



RABBI SHALOM

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The Power of Sincere Prayer

In this week's parasha, we read of the passing of Rachel Imeinu. Rachel's life is short and filled with challenges. She yields her place to her sister Leah, remains childless for many years, and ultimately dies giving birth to Binyamin. Yet, centuries later, the prophet Yirmiyahu (31:10), paints a moving picture of Rachel's eternal role in the destiny of her children:

רַחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל-בָּנֶיהָ... מִנְעִי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינֶיךָ
מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לַפְּעֻלָּתְךָ נְאֻמָּה וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ
אֲוִיב... וְשָׁבוּ בָּנִים לְגִבּוֹלָם.

"Rachel is weeping for her children... Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is reward for your work, says Hashem, and they shall return from the land of the enemy... and the children shall return to their own border."

Rachel's tears pierce the heavens. God promises her that her cry will not go

unanswered — that her children, scattered and exiled, will one day return home. Many have prayed throughout the generations, and their prayers seemed to go unanswered. Why, then, does God respond to Rachel's cry?

Rabbi Shlesinger, in *Eleh HaDevarim*, references the Gemara in Berachot (32b), which teaches that after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, *"the gates of prayer were locked — but the gates of tears remained open."* This refers not only to physical tears but also to inner tears — the deep, wordless cries of the *neshama* (soul). When a person turns to Hashem with complete dependence, with no illusions of self-reliance, those tears reach the heavenly gates that never close. Crying is not a sign of weakness; it is an act of profound faith. It expresses the soul's surrender to God.

Below are a few examples that illustrate the extraordinary power of sincere tefillah.

KOHEN GADOL'S REQUEST

When the Kohen Gadol completed his sacred service on Yom Kippur, he would offer a unique prayer:

—*"ולא תכנס לפניך תפילתן של עובדי דרכים"*—*"May the prayers of travelers not enter before You."* After the festivals, travelers returning home might pray that it does not rain on their journeys. Yet the nation as a whole prays for rain and blessing. Why, then, was there

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concern that the prayers of a few travelers might outweigh those of the many?

The Saba of Kelm explains that the prayers of the travelers are offered with *absolute sincerity*. They fear for their safety and plead for mercy. Such tefillot, born of genuine need and emotion — “inner tears” — can ascend with great power.

MOTHER OF KOHEN GADOL'S REQUEST

A second example appears in Makkot (11a). The Gemara relates that the mother of the Kohen Gadol would send food and clothing to those exiled in the *arei miklat* (cities of refuge), lest they pray for her son's death — for only upon the death of the Kohen Gadol could they be released. Why would she fear the prayers of these negligent killers? Because they had no other hope. Their only recourse was heartfelt prayer. Such tefillot, stripped of pretense, can be devastatingly effective.

CHANA'S PRAYERS

So too we find with Chana, who prayed for a child: “וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל ה' וַיִּכְּוּ תִּבְכָּהּ” — “She prayed to Hashem and wept bitterly” (I Shmuel 1:10). Her tears were not a failure of faith but its highest expression. She poured her soul out before God — and her prayer was answered.

We, too, pray three times a day. Yet routine

often dulls the heart. The words may pass our lips, but not always our souls. The lesson of Rachel Imeinu, of the travelers, of the individuals in the *arei miklat*, and of Chana is that Hashem responds to sincerity — to the cry that comes from the deepest part of the human heart.

Prayer is not measured by eloquence but by authenticity. When our words are infused with emotion, vulnerability, and truth — when we stand before Hashem as Rachel did, with nothing but tears and faith — our voices are heard beyond all gates. May our own cries rise together with hers, hastening the day when Hashem's promise will be fulfilled: “וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגְבוּלָם” — “*And the children shall return to their own borders.*” May we soon see a complete redemption, and dwell in Eretz Yisrael in peace and joy. ■

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