



HELPING CHILDREN PRAY

Erev Shabbos Parashas Toldos 5781

Dear Parents,

Watching the children's progress as the weeks in school unfold, it is truly uplifting to see their ability to learn quickly and to absorb lessons and information throughout the day. Their motivation and eagerness to learn are enabling them to grow in so many areas, in a relatively short amount of time. There is, however, an area of challenge that seems to present difficulties to so many. That is in the realm of *davening*, the daily *Tefillos*.

There are many reasons educators give for this nearly universal phenomenon, and parents, *Rebbeim* and teachers are constantly searching for insights and explanations for why so many otherwise successful students are struggling with *davening* and what can be done about it. It may be worthwhile to examine what purpose *Tefila* is supposed to serve, to help us unlock a means to help the children (and ourselves).

In the beginning of this week's *Parsha*, the Torah tells us: (*Bereishis 25:21*) *And Isaac entreated Hashem, opposite his wife, because she was barren...* *Rabbeinu Bachya* wonders why the *Pasuk* is written in this order. It would seemingly be more accurate to say first that *Rivka* was experiencing difficulty having a child, and then tell us that *Yitzchak* prayed for *Hashem* to enable them to overcome her inability to bear children and to have a child. *Rabbeinu Bachya* explains that the Torah recounts the events in this order, purposely, so we won't mistakenly think that the main point was *Rivka's* barrenness and in response to that, *Yitzchak* prayed.

Rather, the reality is different, explains *Rabbeinu Bachya*. The prayer is the *Ikar*, the main focus, and in fact, *Rivka's* inability to bear children was secondary to that fact. *Hashem* so greatly desires the *Tefillos* of *Tzadikim*, that He manipulates human events to motivate people to turn to Him in prayer. *The Medrash* states clearly (*Bereishis Rabba 45:4*) that the reason the *Imahos* (Mothers) were barren was because *Hashem* desires the *Tefillos* of *Tzadikim*. The challenges will elicit beautiful prayer to which *Hashem* can bring beautiful answers. So great is the power of *Tefilla*, that the laws of nature are turned on their head, to bring forth more *Tefilla*.

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This is a powerful lesson for us. We need to turn to *Hashem* on a regular basis and pray for our needs and for the needs of those we love. We should not wait for a *Tzara* (difficulty) to strike and then begin *davening*. If our *davening* was sufficiently elevated and pure, we wouldn't need the motivation of a crisis or emergency to jolt us into prayer. We also learn from the *Medrash* that when a difficulty strikes, it is *Hashem's* way of telling us: I miss you. I miss your *Tefillos*. Rather than Him pushing us away by striking us, He is trying to get our attention— He is trying to draw us closer to Him.

We need to internalize this message and we can and must share this with our children. If our prayer is focused, as they observe our efforts to understand more, to pronounce the words carefully, to focus on talking to *Hashem*, they will yearn to do the same. *Davening* to *Hashem* is an incredible privilege. It is important to *Hashem* that everyone of us, man, woman and child turn to Him in *Tefilla*. Our children struggle with *davening* largely because it is a seemingly rote exercise, the same day in and day out. We adults need to show in word and deed, that *davening* is so much more than reciting some words, and that it is critical to us and central to our relationship with *Hashem*. It is a tangible sign of how much *Hashem* loves us and how important each person's every *Tefilla* is, each and every day.

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When children see how important *Tefilla* is to their parents and the important adults in their life, they will develop a different relationship towards *davening*. They will learn to look at it as a privilege and opportunity, and each in his or her own way, will feel a closeness to *Hashem* that will calm them and fortify them as they go through the challenges of their young life.

Best wishes for a *Shabbos* of connection,

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