

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

P'TACH LIBI...

B'TORATECHA UVMITZVOTECHA
TIRDOF NAFSHI

'Open LIBI (my heart) to Your Torah and NAFSHI (my soul) will pursue Your commandments. And all who plot evil against me, quickly nullify their plans and disrupt their thoughts.'

At the end of the AMIDA, these words are presented as separate requests of HaShem, just like the previous request that He 'guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully'. But I believe these can also be understood as a sequence: the result of my heart being involved in Torah and my chasing after mitzvot will be that anyone intending to harm me will have their plan thwarted with the help of Gd because of that involvement.

However, while reading the Mima'ama-kim [Alexander Mandelbaum; based upon the lectures of Rav Moshe Shapiro zt"l] on Parshat Tazria, I learned something that gave a deeper meaning to the above phrase. As usual, I never paid particular attention to this, other than the simple meaning of the words: We hope Gd will grant us the ability and desire to learn Torah and will help us run after His mitzvot. But this is what I learned from Mima'amakim:

Man is comprised of three aspects: NEFESH, RU'ACH, and NESHAMA. Each

one of these realities differs from the other and plays a different role in our behavior. The NESHAMA is that part of us that Gd "breathed" into us. It "resides" in the SEICHEL (brain, mind) and is the root of thought. (It is also, given its source, the most spiritual.) The NEFESH is the opposite. It contains the most physical aspects. It carries out actions; it is the root of activity and is the seat of our physical desires. It "resides" in the liver. The RU'ACH is the middle between the two. It is linked to the body in its ability to desire but is not chained to it as is the NEFESH. It can receive and accept messages from the NESHAMA and, as such, is the connection between the NESHAMA and the NEFESH. It "resides" in the heart.

Given that information, I understand that sentence in ELOKAI NETZOR to mean more than what I had thought. Now, it seems to be a cause-and-effect statement, not two requests, albeit connected. 'If You open my heart to Your Torah - the heart that receives messages from my NESHAMA and transmits them to my NEFESH - then the result will be that NAFSHI, that part of me will chase after Your mitzvot.

(After further thought, maybe this understanding gives new meaning to the statement of Chazal: RACHMANA LIBA BA'I - Gd wants what is in the heart - which is KAVANA in davening. It can also mean that Gd desires the action of the heart (over that of the NEFESH) given that He doesn't expect - or even want - anyone to be pure NESHAMA.)