

Which ones are going? (10:8)

Pharaoh seemed overly concerned with knowing whom Moshe *Rabbeinu* was taking to the “prayer retreat” in the wilderness. What difference did it make to him who went? *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, explains that Pharaoh could not accept that anyone other than *Klal Yisrael's gedolim*, Torah leadership, would be involved in this trip. Hashem is *Ram al kol goyim*, above all Nations, His glory is above the Heavens. Why would He listen to the prayers of simple people – certainly not that of children? Pharaoh wanted to know who among the leadership of the Jewish People was leaving to pray. Moshe replied that everyone would be attending, especially children, because their pure, sincere prayers have the greatest efficacy.

Horav Yaakov Mutzafi, zl, was a *mekubal*, mystic, who was proficient in all areas of *Kabbalah*, Jewish esoteric/*nistar*/mystical writings. He devoted much time to praying, especially during the High Holy Days. He would stand in prayer, deep in devotion, following the *kavanos*, meditations, prescribed by the holy mystics such as the *Arizal*. Nonetheless, since his young son stood next to him during *davening*, he would make a point to look constantly to make sure that his son was following the *chazzan* who led the service. One time, he noticed that the child was “lost” in the *machzor*, prayer book, and no longer was following as he should. *Rav Yaakov* stopped concentrating on the esoteric profundities and focused on the simple translation of the words. This way, he could focus more on his son's *davening*. He was more concerned with his son's *davening* than of his own.

A well-known female dentist did not yet merit to have biological children. An observant woman, she prayed constantly and went to *gedolim* petitioning their blessing, but she had yet to be answered with a child. After much contemplation, she and her husband decided to adopt an infant, a little girl, whom they raised with abundant love and care. The child attended school, and when she became six years old, she received her first *siddur* at the school's *siddur* party. Her mother was very excited to attend. It meant so much to her to finally participate in her child's educational milestone events. Her little girl walked up to the stage to receive her *siddur* and returned to be greeted by her mother's tear-filled, beaming face. The child looked up at her mother and said, “*Ima*, now that I know how to *daven* to Hashem, I am going to pray that you will give birth to a little boy, so that I could have a brother.” A year later, the mother, who was almost forty-years-old, embraced her son. The pure prayers of a young child have awesome efficacy.

Inspiring stories, but why do the prayers rendered by young children have such influence? The *Maggid, zl, m'Dubno* explains with a parable. A father and son were returning from a long journey. It was getting late, and the father, concerned that the city gates might close before they returned, encouraged his son to walk faster. The boy, who was young in age and small in build, said, “I can only go so fast. I am sorry.” If they were stuck outside of the city gates for the night, they would be easy prey for violent men and wild animals that surfaced after dark. They kept pushing and even attempted to run, to no avail. By the time they reached the city, the gates were closed. Now what? They screamed, called out, made all sorts of noises, but no one heard them.

The father raised his eyes Heavenward in prayer and, simultaneously, he saw a small window at the top of the gate, where the watchman slept and where the keys to the gates hung in plain sight. The father ruminated that, even if he would climb the wall, he could never fit through the small window, but perhaps his son... He lifted his son up and directed him from the ground as the young boy climbed up the side of the wall. Finally, the boy reached the small opening/window. He wiggled and pushed, and he finally made his way through the opening. He immediately fetched the keys and threw them down to his father.

The *nimshal*, lesson, is quite simple. We pray and pray, cry our hearts out, but often it is too late: the gates of prayer have closed. The obstacles, consisting of prosecuting angels coupled with our own indiscretions and shortcomings, hamper our prayers from making it in, from penetrating the partitions (many of them self-constructed by our failings) that block our prayers. However, “the world is sustained by the pure breath of children learning Torah” (*Shabbos* 119b). Their words of Torah and *tefillah* are pure, untainted by sin; thus, they have the ability to achieve what we cannot, to reach where we cannot, to sustain when we are unable. Pharaoh could not understand this.