

HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

"You shall not see the donkey of your brother or his ox falling on the road and hide yourself from them; you shall surely stand them up with him." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:4) The Talmud (Bava Metzia 32a) expounds that "with him" is a condition: the owner cannot claim that the Torah mandates that the helper right the pack animal while he himself stands idly by. Rather, as long as the owner is involved in the effort, the passerby is obligated to assist.

The Chofetz Chaim (1) extends this concept to our spiritual pursuits. In our efforts to connect with G-d, if we extend ourselves in our physical realm to bond with the Divine, then G-d will assist our efforts and infuse them with holiness. We conclude the thrice daily Amidah with the request "guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully." If we expend effort to restrain ourselves from corrupt speech then G-d will assist us toward success. But if we fail to make any attempt at self control, how do we have the audacity to ask for Divine intervention?

Further, questions the Chofetz Chaim, in the daily morning prayers we beseech G-d "enlighten our eyes in your Torah", but do we commit ourselves to study immediately after the service? He offers a parable of a person in desperate need of a loan who schedules an appointment to borrow funds from a colleague of significant financial means. If the borrower neglects to arrive for the scheduled appointment, does he have any credible complaint with the lender who did not give him the funds? So, too, G-d is desirous to fulfill our requests, but it is incumbent upon us to take the basic preliminary steps, to open the volume and study, for Him to imbue us with His awesome wisdom. If we utter the request but hurry from our prayers to attend to the day's affairs, our prayers cannot be fulfilled, for we have demonstrated they were empty statements.

In these days of Elul - the days when Divine reconnection is fortuitous as we approach Rosh Hashanah, when we formally declare and reaccept G-d's majesty over the universe - we are reminded by the Medrash (Shir Hashirim Raba) that G-d beseeches us, "My children, open for me in teshuva (2) an opening the size of a needle's point and I will open for you openings that wagons can pass through." Just as a parent watches with glee as a toddler takes his first baby steps, but stands back to let him take those steps on his own, so to G-d awaits with great anticipation our taking our initial steps - five-minutes of Torah study, expending a little more restraint over a sharp comment to another or about another before it leaves our lips - after which He will then draw us close to Him and infuse us with His holiness. But we must take that first step.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan of Radin; 1838-1933; author of basic works in Jewish law, philosophy and ethics and renowned for his saintly qualities (2) return and recommitment to the Divine will

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