



TOWARDS MORE MEANINGFUL TEFILLA

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More Than a Last Resort

We often turn to tefillah when we feel powerless. When a loved one receives a scary diagnosis, when a child is struggling, or when a soldier's safety is uncertain, tefillah comes naturally. In these moments we know that only Hashem can help us.

Our attitude, however, may shift when we feel in control. When we spend weeks preparing for a presentation, carefully research a community before moving, or hire the most recommended professionals to do our shiputzim, we are confident. Once we have invested the necessary hishtadlut, the need for tefillah may seem less urgent. But is tefillah meant to be just a fallback plan for when our own efforts fall short or does it serve a more central role?

Tefillah was built into the infrastructure of the world. At the very beginning of creation the Torah notes that the trees and the fields had not yet grown because לא המטיר ה' לא האדמה - "Hashem had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil." (Bereishit 2:5) Rashi explains that Adam HaRishon was created into a world that existed in potential and only after he davened did Hashem bring forth the plant life that was waiting beneath the surface.

The same principle applies to our own lives.

Hashem created each of us with the innate capacity of our intellect, abilities, and unique talents and tasked us with maximizing our potential. Fulfilling this mission requires a combination of tefillah and hishtadlut. We must turn to Hashem with the awareness that every outcome depends on Him while acting independently to take responsibility for our lives.

To understand this balance, we need look no further than the avot, who established the shachrit, mincha, and maariv tefillot that we daven every day. We know that each of them davened for his barren wife, yet the Torah is replete with examples of their significant hishtadlut.

After Avraham Avinu defeated the four kings and rescued Lot, the king of Sodom offered him the spoils of war. Avraham refused, declaring הרמותי ידי אל ה' - "I lift up my hand to Hashem" (Bereishit 14:22) Onkelos translates this as raising his hands in tefillah. He recognized that his massive military success belonged entirely to Hashem.

Later, the Torah tells us that during his stay in Gerar יצחק בארץ ההוא וימצא בשנה ויזרע יצחק בארץ ההוא וימאה שערים ויברכהו ו - "Yitzchak sowed in that land and in that year he reaped a hundredfold; thus had Hashem blessed him." (Bereishit 26:12) Rav Yitzchak Kalish of Vorki points to the order of the wording to teach us that only after Yitzchak puts in the necessary hishtadlut did Hashem bless him with abundance.

The Sifsei Chaim expands on this duality of tefillah and hishtadlut through the story of

Yosef and his brothers. When Yosef demanded that Binyamin be brought down to Mitzrayim, Yakov instructed his sons to gather various gifts and extra money to bring along with their youngest brother. He then tells them "and may Hashem grant you mercy before the man" (Bereishit 43:14) Rashi explains that Yakov was teaching his sons that although they have prepared well and are missing nothing, they must not forget to daven.

According to the Sifsei Chaim, we cannot approach Hashem with an expectation of success without fulfilling our own responsibility to act. We must do our part, while recognizing that our actions alone are never enough. Ultimately tefillah itself is an essential form of hishtadlut, because true effort requires acknowledging Hashem as the ultimate source of every outcome. Tefillah and hishtadlut are two sides of the same coin that cannot be separated from each other.

Rabbeinu Yonah takes this a step further in his commentary on the words בכל דרכיך - "in all your ways know Him" (Mishlei 3:6) explaining that this means recognizing Hashem in every area of life, even the most mundane. We must bring Hashem into the details. When we are working, parenting, traveling, or even looking for a parking spot, we can pause and ask Him for help with the little things. We are never promised exactly what we want but through tefillah we have the opportunity to transform our daily routine into a living partnership with Hashem instead of waiting for crisis to compel us to turn to Him. ■

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