

MACHON PUAH

The Prayers of the Righteous

Last week we saw Rabbeinu Bachya's explanation that Yitzchak's prayer was the essence and the fertility was the incentive to pray. This can now explain the Midrash's reason why our fore- fathers and mothers were infertile.

"God desired the prayers of the righteous. God said: They are rich, they are beautiful and if I give them children they will not pray to Me" (Tanchuma Toldot 9). We often quote the beginning of the Midrash but do not quote the end of the same Midrash. The Midrash says that God wanted a connection with the patriarchs and matriarchs but the Midrash explains itself in the end. The fathers and mothers had wealth and beauty and many other physical gifts. There was a danger that they would become complacent and not feel a need to connect with God.

Therefore God had to hold back from giving them a great and dear gift, He made them infertile, and this is one of the three keys that God holds Himself and does not give over to an emissary. The lack of children created a need to pray and forged a deep connection with God.

When someone has everything they do not feel the need to pray and pour out their heart before the Almighty. Only someone who feels loss and yearning needs to pray.

This can explain why Leah never suffered infertility like all of the other fathers and mothers. The Torah tells us that "God saw that Leah was despised and He opened her womb and Rahcel was barren" (B'reishit 29:31). Leah was hated, or at least not as loved as her co-wife Rachel. She did not have wealth and beauty like the others and so she had the motivation to pray. God heard her prayers and she became pregnant and had many children. The Torah compares her to Rachel who was beautiful and loved, and was infertile.

The Torah is teaching us a deep lesson about and connection with God, infertility is the background and the example. We as Jews need a connection with God and our motivation to turn to Him is when we feel that we are missing something. Our prayers are not always answered but prayer itself is a powerful tool to connect with God and, even in our hour of need, and specifically at that time, we take comfort in our relationship and proximity to the Almighty.

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