

PRAYER POINTS

“MIRACLES, MIRACLES”

Just when all seems lost, when all the laws of nature and logic point to certain disaster, a “miracle” occurs.

Usually, it is a “miracle” that people are seeking when they ask others to pray for them. Likewise, it is usually when a miracle is needed that it occurs to one’s friends and relatives to pray for compassion for their loved one. Praying for miracles seems to be in line with the Torah’s directive to hold on to hope in all situations, and to believe in the power of prayer to work miracles.

Indeed, the nation of Israel itself is the outcome of three barren couples praying for miracles. Abraham and Sarah brought Isaac into the world when they were in their old age. Isaac and Rebecca were married for twenty years before their prayers were answered. Rachel, too, suffered many years of barrenness before she bore a child. It appears from these instances that one is permitted – even encouraged – to pray for a miracle to occur.

This seems to be in stark contradiction what some rabbinic writings teach. They say that one should not pray that Hashem perform a miracle. Furthermore, one is not permitted to pray that Hashem undo what is already done. Another rabbinic text says: If one prays regarding what is already a matter of the past, it is a futile prayer.

What specifically does this mean in terms of praying for help in seemingly bleak situations? Is a disease that has progressed to its final stages and for which doctors have given little hope a “done deal” for which prayer is futile? Are there causes of childlessness that fall into this category? Are there marriages so badly damaged that praying for *shalom bayis* (peace in the home) is a futile prayer? Are there decrees that cannot be overturned? How does one determine when such is the case?

Feeling for others and praying for others often means seeking miracles on their behalf. While there is no doubt that Hashem can do anything and everything, it is vital to understand what we should do, and what we should not do, when praying for His mercy.

POINTS TO PONDER

A rabbinic text teaches that one should pray for mercy even when “the sword is upon his neck.”

One may not pray for something that has already been determined, for it is a futile prayer.

Psalm 5:2 Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, for to You I pray. (NAU)