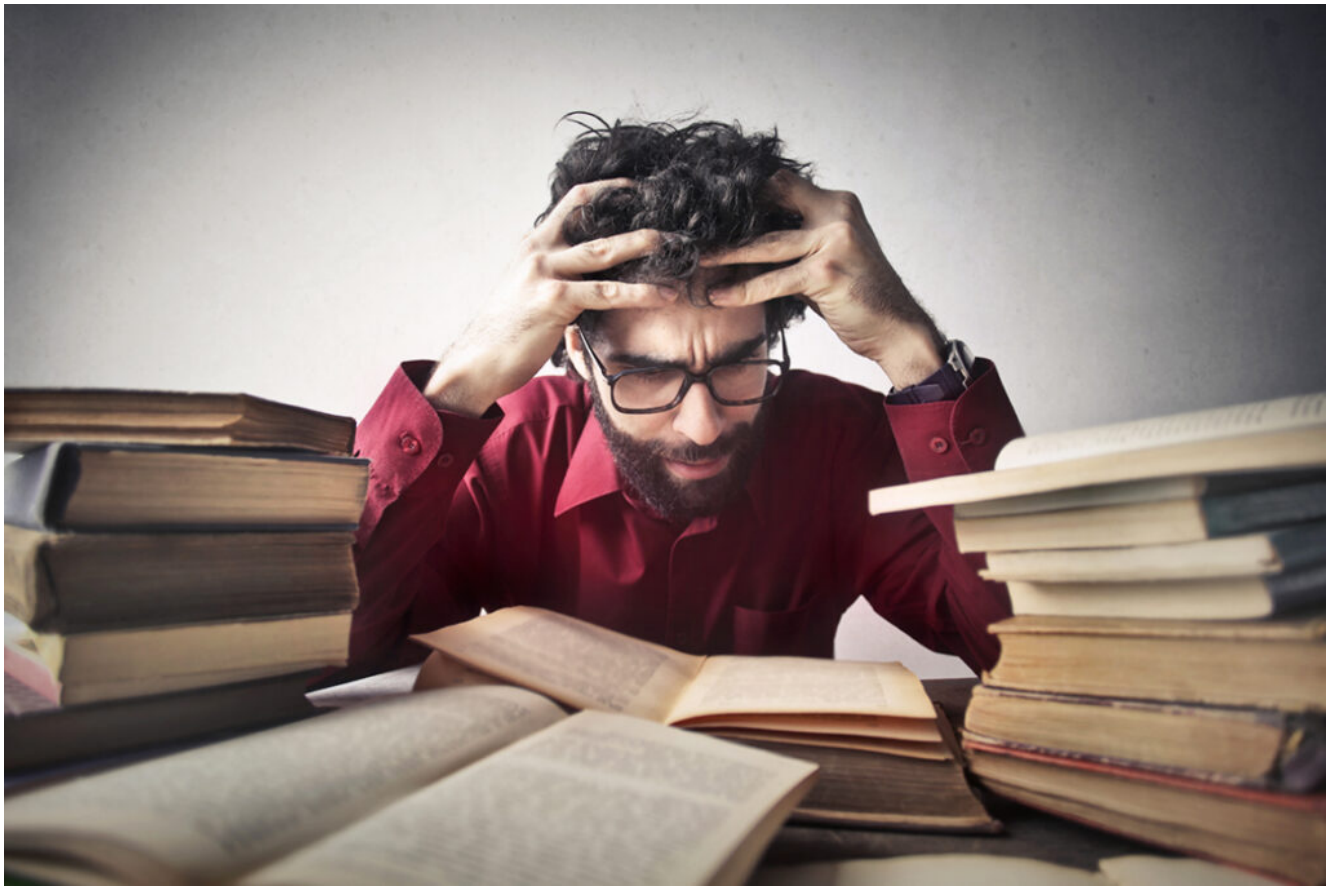


What's the Matter With Us?

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Dvar Torah for Parshat Chukat

Based on *Likutey Moharan* II, Lesson #111

“The saga makers therefore say, ‘Come to Cheshbon!’” (Numbers 21:27).

[Rebbe Nachman] answered him, “Through prayer it is possible to achieve everything, everything good: Torah, spiritual practices and every type of holiness.”

If you are a craftsman or an artist, you appreciate good tools. If you love driving or playing music, you appreciate a well-tooled car or a fine instrument. As a result of your penchant for your hobby or your job, you understand the power of a good tool. It can make your work easier and significantly

improve the quality of what you produce.

How about your Jewish craft? Have you ever stopped to make a *cheshbon* (reckoning), to think about how you approach living a Torah life? Or have you been too busy doing mitzvahs and avoiding misbehavior to fathom your responsibility, what you're called on to do as a member of the Chosen People? Do you have an inkling of the power entrusted to you?

Doing mitzvahs is not a matter of "getting it right" to earn reward on the Great Payday. Any mitzvah you do makes an impact, right now, everywhere. Even so-called ritual mitzvahs and mitzvahs *bein adam l'Makom* (between a person and the Omnipresent [i.e., God]) draw into the world a bit more of those ethereal qualities like holiness and faith. Mitzvahs which are *bein adam l'chaveiro* (between a person and his fellow) lay the foundation for that elusive and fragile thing known as *shalom*.

The most powerful mitzvah we have at our disposal is *tefilah* (prayer). Too many people think of prayer as a refuge of the weak, a placebo for the impotent. Even we, who believe in the efficacy of *tefilah*, underestimate the range of what *tefilah* can change. In part this is due to our puny power of concentration and lack of focus during prayer. We believe that *tefilah* is powerful *in theory*, "but my prayer? How much is it going to do?"

Furthermore, our prayers are usually limited in scope, aimed at small targets: keep us well, help us make it to the end of the month and get my kid/spouse/boss to behave/off my back. This is due to our being beaten down by life and barely managing to keep our heads above the flood-waters of exile. Well, dear reader, it's time to make a *cheshbon*. It's time to realize that *your* prayer, honed properly, used patiently and carefully, can result in a better you, with a better life: "Through prayer it is possible to achieve everything, everything good." But that's only scratching the surface.

Let's make a deeper, more thorough *cheshebon*.

It's time to realize that it's not just your life and concerns that can be helped by *tefilah*. Believe it or not, there are bigger targets and goals for which we can use *tefilah*. All that news and noise in the media? It's not mere static. It's the Shekhinah crying out in pain, to you. It's God telling us that He wants us think also about the *world's* Torah study, the *world's* faith, holiness and peace.

These are huge goals. Our individual prayers will certainly make improvements. However, if in our personal lives improvement is often imperceptible, all the more so when we are dealing with issues of such a great scale. What can we do? We can pray *together*, as a community. With each additional person that joins a community prayer (especially a tzaddik's community prayer), the strength of the *tefilah* increases by leaps and bounds, to a staggering degree (*Likutey Halakhot, P'ru u'R'vu* 5:10–12).

What's the matter with us? We underestimate the power of *tefilah*, the power of our own *tefilah* and the power of praying together. May God soon open our eyes and hearts to see and understand what we can do for Him and His world. Amen.

agutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!