

## Parashat Eikev, Rabbi David Mahler

### Prolonged Prayer

Throughout my life, whenever I've asked great people for advice, I've received the same response.

In a major portion of *Moshe Rabbeinu's* parting words to *Am Yisrael*, he lists a number of the sins they had committed after receiving the ten commandments. He did so in order to caution them not to take their responsibilities lightly.

In his recounting of the *Chet HaEgel*, Moshe reminds the Jewish people (9:17-18) how after he smashed the *luchos*, he davened for them for 40 days and 40 nights. In the next *pasuk* (19) he states that *Hashem* listened to his *t'fillot* **also** on that day. The *Netziv* is bothered by the addition of the word *Gam* (also). Moshe's prayer to absolve *Am Yisrael* from this terrible sin seems to be the first time that Moshe is davening to *Hashem*. Why does he add the word *Gam*?

The *Netziv* quotes the *Ramban's* approach that the two times Moshe prayed were immediately upon hearing from *Hashem* himself that the nation had built an idol and then again after he smashed the *luchos* and returned to the top of the mountain.

Based on the comment of the *Ramban*, the *Netziv* offers a magnificent interpretation of a *Talmudic* statement. The *gemara* (*Berachos* 32b) teaches that "anyone who prolongs their *t'fillah* is guaranteed not to be turned away empty-handed". This seems strange. Just because a person davens a longer *Shemona Esre* or *Shema*, his prayers will be answered? Certainly one must have *kavana* but minutes or seconds can't solely dictate *Hashem's* response. It cannot simply be a reflection of time! The *Netziv* beautifully explains this statement as meaning that a person continuously davens.

Though we are commanded to daven thrice daily, that is the organized, structured prayer composed by the sages. The *gemara* is saying that before I walk into an important meeting, go on a first date, discipline my child, take a flight, sit down for an exam or decide which job to take, I should speak to *Hashem* and ask him for guidance and success. These *t'fillot* can always be done in one's own language, using one's own vocabulary. That's what it means to prolong prayer – to daven continuously.

The advice I've received is always thoughtful, personalized, nuanced and sensitive. It is also always punctuated by a missive to daven as well.

If you want to find a better job, work every angle.....and daven

If you want your presentation to go well, prepare meticulously.....and daven

If you want to lose weight, put a plan in place.....and daven

If you want to improve your marriage, seek advice from professionals if need be.....and daven

If you want to overcome a paralyzing fear, commit yourself to therapy.....and daven

And even if you want davening to be more meaningful – put the work in – but you can daven for that as well.

Prayer is always that secret sauce that can be added to any dish.

I don't have a large presence on social media. I love twitter but rarely tweet myself. However, I recently felt compelled to re-tweet a beautiful excerpt from a book that was posted by a friend of mine. The author, Nellie Morton, coined the phrase, "hearing each other to speech". We usually think that when two people are having a conversation, the person talking is the active one, and the person listening is the passive one. Ms. Morton's observation flips this perception on its head. It is the person listening who is active and begins the process. Only when the listener is fully present and focused, can the speaker then begin to access and discover his or her true story. The listener "hears", leads, the other person to his/her true story. When someone listens deeply to me, I begin to listen deeply to myself.

This quote can be discussed for days but my initial thought was that whenever we turn to talk to G-D, he is laser-focused on every word we utter. He hangs on every word and we begin to open up more and allow Him greater access to our lives. The more we speak to Him, the more we allow Him into our lives.

We should prolong our prayer so that we can prolong our special bond with *Hashem*.