

Kol Ha-Rav June 2016

I don't believe in a God that can be bribed by flattery and blind faith or obedience, a God that is so emotionally needy that he needs to hear our praise multiple times a day. That's not why I pray. My prayer is underscored by the following Hasidic story.

Mendel the tailor goes to his rabbi with a problem. He tells the rabbi, "I try to be the best tailor I can be. If a customer says to me, 'Mendel, you're a wonderful tailor, you're the best,' that makes me feel good. But if someone came into my shop every day and told me how wonderful I was, or if a hundred people crowded into my shop to tell me that, it would drive me crazy. I wouldn't be able to get my work done. So my question is, does God really need to have every Jew in the world tell Him three times a day how wonderful He is? Doesn't He find that tedious?"

The rabbi answers him, "Mendel, that's a really good question. You have no idea how tedious it is for God to hear our praises all day, every day. But God understands how important it is for us to remind ourselves of all He does for us, so in His infinite kindness, He puts up with our incessant praying and accepts our praise."

The God I believe in is not so insecure that He holds it against people who doubt His existence, nor is he so eager to punish people for errors of heart, mind, or faith. Harold Kushner, the great writer, puts it this way: "God's role is to give us the vision to know what we need to do, to bless us with the qualities of soul that we will need in order to do them ourselves, no matter how hard they may be, and to accompany us on that journey."