other.**

**Let's try it for a moment and see. Close your eyes. Imagine yourself as a vessel for receiving Gd's light. Now imagine that light expanding till you see yourself bathed in Gd's light. It feels wonderful to be in that light—like Gd is hugging you. Breathe in that light and let it go to every fiber of your body with its healing power. Now imagine the light expanding again till the whole shule is has become filled with that light. Feel the power of all the holy souls around you in that light.**

**On Shabbos we don't ask for material things, but think about how you would like to change yourself spiritually. Think also of your relationships that need healing—be it with a spouse, a family member or a friend. Now let's ask**

**Gd to help us with all that. Say it out loud with me, “Hashem help me!” Together, “Hashem help me! Say it again, “Hashem help me!” Let’s say it louder, “Hashem help me!” Say it from your heart, “Hashem help me!” Say it from your soul, “Hashem help me!” Again, “Hashem help me!” Once more, “Hashem help me!”**

**Know that Gd listens to your prayers and that His light is always there for you to access—whenever and where ever you are. So in this powerful light that you have brought into this sanctuary, let us rise and pray together the Musaf service, page 460.**

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