

Prayer and Obedience

While I was preparing for today's message, I came across the following item, first published in the Daily Bread: *A friend of mine took his small son with him to town one day to run some errands. When lunch time arrived, the two of them went to a familiar diner for a sandwich. The father sat down on one of the stools at the counter and lifted the boy up to the seat beside him. They ordered lunch, and when the waiter brought the food, the father said, "Son, we'll just have a silent prayer." Dad got through praying first and waited for the boy to finish his prayer, but he just sat with his head bowed for an unusually long time. When he finally looked up, his father asked him, "What in the world were you praying about all that time?" With the innocence and honesty of a child, he replied, "How do I know? It was a silent prayer."* What an incredibly simple and yet profound way to pray. This young child, without really understanding, has an innate understanding of the true nature of prayer. His response reminds me of Mother Theresa who, when asked why she sat so long in silence, replied, "I am listening to God." The observer asked, "and what is God doing while you are listening to Him?" "Why", responded Mother Theresa, "He's listening to me." Doesn't that capture the essence of prayer? It is to be in communications with our ABBA. How, you ask, can there be communications, if no one is talking? I recall with great joy in my heart, the many times my beloved and I have watched a good movie or have experienced a shared moment of the heart and just looked at each other; we don't say a word but we know exactly what each of us is thinking. If we can do that with human beings, with whom we share a love relationship, how much

more joyful will that be, when we share a love relationship with Adonai Elohim Tzivaot, the Lover of our souls.

Pray for an open and heart-based prayer relationship with our ABBA.

King David had this relationship with Adonai. He expresses it rather well, in Psalm 37 - *Trust in ADONAI, and do good; settle in the land, and feed on faithfulness. Then you will delight yourself in ADONAI, and he will give you your heart's desire.* (Psalm 37:3,4) What does it mean to delight ourselves in Adonai?

As we read through David's love poetry to God, we may develop the sense delighting in ABBA, means to keep His word in our hearts and meditate on it throughout our day, whether we are working, playing, interacting with our families or just goofing-off. What does this have to do with prayer, though? Our prayers, as communications with our beloved ABBA, are fuelled by our desire to be close to Him, to develop a deep and enduring intimacy with Him. We desire to delight ourselves in Adonai Elohim Tzivaot; we desire to be one with Him, as He is One with us.

This phrase, keeping His word in our hearts, is an interesting one. Psalm 119, verse 11, begins this discussion, wherein David writes, *I treasure your word in my heart, so that I won't sin against you.* (Psalm 119:11) In order to treasure His Word, we need to experience it, to feel it working within our hearts, within our lives. I am so curious and appreciative of the little ones amongst us who, according to our wonderful teachers in Kehilah, have His Word in their hearts, as they have; what is it about a little child's understanding of His Word that we adults have lost. Will we gain this simple yet profound love merely by reading and meditating on His word? I think not, although it couldn't hurt. It is amazing how quickly such a habit will create a huge difference in our lives and not just in our

spirituality but in our work, play and in our relationships with others – indeed in the totality of our existence. But there is something very special about the way children cling to His Word.

As we treasure His Word in our hearts, we begin to experience a delight in our Beloved ABBA and a sustained delight in Him will result in our will slowly but surely develop into shifting our desires to His, without even realizing such a shift has occurred. This is a transformation process only accomplished by the Holy Spirit of God. What this accomplishes is enormous, as Ya'akov said to us, in His fifth chapter, *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.* (James 5:16) Do we truly understand how powerful prayer is?

The medical journals contain hundreds, if not thousands, of stories of the effectiveness of prayer. Dr H Richard Casdorph, a well-known and highly respected physician and medical researcher, who has over 100 research papers published in a career spanning over 60 years, engaged in a fascinating study of 10 patients, who claimed they were healed by God, through Adonai's power of prayer. He documented their claims, through studying their medical histories, all their tests, including x-rays, CAT and MRI Scans and referred them to medical specialists for intense investigations. His book, *The Miracles*, documents the extraordinary power of prayer in the miraculous healing processes of these ten patients, all of whom were in the process of dying.

Yes, the prayer of a righteous heart is most powerful. But how many of us here can call ourselves 'righteous'? Doesn't Isaiah 64 place us in a proper perspective? *All of us are like someone unclean, all our righteous deeds like menstrual rags; we wither, all of us, like leaves; and our misdeeds blow us away like the wind.* (Isaiah 64:6) This is how we feel, if we are humble in the sight of

Adonai; compared to Adonai Yeshua, this is what we are – filthy rags. Yes, Adonai loves a heart that yearns for Him; He wants us to believe, to step out with all our hearts, all our souls and all our might focused on Him. He wants nothing more than for us to desire to walk His path and He will honour our attempts.

And then we have Rav Sha’ul’s admonition to us to pray unceasingly (1 Thessalonians 5:17). His Name should be on our lips constantly, while we are washing dishes, making the bed, writing a letter to a loved one; it really does not matter. Just a simple, “I love you Adonai.”, will suffice. Indeed, that is a profound prayer and does more to situate ourselves in His will than any long-winded redundancy-filled monologue we could imagine.

In Messianic thought, the focus of our prayers is first of all Adonai Himself, then others around us and then ourselves. What does this prioritization look like in its application? Indeed, the focus of all of our prayers should be our love for Adonai Elohim Tzivaot and our thankfulness for all He provides. If all our prayers addressed these two aspects and nothing else, that would be sufficient. Why? Simply put, God loves a grateful, content heart. Rav Sha’ul leads us to this understanding in 1 Thessalonians 5: *In everything give thanks, for this is what God wants from you who are united with the Messiah Yeshua.* (1 Thessalonians 5:18) Does this mean we should not pray for others? Of course not. We are asked to pray for others need also, even though Abba B’Shamayim knows their needs much better than do we. In Job 42 we read, *When Iyov prayed for his friends, ADONAI restored his fortunes; ADONAI gave Iyov twice as much as he had had before.* (Job 42:10) By extending outward from ourselves to others, in prayer, we demonstrate to Abba our desire to follow one of His primary commands, show love to your neighbour as to yourself, as we read in Leviticus 19:18. How much

more is love shown than by raising a prayer on behalf of the needs of our neighbour or the homeless man at the corner, before our own needs?

It is important to realize there really are no formulae for effective prayer. Oh yes, there are those who tell us all our prayers must include adoration, confession of sins, thanksgiving and supplication. Known as the ACTS Pattern of prayer, this highly structured procedure may work well for some but act as an impediment for others, as it stifles spontaneity. My suggestion is we use a structured prayer, if that guides us to develop a committed prayer-life. If not, then, please do not force yourself into structured prayer, simply because someone tells you it is important to do so. You may find spontaneous prayer is more appropriate for you; if so, then be spontaneous. Don't worry what others think of your prayer; they aren't the ones to whom you are praying. If Adonai Tzivaot doesn't like your prayer, He will tell you. Prayer from the heart is always the right prayer to offer our Beloved Abba. But what if we can't pray? What if the words will not come?

I remember, some time ago, rising after a fitful night and feeling a tremendous spiritual weight on my heart. I wanted to pray but the words wouldn't come. All that emerged from my lips was a deep, deep moan. And I sat there on the floor and just moaned my prayer to God. Yes, that was prayer, for it expressed the condition of my heart and sent a very clear message to the Lover of my soul. Rav Sha'ul knew this all-too-well, as he shares with us in Romans 8, *Similarly, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we don't know how to pray the way we should. But the Spirit himself pleads on our behalf with groanings too deep for words.* (Romans 8:26) If you are so filled with emotion you cannot utter the words, allows Ruach HaKadosh, the Holy Spirit of God, to pray for you, in the language He and Abba understand.

Having shared this brief understanding of prayer in our spiritual lives, the next portion of today's message focuses on the need for obedience to accompany prayer. In my research for today's message, I came across the following article, focusing on one congregation's focus on prayer only. The leaders of this particular flock noticed a lack of spiritual power among its members and were becoming quite concerned. Quite naturally, they focused on what they knew – prayer. All the books told them this is what they needed.

The pastor of the congregation called upon his people to pray and pray fervently. As they do, there is a rising tide of feeling and it appears as if revival might be imminent; however, the expected revival fails to materialize and the zeal for prayer amongst these good people begins to recede. Before long, they are right back where they were before and a numb discouragement settles over all.

What went wrong? The answer is quite simple, really – neither the leaders nor the people in the pews made any effort to obey the Word of God; their only weakness, or so they thought, was their failure to pray long or hard enough. They had no idea they were falling short in the most important matter of obedience.

There are several ways in which people use prayer as an antidote for obedience; I want to focus on just two of these today. First, believers sometimes use prayer as a labour-saving device. In the days of the Second Temple, Israel focused on sacrifices and ignored the call of Adonai for their stepping forward in trust. We see how our beloved Abba responded to this, in Hosea 6, wherein Adonai told His people, *For what I desire is mercy, not sacrifices, knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.* (Hosea 6:6) During the Temple period, Israel used sacrifice as a means of prayer; their needs and desires were sent to God through the burnt offering. Today, our prayers are sent directly to

HaShem, without the use of burnt offerings or other sacrifices; however, they must be accompanied by action, stepping out in service of obedience to His call upon our lives, for us.

Just as we desire to put others first in our prayers, we must also put others first in our actions. This is what is meant by His telling us “I desire mercy.” He wants us to follow His instructions, as laid out in the Owner’s Manual, found in Leviticus 19: *don’t harvest all the way to corners of your field, and don’t gather the ears of grain left by the harvesters . . . don’t gather the grapes left on the vine or fallen on the ground after harvest . . . Do not steal from, defraud or lie to each other . . . Do not oppress or rob your neighbor*, and so on. (Leviticus 19:9,10,11,13) In other words, we are to show our love for our neighbours, our neighbours being any other human being we happen to know or run into. This is a requirement!

Let’s face a critical issue – prayer without obedience is hypocrisy. Scripture speaks to that quite clearly. For example, in Job 27 we read, *For what hope does the godless have from his gain when God takes away his life? Will God hear his cry when trouble comes upon him? Will he take delight in Shaddai and always call on God?* (Job 27:8-10) In Psalm 66 David has shared with us, *Had I cherished evil thoughts, Adonai would not have listened.* (Psalm 66:18) Quite clearly, HaShem will not heed our prayers, if our behaviours speak to Him of disobedience. Adonai Yeshua urges us to make things right with our brothers and sisters, before coming before Adonai, as we read in Matthew 5, *So if you are offering your gift at the Temple altar and you remember there that your brother has something against you, leave your gift where it is by the altar, and go, make peace with your brother. Then come back and offer your gift.* (Matthew 5:23,24) The fourth chapter of the

Epistle of James is quite pointed, when we are told, *Whoever chooses to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy.* (James 4:4) Does that need to be any clearer? Today, the world desires to take you and me as far away from El Shaddai as possible. Temptation, idleness, sloth, greed, pride, arrogance are all weapons of the enemy to drive a wedge between us and Almighty God. And when we are disobedient and do not follow the teachings of Adonai Yeshua, we hand the hammer to the one who would drive home the wedge.

Beloved, we in Kehilah Haverim Mashiach have some deep soul-searching to engage. Are we relying on prayer to replace our action? Are we using prayer as a labour-saving device?

Our second issue deals with bypassing basic understandings of discipleship. We find this stated quite clearly in Luke 6. You know the parable quite well. Adonai Yeshua claims not to know those who have been doing what they wanted and not what He wants and says to them, *Why do you call me, 'Lord! Lord!' but not do what I say?* (Luke 6:46) HaShem neither hears nor responds to the pleas of unrepentant sinners, because they do not respect Him and do not have a desire to follow His path. We are told in John 9, *if anyone fears God and does his will, God does listen to him.* (John 9:31) Our beloved Abba hears the prayers of those who obey His Word, for this is a signal to Him of love, honour and respect.

The desire to please Adonai is a direct result of the Holy Spirit of God renewing our minds, as we journey in our faith walk closer to our Abba and grow more mature in our love of and for Him. This is exemplified in Romans 12, *keep letting yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your minds; so that you will know what God wants and will agree that what he wants is good, satisfying and able to succeed.* (Romans 12:2)

Beloved, I urge each one of us today to renew our commitment to follow His path with love, determination, joy and thanksgiving. Let us, this moment, seek to fulfill the call on our lives to obedience of the One True God. Let us follow Adonai Yeshua's example, found in John 4, *My food is to do what the one who sent me wants and to bring his work to completion*, (John 4:34) and the writer of Hebrews, quoting Psalm 40, *Then I said, 'Look! In the scroll of the book it is written about me. I have come to do your will.'* (Hebrews 10:7)

Join with me this moment, as we recommit our desires and our will for His.

Beloved Abba, we know we have allowed ourselves to stray away from your will and from your calling of us, from time to time. We know we could be more obedient to your desires for us; you have made us kadosh, holy, set apart for you and, yet, often our actions bely that reality. Abba, we pray you would help us in our faith walk; help us to ensure we are stepping out in trust of You and Your Word. Support us, we all pray. Amen