

SALVATION FROM NOTHING

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Chazal have told us that the best way to improve one's prayers is to pause before, during and after one's tefillos. Learning Torah, saying Korbanos, performing acts of kindness and staying on one's toes, are just some of the ways to help augment one's tefillah after one has made the required pauses. Utilizing these methods fortify one's neshamah before prayer and can have powerful results. Thus, each person should try these or any other means that help his prayers.

"You are awesome and who can stand in front of You" (Tehillim). The Vilna Gaon finds an allusion to another method of strengthening one's neshamah for prayer in this verse. If a person perceives himself as a feeble mortal before his Omnipotent Creator, foreign thoughts will not gain entry to his mind (as cited in sefer Boneh Yerushalayim of Rav Chaim Uri of Vilna).

"From nothingness will come salvation" (Tehillim 121). With his classic acuity the Kotzker Rebbe explains that the nothingness refers to the destruction of one's ego. By taking his self out of the picture a person makes room for Hashem to enter the scene and tend to all his needs.

One of the greatest obstacles to concentrating on our prayers is that we spend the whole day focused on ourselves and our own needs. By reflecting on how small we are before we turn to Hashem in prayer, we eliminate some of the partition that our egos have created and enable our tefillos to appear in front of Hashem unobstructed by our strong sense of self. This is what David Hamelech alluded to when he said, "I am prayer" (Tehillim 69,14).

Involving ourselves with Torah, avodah and gemilas chasadim before prayer, Puts us in the right frame of mind to speak to Hashem.

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