

Spiritual Healing in the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Vaetchanan

Is There a Limit to Lengthening in Prayer?

What is Wrong with Praying for a Specific Outcome?

Prayer is central in Judaism. One of the three pillars that the world stands on is service, which today refers to prayer (*Pirkei Avot* 1:2). The holy matriarchs and patriarchs pleaded with Hashem in heartfelt prayer, and Chana, the Mother of our Prayer, is known for lengthening in prayer for a son until she bore Shemuel. When I first came to Torah it was very difficult for me to pray, as it was something I had never learned to do or been used to. Even when I understood the Hebrew words of the Siddur, my mind would wander, and I lost focus. I asked my Rabbi for advice on this, and he told me to pray that I would be able to pray. That helped a little, but what really helps is having something of vital importance to pray for. Realizing that only Hashem has the power to grant my deepest aspirations, I would pour out my heart in prayer for a child, and I never stopped. Continuous prayer is needed for each stage of conception, pregnancy, birth, and child-rearing, and then for our son to find his other half, and it still doesn't end here. Now, that thank G-d, Hashem has answered all these prayers, we continue to pray for a suitable home for the young couple. But is there a limit to how much we should pray? Can a person ever pray too much? It depends on what we are praying for. When I realized that praying for a specific outcome might not always be in our best interest, I stopped insisting in my prayer that Hashem grant my son and his bride a home in beautiful Bat Ayin. Although my husband and I are convinced that there is no better place for the young couple to start their married life than this loving, supportive community, our daughter-in-law- to-be feels otherwise. So, they have been looking in Jerusalem. It is quite challenging but realizing that only Hashem knows what's really good for everyone, I changed my prayer from insisting that the couple find a place in Bat Ayin to praying that they find a home in a place that will be good for them.

Is There a Limit to How Much We Should Pray? Can a Person Ever Pray Too Much?

If a woman prays to marry a specific man, but he is not her predestined soulmate, her prayer can actually be harmful to her. Hashem may fulfill this prayer even if it goes against the master plan. Yet, just as it isn't good for a child when his parents give in to his persistent cry for ice cream, it is not always in our favor to twist Hashem's arm to grant us what we think we need. We cannot demand of Hashem what reality needs to be like, because we can never know anything for sure, we can only believe. There comes a place and time when we must accept Hashem's will even if it may not be what we want. We are not in charge, and we mustn't manipulate Hashem to fulfill our wishes. This is what Bilam tried to do through his witchcraft. Rather than praying for a specific outcome, Tefilah is to rise to the place where it is possible to receive the highest abundance that Hashem has dedicated specifically to us. The difference between manipulating Hashem and opening ourselves to receive Hashem's blessing is very subtle. It can be compared to the prohibition to urge a person to give us an item that he doesn't want to give. Asking is one thing, but to keep nudging is at best impolite and at worst bullying. So, too, in our relationship with Hashem, there comes a time when we must back off prayer.

We learn a lesson on the limits of prayer in *Parashat Va'etchanan*. Moshe wanted so badly to enter the Land of Israel that he prayed for it 515 times, corresponding to the numerical value of the word **וַאֲעִתְחָנָן**/Va'etchanan – "I beseeched," and to the hours between Erev Rosh Hashana and the crack of

dawn on Shmini Atzeret. Yet, Hashem did not even allow him to continue to pray for entering Israel. According to the midrash Hashem asked Moshe Rabbeinu to stop praying because otherwise, Hashem would have had to grant him permission to enter the Land. This teaches us the principle that it is possible to pray too much because it is considered as if the person 'forces' Hashem to do his will.

The Subtle Balance Between Asserting our Will and Aligning it with Hashem's Will

In EmunaHealing we teach the importance of activating our will, as we recite in the Ashrei prayer: "umaspia l'chol chai ratzon" (Tehillim 145:16). This verse can be understood as "Hashem influences and bestows upon each living being a will." We all received a will. When someone doesn't have a will, it is because she doesn't reveal the will within her. Our will can be compared to gasoline, without which the vehicle will not move. We need a will to accomplish anything in life. Depressed people lose their will, and therefore have difficulty getting up in the morning. We need to actualize and live our will. לחיות את הרצון. The more we can peel off the various exterior layers, the more natural it is to be ourselves. Although we choose, we only choose a vessel, we need patience. We have no power over the results, we can only pray and accept that the rest is up to Hashem. There is a fine balance between activating our will and balancing it to align our will with Hashem's and make His will our will (Pirkey Avot 2:4).

Will Moshe's Prayers go Unanswered?

ספר דברים פרק ג פסוק כג וְאֶתְחַנֵּן אֶל ה'שָׁמַיִם בַּעַתְּ הַהוּא לֵאמֹר:

(כד) אֲדַנִּי ה'שָׁמַיִם אֲתָהּ הַחִלּוֹת לְהִרְאוֹת אֶת עַבְדְּךָ אֶת גְּדֻלָּתְךָ וְאֶת יָדְךָ הַחֲזִיקָה אֲשֶׁר מִי אֵל בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה כְּמַעֲשֵׂיךָ וְכַגְבוּרֹתֶיךָ: (כה) אֶעֱבְרָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן הַהוּא הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְבֵּנָן:

"I implored Hashem at that time, saying, "O Hashem, You who let Your servant see the first works of Your greatness and Your mighty hand, You whose powerful deeds no god in heaven or on earth can equal! Let me, I pray, cross over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan, that good hill country, and the Levanon" (Devarim 3:23-25).

I always cry over Moshe's deep desire to enter the Land of Israel. Although his prayer wasn't fulfilled in his lifetime, I believe that the power of his prayer instilled within the Jewish people the desire to make Aliyah for all generations to come. Moshe yearned to unify Hashem in the land, as "Whoever lives outside of the land is like someone who doesn't have a G-d" (Babylonian Talmud, Ketuvot 110b). Therefore, Moshe used the term "your G-d" throughout the book of Devarim, to say that since the Israelites are entering into the Land Hashem's name is called upon them (Siftei Kohen, Devarim 3:25). Rashi explains that the word וְאֶתְחַנֵּן/va'etchanan is from the root חִנּוּן/chinun - 'a free gift.' Although the righteous may base a request on the merit of their good deeds, they request only a free gift of the Omnipresent. Alternatively, חִנּוּן/chinun is one of ten terms that denote prayer (Sifrei); (Rashi, Devarim 3:23). Moshe's prayer furthermore teaches us that we must always praise G-d and afterward pray for our needs. The beginning of Moshe's praise corresponds to the praises we recite in the opening of the silent Amidah prayer, "Your greatness" corresponds to - "The great G-d;" "Your mighty hand" to - "You are mighty;" "Who is a god like You in heaven to - "You are Holy" (Chizkuni). Despite the sweetness of Moshe's prayer, Hashem refused to grant the wishes of his soul.

ספר דברים פרק ג פסוק כ

וַיִּתְעַבֵּר הָשֵׁם בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר הָשֵׁם אֵלַי רַב לָךְ אֵל תּוֹסֵף דַּבֵּר אֵלַי עוֹד בַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה:

“Hashem was angry with me for your sake, and would not hear me, and Hashem said to me, ‘Let it be enough, speak no more to me of this matter’” (*Devarim 3:26*).

Despite our strong resolve and urgency to continue praying, we need to lower our expectations that Heaven must follow our wishes and dictates and have faith in and acceptance of the unknowable. Moshe accepts the fact that his prayers will go unanswered for now. Or rather, he understands that although Hashem always answers our prayers, sometimes the answer is no or not yet!”

EmunaHealing Exercise for Activating and Balancing our Will with Hashem’s

1. Let yourself relax on your chair or cushion and become aware of your breath. Take several deep breaths and feel your body settle down and relax.
2. Get in touch with your will. Ask yourself, “What do I really want?” Perhaps you can dismiss some of your cravings emanating from your lower will and focus on your deeper inner will – the will of your soul, to evolve toward your higher self and cleave to Hashem. Visualize yourself acting the way you really would want to act, possessing the positive traits you strive for, and thinking positive thoughts.
3. See if you can verbalize this vision in prayerful words such as “Hashem please empower and help me keep x mitzvah in a higher more complete way. You may repeat this prayer several times with greater intensity.
4. One of the reasons Moshe wanted so much to enter the Land was to be able to keep all the mitzvot that only apply in the Land of Israel. Get in touch with your own desire to live in the Holy Land. If you already live here, then tune into how you can better connect and appreciate this special merit for which Moshe cried and prayed numerous heartfelt prayers.
5. Take several deep breaths while you marvel at the wonder of the Promised Land and all its goodness despite whatever problems. Tune into the rose and disregard the thorns.
6. Return to focusing on your will. From where in your body does it emanate? Breathe your will into your head, throat, shoulders, arms, and fingers. Allow your will to enter your heart and penetrate it. Breathe your will into your stomach, liver spleen, and kidneys, and let your will flow down your legs all the way to your feet. Allow yourself to feel grounded in your will.
7. Take a few moments to get in touch with your higher will. Think of the five deepest yearnings in your life, perhaps you can connect each of your desires with one of your body parts. Before praying for them, take a moment to evaluate if your desires are aligned with Hashem’s will for you. You may adjust them to become more aligned. Keep in mind to pray more generally rather than for a specific outcome. Now, cry out to Hashem in heartfelt prayer for each of your desires while focusing on the body part where this desire resides. Then be still and breathe softly.
8. Let yourself hope that your prayers will be fulfilled, yet simultaneously let go of being demanding of Hashem. Accept that Hashem’s will is what ultimately determines the outcome of our prayers. See if you can rise to a place where you will be able to receive Hashem’s abundance for you. Whether or not it is Hashem’s will to grant you your wishes, accept whatever goodness Hashem has in store for you!