

THE WORK OF THE HEART

by Rabbi Label Lam

It will be that if you listen well to My commandments that I command you today, to love HASHEM, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart... Devarim 11:13)

To serve Him with all your heart: Work that is of the heart, is Prayer (Rashi)

It helps to have some insight into the dynamics of Prayer so we can appreciate what we spend so much time doing. 1-Why do we ask HASHEM for anything? Can we not presume that HASHEM knows what we need? 2-How can we hope to change HASHEM's mind through Prayer? Can we hope to present previously unknown info?

"Who is a citizen of the next world?", asks the Talmud rhetorically, "Anyone- who prefaces Shema to Prayer!" (Brochos 9B) We can ask, "What is the great advantage of sandwiching Shema and Sh'mona- Esreh?"

1-Shema more than implies listening, it implores that we, Israel, hear. How much more are our chances of being heard when we enter any relationship as listeners and no less so here in the mix of prayer? Why does it work that way? The Maharal writes, "The prayer that a person prays to HASHEM demonstrates that the person is dependant upon Him and he needs Him and he has no real permanence except through Him..." Entering as a listener places the person in a more appropriate posture and lends a truer sense of proportion to this dialogue we call Prayer.

2-Shema is a pledge of absolute allegiance. You are to love HASHEM with all your heart and soul and might and to speak at all times, when lying down and rising up and to teach your kids and to display this loyalty on your head and heart and the doors of your house. Wow! It's a total commitment. Imagine now entering the bosses office in a major company and requesting two sky beepers, three secretaries, a brand new SUV, a \$ 35,000.00 expense account and before you get the full list out of your mouth the bosses interrupts, "Who are you to just enter here and make all these expensive requests?" You leave the room and attempt the impossible, to make a first impression a second time. This time you say, "My name is (fill in your name) and say, "I am your East Coast guy. My mission is to get your product in the front window of every store up and down the Eastern Seaboard..." The boss might well chime in before you finish, "You need a couple of sky-beepers, a new SUV, three full time secretaries to process orders and a huge expense account to woo and wow the customers etc."

Let's analyze it. The request has more appeal because:

1- These are not flippant and capricious wishes. Rather they are pre-screened for practicality. Hence the word for Prayer -Hisparallel- which means "to judge oneself", as Rabbi S.R. Hirsch ztl defines it. The praying person has employed critical criteria to distinguish between spontaneous urges, mere wants and real needs.

2- It is more likely that these requests, if granted, will be appropriated for their intended purpose since there is a built-in recognition of the source of those gifts, due to the formality of the presentation: Firstly- declaring your-self a "company man" and then secondly -asking for necessary stuff.

This approach is actually modeled after Chana's prayer. She successfully launched what amounted to an "irresistible request" with an appeal that sounds like this, "I don't want a child for me. I want it for you!" And she meant it! That makes all the difference. Ultimately we don't change The Almighty's mind in Prayer. We adjust ourselves through the work of the heart. Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).