

From the *Hofetz Hayim* on Prayer.

When a person prays to the Holy One, he should not ask of Him something particular for himself alone. He should not say, 'God, grant me that certain thing which I need so particularly.' For a person does not know what is good for him and what is not.

One might pray for wealth, yet Scripture speaks of *riches kept by their owner for his harm* (Ecclesiastes 5:12)...The only way is for a worshipper to entreat God: 'Master of the worlds, before You what I lack and need is revealed and known. If You will grant it to me, it will be indeed, and if not, not...

Let me give a parable, to which this is like: A man once told his neighbor, who owned a candy-store, 'When you see my little boy give him some candy and I will pay you later.' The shopkeeper, who could not really be counted among the very bright, gave the boy candy by the handful and the boy became sick.

In a few days, the shopkeeper came to the boy's father and demanded payment for the candy he had given the child.

Said the boy's father: 'Isn't it enough that because of you my boy took sick? Do you want to be paid for it too?'

Replied the shopkeeper: 'But you told me to give your boy candy.'

The child's father retorted: 'True enough, but I told you clearly that you should give him only two or three, not so many that would make him sick.

The same applies to a person and his requests in his prayer to God.

In this world, which according to Ecclesiastes is all *transience and a striving after transience* (Ecclesiastes 2:26), it seems to a person that if he attains what he is seeking, he will be fortunate and happy with no one to compare to him; and if not—he will remain unfortunate and wretched, full of bitter complaints against the Almighty.

A person does not give thought to consider that if his quest and entreaty is fully granted, after this earthly life, when he will see the utter and ultimate truth...,he will realize how very much harm he suffered because he received what he wanted; and then he will stand before the Holy One and argue, 'O Creator who formed me, why did You grant me that thing? Why did You accept and answer my prayer? Here it is revealed and known before You that this thing would cause me great harm.' ...Well the Almighty knows human nature, with all its great deeds and its weaknesses, and He knows that by law, in justice, He often must absolutely not give a person what he seeks.

So when a person knows this truth, he will not have any complaints against God because he has not been given what he wants, since that was certainly for his own good.

It's hard for us to understand this. Hard for us to understand that what we want so badly might be the worst thing for us to get. It's hard for us to understand the concept that the Holy One might have more knowledge about what we need than we do. We tend to be so focused on the here and now, on the material that really is transient, that we do not trust in the Wisdom of God to know what is best for us. So we pray for what we want and what we think will make us happy. And we feel badly when we don't get it. And sometimes we feel badly even when we do.

But what the *Hofetz Hayim* is telling us is that we are so caught up in our everyday reality that we don't take a step back to see what is really important, what our real task is.

That task is for us to care for others, to act in a holy and Godly way in our lives. If we can pray to God to be given what we need, we will more easily accept what happens in our lives even if it causes us pain. We will more easily see the connection between the pain we experience and learning how to act in a more holy way. We will see the perspective that God has, as the *Hofetz Hayim* says that He can see 'the utter and ultimate truth.' It is this truth that we ultimately seek every time we pray.

*Shabbat Shalom.*