



Prayer with a Soul
Parshas Vayikra

They were the best of friends all their days in Jerusalem, they grew up as neighbors, they were chevrotas (study partners) for long hours at the Leibele Schul in the Beis Yisroel neighborhood of Jerusalem.

They would stroll together, speaking words of Torah, they were known as "David and Yonathan", after the famed friendship described in the Tanach. Their children played together and their families were always very close.

As they grew old, they did not stop in their ways, spending long hours together in study and prayer.

They made a pact, in which they agreed that the first who would pass away and come before the heavenly court would return in a dream to his friend and share with him the happenings of the Next World. They agreed and shook on it, in pure friendship.

One friend subsequently passed away and went to the heavenly study hall; and after a few nights he came to his friend in a dream. Unfortunately, he did not have permission to share with his dear friend all that he has seen, but they had made a pact, and therefore he told him that which he was permitted to share.

He told the following: When I presented myself before the heavenly court I suddenly saw packages and packages of my sins piling up, and they began to prosecute me. I trembled in great fear and was struck with pains. I said to myself, soon will come forward my mitzvos, prayers and good deeds that I was able to fulfill over my 80 years of life.

The mitzvos came; they piled up, but could not tip the scales against my sins. I said to myself, soon will come the prayers, the prayers that I prayed three times a day, times the 80 years of my life, and that will tip the scale in my favor and secure me my place in Eden.

A small package of prayers did arrive, and I shook with fear and began to shout: "this is the heavenly court?! Where are my prayers?! How is this possible? This is what I had waiting for me?!"

"But you did not pray with proper intention and focus," answered the heavenly court. Yes, there were prayers received three times a day, but only during a small portion were you truly focused on your prayers. If you are not focused on the first blessing of the Amida, the Avos, so to the rest of your following prayers are judged the same, as it is taught in the Shulchan Aruch, the code of Jewish Law, that if you do not

focus in during the first blessing you should restart your prayer.

You have been warned, the friend from above told the friend from below, prayer must have intention.

In our weekly parsha we read the verse: " Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When a man from among you brings a sacrifice to the Lord; from animals, from cattle or from the flock you shall bring your sacrifice."¹

Our Sages teach us that prayer is in place of a sacrifice, and just as sacrifices have varying degrees and considerations, so too do prayers.

In a sin offering, if the animal is blemished it is invalidated, and such it is with prayer before G-d - all prayer without focus and intention is body without a soul.

The Rambam² taught us that "five things prevent one from praying, even though the time for prayer has arrived: the purification of one's hands, ... the proper intention of one's heart." If the heart is not focused, it is not proper prayer.

This is also what is taught in the Shulchan Aruch,³ "Prayer requires the heart be focused, understanding of the words that go out from ones lips, and to realize one is standing before the Divine Presence. Remove all external thoughts until the mind is clear, thought and intention are pure in prayer, and one should act as if standing before a king of flesh and blood, ones words should be organized, all the more so standing before the Holy One Blessed be He, He who knows our thoughts."

It is further written that "so would do the righteous, they would meditate and focus until they reached a level where they would be as if they separated from physicality and overcame the impulses to stumble, until they were like a prophet."

The author of the Shulchan Aruch provides us with a tool for helping one keep his thoughts pure during prayer: "if an outside thought should arise during prayer, be silent until it is nullified, and put in ones heart thoughts that will bring him back to our Father in heaven, and not to allow general thoughts to enter."

¹ Vayikra 1:2.

² Laws of Prayer 4:1.

³ Ohr Chaim 93:1

The Talmud⁴ relates that once when a certain pious man was praying by the roadside, an officer came by and greeted him, and he did not return his greeting. So the officer waited for him until he had finished his prayer.

When he had finished his prayer the officer told him: "Fool! is it not written in your Law, Only take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently," and it is also written, "Take therefore good heed unto your souls?" When I greeted you why did you not return my greeting? If I had cut off your head with my sword, who would have demanded satisfaction for your blood from me?"

The man replied to him: "Be patient and I will explain this to you. If you had been standing before an earthly king and your friend had come and given you a greeting, would you have returned it?" No, the officer replied.

"And if you had returned his greeting, what would they have done to you? "They would have cut off my head with the sword, the officer replied.

He then said to him: "Have we not here then "a fortiori" argument: If you would have behaved in this way when standing before an earthly king who is here today and tomorrow in the grave, how much more so I, when standing before the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, who endures for all eternity? Forthwith the officer accepted his explanation, and the pious man returned to his home in peace."

In the Rabbis words we learn something wonderful - through prayer we can nullify difficult decrees, and so we are taught prayer without intention is like a body without a soul. Without proper pray we cannot live.

Word of the dream spread through the city.

During that time, the remaining friend, a citizen of Jerusalem would be involved in prayer for long hours to connect in order to G-d. People would come from far and wide to see and experience the taste of paradise that was this prayer.

At the funeral of the friend, he was eulogized: "many years ago we lost the pillar of Torah and now we have lost a pillar of prayer."

⁴ Tractate Brachot 32b