

What Stops You From Really Praying?

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Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are on the horizon, and you know there will be a prayer-marathon: days of intense, emotional, and ultimately uplifting introspection, prayer, and closeness to God.

But what if Elul is feeling more like a last-minute scramble than a preparation period?

And what if you feel you are “falling behind” and you need to do some psycho-spiritual catch-up?

Or what if you just aren’t feeling all that spiritual and your prayers feel rote, cold and empty?

The good news is that Elul is a time when our ability to connect to God is great. If we make a quiet space inside ourselves, we’re able to feel the spiritual energy of Elul, which is conducive to overcoming personal spiritual hurdles.

It's a time where we're able to tap into the ability to pray with more focus.

Becoming aware of the obstacles we face to sincere prayer is a first step.

The Three Bears

In Likutey Moharan II, Lesson 1, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov reveals three basic obstacles that inhibit our ability to connect to God through prayer, and they are each rooted in *middot rahot*, negative traits or qualities.

Hatred

"Do not despise any person." (Pirkey Avot 4:3). When we view another as inferior, when we dislike, are resentful of or despise another person, our ability to pray is severely damaged. We lack the ability to recognize the *tselem Elokim*, the Divine form (and source) of other people. We aren't able to recognize that precious nature of our own soul either.

Incomplete Emunah

When we have incomplete *emunah* (faith) and are filled with doubts that prevent us from really believing that God is listening to our prayers, we are unable to pray wholeheartedly. The Rebbe tells us that this incomplete faith actually has a taint of idolatry. He also tells us that "A measure of God's goodness is every individual's importance to Him." You are important to Him and He's listening to, even yearning for your prayers. Faith and belief are essential ingredients of prayer.

Not Valuing the Spiritual

Sexual promiscuity and immorality (which can lead to feelings of depression, worthlessness, and alienation from our spiritual selves) can take prayer out of our

reach. By viewing our bodies and bodily desires as the dominant forces in our lives, and by viewing others as physical beings first, spiritual beings second if at all, we stop-up the pipeline to spiritual growth and connection.

But the good news is that even if these or other obstacles to prayer are present, *it is never too late to move closer to God.*

Hitbodedut

Talk to Hashem in your own words (*hitbodedut*) about the difficulties you're having with prayer, and ask Him to help you accomplish what you need to during the Days of Awe. Tell Him you are open to change and growth and ask Him to assist you.

Ask Hashem to help you recognize the *Tselem Elokim* of your noisy neighbor; to recognize His Hand in more and more moments of your life; to help you see the spiritual more than the physical and material.

You can talk/pray to God about *anything*, and ask for His help with everything, including your difficulties with prayer itself.

May you be blessed with a Good and Sweet New Year.

Shana Tova U'metuka.