

PRAYING with *Fire*

PRAYER POINTS



Insulting God

Don't be afraid to ask.

by [Rabbi Benjamin Blech](#)

It's that time of year again – academia is sending forth another generation of graduates.

In time-honored tradition, prominent guest speakers launch them out into the world with words of wisdom meant to inspire the young men and women ready to begin their careers.

I love to read synopses of these contemporary guides to the perplexed. Many of them are merely clichés dressed up in fancy clothes. But some are truly profound messages that bear listening to, not only by the graduates starting out in life but all of us as well.

And this year I struck gold. One of the guest speakers, addressing those getting their degrees at the College of William and Mary, illustrated an idea that long-ago changed my life. Speaking from the perspective of an extremely successful businessman, he echoed a concept that my teacher shared with me many years ago.

I was a very young boy and I didn't understand something we learned about Moses. The Torah tells us Moses was "heavy of speech and heavy of tongue;" he had a speech defect. Here was the man destined to be the greatest leader of the Jewish people, the Rabbi par excellence, whose stuttering should have made him as unsuitable for his role as the English monarch in the recent Oscar winning movie, *The King's Speech*. King George VI had to be helped in order to properly serve as monarch. Yet Moses remained with his disability.

"Since God can do anything," I asked my teacher, "why didn't He heal Moses?"

As all good teachers do, my rabbi first complimented me on raising a very interesting difficulty. He told me that many commentators address the issue, with a host of different answers, and as I get older I would be able to choose from among these various replies. He shared with me the answer that he personally preferred and told me to always keep it in mind in how I relate to God with my problems in the future.

Yes, Moses would have been far better off had he had the gift of eloquence in addition to all of his other virtues. His stuttering was a disability and of course God could have easily removed this stigma. So why didn't He?

Because Moses never asked.

In all his humility, Moses didn't feel worthy of making the request. And God wanted to show us by way of His dealings with the greatest Jew in history that the prerequisite for His answering our prayers is for us to verbalize them.

Never be afraid to ask anything of God, my teacher concluded. If you're withholding a request because you think it's too much to ask for, that's an insult to the Almighty, almost as if you're implying it's too hard for Him to accomplish. If God wants to say no, that's up to Him. Your role is to make clear you believe in His power to accomplish anything, no matter how difficult.

Learn to ask is the message I internalized.

Think Big

Which is why I found the graduation address given by Joseph J. Plumeri, the chief executive of Willis Group Holdings, so fascinating.

He began by asking the students whether they heard of this big building in Chicago called the Sears Tower. Of course, they all had. He reminded them that it's the tallest building in the Western

Hemisphere. And then he shared with them how some years ago he told people that he was going to rename it the Willis Tower.

People laughed at him, telling him it's impossible. The name Sears had been there since 1973. "Who are you to come along and change the name?" they said to him,

He told them that Sears hadn't been in the building since 1993. He then met with the owner of the building which was 20% vacant and said, "I need 2% of the space." He negotiated the price and when the owner asked, "Do we have a deal?" he told him, "Almost, except for one small thing. Your name is a jinx. You need a new name, a vibrant name, a name that signifies the future, not the past. I want to change it.

"When we dedicated that building," Joseph Plumeri said, concluding his speech, "I was on the evening news with Brian Williams and he said to me, 'How, Joe, after so many years it was called the Sears Tower, how did you get them to change the name to Willis?' And I looked into the camera and I said, 'I asked.'"

When I had the wisdom to ask, God showed me He had the will to answer.

One of the classic Yiddish folk tales by Isaac Leib Peretz is the story of Bontsha the Silent. Heartbreaking in its depiction of a truly saintly soul who is unaware of his goodness, it describes the scene in heaven when Bontsha appears for his final judgment. The angel speaking on his behalf records all of his pious deeds. Bontsha has always suffered in silence. Mistreated throughout his lifetime, Bontsha never complained or questioned God's ways. The heavenly court could find no fault with him. The prosecutor is speechless, he too unable to find a single blemish in Bontsha's life.

The heavenly court comes to a unanimous decision: "Everything in paradise is yours. Choose. Take what you want, whatever you desire. You will only take what is yours by right."

The story closes:

"Well then," - and Bontsha smiles for the first time – "well then, what I would like, your Excellency, is to have for breakfast every morning a hot roll with fresh butter."

As great as Bontsha was, life had beaten him down so he no longer knew how to dream. His tragedy was a tragedy that many of us replicate in our own lives when our aspirations become so diminished that we don't dare to hope for more than hot rolls and butter.

We are all children of God. We have Someone in heaven Who cares for us deeply. Our mistake all too often is not that we seek too much from the Almighty but that we don't have the sense to ask Him for enough.

When we are troubled, and our difficulties seem insurmountable, we should ask Him to intervene.

When we need help in a situation that seems humanly impossible to be resolved, we should ask Him to get involved.

When we suffer and feel helpless, we should seek out the One who promised to come to the aid of all those who have no one else to turn to and ask for His assistance.

I have learned this lesson well from my own personal experience: When I had the wisdom to ask, God showed me He had the will to answer.

We are all children of God. We have Someone in heaven Who cares for us deeply. We need to learn how to ask.