

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

לע"נ הרה"ח ר' יעקב נחמיה בן ר' חיים צבי ע"ה
ע"י נכדו הרה"ח ר' אברהם שלמה יאקאבאוויטש הי"ו

Toldos 5770

And the children moved inside her, and she said, "If so, why did I ask for this?" And she went to consult with Hashem. And Hashem said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will emerge from your loins..." (25:22-23)

Rashi says, "If so – if the pain of pregnancy is so great, why did I long and pray for it?" On a simple level, Rivka was saying that she regretted praying for a child at all. If this is how painful it was going to be, she should have not prayed, and remained barren all her life.

But the Arvei Nachal explains that Rivka compared her childbearing to the redemption of the Jewish people. Hashem made the Jewish people swear not to force the end of exile with excessive prayer. The reason is that if the redemption comes in its proper time, it will come naturally and easily, without any opposition or pain. But if the Jews pray excessively, although Hashem will certainly not reject their prayers, and the redemption will come before its time, it will come with many accusers and with much pain and suffering.

When Rivka saw how painful her pregnancy was, she thought: Surely I was not supposed to have a child now. Hashem wanted to wait longer because He desires the prayer of the righteous. That was the reason why I was barren to begin with (Yevamos 64a). He only gave me a child now because of Yitzchok's excessive prayer, as it says, "And Yitzchok entreated Hashem." She went to consult a prophet, who told her, "It is not as you thought. The pain is not because the child came too early, but rather because there are two nations in your womb..."

The first to understand that the oath against "forcing the end" refers to excessive prayer was Rashi on Kesubos 111a. The Midrash on Shir Hashirim (2:7) applies the oath to the revolts of the Children of Ephraim and Bar Kochba, so it is clear that actions to force the end are also included. Rashi merely meant that even prayer is included in the oath.

Rabbi Shalom Ber Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (1866-1920) said this clearly: "Even if these men [the Zionists] were loyal to Hashem and His Torah, and even if there were a chance that they would achieve their goal, we must not listen to them in this matter, to make our redemption with our own power. Is it not forbidden even to force the end with excessive prayer (Rashi Kesubos 111a)? All the more so that with power and worldly methods, that is, to leave exile by force, we are not permitted... And this is against our true hope, that Hashem will bring us Moshiach Tzidkeinu soon and our redemption will come through Hashem Himself." (Ohr Layesharim, p. 57)

However, the Zionist leader Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook claimed that according to Rashi, the oath prohibits only prayer, not actions: "Rashi adds that we are not to make exaggerated petitions over the End. We are not supposed to be 'nudniks' and

clamor, ‘Redeem us! Redeem us! Redeem us!’ without end. The meaning here is that we are not to hasten the End of the exile through spiritual means. It is not talking about building Eretz Yisroel.” (Torat Eretz Yisroel p. 290)

From the Arvei Nachal it is clear that there is no difference between praying for the redemption early and action to bring it early. The problem is that if the redemption comes before its time, “it will come with many accusers and with much pain and suffering.” We do not want to bring upon ourselves pain and suffering, G-d forbid, whether through prayer or action.

The Ramban also holds that prayer is included in the oath, and in Sefer Haemunah Vehabitachon (p. 369 in the Chavel Edition) he draws a connection between the oath against praying excessively for the end and the following Midrash in Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim 845: “Why do Jews pray in this world and are not answered? Because they do not know the Ineffable Name. But in the future the Holy One, blessed is He, will make it known to them, as it says, ‘Therefore let My people know My name’ (Yishaya 52:6). At that time they will pray and be answered, as it says, ‘He will call Me and I will answer him’ (Tehillim 91:15).” The Ramban says that certainly prayer is effective during exile; the Midrash only means that prayer for the redemption will not be effective, because of the oath. Apparently the Ramban understood the oath not as a prohibition but as a decree: Hashem withheld knowledge of the Ineffable Name from us so that our prayers for the redemption would not be effective.

The Ramban proceeds to ask how his interpretation is consistent with the story of Rabbi Chiya and his sons (Bava Metzia 85b), who would have successfully prayed for the redemption had Eliyahu Hanavi not stopped them. He answers that that moment when Rabbi Chiya and his sons tried to pray was an exceptional moment, but in general any prayers for the redemption, even by such great individuals as Rabbi Chiya and his sons, are not answered. Hashem has simply decreed that the redemption will not come until a certain time, or until certain conditions are met. The decree means that both prayers and actions to bring the redemption early will be met with failure.

The Radvaz, in his commentary Migdal David on Shir Hashirim, says that the oath prohibits excessive prayer – not prayer of the Jews in this world, but prayer of their souls in the World to Come. When a Jew dies and his soul ascends, it tells the other souls all about the difficult exile that the Jewish people is undergoing. They feel the pain and wish to complain to Hashem. But the new soul warns them not to force the end before Hashem desires it to come. Here too, we see that the prohibition on excessive prayer is not because Hashem does not want a person to be a nudnik and beg incessantly without doing anything. The souls in the World to Come cannot take any action in any case; all they can do is pray, yet they are warned not to pray.

The Alshich in his commentary on Eichah says that this prohibition on too much prayer is because the exile is for our atonement and we cannot pray for it to end before it is complete. Again, this shows that both prayer and action are prohibited, because the point is not to end our atonement prematurely. He explains this as the meaning of the verses of Eichah 3:25-26: “Hashem is good to those who hope to Him, to the soul that seeks Him. Good and one should wait and be silent, for the salvation of Hashem.” For any other trouble that may befall us, prayer is the best response; Hashem is good to those who hope and pray to Him. But when it comes to exile, our response should be to be “good” – to better ourselves so that we need no more atonement, “and wait and be silent” from praying. We must trust “in the salvation of Hashem” – for Hashem is also in exile with us, and we trust that He will, so to speak, save Himself and save us along with Him.



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