

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

The Minister's Words Broke Her Heart



In 1980, when Baptist minister Bailey Smith said, “God does not hear the prayer of a Jew,” the Jewish community was outraged.

After the public outcry, I was lecturing on a college campus when a distraught and heartbroken Jewish student approached me with tears in her eyes.

A fellow student had repeated the minister's anti-Semitic slur and told her she would go to hell unless she accepted Jesus.

I reassured her that our bible teaches that God does hear our prayers, and Jews don't need an intermediary to have a personal relationship with God.

In this week's Torah portion, *Eikev* (Deuteronomy 7:12–11:25), we are reminded that after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses prayed to God, saying, “*Do not destroy Your people*” (Deuteronomy 9:26), and God heeded Moses' prayer.

Although Moses prayed on behalf of the entire Jewish nation in this passage, there are countless examples of an individual's prayers being accepted by God as well.

One of the most moving examples is when the barren Hannah prayed for a child, as it says, “*I prayed for this child, and God has granted my request*” (I Samuel 1:27). Our sages point to Hannah's heartfelt and soft-spoken words as the prototype for personal prayer to God.

There is no doubt that the Almighty hears our prayers.

The Jewish perspective is to approach God as our loving Father Who knows what is best for us. However, sometimes the answer takes time, sometimes it is immediate, and sometimes the answer is “no.”

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Regardless, the answer is an expression of God's compassion and mercy and is not solely contingent on our righteousness.

Daniel, who prayed to God after the destruction of the First Temple, stated it this way, *"We do not make requests of You because we are righteous, but because of Your great mercy"* (Daniel 9:18).

When Daniel prayed, he *"faced toward Jerusalem...three times a day"* (Daniel 6:10). Daniel was following the words of King Solomon's prayer after he prophetically foresaw that the Jewish people would be taken captive and exiled from their land. Solomon's prayer instructed the Jewish people that even when they are exiled in the land of their enemies, they can repent and *"pray toward the city [Jerusalem]"* (I Kings 8:48), and God will *"listen to them whenever they call out"* (I Kings 8:52).

The Jewish people followed this advice, and for 2,000 years, they directed their prayers [facing] toward Jerusalem and prayed for the return to Israel. Then, in our lifetime, we witnessed the miraculous restoration of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland.

Prayer reminds us that we are not in complete control.

Similarly, this week's Torah portion describes God telling the Jews, *"Do not say to yourself, because of my righteousness, the Eternal brought me to take possession of this land... rather because of the promise God made to your forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"* (Deuteronomy 9:4-5).

To the best of our ability, our responsibility is to live a moral life guided by God's wisdom as outlined in the Torah. Prayer reminds us that we are not in complete control and the source of blessings is from a Higher Power.

This is what our sages meant when they taught, *"The world stands on three things: Torah, prayer, and acts of kindness"* (Ethics of Our Fathers 1:2).

May this Shabbat provide opportunities to pray from your heart, and may you receive abundant blessings of health and happiness.

Shabbat Shalom,

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