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[Home](#) > Tefillah - 080 Sifting Out Good & Evil

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Asking Hashem For A Good Year

וכו ברכך עלינו וכו' את השנה הזאת לטובה וכו' - Bless upon us Hashem our G-d, this year, for good."

In this blessing, we keep repeating our request for a good year. We mention three times that we want Hashem to give us a good year. What exactly is this "good year" that we keep asking for?

Becoming A 'Container' To Receive The Heavenly Illuminations

In order to receive substance from Heaven, we need to prepare ourselves by becoming a container that will receive the spiritual light. If we ask for a good year but we are not trying to head towards it, this is a contradiction. If we make ourselves into a proper container that will receive what Hashem can put into it, we will be able to receive the Heavenly substance He can give us. But without making ourselves into the proper container, nothing can go into our container.

We all have situations that we ask Hashem for salvation. Are we asking Hashem from an inner place in ourselves, because we simply have wants, or because we are really working towards our spiritual aspirations? We all have desires for holiness. People like to go to the Kosel and to *kivrei tzaddikim*. Are we asking Hashem for things simply because we have *retzonos* (aspirations for holiness), or because we are actually working towards those goals? Are we building our souls along with our tefillos for spiritual success? People are asking for Hashem for all kinds of spiritual success but they are not always working towards those goals. Thus, their tefillos don't always emanate from the depths of the soul.

Ever since Adam sinned, Creation became a mixture of good and evil. There is always *shelo lishmah* in our mitzvos. The Chovos HaLevovos says that the *yetzer hora* is always intertwined in whatever we do – in our actions, and even in our entire psyche. The *yetzer hora* entered our entire psyche ever since the first sin, so evil is mixed into everything, even with good.

Thus, when we ask for a "good year", we are really asking for a truly good year – that Hashem should return the world to the state of before the sin, in which the world was entirely good, where there is no evil mixed in to anything.

Our Avodah: To Keep Sifting Out The Evil

The avodah of all the *tzaddikim*, throughout all the generations, was always to sift out the evil from the good in everything.

For example, a person might be learning Torah and do mitzvos and feeling good from this, thinking that his life is totally pure, but this is only one side of the coin. A person has to also be able to see how evil is mixed into everything he does, for since everything is a mixture of good and evil, we need to see the good and evil contained in something, and not see everything as black-or-white. Everything is a mix.

For example, even the act of wearing Tefillin is not always a completely good act. A superficial person says "What's the big deal? Wearing tefillin is completely good." But the truthful perspective is that even the act of wearing tefillin must contain some evil in it, for every act is a mix of good and evil. The person who is wearing the tefillin, for example, might not be having the best intentions.

That is just one example of how something which seems like a completely good act can also be seen as something that contains some evil in it too. The point is that there is no act which is completely pure and good. You need to see the pros and cons of each thing you encounter and then separate yourself from the evil you find.

This is not something you should merely "know" about; it is a perspective to have towards life and with which to live life with.

Every day we encounter much evil. Except for the Torah itself, there is evil in everything. The Torah itself contains no evil, but evil can still creep into our learning. For example, it says on the front page of a sefer that the sefer was printed on pages that were not produced with *Chilul Shabbos* – that's what we hope! We don't know for sure! In addition, our actual learning can have all kinds of motivations mixed in with it that contain some evil.

What does it mean to have *Yiras Shomayim*? It is to fear sin, and on a deeper note it is for fear the One who commanded me not to sin. But to understand it even deeper, *Yiras Shomayim* is to understand that everything in Creation is a mix between good and evil, and thus everything we encounter needs to be examined. Thus, there is always reason to be afraid, because since there is evil mixed in with everything, a Jew always has reason to be afraid. That is the meaning of *Yiras Shomayim*.

Our avodah is to try to live in a clear world (as one of the Sages said, "You see a clear world") to always sift out the evil from the good in every mixture. The lifestyle of the current world is not the true kind of life; when a person never reflects, he has no idea what we are talking about here, and what's so bad with the world today, what the big fuss is all about.

We need to see how each thing consists of good and evil and get used to realizing that everything is multi-faceted. There is good and evil in everything in Creation.

Evil Influences That Are Creeping In

Everything from the outside world is entering our society. The evil is entering more and more into our society. It's hard to get into all the details of this, but it's astounding. As soon as a new product comes out in the world, people try to make it *kosher*....

Right now there is a decree on us, and it affects our physical safety. But there are plenty of threats to our *spiritual situation*, which are no less real than the threats to our physical life!

Why aren't people aware of the dangers to our spirituality? In the situation we are in, it is not just that we are in a danger – we are in a situation in which *there is no natural way for us right now to be saved!* We are faced with temptations that have to do with committing the three cardinal sins. And there are other matters which have become trampled by the masses that are no longer considered to

be of value. These are things which are a mixture of good and evil, and people think there is nothing wrong with these things. We need to be clear what the dangers are in each matter. There are things which are not forbidden according to Halacha, and they are rather a mixture of good and evil, but they endanger us no less than something that is explicitly forbidden.

The true way life is supposed to look is to live a life like the Avos. We must be clear what is good and what is evil in something. In all food, for example, there is good and evil in it. (This is not about eating "to sift out the *nitzotzos*" (sparks)).

I am not talking about what the general public has to do in order to stop the decrees. The public cannot be saved naturally; only Hashem will be able to save the general public from the decree. But each individual has the power to use his free will and save himself from spiritual danger. In each thing we encounter, we must see how it is made up of good and evil. The fact that something has a "*hechsher*" doesn't mean it is good. We must see the pros and cons of each thing we encounter. Each day, we encounter various things that are very threatening to our spirituality,

In Conclusion

When we ask Hashem for a good year, we need to ask for a good year that is according to Hashem's will, and that is the meaning of a good year. We need to keep sifting out the good and evil - within ourselves. According to how much we sift out ourselves, that is how much blessing we will merit from Hashem, *middah k'negged middah*.

May we merit to sift out the good and evil in everything, not just now in the end of the month of Adar, but all the time. Our entire life must be a constant sifting process, to constantly see the pros and cons of each thing we encounter, and to separate ourselves from the evil that is in each thing.

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