

## “LOOKING ABOVE AND BELOW”

In the confessional of each morning service there is a powerful line: “We do not know what to do; we can look only to You.” The usual understanding of that line is that alone, we are helpless, but with God’s guidance we can move forward.

Yet one could also translate the line as “We do not know what to do for our eyes are turned to You.” Now it yields a different meaning. When human beings look toward God, and not toward one another, they do not know what to do.

In Judaism mitzvot are divided into those between human beings and those between the human being and God. Putting on tefillin is between the person and God; avoiding cruel speech is between one person and another. It is a dangerous temptation of religious life to pay attention only to the mitzvot that are directed toward God, and still to feel free to speak badly of others, cheat on one’s taxes or in business, or to be indifferent to the suffering of others.

When we look only to God, we do not know what to do. “A prophet is a person who holds God and men in one thought at one time” wrote A.J. Heschel. If we keep our eyes fixed only on the heavens, we will not see the sufferer huddled at our feet.