



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

Religious Court of Elad * Batei Hora'ah * Religious Services * Marriage Licensing * Kashrut * Mikvaot * Eiruvim

TORAT

Parashat Nitzavim

HAMELECH

In Your Mouth and In Your Heart

It says in this week's *parashah* (Devarim 30:11-14): For this mitzvah (*teshuvah*) which I am commanding you today, is not concealed from you, nor is it distant. It is not in the heavens... nor is it across the ocean... Rather, the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to do it.

What is meant by the words, "in your mouth and in your heart"?

Proper Prayer

Concentration during *tefillah* is a most challenging enterprise. Too often, even after we make the effort to get to *Shul* (or the women find a pocket of time and a quiet corner), we find ourselves diverse in our prayers. Prayer seems to be a multi-laned highway, with the mouth speeding down one lane and the heart racing down another (sometimes even in the opposite direction?!). Here we are, standing before our Creator, and we just cannot get our minds off of recent events, distant memories or future planning or anxieties, or simple just plain daydreaming. We finish *davening* and we hope that we managed to utter all of the words, but we feel that something was missing. Where were **we**? Was our inner essence part of the process, or was he on vacation or strike or simply out-of-order?

Tefillah is meant to be "service of the heart" (Taanit 2a). Yet, much to our dismay, too frequently, it ends up being "matters of utmost

importance which most people tend to treat lightly" (Berachot 6b).

Good Morning – Good Night – *Gezunt-heit!*

Some people daven and don't even realize what they're saying. *Baalei Mussar* use the following parable.

An uneducated villager got engaged to a big city girl. Before going to meet his future father-in-law, the *shadchan* gave the new *chattan* a short briefing on city manners. The *shadchan* let him know that in the big city, you have to be polite and say the right thing at the right time. In the morning, say, "Good Morning." At night, say "Good Night." Mind your pleases and thank-yous and if someone sneezes, say "*Gezunt-heit*" or "*LaBriyut!*" If you suspect you did something even slightly offensive, be sure to say, "Excuse me."

The *chattan*, thoroughly excited and completely confused, proceeded to meet his future father-in-law. Upon seeing him, he excitedly exclaimed, in one big mumble-jumble, "Good Morning! Good Night – please – thank you – *gezuntheit* – excuse me!"

The *kallah* and her parents did not know if to laugh or to cry.

Heart-to-Mouth Alignment

It has been said that "*Tefillah belo kavannah, keguf belo neshama,*" – "prayer void of concentration is akin to a body without soul." A body without a soul, my friends, is what we call



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death. If we wish to revitalize our prayers and bring them back to life, we do not need mouth-to-mouth resuscitation; we need **heart-to-mouth** revitalization!

Let us go back to that *pasuk* we mentioned earlier: For the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to do it. Expound *Chazal* (Eiruvim 54a): When is it close to you? When it is in your mouth and in your heart to do it. In order for us to really feel in touch with our true selves and our spirituality, we must get our hearts and our mouth working together in alignment.

Fifteen More Years

Sincere tefillah certainly helps. Gemara Berachot 10a relates how King Chizkiyahu was informed by the Navi Yeshayahu that his death was imminent. King Chizkiyahu immediately sent the Navi out of the palace, insisting that he had a tradition from his ancestor King David that even if a sharp sword is upon a person's neck, he is still to pray for salvation.

Without delay, King Chizkiyahu turned to face the wall and offered a fervent plea from the bottom of his heart. Yeshayahu had barely left the palace and was already told by Hashem to return to the king and inform him that his tefillah had been accepted and he would receive fifteen more years of life!

Not a Miracle

Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky (known as the Steipler Gaon) asked his brother-in-law, the Chazon Ish, if it was worthwhile praying for

someone who was diagnosed with "the disease" (i.e., cancer). The Chazon Ish responded that he knew of a talmid chacham, the Rav of Chernigov, who was diagnosed with an illness. The doctors informed him that his end was near. And what happened? He lived another thirty years! Such a thing is not considered a miracle, said the Chazon Ish.

The Steipler added that subsequently, he knew of other prominent scholars, such as Rabbi Moshe Chevroni and Rabbi Baruch Sorotzkin, who lived for decades after being diagnosed with "the disease."

Heart and Mouth in Shofar

Well-known are the words of the Rambam (Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4), yet worth repeating: Although the sounding of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is a Divine decree (which we must heed even if we had zero comprehension of the mitzvah), it also communicates a subliminal message. It announces: Awaken, sleepy ones, from your sleep; deep sleepers, arouse from your slumber! Seek out your ways and repent! Remember your Creator, those of you who forget the truth, distracted by transient vanities, staggering through the year from empty to vain pursuits which are not truly helpful nor advantageous. Take a good look at your souls, improve your ways and your deeds. Each person ought to abandon his bad way / habit and his inappropriate thought etc.

B'ezrat Hashem, we will all hear the *Shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*. But only if we first review and



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review these words of our teacher, the Rambam, will the *Shofar* evoke the desired result. What is the *Shofar* telling us? Wake up! Today is the Day of Judgment! What have I been doing with my life?! Am I living up to Hashem's expectations of me, as delineated in the Torah and *Sifrei Halachah* and *Mussar*?

Such thoughts should put us in the proper mindset, making us aware of the solemnity of the situation. If the *Shofar* arouses us to thoughts of repentance – getting back onto the right track – such a *Shofar*-blowing is the kind which has Hashem rise, as it were, from the throne of Judgment to relocate to the throne of Compassion.

The Ben Ish Chai (Derashot) points out a beautiful allusion. The numerical value of שופר *Shofar* is identical to that of תקפו its strength. When is the *shofar* at its full strength? When heart and mouth are in alignment. Heart is "lev" spelled out למד בית and mouth is "peh" spelled out פה הי; add all of these letters together, and you will also arrive at שופר and תקפו the *Shofar* at its full strength.

As he blows the *Shofar*, the *tokei'a* puts his heart where his mouth is, arousing the entire congregation to do the same, to include their heart – concentration and emotion – in their prayers. The heart-and-mouth team is truly a winning combination.

For Heaven's Sake

On Rosh Hashanah, we realize that everything about our lives is being decided and decreed.

This arouses us to pray for life, health, parnasah, etc. How can we feel more secure that our prayers will be answered? "Remember us for life... *lema'anacha Elokim Chaim*... for Your Sake, O Living Almighty." Let us re-examine all of our desires and yearnings and requests, why is it that we want life, health, money, etc.? For "business" or for "pleasure"? If just to satisfy our physical thirsts, why should He acquiesce? But if we ask for these grants so that we can serve Him to the best of our ability, why should He **not** want to give us all we ask for?

Step One to Rosh Hashanah is to realize that our very life is on the line. Step Two is to reassess why we really feel worthy of requesting a new lease on life. Step Three is sincerely asking for it, from our new perspective.

No Atheist on the Operating Table

If someone were to contract a rare, life-threatening disease and to date, there is only one doctor in the world who knows how to cure it, what would he do? Certainly, he would do all that he could to get an appointment with that doctor. After the appointment, he would indubitably follow all of the doctor's directives to the tee if he wishes to continue living.

Hashem is constantly giving and re-giving us life, with all of the myriads of miracles involved in having our bodies continue to function. Asking for life, saying "*Lema'anachah*," but *chas veshalom*, thinking that once we get some more life, we'll go back to doing some activities which are not exactly in synch with "*lema'anacha*,"... well, that is



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not exactly "*piv velibo shavin*" – mouth and heart on the same page.

The Podiatrist Who Cried

Let us now give a few examples which illustrate the unique power of tefillah, especially when it is prayed with all one's heart.

Rabbi Eliezer Nachum Eisenberg of Chicago relates: My foot hurt me, so I went to the podiatrist, who was a *frum* (religious) Jew. While I was there, he asked me to tell him a *dvar* Torah. So I told him something about the power of prayer.

The podiatrist said back, "You don't have to tell me about the power of prayer! Let me tell you my personal story! Now I am 51 years old. For years, my wife and I wanted children, but it seemed that it was not to be. Yes, we prayed. And we also went to different doctors and experts. Six years ago, the top doctors told us: Enough! Stop trying! It's impossible!

"When they said that, my wife and I broke down. We went home and cried out our hearts to Hashem. We knew that He could do the impossible! And He did! He listened to our prayers! That was six years ago, and now we have not one, not two, not three, not four, but five little children! Practically one a year since that fateful day!"

"I'm So Sorry"

In a city in Southern Israel, a certain government dignitary was due to arrive and speak to all the schoolchildren at a massive gathering. The city

mayor alerted all the local schools, including the religious ones. The principal of the religious school did not want to agree to attend before consulting with Gedolei Yisroel. So he contacted Rav Shach and asked what to do. At first, Rav Shach said that the younger classes should not attend so that they do not get impressed by honor given to a Jew who is not Torah observant. Then Rav Shach notified the principal that he changed his mind. The new decision was that not a single student from the religious school should attend.

The principal was fully accepting of the ruling. At the same time, he knew that he was "in for it". He was expecting the mayor's wrath to be kindled at this affront. He was anticipating being informed of withholding of funding from the city council due to lack of cooperation.

Lo and behold, the next day, the mayor indeed called on the telephone. Prepared for the worst, the principal took the call, only to hear words of apology.

"I am so sorry for the oversight," apologized the mayor. "We had a grand gathering yesterday and simply forgot to invite your school."

The mayor seemed to have forgotten that he had made a phonecall earlier and had offered a personal invitation/demand. The principal immediately called his contact in Bnei Brak to tell him to go to Rav Shach with the good news. The Chinuch Atzmai contact in Bnei Brak ran to tell Rav Shach about the "miracle".



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"Miracle?!" said Rav Shach. "This is no miracle. What do you think I have been doing since I spoke to you yesterday? Do you see this Tehillim? I have been praying, practically non-stop! This that Hashem answers prayers is no miracle. That is how He runs the world."

The Bike Comes Back

Here is another good one.

A young boy received a new bicycle. Much to his dismay, the very next day, it had been stolen from the entranceway to his apartment building. He came home quite upset.

His understanding father, instead of uttering curses at the unknown thief, gathered together all of the children in the family and said, in a serious tone, "We are all so sad for Moishy who lost his bicycle. But we are even more sad for that thief who could not control his evil inclination. Let us pray together that Hashem arouse him to repentance and to return the bicycle."

The father formulated a text which all of the children said, together with some chapters of Tehillim. The children, Moishy included, went to sleep confident that they had done what they could in an attempt to retrieve the loss.

How happily surprised was Moishy to find his bicycle chained to the fence just outside the apartment building, with a note attached: I AM SO SORRY! I WILL NEVER TAKE ANYTHING FROM ANYONE AGAIN! PLEASE FORGIVE ME!

The family kept that note as a reminder of the power of prayer. (See Sefer Aleinu Leshabei'ach Vol. 3, p. 110)

Building Your Home on Prayer

Tefillah, heartfelt prayer, should be one of the cornerstones of every Jewish home. When a husband makes a point of starting his day with *tefillah betsibbur*, getting to shul again for mincha and maariv – it's a different home. When the wife/mother tries to find time to pray, the children see her example and it makes an indelible mark on their young souls. If she is too busy due to her myriad chores and responsibilities, then her short but heartfelt one-line prayers also do wonders, both in achieving what she seeks and in imbuing the home with holiness and faith.

Sometimes people pray and get discouraged when their prayers seem not to have been answered as they would have liked. They should be made aware that the Baal Shem Tov taught that no prayer is wasted. Some achieve immediate results and some are stored away for a later time. Some are used for the one who prayed and some are saved for their children and grandchildren, or other Jews around the globe. Every sincere prayer brings a flow of goodness to this world, and the one who generated it only benefits.

As we open the new year with sincere prayer, may we see the end to all sorrow and travail, and merit to see only blessing, peace, joy and prosperity, now and forever more.

**Shabbat Shalom,
Shanah Tova Umevoret,
Mordechai Malka**