

I prayed to Hashem. (9:26)

The effect of prayer can never be overstated. We have no idea of its power: to alter a decree; to incur favor; to demonstrate our love for the Almighty in recognizing that it is all in His hands and that, without His constant will, we are nothing. We think of prayer as requesting something positive. After all, why would anyone ask for something bad to occur? The following story is a wake-up call, but it is the punch line that really delivers an inspirational message.

A distinguished *rav*/motivational speaker was dispatched to speak to a group of irreligious Jews in a settlement in southern *Eretz Yisrael*. Following his speech, an elderly couple approached him with a strange request: "Rabbi, could you please pray for us – that we die?" they asked. We can only imagine how the rabbi must have felt to hear such a request. "I have never been asked to do something so unusual. You must have a good reason for such a request," he responded.

"Let us tell you our story. We grew up in Communist Russia. Finally, we were able to immigrate to the Holy Land. Life was difficult; acclimating was hard; financially we were challenged every step of the way. Nonetheless, we had one blessing, one comfort, a double gift from G-d: our two daughters, both of whom were a great source of pleasure and satisfaction. One daughter is a graduate student at the Technion in Haifa; the other one lives in Los Angeles. Both are successful and are on the road to even greater achievement.

We recently saved up some money and purchased tickets to visit our daughter in Los Angeles. We spent a month visiting, touring, spending time with our daughter. It was absolutely wonderful. On the last day of the trip, our daughter accompanied us to the airport, where she broke to us her tragic news: '*Ima, Abba*, I have a request of you. Please erase my number from your phone book. I have decided that I want to move on with my life, acculturate myself, and sever my relationship with the past. As long as I am connected with you, I am still in the old country. I want to live!'

"Understandably, our twelve-hour return trip was filled with grief, and we wept the entire way home. We comforted ourselves, however, that we still had one other daughter. We traveled to Haifa to share our unfortunate news with our other daughter – who shocked us with a similar request. She felt that we are backwards and, if she were to remain connected with us, she could never become a part of the 'now' scene. Rabbi, it is now one full year that we have had nothing to do with either of our daughters. Our lives are worthless. This is why we want to die."

If there has ever been a sad story – this is it. The *rav* listened, looked at them with caring eyes and asked, "Rather than have me pray that you die, why do you not pray to G-d that He open your daughters' hearts? Why do you not pray for them?" he asked.

"Rabbi, we are over seventy years old, and never once have we prayed to G-d. We have no clue how to pray to Him," the parents replied.

“My friends,” the *rav* began, “can you imagine the feelings of a Father Who has waited over seventy years for His children to speak to Him? You have been sitting by the phone for a year – everyday – *waiting, hoping* that perhaps your daughters might call. Your Heavenly Father has been waiting for you for over seventy years! Call Him, talk to Him, cry to Him! Use any language that is comfortable – but call!”