

Baltimore Community Tefillah Initiative

Praying With Fire – Week 1 Supplement

Rabbi Heshy Kleinman

A Complete Prayer

A child asks his father for the candy that he knows is in his father's coat pocket. He can practically see it through the fabric of the coat. He knows the treat is there for him, and if the time is right, his father will be delighted to give it to him.

Another child, however, speaks half-heartedly. He is not sure that his father has candy for him. Nor is he sure that his father would want to give it to him should he have it on hand. Rather than anticipating the treat, the child is anticipating disappointment. Yet he realizes that he has no chance at all of getting the candy unless he asks. Therefore, he asks

The prayer one utters when his heart is filled with confidence that prayer brings an answer is a far more powerful prayer than the prayer one utters in the hopes that “it just might work this time.” Confidence in the efficacy of prayer is a powerful tool in crafting a prayer that Hashem will accept.

From all over the world, troubled people would come to see the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva, hoping that his renowned power of prayer could bring them salvation. Known as “the amud hatefillah -- the pillar of prayer”¹ of the generation, the effectiveness of his tefillah was said to be based largely in his firm faith in prayer's power to help in any situation.²

The Gemara³ illustrates the inner workings of this confidence by presenting the following situations: Two patients lie in their beds suffering from the same ravaging disease. The first patient recovers and resumes a healthy, vigorous life, while the other grows weaker each day and dies.

Two suspects charged with the same capital crime stand before the court. One walks out a free man and the other is led off to prison to await a death sentence.

The Gemara⁴ explains that the patient who was cured and the suspect who was freed prayed and were answered, while the patient who was not cured, and the suspect who was not freed, prayed and were not answered. “And why was this one's prayers answered? Because the one who was answered prayed a *tefillah sheleimah*, ‘complete prayer,’ while the other... did not.”

¹ The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Shimon Finkleman with Rabbi Yosef Weiss, ArtScroll, page 167.

² Ibid, page 175.

³ *Rosh Hashanah, Daf* 18a.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Rashi⁵ defines a “complete prayer,” as *niskaven*, “he concentrated.” In the context of this Gemara, however, is it possible that a person facing death by illness or decree would not concentrate, that he would not pray a “complete prayer?”

Rav Elya Lopian,⁶ explains the words ‘*lo niskaven*’ to mean that “he did not have intent.” That means that although the doomed men prayed with the same intensity as those whose prayers were answered, they did not really believe in the effectiveness of their prayers. They prayed “just in case” it could help, but they did not recognize it as the only real source of help.

A complete prayer, on the other hand, is recited with confidence that prayer is the most powerful means to heal the sick or free the condemned. It expresses complete faith that the entire world is in Hashem’s hands, and that He has at His disposal every salvation and every cure that will ever be needed.

The words of *Tehillim*,⁷ “*Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him sincerely,*” refer to those whose prayers are a harmony of heart, [mind] and words.⁸ Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon explains that when one prays a complete prayer with faith and confidence that prayer can do it all, he imbues his prayer with the greatest harmony,⁹ which makes it all the more beautiful to Hashem.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Cited in *Sefer Matnas Chaim, Yomim Noraim*, page 28. Also see ‘With Hearts Full of Faith’ (Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon, Art Scroll , page 92).

⁷ *Tehillim*,145:18.

⁸ *Radak*, *Ibid.*

⁹ Heard from Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon. See also ‘Iggeres HaRamban: A Letter For The Ages’, by Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Page 121, ArtScroll.