

# VAYOMER ELIYAHU

Inspiration and Encouragement on Topics of Trust and Faith in Hashem Yisborach  
Based on the Weekly Torah Portion

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In English



בס"ד

## Through Tefillah, One Becomes a New Man Who is Not Subject to Previous Decrees!

### » How Could Yitzchok and Rivkah Pray for a Miracle?

The *pasuk* in this week's Parshah states (Bereishis 25:21): "And Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife for she was barren. Hashem accepted his prayer and Rivkah his wife conceived."

The verse attests to the fact that Rivkah was barren, and the Gemara (Yevamos 64A) adds that Yitzchok too was naturally unable to bear children. If so, we may ask how could Yitzchak and Rivkah pray for children when we know that one may not pray for a miracle?

This prohibition is stated in the Gemara (Brachos 60) that states: "If one's wife is pregnant and he says, 'May it be Your will that my wife give birth to a male offspring', this is a prayer in vain and His mercy will not help. Rav Yosef asks: The verse states (Bereishis 30:21), 'And afterwards she bore a daughter. And she called her name Dina.' What is the intent of the word 'afterwards'? Rav said that after Leah made a judgment on herself and said: There will be 12 Tribes that will emerge from Yaakov. 6 have already come from me. 4 have come from the maidservants. That equals 10. If this child that I am carrying will be a male then my sister, Rochel, will not even be equal to the maidservants. Immediately, the fetus changed to be a female and she named her Dina."

Rav is asking how Leah could pray that the fetus change from a male to a female when Rav Yosef says this is forbidden. The Gemara answers: 'We do not bring proofs from miraculous stories.'"

We see from this Gemara that we may not pray for miracles. Therefore, we must ask how Yitzchak and Rivkah could pray for children?

The Medrash (cited in Rashi, Medrash Rabbah 45:5), cites the words that Sarah said to Avrohom (Bereishis 16:5): "This outrage against me is due to you." The Medrash states: "Rav Yuden said in the name of Rav Yehuda bar Shimon: She said you have outraged me with your words. You prayed to Hashem and said, 'What have You

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given me while I walk childless?' But you only prayed for yourself. You should have prayed for both of us, and I would have been entrusted with you."

The Matnas Kehunah explains that she was saying, "You withheld and stole from me the words that you should have said on my behalf."

We see an amazing insight here. We see that if someone has the ability to pray on his friend's behalf and does not do so, it is as if he stole this prayer from him. We may wonder why this is called stealing?

It seems that the reason this is called stealing can be explained according to the words of the Rabenu Bechaya. The Rabenu Bechaya asks about the framing of the words of the verse "And Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife for she was barren." Seemingly, the verse should first tell us that Rivkah was barren and then tell us that Yitzchak entreated Hashem for her to have a child.

He answers that the verse is teaching us that the entire reason and purpose for her to be barren was in order for them to pray. The verse tells us about the entreaties first to teach us that the entire purpose of the barrenness was to elicit the prayers.

This idea is seen in the Medrash Tanchuma (Toldos 9), where it is stated: "Why were the Imahos barren? Because Hashem desires their prayers. He said: They are wealthy. They are beautiful. If I would grant them children they would not pray to Me."

We see that the entire purpose of the challenge was to bring them to pray. This is as the Mashgiach Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l was wont to say: "People tend to think that they have some difficulty and therefore must pray. The truth is the opposite. We must pray. Therefore, Hashem sends a difficulty. Had we prayed without the difficulty, we would never have needed it."

We can now answer how Yitzchak and Rivkah were permitted to pray for a miracle. The entire purpose of the barrenness was to bring them to pray. Therefore, they were permitted to pray even though they were

barren, and this was not considered praying for a miracle.

**We** can also say that this was the reason that Sarah was angry at Avrohom for not praying on her behalf. Since the sole purpose of the suffering was to elicit prayers, all that was needed to bring the salvation was prayers. Therefore, if Avrohom failed to pray for her, he is now the cause of the suffering. This caused Sarah to accuse him of stealing from her and being the cause of her pain.

**We** can learn from this the great obligation to engage in prayer that no suffering or difficulty befall us or any member of Klal Yisroel. If we do fail to do so it may be a terrible complaint against us. We can avoid untold suffering and pain through our prayers. We can remove our own pain and the pain of others, and, all the more so, the pain of the entire Klal Yisroel and the pain of the Shechinah in exile. We therefore must strengthen ourselves greatly in the area of prayer.

**Sefer Arvei Nachal** (Parshas Va'eirah) also states that Hashem sometimes delays sending a person his salvation because He wants to hear his prayers. He uses this concept to explain the words of Dovid Hamelech (Tehillim 86:3): "Be gracious to me (*chaneini*) Hashem, for I will call to You all day." He asks that the word "*chaneini*" usually indicates a request for a free gift. If so, why does Dovid seem to be asking for a gift in return for "calling out to Hashem all day". It seems as if he is asking for a reward for davening to Hashem!

**Furthermore**, he notes that it says "I will call to You", in the future tense, rather than "I called to you", in the past tense.

**He** answers that Dovid was asking Hashem to grant his request immediately, and not to delay because He wants to hear his prayers. He said that, in any case, "I will call to You all day", meaning that he promised that even after his request is granted, he will still daven to Hashem, so there is no reason to delay fulfilling his request.

**The** Arvei Nachal concludes by saying: "This is why Chazal say (Sanhedrin 44B) that one should pray before the problem arises... Hashem desires our prayers and if one only prays when a problem comes up, He will delay granting his request so that he should pray more. But if one prays constantly, even when he is not facing any problem, there is no reason for Hashem not to answer him right away."

>> *Hashem Changes Nature for Those Who Pray!*

**Rabenu** Bechaya further states: "The power of *tefillah* is so great that it can even change nature. This is why the verse uses the word '*vayetar*' (and he entreated), rather than the more common words used for prayer, such as '*vayispalel*'. This is because the word '*vayetar*' has a connotation of '*eter*' (a pitchfork), as Chazal say (Sukkah 14A): 'Why are the prayers of *tzadikim* compared to a pitchfork? Just like pitchfork overturns the grain on the threshing floor from place to place, so too, prayers of *tzadikim* overturn the mind of Hashem from the attribute of cruelty to the attribute of mercy.'"

**The** Zohar Hakadosh (Chelek 1, 136) explains the word "*vayetar*" to mean "to tunnel". (The word "*vayetar*" is related to the word "*vayechtar*", which means to dig a tunnel.) This indicates that through *tefillah*, they dug a tunnel, through which their prayers were accepted.

**It** is similarly stated in the Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 63:5): "Rav Levi said: this is comparable to a son of a king who tunnels towards his father to get a measurement of gold. While he is tunneling from the outside, his father is tunneling from the inside to reach him."

**The** Sefarim Hakedoshim explain that Rivkah was barren and could not naturally have children. Still and all, Yitzchok kept davening until he created a place for his *tefillos* to be accepted and for her to have children in a supernatural way. However, the *middas hadin* was obstructing him, so he got around it by digging a tunnel to Hashem – and Hashem dug from His side and changed nature to allow the salvation to arrive in a manner that could not be blocked by any damaging forces.

**This** explains the Medrash's parable of a prince who wanted some gold from the king's treasury. The king was unable to grant his request, as it went against the law of the land. But after the son began digging a tunnel from the outside so that his father should see his intense desire to

get in, the king was moved to express his love for his son by digging towards him as well and to allowing him to get what he so greatly desired.

The same thing occurs with our *tefillos*. Hashem Himself overrides the laws of nature and digs a tunnel for us to push our *tefillos* through and receive whatever we need, with no "natural" obstructions being able to get in the way.

*"...One should pray before the problem arises... Hashem desires our prayers and if one only prays when a problem comes up, He will delay granting his request so that he should pray more. But if one prays... there is no reason for Hashem not to answer him right away..."*

### » *Becoming a Brand-New Person!*

**The** Shach al Hatorah adds that through *tefillah*, one becomes a brand-new person. He writes: “The reason they were barren was so that they would daven and become new people through their *tefillos*. Rivkah would no longer be the daughter of Besuel. Rather, she would become a new Rivkah who was not Besuel’s daughter. This was done in order to cleanse the Jewish people so that they would have no connection to the nation of idol worshippers.

“**This** is why the word ‘*vayetar*’ is used, which connotes a ‘pitchfork’. Just like a pitchfork overturns crops from top to bottom, so too Rivkah was overturned by the *tefillos* and became a new person. Leah, on the other hand, was not barren because she already changed herself through the tears she shed when she prayed not to marry Esav. She already was not the same Leah who was supposed to marry Esav.”

**With** this in mind, we can answer the famous question of how *tefillah* works at all. If Hashem did something, how do we have the right to ask Him to change it?

**The** Bnei Yissochor zy”a (Maamarei Shabbos, Maamar 8:7) answers in the name of the students of the Baal Shem Tov zy”a that through *tefillah*, one becomes a new person. Although a decree of suffering may have been made against a certain person, he can use *tefillah* as a means to transform himself into a new person who is not subject to that decree. Thus, he is not changing Hashem’s will, as He never desired to enact any decree against this “new” person.

**He** goes on to quote the Baal Ha’ikrim (Maamar 4, Perek 18) who relates a parable of a king who decrees that every uncircumcised male in his kingdom should be killed. Of course, everyone who wants to live will circumcise himself so as not to be subject to the decree. So too, if Hashem decrees a hardship on a person, he can change himself through *tefillah* so that he is no longer subject to the decree.

**In** this vein, Sefer Ki Eilecha Espalol asks why we commonly say that so-and-so “*hispalal*” (is praying), rather than saying that so-and-so “*pilel*” (prayed). (According to the rules of grammar, it would be more proper to use the past-tense.) He answers that the word “*hispalel*” indicates “*hispoel*” – having an effect. This indicates that the *tefillos* one said in the past had an effect on him and transformed him into a new person.

### » *Why Do We Celebrate the Fact That the Jews in the Desert Stopped Dying?*

**This** idea that *tefillah* turns one into a new person is also seen from a Tosafos.

**The** Gemara (Bava Basra 121A) states: “Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: There were no days as joyous

for the Jewish people as the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur, as on these days the daughters of Yerushalayim would emerge in white garments, which each woman borrowed from another so as not to embarrass one who did not have her own. Yom Kippur is a day of joy, because it is a day of pardon and forgiveness, and it is the day on which the last Luchos were given. But what is the joy of the fifteenth of Av?...Rav Nachman says that it is the day the people stopped dying in the desert.”

**The** Rashbam cites the Medrash that relates how for all 40 years the nation was in the desert, an announcement would ring out on the day before Tishah B’Av telling everyone to dig their own graves. Everyone would dig graves for themselves and sleep in them that night. In the morning, an announcement would ring out saying, “Let the living separate from the dead!” Everyone who was still alive would rise and get up.

**This** occurred every year for 40 years, and the number of the dead each year was slightly less than 15,000. On the last year, they found that no one died. They did it again on the 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th days of Av, as they suspected they may have made a mistake in the calendar. Once they saw the moon was full, they knew that the decree had been lifted and they rejoiced with a day of celebration.

**Tosfos** asks several questions on this Rashbam. One of his questions is why this was a cause for joy. If everyone who was supposed to die had already died, and everyone else was not supposed to die, why was this a reason to celebrate?

**He** answers that, in fact, those who were destined to die in the final year did not die. Rather, the decree against them was annulled.

**To** explain how it could be that a Heavenly decree could be annulled, he cites the example of Chizkiyahu Hamelech. Yeshayahu Hanavi told Chizkiyahu (2 Malachim 20:1) that Hashem had decreed that he would die, yet he responded, “I have a tradition that even if a sharp sword is on one’s throat, he should not refrain from asking for mercy.” His prayers were answered and he was granted additional years of life (Brachos 10A).

**We** thus see that even after receiving a prophecy that a decree had been enacted, one can still rescind it through prayer. So too, the generation in the desert had the Heavenly decree of death against them annulled through their prayers. Those who were destined to die in the final year were able to cancel the decree by davening to Hashem and thereby transforming themselves into new people who were not subject to the decree.

**Accordingly**, it is not problematic that the *pasuk* says that “that entire generation died”, even though these people were still alive, as through their prayers they became new people who were not part of “that generation” that was destined to die.