



## When is the Time to Stop Praying for What we Want?

### The Ripple Effect of Prayer

Is there ever a time when we have prayed enough for something and it's time to let go and move on? Well, it seems that way from the beginning of *Parashat Va'etchan*, when Hashem became angry at Moshe and told him to stop praying for permission to enter the Land of Israel. Hashem always answers our prayers, but it can be hard to accept that sometimes the answer is, "No!" Our Sages teach that Moshe had offered 515 different prayers to enter the Land, according to the numerical value of the word וַאֲתַחֲנֶן/*Va'etchanan*, which means 'implored.' However, each of Moshe's prayers were rejected (*Midrash Devarim Rabbah* 11:6). This doesn't mean that Moshe's prayers were in vain, as the main purpose of prayer is not only to achieve a certain goal – being granted our wishes, but rather being in communion with Hashem. Moreover, the object of our prayer may not be available to us at any given time. Yet, the yearning expressed through our earnest entreaty can have a ripple effect on others. Rabbi Trugman, as always, puts it so eloquently: "By praying so intensely to enter the Promised Land, Moshe imbued the Jewish people for all eternity with the passionate desire to be connected to the Land. Although he did not personally enter the Holy Land, he bequeathed to all the Jews living in exile the will power and desire to never give up hope of returning to the Promised Land." Every time I read the opening of *Parashat Va'etchanan*, I'm moved to tears by Moshe's heartfelt longing for the Holy Land. Simultaneously, I'm filled with gratitude that we merit to live out our days in this enchanted, G-d given, land within the embrace of the Divine Shechina.

### Moshe's Eternal Power

Yet, sometimes it is prohibited to pray too strongly for something specific. There comes a place where we must accept that Hashem's will may not be what we want. Moshe wanted so badly to enter the Land of Israel, but Hashem did not even allow him to continue to pray for it:

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וַאֲתַחֲנֶן אֶל־הַשֵּׁם בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: כִּד אֲדֹנָי הַשֵּׁם אַתָּה הַחַלּוֹת לְהַרְאוֹת אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ אֶת־גְּדֹלְךָ וְאֶת־יְדֵי הַחֲזָקָה אֲשֶׁר מִי־אֵל בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה כַּמַּעֲשִׂיךָ וּכְגִבּוֹרְתֶךָ: כִּה אֶעֱבְרָה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן הֲהִיא הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְבָּנוֹ: וַיִּתְעַבֵּר הַשֵּׁם בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר הַשֵּׁם אֵלַי רַב לָךְ אֵל תוֹסֵף דַּבֵּר אֵלַי עוֹד בַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה:

"I pleaded with Hashem at that time, saying, 24) 'O Hashem, G-d, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand, for who is [like] G-d in heaven or on earth who can do as Your deeds and Your might? 25) Please let me cross over and see the good land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon.' 26) But Hashem was angry with me because of you, and would not hear me, and Hashem said to me, 'Let it be enough, speak no more to me of this matter'" (*Devarim* 3:23-26).

G-d commanded Moshe to stop praying because otherwise, the power of Moshe's prayer would, so-to-speak, force Hashem to grant him his wish, even though the world was not yet ready for Moshe to enter the Land of Israel. Moshe corresponds to the *sefirah* (Divine Emanation) of *Netzach* associated with persistence, permanence and eternity. Everything connected with Moshe remains forever. This is why Moshe brought us the Eternal Torah, which can never be changed. Had Moshe entered the Land, he would have become the final Mashiach, and caused the building of the eternal Temple- never to be destroyed. However, it would have been a premature redemption, as the world still needed to build its spiritual foundation and evolve to rectify many additional rectifications.

## Your Power of Prayer is Limited when Unaccompanied by Positive Action

So, where does all this leave us? Has G-d ever commanded us to stop praying for anything we want? It's not like we have a direct communication with Hashem, that we would know. Some people rely on prayer alone for everything including their livelihood and soulmate. They may spend hours in *hitbodedut* (solitary prayer), putting out a minimum of effort without seeking a steady job or meeting with matchmakers. I'm not the one to judge. Everyone has a different balance between *histadlut* (effort) and *tefilah* (prayer). Yet, when crossing the Reed Sea, "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Why do you cry out to me? Speak to the Children of Israel and let them travel'" (*Shemot* 14:15). These words teach us an eternal lesson about the limitation of the power of prayer when unaccompanied by positive action.

## Have Patience and Never Despair of Pleading to G-d in Prayer

What if we take every action to accomplish our goal while simultaneously storming the gates of heaven with our prayers? Could there still be a time when we must discontinue flinging our heartfelt prayers for a particular object at Hashem? Chezkiyahu told Yesha'yahu, "This is what I have learned from the house of my father; 'Even if a razor-sharp sword is pressing on a person's neck he should never despair of pleading to G-d for mercy...'" (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 10a). I was trying to voice this principle to my family members when my cousin Ben, ob"m, was in his terminal stage of colon cancer. I couldn't remain silent when his sister announced to the family that they were celebrating Ben's last birthday. Yet to my great regret, my well-meant words of encouragement to intensify prayer, rather than give up hope, only infuriated the already disconsolate sister. *L'havdil*, (on another subject), while suffering secondary infertility for many years, I continuously pleaded with G-d for another child. Although my chances, according to the fertility experts' verdict were slim, I didn't give up. Thank G-d, my prayers and efforts did eventually bear fruit, (but not until ten years after receiving a special dollar-bracha from the Lubavitcher Rebbe). From this experience, I always teach the importance of never giving up hope. Hashem always answers our prayer, but sometimes the answer is, "Not yet!" In that case just keep praying!

## Refrain from Praying in Order to Focus on Your Blessings

There are times, however, when it is not Hashem's will that we continue praying for a particular aspiration. Not everything which is revealed good is our portion to attain in this lifetime. The Lubavitcher Rebbe and his wife never had any children, nor did they merit to live in the Land of Israel. Some people, unfortunately, remain single and childless all their lives. Absorbed in exasperating prayers for decades, being constantly reminded of their dire strait, may lead to unnecessary depression. Perhaps Hashem wants them to stop praying so intensely for unattainable goals, move on and focus on the blessings in their life. I remember when I was praying from the deepest part of my soul for a second child. In order to pray so hard, I had to go to the place where I could get in touch with my deepest anguish about not having more children. I felt like I was vacillating between feeling utter desperation and thankfulness that I did have, after all, a husband and one son. As soon as I focused on my blessings, I was unable to pray from that same place of desperation. At a certain point, we just can't remain in that place of anguish. At what exact point, it's time to make the switch, I cannot say. It varies from person to person. We all need to tune inwardly in order to listen to that inner voice to know when we are called upon to make do with our situation and accept Hashem's will. "Make His will like Your will, in order that He will make your will as His will. Nullify your will before His will, in order that He will nullify the will of others before your will" (*Pirkey Avot* 2:4). After my second son was no longer a baby, I yearned for a daughter. Not yet 40, it was not that I was too old to bear another child, however, I just knew deep down that it was not Hashem's will for me. I can't explain how I knew. Yet, since then, I never engaged in further fertility treatments or poured out my heart in prayers for more children. It was as though Hashem told me, "Let it be enough, speak no more to me of this matter" (*Devarim* 3:26)