



THE POWER OF TEFILAH

by Howie Weinstein

When I sat down to write this article we were in the second week of the war with Hezbollah in Lebanon. As I began to think about a topic, all my thoughts turned to the situation in *Eretz Yisroel*.

Many of us were asking questions. With its military superiority, why couldn't the IDF just blow Hezbollah away? Why was it bogged down in a land offensive with so many *kedoshim* killed and wounded? How could Hezbollah and Hamas continue to rain down hundreds of rockets every day, causing so many civilian casualties and sending a million residents retreating south? In the end, how could Hezbollah appear to be the victor? Are WE not the Chosen People? Wherein lies the strength of our Arab cousins?

As I too pondered these troubling questions, one image constantly came into focus: the cry of the *muezzin* calling thousands of Arabs to drop whatever they were doing and begin to pray – five times a day – with tremendous concentration. I recall our *Maggid shiur* several years ago discussing the power of 'Tefilah' of our cousins, and how we should learn from them.

At the outset, let me paraphrase HaRav Eliashiv Shlita who said, while discussing the current situation in *Eretz Yisroel*, there is no one reason, no one cause, no one remedy. Let me also say that the following words apply to me before anyone else. As we enter the period before the *Yomim Noraim* and seek ways to improve ourselves, perhaps there is another way we in *galus* can help our brothers in *Eretz Yisroel* fight off our enemies.

In the awesome *piyut* of *ונתנה תקף* (*unetaneh tokef*) on Rosh Hashana, we call out three ways we can repeal or reduce the harsh decrees of Hashem toward *Klal Yisroel* in general, and toward us as individuals:

”ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה מעבירין את רע הגזרה”

(But *teshuva*, *tefillah* and *tzedaka* will cancel the stern decree).
Two are physical and material, the third spiritual.

Above the first three words, the Machzor lists the key to understand them. *Teshuva* refers to fasting, as we indeed fast on Yom Kippur, Tisha B'av, and the other fast days. For some it is difficult, for others easy. But this is a limited, physical act that we do. *Tzedakah* refers to money, as we give charity for *Kol Nidre*, for *Yizkor*, daily and at other special times throughout the year. To this summer's emergency and other emergency campaigns in the past we gave generously. Could we give more? Undoubtedly, but we give and support Israel this way. These two are the physical and material means to appeal to Hashem.

Tefilah refers to prayer. Yes we daven with *kavanah* – with concentration – throughout the *Yomim Noraim*, but what about the rest of the year? This summer, with the Rabbi and others away, I was asked to give the short *halacha* after *Shacharis* for a few days. “Pick anything,” I was told. I took the *Shulchan Aruch* and it opened up to the *halachos* of *Tefilah*. We are told that when we daven *Shmoneh Esrei* we have to banish all extraneous, everyday thoughts, and concentrate on the meaning of the words of all the *berachot*. If we can't do that, at least concentrate on the *chasimah* – the conclusion of each *beracha*. If we can't do that, at least concentrate on the meaning of the entire first *beracha*. This was also the content of a Friday Night *halacha shiur* given by Rabbi Muskat during the winter. This is not a limited, physical act, but requires constant intent to improve. This is the spiritual element of appeal to Hashem.

If we make the effort to improve our *tefillah* we are on the road to be inscribed in the Book of Life, to counter the strength of the Muslim faithful, to bring peace and security to *Eretz Yisroel*, and hasten the coming of the *Moshiach*, *bimhera b'yameinu*.

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