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B. One Who Prays for Their Fellow is Answered First.....11

G-d had already promised Abraham children at the Covenant of Parts, yet years passed without the blessing materializing. Only after Abraham prayed for Abimelech did the miracle happen. This teaches us the great virtue of praying for mercy for one's fellow.

Praying for one's needs is a biblical commandment, and one's own life takes precedence over someone else's (Sources 4-5). Accordingly, one ought to first pray on their own behalf. However, we are nevertheless told to pray for our fellow first.

C. Mutual Benefit.....15

Even if one only prays for their fellow in the hopes that they will thus be answered first, that's OK. The main thing is that they are praying on behalf of their fellow. Similarly, if someone lost money and it was found by a pauper, the person who lost it has fulfilled the mitzvah of giving charity, because what matters is that the recipient was helped.

Obviously, however, the ultimate level is that our fellow's needs should be more important to us than our own.

D. One Who Assists Their Fellow is Answered First.....17

In next week's Torah reading, we learn of Isaac and Rebecca's marriage. Rashi explains that while Abraham was busy finding Isaac a match, Isaac was busy finding Abraham a match - bringing Hagar back. In the merit of helping his father, Isaac was answered first.

The Rebbe wrote this idea in a letter to Shifra Morozov, a Chabad Chassid whose husband was killed in battle, saying that in the merit of the help and comfort she gives to others who lost family members in the war, she will be answered first.

Story: The other and "I."

Introduction

G-d promises Abraham a son. For thirty years he waits, and then after he prays for Abimelech, the promise is fulfilled. Are these events linked?

A class on the great importance of prayer and action for others, and how much it benefits all parties.

השיעור לפרשת וירא

השיעור לפרשת וירא:
משיחת שבת פרשת וירא, כ"ף מר-חשוון, ה'תשמ"ג
הנחה בלתי מוגה.
תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ג, חלק א' עמ' 474 ואילך

A. G-d's Promise and its Fulfillment

The Covenant of Parts

The Covenant of Parts was one of the most important events in Jewish history. It was the moment G-d told Abraham about the pain and suffering his descendants would endure, as well as the happier times that would eventually follow. This promise was kept in their minds during the years of slavery and suffering. One part of this promise still has not been fulfilled and we hope and pray for it to be materialized very soon, with the coming of Moshiach.

According to Rashi, the covenant took place when Abraham was 70 years old.

Source 1 Genesis 15:1-14, 17

The Promise of Descendants

Student's
pg. 3

After these incidents, the word of G-d came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram; I am your Shield; your reward is exceedingly great." Abram replied, "G-d, what will You give me, since I am going childless, and the steward of my household is Eliezer of Damascus?" Abram said, "You have not given me children; one of my household will inherit me." The word of G-d came to him, saying, "This one will not inherit you, rather the one who will come forth from your innards will inherit you." G-d took Abram outside, and said, "Please look heavenward and count the stars, if you are able to count them." He said to him, "So will be your seed." Abram believed in G-d, and [G-d] considered it his righteousness.

G-d said to him, "I am G-d, Who brought you forth from Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it." Abram said, "G-d, how will I know that I will inherit it?" G-d said to him, "Take for Me three heifers and three goats and three rams, and a turtle dove and a young bird." Abram took all of these for G-d and split them in half. He placed each part opposite its other half, but he did not divide the birds.

Rashi

Split them: He separated each one into two parts. The verse retains its literal meaning,

אחר הדברים האלה היה דבר-
יהוה אל-אברם במחנה לאמר אל-
תירא אברם אנכי מגן לך שכרך
הרבה מאד: ויאמר אברם אדני
יהוה מה-תתן-לי ואנכי הולך
ערירי ובן-משק ביתי הוא דמשק
אליעזר: ויאמר אברם הן לי לא
נתתה זרע והנה בן-ביתי יורש
אתי: והנה דבר-יהוה אליו לאמר
לא יירשך זה כייאם אשר יצא
ממעריך הוא יירשך: ויוצא אתו
החוצה ויאמר הבטינא השמימה
וספר הכוכבים אם-תוכל לספר
אתם ויאמר לו כה יהיה זרעך:
והאמן ביהוה ויחשבה לו צדקה:

ויאמר אליו אני יהוה אשר
הוצאתיך מאור כשדים לתת
לך את-הארץ הזאת לרשתה:
ויאמר אדני יהוה במה אדע כי
אירשנה: ויאמר אליו קחה לי
עגלה משלשת ועז משלשת ואיל
משלש ותר וגזל: ויקח-לו את-
כל-אלה ויבחר אתם בתוך ויתן
איש-בתרו לקראת רעהו ואת-
הצפור לא בחר.

ויבחר אתם. חלק כל אחד לשני
חלקים; ואין המקרא יוצא מידי
פשוטו

for he was making a covenant with G-d to keep His promise and give the land to his descendants ... The way covenants are made is by walking between the two parts of an animal, as it says in Jeremiah, “those who walk between the parts of a calf.” Here too, the fire and smoke that went between the parts was an emissary of the Divine presence, which is called “fire.”

לְפִי שֶׁהָיָה כּוֹרֵת בְּרִית עִמּוֹ לְשׁוֹמֵר
הַבְּטָחָתוֹ לְהוֹרִישׁ לְבָנָיו אֶת הָאָרֶץ
.. וְדָרַךְ כּוֹרֵת בְּרִית לְחַלֵּק בְּהֵמָה
וְלַעֲבֹר בֵּין בְּתָרֶיהָ, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
לְהֵלֵךְ הָעֹבְרִים בֵּין בְּתָרֵי הָעֵגֶל
(ירמיה ל"ד), אִף כָּאֵן תִּגּוֹר עֵשֶׂן
וְלִפִּיד אֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָבַר בֵּין הַגְּזָרִים
הוּא שְׁלוּחַו שֶׁל שְׂכִינָה, שֶׁהוּא
אֵשׁ

The book of Jeremiah describes how during the siege on Jerusalem by the Babylonians just before its destruction, the city's residents decided to fulfill the mitzvah of releasing their servants which they had not done until then. But once the siege was lifted, they took them all back despite the covenant they made with G-d about this in the Holy Temple. The prophet Jeremiah rebuked them in G-d's name:

“I will deliver the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not kept the words of the covenant which they made before Me when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts. The princes of Judah and the princes of Jerusalem, the officers and the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf. I will deliver them into the hands of their enemies.” (Jeremiah 34:18-20)

We see 1,200 years after Abraham, when the residents of Jerusalem accepted an obligation on themselves they made a covenant by splitting a calf and walking between the parts. This was a legal procedure practiced for thousands of years, not only among Jews.

The Sefer Halkarim (4:45) explains that the symbolism behind this custom is that “making a covenant is a bond between two people to connect the love between them to the extent that they become like one body, and each will watch over the other like they would watch over themselves.” In other words, when two people enter a covenant between the parts of an animal that symbolizes that they are one body and will put themselves out to save the other like they would for themselves.

Student's The birds of prey descended upon the carcasses,
pg. 4 and Abram drove them away.

וַיֵּרֶד הָעֵיט עַל-הַפְּגָרִים וַיִּשְׁבּ
אֹתָם אַבְרָם:

Even Yisrael (Steinsaltz) commentary

The birds of prey descending on the carcasses symbolize the enemies who wish to destroy the covenant. Abraham fought them off and drove them away. This foretells that the covenant and its realization will encounter many challenges and threats and it will be necessary to stand up to them.

העופות העטים על הטרף מסמלים את האויבים המנסים להתנכל לברית. אברם הבריח אותם. הוא ניסה להילחם באויבים סמליים אלה כדי לגרשם. יש בכך כדי לבשר כי הברית ומימושה צפויות להיתקל בקשיים ובאיומים רבים, ויהיה צורך לעמוד כנגדם בעתיד.

The sun was ready to set, and a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and behold, a fright, a great darkness was falling upon him.

Even Yisrael (Steinsaltz) commentary

This is not describing regular sleep that results from exhaustion, but an inability to remain awake, as if something extraneous is inducing him to sleep. This generates a dark fear that has no reason or meaning.

G-d said to Abram, "You shall surely know that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.

I will also judge the nation that enslaved them, and afterwards they will go forth with great wealth...

When the sun set and it was dark a smoking furnace and a fire brand passed between these parts.

Even Yisrael (Steinsaltz) commentary

The smoke and fire represent G-d's presence passing through the parts, concluding the formal part of the covenant.

Almost 30 years passed and Abraham and Sarah still didn't bear children. During that time, Abraham marries a second wife, Hagar, who bears Yishmael, but G-d tells Abraham that this is not the fulfillment of His promise. You will have a child from Sarah, G-d told him, and this son will inherit you and begin the Jewish nation.

Then, a terrifying story happens. Abimelech, the king of Gerar, kidnaps Sarah and drags her to his palace. The story has a surprising ending

Source 2 Genesis 20:1-11, 14-18

Abimelech and Sarah

Abraham traveled from there to the land of the south, and he dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and he sojourned in Gerar. Abraham said about Sarah his wife, "She is my sister," and Abimelech the king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

וַיְהִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לָבוֹא וַתְּרַדְמָה נִפְלְאָה
עַל־אַבְרָם וַהֲגִהָ אַיְמָה חֲשִׁכָה
גְדֹלָה נִפְלְתָ עָלָיו:

אין מדובר בשינה פשוטה הבאה מתוך עייפות, אלא בהיעדר אפשרות להישאר ער, כאילו דבר מה מרדים אותו מן החוץ. ואז נפל עליו פחד קודר שאין לו משמעות ואין לו תוכן מסוים

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יְדַע תְּדַע כִּי־יָגֵר
יְהִיָּה וְרַעַף בְּאַרְץ לֹא לָהֶם וַעֲבָדוּם
וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: וְגַם
אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָן אֲנִי
וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יֵצְאוּ בְּרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל...

וַיְהִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בָּאָה וַעֲלָטָה הָיָה
וַהֲגִהָ תַנּוּר עֶשֶׂן וְלִפִּיד אֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר
עָבַר בֵּין הַגְּזָרִים הָאֵלֶּה:

תנור העשן ולפיד האש מסמלים את הנוכחות האלוקית, שעברה בין הבתרים הללו, ובכך נשלם הצד הטקסי של הברית.

וַיִּסַּע מִשָּׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶרְצָה הַנְּגִב
וַיָּשָׁב בֵּין־קְדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיָּגֵר
בְּגֵרָר: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־שָׂרָה
אִשְׁתּוֹ אַחֲתִי הוּא וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ
מֶלֶךְ גֵּרָר וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שָׂרָה:

G-d came to Abimelech in a nighttime dream and He said to him, "You are going to die because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a married woman." Abimelech had not come near to her, and he said, "G-d, would You kill even a righteous nation? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'? She also said, 'He is my brother.' I have done this with an innocent heart and pure hands."

G-d said to him in a dream, "I too know that you did this with an innocent heart, and I have withheld you from sinning to Me; therefore, I did not let you touch her. Return the man's wife, because he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, know that you will surely die, you and all that is yours."

Rashi

Because he is a prophet: He knows you haven't touched her, therefore he will pray for you.

Abimelech arose early in the morning, and he summoned all his servants, and he spoke all these words in their ears. The men were very frightened. Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us, and what have I sinned against you, that you have brought upon me and upon my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me deeds that are not done.

Rashi

Deeds that are not done: A plague that doesn't regularly afflict people has befallen us through you; all our bodily openings have shut, those for seed, urine, excrement and the ears and nostrils.

Abimelech said to Abraham, "Why did you do this?" Abraham said, "For I said, 'Surely, there is no fear of G-d in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'" Abimelech took flocks of sheep and cattle and servants and maidservants, and he gave them to Abraham, and he returned his wife Sarah. Abimelech said, "Here is my land before you; you may live wherever you please."

וַיָּבֵא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ בַּחֲלוֹם הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הֲנֵה מוֹת עַל-הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר-לָקַחְתָּ וְהוּא בְעֵלְתָּ בְעַלְיָהּ: וַיֹּאבְיִמֶלֶךְ לֹא קָרַב אֵלֶיהָ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי הַגּוֹי גַּם-צָדִיק תִּהְרַג: הֲלֹא הוּא אָמַר-לִי אַחֲתִי הוּא וְהִיא גַם-הוּא אָמְרָה אָחִי הוּא בְתָם-לְכַבִּי וּבְנִקְלִין כִּפִּי עָשִׂיתִי זֹאת:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים בַּחֲלוֹם גַּם אֲנֹכִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי בְתָם-לְכַבְּךָ עָשִׂיתָ זֹאת וְאַחֲשֶׁךָ גַּם-אֲנֹכִי אוֹתָךְ מִחֲטוּלִי עַל-כֵּן לֹא-נִתְתַּיֵּךְ לְגַגֵּעַ אֵלֶיהָ: וְעַתָּה הִשָּׁב אִשְׁתְּ-הָאִישׁ כִּי-נִבְיָא הוּא וְיִתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַדְךָ וְחַיָּה וְאִם-אֵינָךְ מְשִׁיב דָּע כִּי-מוֹת תָּמוּת אֶתָּה וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ:

כִּי נִבְיָא הוּא: וַיִּוֹדַע שְׁלֹא נִגַּעְתָּ בָּהּ, לְפִיכָךְ וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַדְךָ.

וַיִּשְׁכַּם אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל-עַבְדָּיו וַיְדַבֵּר אֶת-כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים מְאֹד: וַיִּקְרָא אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ לְאַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מַה-עָשִׂיתָ לָּנוּ וּמַה-חָטַאתִי לָךְ כִּי-הִבַּאתָ עָלַי וְעַל-מַמְלַכְתִּי חֲטָאָה גְּדוֹלָה מְעַשִׂים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יַעֲשׂוּ עֲשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי:

מַעֲשִׂים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יַעֲשׂוּ. מִכָּה אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִרְגָלָה לְכַא עַל בְּרִיָּה בָּאָה לָנוּ עַל יָדְךָ, עֲצִירַת כָּל נְקָבִים שֶׁל זֶרַע וְשֶׁל קִטְנִיּוֹת וְרַעֲי וְאֲזִנִּים וְחֻטָּם:

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ אֶל-אַבְרָהָם מָה רָאִיתָ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ אֶת-הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם כִּי אָמַרְתִּי רַק אֵינִי יִרְאֵת אֱלֹהִים בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וְהִרְגוּנִי עַל-דְּבַר אִשְׁתִּי: וַיִּקַּח אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ צֹאן וּבָקָר וְעַבְדִּים וּשְׂפָחֹת וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְרָהָם וַיִּשָּׁב לוֹ אֶת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ:

To Sarah he said, "I have given a thousand pieces of silver to your brother; behold it is to you a covering of the eyes for all who are with you, and with all you shall contend."

Rashi

To Sarah he said: Abimelech said in her honor in order to appease her, "I have bestowed upon you this honor; I have given money to your brother, whom you said, 'He is my brother.' Behold this money and this honor are to you a covering of the eyes."

For all who are with you: They will cover their eyes, so that they will not denigrate you. Had I returned you empty-handed, they could have said, "After he violated her, he returned her." Now that I had to spend so much money to appease you, they will know that I returned you against my will, through a miracle.

Abraham prayed to G-d, and G-d healed Abimelech and his wife and his handmaids, and they gave birth.

For G-d had shut every womb of Abimelech's household, on account of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Rashi

They gave birth: As the Targum renders: and they were relieved. Their orifices were opened, and they expelled that which needed to be expelled, and that is their birth.

Every womb: Every bodily opening.

Because of Sarah: Through the words of Sarah.

Several months later, Sarah conceives and gives birth to a son!

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ הִנֵּה אֲרֻצֵי לְפָנַיךָ
בְּטוֹב בְּעֵינַיִךְ שָׁב: וְלִשְׂרָה אָמַר
הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי אֵלַיךְ כֶּסֶף לְאַחֶיךָ הִנֵּה
הוּא־לְךָ כְּסוּת עֵינַיִם לְכָל אֲשֶׁר
אִתָּךְ וְאֵת כָּל וְנִכְחַת:

ולשרה אמר. אבימלך לכבודך
כדי לפיסה, הנה עשיתי לך כבוד
זה, נתתי ממון לאחייך שאמרתי
עליו אחי הוא, הנה הממון
והכבוד הזה לך כסות עינים:

לכל אשר אתך. יכסו עיניהם שלא
יקלוקו, שאלו השיבותיך ריקנית,
יש להם לומר לאחר שנתעלל בה
החזירה; עכשו שהצרכתי לכבוז
ממון ולפיסה, יודעים יהיו שעל
פרחי השיבותיך ועל ידי גס:

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֲבְרָהָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים
וַיִּרְפָּא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וְאֵת־
אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאִמְהוּתָיו וַיֵּלְדוּ:

כִּי־עָצַר עָצַר יְהוָה בְּעַד כָּל־רְחֵם
לְבַיִת אֲבִימֶלֶךְ עַל־דְּבַר שְׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ
אֲבְרָהָם:

וילדו. כתרגומו ואתרנחו,
נפתחו נקביהם והוציאו, והיא
לדה שלהם:

בעד כל רחם. כנגד כל פתח:

על דבר שרה. על פי דבורה של
שרה:

Source 3 Genesis 21:1-3

Sarah's Conception

Student's G-d had remembered Sarah as He had said, and did for Sarah as He had promised.
pg. 7

Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the time of which G-d had spoken to him. Abraham named his son who had been born to him, whom Sarah had borne to him, Isaac.

וַיְהִי כִּי זָכַר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה לְשָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר׃ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה לְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן לְזִקְנָיו לְמוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהִים׃ וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־שֵׁם־בְּנֵוֹ הַנּוֹלָד־לוֹ אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה־לוֹ שָׂרָה יִצְחָק׃

Are these events linked?

Rashi explains that the scoffers of the day had an explanation of their own:

Rashi, Genesis 25:19

Student's The scoffers of the generation claimed that Sarah became pregnant from Abimelech, because for years she hadn't become pregnant from Abraham. What did G-d do? He made Isaac's countenance resemble Abraham's, and everyone knew that Abraham fathered Isaac. This is why the verse says "Isaac the son of Abraham," for there is proof that Abraham fathered Isaac.
pg. 7

לְפִי שֶׁהָיוּ לִיצְנֵי הַדּוֹר אוֹמְרִים מֵאַבְיִמֶלֶךְ נִתְעַבְּרָה שָׂרָה, שֶׁהָרִי כַּמָּה שָׁנִים שֶׁהָתָה עִם אַבְרָהָם וְלֹא נִתְעַבְּרָה הַיָּמָנָה; מָה עָשָׂה הַקֶּבֶ"ה? צָר קָלֶסְתֵּר פָּנָיו שֶׁל יִצְחָק דּוּמָה לְאַבְרָהָם, וְהָעִידוּ הַכֹּל אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק, וְזֶהוּ שְׂכָתוֹב כָּאֵן יִצְחָק בֶּן אַבְרָהָם, שֶׁהָרִי עֲדוּת יֵשׁ שְׂאֵבְרָהּ הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק׃

After negating the scoffers' claims, let's study the Talmud's understanding of the connection between the events:

Rashi

Student's G-d had remembered Sarah: This section was placed next to the preceding section to teach you that when people ask for mercy for their fellow when they are in need of the same thing themselves, they are answered first. As it says (verse 17) "Abraham prayed, etc.," and immediately following it, "G-d had remembered Sarah," i.e., He had already remembered her before He healed Abimelech.
pg. 7

וְהוּא פָקַד אֶת שָׂרָה וְגו'. סִמַּךְ פְּרָשָׁה זוֹ לְלִמְדָהּ, שֶׁכֹּל הַמְבַקֵּשׁ רַחֲמִים עַל חֲבֵרוֹ וְהוּא צָרִיךְ לְאוֹתוֹ דְבָר, הוּא נִעֲנֶה תְחִלָּה (בְּבֵא קָמָא צ"ב), שְׂנֵאמַר וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל וְגו', וְסָמִיךְ לִיהוּ וְהוּא פָקַד אֶת שָׂרָה, שֶׁפָקַדָהּ כִּבְרָ קָדָם שׂוֹפֵא אֶת אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ׃

Rashi cites the Talmud's explanation that there indeed is a connection. In the merit of Abraham praying for Abimelech and his family, their orifices opened and they were able to relieve themselves. This caused Abraham and his family to be answered, and Sarah was able to bear children.

B. One Who Prays for Their Fellow is Answered First

>> The Rebbe

The Power of Praying for Others

Student's
pg. 9

G-d had already promised Abraham that Sarah would have a son, so even without Abraham's prayer for Abimelech the promise had to be fulfilled. Nevertheless, Rashi points to Abraham's prayer for Abimelech as the reason for Sarah's giving birth.

G-d's promise to Abraham was given all the way back at the Covenant of Parts, as Rashi continues "when did G-d promise this to Abraham? When He spoke to him at the covenant between the split parts and told him that his servant wouldn't inherit him, and he gave him a son from Sarah."

Meaning that although there had been a promise made years earlier at the Covenant of Parts (according to Rashi it was 30 years earlier), it had not yet been fulfilled. It was only after Abraham prayed for Abimelech that Sarah became pregnant.

This highlights the power of praying on behalf of others. G-d's promise was not fulfilled for many years after it had been given, but when Abraham prayed for Abimelech, Sarah was immediately remembered and blessed, even before Abimelech was healed.

אף על פי שכבר הבטיח הקב"ה לאברהם ששרה תלד, ואם כן, גם לולי תפלת אברהם על אבימלך היה הקב"ה צריך לקיים את הבטחתו - אף על פי כן מדגיש רש"י שפקידת שרה היתה על ידי תפלת אברהם על אבימלך:

הבטחת הקב"ה לאברהם היתה כבר בברית בין הבתרים, כפי שממשיך רש"י: "כאשר דבר... והיכן הוא דיבור... היה דבר ה' אל אברם בברית בין הבתרים, ושם נאמר לא יירשך זה וגו', והביא היורש משרה".

זאת אומרת, שאף על פי שהיתה הבטחה בברית בין הבתרים, אף על פי כן, עבר משך זמן רב (כמה וכמה שנים, ולדעת רש"י - שלושים שנה) שעדיין לא נתקיימה הבטחה זו. ולעומת זאת - כאשר התפלל אברהם בעד אבימלך, נפקדה שרה תיכף ומיד, "קודם שריפא את אבימלך".

ובזה מודגש ביותר גודל העילוי של "כל המבקש רחמים על חבירו" - כי הבטחה זו שניתנה על ידי הקב"ה משך זמן רב קודם לכן, לא נתקיימה במשך כל הזמן, עד שאברהם התפלל על אבימלך; וכאשר אברהם התפלל על אבימלך - אזי נפקדה שרה תיכף ומיד, "קודם שריפא את אבימלך"

It is clear that Abimelech was healed straight after Abraham's prayer, and Sarah was healed even before that.

ומובן בפשטות שרפואת אבימלך היתה בסמיכות לתפלתו של אברהם (כלומר, שתיכף ומיד לאחרי תפלת אברהם התרפא אבימלך), ועוד מקודם לכן כבר נפקדה שרה, "קודם שריפא את אבימלך".

Greater Than a Preexisting Promise

Student's
pg. 10

Moreover, even when a request for another person is for a completely new blessing, while one's own request is for something that has already been promised and is therefore easier to fulfill, we should ask for mercy for the other person first. We learn this from Abraham who first prayed for Abimelech, even though asking for his own blessing would have been requesting something that had already been promised to him.

ויתירה מזו: אפילו כאשר הבקשה על חבירו היא באופן שצריכים לפעול המשכת רצון חדש כו', ואילו הבקשה שלו היא באופן שהוא יכול לתבוע דבר שכבר הובטח לו (שנקל יותר לפעול קיום הבטחה שכבר הובטחה, מאשר לפעול ולהמשיך רצון חדש) - גם אז הנהגתו היא באופן שלכל לראש הרי הוא מבקש רחמים על חבירו, כפי שלמדים מהנהגתו של אברהם אבינו, שלכל לראש התפלל על אבימלך, למרות שתפלתו בנוגע לעצמו היא באופן שהוא מבקש ותובע דבר שכבר הובטח לו.

This was how Abraham acted before the giving of the Torah, so it is all the more true for us after the giving of the Torah, as love for our fellow Jew is a core principle of the Torah.

ואם הדברים אמורים בנוגע לאופן הנהגתו של אברהם אבינו קודם מתן תורה - הרי על אחת כמה וכמה שענין זה צריך להיות ביתר שאת וביתר עוז לאחרי מתן תורה, ובפרט שכללות הענין דאהבת ישראל הוא "כלל גדול בתורה".

Who Comes First?

Student's
pg. 10

When we need something we must pray to G-d and ask for our needs. This is a positive Biblical commandment, the mitzvah of prayer, "the obligation to pray is that a person... should ask for all of his needs." As a result, one may think that when he and his friend need the same thing he should pray for himself first,

כאשר יהודי צריך דבר מסוים - עליו להתפלל להקב"ה ולבקש את צרכיו. וזוהי מצוה מן התורה - מצות עשה של תפלה: "חיוב מצוה זו כך הוא, שיהא אדם... שואל צרכיו שהוא צריך להם". ועל פי זה - כאשר הוא וחברו צריכים לאותו דבר, יכול הוא לטעון שלכל לראש צריך הוא להתפלל ולבקש על עצמו

because by doing so he is fulfilling a mitzvah, and only after this he should pray for his fellow. This argument is further strengthened by the Talmud's statement that "your life takes precedence to your fellow's."

כי על ידי זה הרי הוא מקיים את המצוות עשה של תפלה, ורק אחר כך יתפלל ויבקש על חברו. ובפרט כשהוא יודע מה שכתוב בגמרא ש"חייך קודמין לחיי חברך".

Source 4 Leviticus 25:36

Student's Your brother shall live with you.
pg. 11

וְחַי אָחִיךָ עִמָּךְ:

Source 5 Talmud, Bava Metzia 62a

Student's If two people are walking on their way and one has a jug of water; if both drink, they will both die, if only one drinks, he will be able to reach civilization. Ben Petura said: Better they both drink and die, and one doesn't see the death of his fellow. Rabbi Akiva taught that "Your brother shall live *with* you" means that your life takes precedence over your fellow's life.
pg. 11

שְׁנַיִם שָׁהוּ מְהַלְכִין בְּדֶרֶךְ, וּבְיַד אֶחָד מֵהֶן קִיתוּן שֶׁל מַיִם. אִם שׁוֹתִין – שְׁנֵיהֶם יָמָתִים. וְאִם שׁוֹתֵה אֶחָד מֵהֶן – מִגִּיעַ לְיִשׁוּב. דָּרַשׁ בֶּן פֶּטוּרָא, "מוֹטֵב שְׂיִשְׁתּוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם וְיָמוּתוּ, וְאֵל יִרְאֶה אֶחָד מֵהֶם בְּמִיתָתוֹ שֶׁל חֲבֵרוֹ". עַד שֶׁבָּא רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְלָמַד, "וְחַי אָחִיךָ עִמָּךְ" – חַיִּיךָ קוֹדְמִים לְחַיֵּי חֲבֵרְךָ"

>> The Rebbe

Student's We are therefore informed that when a person asks for mercy for his friend and he is in need of the same matter he is answered first. This underlines the great importance of love for our fellow Jews, that even when a person needs the same thing himself he first prays for his fellow.
pg. 11

ועל זה באה ההוראה ש"כל המבקש רחמים על חברו והוא צריך לאותו דבר כו" - המדגישה את גודל העילוי וההפלאה של אהבת ישראל - שאף על פי ש"הוא צריך לאותו דבר", אף על פי כן, לכל לראש הוא "מבקש רחמים על חברו".

Disproportionate

Student's Abraham's personal need was much greater than Abimelech's,
pg. 11

ועד כדי כך גדול הענין של "מבקש רחמים על חברו", שאף על פי שהצורך שאברהם היה צריך לאותו הדבר הוא שלא בערך לגמרי לצורך של אבימלך

because he was awaiting the birth of his heir Isaac who would be the ancestor of the Jewish people. The verse states "I multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac," meaning that the birth of Isaac was the key to the flourishing of the Jewish people, like the stars of heaven and the sand on the seashore. Nevertheless, praying for someone else is so important that Abraham first prayed for Abimelech.

כי אצל אברהם אבינו דובר אודות הצורך של לידת יצחק, שעל ידו היה הקיום של כללות עם ישראל, כמו שכתוב "וארבה את זרעו ואתן לו את יצחק", כלומר, שעל ידי לידת יצחק נעשה הקיום של כללות עם ישראל באופן של ריבוי, ככוכבי השמים וכחול אשר על שפת הים, אף על פי כן, לכל לראש התפלל אברהם על אבימלך, שמזה רואים את גודל העילוי של "מבקש רחמים על חבירו".

C. Mutual Benefit

>> The Rebbe

Student's
pg. 13

Praying on behalf of another is one of those good deeds for which we receive physical reward, because when we do so we are answered first.

This applies even when a person prays for their fellow with the goal of receiving the reward of being answered first. This is not the optimal form of prayer for another person, as it is not done out of care for someone else's welfare over one's own - one does so in order to be answered himself first.

(This is analogous to a person who knows that honor chases anyone who runs away from it, so he runs away from honor, in order that it should chase him... Clearly this isn't what running away from honor really means,)

Joke

A person approached their rabbi and asked: "Our sages say that 'one who runs away from honor is pursued by honor,' but I always run away from honor and it still doesn't run after me!"

The rabbi replied: "From your question it seems that as you run away from honor you occasionally look back over your shoulder to see if it is indeed running after you. Honor thinks you are trying to catch it, so it runs away from you ..."

Student's
pg. 13

Even people who pray for their fellow with an ulterior motive are still answered first. The motive notwithstanding, they have still prayed for their fellow.

והנה, הענין ד"מבקש רחמים על חברו" הוא בדוגמת המצוות שאדם אוכל פירותיהן בעולם הזה - כי כאשר מתפלל על חברו אזי הוא מקבל את השכר ש"הוא נענה תחילה".

ומובן, שגם כאשר מתפלל על חברו לפי שידוע שעל ידי זה "הוא נענה תחילה", כלומר, שעושה זאת לשם קבלת השכר, שאז הרי התפלה על חברו אינה בשלימות, כי מה שמתפלל על חברו אין זה משום שטובתו של חברו נוגעת לו יותר מאשר טובתו האישית, כי אם משום שעל ידי זה "הוא נענה תחילה"

(ובדוגמת הבורח מן הכבוד כדי שהכבוד ירדוף אחריו, בידעו שכל הבורח מן הכבוד הכבוד רודף אחריו - כמובן בפשטות מהי המשמעות של בריחה מן הכבוד באופן האמור!)

הנה גם באופן כזה הרי הוא מקבל את השכר ש"הוא נענה תחילה" - מכיון שבפועל ממשי הרי הוא מתפלל על חברו,

Their fellow has benefited from their prayer, and for their fellow's needs the motive makes no difference.

This is comparable to the mitzvah of charity, where the important thing is that the poor person should receive their needs, and the intention of the giver makes little difference. This is expressed in the Talmud's statement "if a person lost a coin and a poor person found it and used it to buy his needs, the loser is given the credit." Even though the poor person found it without the loser's knowledge, he has fulfilled the mitzvah of charity. As the Baal Shem Tov said, purity of intentions isn't of critical importance in the case of charity.

However, the ultimate form of prayer for one's fellow is, of course, when the prayer is made with genuine love for the other person, to the extent that someone else's benefit is more important than one's own.

וחבירו מקבל תועלת על ידי תפלתו, וביחס לתועלת שמקבל חבירו (מילוי צרכיו על ידי התפלה) אין נפקא מינא כלל מהי כוונתו של המתפלל (אם אמנם נוגעת לו טובת הזולת יותר מטובתו האישית, או שעושה זאת כדי לקבל את השכר ש"הוא נענה תחילה").

ועל דרך שאנו מוצאים בנוגע למצות הצדקה, שעיקרה - שהעני יקבל את צרכיו, ואין נפקא מינה כל כך מהי כוונתו של הנותן, כפי שמוכח גם ממאמר רבותינו ז"ל "המאבד סלע מתוך ידו ומצאה עני ונתפרנס בה מעלה עליו הכתוב כו", כלומר, שאפילו כאשר עני התפרנס על ידו ללא ידיעתו כלל, הרי הוא מקיים את מצות הצדקה. וכידוע תורה הבעל שם טוב, שבמצות הצדקה לא נוגע כל כך הכוונה לשמה כו'.

אבל לאידך, מובן בפשטות שתכלית השלימות שבדבר היא - כאשר התפלה על חבירו נובעת מתוך רגש אמיתי של אהבת ישראל, עד כדי כך שטובת הזולת נוגעת אצלו עוד יותר מאשר טובתו האישית, ולכן לכל לראש מתפלל על חברו.

D. One Who Assists Their Fellow is Answered First

In next week's Torah reading, Parshat Chayei Sarah, the Torah teaches us a higher level of love for our fellow Jews.

Most of this portion focuses on the story of Isaac and Rebecca's marriage. After Sarah died, Abraham called his chief of staff Eliezer and commanded him to travel to Haran (modern-day Turkey) to bring a bride from Abraham's family for his son.

Eliezer immediately sets off on his way. As soon as he arrives in Haran, he heads for the well, which is the gathering place for all the locals. He turns to G-d with a prayer and a deal. He will ask a local young woman for a drink of water. If, in return, she would offer to even draw water for his camels, he will know that she is to be Isaac's bride.

Before he managed to finish his prayer, his plan was already fulfilled. Rebecca came out and the entire story began to play out. It was so striking that even her father Bethuel and her brother Laban were forced to agree that it was G-d's hand (24:7). The very next day, Rebecca joined Eliezer for the return trip to Canaan.

Now, when describing her arrival in Canaan, the Torah seems to insert a superfluous verse:

Source 6 Genesis 24:62

Student's "Isaac was returning from Be'er Lachai Ro'i, for
pg. 15 he dwelt in the south country."

וַיֵּצֵק בָּא מְבוֹא בְּאֵר לַחַי רֵאִי
וְהוּא יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנְּגֹב:

Rashi

**From Be'er Lachai Ro'i: He went to bring Hagar
to his father so he could marry her.**

מְבוֹא בְּאֵר לַחַי רֵאִי: שְׁהֵלָה
לְהַבִּיא הָגָר לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִיו
שִׁישְׁאָנָה.

Student's
pg. 15

Be'er Lachai Ro'i is the name Hagar gave to the well near which she prayed to G-d. The Midrash explains that this otherwise unremarkable landmark is a reference to Hagar herself.

This brings us to an often overlooked, but amazing insight:

Abraham just lost his wife, but he is fully invested in finding a spouse for his son Isaac. He is willing to give away his entire fortune to draw Rebecca to Canaan. At the very same time, Isaac is fully invested in finding a wife for his father, and makes a personal journey to Beer Lachai Ro'i to bring Hagar back!

This week, Parshat Vayera, we read about the virtue of praying for a friend, while in Chayei Sara we read not about prayers but about actions. Abraham sends his servant to find Isaac a wife, while Isaac decides to get up on his own and travel personally to find a spouse for his father. And perhaps that's why Eliezer found Isaac's spouse in such a miraculous and easy fashion.

Maybe that's why adoptive parents sometimes merit biological children afterwards. When a couple chooses to adopt a child whose parents cannot raise him or her for whatever reason, G-d pays them back measure for measure and gives them children of their own.

The Rebbe wrote this idea to Shifra Morozov, a Chabad follower whose husband was killed in battle.

When Shifra received the news that her husband, David, was killed during the Suez Crisis, her feeling of loss was tremendous. But shortly after the war ended, the Rebbe had a request for her: to volunteer to help the families of other soldiers killed in action.

During the years that followed, Shifra, together with other Chabad followers, dedicated herself to the Rebbe's directive. Personal assistance, heart to heart conversations, holiday events and celebrations, and Purim packages became a regular part of her schedule.

She maintained constant correspondence with the Rebbe, updating him on the plight of the widows and orphans, and the Rebbe regularly encouraged her to do even more and increase her efforts. She transmitted requests from widows to the Rebbe, and he gave his personal time to each of them, and would even send some money to help them.

Here is an excerpt of a letter The Rebbe sent Shifra:

Source 7 Letter of The Rebbe, 18 Kislev 5728

You are fortunate to have merited to successfully raise the spirits of so many Jewish women—daughters of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah—in their unique circumstance of having lost their husbands. Our sages say that “One who prays for their fellow is answered first,” so G-d will certainly raise and strengthen your spirits.

ואשרי חלקה שזכתה וגם
הצליחה לעודד נפשות רבות
מבנות ישראל, אשר כל אחת
ואחת מהן בת שרה רבקה רחל
ולאה, במעמדן המיוחד שאבדו
בעליהם (תבדלנה לחיים טובים).
ובודאי ובודאי נאמנים דברי
חכמינו ז"ל "הוא נענה תחלה",
שיעודדה השם יתברך ויתעלה
ויחזק רוחה במצבה היא.

Student's
pg. 15

Story The other and “I.” Adapted from HaTomim, vol. 7 pg. 103

Before Pesach 1880, two chassidim arrived in Lubavitch to see the Rebbe Maharash. The first chasid, Reb Michoel Aharon Pisarevsky, though not particularly knowledgeable in Torah and Chassidus, had a warm Chassidic heart. He was always concerned for others. The second chassid, Reb Leib Posen, was a wealthy man from Vitebsk who gave charity and occupied himself with acts of kindness, but all within certain limits.

When Reb Michael Aharon entered the Rebbe's study for a private audience, the first subject he raised was the situation of his old friend, Reb Nachman Zeltzer. He described the poverty of the family, which included children of marriageable age, and pleaded for mercy on his friend's behalf. The Rebbe gave his blessing that G-d should help him, and Reb Michael Aharon begged the Rebbe that the blessing be a firm commitment. When he then described his own dire situation, the Rebbe said, "It seems you're even worse off than Reb Nachman!" Reb Michael Aharon answered, "About myself, I know I don't deserve anything better, so I must not complain, and I have to be satisfied with what I have."

The Rebbe covered his eyes, sat in a state of deep meditation for a short while and then said, "If a person davens for a fellow Yid, his own prayers are answered first. May G-d grant you success!" And not long after, both Reb Michael Aharon and his friend Reb Nachman succeeded in their businesses and became very wealthy.

The second chasid, Reb Leib, began his private audience by describing his personal matters at length and asked for a blessing. Only then did he sigh and report the situation of his friend, a chasid called Reb Shmuel Brin. Even though Reb Shmuel was a very active and successful businessman, he would learn an in-depth shiur in Talmud, Jewish law, and Chassidut every day. Lately, his business had not been doing well, and swindlers had also thrown him deeply into debt. Reb Leib related Reb Shmuel's misfortunes and concluded, "Of course it's all from G-d, but he still is to be pitied."

The Rebbe covered his eyes and sank deep in thought, but did not reply. Soon afterwards, a fire broke out on the street where Reb Leib's storage houses stood, and he lost tens of thousands of rubles. At the same time another fire caught onto his shop, causing him an additional loss. He soon traveled to see the Rebbe, and at his audience he told the Rebbe of his great losses and wept bitterly. With a penetrating look, the Rebbe said, "When tragedy befell Reb Shmuel Brin and left him penniless, you accepted it calmly, but now, when it has come to your merchandise, you cry out. The you and the I are two separate things!"

Realizing now that his hardships had resulted from his attitude towards his friend, Reb Leib wandered around in a daze, not knowing what to do. After two days he returned to the Rebbe's room, asked to be guided on a path of repentance, and undertook to think about the welfare of others.

In response, the Rebbe Maharash quoted the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov, that whenever one passes judgment on another, he is automatically passing judgment on himself, whether in a positive direction or the opposite. Thus, if one passes judgment on another for something he has done, he causes the Heavenly Court to press charges against himself. If, instead, he shares in the anguish of that other person and argues that he deserves help from G-d, he himself is dealt with compassionately.

The Rebbe then instructed Reb Leib to lend his friend 3000 rubles, and to proceed to Moscow to buy merchandise for his own shop. After the Rebbe gave him a blessing he headed for home, ready to do as instructed.

However, arriving at Reb Shmuel's home, he found out that his friend had traveled to nearby Lubavitch. So, even though he was anxious to travel to Moscow for his own purchases, he was afraid to deviate from the exact order of the Rebbe's instructions. Finally, when he went to synagogue on Friday night, he found the recently returned Reb Shmuel in a joyous mood and surrounded by chassidim, who were listening excitedly to what he was saying.

Reb Leib envied him: despite his losses, he looked like the happiest of men. The gabbai then quieted everyone. Reb Shmuel repeated the Chassidic discourse that he had just heard from the Rebbe, and the following day, he repeated it twice more. After Shabbat, Reb Leib hurried to Reb Shmuel's house to give him the money.

Welcoming him warmly, Reb Shmuel tried to raise his friend's spirits by talking about the well-known saying that "after a fire one prospers." Reb Leib was moved by the way Reb Shmuel was able to console him, when only recently he himself had also suffered financial loss. Reb Shmuel then told him of the despair that he had felt when he first found out about the calamity that had befallen him. However, not long after, a special messenger brought him a message from the Rebbe, telling him that he knew of his circumstances but did not agree with the way he was responding to the situation.

Reb Shmuel continued, "When I then visited Lubavitch, I was instructed to buy ready-made rafts, and received a blessing for my merchandise and for a side income as well. So I traveled to Riga to order some fine rafts. On the way home I met a Jew looking for an arbitrator to settle a dispute between two businessmen. I agreed, and after successfully sorting out the matter, I was paid. "How will you pay the people who will deliver the rafts?" Reb Leib asked.

Reb Shmuel reassured him that he had the Rebbe's blessing and G-d would no doubt help. Not knowing how to properly broach the topic, Reb Leib blurted out, "Don't worry about the money! I've brought you a certain sum for that!" And he told him of the loan of 3000 rubles that he had in his wallet. When Reb Shmuel refused to accept it, Reb Leib told him the whole story. Reb Shmuel said, "You have done what the Rebbe has told you to do. However, our sages assure us that G-d considers a good thought as if it was actually done. I am not accepting the money."

That same night Reb Leib traveled to Lubavitch, complained to the Rebbe about Reb Shmuel's refusal, and left the bundle of rubles on the table. Early Monday morning, a messenger from the Rebbe knocked on Reb Shmuel's door with a sealed envelope and a note written by the Rebbe: "I am sending you three thousand rubles until after you sell the rafts. Have success!" Reb Shmuel accepted the money, bought the rafts and sold them at a handsome profit.

At the same time, Reb Leib traveled to Moscow, where the suppliers agreed to sell him merchandise on credit. Moreover, he won thousands of rubles in a lottery and on the advice of the Rebbe, bought and sold flax for an incredible profit. All the above four chassidim finally enjoyed great success and remained wealthy throughout their lives. Above all, Reb Leib learned a lesson: the other and "I" and not two separate things.

This story is full of great lessons. One that we will focus on is how Reb Leib, who suffered a loss, managed to look past himself and put his hand into his pocket and lend his friend money, and then he saw success in his own business.

When you do something for someone else, you are answered first.

Life Lesson:

When we encounter a challenge or difficult moment, we naturally recede into ourselves, worrying about the situation we are in and we see less of the people around us. It's normal.

If we want to leave this cycle, the Rebbe says, we must see and feel the troubles of others, and pray for them and act on their behalf - that is what will bring us salvation.

Additionally, we shouldn't suffice with prayer, we should act. When we are in a difficult situation and we lift our heads from the water and see someone else also struggling, and we amass all our strength to help them while we ourselves struggle to survive, that will bring us the salvation we hope for.