

Segulot – Part 6 – Segulot sometimes don't work, Better Alternatives to Segulot, Proper attitudes, and “Tamim ti'yeh im Hashem Elokecha”

Segulot sometimes don't work

How do we understand that sometimes, even with the use of *segulot*, what we were hoping would happen may still not actually occur?

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (quoted in *Hishtadliyyot Ruchniyyot* – chap. 1, pg. 21) suggested that sometimes the cost for a request to be answered could be greater than its benefit. The example he gives is the [strong] davening that Yitzchak and Rivka did to have children with no more delay. As a result of Eisav and Yaakov being born five years earlier than they would have been without the *tefillot*, Avraham ultimately needed to lose five years of his life, to avoid seeing Aisav “*yotzei l'tarbus ra'ah* – going out to a negative life.” While they were certainly correct to *daven* for children, which they ultimately did receive, when we ourselves don't get what we desperately want, with or without *segulot*, we should try to remember that there may be factors beyond our understanding that are blocking our request.

Better Alternatives to Segulot

Rav Irons once said – “We used to be an “*am segula*” (treasured nation), and now we've become *am hasegulot* – a nation with *segulot*.”

The method to achieving the greatest degree of success, of course, is simply by learning Torah, doing the *mitzvot*, and refining one's character.

Eliyahu haNavi taught his disciples – I call heaven and earth to witness that anyone – man or woman, gentile or Jew, freeman or slave – can have Divine inspiration come upon him. It all depends upon his deeds. (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* – chap. 9).

Rav Yaakov Hillel pointed out – Throughout the generations, there have been many holy leaders who reached high levels without knowing *kabbalah*, and [conversely] there have been many people who dabbled in *kabbalah* improperly, and achieved nothing but evil.

Proper attitude with segulot

Perhaps the clearest statement about the attitude that we should have with *segulot* is spelled out by the **Mishnah** in **Rosh Hashanah** 3:8. The *Mishnah* quotes the verse (*Shemot* 17:11) – “And it happened that when Moshe raised his hand – Yisrael was stronger, and when he lowered his hand – Amalek was stronger.” The *Mishnah* then asked – “But do the hands of Moshe win the battle or lose the battle?” Rather, the verse comes to say – “As long as Yisrael gazed upward and subjugated their heart to their Father in heaven, they overpowered them [their enemies], but if not, they would fall.”

And similarly, [it quoted the verse] – “Hashem told Moshe – Make yourself a fiery [serpent] and place it on a pole, and it will be that anyone who is bitten will look at it and live.” The *Mishnah* asked again – “But does a serpent kill and does a serpent give life?” Rather, when Yisrael gazed upward and subjugated their heart to their Father in heaven, they were healed, but if not, they perished.”

We need to remember that the most that any *segulah* can ever be is a tool to help us to connect more effectively with Hashem.

As **Rav Berkowitz** explained – Any *segulah* only works (and is therefore permissible) if it helps your *kavana* (intention to connect with Hashem); whereas treating it merely like a good-luck charm could, G-d forbid, end up approaching *avoda zara* (idolatry). We need to ask ourselves – Are we looking for something external to change us, or are we willing to put in the effort to change ourselves?

In addition, **Rav Wolbe** wrote – We have a tradition from our master, the **Chazon Ish**, that some prayers are answered more quickly than others, but no prayer returns unanswered. Why then should we seek a blessing through a back door [i.e., with *segulot*]? The gates of prayer are open before us when we pray from the depths of our heart and with tears. The great men to whom people turn for help [i.e., with *segulot*] should teach the public to pray, and tell them that – “Hashem will not withhold good from those who walk [with Him] wholeheartedly.” (*Tehilim* 84:12).

The “flipside” of *segulot*, and the guiding principle in Judaism, is – “*Tamim ti'yeh im Hashem Elokecha* – You shall be wholehearted with G-d, your L-rd.” (*Devarim* 18:13).

Rashi explains that this verse refers to our **relationship with Hashem** –

[We should] walk with Hashem wholeheartedly, look ahead to Him (i.e., trust what He has in store for us), and not investigate the future. Rather, accept whatever comes upon us wholeheartedly. We will then be with Him, and [among] His portion.

Ohr HaChaim –

Since He commanded us [in the preceding verses] not to engage in negative spiritual activities, He now tells us to be wholehearted. There is no reason to violate any of these [prohibitions] to [try to] know the future or to fix any lack. If you are with Hashem wholeheartedly, then you will not lack anything.

Ramban –

Dedicate our hearts to Hashem alone since only He knows the future, and He is the power above all powers. There **are** powers out there but we should not be limited to that. Hashem is the *Baal hakochot kulam* (Master of all powers). [“*Tamim ti'yeh*”] not only involves prohibitions, it is also a *mitzvat asef* (positive obligation).

We shall wholly dedicate our hearts to Him and realize that He alone does everything. He is the one who knows the real truth of every future event, and from Him alone should we inquire about the future, through His prophets or the *Urim v'Tumim*. We should not inquire of the stargazers, or trust that their words will be fulfilled completely. Rather, if we hear a statement from them, we should say – *Hakol biyedei Shamayim* (All is in the hands of Heaven), for He is the G-d over all the powers, Who alters the arrangements of the stars and the constellations as He wishes. And we should believe that all that occurs to a person is according to how close he has made himself to the service of Hashem. Therefore, after the Torah prohibits inquiring about future events from a diviner or one that consults with the dead, it states that you should be wholehearted with Hashem in all these matters. This is also the opinion of Onkeles, who translates this verse as – “You shall be complete in the fear of G-d your L-rd,” meaning that you should not be lacking in your fear of Him. The word *tamim* means whole, as in a *keves tamim* (whole lamb), meaning with no blemish or anything missing. This verse is a *mitzvat asef* (positive commandment).

Rav Binyamin Zilber explains that according to the Ramban, G-d's instruction to Avraham – “Go before Me and be perfectly faithful,” is the first *mitzvat asef* (positive commandment) [that G-d

gave to him]. This means that a person should not try to search out the future and look into horoscopes, for Hashem can change a horoscope from good to bad, and vice versa.

Sefer Chareidim –

The elevated mitzvah of *bitachon* – to trust in Hashem, is learned from this mitzvah to be *tamim* (Dev. 18:13). This teaches us that it is a mitzvah to trust in Hashem with all of our heart, and in terms of every aspect of this world.

Rav Hirsch –

Just like *tamim* with *korbanot* means a complete animal, with no flaws or blemishes at all to disqualify it, [*tamim ti'yeh*] refers to a complete wholehearted devotion and trust with Hashem with nothing missing at all. The goal of *temimut* (wholeness) in our relationship with Hashem is a complete surrender of our entire being and a *bitul* (nullification) of everything besides Hashem – both internally and externally.

Maharal (Be'er HaGolah #2) –

The notion that being *tamim* with Hashem would mean not to guard ourselves from danger, and simply to be naive with all of our actions, since Hashem will protect us, is irrational. We are not supposed to rely on miracles. G-d gave man wisdom and knowledge to be able to be an intelligent person with all of his actions, so why shouldn't he protect himself from harmful things? The Torah commanded us to be *tamim* with G-d and not to follow after negative spiritual practices, like saying that some times are good for certain activities or similar things. However, to guard oneself from danger, and to think about one's life situation, is what any intelligent person would do, without using sorcery or magic. This is so obvious that there is no need for any elaboration. Whoever would think this [irresponsible notion] is simply lacking intelligence and is wrong.

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