

V'Ani Tefillah Foundation
Baltimore Community Tefillah Initiative
Praying With Fire – Week 3 Supplement

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Answering Calls - From Home

I called your phone-number and left you a message, but got no reply. I tried again and again, but there was no response, no call back from you. I guess you must be too busy, have no time for me, or don't want to be in touch with me. Or, maybe your phone is just not working properly, or doesn't receive messages, I don't know why ...

כה אמר ד' ... מדוע באתי ואין איש קראתי ואין עונה (ישעיהו ג')

Even nowadays, when we don't have *Nevi'im*, we receive many calls from Above, more often than we may realize. World events, headline news, as well as many less earthshaking events that we each experience every day are actually ways and means employed by HaShem to communicate with us, calling to us to give Him a call.

Like loving parents who send their son or daughter away to yeshiva or seminary, or even just to camp for the summer, and wait all the while to hear from their beloved child, "Has he\she called recently?" they ask each other, HaShem also waits to hear from His children, whom He misses more than we can imagine (see *Berachos* 3a).

When we are not in touch and don't call Him on our own, HaShem will initiate a call and send us a message through the limitless means at His disposal. After all, since we are totally dependant on Him, He can always withhold just a bit of what we want and\or need, and hopefully we will get the message and call Home. If that doesn't elicit the desired response, the follow-up message might be harder to ignore.

Hence, we are taught that natural disasters, like earthquakes, cyclones, hurricanes, tsunamis, and wildfires (all of which have occurred quite recently in frightening magnitudes), are actually meant as 'wake-up-calls' – addressed specifically to us, the only people online to receive and respond to such calls from Heaven (see *Yevamos* 63a).

A well-known Medrash offers this, in the form of a parable, as the purpose behind the entire episode of *Kriyas Yam Suf*. A king once saved a princess who cried out to him while being attacked by thieves. Afterwards, though, she did not maintain any further contact with the King. So what did he do? He sent more thieves to attack her again, waiting for her to call out to him as before, at which point he again came to her rescue. Similarly, HaShem wanted to hear from us again after taking us out of *Mitzrayim* just as beforehand, and for this reason brought *Parroh* chasing after us, in order to prompt us to pray [with fire] once again (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 2:2).

In other words, the message borne by *tzaros* that are sent our way is often, simply, “Hello, are you there? I haven’t heard from you in quite a while. Please give me a call. I’d love to hear from you soon.”

In fact, it is one of the 613 Torah *Mitzvos* to daven to HaShem – specifically in response to situations of suffering. According to *Ramban (Sefer HaMitzvos, Asei 5)*, this is the only time that prayer is a *Mitzvah D’Orayisa*. And according to *Ramban*, who considers our daily davening a Biblical obligation, there is another *Mitzvah* specific to calling out when suffering (see beginning of *Rambam Hil. Ta’aniyos*). As expressed by *Ramban (ibid)*, davening in response to troubles demonstrates our faith in HaShem and our belief that He listens to us and saves us when we call out to Him.

This all hits home very poignantly when we are confronted with the horrible terror attacks our brothers and sisters continue to suffer in Eretz Yisrael. Last week we were all horrified to hear about the Arab wild-man (*pera-adam*) on a bulldozer plowing over Jews in Jerusalem. We were shocked and aghast, we read about it and talked about it. But how many of us reacted by *davening*, right then and there, wherever we happened to be? By crying out to Heaven to stop such horrendous acts from happening again? By pleading with Him to save us from our centuries-long misery and end this lengthy, bitter *galus* already? Or, at the least, by praying right away for the injured victims of this murderous attack? Did we answer His call and call Him back *asap*, or did we just follow the news and not know what to do with it?

Admittedly, we have become somewhat accustomed, even calloused, to such events, and our reactions are muted. Just a few years ago we here in Baltimore as well as in communities around the world used to make city-wide gatherings for *Tefillah* and *Tehillim* in response to other painful parts of this ongoing saga of suffering. But we haven’t heard many calls to such rallies of late.

Instead, it’s now up to us to respond individually, each and every one of us as he or she can best muster up a response, with *Tehillim* in hand, a *possuk* on our lips, or simply with a heartfelt cry to our Father in Heaven who so much wants to hear from us. All these individual cries add up together and are heard collectively as the cries of our nation, as it says (*Shemos 2:23*) *va’izaku, va’taal shavosom el HaElokim*, and they cried out, and their prayers ascended before HaShem. When we cry out, He hears. *Ki mi goy gadul asher lo elohim kerovim eilav ka’HaShem Elokeinu bechol koreinu eilav*, For who is a great nation with a god close to them, like Hashem our G-d is so close whenever we call out to Him (*Va’eschanon 4:7*).

Of course, we needn’t wait for tragedy to hit, *HaShem yishmareinu*, before turning to our Father in Heaven in real, heartfelt prayer. We constantly have so much that we need, for ourselves, our loved ones, and all of our people, that there is always plenty for us to pray for, with fire and with feeling. And there is also so much to be grateful for, so much that we are all blessed with, that give good cause to offering daily prayers of thanksgiving and to sing His praises with all our hearts.

And just as in the parable of the princess, the king staged the later attack to prompt a response and hear from her again, only when she was not otherwise keeping in touch with him.

HaShem is calling to us. Let's give him a call, and keep in touch. He loves us, His children, and awaits our calls, in good times as well as otherwise. He is standing by, ready to answer. It's up to us to call Home.