Jewish Tribune – Vayeira

**The Power of Prayer**

Our parsha tells of Avimelech, the king of the Pelishtim, taking Soroh Imeinu. HKBH afflicts the members of Avimelech’s palace with a disease and appears to Avimelech in a dream, warning him to return Soroh to her husband Avrohom.

Avimelech obeys and showers Avrohom and Soroh with gifts and he and his household are healed. Following this, Soroh conceives and, at the age of ninety-nine, gives to birth to Yitzchok.

Based on the above episode, the Gemoro in Bava Kama (92a) states the principle that כל המבקש רחמים על חבירו והוא צריך לאותו דבר הוא נענה תחילה - anyone who davens for someone and he himself needs the same thing, he is answered first.

Avrohom davened that Avimelech and his household be healed and, as the possuk tells us, they were – Avimelech’s wife bore children. Immediately following that -וַה' פָּקַד אֶת שָׂרָה, Hashem remembered Soroh.

How exactly does this work? And what if the person davening only prays for the other person so that he himself will be answered and not because he is genuinely concerned about the other person?

This question was put to Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein who gave a fascinating answer. Rav Zilberstein explains that the Maharal writes that there needs to be a conduit for HKBH to send his brachos down to this world. This connects the recipient of the blessing with HKBH, the source of all blessing.

Tefillah is such a conduit. When we daven, this creates a conduit which connects the person to the Heavenly source of goodness and the blessing can now flow freely. And when we daven for another person, we actually become the conduit to link the Ribbono shel Olam to the recipient of our prayer.

Imagine you were using a hose to water your garden. The hose serves as the conduit to transfer the water to the garden but the hose actually becomes wet before the grass does.

Similarly, when a person davens for another person, he merits to become the conduit, the medium through which another person is blessed. And he actually becomes “wet” with goodness even before it reaches its ultimate target.

Therefore, contrary to what a person may instinctively think, the power of tefillah is so great that one who prays for his friend – even for ulterior motives – will still merit to be answered first.

But there is more. The meforshim ask a strong question on the principle of כל המבקש רחמים על חבירו והוא צריך לאותו דבר הוא נענה תחילה - anyone who davens for someone and he himself needs the same thing, he is answered first.

Soroh had already been promised a child before this episode! So even if Avrohom would not have davened for Avimelech, she would have had a child!

The Maharal in Chiddushei Aggados gives the following answer. If you daven, it’s for free and not deducted from your stored away heavenly “savings”. Had Avrohom not davened, the gift of a child would have been deducted from their heavenly account. But since Avrohom davened, it was not. It was a free gift.

What is the rationale for this?

I once heard an explanation from Rabbi Hartman. He explained that the central point of tefilla is to acknowledge to HKBH that we are nothing. I have no zechusim of my own and need to turn to you for everything. Therefore, with that approach, nothing is deducted from me as I am not drawing on any “self”.

But if a person feels that it is him and that he does deserve it, HKBH can help it happen but it will come off his cheshbon.

Our parsha is the source of many important principles in tefilla. The importance and potency of davening for others and our focus in tefilla. Tefilla is one of our key weapons in these troubling and turbulent times. Let us harness the power of prayer and may all our tefillos be answered l’tovah.

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