

Yitzchak entreated Hashem... Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by him, and his wife Rivkah conceived. (25:21)

Rashi explains that the implication of the masculine singular form *lo*, “by him,” is that Hashem responded specifically to Yitzchak’s *Avinu*’s prayer, as opposed to that of his wife, Rivkah *Imeinu*. In addition, he explains that the root of the word, *va’ye’etar*, “and he entreated,” is the word *atar*, which denotes abundance and beseechment. The sense of the *pasuk* is that Yitzchak prayed abundantly – every which way, in order to effect a positive response from the Almighty. Why was it necessary to pray so hard in every manner possible?

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, gives us a powerful – almost frightening – insight into the concept and efficacy of prayer and its far-reaching implications. *Rashi* teaches us that on the day that Eisav went out *l’tarbus raah*, left the fold and publicly displayed his true malevolent character, Avraham *Avinu* died. The Patriarch was originally supposed to live five more years – to age 180. He died prematurely, so that he should not be privy to the infamy wrought by his evil grandson. This means, explains *Rav Yosef Chaim*, that Yitzchak and Rivkah’s prayers had severe ramifications for the Patriarch. Had the prodigal twins been born five years later, Avraham could have lived out his entire pre-determined lifespan. Their prayer – if accepted – would be the indirect cause of Avraham’s premature demise. Frightening! We see now why Yitzchak had to pray with such fervor. He was not simply asking for a child. It was much more. He did not know this, but Hashem, Who knows all, was well aware of the difficulty of this decision.

What a powerful lesson for us. We all pray and, while Hashem certainly **listens** to **each** and **every** prayer, the reply is not always, in our limited perception, positive. Sometimes, the answer is “no!” We have difficulty understanding His ways, but, He has reasons for everything.

Rav Yosef Chaim adds that this idea is underscored in the *pasuk* in *Ashrei* – *Retzon yireiav yaaseh, v’es shavaasam yishma v’yoshieim*, “The will of those who fear Him, He will do; and their cry He will hear, and save them.” This verse seems redundant. Given the above remarks, we understand that there are times when we ask for something which we ultimately might regret or which will eventually cause us pain. The *pasuk* teaches us that Hashem listens **twice** – before and after – we ask for something. At first, it is good. Then we realize – or become aware – that the ramifications are not good. We pray again. He listens – once again. May our prayers be heard, and may we know for what to pray.