



Parshas Vayera

October 22, 2021

## A Taste of Torah

### A Lot to Pray For

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

You prayed and prayed and prayed, but to no avail. Your hopes were dashed, your tears and pleas seemingly lost and unanswered. You are left sad, drained and wondering: Why did I bother praying if I didn't get what I begged for?

You may identify with the above experience. You are not alone. While stories of prayers answered abound, there is, unfortunately, no shortage of situations where intense, prolonged entreaties of the Almighty did not receive the hoped-for response. How is one to react to this frustrating, difficult circumstance?

While there are a number of angles and ideas that exist in answering this burning question, one approach can be found in this week's parsha. Hashem informs Avraham that He is planning to destroy the wicked and corrupt city of Sodom and its four sister cities. Avraham responds with a lengthy prayer, pleading with G-d to spare the cities and their inhabitants for the sake of fifty righteous people. No, says Hashem, there aren't fifty righteous people to be found there. Forty-five righteous people? Asks Avraham. Nope. 40... 30... 20... 10... Avraham does not abandon the evil populace to its imminent obliteration.

Sorry, replies Hashem, but even a *minyan* of ten righteous individuals cannot be found in the city. Avraham, having failed, departs for home, and the annihilation commences.

One cannot help but wonder: Hashem, in informing Avraham, surely knew that he would intercede on Sodom's behalf. Hashem also surely knew that the cities were beyond salvation; they were doomed to their fate, and Avraham's prayers were doomed to failure. Why, then, did Hashem not just tell Avraham this at the outset? Why did He string Avraham along, allowing him to continue his futile prayers?

These questions are actually at odds with a basic fact: some people did, indeed, escape the inferno of Sodom. Yes, that's right, I'm referring to Lot and his daughters. As you read this, you may be rolling your eyes and saying, "Really, that's who Avraham needed to pray for?! His wayward nephew Lot and his daughters, women with whom Lot would soon have a drunken, incestuous relationship that would produce the nations of Ammon and Moav, thorns in the side of the Jewish Nation for centuries to come? For that, Hashem needed Avraham to pray?!"

But before you say all that, consider: The Medrash, commenting on the verse in Tehillim (89:21) "I have found My servant David" (a reference to King David), cites Rabi Yitzchak who said, "Where did I [Hashem] find him? In Sodom."

This Medrash is referring to the fact that the convert Ruth, great-grandmother of King David and the matriarch of the Davidic line that will ultimately produce Mashiach, was a Moabite convert. In addition, an Ammonite woman named Na'ama converted to Judaism, married David's son King Solomon, and produced Rechavam, who succeeded his father as king. Thus, the Davidic dynasty and, ultimately, no one short of the Messiah himself were saved from Sodom thanks to Avraham's prayer!

Incredibly, when we look at these verses in the Torah and focus on the tragedy and catastrophe of the moment, we cannot see the enormous history-altering miracle taking place under our very noses. Lot, with the hope and salvation of all Mankind hidden deep within him, is saved from death. The world is saved. Sodom and its environs were, indeed, condemned to be wiped off the face of the Earth, but a very small part of that city was not. And that small, insignificant remnant turned out to be very important.

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## Stories for the Soul

### Life-Changing

David Hyman of Seattle was the type of person who was always looking to help others, to dispense some friendly advice, to give someone a boost when he really needed it. One day, a salesman knocked on his door. While Mr. Hyman had no interest in purchasing the item being offered, he nonetheless invited the fellow in, offered him a seat and a drink, and began talking with him.

Seeing, during the course of the conversation, that the salesman was having a hard time in life, Mr. Hyman pulled a book off of the shelf near his seat, and said, "I want to give you this book. This book absolutely changed my life! Read it well, and it will offer you a whole new perspective on life." The salesman departed with the book, and the two men never saw each other again.

Mr. Hyman passed away in 2009, and the family he left behind moved to Baltimore. But, a few years after his passing, the Hymans' neighbor in Seattle received a knock on the door - it was the salesman who had visited the neighborhood years earlier. The fellow told the neighbor about his meeting with Mr. Hyman, and related, "My family immigrated from Vietnam, and we had a hard time here in America. One of my brothers became a professional hit man, another a drug dealer. I was trying to scrape by as a salesman, when your former neighbor gave me encouragement and a book that he said would change my life. Well, I read that book, and it was, indeed, a game-changer. I put my life together, and today I am a successful manager in a prominent company. All thanks to Mr. Hyman's encouragement."

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## Kollel Happenings

### MEET YOU IN THE MIDDLE: LITIGATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION AT NOV 3 T4T ON ZOOM

Join Abraham Z. Melamed, Esq., Mediator at Melamed Mediation, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they negotiate the ins and outs of conflict resolution on Wednesday, Nov. 3 at 7:30 pm via Zoom. Visit [denverkollel.org](http://denverkollel.org) or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) for details and Zoom info.

### TALMUDO BIYADO GEMARA CLUB FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS

Learn, review, and acquire a masechta! Boys in grades 6-8 are invited to join Rabbi Chaim Gross at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center/Ohel Yissochor weeknights Mon.-Thu. from 8-8:30 pm for a Gemara shiur followed by review. Contact Rabbi Nesanel Kipper at [rnk@denverkollel.org](mailto:rnk@denverkollel.org) for further details.

### BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

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## Halacha Riddles

**Last week's question:** When would a woman have a choice if she should recite *Birkas Hamazon*?

**Answer:** While the basic obligation to recite *Birkas Hamazon* after eating a filling bread meal is a Scriptural obligation, there is a dispute whether women are obligated in *Birkas Hamazon* on a Scriptural or Rabbinic level (Shulchan Aruch 186:1). Normally, if one has a doubt whether he must recite a blessing or not, the rule is *safek brachos lihakeil*, one is lenient regarding an uncertainty for a blessing, and so the blessing is not (and may not be) recited. However, this is because most blessings are of Rabbinic origin. For a *bracha* whose obligation is of Scriptural origin, however, one must be

stringent and repeat the blessing. Since the nature of a woman's obligation of *Birkas Hamazon* is unclear, a woman who has an uncertainty if she must repeat *Birkas Hamazon* or not (e.g., she does not recall if she recited it or not) may choose to repeat it in accordance with those who say it is a Scriptural obligation or she may choose not to repeat it (in accordance with those who say it is Rabbinic) (Mishna Berura 186:3).

**This week's question:** Two adult Jewish males have a similar, though not identical, uncertainty regarding their recitation of *Birkas Hamazon* on an ordinary weekday, yet one must repeat *Birkas Hamazon* while the other does not. How is this possible?

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part XXII

In 1932, Rabbi Shapiro was elected to the Sejm, or Polish Parliament as a representative of the Agudah party. His oratorical skills and famed sharp wit allowed him to serve his constituents well, often facing down significant anti-

Semitism. The story is told of an anti-Semitic Sejm member who needled Rabbi Shapiro by informing him that a park in Silesia did not allow Jews or dogs to enter. Rabbi Shapiro retorted, "Well, neither of us may enter!"

## Stories for the Soul

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Avraham Avinu was the paradigm of *chesed*, loving-kindness. The Torah details how his *chesed* included all people, regardless of their station in life. We, too,

must follow his example and help those in need, regardless of their stature or prominence.

## A Taste of Torah

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And it all happened thanks to what appears to be, at first, a fruitless and pointless prayer.

The answer to the questions posed at the start of this discussion is: You cannot possibly know what your prayer accomplishes. True, it may not produce the response you are hoping for at this moment. But we are small beings existing for but a few brief moments in a vast Universe whose physical, and even more so spiritual, limits are far beyond our comprehension. Sometimes, one does

merit to see the fruits of his earnest entreaties to the One above. Sometimes, one does not. But rest assured, every word uttered resounds in the Heavens, every cry is noted, every tear collected. One day, perhaps not in this lifetime, we will see the deliverance our prayers produced, the lives they changed, the worlds they created. Until then, never give up. "Hope to Hashem; strengthen and fortify your heart, and hope to Hashem." (Tehillim 27:14) The very future of the world may well depend on it.

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