*Parshas Vayikra* begins the *parshiot* of *avodah*, one of the three pillars that sustain the universe. The Ramban teaches that one felt humbled when he observed his *karbon* being consumed on the m*izbeach. Why?* Because he realized that the acts performed on the *mizbeach* should actually have been occurring to him, for ultimate justice demands death for any violation of the Al-lmighty’s *mitzvos.* Experiencing the demise of the animal aroused his heart to *teshuva* and self-improvement. Through the karbanos, the inner commitment of *Klal Yisroel* was strengthened.(Vayikra : 1:9)

Since the destruction of the second *Bais Hamikdash, karbonos* have been replaced by a different *avoda* called עבודה שבלב, The *Chachamim* expounded “You should love *Hashem Elokecha* with all of your heart... What is avodah of the heart? It is *tefilah* “(*Taanis* 2a). Prayer can be one the most spiritually elevating experiences possible. Hagaon Rav Shlomo Volbe explains that “avodas halev” does not begin in the heart. The heart is aroused through understanding (*binah*) who we are vis-a-vis our Creator and Infinite Benefactor. This should inspire us to submit to Him. (*Alei Shor-* First *Chelek*, *Perek Tefilah*).)The amount of stories regarding how *tefilot* saved people with serious illnesses and brought success with *shidduchim* would take up volumes.

However, dovening properly, presents challenges. Rav Shalom Schradron, זצ"ל, makes a poignant point through the following *mushul:*

 *A man, buying fruit and vegetables, at the marketplace, feels a bang on his chest. He continues shopping and immediately feels another jab. Wondering who could have done such a travesty, he realizes that he is the culprit. He had arrived at selach lonoo in Shemonah Esrai.*

So it is during *tefilah,* thatour thoughts wander all over the world. Sometimes the sound of the speed (of prayer) competes with the speed of sound. Dovening to the Hashem sometimes becomes a matter of rote. How do we rectify such circumstances? What do we teach our children?

Here are some ideas that might help improve our *tefilot:*

1. **Realizing Before Whom We Stand-** We have been given an opportunity to have a personal rendezvous with the *Rebono Shel**Olam***,** our Life Sustaining, Merciful and Awesome Creator. At the time of tefilah, it is very helpful to think that we are about to engage in the most important task in the universe. We stand before the *Melech* pouring out our hearts with petitions, praises and thanks. Usually, we cry out to the Al-lmighty to help us with our personal problems and woes. The following story provides a new dimension.

 *After the esteemed director of Ezer Metziyon, Rav Cholak finished sitting with a donor, he suggested that they pop over to the Kosel. They saw a man there shaking and dovening with great fervor. Rav Cholak mentioned to his friend “if there is a medical problem, I will take care of it. If it’s a financial difficulty, you’ll be on top of it.” The friend nodded his head.*  They approached the man and asked if anything was wrong. He replied, “Everything is fine.” *Continuing to tremble and doven intensely, Rav Cholak approached him again and queried, “But you appear to be in great distress.” “Oh no, he replied,”I just married off my last child. I came to pour out my thanks and praises to the Al-mighty.”*

2) **Develop a Familiarity with the Words**- If we don’t know the meaning of the Hebrew words, we should look them up in a dictionary or spend a certain amount of time each day studying from a linear *siddur.* It is very important to understand what we are saying and how it enhances our *kavanah.*

3) **Day and Night-** Rav Avrohom Schor*,shlita* stated that a tired person is equated to a home with four open doors. Fatigue opens more doors of distraction and gives the yetzer harah an advantage on the battle field. In the morning, a *ben Torah* awakes and instead of turning on the other side, realizes,”’HASHEM HAS RETURNED MY *NESHAMA*.”’ He accustoms himself to say *Modeh Ani* with *simcha* and jumps out of bed, against the gravitational pull of his blankets, for he has a vital mission to accomplish.

5) **Arrive at *Bait Knesset* on Time**- The *mispallel* has an especially important “meeting” to attend at a specific time. One of the most effective aids to a successful *dovening* is allowing the time to express one’s words with *kavana,* without worrying about keeping up with the pace.

 6) **Focus**. It is best for one to sit quietly in his seat, calmly, a few minutes before *dovening* begins. He puts all foreign thoughts out of his mind. Eyes glued to the siddur, he can follow the *tefilah* with his finger. - Rav Shimshon Pincus defines a Jew as one who develops a bond with his Creator. One of the optimum ways to accomplish this is through *tefilah*. (*Sichos-Pesach)*. If one yearns to develop this connection, that will with help all around.

7**) Do Not Despair if it’s Not Going as Planned-** The Chofetz Chayim conveys the following *mushul:*

*A person is given twenty minutes to fill bags with emeralds and precious jewels surrounding him. Realizing that he has “time”, he dozes off. He is jolted out of his stupor, with only five minutes remaining. Instead of giving up, he takes advantage of lost time by swooping up as many precious stones as possible.*

The Chofetz Chaim continues, the same applies by *davening*- if we suddenly find ourselves by A*l Hatzadikim in Shemonah Esrei*, we commencewith *kavanah* without worrying about what was lost.The *Gemara* (*Brochos* 32b) teaches that *tefilah* requires constant *chizuk*. Worrying about what we haven’t done can torpedo what we still can do! Besides, the Al-lmighty appreciates our efforts. Additionally, the Chozon Ish states that no *tefilah i*s lost.

How do we make *tefilah* a pleasant experience for our younger offspring? First, we must be paradigms. Secondly, it would be wise to explain to them purpose and importance of *dovening,* without making demands. Positive reinforcement is effective such as offering the child a *“*special*” kiddush after musaf.* When the child arrives at *shul*, we praise him for what he d*oes daven* and not criticize him for what he doesn’t. Guide them to associate with the right *chevra*. It’s a good idea to place one’s *tallis* around his son during *birkas kohanim.*

May Hashem help us to improve our *tefilah* and guide us in the right *derech* for our children.

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