



*For crying out loud*

# Unlocking our **POTENTIAL**

Recognising what we need...and asking for it

**BY ROBERT SUSSMAN**

**THE IDEA FOR THIS COLUMN WAS BORN OUT OF** a casual conversation that took place at last year's Sinai Indaba. While waiting for one of the speakers to begin, I casually chatted with the woman sitting next to me, who bemoaned the fact that she would inevitably spend her time in shul talking to those around her, rather than participating in the davening. Why? Because she found the davening to be something with which she simply could not connect – irrelevant, hollow words. I encouraged her to seek out the rabbi of her shul and ask

him to start a shiur (class) on davening.

Whether or not she ultimately did so, I realised that this magazine affords an opportunity to reach a much larger audience of people who are perhaps struggling with the very same issue. There are, no doubt, great and obvious limitations to what can be accomplished in this format. There is also no substitute for a proper shiur or in-depth study from primary sources. That said, I pray – pun very much intended – that some of the ideas discussed here will inspire readers to further study and more shiurim surrounding this topic.

## **THE STRUGGLE OF OUR GENERATION**

Each generation has its own unique struggles. Many of us can share memories – and even hard, physical evidence in the form of tear-stained pages of Siddurim and Tehillim (Psalms) – of grandparents and great-grandparents davening with all of their might and, quite lit-

erally, crying their eyes out to Hashem. In our generation, however, such a thing is rarely the case. We struggle greatly to connect with our Maker and with the holy words contained in both the Siddur and Tehillim, which have been passed down to us, at least in part, to facilitate a connection with Him. The struggle with davening can, without a doubt, be counted amongst the greatest struggles, if not the greatest struggle of our generation and one which we, consequently, suffer from as a result. Suffer for not davening?

## **ACTUALISING THE POTENTIAL OF OUR WORLD**

The Torah tells us that Hashem created the world with the potential built into it for vegetation to sprout forth. Hashem had sown the entire earth with vegetation, but none of it sprouted and grew. The potential to grow was there, but something was impeding the process from starting. It was only after Adam HaRishon, the first man, was created and subsequently recognised that the world needed such things as trees and vegetation – and then proceeded to take the time to daven to Hashem for them, that the trees and vegetation actually sprouted from beneath the surface of the earth.

The lesson? Had Adam HaRishon not recognised this void that existed in the world and then davened for it to be fixed, the trees and vegetation with which Hashem had seeded the earth would never have sprouted; their potential would never have been actualised.

## **ACTUALISING OUR OWN POTENTIAL**

And there are other places in the Torah where we see a similar lesson. It's well known that when G-d first called



**“SOMETIMES THE LIMITATIONS WE FACE IN LIFE ARE ENTIRELY SELF-IMPOSED. IF A PERSON WANTS G-D'S HELP, HE NEED ONLY ASK FOR IT. IF WE DON'T ASK, THEN WE DON'T GET.”**

upon Moshe to approach Pharaoh and to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, Moshe responded that he was “not a man of words” – that he was “heavy of mouth and heavy of speech”. After the Jewish people failed to listen to him, Moshe told G-d – not once, but twice – that he had “sealed lips”. How did G-d respond? Don’t worry, I’ll be with your mouth and teach you what to say.

The Ramban ask a seemingly obvious question: Why did G-d only offer to help Moshe with his speech? Surely, G-d, who is All-Powerful, could have simply fixed Moshe’s mouth so that he could speak without any sort of impediment? The answer given is simply frightening: Moshe never prayed for such a thing! Instead, Moshe chose to use his speech impediment as an excuse, rather than as an opportunity for growth and change. Sometimes the limitations we face in life are entirely self-imposed. If a person wants G-d’s help, he need only ask for it. If we don’t ask, then we don’t get.

Just as with the earth, the potential for great things lies just underneath the surface when it comes to each of us as well. It’s up to us to recognise our potential and to turn to Hashem and ask for His help to make it a reality, to move it from potential to actual.

### **PRAYER SETS THE TONE FOR OUR ENTIRE DAY**

Although the primary place for prayer is shul, prayer actually doesn’t even begin there, nor should it end there. For a Jew, prayer begins from the very moment that we open our eyes while still lying in our beds and continues throughout our entire day until the very moment that we find ourselves back in our beds, closing our eyes.

Speaking a couple of years ago at a graduation ceremony at the University of Texas, Retired US Admiral William McRaven shared 10 life lessons that he had learned from the Navy’s basic training programme for its elite SEAL team.

First on the list was what he called the simple, mundane task of making one’s bed – corners square, covers pulled tight, pillow centred just under the headboard, and the extra blanket folded and placed at the foot of the rack – day-in and day-out. “It seemed a little ridiculous at the time, especially in light of the fact that we were aspiring to be real warriors, tough, battle-hardened SEALs.” McRaven eventually learned many lessons from this simple task, among them, “If you make your bed every morning, you will have accomplished the first task of the day...and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. And, by the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed.” Making one’s bed each morning sets a tone and a direction for the entire day.

So too, prayer – from the very moment that we open our eyes as we are still laying half asleep in bed – sets a tone for our entire day. **■**

*Relax, you're with us*



**PREMIER®**  
HOTELS & RESORTS

INTERNATIONAL

🌐 World 🌐 Class 🌐 Africa 🌐

Whether you're with us for business, leisure or a family holiday,  
**Premier Hotels & Resorts' wide range of quality destinations offer you the best of all worlds.**

Introducing Kosher facilities at Premier Hotel Cape Town

By arrangement only. Send your Kosher enquiries and bookings to [kosher@premierhotels.co.za](mailto:kosher@premierhotels.co.za)

**Central Reservations: 086 111 5555 | [info@premierhotels.co.za](mailto:info@premierhotels.co.za) | [www.premierhotels.co.za](http://www.premierhotels.co.za)**