

COMMENTARIES OF THE DUBNO MAGGID

PARASHAS TOLDOS

In this week's parashah, the Torah relates (Bereishis 25:21): "And Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, for she was barren; Hashem acceded to him, and his wife Rivkah conceived." The Gemara in *Yevamos* 64a reports that both Yitzchak and Rivkah were both originally barren. The Midrash on the verse we just quoted expounds (*Bereishis Rabbah* 63:5):

Opposite his wife – this teaches that Yitzchak was bowing down in one section of the room and she was bowing down in another section. He said: "Master of the Universe! Let all the children that You are giving me come from this saintly woman." And, similarly, she said: "Let all the children that You will eventually give me come from this saintly man."

In other words, although both Yitzchak and Rivkah were both barren, Yitzchak prayed on Rivkah's behalf rather than his own, while Rivka prayed on Yitzchak's behalf rather than her own.

The Gemara in *Yevamos* takes special note of the Torah's report that "Hashem acceded to him," and remarks: "It should say 'Hashem acceded to them'! But the Torah writes 'to him' because the prayer of a righteous child of a righteous man is not the same as the prayer of the righteous child of a wicked man." The Maggid notes that it seemingly would have been enough for the Gemara to write "a righteous child" rather than "the prayer of a righteous child." He is thus led to explore the question of why the Gemara added the phrase "the prayer of."

He explains as follows. When a person prays for someone else, it is virtually inevitable that his spiritually level will differ from that of the person he is praying for, either higher or lower. This being so, we may ask whether Hashem's response to the prayer is based on the spiritual level of the person offering the prayer or on that of the person being prayed for. Initially, we would think that, since the person being prayed for is the one who will receive the benefit of Hashem's aid, it is his or her level that is the key factor. But evidently this is not so. In the episode we are discussing, Yitzchak was praying for Rivkah and, at the same time, Rivkah was praying for Yitzchak. Now, Yitzchak was a righteous son of a righteous father, while Rivkah was a righteous daughter of a wicked father, and hence Yitzchak was on a higher spiritual level than Rivkah. Thus, if the level of the person being prayed for were the key factor, the Torah should have written: "Hashem acceded to her" – that Hashem answered Rivkah's prayer that He grant aid to Yitzchak. Since the Torah instead writes *to him*, we see that level of the person *offering the prayer* is the key factor. The reason the Gemara writes "the prayer of a righteous child" rather than simply "the righteous child" is to underscore that the focus is on the level of the person offering the prayer.