

YITZCHAK PRAYED...FOR SHE WAS BARREN: BAAL HATURIM NOTES INVERTED STRUCTURE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Toldos

Yitzchak Prayed...For She Was Barren: Baal HaTurim Notes Inverted Structure

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #701, Fasting On The Wedding Day. Good Shabbos!

At the end of Parshas Chayei Sarah, the Torah mentions the descendants of Eisav and concludes with the words "These were the years of Ishmael's life: a hundred years and thirty years and seven years, and he expired and he died, and he was brought in to his people. They dwelt from Havilah to Shur - which is near Egypt - toward Assyria; over all his brothers he lay (al penai kol echav nafal)" [Bereishis 25:17-18].

Literally, the word "nafal" in the concluding expression "al penai kol echav nafal" means "he fell over all his brothers". Rashi interprets the word "nafal" to mean "shachan" - he dwelt.

The Baal HaTurim is bothered by this strange usage. The Baal HaTurim comments that there is a message in the juxtaposition of the last words of Chayei Sarah (al penai kol echav nafal) and the first words of Parshas Toldos: "These are the generations of Yitzchak; Avraham bore Yitzchak..." The Baal HaTurim explains that the proximity of the two expressions teach us that when Yishmael will fall and be finally defeated in the end of days, then the Moshiach [Messiah] - the descendant of Yishai who is himself a descendant of Yitzchak (Toldos Yitzchak ben Avraham) - will come.

Even in the most terrifying of times, we are comforted by the fact that eventually, with the ultimate downfall of the descendants of Yishmael, we will merit the final redemption by our righteous Moshiach.

Yishmael typifies the power of prayer. He himself was born out of the power of the prayer of his mother Hagar. To this very day, the Arabs excel in prayer, which occupies a significant place in their daily ritual. In order to counteract the power of their prayer, we need to improve the concentration

and intensity of our own prayers.

The words of Rabbeinu Bechaye in this week's parsha are particularly important in this regard. On the pasuk "Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren" [Bereishis 25:21] Rabbeinu Bechaye notes that the pasuk is inverted. It should read "Rivka was barren and could not have children, therefore Yitzchak prayed for her." Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the intent of the particular structure of that pasuk is to teach us that the prayer was the cause of the barrenness. In other words, G-d caused Rivka to be unable to conceive so that the two of them would find it necessary to pray to Hashem to request a cure.

The simple reading of the pasuk is that the "Cause" of the prayer was the fact that Rivka could not have children and the "Effect" was the prayer itself. Rabbeinu Bechaye says that the truth is the exact opposite. G-d wanted Yitzchak to pray - that was the main "Cause". The "Effect" of this "cause" was that Hashem gave Yitzchak a motivation to pray, namely the fact that he and his wife were childless.

The Almighty wants us to daven because He wants to have a relationship with us. This is what prayer is about - establishing a relationship with Hashem. Unfortunately, most of us are not motivated enough to pursue that relationship unless we have an incentive. Therefore, G-d set up the world so that man should pray for his needs. However, sometimes He sees that this arrangement is not enough to solicit sincere prayer, so G-d gives us "special needs" and "special reasons" to motivate our intense prayer.

The main focus of this pasuk is that Yitzchak needed to pray; his wife was only barren because the Almighty desires the prayers of the righteous.

The Talmud states [Brachos 10a] "Even if a sharp sword is placed against the neck of a person, he should not abandon hope for mercy." Even in such a crisis, a person should not give up hope, but should pray to the Almighty. The Talmud proves this idea by citing the fact that when Dovid HaMelech [King David] came onto the location that was supposed to be his future capital (Yerushalayim) and saw the image of an angel there with an outstretched sword, he could have come to the conclusion that the situation was hopeless. Nevertheless, he prayed.

So often, we encounter situations in life that we feel to be hopeless. But if we bear in mind that the impending catastrophe we are facing is not there because the Master of the Universe wants to cut off our necks, Heaven forbid; on the contrary, we may have reason for hope. The catastrophe is only there because He wants to hear our prayers. That is why we should never give up. If the whole reason the sword is there is to get us to pray, then when we start praying in earnest the sword will be removed.

The idea that G-d wants a relationship with us and that is the cause for Him giving us a "motivation to pray" should give us new hope for the effectiveness of our prayers.

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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