

And Bnei Yisrael raised their eyes and behold! Egypt was journeying after them, and they were very frightened. Bnei Yisrael cried out to Hashem. (14:10)

The euphoria connected with the liberation and exodus from Egypt lasted until the nation saw Pharaoh and his army in pursuit. Some prayed fervently to Hashem for salvation. Prayer is our key to reaching Hashem and petitioning Him to annul whatever decree hangs over our heads. Others were frozen in fear. They sadly complained that they would have settled for remaining in Egypt as long as their slavery would have ended. Hashem responded that this was not a time for prayer, but rather for positive action, for *mesiras nefesh*, a display of their faith in Him and a willingness to move forward into the waters of the Red Sea. *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* explains that, while prayer is the gold standard of response when a person is in critical danger, this time it was not the most efficacious response.

Hashem exercises His *Middas HaRachamim*, Attribute of Mercy, when the supplicant has sufficient merit that renders him worthy of this extraordinary Heavenly mercy. When *Klal Yisrael* stood at the banks of the Red Sea, however, they were really no different from the Egyptians. We must remember that the Jews had succumbed to 210 years of living in a country whose moral bankruptcy was the most extreme in the world. They were exposed to an unprecedented assault on their spiritual and moral well-being. At some point, they deferred to the noxious influence. Idol worship is an anathema to the Jewish people, but their Egyptian slavery affected this aspect of their singular devotion to Hashem. Standing at the Red Sea, the prosecuting angel of Strict Justice stated that it was unjust for the Jews to be saved at the expense of their Egyptian pursuers. Thus, the only initiative that could have saved them was an act of *mesiras nefesh*, such as moving forward into the menacing waters of the Red Sea.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, was wont to say that *tefillah* is Hashem's gift to us. It is a weapon which enables us to reach out to Him, to petition His salvation, even if we are not worthy of it. All one must do is place his trust solely in Hashem with the realization that, after all is said and done, only Hashem can pull us out of our predicament. One who believes in the power and efficacy of *tefillah* and places all his hopes on Hashem's positive response will succeed in his quest for salvation.

Tefillah is a powerful tool which does not necessarily need to be employed only in instances of life or death, serious illness, financial challenges, or family troubles. What about something positive that means the world to a person? Is prayer the appropriate option? Will it be efficacious? The following incredible story (related by *Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk*, in *Otzroseihem Amalei*) demonstrates that *tefillah* expressed by the right person with proper intention works.

An elderly Jew, one of the *yakirei Yerushalayim*, special individuals, patriarch to a large family of *bnei Torah* and daughters who married *bnei Torah* (clearly they themselves represented the

epitome of a *bas Yisrael*), passed away. His *petirah*, passing, occurred close to *shkiah*, sunset. The *minhag*, custom, of Yerushalayim is not to keep a deceased person overnight. Thus, the burial takes place as close as possible to the time of death. As such, the *Chevra Kadisha*, sacred burial society, immediately informed the gentile gravediggers to prepare a grave. As soon as they received the call, they set about digging the grave.

When the *Chevra Kadisha* arrived at the cemetery with the body, they discovered, to their chagrin, that an error had been made in identifying the gravesite of the deceased. Apparently, he had purchased two graves side-by-side for him and his wife. The gravediggers had mistakenly prepared the grave that was designated to the wife of the deceased, who was very much alive. The graves could not be switched because a woman was already buried next to the site reserved for his wife. The *Chevra Kadisha* could not wait until the next morning when the gravediggers would dig a new grave, so they rolled up their sleeves and began to dig another grave.

The son of the deceased watched the proceedings with incredulity written all over his face. It was not as if he did not understand what was taking place. Rather, something was surreal about the *Chevra Kadisha* digging the grave that floored him. He said nothing until his father had been buried with *kavod*, honor. As they were leaving the cemetery, he spoke up and explained the reason for his surprising behavior.

“A number of years ago, my father summoned me to his apartment to discuss his *tzavaah*, will. He handed me the will, then stopped and asked me to return it to him. He had a clause to add. He wrote, ‘I ask of you to see to it if at all possible that my grave be dug by Jews who are Torah and *mitzvah* observant. I do not want my grave prepared by non-Jews.’

“I asked my father, ‘*Abba*, why are you placing such a difficult responsibility on us? The grave diggers who are employed by the *Chevra Kadisha* are all gentiles. We cannot give them orders to prepare the grave through Jews who are *yereim u’shleimim*, G-d-fearing and virtuous.’ My father did not budge. He reiterated his demand and said, ‘You say that it cannot be done. Well, then, I will pray to Hashem that He should see to it that my grave be dug by *frum* Jews.’

“This is exactly what my father did. He poured out his heart to Hashem every day. He made one request to which he believed with all his heart that Hashem would respond positively. He did, as we see how events were Heavenly orchestrated, so that my father would receive his wish.”