*ParshasVayikra* begins the *parshiot*of *avodah*, one of the three pillars that sustain the universe. The Ramban (Vayikra 1:9) 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 KlalYisroel was strengthened.

Since the destruction of the second *BaisHamikdash, karbonos* have been replaced by a different *avoda*called עבודה שבלב, which the *Chachamim* expounded to mean *tefilah* (Gemara*Taanis* 2a). Prayer can be one the most spiritually elevating experiences possible. RavShimshonPincus (*Sichos-Pesach*) **defines** a Jew as one who develops a bond with his Creator. One of the most effective means to accomplish this is through*tefilah*. Furthermore, Hashen**desires** our tefilot.Hashen **listens** toour tefilot.He **answers** them**.** The amount of stories regarding how *tefilot* saved people with serious illnesses and brought success with*shidduchim* would take up volumes.

However, davening properly, presents many 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. Figuring, someone jabbed him by accident, he continues shopping. Another bang occurs jolts him into remembering that he is saying selachlonoo in ShemonahEsrai.*

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. Davening to our Life-Giving Source has sometimes become a matter of rote. How do we rectify such circumstances? What do we teach our children?

Here are some ideas from experience 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 *RebonoShelOlam***,** our Life Sustaining, infinitely Merciful, Powerful and Awesome Creator. We stand before the *MelechMalcheiHamlachim*to pour out our petitions, praises and thanks. An eye opening example is expressed in the following story:

*When the esteemed director of EzerMetziyon, RavCholak, was finished sitting with a donor, he suggested that they pop over to the Kosel. They saw a man there trembling and davening with great fervor. RavCholak mentioned to his friend “if there is a medical problem, I will take of it. If it’s a financial difficulty I’m sure you’ll be on top of it.” The friend nodded his head.* They approached the man and asked if anythingwas wrong. He replied, “Everything is fine.” *Continuing to shake and daven intensely, RavCholak approached him again and queried, “But you must be in distress.” Oh no, 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 one does not know the meaning of the Hebrew words, he should look them up in a dictionary or spend a certain amount of time each day studying from a linear *siddur.* It is immensely important to understand what one is saying.

3) **Get a Good Night’s Sleep-**RavAvrohomSchor*,shlita* stated that a tired person is equated to a home with four open doors. Fatigue opens more doors of distraction and helps our*yetzerharah* to be cleverer. Of course, fatigue also affects kavanah.

4) **Wake Up in the Morning with*Zerizus-***A Torah Jew opens his eyes and instead of turning on his other side, hethinks,”’HASHEMHAS RETURNED MY *NESHAMA*.”’ He says *ModehAni* with *simcha*and jumps out of bed, against the gravitational pull of his blankets, for he has a vital mission to accomplish. I recently heard a story from RavTzvi Meir Zilberberg,shlita:

R*avYechkezkelAbromsky was exiled to Siberia. Lying next to him was a misguided Yid who expressed cynically, “consider the situation you are faced with- backbreaking labor in the unbearable cold, no opportunity to do what you want, constant embarrassment, crumbs to eat, completely shut off from your way of life, unaware of what tomorrow will bring and in a few hours you will arise AND* ***say****ModehAni!??” RavAbromsky replied his voice rising to a crescendo, “*I will **a**rise and **say***ModehAni because it is another day to live with emunah and to show אין עוד מלבדו.”*

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 *davening* 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.

7**) Do Not Despair if it’s Not Going as Planned-**The ChofetzChayimconveys 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 in as many precious stones as possible.*

The ChofetzChaim continues,the same applies by *davening*- if we suddenly find ourselves by A*l Hatzadikim in ShemonahEsrei*, we catch ourselves and 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.

How do we make *tefilah* a pleasant experience for our younger offspring? First, we must be paradigms. Secondly, it would be wise to explain the importance of *davening,* 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. I place my *tallis*around my son during *birkaskohanim.*

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

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