**God Who Hears Prayer**

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| Hear our voice, Adonai our God, have compassion upon us and spare us.  And accept with mercy and desire our prayers.  For You are a God who hears prayers and supplications.  And do not turn us away empty-handed, our King.  For You hear the prayers of Your people Israel with mercy.  Blessed are You Adonai, who hears prayer. | שְׁמַע קולֵנוּ. ה' אֱלהֵינוּ חוּס וְרַחֵם עָלֵינוּ.  וְקַבֵּל בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרָצון אֶת תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ.  כִּי אֵל שׁומֵעַ תְּפִלּות וְתַחֲנוּנִים אָתָּה.  וּמִלְּפָנֶיךָ מַלְכֵּנוּ. רֵיקָם אַל תְּשִׁיבֵנוּ:  כִּי אַתָּה שׁומֵעַ תְּפִלַּת עַמְּךָ יִשרָאֵל בְּרַחֲמִים. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', שׁומֵעַ תְּפִלָּה: |

This is the final prayer in the section of the Amidah that is only said on weekdays. We finish the section in which we ask God for many things by reminding God and ourselves that we believe that God "hears prayer."

The idea that God hears prayer is not easy for us to understand. After all, most of us do not believe that there is a little old man sitting up in the heavens with ears listening to what each of us say. God is not a "Jewish Santa Claus" who hears exactly what we ask for and then decides whether he's going to give it to us or not.

With that in mind, what do you mean when you say that God hears prayers?

Could you still pray if we didn't think God heard our prayers?

How might a person's life be different if she believes or doesn't believe that God hears prayers?

**Prayers for Rain**

The land of Israel is frequently plagued by drought. It only rains in the winter there, basically from Sukkot through Pesah. When it doesn't rain, Jews add special prayers to this paragraph of the Amidah to ask for rain. There are also special fasts that are observed in order to ask God for rain.

There are some very interesting stories in the Talmud about rabbis and other Jews praying or decreeing fasts for rain. In some cases God does listen to them and and in some cases God does not. When reading these stories ask yourself the following questions:

* What are these stories are meant to teach? What is their "moral"?
* To whom does God listen? Why does God listen to some and not others?
* What does this teach us about Jewish values and Jewish prayer and the connection between the two?
* Why doesn't God listen to the rabbis? What does this tell us about being a rabbi?

**Babylonian Talmud Taanit 24a**

Once Rabbi Judah Hanasi decreed a fast and no rain fell.

Thereupon Ilfa (someone's name) went down before the ark (to be a shaliah tzibbur) and said, "He causes the wind to blow, (משיב הרוח) and the wind blew. [He continued], "He causes the rain to fall" (ומוריד הגשם) and rain fell.

Rabbi then asked him: What do you do [such that God listens to you]?

He replied: I live in a poor remote place where wine for Kiddush and Havdalah cannot be found but I take the trouble to get wine for Kiddush and Havdalah and thus

I help also others to fulfill their duty.

**Babylonian Talmud Taanit 24b**

Once Rav came to a certain place and decreed a fast but no rain fell. The shaliah tzibbur then went before the ark and said, "He causes the wind to blow, (משיב הרוח) and the wind blew. [He continued], "He causes the rain to fall" (ומוריד הגשם) and rain fell.

Rav then asked him: What do you do [such that God listens to you]?

He replied: I am a teacher of young children and I teach the children of the poor as

well as those of the rich; I take no fees from any who cannot afford to pay; further, I have a fishpond and any boy who is reluctant [to learn] I bribe with some of the fishes from it and thereby appease him so that he becomes eager to learn.

**Mishnah Taanit 3:8**

It happened that they said to Honi the circle drawer: “Pray for rain to fall.”

He replied: “Go and bring in the pesah ovens so that they do not dissolve.”

He prayed and no rain fell.

What did he do? He drew a circle and stood within it and exclaimed before Him: “Master of the universe, Your children have turned their faces to me because I am like one who was born in Your house. I swear by Your great name that I will not move from here until You have mercy upon Your children.”

Rain then began to drip, and he exclaimed: “I did not request this but rain [which can fill] cisterns, ditches and caves.

The rain then began to come down with great force, and he exclaimed: “I did not request this but pleasing rain of blessing and abudance.”

Rain then fell in the normal way until the Jews in Jerusalem had to go up Temple Mount because of the rain.

They came and said to him: “In the same way that you prayed for [the rain] to fall pray [now] for the rain to stop.”

He replied: “Go and see if the stone of people claiming lost objects has washed away.”

Rabbi Shimon ben Shetah sent to him: “If you were not Honi I would have excommunicated you, but what can I do to you, for you are spoiled before God and he does your will like a son that is spoiled before his father and his father does his request. Concerning you it is written, “Let your father and your mother rejoice, and let she that bore you rejoice” (Proverbs 23:25).

* Why does God listen to Honi? Why didn't God listen to Honi at the outset?
* Why is Rabbi Shimon ben Shetah so angry at Honi? Why does he say that Honi is "spoiled"?
* What does Rabbi Shimon ben Shetah think about God listening to prayer in general?
* What do you think about Honi? Does he act appropriately? Is he a model for Jewish prayer?