

FROZEN HEARTS

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

The Kotzker Rebbe was once walking with his brother-in-law, Rav Yitzchak Meir, the Chiddushei Harim. They saw a frozen lake, upon which the non-Jews had carved a cross into the ice.

The Kotzker asked his brother-in-law Rav Yitzchak Meir, "What do you see?"

The Chiddushei Harim responded, "A cross."

The Kotzker replied, "I will tell you what I see. Water is symbolic of purity. When it freezes, all of its potential for good disappears, and it attracts the greatest impurities known to mankind."

The Kotzker meant to imply that when one's service of Hashem is filled with fire, he is empowered to draw himself close to his Creator. Divine service that lacks warmth is a likely target for all of the impurity in the world (Emes V'Emunah p. 127).

With his classic acuity, the Kotzker warns us of the dangers of frozen Divine service. Tefillos that are filled with warmth have the power to pierce the heavens and ward off any impurity. However, if our prayers are cold as ice, then we are susceptible to all of the impurities that surround us today.

The Rambam relates to a person whose mind is elsewhere during prayer, and articulates this succinctly. "If someone thinks about business during prayer it is as if he did not pray at all, and he is the subject of the Navi's lament [Yirmiyah 12,2], They are close to me in their mouths, but far from me in their hearts" (Moreh Nevuchim).

In the Yad Hachazakah he rules, "Any tefillah that a person recites without intention is not a tefillah" (Hilchos Tefillah 4,15). The Rambam is impressing upon us the fundamental role of intention in one's prayers. Let us try and understand what intention entails and how to ignite our tefillos.

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