

תְּפִילַת יִצְחָק *Tefillat Yitzhak* -- Rabbi Jon's commentary on words of prayer

The worshipper must direct his heart to each and every word. He is like a man who walks in a garden collecting roses and rare flowers, plucking them one by one, in order to weave a garland.... Every word seizes hold of him... entreats him not to abandon it, not to break their bond, saying: *Consider my light, my grace, my splendor.*

--Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, quoted in Rabbi A. J. Heschel, "Quest for God", p. 34

As you are learning the prayers, one goal is to find a word or a phrase here and there that is meaningful to you to add to your "repertoire". If you find one, stop and try to say it to yourself in Hebrew, whether you are reading the Hebrew or the transliteration. Say it slowly, or more than once, or in a quiet chant that your ears can just hear. Let whatever meaning or feeling sink in, you needn't rush to move on with the congregation.

Siddur Sim Shalom, p.105

כָּל עֲצְמוֹתַי תֹּאמְרָנָה	<i>Kol atmotai tomarna</i>	All my bones (shall) say
יְיָ מִי כָמוֹךָ	<i>Adonai, mi chamocha</i>	Adonai, who is like You
מִצִּיל עֲנִי מִחֶזֶק מִפְּנֵי	<i>Matzil ani me-chazak mimenu</i>	rescuing the poor from one stronger
וְעֲנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן מִגְּזֹלוֹ	<i>V'ani v'evyon mi-gozlo</i>	and the poor and lowly from one robbing him

At the end of a section of prayers about our breath, words, and songs, there is a paragraph about how every part of the body has a way to praise God. Our lips, tongues, knees, backs -- even our livers and kidneys! That paragraph can be a kind of meditative imagery, a slow way to feel each part of our body and dedicate it. Even the parts that don't work voluntarily, we can still be aware of them and thankful that the blood that beats through us energizes us to perform mitzvot, and keeps us alive in connection to God.

The whole section is concluded and summarized by this "proof-text", as it is called, from the Psalms. The first part of the verses pushes deepest into our body, to our bones. The next part says something specific: that God is one who rescues us, from people and forces that take things away, and that our bones and body parts have the unique ability to sense that.

The "one who is stronger" or "the one who is robbing" can be literal or metaphorical -- illness, thoughts, memories, or situations that are strong in our lives. What does it mean that our bones are the place where we find the rescuing power of God?