

THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE PRAYERS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshios Tazria & Metzorah

The Key To Effective Prayers

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 413, Speaking Lashon Horah on Baalei Machlokes. Good Shabbos!

The Key To Effective Prayers Is Watching Our Mouths

The Parshios of Tazria and Metzorah deal extensively with the laws of Tzaraas, a disease or condition which comes as punishment for the sin of speaking Lashon Horah (gossip; slander). Three times every day, following the Shmoneh Esrei prayer, we say a prayer that should act in our behalf to help us control our mouths: "G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully." The source of this prayer is a Talmudic listing of various prayers uttered by the Amoraim at the end of their formal prayers [Berachos 16b-17a].

Our prayer announcing the coming of a new month -- "Rosh Chodesh bentching" -- is the prayer quoted in the Gemara from Rav. The prayer quoted there in the name of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi has also been adopted in our morning service, immediately following 'Brochos': "May it be Your will, Hashem, to rescue me today and every day from brazen men and brazenness." Rava's prayer as cited there has been adopted as part of the Yom Kippur liturgy. Mar bar Ravina's prayer is the above-referenced prayer asking for G-d's help to guard our tongue and lips from speaking evil. It concludes with the words "May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, Hashem, my Rock and my Redeemer."

Rav Nissan Alpert notes that this last prayer (May the expressions of my mouth...) is really a generic tag line that could have been added by any of the Amoraim to their prayers. Rav could have said it;

Rebbe Yehudah HaNasi could have said it; Rava could have said it. Why is this generic formula only appended to the prayer of Mar bar Ravina?

Rav Alpert explained that this generic request that our prayers be answered is uniquely appended to the prayer of Mar bar Ravina because he provides the key for allowing our prayers to be effective. The essence of the prayer "Guard my lips..." is to make all my other multitude of prayers -- for understanding, health, livelihood, security from enemies, National restoration, etc. -- effective. The key for our prayers to be accepted is the possession of a tongue and lips that are worthy of being listened to by G-d.

We have a long laundry list of requests for G-d -- three times a day, 365 days a year. But so many times, our prayers seemingly are not effective. Our prayers are not answered (at least as far as we can tell). Why not?

If a person has a radio transmitter that he has just smashed with a sledgehammer, he should not be surprised if he turns it on and it does not work. "Why doesn't it work? Because you broke it!"

Our mouth is a transmitter. We use it to utter our prayers. If everyday, so to speak, we take a sledgehammer and slam our mouths it is obvious why our mouths might not be effective in prayer. It is not that our prayers are not answered -- they might not even be transmitted!

Mar bar Ravina ended his prayer with the request that his prayers be accepted and desired by G-d. But he prefaced that climax to his prayer with good advice as to how to make one's prayers accepted by G-d. The key is having a tongue and lips that are guarded from speaking evil.

It is futile to use a mouth contaminated by gossip and slander to effectively transmit prayers to G-d, even for our sincerest needs.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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