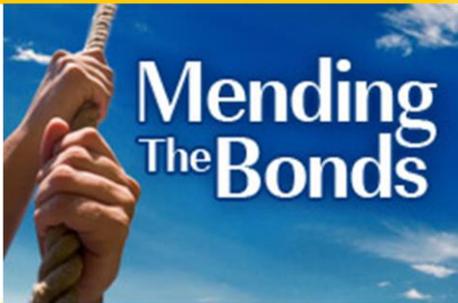


PRAYING with *Fire*

PRAYER POINTS



Mending the Bonds

by Rivka Zahava

Prayer is a powerful tool to repair our relationship with God and man.

It's Tammuz. The very name of this month knots my stomach tightly. For over 2000 years Jews have known that the three weeks from the 17th of Tammuz to the 9th of Av is an inauspicious time for the Jewish nation. It is a time in which God withdraws His usually benevolent and compassionate watch from us. Our history is full of tragedies and exiles that began and took place during this period, in which every year, we are made to hear the message, "My children, you have withdrawn from me. You have strayed. Feel the distance and what it causes, and come back."

The fear Tammuz instills in me is a good thing. It is meant to be a catalyst for action, for healing and mending. We are meant to contemplate the severed connection between God and us and to take tangible steps towards repairing it.

Relationships need constant words of love and appreciation to stay strong and develop. Our relationship with God is no different.

The key to every relationship is communication. One of the most important ingredients for a healthy marriage is the ability to express oneself to their spouse, whether it be feelings of gratitude, anger or excitement. Rifts are opportunities to work it out together and come to an understanding. Like a plant

requires water and sunshine to grow, our bonds necessitate constant words of love and appreciation to stay strong and develop.

One's relationship with God is no different; it also requires communication. The structured prayers serve as our crucial guide to expressing and connecting to our Creator. In addition, built into the heart of every human being is the natural power to talk to God, at any minute of any day. Wherever you are, you have the ability to simply open your mouth and speak to the Almighty, your heavenly Father Who loves you.

Brian used to get extremely nervous before big business meetings. He couldn't sleep the night before and would worry for days whether or not the deal would go through. Business was picking up speed and these stressful meetings were becoming more and more frequent. Brian realized he couldn't function anymore. One day, he saw a bumper sticker that said, DON'T TELL GOD HOW BIG YOUR PROBLEMS ARE, TELL YOUR PROBLEMS HOW BIG GOD IS. He decided to try it out.

For the first time in his life, he started talking to God. He would explain why he was nervous about this particular deal, laying down all the details of the other company and their deliberations. He would express his fears about the benefits and risks of the deal to his own company. "God, if it's good, make it work. If not, help it fall through." Brian felt himself calm down when he spoke things out with God. And soon enough he would take a minute to thank Him after each meeting, feeling the abundance of blessing in his life.

Red traffic lights are a perfect time to reconnect with God.

"Good Morning, God!" "Thanks for letting my car start, God!" "Please help me get to the office before my boss, God!!!"

One sentence can build a bridge between you and Him.

Loving Other Jews

These three weeks are also the time to work on repairing the bonds between our fellow Jews. The Talmud teaches us that the Holy Temple was destroyed because of the baseless hatred and lack of respect that crept into the lives of the Jewish nation.

Praying for someone else requires opening your eyes to his plight and letting his pain flow through your heart.

This, too, can be repaired through prayer. There is a concept taught that if someone is in need of something and desperately wants his prayers to be answered, he should pray for somebody else who is in need and he will see himself answered first. It's not a business exchange; it is a character change. In order to pray for someone else, I need to open my eyes to see his plight and let his pain flow through my heart. His troubles become real; they become mine and spur me to beg for his rescue. God hears this brotherly cry and He is moved because He sees that I have let myself be moved. I have

become a more compassionate person, therefore more deserving of Divine intervention in my own life.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev had a policy: if someone hurt him, he would pray for that person. His theory was if someone is wrong, there is no point in getting angry with him, rather he would pity him. He would ask God to help that person learn and change and eventually have a more satisfying life.

We all know someone who has poor social skills. It can be really irritating when they say the wrong thing at the wrong time or insist on things being done their way. But if we could stop and think about the sad life that person must lead because of this social handicap, we might be moved to compassion and intercede on their behalf.

It's Tammuz. Let's show God that we want to be close to him. Let's turn our daily lives into a stage for connecting to Him. Let's use prayer to draw us closer to our loved ones and our not so loved ones. May this be the last Tammuz that we spend in exile, distanced from God.