

PRAYER IS THE KEY TO INVOKING DIVINE ASSISTANCE

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 # 709, Kavod Malchus & Secular Kings. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Va'eyra contains the majority of the 10 plagues brought upon the Egyptians. There is a definite pattern of how the plagues came and how they left. For instance, with the plague of Tzefardeah [Frogs], Moshe threatened Pharaoh "Let my people go or else I will bring a plague." The Frogs came, Pharaoh asked that Moshe pray to Hashem to take them away. Moshe Rabbeinu prayed and they went away. The same thing happened with the plague of Orov [Wild Animals]. They came, Pharaoh suffered, he begged Moshe and Aharon. They prayed to G-d and the wild animals left. Likewise, with Barad [Hail] and Arbeh [Locusts], the King begs that Moshe daven for him, Moshe davens, the Hail stops, and the Locusts leave.

It almost seems like a play. Why was it necessary that every single time that Pharaoh had to ask "daven," Moshe would daven, and only then, the plagues would cease? The answer, according to Rav Yeruchem Levovitz (the Mir Mashgiach) is that this narration teaches us something very fundamental about life. The way to obtain things in this world is to pray for them. This is the **ONLY** way to achieve things in this world.

Someone who has a pressing need - say a sick family member in need of a cure - might wonder what is the most effective spiritual way to help the person in need - to pray or to learn in the person's merit. Most people might tend to feel that learning on behalf of the sick person would be more spiritually beneficial than merely praying for the person. After all, "Talmud Torah k'neged kulam" - the merit of Torah learning outweighs all other merits [Peah 1:1].

Rav Yeruchem states otherwise: "And know that even though 'Torah learning outweighs everything' nevertheless, obtaining something in this world only happens through prayer." In other words, the concept that "Talmud Torah k'neged kulam" means that in the next world, when we look to collect our reward for all our good deeds in "this world," the greatest reward we will receive is for Torah learning. However, the way to get things in this world is with a different mechanism. The way to obtain things is to daven for them.

Rav Yeruchem sites Moshe Rabbeinu as a case in point. Moshe was the prime example of one who occupied himself in Torah study and Torah teaching. Nevertheless, when Moshe requested the nullification of the decree against the Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf, his approach was

not to "sit and learn" or to rely on any other merits he might have had, but to pray intensively to the Almighty for their forgiveness. The decree was not nullified through the strength of Moshe's Torah or his good deeds, but rather only through prayer as it is written, "And Moshe besought the L-rd his G-d" [Shemos 32:11]. Why didn't Moshe learn for Klal Yisrael? The answer is that G-d set up this world such that if a person wants things, the person needs to daven for them. However, the concept that "Torah study outweighs everything else" applies to reward in the World to Come.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, among his many other attributes, was a prolific writer. He spent an unbelievable amount of time writing down his thoughts and words of Torah. During every spare moment, he was either learning or writing. One of Rav Moshe's children once called and told him that one of Rav Moshe's grandchildren was very sick and was being taken to the hospital. Rav Moshe closed his Gemara, closed his notebook, went to his shtender [lectern], took out a Tehillim, and began reciting Psalms. Every 15 minutes he would ask - "Have they called that it is better? Have they called yet?" He was sure that in the merit of his Tehillim, things would be all right.

Why did Rav Moshe start saying Tehillim? Why did he not dedicate the merit of his writing a certain piece of Torah or a certain responsa to the merit of his grandchild, for a speedy recovery? The answer is that in this world, when we need something, there is only one way to obtain it - through prayer. The uniqueness of the reward of Talmud Torah only applies to the World-to-Come.

Our parsha emphasizes this idea through the recurrent theme of Pharaoh beseeching Moshe to pray and Moshe's praying to have each of the plagues removed.

It Was The Same Yosef Throughout; It Was the Same Moshe Throughout

The pasuk says, "These are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh King of Egypt to take out the Children of Israel from Egypt, this was Moshe and Aharon" [Shemos 6:27]. Rashi is bothered - what does the pasuk mean when it says "This was Moshe and Aharon"? Rashi comments: "These are the ones who faithfully and righteously carried out their mission from beginning to end." In other words they did not change. They were the same righteous people when they began and when they completed their mission.

This comment of Rashi is reminiscent of another Rashi in last week's parsha, Parshas Shemos. On the words "And Yosef was in Egypt" [Shemos 1:5], Rashi states that this teaches us of Yosef's righteousness throughout. The same Yosef who faithfully watched the sheep of his father was the Yosef who was in Egypt and became King, remaining totally righteous. This concept that it is the same Yosef is totally analogous to Rashi's comment here that it is the same Moshe and Aharon.

Rav Simcha Zissel Brodie, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva, asks as follows. It is indeed a novelty to teach us that Yosef retained the righteousness of his youth as he went through his travails in Egypt and eventually ascended to greatness such that he had the full power of the throne behind him. One might have thought that he was no longer the same Yosef after having been removed at age 17 from the serenity and insulation of his father's house and having been thrust into all the

temptations and spiritually fraught situations he faced as a slave in the decadent land of Egypt. Yosef thought he would never see another Jew in his life. It would have been so easy to throw everything away. This lowly slave becomes the viceroy of Egypt. For him to remain the same Tzadik, after having undergone all that turmoil in his life, is indeed worth noting. That is an amazing accomplishment!

But Moshe Rabbeinu was 80 years old when he started his mission. From the moment he started his mission, he was in the spotlight. All of Klal Yisrael looked at him and watched his every move. He was in the Wilderness for 40 years but he talked to the Ribono shel Olam on a daily basis! The fact that he remained a Tzadik is hardly surprising. What then is Rashi saying here - "This is the same Moshe from beginning to end"? This is hardly on par with "This is the same Yosef from beginning to end".

Rav Simcha Zissel answers this question by citing one of life's great truths: Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The novelty of Moshe's leadership career was that even though he had absolute power and was "politically untouchable," he remained the same modest and humble individual from beginning to end. He defeated the greatest ruler on earth (Pharaoh). He brought the Torah down from Heaven to Earth at Sinai. People were hanging on his every word. They worshipped his footsteps. And yet, he remained an anav [modest person]. The power did not go to his head. He was not corrupted by it. That was quite an accomplishment, unheard of in the annals of mankind! It was noteworthy so as Rashi explains, the Torah makes note of it through the phrase "hu Moshe v'Aharon" [this is (the same) Moshe and Aharon].

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 Va'eyra are provided below:

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