

## The Three Things That Lift The Harsh Decree

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As we turn toward the High Holidays, we'll be evaluating our behavior over the last year, trying to see ourselves from God's point of view. It can be profoundly depressing.

From God's point of view, I was not as pious, kind or generous as I ought to have been...not by a country mile. I have to get about the business of cleaning up the messes I've made this year. But what do I do about the things that I can't take back?

Thankfully, the Talmud instructs us that there are three things that we can do that will lift the scales in our favor when we are out of balance, so to speak:

*Rabbi Elazar said: Three things nullify the harsh decree, and these are they: prayer, charity and repentance. And we find the source for all three of them in one verse. "And if My people, upon whom My name is proclaimed will humble themselves, and they will pray, and they will seek My face and they will repent of their evil ways, I will hear from heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land (II Chronicles 7:14)."*

*"They shall pray" = prayer.*

*"They shall seek My face" = charity, just as it says in Psalms 17:15: "And I, in righteousness shall behold Your face" (meaning I will see Your face because of my righteousness/charity).*

*"And they will repent of their evil ways" = repentance.*

*If they do these three things, then "I will hear them, forgive them and heal their land."*

(Y. Taanit 2:1, 9b1ff)

### Discussion Questions

1. Obviously, since all of us are facing the severe decree (except for those 36 completely righteous people in the world), we should all be working on the prayer, charity and repentance program right now. How will you put this into action yourself? How can you repent for something that happened long ago when the principle actors in the drama are no longer here?
2. Rabbi Elazar is very set on the idea that prayer comes first, then charity and then repentance. Why are they in this specific order? In the prayer book, it lists these items as repentance, prayer and charity. If we can see prayer as working from the inside out, how does this change the sequence? In other words, do you have to change yourself first and then work ever outwards?
3. Rabbi Elazar is also clear that doing charity is the way to see God's face. By simply doing charity we can see the face of God! What a small admission price to pay for such a wonder! So stock up on raisins, crackers, etc., to give away to those in need. The beggar on the corner could, in fact, be the Messiah. Try to see him/her that way. I guess then you really will see the face of God...in everyone you meet.

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