The Meaning of Tefillah Part III: Tefillah as an Exercise in Hope

The First Appearance of Tefillah

1) בראשית פרק כ פסוקים ב-ז

וַיִּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־שָׁרָה אִשְּׁתָּוֹ אֲחָתִי הֻוֹא וַיִּשְׁלֵּח אֲבִימֶּלֶרְ מְלֶךְ גְּלֶר וַיִּקְּח אֶת־שָׂרָה וַיְּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם וְיִּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־שְׂרָה אִשְׁתִּוֹ אֲחָתִי הָוֹא וַיִּשְׁלֵּה נְיִּשְׁת הְצִּלַת בְּעַל: וְאַבִימֶּלֶךְ לְא קָרָב אֵלְיהָ וַיִּאמֶר אַבְּרָהָם אֶל־אָבִימְלֶבְ בַּחֲלֵוֹם הַבְּיִלְה וַיִּאמֶר אַתְּרָה אָחָי הָוּא אָמַר־לִי אֲחָתִי הְוֹא וְהְיא־גַם־הְוֹא אָמְרָה אָחָי הָוּא בְּּרָבְ וּבְּנְקְיוֹ בַּפְּי הְבִּיקְעוֹ בְּיִלְתִּי זְּאֹת: וַיִּאמֶר אָחָי הָוּא בְּרָבְ אַשְׁר־לָיקֹם גְּם־אָנֹכְי וְבְּעִּלְיה בְּעִלְיךְ עַשְׂיִהְ הֹאִי הְוֹא אָמְרַב וְּהְצִית הְוֹא אָמְרָה אָחְיִי הְוֹא אָמְרַב וְנִיּקְם בְּחְבְּיוֹ בְּבָּי וְבְעָלִיהְ וְהְיִאבּלְרָב וְשְׁרָה אָשְׁתְּי הְוֹא אָמְרָב וְחָיֵה בְּעִלּים בְּחָלִם בְּם אָלִיהְ: וְעַשָּׁה הָשָּׁב אָשֶׁת־הָאִישׁ כְּי־נָבְיא הוּא וְיִתְּפַּלֶּל בָּעִדְרָ וְחְיֵה אְשְׁתְּוֹ הְּלִּבְ לִבְּיִבְ וְתְשִׁרְם בְּחָתְם בְּחָתְם בְּרָב אָשְׁר־לָבְרָ בְּיִבְיּי הְוֹא אָמְרִבְיוֹ הְאָלְיִהְ וְתְּבְּלָּב וְתְבְּיִבְי וְתְשִׁרְם בְּחָתְּם בְּעִבְּיך וְתְשָׁב בְּעִבְּרְב וְיִלְּהְ בְּעְבְּרָב וְיִיְיִם הְעִבּילְים בְּיִבְיִי הְוֹת הָּמִלוֹת תְּלָּה וְבָלְיהְ וְלָבְיִבְי וְשְׁבָּים הְנִבְּיִים הְּעִבְּיי בְּיִבְיִי הְוֹתְם בְּעִבְּים הְיּשְׁרִב דְּע בְּיִבְיִים הְעִבְּים הְבִּילְם בְּבְרָב בְּיִים הְאָבְיִם הְיּבְיבְרָב וְיִים הְעִּבְיִים הְעִּים הְיִבְייִים הְאוֹת הָּמְלוֹת אֲלָּיהָ: וְעַשָּׁה וְנְשְבָּים הְנִלּיב בְּיִים הְעִיבְיים בְּיִים הְעִּבְיים הְיִיבְים הְיִבּים הְיִיבְים הְיִיבְם הְבִּילְים הְיִיבְים הְּבְּיִים הְעִיבְּים הְּעִיבְּים הְּיִבְּיִים הְעִיבְּיִים הְעִּבְּיוֹים הְעִיבְים הְּעִבְּיִים הְּיִבְּיִים הְּבְּבְיְבְייִים הְעִיבְּים הְבִּילְיבְים הְיִים הְּבְּבְים הְיִיבְים הְיִיבְים הְיִיבְים הְיּיבְים הְיִים הְיִים הְיִים הְּיבְּים הְיִים הְעִּיְם הְּשְּבְּיוֹם הְיִבְילְים הְיבְב

Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "You are to die because of the woman that you have taken, for she is a married woman." Now Abimelech had not approached her. He said, "O lord, will You slay people even though innocent? He himself said to me, 'She is my sister'! And she also said, 'He is my brother.' When I did this, my heart was blameless and my hands were clean." And God said to him in the dream, "I knew that you did this with a blameless heart, and so I kept you from sinning against Me. That was why I did not let you touch her. Therefore, restore the man's wife—since he is a prophet, vayitpaleI for you—to save your life. If you fail to restore her, know that you shall die, you and all that are yours."

Revisiting Yaakov's Wonderment

2) בראשית פרק מח פסוקים י-יא

ּוְעֵינָי יִשְׂרָאֵלֹ כָּבְדָוּ מִזֹּקֶן לָא יוּכָל לִרְאָוֹת וַיַּגְּשׁ אֹתָם אֵלֶיו וַיּשְׁק לָהֶם וַיְחַבֶּק לָהָם: וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵלֹ אֶל־יוֹמֵׁף רִאָה פַנֵיךָ לָא פָלַלָתִי וְהָנֵּה הֶרָאָה אֹתֵי אֱלֹהִים גַּם אֵת־זַרעַךָ:

Now Israel's eyes were dim with age; he could not see. So [Joseph] brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see you again, and here God has let me see your children as well."

3) רש"י בראשית פרק מח פסוק יא

לא פללתי. לֹא מְלָאַנִי לִבִּי לַחֲשֹׁב מַחֲשָׁבָה שֶׁאֶרְאֶה פָנֶידֶ עוֹד. פללתי לְשׁוֹן מַחֲשָׁבָה, כְּמוֹ הָבִיאִי עֵצָה עֲשִׂי פְלִילָה (ישעיהו ט"ז):

I HAD NOT CONTEMPLATED — I had never dared to cherish the thought that I would again see your face. פללתי is an expression for thinking, like the noun in (Isaiah 16:3) "Give counsel, carry out the thought (פלילה)".

4) משנה ברכות פרק ט משנה א

הַצוֹעֵק לְשֶׁעָבַר, הֲרֵי זוֹ תְּפִלַּת שָׁוְא. בֵּיצַד. הָיְתָה אִשְׁתּוֹ מְעֻבֶּרֶת, וְאָמֵר, יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁתֵּלד אִשְׁתִּי זָכָר, הֲרֵי זוֹ תְּפָלַת שָׁוְא. הָיָה בָא בַדֶּרֶךְ וְשָׁמַע קוֹל צְוָחָה בָּעִיר, וְאָמֵר יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁלֹא יִהְיוּ אֵלּוּ בְּנִי בֵיתִי, הֲרֵי זוֹ תְּפִלַּת שׁוֹא:

And one who cries out over the past in an attempt to change that which has already occurred, it is a vain prayer. For example, one whose wife was pregnant and he says: May it be God's will that my wife will give birth to a male child, it is a vain prayer. Or one who was walking on the path home and he heard the sound of a scream in the city, and he says: May it be God's will

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that this scream will not be from my house, it is a vain prayer. In both cases, the event already occurred.

5) פסיקתא זוטרתא (לקח טוב) בראשית פרשת ויחי פרק מח

כלומר לא הייתי מתפלל לראות פניך, לפי שנתייאשתי ממך ואמרתי טרוף טורף יוסף (בראשית לז לג), כי דבר שאדם סבור שהוא בעולם הוא מתפלל עליו רבונו של עולם זכיני לראותו:

That is to say, I did not mitpalel that I would see your face, because I despaired of you and said, "a wild animal has torn him apart," for only when someone believes a thing to be in existence does one pray to the Master of the World to see.

6) רד"ק בראשית פרק מח פסוק יא

ויש מפרשים פללתי ענין תפלה, כי לתפלת שוא הייתי חושב זאת התפלה, כי באמת הייתי חושב שאתה מת:

Some commentators relate the word מבלה to the word תבלה, prayer, in which case Yaakov was saying to Joseph that he had not prayed to G'd concerning being reunited with Joseph in this life as he had considered it a forbidden, vain prayer, i.e. uttering the Lord's name in vain, seeing that all the evidence he had at his disposal indicated that Joseph was already dead.

https:// "תפילה" האם חשבתם פעם מה פירוש המילה "תפילה"? //https:// www.hidabroot.org/article/1160971

בפסוק בפרשת ויחי 'ראות פניך לא פיללתי' – המשמעות של המילה 'פיללתי' היא במובן של ציפיה ותקוה, לא ציפיתי ולא קיויתי שעוד אראה אותך... התפילה בנויה על ציפיה ותקוה, האדם תולה את תקותו בבורא ומאמין ומצפה שיעזור לו, רק כך יכולה להווצר תלות וכך יווצר חיבור שהיא המשמעות הנוספת של המילה תפילה.

ולכל מי שמרגיש עכשיו עת צרה, כי הוא נכווה מהגזירות הכלכליות וגם מהרוע המייצר אותן, אז הנה הזדמנות לתלות יהבנו באבינו שבשמים ולהפנות אליו את הדאגה וגם את הכאב, הוא יכול והוא רוצה לעזור לכל אחד מאתנו.

A verse in Parshat Vayechi reads, "to see your face I never pilalti,"- the meaning of the word "pilalti" is a sense of anticipation and hope, i.e., "I did not anticipate nor hope that I would again see you." Tefillah, then, is built upon hope and anticipation, for during tefillah a person takes his or her hopes and depends upon the Creator and believes and anticipates His assistance. For only in this way can dependence be created, and a connection can be generated, which is the additional meaning of "tefillah."

And to anyone who feels right now that they are in a difficult time...tefillah is an opportunity to depend on our Father in Heaven, and to turn to Him with our worries and our pain, for He can, and He desires to, assist each and every one of us.

8) Rabbi Yechiel Spero, Touched by a Light (94-95)

On December 7, 1988, a devastating earthquake destroyed much of the northwestern section of Armenia. Over 25,000 people lost their lives. Parents ran frantically to try and find their children who were buried under piles of rubble. In one small town, a father ran to his child's school, but when he arrived, he saw that the school was no longer standing. The entire building was one big pile of stones and debris.

Other parents came to the site and hung their heads and cried. They were certain that their children were no longer alive. But this loving father had frequently reassured his child that he would always be there for him. And he was not going to allow this tragedy to be an exception to the promise.

And so, he began to dig. Bystanders who had gathered wondered aloud how long the desperate father would continue. Realists tried to convince him that he was wasting his time

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and that his efforts would prove futile. But he paid no attention to anyone. Instead, he called out to his son over and over again,

"Armand! Don't give up hope. I am coming to get you. Armand! I love you! Don't give up hope!" He repeated this refrain over and over, as the crowd looked on with a mixture of pity and admiration at the father's heroic and courageous and perhaps foolhardy efforts. He removed stone after stone, block after block, and worked diligently. Although others began to help, they quickly gave up. But this father displayed unusual dedication and endurance. Twelve hours passed, but he didn't tire. He continued to haul away piece after piece. After 24 hours, there were still no sounds and no sign of life.

But a father is a father, and he never gives up on his child. So the father continued to dig. Then, in the 38th hour, he began to hear a voice. It was his son, Armand!

"Papa! Papa!" Armand continued to call as his father, exhausted and drained, worked more feverishly than ever. Word began to spread and hundreds gathered. Those individuals who had looked on with pity and had thought that this father had lost his mind now began to join him, while strangers clapped and cheered. A short while later, he removed one final stone. He reached out and grabbed his son's hand and cried uncontrollably.

Father and son were reunited, and thirteen other children's lives were spared. They were saved because a slab of cement had collapsed above them, creating a small cavity, preventing the rubble from crushing them. The story was written up the world over, and Armand's father became quite a sensation. He had taught the world a lesson in parenting. When asked if he ever gave up hope, little Armand replied, "No, I never did. My father told me that he would never give up hope on me, and I told all the other children that my father will come and find me, no matter how long it would take."