

NOT FOR MYSELF

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"And G-d heard the voice of the lad" Beresheet 21:17

When the Children of Israel stood with their backs to the sea with Par-oh in hot in pursuit, the Torah says "And the Children of Israel cried out to Hashem." Rashi comments: "They adopted the craft of their Patriarchs". The people of Israel are a nation that prays. This talent is derived directly from our forefathers and matriarchs who fine-tuned a natural ability into an expertise. Abraham Abinu a'h was one who prayed in all situations. He not only prayed for himself and for his wife Sarah to have a child -- he prayed for those around him regardless of their merit.

When Hashem decided to destroy the wicked people of Sodom and Amorah He felt it necessary to reveal His intentions to Abraham. Upon hearing of the pending disaster, Abraham began to pray on behalf of the vile residents of those cities. Unfortunately for the people of Sodom and Amorah G-d did not rescind His decree and they were destroyed in a fiery holocaust. Our sages teach that in any event the prayers of Abraham were not said in vain and they stand in the stead of his children throughout the generations.

Later we see that Yishmael, Abraham's offspring from Hagar, prayed as he weakened from thirst and was approaching death. Hashem, over the objection of the angels, saved the boy, in spite of the fact that his offspring would in the future torture the exiles of Zion. Rashi points out that although BOTH Hagar and Yishmael were crying and praying for salvation, Hashem responded to the sound of the boy's cries. From here we learn, says the greatest of commentators, the prayers of a sick person on their own behalf is more powerful than the prayers of others on behalf of that ill individual -- and it is accepted first.

This, however, seems to contradict another Rashi in this week's Parasha. Abimelekh, the King of the Pelishtim, abducted Sarah Imenu a'h. His intentions were not honorable but his evil plans were blocked by heavenly intervention and our Matriarch was released unharmed. Abimelekh's people were punished in a miraculous manner. No women were able to give birth. In fact, all the animals and fowl were not able to reproduce offspring or lay eggs. When Abimelekh released Sarah, Abraham did what he knew how to do best -- he prayed for the recovery of Abimelekh's people and flocks. Hashem returned everything to normal in response to our Patriarch's supplications.

Then the Torah begins the saga of the pregnancy of Sarah and the birth of Yitzhak. Rashi comments: "The Torah placed the pregnancy of Sarah adjacent to the prayer of Abraham for the non-producing

Pelishtim to teach "All who request mercy for a friend and he or she needs the same thing -- is answered first."

The question is: Is it best for a person to pray for oneself -- like Yishmael -- or is it more productive to pray for another with a similar problem -- like Abraham?

The answer is that when one has no one else to pray for one should still continue to pray for them self. However, should one be cognizant of another who has a similar need then that prayer is more potent and effective for the one praying -- he or she will be answered first.

Life is a series of crises -- if one solves one problem another pops up in another area. The solution for all problems is to pray and to trust that G-d will do what is best. No prayer goes to waste -- one should always pray. If the opportunity arises to pray for another with a similar requirement -- jump at the opportunity to help others as one helps oneself.

Shabbat Shalom

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