

Parshas Toldos

Rabbi Zvi Selevan

Yitzchok Avinu and Rivkah Imeinu longed for a child through whom they could build the Jewish People. Together they prayed, and as the Torah relates in the beginning of this weeks parsha, their prayers were answered with Yaakov and Eisav being born. The terminology used by the Torah when it relates the acceptance of their heartfelt prayers is "his prayer was accepted", implying that Rivkah's prayers were not strong enough to pierce the heavens, only Yitzchak's was capable of doing so.

Rashi explains the reason for this and says "the prayer of a tzadik who is the son of a tzadik does not compare to the prayer of a tzadik who is the son of a rasha". This statement is quite puzzling. It would seem to imply some sort of prejudice against Rivka who came from a household of reshaim, of wicked people, while giving preferential treatment to Yitzchak for having come from the house of Avraham. Isn't every person judged separately from their family? A rasha who is the son of a tzadik has no more personal merit than any other rasha because he comes from a righteous home, so why should the prayers of a tzadik ben rasha carry less weight in Heaven? What is behind this seeming discrimination?

Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon shlit"a, the mashgiach of the Lakewood Yeshiva, once explained this statement with the following penetrating insight. Many times, people will think "I don't need Hashem for what I would like to have happen, it's all under control, and everything is already taken care of". Nothing could be farther from the truth, he explained so eloquently. Such thoughts only serve to blind us to the reality that we need Hashem

constantly in our lives, and without Him nothing will happen. Therefore, a person who has such a thought, will need to exert extra strength and energy to pray for that exact need, although it appears needless. He will have to fight to overcome his "blindness", and realize that we do need Hashem for every single thing, whether large or small, and that all is truly dependent upon His Will. If we do that, our prayers will then have extra potency and will surely bring about the desired effect.

Shlomo Hamelech tells us in Mishlei, B'chol derachecha de'ehu, In all your ways you shall know Him, and He will straighten your path. Rabbeinu Yonah

because I am a great tzaddik and have much merit to my name". This too is not true, for no matter how great a tzadik one may be, his merits alone are never enough to counterbalance even a minute amount of the great and massive favors he has received from Hashem over the course of his lifetime.

Rivkah's prayer was surely beloved by Hashem as much as Yitzchok's, after all both were tzadikim. Yet Yitzchak alone was placed in a unique dilemma. He might have thought "I am the son of Avraham the great tzadik, as well as being myself a great tzadik, therefore I have enough merits to 'earn' a child". As such, he had to expend extra effort

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explains the possuk in this fashion. Even for things that we think we don't need Hashem, or do not require His assistance, we must fight to realize that they do, and therefore we must pray to Him. If we do so, the possuk promises us "and He will straighten your path".

This is what we say every morning in our daily davening, Lo Begevuras Hasus Yechpatz, Not in the horse's strength does He desire, nor does he want man's [strong] thighs. Hashem desires those who fear Him, those who yearn for His kindness. By yearning for Hashem's kindness, even in the most mundane areas of life, we become desirable to Hashem, and then He will surely fulfill all of our needs.

However, it is not only in the physical realm that such thoughts can occur, but it is even in the spiritual realm. Man may think to himself "I don't even need to ask Hashem for assistance in certain areas, I am already assured of His help

and energy in his prayers to uproot those thoughts from his mind, thereby making his prayers more potent. He had to work even harder to pray to Hashem and beg for the gift of a child, even though perhaps he thought he should not be required to do so. Rivkah had no such thoughts in her mind being as she came from the opposite type of home as Yitzchak did, consequently her prayers, as beloved as they were, did not succeed. The prayers of Rivka were missing that extra touch that the prayers of Yitzchak had. Yitzchak's prayer pierced the heavens, while Rivkah's could not.

May we all merit to take this lesson to heart, and to always remember that we must pray to Hashem for every single thing in life. We must remember not to take anything for granted and to always remember that whatever we have in life is only because Hashem is His kindness has chosen to bestow that gift upon us. Good Shabbos! ♦