

Hachazireinu Bitshuva:

Davening for our Spiritual Needs

Rav Yonason Eibschutz, in his work *Ya'arot Devash* (*Derasha* 1), underscores the profound capacity we possess to approach God with all our needs during the *Shomei'a Tefillah* blessing:

One should put all his intentions to Hashem, to pray to Him for all his needs, whether small or large. One should not refrain from davening for anything. If one must find a shidduch, he should pray to Hashem; for merchandise, he should pray to Hashem...

The principle of the matter is that there is nothing that one needs to do on a given day that he would not need to daven to Hashem for help to succeed... And he should not have to say that [only] if, chas v'shalom, there is trouble in his home that he should [therefore] pray...

These personal requests serve a dual purpose: they fortify our *emunah* and serve to amplify our *kavanah* when we daven. While *Shomei'a Tefillah* is a general *berachah* designated to encompass our diverse personal needs, as affirmed in the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 8a), the *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 119:1) aligns with Rav's opinion, allowing individuals to insert specific

requests into each corresponding Amidah blessing. The *Mishneh Berurah* goes even further, asserting that such a practice is not only permissible but also "proper and fitting" (122:8).

Although many are accustomed to mentioning the names of ailing relatives and friends within the *Refa'enu* blessing, it's crucial to remember that we can also beseech God for assistance with our spiritual aspirations. As exemplified by the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 81b), where Rav Chiyya bar Abba regularly implored for divine aid in subduing his *Yetzer Hara*.

This concept is underscored in the *Shemoneh Esreh*, where we first request the ability to make sound decisions (*Chonen Hadaat*) and then implore God for the capacity to repent (*Hashiveinu Avinu*). Similarly, every morning, in the closing blessing of *birchot hashachar*, we recite:

May it be Your will, Lord our God and the God of our fathers, that You allow us to follow Your Torah, and adhere us to Your commandments. Do not bring us into sin, transgression, iniquity, tribulation or disgrace, and do not allow the evil inclination to control us. Keep us distant



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from a wicked person and a wicked companion. Have us cling to our good inclination and good deeds. Make our inclinations subservient to You.

Furthermore, as Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, *Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Mir Yeshiva, expounds (*Or Yechezkel* 3:177):

Prayer is first and foremost in every effort, and there is no matter which is not rooted in prayer ... One merits God's beneficence only through prayer and the request to benefit from His kindness. Without prayer, one does not merit anything. And this is true not only for the acquisition of material things – it is true of spiritual gains as well. Therefore, it should be second nature to solicit God's guidance in our avodat

Hashem. We might erroneously hesitate to seek His assistance in *material* aspects of our lives, deeming them as inconsequential or trivial. However, when it comes to studying Torah, fulfilling *mitzvot*, and growing ever-closer to Him, we should readily seek His support.

Nevertheless, many are more inclined to pray for material needs than for spiritual ones. Why is this the case?

Tefillah, especially spontaneous personal prayer, is born out of a sense of need, and often, we are more attuned to our physical requirements than our spiritual ones. We feel a stronger urgency for sustenance than for success in prayer. A physical injury, like a cut on our finger, typically grabs our immediate attention more than the remorse we should feel for neglecting a *berachah*. This dichotomy should not persist. The deliberate placement of spiritual needs at the forefront of the *Amidah's* petitions is intended to prompt us to reevaluate our priorities. However, for most individuals, the initial thoughts that come to mind when contemplating what to ask from God tend to be more material in nature.

Additionally, this disparity arises because material needs often seem not just more important, but more immediate and pressing than spiritual ones. We assess our growth in Torah and *mitzvot* annually, coinciding with the approach of Elul and the *Yomim Noraim*. We seldom take the time to gauge whether we are better servants of Hashem today compared to yesterday. Consequently, we prioritize our physical well-being, material necessities, and other requests that we anticipate with greater impatience.

There's another reason why we hesitate to make personal requests for spiritual advancement. Paradoxically, we find

it somewhat awkward to ask God for help in this regard. After all, isn't it *our* responsibility to make righteous choices? Are we not supposed to utilize our free will to draw closer to Hashem? As Chazal convey (*Berachot* 33b), "All is in the hands of God - *except for the fear of heaven*," signifying that our choices to do right or wrong are within our control.

The Maharsha (*Berachot* 10a) elucidates that "in the direction that a person wishes to go, he is led." While God has the capacity to control free will, He often opts not to intervene. Humans retain the autonomy to choose their path, and if one desires spiritual growth, they can beseech Divine support.

Chidushei Harim, Likutei Shas (*Berachos* 33b) takes this a step further. He suggests that matters of a physical nature are in the hands of God. He decides whether to accept our *tefillot* on these matters. However, if we pray for spiritual success (the fear of heaven) and we are sincere, He will certainly accept those prayers.

In fact, there are times when we *must* ask for assistance. Individuals are obliged to exert themselves to uphold *mitzvot* independently. However, when one senses they are on the brink of faltering, they are duty-bound to cry out for help. This act, which involves speaking up and entreating their Creator for assistance, is itself an exercise of free will. They could choose to remain silent and succumb to the urges of the evil inclination. Instead, they choose to engage in the struggle, first and foremost by entreating God for assistance.

A poignant parable by Rav Shimshon David Pincus further illuminates this point. It recounts the tale of a young doctor assigned to the emergency ward as his more senior colleagues

collectively took the evening off.

The doctor's supervisor told him, "There's an important conference this evening and all the doctors will be attending. You'll stay here in charge of the emergency ward. Right now, there are only three patients here. It's your job to keep an eye on them and make sure they're okay. If for any reason you can't take care of these patients by yourself, or if any more patients arrive, remember you have all our numbers. Call immediately for help and we'll send more doctors."

This doctor, filled with extreme self-confidence, gave a salute and said, "Yes sir! I'll be just fine, you can trust me. Tonight, you'll see what I can really do!"

The night started off perfectly well. The doctor made the rounds, checking all the patients every five minutes. One of the patients started moaning and groaning in pain. While the doctor was busy taking care of him, two more patients were wheeled in from a car accident needing transfusions. The doctor rushed from one patient to another, doing the best he could. Then another patient cried out, urgently in need of help. Suddenly the doors swung open and another patient was wheeled in on a stretcher. The doctor remained calm and stayed there with great devotion, not even stopping to eat or drink (or call for help). He treated every patient, hour after hour, all night long.

By the crack of dawn, he found himself with eight patients, seven of them still alive. One had returned his soul to his Creator that night due to a lack of timely medical care.

In the morning, when he needed to inform the incoming shift of the patients' condition, the entire staff was appalled to hear what happened. They couldn't understand how only one doctor had been in charge of eight patients in critical condition. How could there be such negligence with people's lives? But the

doctor insisted, "I didn't even stop for a drink of water. Believe me, I did everything I could!" They said right back, "Why didn't you call for help?" He continued with his foolishness, explaining how devoted he was and how hard he had tried.

The family of the deceased patient sued this doctor for negligence. Even in court, he tried to defend himself with the same arguments, saying he had done everything he could. Did it help? Not at all. He was held accountable for the patient's death and was given a severe punishment to match his crime. The most responsible thing he could have done - what he should have done - was to call for help.

This narrative parallels our own tendency to insist on self-reliance. While we must strive to fulfill God's will to the best of our abilities, when challenges arise and complications ensue, we must not hesitate to request help. Stubbornly asserting, "I'll handle it myself," is imprudent.

Lastly, beseeching God's aid in our teshuva (repentance) endeavors can be profoundly transformative. Many of us outline resolutions for self-improvement around the Yomim Noraim, dedicating time during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva to reflect on these goals and implore Hashem for forgiveness and guidance on Yom Kippur. However, as time progresses, these resolutions often wane and fade into the background, only to be resurrected the following year.

Several years ago, I began requesting Hashem's help with my teshuva goals during the "Hasheiveinu Avinu" blessing. This practice has revolutionized my avodat Hashem. At any point in the year, I can communicate my aspirations to God and remind myself of the areas I am diligently working on. Shemoneh Esreh has transformed into a daily teshuva ritual, not solely seeking God's acceptance of my repentance but also outlining my plans and objectives. If I detect a slip in any of these areas, I don't need to wait until the next Elul; I immediately beseech Hashem for forgiveness in the "Selach Lanu" blessing.

This practice allows a 40-day teshuva process, running from Elul through Yom Kippur, to evolve into an ongoing journey of self-improvement. Requesting God's assistance in our spiritual growth not only invokes Divine support but also reinforces our own determination.



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