

“Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren.” (25:21)

Prayer has always been an important aspect of *Klal Yisrael's* service to the Almighty. Moreover, as *Chazal* mention, the Matriarchs were initially barren. Hashem granted them offspring in response to their heartfelt prayers. Thus, the commentators observe that the emergence of *Klal Yisrael* is a miracle, for each new generation is in its own right a gift of G-d to a mother who could not have given birth under natural circumstances. Hashem “desires” the pure prayers of the righteous, accompanied by their self-improvement. This serves as a lesson for all of us, indicating the possible effect of a pure heart and absolute faith. The Chassidic Masters sum up the concept of prayer with the idea that “*Torah is G-d's gift to man. Prayer is man's gift to G-d.*”

When we consider it, the mere thought of being able to speak personally to the Almighty should evoke an intense feeling of reverence and awe. One should be so overwhelmed that he should literally be rendered speechless. This is the reason, suggest the commentators, that we preface our *Shemoneh Esrai* prayer with the phrase, “*Hashem sefasi tiftach,*” “G-d, open my lips.” We pray for the ability to pray, to communicate with Him in the appropriate manner.

Not everyone has either the erudition or depth of intelligence to achieve the intensity of devotion required in prayer. Indeed, many do not even know the meaning of the words in the *Siddur*. Nonetheless, if the most important aspect of *tefillah*, the *kavanah*, intention, is sincere, the prayer is precious before the Almighty. A very beautiful illustration of this thought occurred when the famous *Horav Levi Yitzchak, z.l., m'Berditchev* once delayed the start of services on *Rosh Hashanah*, citing the following reason:

“There is a young shepherd who was orphaned as a child. As a result, he never had the opportunity for a Hebrew education. While he never learned to *daven*, he somehow came to know the shapes and sounds of the letters of the *Aleph-Beis*. This morning, as he was watching people rushing to *shul* to pray to Hashem, he looked up at Heaven and said, ‘Dear G-d, I would very much like to pray to You, but I do not know how. I do, however, know the *Aleph-Beis*. I will recite the letters of the alphabet to You, and You, dear G-d, put them together to make the proper words.’ This is why we must wait. Hashem is presently occupied arranging the letters recited by the shepherd.”

We have all heard this story at one time or another, but do we take into consideration the message it conveys? Do we glean from it the significance of sincerity, the impact of a pure heart, the relevance of being straightforward and honest in prayer? If we have not, then maybe we should.