

And the nation was complaining; and it was bad to Hashem's ears. And Hashem heard. (11:1)

Simply, the pasuk teaches that the Bnei Yisrael complained, moaning about the long journey through the wilderness which was forced upon them. They were not happy about it, and their complaints reached Hashem's "ears." This led to Hashem's punitive response to their complaining. The Chasam Sofer offers an alternative approach to these pesukim. Understandably, describing Hashem in anthropocentric terms – such as eyes, ears, hands – is purely figurative, since Hashem has no physical form. The nation (at this point) believed in the figurative "eyes" of Hashem, accepting that He sees everything. They also accepted the figurative "hand" of Hashem, believing that Hashem can and does do everything. His power is all-encompassing. They did not believe, however, in Hashem's figurative "ears." They were neither prepared to accept the fact that Hashem hears their tefillos, supplications, nor anything else which they said.

Why did they believe in Hashem's figurative eyes and hand, yet reject His figurative ears? Perhaps we may suggest that, when a person prays to Hashem and does not receive a positive response (to his liking), it is easier to say, "Hashem did not hear," or "Hashem does not listen," rather than accept the notion that Hashem heard, but His reply was, "No." No one likes rejection. It is more convenient to lay blame on the ability of the benefactor than to accept personal failure and rejection.

The Chasam Sofer provides a deeper insight into the complaints of the misonenim which "reached" the "ears" of Hashem. The nation complained that Hashem did not hear them, thereby disbelieving the concept of Hashem's "ears." Hashem responded, Va'yishma Hashem, "Hashem heard," and He punished them. He demonstrated that He hears their complaints, and, just as He hears their complaints, He also hears the sweet sound of their Torah study and prayer. The answer might not always be, "Yes," but the supplication is always heard.

There are various ways for our supplications to make their mark, to go beyond the "hearing" step and achieve a positive response. Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita, cites Moshe Rabbeinu's tefillah on behalf of his sister, Miriam HaNeviah: Keil na refa na lah, "Please Hashem, heal her now." He quotes the Chida, who writes, "I heard in the name of early commentators that when Moshe was in Heaven to receive the Torah, he received (from the Melachim, Angels) the secret that when one says the word, na, please, twice in his tefillah, his plea will be answered." Understandably, this is a profound esoteric statement whose explanation is beyond our grasp. We do not know why or how reciting na twice grants the tefillah greater efficacy. All we know is that we have avenues for spiriting our sincere and worthy prayers to Hashem.

Rav Biderman relates a story which teaches us another aspect of prayer that works – sincerity. A certain city was considering hiring one of the Chasam Sofer's prime students as the Rav. This was a prestigious community, and, thus, a much-sought after position. There was another candidate for

the position, also a scholar, and the committee was weighing the pros and cons of both candidates. The Chasam Sofer felt that his student was very competent and would make an excellent Rav for the community. To this end, he traveled to that community, together with his student, to lend his support in helping them to make a choice. [We must remember that the Chasam Sofer did this because he felt strongly that his student was far more erudite and would have a greater impact on the spiritual ascendance of the community.] In the end, the community's search committee decided to go with the other candidate.

Obviously, the Chasam Sofer's student was crestfallen. He had really looked forward to being selected – especially since his revered Rebbe, the gadol hador, preeminent leader of the generation, had personally vouched for him. Sensing his student's pain, the Chasam Sofer looked at him and said, "I could surmount every (spiritual) barrier to help you become Rav, but I could not break through the wall of tears that the other candidate had shed in prayer to become the Rav."

Tears are moving. They grant one's prayers greater credence, since they are an indication of the sincerity and broken-heartedness of the supplicant. The Gates of Tears are always open. When all else seems to fail, one should pour out his heart and express his emotions. Hashem is listening. The tears might just serve as that added ingredient which can turn the tide by adding greater meaning and urgency to his prayer.