



**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS**  
*Perek 2 Mishna 13*

**CONVERSATIONS WITH HASHEM**  
*Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita*

A family simchah always comes with its own brand of mixed feelings. There is so much we invest in our loved ones, and when we celebrate special occasions that input is heightened. As I write these words we are basking in the aftermath of a great grandson's bar mitzvah, and the butterflies are still fluttering in my stomach. A wise rav once pointed out that humans are unique in that they feel attached to their grandchildren whereas no other creature in the world does. There may be other creatures that care for their young, but never do they kvell over their grandchildren.

Our young today are blessed with so much, yet in many ways they face great poverty. I don't mean in a financial sense, though at this moment in time much is being said about the precarious state of the world's economy. No, I mean it in a spiritual sense. Our Yeshivos and Bais Yaakovs give their students reams of information, and the average child has access to more than any previous generation, yet...well, something seems to be lacking.

There was a time when we were taught that mitzvos were tools for becoming conscious of Hashem and His constant care. A Yid made a blessing with heartfelt thanks, because his reality was one that strove for constant awareness of Hashem's gifts. Those in previous times reached out to Hashem consistently; they knew Hashem was within them, part of their every act. Somehow we have drifted away from all this; our technological prowess has somewhat desensitised our inner soul's striving for Hashem's participation in our daily life. I recently read that three out of four adults say they have suffered from depression and anxiety in the past. I'm certain the crises brought on by the pandemic has much to answer for, and the emotional havoc it wrought will take time to heal. The level of material wealth that so many enjoyed before all this has made us even more wary and fragile. It may well be that in acquiring all this material stuff we have become unhinged from the realisation that everything is transient. Only the knowledge that in fact

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everything is Hashem's and whatever He gives us is for our benefit, can we create a greater bond with Him. We all remember when the world was in shock and Torah Yiden promised themselves that we would never go back to the chaotic 'normal times'? Well, what ever happened to all those well-meaning hopes? It seems we have quickly returned to business as usual, and the old 'normal' is back in full swing. This slippage is spreading and we must stop the spiritual leaking before we all sink.

One special bridge that is meant to close this spiritual gap is prayer. Reaching into our soul, having a real conversation with our Father Hashem, creates the realisation that we are truly His children, asking Him for strength and comfort. All too often we babble through our tefillos with one eye on the clock and the other on our mobile phone. The deep sigh of a child seeking his Father is lost, and instead we spend time waiting to get on with the day's next task.

I know I sound old and outdated, like those old timers who can't get used to the new and real world. I accept this in good grace but with a broken heart. This new world is a colder place, and sometimes the chill runs through us all. Our prayers are keys to so very much, the words steeped with warmth and love. We need a connection with Hashem more than ever, and yet so much seems to have become only about the length of one's coat or the colour of one's hat. Our young need to be given their own set of miraculous keys, so that they won't be swept away in the ashes of the mundane.

We all face trials that stretch our minds and sear our hearts. Without the ability to cry out, "Father!" – How can we begin to find light? Yet the rolling thunder that is today's society deafens our senses to all that is hope, and we remain tossing in the sea of self-doubt.

This Mishnah tells us: "Rabbi Shimon says: Be careful in reading the Shema and the Shemoneh Esrei when you pray. Do not regard your prayer as a fixed, mechanical routine but as an appeal for mercy and grace before Hashem, as it is said: 'For He is gracious and full of great mercy, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, and relenting of the evil decree.' And do not consider yourself a wicked person."

The Mishnah brings sheer joy to every soul withering away in the torment of doubt. Speak to Hashem, dear children, for His love for you is beyond comprehension. Cry out with humility, knowing that He is in your heart, waiting to offer the healing balm of His truth. No man need feel so far removed that he can't call out, for Hashem knows where you are and is still your Father. We have no right to consider ourselves wicked as long as we are able to remain in spiritual conversation with our loving Creator.

We all know that the first Mishna in Shas opens with the discussion of when it is time to read the Shema at night. A "gutta Yid" once told me that, of all the subjects available to begin the learning of Mishnayos, why is this particular area the one chosen to be discussed first? His answer was that when a youngster becomes Bar Mitzvah, Shema is the very first mitzvah he will encounter. Right from the start, we learn that prayer is about being conscious of Hashem; it starts at the very first moment, and hopefully it grows.

I am an Alter Ziedah, kvelling along with the best of my species, praying that this young man's Shema will be the first of a long lifetime of intimate sharing with Hashem.