

The Double Request

Category: Holidays, Pesach

Remembering the source of your blessing.

The Forgotten Letter

During the Shluchim Conference of 1991, Chaplain Jacob Goldstein brought a colleague; a chaplain of the United States Military to receive a dollar from the Rebbe and a blessing. The chaplain introduced himself to the Rebbe, saying, "I'm Elimelech Saidman, I'm the chaplain in Frankfurt, and I wanted to ask for your blessing."

Immediately, the Rebbe responded, "I once received a letter from you."

The chaplain said that he had just given a note to the Rebbe's secretary, but he had never written to the Rebbe previously.

"Not today, but a few years ago," the Rebbe explained.

Suddenly, the chaplain remembered. "A few years ago, when I was in Arizona, I did write."

The Rebbe gave him a blessing to have a good influence on the Jewish soldiers, and with that, he went on his way.

The video was made public at the time, but it didn't really make waves. We were accustomed to the fact that the Rebbe remembered the people who wrote to him even better than they remembered writing themselves.

But several years ago, this chaplain visited the Chabad House in Alaska, and told the full story to the rabbi, my brother Rabbi Yosef Greenberg.

In 1986, Eli Saidman lived in Tucson, Arizona, where he developed a close relationship with the local Chabad rabbi, Rabbi Yossi Shemtov. Eli shared with the rabbi that he and his wife had already been married for five-six years and hadn't yet been blessed with children. They had tried various treatments, but to no avail.

Rabbi Shemtov suggested that he write to the Rebbe, but Eli protested. "I'm not a Lubavitcher. Why should I start writing letters to the Rebbe?" Rabbi Shemtov didn't let up. "Listen, the Rebbe cares for every Jew. You've tried medical treatments. Why don't you try spiritual treatments?"

He talked Eli into it, and he wrote a letter to the Rebbe describing his situation and asking for a blessing. He never received a response, and he forgot all about it. A year and a half later, his wife gave birth to a baby boy, and in 1990, they had a baby girl.

When Chaplain Goldstein offered to bring him to the Rebbe in 1991, he was delighted to go, but he had totally forgotten about the letter. When he stood in front of the Rebbe and said his name, it was the Rebbe who reminded him, "I once received a letter from you." The memory suddenly came back to him, but he was in such shock that he couldn't say anything.

As he left the Rebbe, he met Rabbi Shemtov and repeated what had happened. Rabbi Shemtov responded, "At the time, I told you that even if you don't receive a response, the blessing will come. The children that you had were the best answer."

Answer Twice

Every year, at the Seder, we have a consistent guest: Elijah the Prophet. We invite him to the Seder, we designate a cup of wine for him, and we open the door, etc.

Those of you who visited Israel may know that on Mount Carmel in Haifa, there is a place called "Elijah's cave." The book of Kings relates that three thousand years ago, the area was controlled by the Kingdom of Israel (as opposed to the Kingdom of Judea) which was a strong supporter of the Baal idol worship. False prophets roamed the country giving over prophecies in the name of Baal and telling everyone pretty much what they wanted to hear.

In the entire kingdom, there was one true prophet: Elijah. He desperately wanted to abolish the practice of idol worship, so he orchestrated a public 'debate' with the prophets of the Baal, and invited all the people to be the judges.

Elijah built an altar and suggested that whoever could bring a fire from heaven to

burn their sacrifice would be proven as the true prophet. The false prophets agreed to the challenge, and multitudes of people gathered excitedly on Mount Carmel to watch the scene. The prophets of the Baal were given the first chance to bring down heavenly fire.

They set up their sacrifice and began to pray to Baal to light the fire, to no avail. As the hours passed and morning turned to noon, Elijah began to taunt them. "Talk louder, maybe your G-d is hard of hearing. Maybe he is sleeping." They took Elijah's suggestions seriously and began yelling and screaming. In good Baal fashion, they began to scratch and injure themselves as well. But again, to no avail.

Then it was Elijah's turn. He took twelve stones, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel, and built an altar. He slaughtered a sacrifice, and instructed that buckets of water be poured all over the animal and the altar. He then approached the altar and prayed:

"G-d, the G-d of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. Today, it will become known that you are the G-d of Israel, and I am your servant."

He turned to G-d and said,

"Aneini, Hashem, aneini, answer me, O G-d, answer me. Let the nation know that you are G-d."

G-d answered his prayers. A fire came from heaven and consumed the offering, the wood, and the entire surrounding area.

When the people saw the miracle, they declared the famous statement that we repeat seven times on Yom Kippur at the end of Ne'ila: *"Hashem hu ho'elokim, G-d is the true G-d."*

This story is one of the most dramatic stories in the entire Tanach.

The Talmud focuses on the prayer of Elijah and asks, "Why was it necessary to repeat the word *aneini*, answer me? Why didn't Elijah say *aneini* once?" Rabbi Avahu answers, "Elijah said to G-d, 'Master of the world, answer me with fire from the heaven, and answer me by so they don't say, 'It was witchcraft.'" (Berachot 9b).

It was a double request. First of all, he wanted the miracle of the fire. But he added a second request: Don't allow the people to believe that it didn't come from You.

The Holy Books say that this prayer is relevant to every person. Whenever we pray, we ask for G-d's blessings for health, wealth and happiness, but often, when our prayers are answered, we quickly forget about G-d's part in it and we take the credit for ourselves. It was the doctor who healed me, it was the business opportunity that came my way, and so forth.

Therefore, we need to pray a double prayer: 1 - that G-d answer our prayers for whatever we need, and 2 - that our Evil Inclination be unsuccessful in persuading us that the success is our own.

We can take this amazing lesson from Elijah for the next Seder — "Answer me, G-d, answer me."