

Praying With Fervor

The Mishna (Berachos 34b) says:

המתפלל וטעה סימן רע לו ואם שליח צבור הוא סימן רע לשולחיו מפני ששלוחו של אדם כמותו אמרו עליו על רבי חנינא בן דוסא שהיה מתפלל על החולים ואומר זה חי וזה מת אמרו לו מנין אתה יודע אמר להם אם שגורה תפילתי בפי יודע אני שהוא מקובל ואם לאו יודע אני שהוא מטורף

An emissary of the congregation who errs in his prayer foreshadows a bad omen for himself and his congregation. The *Mishna* says Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa would pray for the sick and would say who would live and who would die. When asked how he could be so sure if his prayer was effective or not, he replied if his prayer flowed smoothly he was assured that the prayer was accepted (or another interpretation by Rashi is that the sick person is accepted by Hashem) otherwise the prayer was rejected (or the sick person was rejected). The Gemara quotes Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi in support of Rabbi Chanina who based it on the verse בורא נים שפתים שלום שלום לרחוק ולקרוב אמר ה' ורפאתיו (Isaiah 57:19).

Rashi comments on Rabbi Chanina's statement "if the prayer is well organized and I can recite it fluently without stumbling over the words and my prayer flows from my heart to my mouth as long as I wish to extend my supplication". Why was Rashi, who is well known for brevity, so verbose here? Why didn't he stop after the first part of his explanation (the well organized prayer that he recites without stumbling)?

While the concept of שלוחו של אדם כמותו appears throughout Shas, this is the only Mishnaic reference to it. The premise is that an agent, שליח, whose mission results in an undesirable outcome to the principal, משלח, is no longer considered his agent. The משלח can claim he sent the שליח for his benefit not his detriment, לתקוני שדרתיך ולא לעוותי. This concept is consistent across Halacha, from *Choshen Mishpat*, to *Even HaEzer*. Why do we say that a ש"ץ who erred in his prayer portends a bad omen for his congregation? Why can't they disavow his services based on לעוותי שדרתיך and claim they appointed the ש"ץ to help and not hinder?

There are 2 different types of שליחות. Regular שליחות implies representation but not replacement (i.e. power of attorney). If a שליח summons a litigant to court on

behalf of his משלה, the litigant may refuse to appear and claim לאו בעל דברים ידי את, you are not my legal protagonist or representative, I wish to deal directly and only with him or I wish to represent myself. However if the שליח is appointed with a הרשאה, power of attorney, the משלה grants the שליח all rights and privileges that he would have enjoyed in this situation. The defendant can no longer claim לאו בעל דברים ידי את, that you are not my agent. If a שליח with a הרשאה errs, the משלה cannot claim לתקוני שדרתיך ולא לעוותי. If I appoint someone as שליח צבור he is supposed to pray on my behalf with the same intensity and fervor as I would pray with. [The Rav noted the importance of the תפלה הש"ץ to listen to every word the ש"ץ utters, since the ש"ץ is voicing my prayer. I cannot fulfill the *Mitzvah* of prayer without listening to each word he says.] In essence, the ש"ץ is viewed as שליח with הרשאה. His errors adhere to those who appointed him.

Rabbi Chanina was not the first great person to pray for the sick. In *Parshas Vayeira*, Hashem tells Avimelech to ask Avraham to pray for him. If Hashem *wanted* to heal Avimelech why was it necessary to ask Avraham to pray, why not accept Avimelech's supplication? If Hashem *did not want* to heal Avimelech, why ask Avraham to pray at all? The message here is Hashem informed Avimelech that He has no need for him. However, if Avraham can be motivated to pray on Avimelech's behalf because he, Avraham, needs Avimelech and would personally be pained at the prospect of Avimelech's death, Hashem will accept Avraham's prayer on Avimelech's behalf.

Judaism teaches that every person has a unique mission, שליחות, to accomplish during his or her existence on this world (the Rav referred to as the Doctrine of Assignment in his 1964 Yahrzeit Shiur). An individual persists in life as long as he makes progress towards completing his mission. If his mission is complete or if he is ineffective in that mission and can no longer progress in pursuit of his mission, the משלה can terminate the mission at any time. The individual is similar to a contract laborer retained for a specific job and released upon completion (Job 14:6). The Talmud relates the story (Yerushalmi Peah 3:2) regarding the mother of Rabbi Tarfon who broke her shoelace and could not walk. Rabbi Tarfon placed his hands under her feet and she walked on them until she reached her bed. When Rabbi Tarfon became gravely ill, the Rabbis visited him. His mother begged them to pray on his behalf, citing his extraordinary כבוד אב, honor and respect he exhibited for his mother, as a merit for his recovery. The Rabbis said that even had he acted in this manner thousands of times, he would not have fulfilled even half of the requirement of כבוד אב. Why did the Rabbis dismiss the merit that she mentioned? After all, we look to accentuate the good deeds of the sick so that Hashem may have mercy on them.

The Rabbis were saying that perhaps the primary mission of the great Rabbi Tarfon was not to be one of the greatest sages in Israel. Perhaps he was sent to take care of his elderly mother. He may also have had a secondary mission to be the great Tana and sage. If his mother is stating that he completely fulfilled the *Mitzvah* of כבוד אב then perhaps Rabbi Tarfon has completed his primary mission and is ready to return to Hashem, who sent him on his mission. However the Rabbis insisted that he had not yet fulfilled his primary mission, hence there is still a great purpose to his life and a need for him to return to health and continue his primary and secondary missions.

Hashem told Avimelech that if Avraham had no need for Avimelech, then Avimelech's mission was complete and it was time for him to die. However if he could convince Avraham that he was still able to make progress in his mission, and move Avraham to pray earnestly on his behalf, Hashem would accept Avraham's prayer, because he is a prophet, כי נביא הוא. נביא and גיב, as in גיב שפתים, share the same root. גיב derives from fruit, תנובות שדי. Prayer is the fruit of the lips. If the prayer uttered on behalf of the sick flows smoothly, if it rolls off the tongue and lips without stammer, stutter or stumble, it is indicative that the one praying for the sick person empathizes with him. He is expressing his own emotional need for the recovery of the sick individual and fear of the gap that in his own life that would result with the demise of that person. If the supplicant is capable of expressing all the concern and emotion his heart feels in this situation, his prayer will be heard and accepted by Hashem.

One who clearly understands a topic or appreciates a need does not stumble for words to express that topic or need. However if a person does not fully understand an idea or topic he will fail in his attempts to convey that idea effectively. If he cannot motivate himself to pray with a full heart on behalf of the individual in need, he will falter in his prayer and it will be rejected. If the prayer is גיב שפתיים, then it will be שלום שלום לרחוק ולקרוב אמר ה' ורפאתיו, there will be peace for those far and near, and the prayer will be accepted and the individual in need will be healed. If the ש"ץ cannot motivate himself to pray carefully and fluently on behalf of his congregation, it must be because he does not empathize with his congregants. Such a ש"ץ will not be an effective representative for his congregation.

Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa was "the Chofetz Chaim of his generation". While there were many Gedolim in his generation, the Chofetz Chaim was the individual people turned to in times of need for prayer on behalf of a person in distress. As the

Talmud says, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai asked Rabbi Chanina to pray on behalf of his son, even though Rabbi Yochanan was the great leader and scholar of his generation. Rabbi Yochanan himself said that Rabbi Chanina was considered a servant before Hashem while he was considered an officer before Hashem. It is the servant's prayer that will be more readily accepted by the king, because of his constant contact with the king and the close relationship and trust they built. A Rabbi Chanina or a Chofetz Chaim is able to empathize with the person in need and to eloquently express the anguish he personally feels because he personally feels the anguish of the distressed person he is praying on behalf of. He is confident that his prayer will be heard and accepted because of his close relationship with Hashem, as long as it is clear, unimpeded and from the heart.

We now understand Rashi's verbosity in explaining the *Mishna*. In order for Rabbi Chanina to pray for the individual, or a ר"ש to pray for the congregation, he must be motivated so his prayer flows from his heart without stammer or stumble. If one is truly interested in the welfare of another person, he will be very careful and eloquent in his prayer. Rabbi Chanina was emulating Avraham the נביא whose prayer on behalf of Avimelech was גיב שפתיים. Such a prayer can result in peace and healing to those in need, be they near or far.