

“Avraham prayed to G-d, and G-d healed Avimelech, and his wife, and his maids and they were relieved (literally, gave birth).” (20:17)

Hashem punished Avimelech and his families for taking Sarah from Avraham. It is interesting to note Avraham's reaction when Avimelech realized that he had erred. Avraham prayed that Avimelech be cured from his punishment. Avraham *Avinu*, the *amud ha'chesed*, pillar of kindness, conveys to us the appropriate response to hearing about someone else's misfortune – pray for him! Avraham's sympathy set the standard for his descendants. How often do we hear about another Jew who has fallen ill or succumbed to another misfortune. While it is true that we feel for him, how many of us feel the pain as if it were our own? Avraham prayed for Avimelech, simply because it was the right thing to do.

Furthermore, Avraham prayed for Avimelech to be able to have children once again, a blessing that had eluded Avraham. He prayed for someone else, even though he himself would have been overjoyed to have children. According to human nature, if one hears about another person who has sustained the same illness from which he himself is suffering, he will not pray for his fellow. He might even feel that misery loves company. Avraham *Avinu* had every reason to disregard Avimelech's "situation." After all, it was not as if Avraham had himself been blessed with children, that he should now concern himself with Avimelech.

This was not Avraham's manner and this is not the way a Jew should respond. As descendants of Avraham *Avinu*, when we hear of another Jew's pain our immediate reaction should be to *daven* for them. Is that not what we do for ourselves? *Horav Moshe Leib Sasover, z.l.*, was wont to say, "To know the needs of men and to bear the burdens of their sorrows – that is the true love of man."

Avraham *Avinu* was rewarded for praying for Avimelech. *Chazal* tell us, "Anyone who prays for his friend, when he himself is in need of that mercy, he is answered first." Whether this is a reward, or Hashem's response to an act of total self-effacement, it is a wonderful *eitzah*, piece of advice, for those in need. As mentioned before, it goes against the grain of human nature to rejoice in another person's joy when he personally is in need of that same blessing. If one can break away from his natural proclivity and elevate himself to pray for another person experiencing the same need, Hashem will certainly look favorably on his prayer – and He will bless that individual first.

Visiting the sick is not easy. To walk in, smile, convey best wishes and leave, does not constitute *bikur cholim*. To fulfill the *mitzvah* of visiting the sick, one must empathize with him; one must pray for him. To visit the sick means to pray for him. To care for the sick means to pray for them. One who feels for another Jew knows that there is only one "address" for assistance – Hashem – and he turns to Him.

Let me close with a notable *Midrash* regarding Avraham's prayer on behalf of

Avimelech: *Chazal* portray the Heavenly angels crying out to Hashem, “*Ribono Shel Olam!* Sarah has been barren for so many years. Avraham prays for Avimelech’s wife, and she becomes fertile along with his other midwives. These women You remember, and You listen. Yet, Sarah remains infertile. Is this justice?” Immediately, Hashem remembered Sarah. This *Midrash* tells it all; we have only to listen.