

According to the Talmud, the three daily prayers, שחרית מנחה ומעריב, are credited to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (ברכות כו עמוד ב). However, when it comes to how one prays, it is the matriarchs and great women of Israel that are held up as primary exemplars. Our Amida of Rosh HaShana is derived from Chana's prayers for a child and Gd hearing and accepting her prayers (ברכות כט עמוד א). After having her child, Samuel, she prays again, offering a combination of prayer for the future of the child and praise to Gd for granting her wish. Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel also prayed to bear children. The focal point of the Haftarah of Rosh Hashana is Rachel's prayer (ירמיהו (ל"א:טו):

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מִבְּכָה עַל-בְּנֵיהָ מֵאַנָּה לְהַנָּחִם עַל-בְּנֵיהָ
כִּי אֵינָנּוּ: כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה מִנְעִי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינַיִךָ מִדִּמְעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לְפַעֲלֹתֶךָ נְאֻם-יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ
מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב:

At the time of the destruction of the Temple, Jeremiah beseeches the patriarchs to pray to Gd to halt the destruction and prevent the looming exile. Their prayers have no effect. It was Rachel's prayer for her exiled children that moved Gd to promise to return them ultimately to their homeland. The power of a woman's prayer is a fundamental aspect of פרשת ויצא.

Leah was caught in a difficult situation. Chazal go out of their way to dismiss the notion that Jacob despised her for the seemingly deceitful episode of switching her for Rachel on the wedding night or because he never intended to marry her. Yet it appears from the story as related in the Torah that Jacob's relationship with Leah was strained. The Torah tells us (בראשית כ"ט לא-לה):

וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי-שָׁנוּאָה לָאָה וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת-רוּחָהּ וְרָחֵל עָקְרָה: וַתֵּהָרֵא לָאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ
רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמַרְהָ כִּי-רָאָה יְהוָה בְּעֶנְיִי כִּי עָתָה יֵאָהֲבֵנִי אִישִׁי וַתֵּהָרֵא עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּאמֶר כִּי-שָׁמַע
יְהוָה כִּי-שָׁנוּאָה אֲנִי וַיִּתֵּן-לִי גַם-אֶת-זֶה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן: וַתֵּהָרֵא עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּאמֶר עָתָה
הַפַּעַם יִלְוֶה אִישִׁי אֵלַי כִּי-יִלְדֹתִי לוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים עַל-כֵּן קָרָא-שְׁמוֹ לֵוִי: וַתֵּהָרֵא עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּאמֶר
הַפַּעַם אוֹדָה אֶת-יְהוָה עַל-כֵּן קָרָאָה שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה וַתַּעֲמֵד מִלְּדוֹת:

While Jacob perhaps considered his love for Rachel as simply greater than the love he had for Leah, Gd saw it as an expression of hatred from Jacob to Leah and granted her a child. It is interesting to see how Leah interpreted the gift of her first child. She deduced that Gd saw her personal difficulty, עניי, and assumed her relationship with Jacob would now change because naturally a husband shows more affection and devotion to his wife after bearing him a child. It was Gd who identified hatred towards Leah. Leah herself did not, as of yet, discern hatred from Jacob towards her.

Leah gained a new and disappointing perspective on her relationship with Jacob after the

birth of Reuben. Her hope that Jacob would come around and show her more love after the birth of Reuben was shattered and unfulfilled. She came to realize her situation was not simply her personal issue. עניי, but was the result of a personal dislike from Jacob towards her, כי שנואה אנכי, and names her second son Simon in recognition of Gd hearing her despair and recognizing her situation before she herself did.

It is interesting to note the sequence of Gd's response to Leah's situation. Initially Gd sees, וירא, Leah's predicament. Gd's vision here connotes an understanding of the situation, even before Leah herself noticed it. Sometimes someone can suffer without even realizing the depth of their difficulty. We think the problem begins and ends with ourselves and we can somehow resolve it on our own. We misdiagnose the cause and incorrectly suggest a remedy. Gd sees all and fully understands our predicament before we do.

After Leah more fully understood her situation, she prayed more vocally to Gd to ease her predicament. A difficult situation is seen and understood, while prayer is heard: (איכה ג – נו):

קולי שמעת אל-תעלם אזנך לרוחתי לשועתי:

She now acknowledges Gd retroactively for understanding the depth of her predicament before she did.

Which of the senses, sight or hearing, is more important to us? When it comes to prayer for preemptive intervention, apparently sight, vision is more important. Chazal tell us in Pirkei Avot (פרק ב משנה ט) :

איזהו חכם הרואה את הנולד

Perception and understanding, ראייה, how a situation can develop and become difficult is critical to preemption. However, for difficulties that have already occurred, hearing, שמיעה, is more important. We depend on Gd hearing our pain and prayer and acting upon those prayers. While a line of sight can often be obscured, prayer can be heard despite and around obstacles. The Talmud (סנהדרין קד עמוד ב) tells us about a woman who lost her son. Rabban Gamliel heard her nightly cries and his tears dissolved his eye lashes. Even though we cannot see the individual in distress, we can still hear their cries of pain.

In the 13 blessings of our daily Amida we include a blessing of ראה נא בעינינו, asking Gd to see or understand our affliction. We later add another blessing of שמע קולנו, Gd please hear our voices and accept our prayer. When Gd initiated the redemption of the Jewish People, He first heard their prayers and then saw their situation, i.e. first שמיעה

and then ראי-ה. We find this order:

(שמות ב כד-כה)

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת-נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת-בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת-אַבְרָהָם אֶת-יִצְחָק וְאֶת-יַעֲקֹב: וַיֵּרָא
אֱלֹהִים אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּדַע אֱלֹהִים:

(דברים כו – ז)

וַנִּצְעֶק אֶל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֶת-קִלְנוֹ וַיֵּרָא אֶת-עַנְיָנוּ וְאֶת-עַמְלָנוּ וְאֶת-לִחְצָנוּ:

Why is the order, שמיעה followed by ראייה, reversed as compared to Leah and why do we prefer the order associated with Leah when it comes to our Amida?

Perhaps the difference is between individual and communal prayer. An individual, like Leah, is often confronted with looming difficulties they do not yet perceive of or recognize as potential afflictions or problems. We ask an all-knowing Gd to redeem us from those situations before they manifest in tragedy or major difficulty. This is the blessing of ראה בעניינו. We also ask Gd to help us in acute situations that have already arisen and confront us on a regular basis. We identify and express these directly to Gd in our prayer. For these situations we ask Gd to hear our prayers directly, שמע קולנו.

The community typically calls out after a problem has manifested. For example, the Jews found themselves already in a terrible predicament in Egypt. They instinctively called out to Gd to help save them. Once the community recognizes their situation, Gd will see and understand their need and act accordingly. Hence שמיעה precedes ראייה for the community.

In fact, Leah's reaction to the birth of her children informs our daily Amida even more deeply. First she acknowledged Gd for perceiving her difficulties before she did. Then she acknowledged Gd for hearing her prayers. She then bears her third son Levi whose tribe will be selected for the priesthood and service in the temple which will unite Gd with the Jewish people. Finally she thanks Gd for hearing her prayers and granting her a fourth son she names Judah. The individual's Amida reflects this progression. First he says שמע קולנו similar to Leah acknowledging Gd for hearing her prayers by naming her second son Simon. The next blessing, רצה, asks Gd to accept our prayers in lieu of the service performed by the Levites in the Temple. And then we add the blessing of מודים, to acknowledge the kindness and miracles Gd has shown us, similar to Leah naming her fourth son Judah.

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