

Kinder Torah

בס"ד

Parashas Voeschanan

Open My Lips

"Today is the big day, Mr. Moirah."
 "Yes it is Rabbi Potach. I have been preparing for this day for a long time. I requested an audience with the King over six months ago. I was finally informed four weeks ago that he would be able to see me today."
 "What an honor!"
 "Yes, Rabbi. I feel very fortunate."
 "Do you know what you are going to say?"
 "Yes. I have given it a lot of thought. First, I will praise His Highness by speaking of his greatness. Then I have a list of requests that I will ask him to grant. Finally I plan to thank him for all that he has done for me and given to me until now."
 "That sounds very respectful and appropriate Mr. Moirah."
 "I hope it works. I am very scared. The King is the most powerful person in the kingdom. I hope to find favor in his eyes. Even if he does not fulfill my request, I hope that I do not anger him and give him reason to punish me."
 "B'ezras Hashem, Mr. Moirah."

And so, the chosen hour arrives. Mr. Moirah is escorted from the gates of the royal grounds to the palace. There, another servant accompanies him to the King's chambers. He waits outside the door until he is summoned. He then enters the throne room to find himself alone with His Royal Majesty. The King, an awesome figure, sits high on his imperial throne. He is clothed in royal robes that are majestic beyond description. Perched on his head sits the regal crown, inlaid with countless jewels and precious gems. In his hand is the scepter with which he reveals his life and death decisions. His face bears an intense expression, totally focused upon Mr. Moirah, waiting to hear the words that his lips utter. The experience is totally awe-inspiring, and indeed, Mr. Moirah is petrified. He attempts to open his mouth to speak, but his lips will not move. They are paralyzed with fear.

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This story may help give a small insight into the proper state of mind before tefillah. "My Master (Hashem) open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise¹." Our sages ruled² that we say this verse before beginning the Amidah prayer. Why? The Siddur Shaar Harachamim cites the Alshich's commentary on the verse in parashas Voeschanan (Devarim 3:23). Moshe Rabbeinu's supplication teaches us how we must approach prayer before Hashem. A person must realize his lowliness and lack of perfection before the Blessed One. He must recognize that the extent of his obligations to serve the Al-

mighty are so vast, that even all of the good and righteous deeds that he has performed all of his life are not enough to pay back even one of the good things that Hashem has done for him. Therefore, a person cannot think that he merits blessings and salvation from Hashem; rather it is all a gift. No one is free of sin. His *aveyros* prevent him from receiving Hashem's goodness. How embarrassed he must be – like a thief caught in the act of stealing, who is asking for a gift from his victim! Finally, a person must contemplate the exaltedness and vastness of the One before Whom he is standing. He will then be seized with trembling and anxiety from the fear of the moment. He will be petrified and his lips will not move. Therefore, the first request that he must make is an appeal for *Siyata DiShmaya* (Heavenly assistance) to open his lips! Our fright prevents us from performing even that small action!



Once our mouth is open, what do we say? How can we even possibly hope to begin to describe the Almighty's Awesomeness? Therefore, we say the second half of the verse, "that my mouth may declare Your praise!" "Hashem, I need Your assistance to put the proper words into my mouth to express appropriate praises of Your Goodness!" And so, we can now begin the Amidah prayer. With Hashem's help, we can open our mouths and say the right words.

*Kinderlach . . .
 Fear is a precious commodity. It makes a person realize his ultimate powerlessness. This is the reality of this world. The Almighty is the All Powerful One in Whose hand everything rests. He is constantly good and kind to us, in spite of all of our mistakes. How can we ever hope to repay Him? To make a request based upon merit is pure folly. Therefore, before we stand before Him in prayer to make praises and requests, we must first contemplate our lowness and His Exaltedness. If we do this properly, we will be seized with trembling that prevents our lips from even opening! What can we say before the Almighty, Creator of the universe, King of kings, the*

Holy One Blessed be He? And so, our first request is for the Siyata Di'Shmaya to open our lips. We then ask that the appropriate words come out in heartfelt prayer before the Creator. Kinderlach, even an understanding and appreciation of this concept is worth a fortune. May you also be able to feel it with proper intensity.

Righter Than Rights

"Abba, you look so happy."
 "I am, Avi. I just saw a sign advertising a *machsan* (storage room) for sale. My office in our *machsan* is very crowded. I really need more room."
 Avi's father calls the number. Who answers the phone but his next-door neighbor, who owns the *machsan* next to his, in the basement of their building.
 "This is too good to be true. I can buy this *machsan*, which is right next to ours, and knock down the wall between them to make one huge room for my office."
 "Wonderful, Abba."

The neighbor, who is selling his machsan, has mixed emotions.

"I don't know what to do, dear. Our next door neighbor wants to buy the *machsan*. It would surely be good for him. However, someone else wants to buy it. What should we do?"

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"And you shall do the straight and the good (thing)" (Devarim 6:18). What is the straight and the good (thing)? Rashi explains that this is referring to compromise and going "before the letter of the law." When there is a dispute between two people, each side should try to compromise, and not insist upon his full rights. The Gemora (Bava Metzia 108a) speaks about a case where a neighbor wants to buy a field adjacent to his own. The seller must give him preference. It is much better to own adjacent fields, than scattered ones. So too, in the case of our *machsan*. It is much more convenient for Avi's father to own two adjacent *machsanim*. Therefore, the Rambam (Hilchos Shechanim 12:5) rules that the seller must sell to his neighbor because that sale is "straight and good."

*Kinderlach . . .
 "It's mine. I have a right to it." That is true. However is it always right to insist on your full rights? Compromise is a wonderful thing. Each side must give in a little. Therefore, sometimes giving up some of your rights is really right. Righter than rights.*

¹ Tehillim 51:17
² Gemora Brachos 4b and 9b