

1. "I love YHWH, Who hears my voice, my pleas; Who turns His ear to me..." (Psalms 116:1-2). In the simple sense of things, the "hearing of my voice and pleas" described here is the fulfillment of the request for which the pleas came. And of course, we should be alert to the fact that afterward, it says, "Who turns His ear to me", for the fulfillment of a request includes within it the turning of the ear. In the order of receiving prayer, the turning of the ear is a prior stage to the fulfillment of a request; therefore, the order of the verse is a diminution in stature in the order of receiving prayer. Of course, such a diminution would not fit the context here. Instead, we should approach this as follows. From within matters of the day we have recognized the amazing, new insight that sometimes it is specifically the proliferation of prayers that causes the prevention of the fulfillment of our hearts' desires in that prayer. Our Sages, of blessed memory, interpreted the claim, "Why are you crying out to Me?!" (Shemot 14:15), which was said to Moshe at the sea, to mean, *'Why are you praying for so long?'* (TB Sotah 37a, Rashi on Shemot 14:15). The light of our eyes, the Maharal, proved from this that in the middle of a prayer, he would not have been answered and therefore, it was demanded of him that he finish his prayer so that he could be answered. This new insight needs an explanation, for if, upon completing his prayer, he was fit to be answered, what kind of hindrance is it if he is still standing in that prayer? The justification of this claim we find in the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, who asked in a midrash about Israel's situation by the sea:

"Why did the Holy One do this to them? Because the Holy One craves their prayer. Said Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, what does this matter resemble? To a king who came on the road, where there was a princess crying out to him, 'Please save me from bandits!' The king heard her and saved her. After a few days, he asked to marry her – he craved that this woman would speak with him – but she did not want to. What did the king do? He provoked the brigands toward her so that she would cry out and the king would hear. When the brigands came to her, she started to cry out to the king. The king said to her, 'That's what I've been craving – to hear your voice.'" (Shemot Rabbah 21:5)

We see from this that prayer does not come on account of troubles; rather, troubles come on account of prayer. And it stands to reason that in the middle of prayer it is impossible to be answered, because that way, the salvation would be an interruption of prayer. And since the troubles came only in order to hear Israel's voice, it is understandable that it would be impossible for salvation to come at a time when it would be causing the interruption of that voice. Since Hashem's will is for the salvation

of Israel, thus came the claim "Why are you crying out to Me?!" – *'Why are you praying for so long?'* And this is an amazing matter toward explaining the value of short prayer, since the goal of a request is not the fulfillment of the request, but the point is the very fact of the request. Therefore, the request should not be interrupted even via fulfillment of the request itself.

2. We can continue this line further: even after the miracle has occurred and the soul sings songs over the fulfillment of the heart's desires in prayer, the soul does not cleave to the achievement of the request via prayer; rather, the soul holds onto the movement of closeness inherent in the hearing of its prayer, and it is just that the proof that it has been heard is the achievement of the request made in prayer. It is the way of the world that a person says, *'I am happy that, of course, my request will be fulfilled, and the proof of this is that he has inclined his ear to me.'* By contrast, in its song to God, the soul says, *'I rejoice that He has inclined His ear to me, and the proof of that is that my request has been fulfilled.'* "I love YHWH, Who hears my voice, my pleas, Who turns His ear to me..." This is not a diminution in the order of the acceptance of prayer from the ends to the means; on the contrary: there is an ascent in cleaving, from the signs of closeness to the essential fact of closeness. Just as from the side of Praised God, the trouble itself is nothing but a ruse in order to hear Israel's voice, so, too, from the side of the Community of Israel, the salvation itself is only a ruse through which to feel the inclination of the Omnipresent's ear. "I love YHWH, Who hears my voice, my pleas, Who turns His ear to me..."

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R. Shalom Noah Berezovsky (1911-2000, The Slonimer Rebbe), *Netivot Shalom*, Tefillah, 3:6.

Just as the holy Torah speaks to every single Jew, and to his every spiritual and physical situation, similarly prayer is independent of all spiritual situations and emotions of the heart. Rather, it is an all-encompassing that applies to every time and situation.

This can be explained by reference to a passage found in *Tanna Debe Eliyahu Rabbah* 17: “Four billion nine hundred and sixty million ministering angels stand from sunrise to sunset and declare: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole world is filled with His glory.’ And four billion nine hundred and sixty million ministering angels stand from sunset to sunrise and declare: ‘Blessed is the Lord’s glory from His place.’”

The commentators were troubled: what relevance do sunrise and sunset have above, in the angelic realm? After all, the sun is only part of this, the corporeal world! And further: why do they say “Holy, holy, etc. ...” from sunrise to sunset, and “Blessed is the Lord from His place” specifically from sunset to sunrise? And even beyond what they raised, there is another difficulty, in that we say: “As the sweet words of the assembly of the holy Seraphim who thrice repeat ‘holy’ unto You, as it is written by Your prophet: And they call one to another and say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with His glory.’ Those facing them offer praise and say, ‘Blessed be the Lord’s glory from His place’”—from which it is clear that the two groups of angels make their respective declarations all at once, at the very same time!

The explanation of this is that there are four billion nine hundred and sixty million ministering angels whose service above has the aspect of transparency (*behirut*)¹—that is, the aspect of sunrise. They see that the whole world is filled with God’s glory. And there are four billion nine hundred and sixty million ministering angels whose service is from a place of divine hiddenness, according to the aspect of sunset—in that they do not see transparently that God’s glory fills the whole world. They say:

¹ Lit. “effulgence”

“Blessed is the Lord’s glory from His place”—that is, even though they do not perceive that God’s glory fills the world, they nevertheless know that He is in His holy abode, and they proclaim, “Blessed is the Lord’s glory from His place.” Each of these groups makes its respective declaration, each one according to its root and essence. The first group [which sees God’s glory clearly] is not greater than the second [which does not see it], nor does one group speak with greater or lesser enthusiasm than the other, but rather each turns to the other [and they make their declarations together, simultaneously]...

Through this teaching, our Sages of blessed memory instruct us in the path of prayer: sometimes a Jew prays to God from the aspect of sunrise and sometimes from the aspect of sunset... It shouldn’t make any difference to one whether he feels with the entirety of his heart and flesh that God’s glory fills the world, and he sees the Creator, may He be blessed, everywhere in creation, or whether, in contrast, right now he only believes that “Blessed is the Lord’s glory from His place”—because, ultimately, they are one and the same. The same delight that God derives from one group, God also derives from the other. And so we also revere and sanctify according to the aspect of each of these groups, whether at a time of divine hiddenness or of divine manifestation, “our God is one God,” and the prayer we utter is pure and accepted like the sweet words of the assembly of the holy Seraphim.