



Shevat

TORAH YOGA

by Rabbi Elana Kanter

In one of Job's responses to his friends (Job 19:26), he says "*mi-b'sari eb-bezeh eloha*" (while in my flesh, I would behold God). He is declaring that he believes God will vindicate him while he is still alive, still "in his flesh." Later commentators, however, understood the verse to mean that our flesh, our bodies, can sense the presence of God. Not just our emotions or our intellect, but our physical selves can be vehicles for connection with the divine.

I want to suggest two ways in which we can connect with God while practicing yoga, or while engaging in other forms of mindful movement. As we slow down and begin to pay attention to our breath and the sensations of our bodies, we might find ourselves overwhelmed by gratitude: for limbs that can move in so many ways, for the miracle of breath that happens without our having to think about it, or perhaps for the fact that today, this or that body part doesn't ache.

Responding to the gratefulness that has welled up within us, we might want to whisper an impromptu prayer of thanks, or we might say the brachah "*Baruch matir asurim*" (blessed is the One who frees the bound), the blessing we say each morning in thankfulness for the motion of our limbs. Moving our limbs in intentional ways reminds us of how blessed we are to have a physical body.

As we move in different ways, we might notice that what we are doing with our body is something we would like to do with our souls. For example, in yoga and in other types of movement, we challenge ourselves to reach higher, or to stretch further.

As we reach up or reach out with our bodies, we might meditate on the question: *What is it that we are reaching for in the emotional or spiritual parts of our lives?*

As we stretch our limbs, we might consider in what ways might we want to stretch ourselves in holiness or in kindness, in the doing of mitzvot, or in the relationships we have with those we love? In yoga, spiritual metaphors are made physical, but we can also use the physical to reach the spiritual. Move the body and along with it, the soul.

"Mi-b'sari eb-bezeh eloha" (From my body, I will see God). Through doing that which keeps our bodies strong and well, like yoga or other mindful movement, we exercise the soul and strengthen the spiritual self along the way.

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