POWER OF PRAYER

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read Parshas Mishpatim, Judgments, which contains fifty-three different laws. The Ramban explains that these laws came now, after the Ten Commandments, to give the parameters for the Tenth Commandment: Do not covet the belongings of your neighbor. Only a clear system of judgments allows for clearly defined ownership and rights. Without knowing what actually is your neighbor's, the last commandment cannot be properly fulfilled.

Amongst these guidelines for interpersonal relationships, the passuk {verse} teaches: "A widow or orphan you shall not afflict. If you will afflict them, if they will cry out to me I will hear their cries. [22:21-22]" Rashi explains that this injunction actually applies to causing anguish to any individual. The passuk only mentioned widows and orphans, as they are unfortunately common and easy targets.

Beware, the passuk teaches. When people cry out to Hashem, He hears their cries. This is the case no matter what causes them to cry out. Every t'filah {prayer} has its power and makes an effect...

I recently came across a story involving Rav Kanievsky, zt"l, author of the Kehilos Yaakov, known to the world as 'the Steipler.' One of his grandchildren remarked to him that he was planning to travel to the Kotel {the Western Wall} in order to pray.

"When you are standing there, please mention me in your prayers," the Steipler asked of him.

His grandchild was a bit shocked. "Do I need to mention my grandfather before Hashem? Your connection to Hashem is so, so strong! Do you think that the heavens don't know about the Kehilos Yaakov that there's a need for me to mention you?"

The Steipler's response was immediate and sharp. "Know that no prayer is sent back empty. That is the nature of Hashem in this world. Every word of prayer causes a reaction. If not today then tomorrow, if not tomorrow then the next day, it might even take a hundred years but every word of prayer has its effect. Any prayer that you'll say on my behalf," he told his grandson, "will have a tremendous effect."

The biggest problem is that we don't really believe in the power that our t'filos have.

There's a famous story that happened in the time of the Alshich Hakodesh. A certain person had always earned his livelihood hauling tar and other such materials on a wagon hitched to a donkey. One time he heard a shiur {class} given by the Alshich about pure trust in Hashem where no effort needs to be made. He thought to himself that he must be crazy working so hard to earn a living and

decided to trust in Hashem and quit working.

He began to spend his days sitting by the fireplace reciting T'hillim {Psalms}. Even when his wife and children began to worry, asking him to return to work to earn some money, he remained calm and steadfast. "Are you crazy?" he asked them. "I heard from the Alshich that if a person really trusts in Hashem, He'll send sustenance without any work needing to be done. Why should I kill myself to bring something that will come on its own?" And with that, he calmly returned to his T'hillim.

Seeing no purpose in owning the wagon and donkey, he sold them to a gentile neighbor. This new owner took the wagon and donkey to an area where he was digging and discovered a large stash of gold and gems. He filled sacks, placed them on the wagon and then returned to dig some more only to be killed by a large falling rock. Hours later, when the donkey began to get hungry, it returned on the path it had walked for years, back to the house of its original owner. He calmly paused from his T'hillim to look outside and see the bounty that had come his way.

The students of the Alshich approached their Rebbe, wondering how this simple wagon driver had succeeded with his faith while they had all failed. The Alshich explained that the wagon driver had accepted the truth he had heard without doubts or fears. He understood it and accepted it as plain and simple fact. "You, on the other hand," he told his students, "had worries and concerns. You didn't believe in the power of your bitachon {trust}."

As I said, if we'd only believe in the power of our t'filos...

This past week a student related to me something incredible. He is a boy from a very rough background who was finding it difficult to adjust to religious observance. He didn't see himself ever becoming truly observant. Last week his mother called telling him that his great grandfather was in a coma and asked him to go to the Kotel to pray for him. As the Mashgiach {spiritual supervisor} was scheduled to speak that night, he recommended to the boy that he should go after the sicha {speech}. That night the Mashgiach discussed the power of t'filah. He quoted the Talmud that teaches that if a person says a certain part of the prayers with all of his focus, strength and heart, even an evil decree that had been standing for seventy years is torn up. The boy heard this and accepted it at face value. No doubts and no worries.

At the end of the sicha he promptly traveled to the Kotel and began to pray. As he told me: "I had 'sick' kavanah {focus} when I said those words and I did everything with more concentration than I ever did in my life. When I called my mom later we figured out that just when I left the Kotel was the time that my great grandfather came out of the coma."

He believed it.

Good Shabbos,
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