



A Prayer for the Journey
Parshas Chayei Sarah

Rabbi Zevulun Charlap was a close friend of Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin, known as the "Angel of Brisk." Rabbi Zevulun served as a magistrate on Rabbi Diskin's court.

During one of their meetings, Rabbi Yehoshua shared that he had received a telegram from a young Russian Jew, who was to be drafted into the Russian army.

The young man was very fearful of the draft, as most of Jews who entered the Russian army lost all connection to their Jewish identity. He sent the telegram asking the rabbis to pray for him.

Rabbi Yehoshua asked Rabbi Zevulun, who prayed at the Kotel every Shabbat, to pray for the young man.

"Please recite the entire book of Psalms for him," Rabbi Yehoshua requested.

Rabbi Zevulun, accompanied by his son Rabbi Moshe, tearfully prayed at the Kotel on behalf of the young Jew.

They decided to update Rabbi Diskin on their deed. When they arrived at his home, in midafternoon, they heard him reciting the *Shema*, something usually said as a part of the morning prayers.

Rabbi Zevulun assumed that Rabbi Diskin must have prayed earlier and was again reciting the *Shema*, but then they realized that he was still in the midst of his morning prayers, even though it was late in the day.

They asked his wife about this strange conduct. "Why did he not pray in *Shul*? Why is praying so late?"

She replied that Rabbi Diskin was not feeling well, and that when the Torah is taken of the holy ark in *Shul*, a heavenly entourage descends from above to rejoice in the joy of Torah, and as her husband experiences this magnificent scene, she did not want him to go to *Shul* this week out of fear for his health.

When Rabbi Diskin concluded his prayers Rabbi Zevulun told him of their prayers at the Kotel, and that he was confident of their success.

Rabbi Diskin's appeared distraught, and then he stated: "The draft has been postponed by a week. Please go and pray again next week."

Rabbi Zevulun agreed.

In our weekly parsha we learn of the significance of prayer in our lives; without prayer we cannot exist.

Eliezer is sent a mission to find a wife for Yitzchak.

"And he [Eliezer] made the camels kneel outside the city beside the well of water, at eventide, at the time the maidens go out to draw water. And he said, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please cause to happen to me today, and perform loving kindness with my master, Abraham."¹ The journey begins with a prayer.

When he encounters Rivkah, Yitzchak's future wife, he prays again. "And he said, "Blessed is the Lord, the God of my master, Abraham, Who has not forsaken His loving kindness and His truth from my master. As for me, the Lord led me on the road to the house of my master's kinsmen."

Only with prayer before and after undertaking an endeavor can one succeed.

When Eliezer returns home, he meets Yitzchak and "the servant told Yitzchak all the things that he had done." What did he tell them? Our Sages tell us that "he revealed to him [Yitzchak] the miracles that were wrought for him, that the earth had shrunk for him [he had a speedy journey] and that Rivkah had come to him providentially as a result of his prayer."

Why did Eliezer tell Yitzchak about "that the earth had shrunk for him?"

The message is very important. Eliezer tells Yitzchak that he had a speedy journey on his way going to the mission, because he prayed ahead of the mission. The prayer made the difference.

On the way back he did not pray, and therefore the earth did not "shrink" for him. They were waiting for Yitzchak to pray, "and Isaac went forth to pray in the field towards evening," and only then did Eliezer arrive with Rivkah.

Prayer is the key in succeeding in a mission and making "the earth shrink" for the benefit of that success.

When my grandfather, Rabbi Shneur Zalman Grossman, became sick shortly before he passed away, he laid in bed in Shaare Zedek Hospital. My father, Rabbi Yisrael Grossman, was at his side.

My father noticed that Rabbi Moshe Charlap was laying in the next bed. They discussed Torah and shared old stories.

Rabbi Moshe recounted the time he and his father prayed for the young Russian Jew. How did the story end? Shortly after Rabbi Zevulun's second prayer session at the Kotel, Rabbi Diskin called him and gleefully showed him a telegram he had received. It had one line - that the young Jew had been released, thanks to their prayers.

This is the power of prayer, which has a deep impact on the events of this world.

¹ Beresheit 24.