

PRAYING with Fire

PRAYER POINTS

GRASPING THE HANDICRAFT OF THE PATRIARCHS

When the Hebrews left Egypt, the Torah relates their situation was desperate and they appeared to be doomed. Pharaoh was pursuing them, and the sea was before them. One sage explains that, in this terrified state, they “grasped the handicraft of the Patriarchs,” a phrase that refers to prayer. Why, another sage asks, are the desperate prayers of Israel, recited in a moment of terror, compared to the “Patriarchs’ handicraft” – of regular morning, afternoon, and evening prayers?

His answer reveals the underlying approach to any prayer a person utters, whether in good times or times of great challenge: For the Patriarchs, there was no difference in the emotional content of desperate prayers and their regular prayers, for they keenly felt that one depends upon the Almighty’s kindness and protection from minute to minute.

A person has only what the Almighty ordains that he should have, and thus, he is at all times praying for his life, his success, and every morsel he consumes. King David expresses this bedrock concept in *Tehillim* 20:8: *Some with chariots, and some with horses, but we, in the Name of the Almighty, our God, we call out.* Trust in the Almighty is a person’s only true possession.

Chazal, the sages, teach that we must totally rely on the Almighty’s mer-

cy to succeed in every aspect of our lives. A rabbinic writing states that “it is as difficult for the Omnipresent to match a man and a woman for marriage as it was to accomplish the splitting of the Reed Sea.” Similarly, “providing man’s sustenance is as difficult as the splitting of the Reed Sea. Thus, one must pray for his sustenance, and not take it for granted.” *Chazal* also teach that certain aspects of maintaining one’s health are as difficult as the splitting of the Sea of Reeds.

One of the rabbinic writings advises one who wants wisdom to pray for mercy from the Almighty, the Source of all wisdom. “Engaging a lot in study...without prayer does not suffice.”

To be able to pray properly, a person has to abandon his illusion of being the master of his own fate. He must open his grasping hand and internalize that without the Creator constant help, his hand will remain empty.

We have nothing, except through the Almighty’s beneficence. When a person feels his vulnerability, and knows in the deepest recesses of his heart that all he has is bestowed upon him through prayer, then we can grasp the “handicraft of the Patriarchs.”

POINTS TO PONDER

For our Patriarchs, there was no difference in the emotional content of desperate prayers and regular prayers.

Our Patriarchs keenly felt that one constantly depends on the Almighty’s kindness and protection.

To be able to pray properly, a person has to abandon his illusion of being the master of his own fate.

Psalm 54:4 O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth. (TNK)