

# UNANSWERED PRAYERS ARE NOT WASTED

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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**Dedicated This Year Le'eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R. Yissocher Dov - - In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand**

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## Unanswered Prayers Are Not Wasted Prayers

When G-d decided to destroy Sodom and Amora [Gemorrah], He initially withheld this information from Avraham. Subsequently, the pasuk [verse] says "And G-d said, 'Shall I hide from Avraham that which I am doing? ... For I have loved him' (ki yed-ativ)." [Bereishis 18:17-19]

What was the purpose of informing Avraham about the plans to destroy Sodom and Amora? G-d knew what was going to happen. He knew that Avraham would pray and negotiate for the salvation of Sodom. G-d knew ahead of time that there were in fact not 50 people in Sodom worthy of saving, nor were there 40, or 30 ... or even 10. He knew that eventually the city would be destroyed.

If so, what was gained by giving Avraham this information? "Because I love Avraham so much, I want to give him a chance to pray for Sodom... even though I know that his prayers are doomed to be rejected." Where is the logic here? Avraham's prayer was to be nothing more than an exercise in futility. G-d knew ahead of time that Sodom did not have the requisite 10 righteous people to be deserving of salvation.

The Bais Av explains that the purpose of informing Avraham serves as a very important lesson for all of us. G-d was in fact doing a favor for Avraham. When we pray for another person -- whether we are successful in our prayers or not -- we become better people by virtue of these prayers. G-d wanted to offer Avraham the kindness of having an opportunity to empathize with his fellow man, to think about the impending tragedy of Sodom, and to at least attempt to stave off the tragedy. When

someone puts himself out for others, he becomes better as a result of that effort.

So many times in our life we say prayers for others. Sometimes these prayers are not accepted. Our reaction tends to be, "All the Tehillim and praying were for nothing. It was wasted because he did not get better or the situation did not change." Not at all! The prayers are not for naught. We have become better people as a result of those prayers, which emerged from our care and empathy for our fellow Jews.

Judaism is not a religion that measures success by results. Judaism measures success by effort.

Avraham's Promise Binds Future Generations; Avimelech's Promise Does Not

Towards the end of the Parsha, Avimelech told Avraham "I see that G-d is with you in everything that you do. And now, swear to me, by G-d, not to be deceitful with me or with my children or my grandchildren. The kindness that I did with you, please do with me..." [21:22-23] Avraham agreed to the terms of the oath.

If we look at the terms of the agreement, it was clearly a one-sided bargain. Avraham swore to be kind to Avimelech and his children and grandchildren and he obligated his own descendants to be kind to Avimelech and his descendants. Avimelech, on the other hand, swore regarding his personal obligation to Avraham. However, he did not obligate his children, nor did he even promise kindness towards Avraham's children and grandchildren. There was no full reciprocity here.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch explains the reason for this discrepancy. Avimelech knew that Avraham was in a position to make a commitment and be sure that his children and grandchildren would follow along. Avimelech likewise knew that whatever he himself might promise, would certainly NOT be binding upon his children.

The Jewish way of life is to follow the traditions of parents and grandparents. Our heritage is all about "passing it on" -- having confidence that there will be grandchildren and great-grandchildren that will respect the word of a Zayde [grandfather]. That was in fact the definition of the essence of Avraham: "For he commands his children and household after him (lishmor derech Hashem)" [18:19]. Even Avimelech understood that Avraham could make such a commitment, but he himself could not. Avimelech could not even be certain how his children would turn out, let alone his grandchildren.

In this week's parsha, Avraham received the command of the Akeida [the binding of his son, Yitzchak]. Avraham declared his readiness. He began his journey with his son Yitzchak.

But consider for a minute... Yitzchak was not a 3-year-old child. According to Rabbinic tradition, Yitzchak was already 37 years old. Should the father not at least have mentioned the purpose of the journey to his son, before they departed? The answer is that there was no reason for him to do so. Just as he could take an oath that his children and grandchildren would keep his agreements, he KNEW who he was dealing with. He knew he had been successful in the education of his son. There

was no question in his mind that Yitzchak would be equally prepared to carry out this commandment.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zt"l, took a trip to Israel in his older years, accompanied by one of his sons. During the long flight, Rav Yaakov's son looked after his father's every possible need with great dedication. There was another man was sitting on the plane near the Kamenetskys. As time went by, Rav Yaakov noticed that the man was becoming more and more upset. Rav Yaakov finally asked him, "What's bothering you? What am I doing wrong?"

The man responded, "I can't stand to see how well your son is treating you. I know that if I were an 87-year-old man and would have to rely on my son to take care of me, I would be in very bad shape. It simply eats me up to see how well your son treats you, knowing how poorly my son treats me."

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, in the best spirit of the disciples of Avraham, was able to raise generations that respected elderly parents and grandparents. Unfortunately, in our time, this tradition is lacking, not only among the world at large, but also because of our assimilation and acculturation, this once proud tradition is even lacking among our own people. Our pristine tradition, however, is demonstrated in this week's parsha. A grandfather can make a promise, confident that even his grandchildren will follow it to the letter of the law.

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Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.  
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayeira are provided below:

- Tape # 029 - Mila and the "Yellow" Baby
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