

תורת אביגדור
הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha
Adapted from his Tapes, Sforim and Writings of Talmidim

פרשת עקב

Mishpachat Levy
Edition 

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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת עקב

MOSHE RABEINU DAVENS UP A STORM

In this week's *parsha*, Moshe Rabeinu describes how he prayed to Hashem on behalf of Aharon his brother after the *cheit ha'eigel*: ואתפלל גם בעד אהרן בעת ההיא – And I prayed for Aharon at that time" (Eikev 9:20). And a few *pesukim* later we find the word ואתפלל again; this time Moshe is begging Hashem to remove His wrath from the *Am Yisroel*: ואתפלל אל השם ואמר השם – 'And I prayed to Hashem, " Hashem O' G-d, don't destroy Your nation..." (Eikev 9:26). And what a prayer it was! Although we read only four *pesukim* here (26-29) it was actually a *tefillah* that was unequalled in history. Moshe threw himself down on the ground and davened for *forty days and nights* before Hakodosh Boruch Hu, begging with all kinds of entreaties on behalf of his beloved people. You know what it means to stand in front of Hashem for forty days?! It's impossible to even imagine. If we *daven* for something for five minutes straight, we've already exhausted all the possibilities of speech. And here we have Moshe Rabeinu being—*mispallel* for forty days and forty nights! And there's no doubt that the *Am Yisroel* followed suit and also spent days beseeching Hashem for forgiveness.

I'll tell you a secret now. This whole episode of the Golden Calf was foreseen *and intended* by Hashem for the purpose of eliciting this great outpouring of prayer from Moshe and the *Am Yisroel*. And for what purpose? To make them great. So that they would become more and more excellent by means of *tefillah*. By means of the davening itself, *Moshe u'vnei Yisroel* achieved pinnacles of perfection heretofore unimaginable. You know, it's not for naught that the first time we find Moshe Rabeinu speaking to Hakodosh Boruch Hu *panim el panim*, face to face, was after he spent this extraordinary amount of time in *tefillah* before Hashem. Only because of his *tefillas*, and the change in Moshe that it caused, was this additional degree of greatness, *panim el panim*, bestowed upon him.

THERE'S NO MITZVAH TO DAVEN?!

And so, it is abundantly clear that *tefillah* has the capacity to make one great and to become perfect in the eyes of Hashem. And therefore, before we embark on our subject for tonight, the subject of *tefillah*, we are going to ask a *kashya*, a question. Why is it in the Torah, there is no *explicit* commandment for *tefillah*? Yes, it is included in "*Le'avdo b'chol l'va'chem*," to serve Him with all your heart; good, very good. But that could mean more than one thing, and such an important subject as *tefillah*, why shouldn't it be specified? I think it's a good question. Among the obligations of a Jew, a loyal servant of Hashem, *tefillah* takes up a big part of our day! So why couldn't it have been included in the *Aseres Hadibros* we read last week, or at least in *taryag mitzvos* openly? It's a good question, I think.

And one answer, the most important answer, is that *tefillah* is not something that you do as a *mitzvah* one time or ten times. *Tefilla is a way of life!* *Tefillah* means a state of existence, a frame of mind of being always in contact with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. It means that as soon as you wake up in the morning you're expected to be in contact with Hakadosh Baruch Hu; you thank Him: *Modeh ani l'fanecho* - "I thank you, Hashem." And all day long until you drift off to sleep, you're speaking with Hakadosh

Baruch Hu. That's what you're in this world for! To be a man of *tefillah*.

MAN OF TEFILLAH

You know that our greatest men were always men of *tefillah*. Look at Dovid Hamelech. He was great in everything. He accomplished many great things. He did everything! He fought wars, he learned Torah and he was the King of the *Am Yisroel*. And yet, when we want to consider what was the central pillar of this man's perfection, we turn to his own words: *Ani Tefilla*, said Dovid, "I am *tefillah*." Now, we know that Dovid spent time on *tefillah* and that he was distinguished for that. He was well known for his communion with Hashem; that's how we have our Tehillim. Dovid lay on the field and he spoke to Hakadosh Baruch Hu as long as he could, and even when he couldn't speak to him he was thinking to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. So there's no question that he davened well. But we're saying much more than that here.

What is this declaration of Dovid, *Va'ani Tefilla*, "I am *tefillah*"? What does that mean, I am *tefillah*? Maybe you could say he davened well. Or he davened a lot. He had *kavanah*, maybe. But "I am *tefillah*"?!

And the answer is that Dovid Hamelech didn't merely *daven*. He didn't even merely daven a lot, and with *kavanah*. It was much more than that. His whole essence was *tefillah*. His entire life, he was thinking of Hashem and talking to Him.

L'hagid baboker chasdecha - He thanked Hashem in the morning and he kept it up all day along. That was what made Dovid great, and that's why Hashem took to be the king. Because Dovid had spent all of his youth in constant contact with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, that's the reason he was chosen by Hakadosh Boruch Hu to lead the *Am Yisroel*.

IN THE SYNAGOGUE ALL DAY LONG

And now we can answer our question about the missing *mitzvah* of *tefillah*. How can one say a "*mitzvah* of *tefillah*"? It's not like a *mitzvah*, that you can say, I did it, I'm done. It's your life! It's

every second of your life. The life of a servant of Hashem is always to be talking to Hashem either in gratitude or in request. Now, as you hear this, we are not blaming anybody; and certainly I cannot say it is a criterion for me; but at least let us learn a little bit from Dovid Hamelech and understand that this is the way to greatness. *Va'ani Tefilla*, I am a man of *tefillah*, is the way to perfection.

We all know what it means to daven. There is nothing that is more woven into the fabric of our lives than *tefillah*. We are a nation of מתפללים. In my first shul we had a gentile neighbor, an old man, right next door. And one afternoon, when we were gathering to daven Mincha, I heard him say to his daughter, "What is it with these Jews?! All day, back and forth, back and forth, to the synagogue. Don't they ever finish praying?" And the answer is, no, we never finish praying. We are a people that are always davening. We learn from Moshe Rabeinu and Dovid, the *Ish Tefillah*, the Man of Prayer, and we are the *Am Tefillah*, the Nation of Prayer.

Now, if Moshe Rabeinu used the opportunity of ואתפלל so often, and Dovid Hamelech made himself into an *ish tefillah*, then we should surely try to better understand the function of davening to Hashem. That was the greatness of Dovid Hamelech. It was the perfection of Moshe Rabeinu. And it is most definitely an opportunity for us as well, to become great and perfect in the eyes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

THE FATHER OF OUR NATION CAN'T BE A FATHER

And so, in order to begin our subject for tonight, let's learn a *gemara* which is often misunderstood. In *Mesichta Yevamos* (64a) the Gemara asks a question: Avraham Avinu, the *tzadik* Avraham, had very great trouble having children. Years and years passed, and he begged and he begged, but no results. And he was anguished about this. השם אלוקים מה תתן לי - "Hashem, what are you giving me already. All the things you've given me mean nothing to me without a child." It was an expression of deep pain. Avraham was in his seventies when he said that, and Hashem still

wouldn't bend His will. He continued to deny Avraham his dearest wish.

And he prayed day in and day out, and he shed copious tears for many, many bitter years. But Hakodosh Boruch Hu didn't let up. He was doing this to the one whom He loved most. Avraham had to wait many years before one son was born to him. And it's a question. Now this question would not bother modern people. They would say, that's how he was. He wasn't capable of having children. But our Sages *were* bothered by this. What's the cause for such a surprising phenomenon? Who else in the world deserves to be made happy if not Avraham and Sarah?

TZADDIKIM SUFFER IN THIS WORLD

And it's actually a recurring phenomenon that the Torah persistently makes note of, the difficulty of having children. Avraham and Sarah: "Sarai was barren, without a child" (Bereishis 11:30). Also, Yitzchok and Rivkah: "Isaac entreated G-d for his wife, for she was barren" (ibid. 25:19). And Rachel as well: "Rachel was barren" (ibid. 29:31). It is surely a noteworthy "coincidence" that the *Avos* and *Imahos* were harassed by such an adversity as childlessness.

Now listen to this answer of the *gemara* because it must have been a very important purpose if it was going to postpone the fulfillment of this great function of **אעשך לגוי גדול**, "I will make you a great nation." As important as the *Am Yisroel* was, there was something more important than that. The *Am Yisroel* could wait; that could be postponed. *Something* had to come first. And what was that? So get ready to hear the great purpose: **מפני שהקדוש ברוך הוא מתאוה לתפילתן של צדיקים** - "Hakodosh Boruch Hu craves the prayers of the *tzadikim*." He wants to hear the *tefillah* of the *tzadikim*. That comes first.

To pray for a child! For Avraham to pray to Hashem that he should have children! That was to Hashem more important than the creation of a great nation. It's remarkable! That means that when Avraham Avinu prayed for children *it was a bigger accomplishment than having children*. Having children, that can wait.

But praying for children, that comes first; that's the prime achievement.

THE PURPOSE OF ALL SUFFERING

And that's what *all troubles* that come upon a person in this world are for. Rashi says in one place, why is there illness in the world? That's Rashi's *kashya*. And Rashi says, illness comes *in order* to make people turn to Hashem and ask for help. It's a remarkable statement. Troubles come upon a man to force him to turn to Hashem; to make him ask Hashem for help. Hashem brings upon you aches and pains and all types of difficulties *because He is mis'aveh, He craves, your tefillos*.

Now, why does Hashem "desire" the prayers of the righteous? Does Hashem have any needs or desires? He doesn't need anything at all from you! The *tefillos* of the biggest *tzadik* don't do anything for Hashem. And so, if He doesn't need you, and He doesn't need your *tefillos*, so what's going on here? Why would Hashem, the *tov u'meitiv*, inflict pain upon us because of "His desires"? Hakodosh Boruch Hu holds back children from Avraham Avinu, from Sarah Imeinu, from Yitzchok and Rivka and Rochel, because He desires their *tefillos*?! He besets a man with sickness and trouble because of His desires? It's very difficult to understand.

HASHEM DESIRES OUR PERFECTION

And the answer is this. We must say that when Hakodosh Boruch Hu desires something from the righteous men, it is for *their* benefit. When people are brought to *tefillah*, when they are induced to daven to Hashem, it is a benefit for them. It's a stroke of great fortune! Not like people think that it is necessary to pray because of some problem. The truth is exactly the opposite - the problem is a gift from Hashem because it offers the occasion, the incentive, to pray to Him.

What Hashem *desires* is the perfection of a *tzadik*. By the way, when I say *tzadik*, I mean you. That's what we're all aiming for; to make ourselves into *tzadikim* by becoming as perfect as

possible while we're still in this world. And although there are many different ways that lead towards Hashem, there is no question that perfection is most easily achieved through constant *tefillah*. And that's why Hashem craves the *tefillos* of the *tzadikim* - because He craves their *perfection*.

STICKING YOUR NOSE WHERE IT DOESN'T BELONG

When you think about it for a minute, the entire concept of *davening* to Hashem is strange. Why are we *davening* altogether? When we pray to Hakodosh Boruch Hu it seems like an interference in His business. Do we have to tell Him what to do? We have to tell Him what we need or what we want?! Let's say you pray for your health - you have a cold and you daven that He should heal you. He knows just well what to do. He needs you to tell Him?! And He's the *chofetz chesed*. He wants to help you more than you want to help yourself. And He knows better than you what you need. So why are you sticking your nose in where it doesn't belong?! It's something we have to understand- why *are* we *davening*?

A common misconception is that *tefillah* is for the purpose of making our entreaties and wishes heard by Hashem. We want something, we need something or we are distressed by something, so we cry out to Hashem. We ask Him to answer our prayers by providing us with our wants and needs, or by removing the cause of distress. And we hope that by approaching Him with our entreaties, He will find us worthy of having our prayers answered. And while that is to a certain extent true, it is a simple-minded and superficial understanding of *tefillah*. It is important to understand that to have our prayers answered by Hashem, is *not* the primary purpose of *tefillah*.

THE IDOL WORSHIPPERS OF BROOKLYN

You know, the Chovos Halevovos tells us that *bitachon* is one of the foundations of our lives. And he explains that if a person never works on *bitachon* then he is an *oived avodah zarah*; he's an idolator. Yes, he says that *if you're not a ba'al bitachon, then you're an idol worshipper!* Because you think that without Hashem

everything goes on anyhow, by itself. You go to the bathroom - it happens by itself. You're balancing as you walk, by itself. Your eyes are constantly taking pictures, by itself. Your heart is pumping, all by itself. It rains, the wind blows, the food comes to the supermarket; everything is happening by itself.

So what is that man worshipping? He's worshipping the false god called nature. Because what is nature after all? The word "nature" is a Greek invention, a word they invented to conceal the great fact of Hashem Who is actually behind everything. That's why in the *gemara*, when it describes something as being natural, it don't say the word natural. It says בִּידֵי שָׁמַיִם, "In the Hands of Hashem." But if we don't make progress in *bitachon*, in Awareness of Hashem, then we are also bowing to the false god of cause and effect that we live with all our lives.

PRACTICING KOCHI V'OTZEM YADI ALL DAY LONG

Of course we must exert ourselves on behalf of our health and *parnasa*. And that's what we're busy with a very large portion of our lives. We're busy all day long fooling ourselves, putting the attitude of *kochi v'otzem yadi* into our heads. "It's my own efforts that are getting me through life." And because of that, there is constant tension between the *bitachon* that we're supposed to live with in our minds, and the *hishtadlus* that we're living with in our lives.

As long as we strive to take care of ourselves, to provide for our needs, to guard our safety and health, and everything else that we're doing for ourselves and our families, it is almost impossible to continue to actually believe, to feel, that it is Hashem who is doing everything. The truth that He alone is the One Who protects us and provides us with everything is very far from our minds. We might be able to say words of *bitachon*, we are very capable of saying the right words, but because our deeds constantly contradict the *bitachon*, so to *actually believe* so is a difficult *avodah*. It is a faint belief that we live with only superficially.

IT NEVER RAINS AND THE WINDS NEVER BLOW

Even the way we speak is like *oivdei avodah zarah!* I'll give you an example. We say in English "It's raining," or in Yiddish "*ess regent.*" What does that mean "It's raining"? It doesn't rain by itself! In *shemonah esrei* we say משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם - "*He brings down the rain.*" Hashem is the one bringing down the rain. Here's a man walking down the street and he says "*a vind blost*". "A wind blows"?! No, a wind doesn't blow. We say משיב הרוח "*Hashem is blowing the wind.*" It's all Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

And therefore it's necessary to work on *bitachon*. When will you work on it? If you learn *Sha'ar Habitachon*, very good. But how many people do that? The Chovos Halevovos is not such an easy sefer to learn. And even if you do learn *Sha'ar Habitachon*, that's not enough; you have to *practice* it every day.

And so what is the solution to this difficulty? How do we address this tension between *hishtadlus* and *bitachon* that we live with all the time? And the answer is: by means of *tefillah*. *Tefillah* is not about getting what you need, what you want in your pocket. It's about getting *bitachon* into your head. I'll explain that.

TEFILLAH DOES NOT MEAN "PRAYER"

To better understand what *tefilla* really is, we'll first take the word תפילה and analyze it. The word *pilleil* means "to think," as in ראה פניך לא פללתי. When Yaakov finally met up with Yosef, he said "I never *thought* I'd see your face" (Bereishis 48:11). And the reflexive form (התפעל) of the word, התפלל, therefore means "I caused myself to think." When Moshe Rabeinu said ואתפלל אל השם, he was saying "And I made myself think when I turned to Hashem." ואתפלל גם בעד אהרן, "And I made myself think when I approached Hashem on behalf of Aharon."

You didn't realize that, did you? You thought it meant *davenen*. But really, when you go to the *beis knesses* to be *misparallel*, that means that you're going there *to think*. That's a surprise to most people. To think?! To daven, of course; maybe even to shake, yes. And that's good, it's all very good. But that's not what *tefillah*

means. Because the true purpose of *tefillah* is so that *you should think*.

BECOMING A MAN OF BITACHON

We turn to Hashem, not in order to make our needs heard, but primarily to *impress upon ourselves*, להתפלל, “to make ourselves think,” that Hashem is the sole source of all of our well-being. Everything you ever had, everything you have now, and everything you will ever have, comes *only* from Hakodosh Boruch. And don't tell me you know it already. Because whatever you know is only a tiny drop in the bucket of the infinite Awareness that you are capable of achieving in this world. Every single time that you turn to Hashem in *tefillah* causes you to become more and more perfect in the eyes of Hashem.

An *ish tefillah* gradually becomes an *ish bitachon*. You might not notice the gradual change in your personality, but every *tefillah* - if said with thought - makes you greater and greater. When you persist in turning to Hakodosh Boruch Hu before everything you do, and requesting His help so that you should succeed in whatever it is that you're doing - there's no difference if it's a heart surgery, looking for a place to park your car, or just crossing the street - you'll become a *ba'al bitachon*. And that is the most important achievement of *tefillah* - to gain this *bitachon* that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is in charge; *hakol bidei shamayim*. And we can gain that by thinking about what we're saying as much as possible. And that will convince us more and more of this great principle of life, that these requests can be granted *only by Him!* *Tefillah* results in *emunah* and *bitachon*. And that's the true purpose of *tefillah*.

YOUR PRAYER WAS ANSWERED!

And whether or not Hashem has answered your request according to what you hoped, you have gained a much more valuable gift - the gift of *bitachon*, the genuine belief, the attitude of the mind, that *Hashem is the only thing you have*. And that gift, that success, will accompany you much further than anything you might have asked for!

And that's why when you go through the *tefillos*, you'll see many such statements, so many words that declare that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is in charge of every detail of our lives. And the wise man will make sure to utilize every opportunity to *daven*, because to recognize that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is the One Who is doing things, the One who is doing everything, is the greatest achievement of life. And the more you turn to Hashem and ask Him for whatever you need, the more you "knock it into yourself" that *only Hashem could help you*.

FREE ADVICE!

By the way, if you're interested in being a *mispallel* and causing yourself to think while you *daven*; I'll give you a suggestion. It's good advice - and it's free too. I won't charge you anything for it. Choose one little area of *davening*, and decide that you'll go slow in that one area. No matter how much those around you are rushing through *davening*, you make sure to spend three minutes on one little area. Let's say, three minutes on one *bracha*. Let the people keep galloping, but you're standing still, and you're thinking in that one *bracha*. You're thinking about the ideas in the *bracha*, or in the *possuk*. It sounds easy, but it won't be in the beginning. But if you get busy working on this project, you'll be a success.

You're asking Hashem - *Refa'ainu Hashem* - Please Hashem, please give me good health. It makes you think - it makes you aware - that Hashem is the One who is giving you good health. The Gemara says לעולם יבקש אדם שלא יחלה - "A person should always ask mercy - always, always he should ask Hashem that he shouldn't become sick." *Always!* You're a healthy man. You're not even thinking about getting sick. But keep on asking. "Please Hashem, please keep me healthy." Keep on asking! *L'olam!* If you're wise you'll do it *every day*. Even on the street, stop for a minute and say, "I'm asking you Hashem, please keep me well." If you're married, "Keep my wife well. Keep my children well."

Otherwise we will keep on thinking that כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה, that my own power – my own ability – gives me my good health. No! Your good health comes from Hashem. Three minutes on one subject and your mind will be changed forever. And if you get busy with this program, you're on your way to being an *ish tefillah*, a man who thinks when he davens.

WHO'S MORE IMPORTANT? THE DENTIST OR HASHEM?

Here you have a person who is not feeling well; let's say he woke up with a toothache. Of course, he's a *frum* man, and so when he goes to *davening* he says in a formal way, “*Refa'einu Hashem v'neirafei*, heal me Hashem and I will be healed.” And he certainly means it; he certainly wants to get well. It's impossible to live with a toothache. But the question is, does he *really* feel that he is speaking to the right address, that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is the One who can make him well? If he does it half-heartedly - if he is thinking that in reality, he has to go to the dentist, and that *davening* to Hashem is merely a formality - an important formality, but still it's not the real thing - then that's *not the tefillah of a ba'al bitachon*.

A person must believe with all his heart that it's the going to the dentist that is the formality. You have to go! And by the way, you should go to the very best dentist you could find. But at the same time you have to know that it's only a formality. *Bitachon* requires that you understand that Hashem is the One who heals. And every *tefillah* can be a *shiur* in *bitachon*. The more you ask Hashem, the more you turn to Him, the more you realize that He is the only One. Not the doctor, not the dentist, only Hashem.

HOW TO TAKE MEDICINE

And therefore, every time you take a medication – not only for a serious ailment, but even just an aspirin for a headache – Chazal tell us (Brachos 60a; Orach Chaim 130) that we should say a prayer to Hashem, asking Him to make the medication be effective. יהי רצון מלפניך השם אלוקי שיהא עסק זה לי לרפואה. It is of utmost importance to ask Hashem for His help. Don't just mumble the words. You're turning to Hashem in *tefillah* in order

to strengthen your awareness that only He is the One Who heals. Think about that. Don't waste the golden opportunity.

Many years ago I had to visit a *talmid* of mine in the hospital. He was a patient there. And in the room where he was staying there was another patient - an elderly man who had just undergone surgery. And I remember, when his grandson, or a great-grandson, walked into the room to visit, he said, "Zaidy, was the surgery a success?" And I thought to myself, "However much of a success the surgery actually was - and *boruch Hashem* it was a success for that man - the primary purpose, the true purpose of that man's heart failure and his need for surgery wasn't because of the need for a new valve in his heart. The true purpose of his heart condition was so that he should call out to Hashem. Sometimes, Hashem does you a favor and gives you a big opportunity for gaining Awareness and perfection. And therefore, the primary purpose of this man's sickness and hospital stay was to encourage him to call out to Hashem. Its true purpose was to give him an opportunity for greatness.

And by constantly beseeching Hashem for His help and His mercy, this man would make great strides forward in accomplishing the purpose for which he came into this world - to become more and more aware of the reality of Hashem. And even if, *chas v'shalom*, that man hadn't lived, but if he had spent his last days, his last hours, asking Hashem for mercy, then it was a success! His sickness was a success because he squeezed out from that opportunity the great success of life

HASHEM DOESN'T ANSWER YOUR *TEFILLAS* THE WAY YOU THINK

And I want you to know, that even when Hashem *does* answer your prayers in the way you had hoped for, it is not simply Hashem acceding to your request. It is much more than that. A *tefillah* that is answered is a *form of encouragement* that Hashem is sending to you, encouraging you to continue seeking Him out, through *tefillah*, in all areas of your life. Hashem is encouraging you as an incentive for you to continue your striving for awareness of Him. Hashem sees that you are impressing upon

yourself the Awareness that He is the All-Powerful One and that He is the sole source of the things you need, and He wants you to persist. So he shows you He's listening to you.

Now, although we have said that misfortune is sometimes brought upon a person in order to stimulate him towards prayer and greater awareness of Hashem, it would be terribly wrong to believe that it is only those difficult situations where one finds this opportunity. On the contrary, if you listen to what I will explain now, you will understand that it is the normal day-to-day needs and difficulties that are the greatest opportunities for accomplishing the greatness inherent in the word **אתפלל** - "I cause myself to think."

DON'T YOU WISH YOU WERE A COW?

Once we understand this primary objective of *tefillah* we can answer a very big question that we have about creation. Have you ever noticed that cows don't seem to have any trouble making a decent living to support their family? It's a large family, with many calves, and yet the cow and her family find a patch of grass and can munch away happily for hours on end. No worries.

No *shalom bayis* problems for the bull and cow either. Have you ever heard about lions needing dental work that they can't afford? Or trouble raising the children? Do cats have to spend years under the care of their parents learning how to navigate life? How to get along with friends and neighbors?

Mankind however, created by Hashem as the pinnacle of the Universe and to be more advanced than all life forms in the world, is for some strange reason beset by day to day difficulties and complications that we don't find by any of the other creations. Hashem, the Perfect One, Who created this world with His Perfect Wisdom, could have surely created man without the many obstacles that he faces.

LIFE IS FULL OF STRUGGLES

Why is it that every person, wealthy or poor, healthy or sick, young or old, is always facing adversity and struggles -

either big or small, and usually both? In the typical day there are, without exaggeration, tens of events that can irk a person. Maybe your boss is upset with you. Or you're having trouble with the car. Your wife is upset with you. Your son is not adjusting to learning *gemara*. You can't find the key. A neighbor who is very difficult. Bills to pay. A toothache. Running late for the bus. The rent is overdue.

Not only the more serious events in your life; *chas v'shalom* you got the dreaded news from the doctor, the word that I don't want to say. Or you lost your job, *chalilah*. Not only those tragedies, but even the small things that you face every day, and all day. Running to catch a bus. A night with no sleep. Struggling with a bad *middah* for many years. A headache. You got bit by a spider. I don't have to explain to you – it's the life of every one of us. No one is immune to it. Hashem, who created such a perfect world, with unfathomable Wisdom, chose Mankind for some reason, to be the one aspect of Creation that is faced with ever-present difficulties. We're

I was learning upstairs one afternoon this week. I was learning pretty *geshmak*. And then I got up to take some pens that I have put away behind the *seforim*. They were on a shelf behind the *seforim* in a dark corner. And I soon saw that I had a sharp pain in my finger and it turned black. All of a sudden my finger become black. And numb.

I was frightened; very frightened. It looked *chas v'shalom* like tetanus, like blood poisoning. Maybe I touched a sharp rusty nail. And I said, "Ribono Shel Olam, have pity on me. *Anah Hashem hoshee'ah nah! Racheim alai v'kabeil tachanunai!*"

And then I realized what had happened. Hiding in that dark space was a wise spider. And he saw that I was learning all afternoon and that I didn't think about Hashem even once. So he said, "Miller! You'll spend all afternoon learning and you won't think about Hashem even once?!" So he gave me a good bite; it was a poison, but not fatal. And it turned black right away and I cried out to Hashem! I made a great achievement because of that spider. If I see him, I won't squirt *Attack* or *Combat* on him. I'll be grateful to him. Because of his bite, I cried out to Hashem! What could be better?!

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not satisfied with life like our good friend the cow. It's something that I think is a good question.

MEAT MACHINES DON'T NEED TZAROS

And so we'll answer like this. Cows have a certain purpose in this world. They were created to eat grass and to miraculously turn that inexpensive green substance into milk and and meat and leather. And they do that job perfectly. They fulfill their purpose here in this world exactly as planned by Hashem, without the need for them to experience any of the tribulations that we face. And the same with all of the other creatures that Hashem created. Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives them what they need to succeed.

But we weren't created to turn grass into meat. We were created to turn our brains into Torah minds. And all of these struggles, all of the complications and obstacles of life, are sent to us as an opportunity for to spur us along towards this greatness of the creation of a mind. These small struggles are all intended as goads to prod us towards the realization that we must turn to Hashem. Every small challenge that you face is actually challenging you to recognize that Hashem is everything, and that He's your address for anything you want.

MANN EVERY DAY?

Did you ever wonder why the *mann* fell down from the sky every day in the Wilderness? Why didn't it fall once a week? Hakodosh Boruch Hu could have just as well made enough *mann* for the whole week fall down at the beginning of every week? Or even better; once a year. Why the need to go collect the Mann every day. It was a *neis* in any case, so why not just make this whole business of collecting the *mann* an annual event.

Now, that's not my question. That's the question that the *talmidim* of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai asked of their Rebbi (Yoma 76a). And Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai didn't think it was a foolish question and he answered with the following *mashal*:

THE SPOILED PRINCE

There was a king who gave his son an allowance, an allowance for all of his day-to-day expenses. And he gave him the

allowance once a year. In the beginning of every year he wrote him a big check. And what happened? The prince got busy spending the money. And he made sure, of course, to come back and visit his father. But only once a year. He came back once a year to pick up his check. Once a year! So what did the King do? He changed the allowance system. He told his son that from now on, he would have to come pick up his allowance once a day. Every morning, he would have to come back to pick up the day's money. And what do you know, the prince found the time to come by and visit his father every day.

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said that it was the same way in the *midbar*. A man had a family, with four or five little children. And children get hungry. Growing children eat a lot. And they complain when they get hungry. And every day the father of the house would worry: Will there be *mann* tomorrow? Will I have what to feed my family? Don't think that the people were sure *mann* was coming the next day! Hashem was watching to see if they deserved it. So the father of the house would call out to Hashem. Every day! He would get busy pleading with Hashem, please give me *mann* to feed my children! Ah yay yay! And the same thing was going on in all the tents in the Wilderness encampment. Everyone was turning to Hashem in prayer. Everyone was thinking about Hashem. And what was the result, asks Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. נמצאו כולן מכוונים את לבם לאביהן שבשמים. The *Am Yisroel* was gaining a deeper and deeper *bitachon*; the awareness that Hashem is the only One who provides them with their needs. Every day, every *tefillah*, was another perfection of the mind.

THE MYRIAD OPPORTUNITIES OF LIFE

What we are being taught here is that every situation we face, no matter how minor, no matter how small, is an opportunity for greatness. Every situation is an opportunity for using *tefillah* to achieve greatness by creating the awareness in your mind that Hashem is your only hope. And that greatness can only be achieved through constant and consistent words and thoughts. Every time you are looking for that elusive parking

spot, you should be talking to Hashem. “Hashem, please help me find the parking spot that I want.” And then say it again. Over and over again. And each time you say it, you are impressing even deeper into your mind that it is only Hashem who provides parking spots. And don't laugh, because that is the truth. If you don't *daven* for it you could very well be the *oived avodah zarah* that the Chovos Halevovos was referring to.

And if you *daven* for it, you'll begin, little by little, to realize this truth that besides for everything else, Hashem is also *the Hashem of parking spots*. He's not just a word in the *siddur*! And that's how you become great while looking for parking. And all day long you're becoming more and more aware that Hashem is *Hashem Echad* – that He is the sole provider of anything that we have or want. While you're waiting in the doctor's office you're turning to Hashem, and when you're running late for an appointment you're turning to Hashem. When your child rides his bicycle you're asking, “Hashem, please protect my son.” You're talking to Him all day long; you're an *ish tefillah*.

STROKE PREVENTION

The *tefillah* of *Refa'einu* in *shemonah esrei* is not intended to be put on the side to be brought out only when someone gets sick. No; when you say **רפאינו השם ונרפא**, Heal me Hashem, you're supposed to realize how many hundreds of thousands of complicated situations are taking place in your body this second. And every one of them is *mamash* a miracle that you're surviving. Don't you know that you have in your brain very thin capillaries where the blood flows through. They're so thin that the blood has to flow through corpuscle by corpuscle. It's so thin that they have to make their way through in a single file, one corpuscle at a time. Now, blood is a sticky business you know. If you ever came into contact with blood you know that it's plasma, and it's sticky. So why doesn't it happen that in these very thin tubes the blood should get stuck. If it gets stuck and clogged, *chas v'shalom*, what would be! In the brain, it would be a stroke right away.

The blood doesn't flow on its own. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is making the blood flow. Even in those very fine capillaries, Hashem keeps the blood liquid and it flows through. So you're davening *refaeinu*; it doesn't mean you, you think. It's your neighbor on the hospital, maybe. Or the man is shul who had a stroke. No, it's you. It's you! But as you're *davening*, sometimes a corpuscle almost gets stuck, it slows down in one of the bends; Oh no! And then the next one comes and nudges it and pushes it ahead; Ahh! It cleared it and you were just saved. *Boruch atah Hashem rofei cholei amo Yisroel!*

A WASTED MIRACLE

Now, that's why we say ברוך אתה השם, You Hashem are the One who is רופא חולי עמו ישראל. *You're* healing us! Not merely that we are not sick. You are healing us constantly! But if you're not thinking about it, then the whole thing is a waste; all the *nissim* are being wasted on you.

So when you daven *refa'einu* you're working on *bitachon*. Hashem is the One! Of course, when it's necessary to take a *refuah*, so you have a *mitzvah* to take the medicine. Do whatever has to be done. But you have a *bigger mitzvah* to work on the *emunah* that only Hashem is the *rofei cholei amo Yisroel*. It's You Hashem Who's the One who heals us. Over and over again, you say those words, and every time it's another layer of *bitachon* being laid in your mind. And before you know it, it will hit you like a tin of bricks - He really is the *rofei cholei amo Yisroel!*

BORUCH HASHEM, I'M SANE

When you daven אתה חונן לאדם דעת, why do you say the words אתה חונן? You don't start all the *tefillos* with the word *atah*. You say *Shema Koleinu*, and *Refa'einu* and *Bareich Aleinu*. Only when it comes to *da'as*, you say *Atah Chonein*. Why? Because people think, "Da'as? I have *da'as*. I have my own *daas*." A working mind is so "natural" to your existence so you think it's a *davar poshut*, it's simple, that's who you are. And so *da'as* needs a *hakdamah*: No, you don't have any *daas*. And the preface is *Atah, You! You Hashem are chonein l'adam daas*.

And so every time you say **אתה חונן**, with some thought, you're teaching yourself again and again that you're only sane because of Him. Don't think you just have sanity: "I'm sane. I was born sane. I have to be sane." You don't have to be anything! Why aren't you roaming the street, shouting? Like this, you should be a raving lunatic! But you're walking like a decent civilized person; you're not talking to yourself. That's *da'as!* Hashem is giving you daas right now. The reason that you're not chalilah in an insane asylum, in a padded cell, raging and knocking your head against a wall is because of *Atah, You!* It's a gift that He's giving you - it's a big gift to have daas. Sanity is a tremendous gift. And therefore you're learning *bitachon*.

HASHEM PAYS THE BILLS

Boruch atah Hashem m'vareich hashanim. You're the one who gives *parnasa*. And if you think that way, even for just that moment, every little bit is a big achievement. You're living for a purpose now. You're a hardworking man. You're a professional. You have a good *parnasa*. You have everything you need. Don't give yourself credit at all. Ask Hashem. You must say, "Hashem, please give me *parnasa*." Thank Hashem because He is the one giving it to you. Because there are plenty of professionals that lose their jobs and are out of luck. And therefore, in order to become aware of Who is giving us our paycheck, we have to always be turning to Hashem in *tefillah*.

WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MOSHE RABEINU

Every small degree of awareness of Hashem as the only One who gives you anything is a perfection of character. Moshe Rabeinu believed in Hashem. He believed in Hashem more than any of our great men. Hashem spoke with him **פנים אל פנים**. Of course he believed. But he also knew that every added degree of the True Knowledge of the Awareness of Hashem would be his biggest success. And therefore at every opportunity that he found, he was *mispalleil* to Hashem. He caused himself to think about Hashem and His omnipotence again and again and again. His brother, Aharon had incurred the wrath of Hashem, and Moshe

Rabeinu used the opportunity to become great. ואתפלל אל השם. בעת ההיא. “And I caused myself to think about Hashem at that time.” Another added level of Awareness of Hashem.

And when the בני ישראל sinned, the same thing. ואתנפל לפני השם את ארבעים היום ואת ארבעים הלילה. “And I fell before Hashem in prayer for forty days and forty nights” (ibid. 9:25). Forty days and forty nights of thinking about Hashem and His greatness! And that’s how Moshe Rabeinu became so great. Because he understood that every situation he faced, every big and small need, was an opportunity to be *mispalleil* to Hashem, to think about Hashem, and to become greater and greater by adding a deeper and deeper awareness that it is Hashem who is the only One you can ever turn to for anything.

And that greatness is accessible to all of us. Hashem has purposefully created us as the neediest creatures in the world, as an impetus so that we should feel the need to turn to Him and become aware of Him. And our greatness is assured as long as we walk the path trodden by Moshe Rabeinu: ואתפלל גם בעד אהרן בעת ההיא. Every עת, every moment, is the עת ההיא for you. It's your great opportunity to be מתפלל אל השם – to cause yourself to think about Hashem. But you must think; it's not the words but the thoughts behind the words that make a davening into a *tefillah*. And every עת therefore, every instance of need, is your personal opportunity for growing greater and greater in reliance on Hashem alone, and fulfilling your purpose in this world.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Tz"l

Q:

In *davening* we ask Hashem, ואל תביאינו לא לידי נסיון – Don't bring us into a situation of being tested. Why do we ask Hashem to help us avoid all *nisyonos*, all forms of spiritual tests, if the whole reason we are in this world is to face our tests, pass them and thereby become great?

A:

We ask Hashem, אל תביאינו לא לידי נסיון. Why? And the answer is that among the tests that Hashem sends upon us is the success of avoiding tests. If we successfully avoid a test, let's say, you are בורח מן העבירה – you run away from the possibility of a sin, then you have successfully passed the test. Any form of keeping away from the *nisayon* is the most successful way of dealing with the *nisayon*.

Anybody who comes close to a *nisayon* willingly is already blameworthy. And even though he succeeds in overcoming the temptation, he is blamed. Why did you bring yourself close to the sin?! He is blamed for that. You should be afraid of an *aveira*. You should run away from the possibility of sin. There's no need to look for tests. You're facing them all day long. All day! And you're not even aware of most of them. So whatever you can do to avoid them is already a success.

And therefore, we have many *takanos* in the Am Yisroel, many Rabbinic restrictions, that are intended for the sole purpose of protecting us from *nisyonos*.

You should never look for *nisyonos*. Never look for tests! That itself is a successful reaction to the problems that are facing us. **הוי בורח מן העבירה.** Avoid the problems that you can avoid. That itself is a great success.

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