

# PRAYING with Fire

## PRAYER POINTS

## PRAYER ROLE MODELS

***Abraham and Moses knew how to turn every action into an experience of communicating with God. Their very existence became synonymous with "prayer."***

There are many ways to describe the prayer experience, but the most obvious is, "talking to God." The Jewish ideal is to never have a conscious moment where we're not talking with God. This ideal can spiritually enhance your life and make your prayer more uplifting.

Abraham is a paradigm of this close connection to God.

The Book of Genesis tells us that Abraham had just performed circumcision on himself at the command of God, and was into his third day of recovery, the worst for an adult. On that day, God came to pay him a sick call -- so to speak -- by revealing Himself to Abraham, to show honor to him for obediently carrying out his brit milah at such a late age.

In the midst of talking with God, three strangers passed by Abraham's tent. The three strangers were really three angels sent by God to allow Abraham to perform the kindness he longed to do, in spite of his pain and incapacitation. Without "signing off" with God, Abraham simply ran to his guests, leaving God "hanging."

The account in Genesis relates that after Abraham tended to his "special" guests and they took their leave, he returned to God and picked up the conversation right where he left off.

There is no criticism of Abraham for what might have seemed like an act of impertinence, not from God or the rabbis later on in history; it is simply assumed that Abraham had done the will of God.

**Abraham had never stopped communicating with God; all that changed was his mode of communication!**

Why? Because Abraham had never stopped communicating with God the entire time; all that changed was his mode of communication!

Before his guests arrived on the scene, Abraham used prophecy as means to speak with God. However, upon the arrival of the guests -- of which Abraham knew God was aware, and, for which He was responsible -- Abraham understood that it was God's will that he perform an act of kindness instead. At that moment, his actions, done for the sake of heaven, became the new mode of communication, because they expressed Abraham's understanding of the purpose of creation, and, his devotion to fulfilling that purpose.

## **LIFE AS PRAYER**

For Abraham, there was only one world -- God's world. Everything that happened to him was either a direct or indirect opportunity to reach out for God. This developed into an attitude for life itself, which kept Abraham forever in the ready to communicate with God using whatever means were available at the moment. As a result, Abraham earned the right to actually talk with God personally at the ripe old age of 70 years.

You could say that Abraham's life was one, long, ongoing prayer.

Moses is another Biblical figure that teaches us a very important point about prayer.

Told by God to speak to a rock in order to bring forth water, Moses hit the rock instead, thereby forfeited his right to lead the Jewish nation into the land of Israel. Even though that decree seemed immutable, Moses successfully turned that decree around and was about to regain God's permission to cross the Jordan River into the Holy Promised Land. Had it not been for the fact that the Jewish nation was not ready for the Final Redemption, Moses would have led the Jewish people into the land.

How did Moses seem to accomplish the impossible?

Through prayer.

What made Moses' prayer so powerful? To answer this question, I will tell you a story.

## **A PARABLE**

There was once a boy who heard that anyone who came and paid his respects to the king could make a request and it would be granted. Not being from a family of means, he set out by foot to make the two-week journey to the royal palace, to have his dream come true.

All of his life he wanted to own a pony, but, his father could never afford to buy him one. Once in a while, some of the wealthier boys would allow him to borrow their ponies for a short while, but he longed to have his own pony that he could ride whenever he wanted to.

His mother packed him provisions for his journey, and kissed him on his forehead. "Take care of yourself," she said, warning, "and don't take any unnecessary chances." Off the boy went in pursuit of his dream.

Though the journey was easy at the start, the boy soon tired, and though he was careful to ration his food and drink, he eventually ran out. As far as he could tell, he still had a good four days of travelling left, but, without food and drink, he was not likely to make it. It wasn't very long before thoughts of a pony turned to thoughts of survival.

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Turning back was out of the question, for, he surely had no strength to make it back. So, hungry and weak he stumbled forward.

Miraculously, the boy arrived at the palace and fell before the king's guards. He was so tired and delirious that he did not notice how unfit he had become to enter the king's palace.

"Who goes there?!" one of the guards demanded, his voice giving the impression the boy was NOT going to get in the palace in his present state.

"Please sir," the boy whimpered, "I have traveled for two weeks to see the king and pay my respects, and make my request... I haven't eaten very much for three days already."

"What?!" the guard shouted. "See the king? As you appear before us now? Don't you think that I enjoy living, boy! The king would have my head for letting such a disrespectful appearance in to stand before him!"

And, with that, the boy dropped completely to the ground in a faint of despair.

Fortunately, though, for the boy, the king had been walking the ramparts for his daily exercise, when he had overheard the commotion, and stopped to look down to see what it was all about. The boy's condition struck a chord of sympathy in the king, who was a father as well, and, he bellowed out, "Guard!"

**The boy's prayer was answered without him saying another word, because he WAS his prayer.**

"Yes-s-s-s Sire," the frightened guard answered as he turned toward the voice he knew well. He assumed that his head was going to roll just for letting the poor beggar come that close to the palace.

"Bring that poor boy into the palace and give him food and drink," the kindly king began. "And, when his strength returns to him, have him bathed and adorned in fresh clothing. Then, you shall bring him before me where I shall allow him to pay his respects in my royal chamber. Shall I not greatly reward a country boy who has risked so much to greet his king?"

Upon hearing that, the guard breathed easier and took the boy, carrying out his king's every wish to the last detail. The boy's prayer was answered without him saying another word, because he WAS his prayer. Just looking at the ragged child lying in the dirt was all the king needed to see to know what to do for him. I AM PRAYER

*"As for me, may my prayer to You, God, be at an opportune time"*(Psalms 69:14). These words can actually be read:

"And I am my prayer to You, God, at an opportune time."

When we're real with life, real with God, and real with ourselves, then, our very lives become prayers to God, for, He sees what we lack to accomplish His will, and He is anxious to give us what we need.

This was Moses' greatest prayer. As he told the Jewish people:

*"And I pleaded with God at that time, saying..."* (Devarim 3:23)

At "that" time? At what time?

Rashi explains:

"After I [Moses] conquered the land of Sichon and Og, I thought that, perhaps, the vow that I should not enter the land was annulled (since their territory was part of the land of Israel also)." (Rashi)

According to the Midrash, it could have been, since Moses had accomplished so much and had made himself into someone who didn't just want to live in Israel, but who NEEDED to enter the land.

Moses had brought himself to the point of spiritual perfection, so that the need for God's vow against him no longer existed -- as if he had become a new person all together -- and therefore, God would have cancelled the vow had it not been for the shortcomings of the nation he would have led across the river.

This is what Moses told the people:

*And I pleaded with God at that time, saying... "Please allow me to cross over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan, that good mountain, and Lebanon." However, God was angry with me because of you and would not hear me out.* (Deut. 3:25)

How does one become a "prayer"? This will be the subject of the next essay.