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“And Your Holy Spirit, Do Not Take From Me”

In the *Selichos*, we ask Hashem, **אל תשליכני מלפניך, ורוח קדשך אל תקח ממני**, - “Do not cast me away from before You, and Your holy spirit, do not take from me.” We are asking Hashem not to take away His holy spirit (*ruach hakodesh*) from us.

What kind of *ruach hakodesh* is this referring to? Is it referring to the high level of *ruach hakodesh* that comes all the way at the end of the ladder of growth which the Sage Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair describes, as brought in *Mesillas Yesharim*?

Simply speaking, we can answer that the *tefillah* here is applicable to those rare individuals who do reach *ruach hakodesh*. If we go with that answer, then *Klal Yisrael* is *davening* to Hashem that He should not take away the *ruach hakodesh* from those individuals.

According to this approach, though, it is not a personal request, and it is rather a request for the whole of *Klal Yisrael*. If so, though, why do we say “do not take from *me*”, which implies that it is something that applies to us as individuals?

Our Ruach\Bechirah

It is written, “A pure heart You created me with, and a proper spirit You prepared within me.” Every person has in himself a “*ruach*”, a life spirit, which Hashem has breathed into him. When a person dies, his *ruach* returns to its Source. But as we live, the *ruach* of Hashem lives within our body and keeps us alive.

The Vilna Gaon explains that it is essentially our power of *bechirah*, our power to choose. Whenever we choose, we are choosing from the power of our *ruach* that is found within us. But the Gemara says that every day, the *yetzer hora* gets stronger, and it wants to destroy a person; and if not for Hashem helping the person, the person cannot overcome it.^[1]

A person has *bechirah*, he has a *ruach*, but the *yetzer hora* is stronger than one’s *bechirah*. A person really cannot defeat the *yetzer hora*. The only way to defeat it is when Hashem is helping the person. Hashem helps the person fight the *yetzer hora*. How does Hashem help a person? Through His “*ruach hakodesh*” that He instilled in each person.

Our own *ruach\bechirah* is not strong enough to defeat the *yetzer hora*. The help that Hashem gives us to fight evil passions can only be through His *ruach hakodesh* that He placed within us. When it is

accessed, the light of Hashem is shined upon the person, and then the *yetzer hora* can be defeated.

Choosing between good and evil will not help, because the *yetzer hora* is stronger. But Hashem helps the person through giving Him his own *ruach*, His "*ruach Elokim*". When a person is trying to choose to do the right thing, Hashem helps him and gives the person of His own *ruach* to fight the *yetzer hora*. When a person really wants to do good and choose good, Hashem then steps into the picture and gives Him a *ruach* that is far stronger than the person's natural *ruach* he is born with.

The person is the one choosing to do good, but the *ruach* within him is still not strong enough to fight the *yetzer hora*. Only when Hashem gives the person His *ruach* does the person become enabled to actually defeat the *yetzer hora*.

So we are not dealing with the high level of *ruach hakodesh* that Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair describes. We are referring to a far more basic level of *ruach hakodesh*, which Hashem places in each Jew - as long as the person chooses to do good.

We must absorb this idea and internalize it. First we need to understand it and then we need to actually feel it (it should be turned from *daas* of our brain into *daas* of the heart).

Choosing Good Over Evil: We Cannot Do It On Our Own

Every time a person chooses, sometimes he chooses good, and sometimes, he chooses evil, *rachamana litzlan*. But the main issue lies in what we are thinking as we are about to choose what to do. Even when one chooses good over evil, if he thinks that it's coming from our own power, this is the root of why we fall.

Man should never think that his own *ruach* is strong enough to defeat the *yetzer hora*. If he does, he's already setting himself up for failure. He might be full of conceit and tell himself that "I can do anything!" but the truth is, Chazal say that the *yetzer hora* is stronger^[2]. Our *bechirah* is essentially to realize that we need the *ruach elokim* of Hashem to help us.

When we ask of Hashem for forgiveness, from our sins - each to his own - it appears to simply be a request that we be forgiven for the *actions* of what we did which were improper. But the inner meaning of it is to ask Hashem for forgiveness over the *reason* that caused us to sin.

It is not mainly about what happened, what action of sin the person did; it's mainly about the reason that causes one to fall in the first place. This is because if one uproots the sin but he didn't uproot the reason that caused him to sin, he will just keep sinning again. But if he uproots the reason that brought him to sin, then he will have no reason to sin again.

What does it mean to do *teshuvah* over the reason that made one sin? We are not talking about someone who sins intentionally. We are speaking about a person who wants to do the right thing, but that his evil inclination overcame him, as it is with all of us, each to his own. What is the root of the matter?

From the prayer of "*Do not cast me away from before You*", we can understand what the root of sin is. The root of why people succumb to evil, Chazal say, is because of the *yetzer hora*, and that the *yetzer hora* gets stronger every day, and if not for Hashem's help, a person cannot overcome it^[3]. Why does a person fall as he's choosing between good and evil? It is because he didn't have Hashem's help with him.

Hashem's Power - Within

One kind of fall is where a person never wanted to choose the right choice to begin with. He simply fulfills the evil desire without even trying to choose between good and evil. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that this is a kind of person who is living his life on the wrong path, thus his *teshuvah* is that he will have to uproot himself entirely from the way he's living. We are not talking about this kind of person.

We're talking about the kind of person who really wanted to do the right thing (such as most people who grow up in the *frum* Torah world), but he fell to his *yetzer hora*. After all, there are *nisyonos* (trials) that a person faces. What was the reason a person fell to the sin? It was because Hashem wasn't in the picture.

Had he enlisted Hashem's help, he would have been able to defeat the *yetzer hora* when it attacked. Without Hashem in the picture, a person is torn between his *bechirah*: "Should I do it? Should I not do it? Should I do it? Should I not do it..." He can't take the pressure anymore of having to decide, and at some point, he falls to the *yetzer hora's* voice.

Had he put Hashem into the picture, he wouldn't have fallen. If he did fall, it must be because he didn't reveal Hashem's Presence in his situation.

But why wasn't Hashem in the picture? Don't Chazal say that Hashem helps a person overcome the *yetzer hora*? It is because Hashem doesn't always help the person when he's facing his *yetzer hora*. One has to enlist Hashem's help by turning to Him from beforehand. It is when one recognizes the *ruach Elokim* that is really within him. Hashem's holy Spirit is placed within man, and it only needs to be accessed. It is found in the depths of one's soul.

When one is choosing between good and evil, and he turns to Hashem for help, he must not think that he can overcome the *yetzer hora* from his own strength. He must recognize that it is only Hashem who can fight his war for him.

If a person wants to choose the right thing and he attempts to wage war with the *yetzer hora* on his own, he will surely fail. But when one deeply believes and realizes that he really cannot do it on his own - as our Sages say that it's impossible to win the *yetzer hora* without Hashem's help - and along with this, he also realizes that the *ruach Elokim* of Hashem is found within him and that it can help him, and that only Hashem's power can help him - only with this perspective can a person overcome the *yetzer hora*.

On the same note, if someone did overcome his *yetzer hora*, he must not think that it was his own power of *bechirah* that enabled him to win. It didn't happen simply because he chose to listen to the right thing. He must feel that it was only because of Hashem's help that he was able to win. Hashem must have given him the strength of heart to be able to succeed over the *yetzer hora*.

In all of the *nisyonos* (trials) that a person faces with his *yetzer hora*, it is not enough to simply intellectually realize that we need Hashem's help to win. It must be a recognition of our heart, that any time we succeed over the *yetzer hora's* arguments, we must feel that it is only because Hashem helped us.

In Summary

So it looks like this. As one is facing a particular *nisayon* with his *yetzer hora*, he must turn to Hashem and request His help. And after he has succeeded, he must feel and recognize that it was only Hashem who gave him strength to win.

Thus, the main aspect of falling to a sin, which we ask forgiveness from Hashem for, is when we don't enlist Hashem's help, and we think that we do it all alone, as if we are mighty and strong and that we

can do it on our own. But that is the root reason of why we fall to a sin. When we think we are alone, we fall. We must remember that Hashem is with us, and then we can withstand.

“Do not cast me away from before You.” When a person has a *nisayon* with his *yetzer hora*, if Hashem casts him away, he has no chance in defeating the *yetzer hora*, because he cannot do it on his own. Thus we ask Hashem not to be cast away. It is a prayer that encompasses all of our life, but it is especially applicable to our *nisyonos* with the *yetzer hora*. When we find ourselves in a *nisayon* with the *yetzer hora*, we need to have Hashem’s help.

And then we ask Hashem, *“And Your holy spirit, do not take from me”* – because if we don’t reveal Hashem’s holy spirit that has been placed within us, we do not have the power to defeat the *yetzer hora*.

Preparing

Therefore, whenever we have a *nisayon* with the *yetzer hora* – and on a more subtle note, it is not only when we have the *nisayon*, but even **before** the actual *nisayon* comes – we must recognize and feel that Hashem is with us, and we must draw upon His Presence as He is with us in our *nisayon*. Then we can turn to Him for help.

In whatever *nisayon* we face, we must examine ourselves deeply and ask ourselves if we think we can do it on our own, or if we realize that it’s only Hashem who can help us succeed. If one feels that it is Hashem’s power within him that can help him, he wouldn’t fall to the sin. If he did fall to the sin, it must have been because he did not reveal the *ruach Elokim* within him.

The Plan

We ask Hashem for forgiveness, and we must certainly feel remorse over the action of the sin. But the main thing we ask forgiveness for is for the reason that brought us to sin. The reason we sinned was because we didn’t bring Hashem into the picture, for had we enlisted Hashem’s help, we never would have fallen to the sin.

If a person just asks Hashem to be forgiven for his sins of the past year but he continues his life as usual, thinking that he’s alone in his struggles with his *yetzer hora*, there’s no doubt that he’ll continue to fall again and again. He is missing the point of why we ask Hashem for forgiveness.

He must learn to take a new route than what he is used to in his *nisyonos*. We ask Hashem not to take away His holy spirit from us, and this is an actual power we can feel as we find ourselves in a *nisayon* with the *yetzer hora*. The more a person feels Hashem as a reality as he’s in a *nisayon*, and he feels that his own *ruach* cannot win, he can then turn to Hashem in prayer and ask Hashem that He not remove His holy spirit from him. From this recognition and from this prayer, one will be able to succeed over the *yetzer hora*.

The more a person thinks he is alone in his struggle with the *yetzer hora*, the more he is in danger of falling. But the more he realizes that he can only succeed in life with Hashem’s help, and especially when it comes to his *nisyonos* with his *yetzer hora*, he will be able to succeed, when a *nisayon* comes.

Thus, when we come to ask Hashem for forgiveness over our sins, we must build for ourselves a way for the rest of the year in which we can succeed.

In Conclusion

These words are not here to be mere inspiration; it is a way of life. If it is inspiration, then it will only

last for some time, and then you will need new inspiration when it comes next Rosh HaShanah.

But if we turn this into a way of life – when we recognize that we need to always include Hashem in all the parts of our life, including our darkest struggles, and that Hashem is near us and with us – as real and as palpable as can be – we will then receive the strength from Hashem to overcome.

May we merit from Hashem, all of us together with the rest of *Klal Yisrael*, that we should not ever feel that we are alone when the *yetzer hora* attacks. Rather, Hashem is near you, and with you. When we draw upon His Presence, we can then merit Hashem’s help to overcome the *yetzer hora*’s temptations. May all sin be removed from the world, whereupon Hashem’s Presence and Glory will be fully revealed upon the world.^[4]

[1] Sukkah 52a

[2] Sukkah 52a

[3] ibid

[4] Editor’s Note: In relation to this *derasha*, see ***Tefillah #0149 (Source of Your Strength)*** and ***Tefillah #0155 (Seeing The Daily Miracles)***, and ***Getting To Know Your Thoughts #017 (Using Imagination For Holiness)***.