

# The Genie In The Box

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*As he walked wearily through the desert, his unknown destination as far removed as ever, he noticed something gleaming just a few steps away. Probably a mirage, he thought—but in a desert one cannot afford the luxury of despair. He changed direction and went over to investigate. There was something there.*

*He reached down to pick it up, but it was stuck. He got down on his knees to pull it out. It was buried more deeply than he had thought. Other than the little bit that had reflected the sunlight, whatever it was seemed to be part of the sand itself. The blistering sun made his job harder, but made him more determined to unearth his discovery. He dug his fingers and hands more deeply into the sand, getting his fingers under the box. He leaned in, straining his back and shoulders, and started pulling.*

*He pulled and he pulled harder, the box beginning to budge, the sand beginning to give way. Breathing heavily and perspiring, he stopped and started again and again until finally—finally! —the box came free. He pulled it up.*

*The box was totally encrusted with sand. He banged on it once, then twice, and layers and layers of sand fell away. Underneath all the sand was a small rusty tin box, its opening sealed with an even rustier lid. He dug his bleeding fingertips into the rust and clawed hard to remove the lid. He did—and out rushed the genie.*

*“You have freed me!” the genie roared. Our amazed hero looked at the lion-shaped apparition. “I have been trapped for thousands of years and you have freed me! To show my gratitude, I will grant you one wish, any wish you may ask.”*

*The man thought. He had been in the desert so long. There were so many things he lacked, so much that he needed, so much that he hoped for. Choosing only one thing would not leave him much better off. Was there one wish that he could make that would provide all his needs or fulfill all his hopes, even those he didn't yet know about? Calmly and fearlessly, he gazed at the genie and replied, “My wish is to have a thousand wishes.”*

*We live our lives in a spiritual desert. The heat of the sun of desire is merciless, constantly cooking us: more food, more sex, more money, more power. The sun's glare makes us see what is not there, and blinds us to what really exists. The sand is hollow; it makes walking so difficult and nothing substantial can be built out of it. The desert has no map and no landmarks. We wander aimlessly. That we still hope to make it out of the desert alive is itself a miracle.*

*By God's grace, we are given a glimmer of hope. Overlooking past disappointments, we break our inertia and change direction, for no good reason, just out of faith. Our desire to find something worthwhile pushes us to humble and lower*

ourselves so that we'll even dig to find what we're looking for. We'll strain and ache for deliverance.

When success seems to elude us, we'll dig in with our fingernails to get success in our grasp. When the genie is finally set free—when we discover what tools we have—we'll keep our wits about us to use the genie's power in the best possible way.

*Tefilah ligt in drert.* Prayer lies in disgrace. It's buried so deeply, so hidden from view, that people don't think of it much, nor think much of it. "It's like sand, impractical to build with. It's rusty, a relic of primitive times."

King David, author of the Psalms, said, "I am prayer" (*Psalms* 109:4). Rebbe Nachman echoed those words when he said, "Gor mein zakh iz tefilah (My entire mission is prayer)!" (*Likutey Moharan* II, 93).

By engaging in person conversation with G-d, you have released the genie and put the power of prayer at your disposal. Your wish has become a thousand.

Someone once asked Rebbe Nachman for his advice on how to best approach God. Rebbe Nachman recommended that the man study a particular subject. "But Rebbe, I can't do that. I am unable to learn," the man protested.

Rebbe Nachman responded, "With prayer, one can achieve anything, every sort of good. One can achieve success in Torah study, prayer, sanctity, any type of Divine worship and any and every sort of good on any spiritual plane" (*Likutey Moharan* II, 111).