

PRAYER AND DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY ARE THE SECRETS TO RAISING GOOD CHILDREN

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #481 Lying To Keep What's Yours. Good Shabbos!

Prayer and Domestic Tranquility Are The Secrets To Raising Good Children

In Parshas Toldos we begin the life story of the second of our Patriarchs. The pasuk at the beginning of the parsha says, "Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren." [Bereishis 25:21]

In this Parsha, we begin to notice a disturbing trend. Avraham our Patriarch was married to a woman who was barren. Now we find that his son Yitzchak was also married to a barren woman. Rashi points out that Yitzchak himself was also sterile. Next week we will move on to the life of Yaakov and see that the phenomenon of sterility plagued his household as well. His chosen wife, Rachel, could not conceive.

It is not a coincidence that Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Yitzchak were all sterile. In each generation, a miracle was required allow these individuals to have children and to allow the Jewish nation to come into existence.

The Gemara [Yevamos 64a] comments on this: Why were our patriarchs and matriarchs barren? Because the L-rd strongly desires (mis-aveh) the prayers of the righteous. At first blush the Gemarah makes the Almighty sound somewhat sadistic. He desires the prayers of the righteous, so He puts them in terrible situations, forcing them to pour their hearts out to Him - all because He strongly desires hearing those prayers. This cannot be true. Hashem is Good and a Doer of Good. Sadism plays no role in how He conducts the world!

What then is the meaning of the Gemarah that says "Hashem strongly desires the prayers of the righteous?" I once heard a very moving address from Rav Pam on this statement of Chazal. Rav Pam's point was that we really have no comprehension of the prayer of the righteous. When a real tzadik prays, he undergoes a transformation that is almost beyond our understanding. He enters a different world. Kabbalistic works refers to this as "hispashtus ha-guf". It is as though the davening becomes such a transcendental experience that the person has a type of "out of body experience"

whereby his soul clings to the Almighty.

We who complete the entire morning service in 30-35 minutes, and who can do it in 15 minutes or even less on a busy day, cannot easily relate to the concept of "hispashtus ha-guf" and "souls clinging to the Almighty". We do not really understand what these terms mean. We have never experienced such davening. But this is implied by the term "prayers of the righteous."

Such prayers allow the Tzadik to escape the mundane bonds of this earth, reaching a level of spirituality that transcends mortal existence and flies him into another world. That is why the Gemara mentions [Brachos 32b] that the pious men of earlier generations (Chasidim Rishonim) spent 3 hours completing a single prayer. They prepared for an hour before davening, davened for an hour, and then spent a third hour after davening.

We can understand why it would be appropriate to spend an hour on davening. We can even relate to the fact that it would be appropriate to spend an hour of preparation time before davening. But we don't begin to understand what these pious individuals did during the hour after davening.

The best way to explain this is to think of the hour after davening as a decompression state. If one dives under water for some time, depending on how deep one goes, he cannot come up to the surface suddenly. If he tries to do so, he will suffer from a condition known as the "bends." Divers must enter a decompression chamber upon resurfacing too quickly, because they cannot transition from the underwater world into our world without an adjustment. They have been in a different world.

The "hour after prayer" is the decompression that the pious of earlier generations needed in order to get back to this world after being literally in another world. Once one has been in Heaven, he cannot run to carpool in an instant. The "Chasidim Rishonim" achieved such a lofty level of spirituality that it literally took them an hour to descend back onto this earth.

This, Rav Pam said, is why the Almighty wanted the Patriarchs and Matriarchs to pray as they did to achieve children. The Ribono shel Olam was not interested in merely producing offspring. These Patriarchs gave birth to other Patriarchs. In order to have a child that is worthy of being a Yitzchak or worthy of being a Yaakov or worthy of being one of the Tribes of G-d, those children need to be conceived in an atmosphere of tremendous kedusha [sanctity].

One cannot merely occupy himself in the physical realm of this world and conceive a child, and expect that child become a Yaakov Avinu. We can relate to the fact that when children are conceived, if the parents are physically healthy, the children have a much better chance of being physically healthy. We know that if a woman is on alcohol or on crack or otherwise drug dependent, it will definitely have a negative effect on her child when she conceives.

So too in a spiritual sense, parents who want to produce a Yitzchak or a Yaakov or a founder of a Tribe of G-d must themselves be in a realm of utmost spirituality. The way to achieve that realm of

utmost spirituality is to have them daven. Hashem does not seek the prayers of the righteous in any sadistic sense, Heaven forbid. He does not need their prayers. However, the Ribono shel Olam does need to ensure that Yitzchak, Rivka, Sarah and Rachel will be on a level where they can conceive children who will be righteous. The surest way of doing that is by making these parents daven intensely so that they may ascend into the world of the spiritual and, under those circumstances, conceive and give birth to children.

These are very lofty ideas. Perhaps the concepts are beyond most of us. But there is a practical implication to these ideas that is relevant to us. The lesson that the atmosphere, the climate in which children are conceived makes a difference is readily transferable to the lesson that the atmosphere and climate in which children are raised also has a profound effect on how they ultimately turn out.

Not everything is achieved at conception. There is nature. But there is nurture as well. A child who is raised in an atmosphere of holiness and purity is a different child than a child who is raised on the streets, a fact we can readily attest to from merely looking around. How does one achieve an atmosphere of kedusha? We try so hard to provide a physically safe environment for our children. What can we do to provide a spiritual haven in which children can grow up and prosper?

Rav Pam quoted the words of the Steipler Rav, zt"l. The Steipler Rav said that raising good children depends on two factors. Fifty percent of the success in raising a good child is prayer. If there is one thing worth davening for and worth pouring out one's heart for, it is that one should merit having good children. The other fifty percent, the Steipler Rav said, is Shalom Bayis [domestic tranquility]. When children see parents living together with love, cooperation, and respect for one another in a serene environment, it profoundly affects the type of person they will become. Conversely, raising children in a house where there is fighting and back-biting and all the unfortunate things that sometimes go on among parents has an extremely detrimental effect.

Rav Pam quoted the famous Gemara [Gittin 90b] that when two people divorce, even the mizbayach [Altar in the Temple] sheds tears. All the commentaries try to explain the analogy. What does it mean "the mizbayach sheds tears when a person divorces his first wife?" Rav Pam explained that a mizbayach sees sacrifices every day. However there is one sacrifice that even the mizbayach cannot accept -- the sacrifice of children. Children are the sacrifices of a household that is fraught with dissension.

The lesson of "And Yitzchak prayed opposite his wife" is that the spiritual level of the parents and the domestic tranquility that exists among the parents has a profound effect on the offspring that we hope to produce.

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 Toldos Sarah are provided below:

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