

Prayer as a Weapon #5

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

When Yaakov Avinu blessed his children, he said, "I took *Shechem b'charbi u'vekashti*," with my sword and arrow. Targum Unkelos translates *b'charbi u'vekashti* as "*b'tzeluti uvuati*, meaning with my prayers and requests. Prayer is a powerful weapon

In Tehilim, King David, one of the greatest formulators of Jewish prayer, uses the term *zemirot*, from the root word *zemer*, a song. *Zemer* can also mean to cut with a sword or knife or to prune. A *zemer* is a song with a cutting edge. It can break through all obstructions that prevent us from achieving our goals.

Whether it's praying for redemption, health, or whatever other things we are lacking, there are tremendous barriers. Prayer is like a sword that can pierce right through. Nothing can withstand the power of prayer. Not only does it bring blessing, but it can cause miracles to happen. Nothing can stop prayer, which works above natural law.

Chazal say, "*Afilu cherev chada munachat al tzavoro al tityaesh min harachamim*." Even if a sharp sword rests upon your neck, do not despair of Hashem's mercy. People at the brink of death have risen from their sickbed

through the power of prayer. Prayer is a sword, a powerful weapon that Hashem gave to us.

In the Shemonei Esrei, we say three times daily, "*Ki ata shomea tefilat amcha*." You listen to the prayers of your people. There's no prayer that goes unanswered. Even if a person thinks he wasn't helped, one day he will be. Moshe prayed 515 prayers to enter Eretz Yisrael. Although he himself did not merit to do so, his prayers weren't in vain. Every Jew who entered the land after him, did so on the strength of his prayers.

Netivot Olam I: Combating The Yetzer Hara #8

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

As our identity becomes entwined with the evil inclination, the *yetzer hara* becomes progressively stronger. A person must gird himself to fight against it. Rav Yitzchak said, "The *yetzer hara* renews itself every day." It makes sin seem new, when in fact there's nothing new about it. The good seems old, because good is part of the human essence, while evil is superimposed upon it. Good resonates in the deepest part of our self, which is ageless and eternal, while evil appears new because it doesn't exist inside ourselves. Evil by definition doesn't have existence. It conceals it and creates an illusion of darkness.

One of the best ways to fight the *yetzer hara* is by using its own method, by presenting the good inclination in new ways. The two most successful movements during the age of the Enlightenment were Chassidut and Mussar. Both took existent reality and dressed it up in new ways of discovering Hashem in the world and in ourselves.

The Chatam Sofer fought the Enlightenment with his motto, "*Chadash assur min haTorah*." He forbade innovative changes to Jewish practice. He made battle against those who had veered off the path innovative. In this way, he was able to rally his troops around him. Bais Yaakov too in its early days sold newness. It propagated the feeling of sisterhood and of discovering oneself in a Torah framework. This is our challenge today. We must find new and novel ways in our own

personal battles against the yetzer hara.

The *yetzer hara* is also called the satan and the *malach hamavet* (angel of death). We may mistakenly think that the *yetzer hara* is physical because it uses physicality as a tool. In reality the *yetzer hara* is spiritual. The tool of the *yetzer hara* is *chisaron*, lack. There are always lacks within ourselves and society. The satan points them out and gives us a new way to contend with it. We must be careful.

The feeling of *chisaron* is a real feeling, but its essence isn't real. The desire to fill the empty spaces is normal. The question is with what will we fill it. When we turn towards evil for a solution to our imperfections we create even deeper deficiencies.

The function of the *malach hamavet* is to take a person out of his body because his soul has no more purpose on this world. Our missions were fragmented after the sin of the *eitz hadaat* (tree of knowledge). We do things that put us in a place where there's no more reason to continue the battle. In this frame, our task is completed. Death is *tumah*, a blockage. It's not being able to interact with the world any longer. The *malach hamavet*, which creates the heaviest concealment and ends *bechira* (free choice) most completely, is a spiritual force generated by the *yetzer hara*'s reality.

Within us, there's an internal and external aspect. The internal is the soul and the

external is the desires of the body, which feel very basic and real to us. Often our boundaries are so shaky and our awareness of what's going on in our choice processes is so subtle that we have two voices that both sound like the real self. The part that wants dignity and *tzniut* (modesty) resonates as true, but the part that wants newness and attention feels true too because the self that desires is also there, although it's not the most essential aspect of who we are. It's a tough call and most of us don't succeed all of the time.

Bringing upon oneself thoughts of desire is more severe than actually sinning. As long as the thought process isn't involved, the essential self isn't involved. Our contact with our soul comes through thought. A person who makes the wrong choice may say, "I have to be me." Which side of who you are is really you? How deep are you willing to go to find yourself?

We've lost our sense of self. A person who brings evil of the mind upon himself won't dwell with Hashem because he's driven Hashem out of his consciousness. You can't be identified with good and evil at the same time.

The *yetzer hara* can drive a person out of both worlds. It cuts a person's reality off from this world and cuts him off from Hashem, who is the eternal and ultimate source of good.

Parshat Mishpatim: Brick Burden and Buoyancy

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

When Moshe, Aharon, his sons, and the seventy elders ascended Har Sinai, they saw a vision of Hashem. "Under His feet was the *livnat hasapir*," the sapphire brickwork. Rashi says that this brickwork served to remind Hashem of the suffering of the Jewish people in Egypt.

Rav Belsky asks why the bricks in this vision were made of sapphire and not of straw and mud like the bricks that caused the torment in Egypt? He explains, we tend to focus mainly on the redemption and the giving of the Torah, which were major events in Jewish history. However, the unpleasant Egyptian servitude also impacted the Jews in a deep way. Only a people who had experienced so much suffering could become Hashem's nation. In Hashem's eyes, every mud brick was a sapphire.

The capacity to transform difficulty into lessons of tremendous value is one of the greatest abilities a person can develop in life. Every painful experience has meaning and purpose. The greatness of a person is revealed when he takes those bricks of clay and transforms them into sapphire gems. Our challenge is turning our burdens into opportunities. How do we accomplish this?

The first way is to remember that eventually, in retrospect, we will understand everything.

When the sea split and the Jews saw the great hand of Hashem upon the Egyptians, they realized the meaning behind their suffering. The Chatam Sofer expounds this idea. Moshe asked Hashem, "Show me your ways." Hashem responded, "You shall see my back, but not my face." When we view things in historical perspective, we can understand the whole picture. On the sixth day of creation, the Torah says that Hashem looked at all that He had made and, "V'hinei tov moed" (And behold it was very good.) What was very good? Suffering. In the context of the six days of creation, you can see things in their entirety and then you can understand how affliction is really a blessing.

The second way is turning our suffering into trust. Trust is a result of emotional closeness, not intellectual understanding. Emotional intimacy allows one to live with an intellectual problem because one's trust is so great. When you feel Hashem is your loving father, you have a deeper sense of trust when seemingly bad things happen. Without knowing the why of our pain we can still find meaning in it and be consoled.

The third way is turning fate into destiny. Sometimes the only way to deal with tragedy is to transform it into opportunity.

The Baalei Mussar explain that the elders were shown the *livnat hasapir* because

Hashem wanted to tell them *Itcha anochi b'tzara*, (I am with you in your pain). Throughout the slavery in Egypt I was with you, and now I am with you in your joy as you receive the Torah. This is the attribute of *nosei b'ol im chaverio*, sharing in a friend's burden. This applies to feeling the suffering of others, and rejoicing in their joy. The entire parsha is predicated on this. It begins with how a master must treat his servant and ends with the *livnat hasapir*. When we can feel for another person, we've turned our bricks into sapphire, we've achieved redemption.

Rav Chaim Friedlander says that feeling along with another person is accomplished through shrinking the ego. *Nosei b'ol* is not only in the realm of emotions but in the realm of actions. If you can't help someone physically, you can still pray for them. The Sichot Mussar notes that just as Hashem had the *livnat hasapir* under his feet as a constant reminder, we too should create reminders for ourselves to think of others.

The *livnat hasapir* teaches us to turn our pain into opportunity, our suffering into moments of closeness to Hashem. We can create jewels in our life and feel the pain and joy of others. When we step out of our narrow constraints, we can make the suffering lighter. When we turn someone else's bricks into sapphire, we've turned our own too.

Achieving Balance Class #8

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

Question:

My eight year old son often hurts his friends with words. I know he's clearly acting out when he feels bad about himself. How do I balance giving rebuke and elevating his self-esteem?

Answer:

There are a few concrete things you can do.

Talk to him before or after he's in the act, but not while he is acting out. Catch him when he's available emotionally and tell him a thematic story. It could be about the animals in the barnyard who put down the weak horse or the

new Russian boy in cheder who was excluded.

You should convey the point that the good guy is the one who saves the persecuted ones.

Once he identifies with the good guy, then you can say, "I wish sometimes that I was like that." Many times when I read about heroes in the Holocaust who saved hundreds of people I wish I could be like them, but of course we can only do what we can. At least we should never hurt anyone or call them stupid or clumsy. Then list all the words he says without him knowing that you are talking about him. It may not work right away, but it's sure to enter his heart, even if he

doesn't give you any signs.

If you catch him stumbling again, you could tell him, "These are things we don't say. They hurt people's feelings." He already knows from your stories that that's what the bad guys do. He may say, "Yes, but he really is stupid." You could then respond, "That may be true, but how do your words make him feel? You're supposed to try to make him feel good. This upsets him."

If you've done the preliminary work, he'll get the message.