

FACE TO FACE

by Rabbi Dovid Green

A parable: A king once granted all of his subjects the opportunity to come before him with requests. Every day the king set aside one hour for audiences with his subjects. Appointments were made for months in advance. Each person was given three minutes to beseech the king for his needs. Many requests were indeed granted. One man, whom we will call Ploni (Mr. So and So), was given an appointment for three months in advance. That was ample time to prepare just the right words which needed to be said in not one second more than three minutes.

As time went by, Ploni compiled a large list of things he would read before the king. He was quite proud of himself, and he was making plans what he would do with his new-found fortune. After all, Ploni reasoned, "I have been a loyal and faithful subject for many years."

On the appointed day Ploni made his way to the palace. He was ushered in to the king's chambers. He bowed and greeted the king. He took out his list and began reading. "You **expect** all of those things?" asked the king. "Yes, your highness." "Why?" asked the king. "Because I have been a loyal and faithful subject, your highness." "And for that I owe you something? Is that what you are saying?" "Yes, your highness," replied Ploni. "Remove this man, and let it suffice for his reward that I let him go on being my loyal and faithful subject," exclaimed the king angrily. "And don't come back here wasting my time with your foolish expectations."

If we can have a connection with the Creator of the universe; if He is willing to listen to us, how should we best make use of the opportunity we have to beseech Him? What is the attitude we should have in prayer?

We find in this week's parsha a basic lesson which is a foundation in Jewish Prayer. Yaakov is on his way back to The Land of Canaan after having fled from his angry brother 20 years earlier. He sends word to Eisav that he is returning, and that he wants to be on good terms with him. Eisav responds with gestures of war. Yaakov's messengers return with news that Eisav is on his way with 400 men. Among the other preparations that Yaakov makes, he prays. From his words we understand the way we, his children, should approach G-d in our prayer.

"I have become small (undeserving) from all of the kindnesses and truth that you have done with your servant," says Yaakov to G-d. "...Please save me from my brother Eisav..." (Genesis 32:11-12). In the classic work "Beis Elokim", the Mabi"t writes that a person should not demand something of G-d. When we demand, fulfillment of our requests depends on whether we really deserve it. Rather,

requests should be for kindness; that we should not feel entitled to what we request, but like someone asking for more than he deserves. This is the way Yaakov approached G-d. "I have become undeserving." That means "I've already received more than I'm entitled to. Yet I have needs, and I recognize that You, G-d, are the One Who can fulfill them." When G-d sees that we recognize His kindness, He continues to bestow it in that merit. His kindness is unlimited.

The student of Torah considers his time in prayer a very special time. Prayer is called "the fruit of the day". This means that standing face to face with G-d, praising Him, thanking Him, and recognizing His ability to grant us our requests is not just a means, but a noble end in itself. The sweetness of the fruit is the attitude we manifest in requesting humbly, and not demanding our needs.

Good Shabbos.

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