

Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren. (25:21)

Rashi interprets the word *va'yeetar* to mean that Yitzchak *Avinu* prayed abundantly for Rivkah. He never felt "I prayed enough." He finished one prayer; he immediately began to pray again. The first prayer was not accepted; perhaps the next one would be accepted. The fact that, according to the laws of nature, it was biologically impossible for Rivkah *Imeinu* to conceive, he, nonetheless, understood that his function was to *daven*, the rest was up to Hashem to decide.

The *ratzon HaBorei*, will of the Almighty, is that we *daven*. If we care enough about an issue, then we cannot give up hope of seeing it achieve fruition. Indeed, *Chazal* teach that the cause and effect of Yitzchak's prayer can be different from what we might believe. Rivkah was barren, so that she and Yitzchak would pray! We never halt our prayers. We never stop praying, because we do not know which prayer will make the difference.

In his *Shaarim b'Tefillah*, **Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl**, proves that *pegia*, which is a form of prayer, actually means *rebui bakasho*, in which one continually prays for something until he is answered. One does not give up; one does not throw in the towel. We finish one *tefillah*; we immediately begin to pray again. If we pray long and hard enough, Hashem will ultimately listen.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* prayed for *Klal Yisrael*, entreating Hashem to forgive them for perpetrating the sin of the Golden Calf. He prayed 515 times for Hashem to rescind the decree preventing him from entering *Eretz Yisrael*. Concerning the Golden Calf, Hashem made him stop. *V'Atah hanichah Li*, "And now leave Me (alone)." The *Talmud* in *Berachos* 32b explains that Moshe "took hold of Hashem and would not let go, as if to say, 'I will not let go until You forgive the nation.'"

The *Talmud Yerushalmi Berachos* 4:1 states, *Kol ha'marbeh b'Tefillah ne'eneh*, "Whoever is firm and offers abundant prayer (who simply does not stop, but continues praying and praying) will be answered. It is very similar to a child who keeps on pleading with his father. At some point, the father will give in. If we do not give up, Hashem will listen to us, despite our unworthiness.

In every generation, there have been Jews who have known this wonderful secret of prayer. They understood that the *kunst*, trick (so to speak), to prayer is to never stop praying. *Rav* Shimshon relates that he came to understand this avenue of efficacy in prayer from a woman's prayer on behalf of her husband. A young couple became inspired with a zeal for Jewish observance and decided to return, to embrace a life of Torah and *mitzvos*. They sent their young children to a Torah school, where they received an exemplary Torah-oriented education. The boys went on to *yeshiva gedolah*, where they were eminently successful, becoming *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, of note. Likewise, their daughters married fine young men who were *yeshiva* graduates, committed to continued growth in *Kollel* following their marriage.

Now that the children were doing well, it was time for the parents to join in and participate – rather than to lead and delegate. The father began to learn, and slowly he went from reading *aleph-bais* to learning *Chumash*, *Rashi*, followed by *Mishnayos* – and now he was involved in in-depth study of *Gemorah*. He gave up his job and devoted himself to full-time Torah study in a *Kollel*. Wonder of wonders! The man was fifty years old when he began to learn and, in the space of five years, he went from being a semi-literate novice to a budding Torah scholar. How did this transpire? Apparently, this man's wife was adamant in her resolve that her husband become a *talmid chacham*. Although she realized that this was an unrealistic dream, she began to pray day and night, reciting reams and reams of *Tehillim* every spare moment. She prayed that her husband become a *talmid chacham*. She kept it up – and Hashem listened.

Everyone has his own *pekel*, package of needs. For some it is simple, while for others the needs are life altering. They pray and pray – and, at one point, say, “*Shoin genuk*, it is enough. I tried. How much more can I pray?” We see from this *pasuk* that there is no end to prayer. It will be effective – at a point. When? Only Hashem knows. Regrettably, after a certain point, our passion diminishes and our entreaty loses some of its urgency, as we become almost complacent. This is why I cite the following story:

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, asked his father-in-law, **Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl**, for some sort of *eitzah*, advice, on how to address the *shidduch* crisis. Many wonderful young men and women are encountering great difficulty in finding their *bashert*, predestined mate. *Rav Elyashiv* replied, “There is one (and only one) *eitzah*, piece of advice: *Daven*.” “They have been *davening* for quite some time already; to the point that their lips are dried out,” *Rav Zilberstein* countered. “Let them continue *davening*, and they will see *yeshuos*, salvation, from Hashem.”

Rav Zilberstein took this question and answer to **Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita**, and asked his same question: “They claim that they have not stopped *davening* – and, yet, they have not seen any sign of salvation.” *Rav Shteinman* rose from his chair, went over to the bookcase and removed a *Navi*, *Melachim II*, and turned the pages to *Perek 4*, which relates the story of *Ovadyah HaNavi*'s wife who cried out to *Elisha HaNavi*, “Your servant, my husband, died, and you know that he was a G-d-fearing man. The creditor (to whom we owe much money) seized my two sons to become his slaves (as reimbursement for the debt).”

The *Radak* writes that *Ovadyah*'s wife offered up 265 entreaties, and only then (after she had prayed this amount of times) did Heaven answer her. This means that had she prayed only 264 times, she would not have received a Heavenly response. This teaches us that one can cry with fiery passion, entreating the Almighty 264 times, and still remain unsuccessful. Why? Because it is that next prayer, the 265th prayer, which would be the *coupe de grace*, the finishing touch, for which Hashem was waiting. The only recourse is to continue praying with the same level of feeling and emotion. At a certain point, it will happen.

Regrettably, we do not take *davening* seriously enough. While everybody *davens*, how many

understand the uncompromising obligation to attend *tefillah b'tzibur*, *daven* with a *minyan*? It is not that one does not care, it is just that we have so many responsibilities which we have convinced ourselves take precedence over *minyan*. It could not be further from the truth. Rather than go into a long discourse on the overriding importance of *tefillah b'tzibur*, I share with the reading public an inspirational story related by *Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita*, concerning *Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl*, author of the *Seridei Eish*, *Rosh Yeshivah* of the Hildeshaimer Seminary in Berlin, and later *Rav* in Montreux, Switzerland.

Rav Weinberg was one of the preeminent students in Slobodka when the *Yeshivah* was home to the greatest and most brilliant scholars of the time, among them: *Rav* Reuven Grozovsky; *Rav* Aharon Kotler; and *Rav* Yaakov Kaminetzky. *Rav* Weinberg related that he was very diligent in his studies, hardly leaving the *bais hamedrash* to catch a few hours of sleep, only to return immediately to his place and continue studying. One day, not realizing that the *shkiah*, sunset, had changed before he knew it, he had missed davening *Minchah*. He was distraught over this. How could he have missed *Minchah*? What should he do? He made an appointment to speak with the *Rosh Yeshivah*, the *Alter* of Slobodka, **Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zl**.

"What is the problem?" the *Alter* asked his prize student. "*Rebbe*, I am very fortunate to learn in such a *makom Torah*, with such outstanding friends and colleagues. Hashem has blessed me with the ability to remain diligent in my studies and to grow exponentially in Torah." "So, what is the problem?" asked the *Alter* – once again. "It is specifically because of my diligence that I overlooked the time, and I did not pay attention to the sun setting at an earlier time. Suddenly, I found myself ready to *daven Maariv*, the evening service, while not yet having prayed the *Minchah*, afternoon service. I am terribly troubled by this. I do not know what to do."

The *Alter* listened to his story and responded, "Return to your *shtender*, lectern" (in other words, "Go back to your studies"). *Rav* Weinberg was troubled. He had a problem. He had missed *Minchah*, and he had related his problem to the *Rosh HaYeshivah*, whom, he was sure, would offer a solution. Instead, he just told him to return to his *shtender*. He was baffled, but one did not question the *Rosh Yeshivah*. He was one of the most perceptive people of that generation. Surely, he had a reason for his seemingly strange response.

Two weeks passed. *Rav* Weinberg was learning in the *bais hamedrash* when the *Alter* walked in and motioned to him with his finger. He quickly jumped up and approached his revered *Rebbe*. "Yes," he said. "Today, *Horav* Naftali Amsterdam (preeminent disciple of *Horav* Yisrael Salanter) is arriving in Slobodka. He will select you as his *chavrusa*, study partner. You will probably study with him in the *shul* that is near to the river. As you are walking together with him, present to him the question that you presented to me two weeks ago."

A few hours passed, and, indeed, *Rav* Naftali called for the student. *Rav* Weinberg was profuse in his gratitude to the venerable sage for choosing him as a study partner. This was an unparalleled *z'chus*, merit. As they walked to the *shul* where they would learn, *Rav* Weinberg asked if he could

present a question to the sage. “I already shared this query with my *Rosh Yeshivah*; however, he suggested that I present it to the *Rav* and seek his counsel.”

“What is the problem?” *Rav Naftali* asked. *Rav Weinberg* began with his litany: “I am a student in *Slabodka* where the learning is exhilarating. As a result, I spend my every waking moment engrossed in the study of Torah, *mussar*, ethics, and seeking ways to improve my *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. Everything was going well, except that, one day, I became so involved in my learning that I missed *davening Minchah*.” As soon as *Rav Weinberg* uttered these words, *Rav Naftali* repeated them, “Oy, you missed *Minchah*!”

The second these words left his mouth, *Rav Naftali* fell to the ground in a dead faint. *Rav Weinberg* concluded the story: “I went through many terrible ordeals in my life, years of misery and pain, but I never once missed *Minchah* – after I saw *Rav Naftali*’s reaction.”

Veritably, the *Alter* could have made the same statement, “Oy, you missed *Minchah*,” but it would never have had the same impact as seeing *Rav Naftali* faint to the ground upon hearing that a *yeshivah* student had not davened *Minchah*. This was the *Alter*’s greatness. He was acutely aware what made an impact and how to maximize the experience to achieve its ultimate potential.