

טז' מנחם אב, תשפ"ב / August 13, 2022 Parshat Vaethanan

Praying for the Ability to Pray

Deuteronomy 3:23

(23) I pleaded with ה' at that time,
saying,

דברים ג':כ"ג

(כג) וְאֶתְחַנֵּן אֶל־יְהוָה בְּעֵת הַהוּא
לֵאמֹר:

Rashi on Deuteronomy 3:23

חנן — All forms of the root ואתחנן (1) signify a free gift. Although the righteous might make a claim to reward based upon their good deeds, they solicit from God only a free gift. — Another explanation is that this is one of the ten terms by which prayer is called.

רש"י על דברים ג':כ"ג

(א) ואתחנן. אין חנון בכל מקום
אלא לשון מתנת חנם – אע"פ שיש
להם לצדיקים לתלות במעשיהם
הטובים אין מבקשים מאת המקום
אלא מתנת חנם; ד"א זה אחד
מעשרה לשונות שנקראת תפלה

**Commentary of Rabbi Pinhas Halevy
Horowitz, 18th-19th C
Galicia/German.**

It is possible to explain this according to the Sages (Brakhot 4): Rabbi Yochanan said: In the beginning--meaning in the beginning of the *shomneh esreh*--one says "God, open up my lips so that my mouth may declare your praise." And this matter is similar to that which is brought in the name of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa (Brakhot 34), who said "If my prayer is fluent in my mouth, I know that it is received."

Exodus 4:10

(10) But Moses said to God, "Please, my lord, I am not a man of words, either in times past or now that you have spoken to your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

Midrash Tanchuma, Devarim 2

**פרוש הפלא"ה, הרב פנחס הלוי
הורוויץ**

אפשר לבאר לפי חז"ל (ברכות ד):
אמר ר' יוחנן: בתחילה--בהתחלת
תפילת שמונה עשרה--אומר "ה'
שפתי תפתח ופי יגיד תהלתך."
ועניינו כמו שמובא בר' חנינא נן
דוסא (ברכות לד), שאמר "אם
שגורה תפילתי בפי יודע אני שהוא
מקובל." וזהו "ואתחנן אל
ה'--בהתחלה--לאמר." התחננתי
שאוכל לדבר, שה' שפתי יפתח.

שמות די:י

(י) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ה' בִּי אֲדֹנָי לֹא
אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אֲנִי גַם מִתְּמֹל גַּם
מִשְׁלָשִׁים גַּם יָמָז דְּבָרָךְ אֶל־עַבְדְּךָ
כִּי כְבֹּד־פֶּה וְכַבֵּד לְשׁוֹן אֲנִי:

(1) The mouth that said "I am not a man of words" said "These are the words..."

מדרש תנחומא, דברים ב'
(א) הִפֵּה שְׁאָמַר, לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים
אֲנִכִּי, אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים.

Various Thoughts on Prayer by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

"Prayer is arrival at the border. The dominion is Thine. Take away from me all that may not enter Thy realm." Man's Quest for God, p. 6

"We do not refuse to pray; rather we abstain from it. We ring the hollow bell of selfishness rather than absorb the stillness that surrounds the world...Futile self-indulgence brings us out of tune with the gentle song of nature's writing, of mankind's striving for salvation...We dwell on the edge of mystery and ignore it, wasting our souls, risking our stake in God." Ibid, pp 5-6

"The idea of prayer may seem to be the assumption of man's ability to accost God, to lay our hopes, sorrows and wishes before Him. But this assumption is a paraphrase, rather than a precise expression of what we believe. We do not feel that we possess a magic power of speaking to the Infinite; we merely witness the wonder of prayer, the wonder of man's addressing himself to the Eternal. Contact with Him is not our achievement. It is a gift, coming down to us from on high like a meteor rather than rising up like a rocket. Before the words of prayer come to the lips, the mind must believe in God's willingness to draw near to us, and in our ability to clear the path for His approach. Such belief is the idea that leads us towards prayer."

Review of Religion 9/2, 1945, p. 158

"The issue of prayer is not prayer; the issue of prayer is God." Quest, pp 74-75