

Pray for Avimelech

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · Jerusalem · Wednesday 28 October 2026 / 17 Cheshvan 5787

Yesterday Israel voted for the 26th Knesset. This morning about half the country woke up pleased and the other half woke up worried. The official results belong to the Central Elections Committee, and they can wait for it. This piece is about something that can't wait: what we do with the people who voted the other way.

Today's portion of the Torah reading, the fourth section of Vayeira, has an answer, and it isn't an easy one.

Avraham comes to Gerar, and the king, Avimelech, takes Sarah into his house. G-d warns Avimelech in a dream, and he gives her back. By any fair reading Avraham is the wronged party. He has every reason to keep his distance, nurse the hurt, and let Avimelech's household deal with what came on them.

Instead the verse says: "And Abraham prayed to G-d, and G-d healed Abimelech and his wife and his handmaids, and they gave birth."

Avraham prays for the man who took his wife. And look at what he prays for. Avimelech's house had been closed up; no child could be born there. Avraham himself has been waiting for a child for decades. He asks G-d to give the other house the very thing his own house still lacks.

The next verse opens: "And the L-rd remembered Sarah." Rashi explains why the two are placed side by side: "to teach you that whoever begs for mercy for his friend, when he needs the same thing, he is answered first." The Gemara (Bava Kamma 92a) learns it from the same verses. Rashi even adds that G-d "had already remembered her before He healed Abimelech."

So the order runs backwards from what we'd expect. Avraham doesn't first get what he needs and then, feeling generous, pray for the other side. He prays for the other side while he is still empty, and that's where his own answer comes from.

After an election, everyone needs the same things. A government that works. Safety for our soldiers and our towns. Bereaved families and reservists who need the Knesset to get to work. A country that can still sit at one Shabbat table after a hard campaign.

If you're disappointed this morning, pray that the people you voted against get what the whole country needs: wisdom, honesty and success in keeping Israel safe. If you're pleased this morning, pray for the people who are worried, that their fears turn out wrong and their voice is heard.

Avimelech wasn't Avraham's ally. He was the man who had just wronged him. Avraham prayed for him anyway, and Sarah was remembered first.

That's a good way to start the day after.

All glory to the Ribono shel Olam · Errors are mine

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