



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL

TEFILLA

BY REBBETZIN ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI

Director of OU Israel L'Ayla Women's Initiative



ה' שפתי תפתח ופי יגיד תהלתך

Rav Dovid Shlomo Eibishitz (1800's) ערבי נחל, brings down in his Sefer, the following Mashal (parable):

There was once a king who wanted to have a beautiful new crown made for him. He called for the three most talented craftsmen in the country to each take a turn at attempting to construct a perfect crown, under his direct supervision.

The first craftsman arrived at the palace and listened carefully to the king's instructions. He then proceeded to create an exquisite crown which fit the king's exact description. Much to everyone's surprise, instead of praising the artist's work, the king ordered that his hands be chopped off! He explained that he was shocked to see how calmly and serenely the man worked while standing in front of him. He would have expected for him to be shaking as he nervously worked in the presence of royalty; the fact that he was so calm attested to his complete disrespect for the king.

When the second artisan began his hand at creating a crown, he indeed began to tremble and shake. His hand was so unsteady that he simply could not continue. The king promptly sent him home.

The third craftsman was just as nervous as the second. As he began his work, he felt himself trembling with fear. But then he took a hold of himself and realized that he would need to relax himself in order to succeed in creating a crown. He approached the king and said – “Your highness, I greatly fear and revere you. I do not deserve to take on this tremendous task. But I want to fulfill your will and therefore, I am asking your permission to relax and let down my guard in order to be able to be calm enough to do as you have asked. Please give me the working conditions that I need in order to be able to fulfill your will”. The king was indeed happy with this request and the mission was successfully accomplished.

When we arrive at Shemoneh Esrei and are about to approach HaKadosh Baruch Hu “face to face”, we should be filled with fear and trepidation. How could it be that mere mortals are able to speak with G-d? If we jump right into our Tefilla without any hesitation, we are like the first craftsman who didn't feel any apprehension at all as he worked in front of the king. On the other hand, we can't get stuck in our fear like the second man. Rather, like the third artist, we need to gather up our courage and ask – “ה' שפתי תפתח ופי יגיד תהלתך” – *Hashem, please open our mouths so that we can say your praises.* We know that we are completely inadequate to daven before You. We rec-

ognize the absurdity of us standing before You. We are scared and humbled by the monumental task in front of us. Help us out, open our mouths, and give us the confidence. Only then we will be able to fulfill Your will and daven properly.

In addition, many commentaries point out an additional meaning to these words. They explain that as we begin Shemoneh Esrei, we are worried that we might not formulate our words properly. We might not know the right words to say or the right kavanot (thoughts) to have as we recite those words. We ask Hashem to please open our mouths for us, make the right words come out, together with the appropriate accompanying thoughts. Give us the *kochot* (strength) needed to concentrate,

connect, and interact with You, the King of all Kings. Let's try to take a moment before taking our three steps back to really think about what we are about to do and to feel the meaning behind these words.

Just to close with one thought outside the realm of Tefilla, I have been inspired numerous times when various Rabbis and teachers (and Chidon haTanach contestants) recited these same words before beginning to speak, asking Hashem to help put the right words in their mouths. We too can pause before any important conversation, be it with a spouse, co-worker, or child, and recite these words, offering a silent prayer to Hashem to help us formulate our thoughts coherently, sensitively, and effectively. ■

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