

# UNANSWERED PRAYERS

*by Rabbi Daniel Travis*

*God said to Noach, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; the world is filled with crime because of them. I am going to destroy them with the earth." (Bereshith 6:13)*

Upon hearing that their lives were threatened by an impending flood, many individuals beseeched God to spare their lives. However because of their dishonesty, their prayers were not accepted. In contrast, Eyov (Job), who guarded himself from the smallest monetary infringement, merited having his prayers answered.<sup>(1)</sup> In King Dovid's words, "God is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him with truth."<sup>(2)</sup> Although God hears the cries of all that turn to Him, He is only close to those who live lives of truth. Therefore people who maintain a life of honesty and integrity can hope to have their prayers answered.<sup>(3)</sup>

In the same vein, debasing one's lips with slander and falsehood may cause one's prayers to go unanswered.<sup>(4)</sup> This theme is dramatically demonstrated at the close of the Amidah prayer. Many opinions say that we should conclude our prayers by petitioning God to answer our requests.<sup>(5)</sup> However, according to other opinions, this is unnecessary since we immediately ask God to protect us from falsehood and slander. By offering a sign of utter disdain for any form of untruth, we hope that our prayers will be accepted.<sup>(6)</sup>

King Dovid developed this idea further in Tehillim when he asked, "Who may ascend the mountain of God and stand in the place of His sanctity? One with clean hands and a pure heart, who has not sworn in vain by my soul, and has not sworn deceitfully."<sup>(7)</sup> This implies that integrity is imperative in order to forge a close relationship with God. Similarly he wrote, "Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit... The eyes of God are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. They cry out and God hears, and He rescues them from all their troubles."<sup>(8)</sup> From the juxtaposition of these verses, King Dovid's message is clear: one who guards his speech will see the fruits of his effort - his prayers will be answered!

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1. *Shemoth Rabbah* 22:4. *Maharil Diskin on Bereshith* 6:13.

2. *Tehillim* 145:18. In this psalm King Dovid contrasts similar concepts in the two halves of each verse, connecting them with a vav hachibur (a connecting 'and'). The exception to this pattern is the seventeenth verse, "God is close to all those who call him, to all who cry out to Him with truth." It is impossible to say that God is also close to those who call to Him truthfully, for God can only be close

those who do so. Those who call on God without truth are totally distanced from Him. (Havu L'Hashem Kavod, p.31 in the name of the Vilna Gaon).

3. Kad HaKemach - Emunah.
4. Alshich, Shemoth 28:35.
5. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 122:1,2. Most commentators follow this opinion.
6. This is the opinion of the Vilna Gaon.
7. Tehillim 24:3,4.
8. Tehillim 34:14,16.

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