

HEART WORK

by Rabbi Label Lam

And it will be, if you hearken to My commandments that I command you this day to love HASHEM, your G-d, **and to serve Him with all your heart** and with all your soul... (Devarim 10:12)

and to serve Him with all your heart: with a work of the heart, and that is prayer, for prayer is called service-work... -Rashi

The job of prayer is to work for HASHEM with the heart. How is that done? How is that done if we are reading from a scripted text? This question is often asked and for good reasons. It's a great question! How is this done?

The answer may be found in the famous letter the Ramban wrote to his son. Regarding prayer he advises as follows: "Remove all your worldly issues from your heart during prayers, and prepare your heart before HASHEM. Purify your thoughts and **think before you speak**..." The practical key in this piece are those 4 words, "**think before you speak**".

A relatively newly married man, struggling with Shalom Bais, approached his Rabbi for some advice on how to return the smile to his bride's face. The Rabbi asked him if he had ever gotten his wife a bouquet of flowers on Erev Shabbos! He looked at the Rabbi curiously and admitted that he had not.

Then the Rabbi uncorked the first new big idea. "Make sure to get your wife fresh flowers every Erev Shabbos!" "That's it!" queried the newly wed. "No!" the Rabbi insisted. "You must include a note and or tell her something nice and flattering!" The poor young man looked at the Rabbi with bewilderment. "I have no idea what to say!" The Rabbi then offered some cliché phrases that just might reach the mark. "Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth!" (It worked for Lou Gehrig) or "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day!" (*Shakespeare got away with it ~ Sonnet 18*)

Dutifully the student scouted out and selected an elegant bouquet prior to Shabbos and he wrote down those choice phrases that to recite at the magic moment. When the appropriate time arrived he approached his wife on that eve of the Holy Shabbos and he presented the flowers. Her heart practically melted with joy and then she looked at him right on cue and waited for him to say something, just as the Rabbi had predicted.

Glancing down on the paper he looked in her direction and said, "The Rabbi said I should say, 'Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth!' He also said, 'Shall I compare thee to a

summer's day?!" Her smile suddenly collapsed into a frown, the bouquet of flowers came crashing down on his head, and he found himself back in the proverbial doghouse, exactly where he was before.

What a lost opportunity. He did not say his own words! She got the message! This was not him speaking words from his heart. What should he have done? Let us pause for a moment and think! Exactly!

Pausing for a moment and thinking about a word before you say it makes *you* the speaker. It becomes personal. It adds a drop of the jet fuel of intentionality. When we are reciting and even translating accurately but in the rear view mirror, "this is the meaning of the word I just said", then it is as if we are saying, "The Men of the Great Assembly said I should say, "Boruch Ata..."

Trying it the way the Ramban prescribes is powerful experientially. Admittedly, it's not easy. It may even seem tedious. Try it for one blessing. You might find that things are slowing down. Every utterance takes on new meaning and feels real. The lights are turning on. Doing this for even one blessing or two may prove exhausting but you'll find it endlessly rewarding. That may be why it is appropriately called **heart work**.