

PARSHA VAETCHANAN

AUGUST 1ST, 2015
AV 16TH 5775

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WE HOLD THE KEY TO REPAIRING THE WORLD

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "Please let me cross over and see the good land" (Devarim 3:25).

Moshe implored Hashem to let him enter the holy land, beseeching Him 515 times, which is the numerical value of va'etchanan. Nevertheless, his prayers were not answered, for the Holy One, blessed be He, did not allow Moshe to enter the promised land. In reality, why did He so adamantly refuse to grant Moshe's prayer, given that the Sages have said (Yebamot 54a) that G-d yearns to hear the prayers of the righteous? In fact G-d ended Moshe's prayers by saying: "Rav lecha [Enough for you]. Speak to Me no further of this matter" (v.26), which is very surprising. Even if it had been decreed that Moshe would not enter the land due to the sins at the waters of Meriva, why did the Holy One, blessed be He, not allow him to pass through a small portion of the land, just to look upon its beauty and fulfill mitzvot that depend upon living in the land, even if it meant taking him out immediately afterward?

We must learn a very important principle here that is crystal clear: Absolutely no one can understand the reasons of the Holy One, blessed be He, and none of us has the slightest notion or inking of the Creator's deep thoughts, praised be His Name. Since He did not agree to Moshe's request, it was certainly for his own good and benefit. In fact the ways of Hashem are hidden from us, and He alone knows exactly what is good and not good for man. This represents a sharp admonishment to us all, for sometimes we constantly pray and beseech the Holy One, blessed be He, to give us what we ask, but to our great disappointment we see that our prayers yield no result and that we have received nothing. We even get the impression that the gates of Heaven, so to speak, are tightly sealed before us, and we erroneously begin to lose hope, thinking that the Creator is far from us and not interested in our prayers. Such a belief is founded in error, for He truly yearns to hear our prayers and listen to our voice. If we notice that our prayers are not answered and deliverance has not yet arrived, we must realize with certainty that it is for our own good, since only Hashem knows what is good for man and what is harmful for him. Who was greater than Moshe, whose prayer the Holy One, blessed be He, did not answer for reasons known only to Him, reasons that are hidden to us.

This is the meaning of Hashem's words to Moshe: Rav lecha ("Enough for you"). The term rav means that Moshe would be a Rav, meaning that he would teach the Children of Israel what there is to know about prayer, and from him they would learn that prayer is not always answered, for sometimes we ask for things that are not for our own good. And just as Moshe's prayer was not granted, likewise a Jew's prayer is sometimes not granted because it is not for his own good.

I traveled to Toronto once to encourage the local community there, when I suddenly thought of traveling to New York to spend Shabbat. It made absolutely no sense, because logically it was better to remain in Toronto for Shabbat on account of a wedding of someone who financially supported our institutions. It was therefore better to remain in Toronto for the sake of our institutions and the Torah world. However Hashem compelled me to travel to New York, and the Sages have said: "A man's feet...lead him to the place where he is wanted" (Sukkah 53a). In fact when I arrived in New York, I was welcomed with great honor, and I gave a class on strengthening Jewish observance, supporting them with the words of the living G-d. During this class, I noticed that although the synagogue was a beautiful building, it did not yet contain a heikhal [ark] that was suitable for housing Torah scrolls in a dignified way. When I asked why, the leaders of the synagogue told me that they intended on building a beautiful and imposing heikhal, one that befitted such a magnificent synagogue, but didn't yet have the funds to do so. I immediately thought that it was for this reason that Heaven had sent me there. I instantly proceeded from thought to action, gathering together the entire congregation and speaking to them about the honor of the Torah, saying that it was a tremendous and very important mitzvah to give money for the heikhal. To my great surprise, it only took a few minutes for the necessary funds (\$150,000) to be collected.

Since I had merited such an important mitzvah, the mitzvah to beautify and honor the house of Hashem, He gave me a wonderful gift that was absolutely priceless. It was an important and precious spiritual gift, for as soon as I left, I had a beautiful solution to the problem mentioned above: Why the Holy One, blessed be He, adamantly refused to grant Moshe's request. What could have happened if Moshe had entered the land and seen a little of it? With G-d's help, I would like to explain this concept as follows: The Sages have said (Zohar Bereshith) that the Holy One, blessed be He, used the Torah as the blueprint for creating the world. They also said (Bereshith Rabba 11) that He planned on creating the souls of the Children of Israel even before creating the world. This means that the Jewish people were witnesses to Creation, and they were worthy of seeing how Hashem created the world using the holy Torah. The center of Creation and the universe began with Even HaShetiya, the Foundation Stone that is found in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred of places. As the Sages have said (Yoma 54b), there was a rock there, and it was called the Foundation Stone because the world was founded from it. Consequently, when the Holy One, blessed be He, first looked into the Torah, He created the Foundation Stone, which was the start of Creation. That being the case, there is an incredible abundance of

Publication of
HEVRAT PINTO
Under the Direction of
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holiness and purity in that place, for it was the first time that the Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah to create something in the world. Thus when Moshe said, “Please let me cross over and see the good land,” he did not just want to walk through it. Rather, what he really wanted was to reach that most sacred place, the Foundation Stone, and by touching it he would have brought about the rectification of the world, meaning that the Final Redemption would have occurred. That

is what Hashem did not agree to, for He wants the rectification of the world to occur through the personal efforts of the Children of Israel, meaning by strengthening themselves in the performance of mitzvot, studying the holy Torah, and drawing closer to Hashem. That is how they must repair the world – through their own efforts – without Moshe doing this work for them. Hence Hashem said to him, “Enough for you. Speak to Me no further of this matter.”

The Words of the Sages

They Became Torah Giants

“On the eve of Pesach 5745,” said Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Schlesinger in the book *Pearls from our Teacher the Kehilot Yaakov*, “I shared with the Steipler two comments on his book *Kehilot Yaakov*. He reflected and provided some explanations, but then he suddenly said: ‘Some young people think that vacation time is a period of abandonment, a time when Torah study is optional. However that’s a mistake. Not for a moment are we exempt from learning Torah as long as we are capable of it.’”

“The Steipler added, ‘I know that numerous Torah giants became great in Torah precisely because they were careful to continue learning during vacation time. This can be explained in two ways: First, we benefit from even greater divine aid by learning at a time when others abandon it. Furthermore, during vacation time we can study the things that interest us even more. During the year, we must yield to the yeshiva’s study program, whereas on vacation we can study whatever we want in Torah, be it Zeraim, Moed, Kodashim, Taharot. We can come up with novel explanations, put them to writing, and grow in Torah. I can think of several brilliant Torah figures who reached their level due to their perseverance in learning during vacation time.’”

Like an Electric Utility

The gaon Rabbi Yehuda Tsadka would often say, “It is written in the Gemara, ‘Between the study of the Torah and the reading of the Megillah, the reading of the Megillah takes priority’ [Megillah 3b]. From here we learn that it is permissible to interrupt one’s study to go and listen to the Megillah. Yet what do roshei yeshivot base themselves on to authorize the complete closing of their yeshiva for three weeks?” His response: “The Gemara recounts [Berachot 35b] that Rava asked his students not to come to study during Nissan and Tishri so they could prepare their sustenance for the entire year during that time [so they would not be occupied during the rest of the year]. However we don’t see that they liberated them from houses of study for a vacation.”

He illustrated his point as follows: “As our Sages have explained, since the verse: ‘For the Jews there was light’ [Esther 8:16] alludes to the Torah, then we, the holy yeshivot, are compared to the ‘power plant’ of an electric utility, the mission of which is to produce electricity for constant light. Have you ever seen an electric utility shutting down for a day?”

One day Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka sat down in synagogue next to a learned man, whom he heard proclaiming with great emotion and concentration: “There is something that I ask Hashem, that I demand instantly, which is to dwell in the house of the Hashem all the days of my life.” At that point he turned to him and said, “You have just committed yourself to never taking a vacation again! You explicitly said, ‘to dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life.’”

Not Much

In his youth, Rav Kovalevsky was close to the Chazon Ish.

At the end of the yeshiva winter session, he went to say farewell to his Rav before returning home to his parents. The Chazon Ish gave him a few bottles of wine so he could fulfill the mitzvah of rejoicing during the holiday.

He then said to him, “There is another way to rejoice during the holiday, and it is found in the verse: ‘The orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart’ [Tehillim 19:9]. Don’t forget to fulfill them even during your vacation.”

“How much should I study?” asked the student.

“Not much,” replied the Rav. “Four hours in the afternoon, and four hours at night.”

When Rav Kovalevsky recounted this story some time later, he affirmed that he had followed this advice, but modified it. In fact he studied two hours upon arising (prior to Shacharit), two hours afterward, two hours before Mincha and Ma’ariv, and two hours at night.

A True Rest

In his advanced years, Rabbi Moshe Yechiel Epstein, the Rebbe of Ozharov, traveled to a summer retreat in Jerusalem to rest. At the same residence were a few rabbis and other great men of Torah, and they carefully watched the Rebbe’s conduct and were amazed by his incredible diligence.

One such man, who served as the mashgiach of a yeshiva, said to his colleague: “It’s incredible! This Rebbe is already old and has come here to ‘rest,’ and yet he never stops studying day or night!”

He didn’t have any peace of mind until he asked Rabbi Moshe Yechiel: “Rebbe, please, can this really be called resting?” The Rebbe replied, “Absolutely! For me, as long as I’m not disturbed as I study, I call it resting.”

Doctor Yanushkovitch’s Request

When Rabbi Nachum Pertzovitch, the Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, was severely ill, his state of health especially deteriorated during the vacation period, as witnessed by the members of his own family. He had no classes to give, no students to teach...but his pain was constant and intensifying.

Rabbi Nachum himself once mentioned this. It was one of those rare occasions in which he spoke of himself, and even then he did so in passing in the middle of some discussion.

A young student went to see him because he was suffering from excruciating pain. The Rav sympathized with him, then consoled him with a real life example:

“Look at me. I have great pain each time I move my hand. However the main thing is that we are alive, that we can study!”

Rabbi Hillel Kagan often recalled the words addressed by Rabbi Tarfon to his disciple Rabbi Akiva: “Whoever separates himself from you [study] is as though he separated himself from life” (Kiddushin 66b). He also recounted that Dr. Yanushkovitch of Vilna had personally taken care of his teacher the gaon Rabbi Shimon Shkop near the end of his life. At that point he advised him to stop giving Torah classes, for they required too much effort and concentration, which were liable to harm his frail heart.

Rabbi Shimon responded with a smile, “Doctor, all your instructions and advice have but a single goal, which is to save my life. For me, however, if I don’t teach Torah, then what purpose does my life serve? That is my life. When a Rav is sent into exile, his yeshiva goes into exile with him, for there is a mitzvah to live.”

At the Source

You in Turn

It is written, “As Hashem my G-d has commanded me” (Devarim 4:5).

Rabbi Yitzchak said, “If someone knows words of Torah, he should not deprive Jews of them. Instead he should teach them with a friendly demeanor, just as Moshe said: ‘See, I have taught you decrees and ordinances, as Hashem my G-d has commanded me.’”

In the Midrash Chadash, our teachers emphasize the expression, “As Hashem has commanded me.” In other words: Just as He taught me, likewise I teach them to you, and you in turn will teach them to others.

Quickly for Us

It is written, “You will surely perish quickly” (Devarim 4:26).

When someone borrows an object from his friend and promises to return it quickly, after how long a time must he return it?

In his book *Ta’ama D’Kra*, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky rules that “quickly” corresponds to a little less than 20½ hours.

The source of this opinion is found in the Gemara: “Rabbi Acha bar Yaakov said, ‘This proves [that the term] “quickly” [used] by the Sovereign of the universe is 852 years’” (Gittin 88b).

Now since a “day” for G-d corresponds to 1,000 years (“For even 1,000 years in Your eyes are like yesterday when it is past” [Tehillim 90:4]), and since “quickly” for G-d is 852 years, therefore “quickly” for us corresponds to 20 hours, 483 chalakim, 50 seconds, and 24 thirds.

His Great Strength

It is written, “He took you out before Himself with His great strength from Egypt” (Devarim 4:37).

In his book *Ayelet HaShachar*, the gaon Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman asks the following question: It seems that the expression “with His great strength” requires an explanation. G-d obviously does not need great strength to take His people out of Egypt! That being the case, what does this expression mean? There are two possible answers:

First, in the eyes of most people, a plan to liberate 600,000 servants from Pharaoh’s kingdom seemed almost unachievable. “Great strength” was therefore necessary, hence the expression used by the verse. Second, the Children of Israel were mired up to the 49th gate of impurity. They needed tremendous merit to be delivered from Egypt, which was the “great strength” that Hashem used to bring the Jewish people out.

In Order to Obey

It is written, “Honor your father and your mother, as Hashem your G-d commanded you” (Devarim 5:16).

The mitzvah to honor one’s parents, writes the Aruch HaShulchan, is a logical commandment that is recognized among all nations and civilizations. Even non-believers observe it naturally and rationally. Nevertheless, the Children of Israel are obligated to fulfill a rational commandment not for logical reasons, but because it is G-d’s order.

Hence it is said in the commandments given in this week’s parsha: “Honor your father and your mother, as Hashem your G-d commanded you.” In other words, honor your parents not because your mind tells you to, but because “Hashem your G-d commanded you” – meaning that you should honor them in order to obey G-d’s order, not because logic demands it.

Repentance

It is written, “When you are in distress and all these things have befallen you at the end of days, you will return to Hashem your G-d and hearken to His voice” (Devarim 4:30).

Rabbi Yitzchak explained that the expression, “When you are in distress” teaches us that the best kind of repentance is one that takes place before strict justice comes upon the world, for when strict justice holds sway over this world, it is extremely difficult to escape and neutralize it. As soon as strict justice begins its mission, it does not stop before having completed it. When its work is done and humanity has repented, then all the worlds will be “rectified,” as it is written: “...and all these things have befallen you at the end of days, you will return to Hashem your G-d... for Hashem your G-d is a merciful G-d.” What is the meaning of “at the end of days”? It comes to include the Shechinah, for it too is in exile and suffers alongside the Jewish people without ever abandoning them.

Although G-d created strict justice in the world, He prefers not to use it. In this way, Jews can return to Him spontaneously and He can do good for them both in this world and in the World to Come. We must realize that nothing can stand before repentance.

– From Zohar III:122ab

In the Light of the Parsha

Learning to Love Hashem

It is written, “You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Devarim 6:5).

In the Gemara, our Sages cite Rabbi Eliezer as stating: “If it says ‘with all your soul,’ why does it also say ‘with all your might’? And if it says ‘with all your might,’ why does it also say, ‘with all your soul’? [He answers:] If there is a man who values his life more than his money, to him it says: ‘with all your soul.’ And if there is a man who values his money more than his life, to him it says: ‘with all your might’” (Berachot 61b).

How is it possible to attain such a great love for G-d?

We must seek inspiration from a father’s love for his son, and from a son’s love for his father. In seeing the love that his father has for him, the personal sacrifices that he makes for him, and the daily concerns that he has for him, a child will sense a profound love for his father developing within him.

This is exactly the path to follow for developing a love for G-d. In sensing how much G-d loves us, in observing that He grants us life at every moment and provides us with all that we need in terms of sustenance, health, and so many other things, we will witness the birth and growth of a powerful love for our Creator within us, and we will understand that we cannot remain ungrateful to our Benefactor. We will then freely choose to fulfill His will and observe His commandments, to the point of being able to sacrifice ourselves for Him.

Thus by noting the kindnesses that Hashem bestows upon us, we will be able to love Him “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.”

Guard Your Tongue

Better to Avoid Them

We must be very careful not to spend time with a group of people who have gathered together. If we are obligated to spend time with such a group, we must make certain to limit our time with them. Even if this group is composed of honorable and upright individuals, and only one of them is a bad influence, he will ruin all the rest. Hence it is better to avoid such groups. If, for whatever reason, we are forced to remain in their company, we must make an effort to remain silent. – Sha’ar HaTevunah

In the Footsteps of our Fathers

Between Coveting and Desire

It is written, “And you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor shall you desire your neighbor’s house, his field, his slave, his maid-servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Devarim 5:18).

At first glance, we may think that coveting and desire are one and the same, being synonyms for one another. However Rashi interprets it differently, and the Mechilta explains that the use of repetitive language renders a person guilty for coveting on the one hand, and for desiring on the other.

The difference between the two is explained in Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvot: If a person sees that his friend has something nice, and in his thoughts he desires it, he has transgressed the prohibition “you shall not desire.” However if he also makes an effort to coax his friend into selling it to him, or uses other forms of pressure, he has transgressed the prohibition “you shall not covet.”

Desiring and coveting anything that we feel we are lacking disrupts our service of G-d and prevents us from studying Torah properly, meaning in peace and tranquility. To use the words of the Be’er Mayim Chaim: “Whoever desires and covets luxuries and unnecessary possessions, his weariness will never end. Day and night, he will not stop running through houses, courtyards, markets, and streets looking into every corner. Even the little that he prays and serves G-d is not adequate, for he will diminish these as much as possible. His mouth will utter prayers and supplications, but his heart will already be thinking about what to do afterwards. He is constantly agitated.”

The Desire for a Candlestick

Whispers made their way through the assembly of the faithful in the great Frankfurt synagogue on Shabbat. A few minutes before the Sefer Torah was taken out, two Jews known for their vileness entered the large hall. They were infamous for being thieves, people who didn’t know how to differentiate between their own money and that of others.

Among the congregants, those with a sharp eye could easily see that this wasn’t an ordinary visit. Instead, these two men were extremely emotional. The gabbai welcomed them with joy and warmth, giving them a seat and even honoring them with an aliyah. At the end of the prayer service, one of them stood on a chair and requested everyone’s attention. “You are all certainly asking yourselves what we are doing here,” he said. “Last night, something extraordinary happened to us, something that made us change our ways and return to the path of our forefathers.” The tension in synagogue was at its height. Everyone was listening. “It’s very difficult to recount this story,” he added, “but we thought that sharing it in public would allow us to atone for our sins.” The story that he told was the following: It was the middle of the night as they passed the house of Rabbi Pinchas Halevi Horowitz, the Rav of the city and author of Hafla’a. There on the edge of his window they saw a magnificent Shabbat candlestick, impressive both in size and beauty. The men realized that by stealthily making their way up the window, they could snatch it. As they climbed up and prepared to grab the candlestick, the Rav entered the room and saw them. Realizing what they were doing, he said to the thieves: “The town is surrounded by an eruv, so you won’t be adding the sin of carrying to the sin of theft. Nevertheless, since the candlestick is

mukseh [forbidden to handle on Shabbat], I am informing you that I am renouncing possession of it, meaning that you can come and take it at the end of Shabbat.”

Stunned, the thieves lowered their eyes and fled. They could not believe that the Rav was willing to give up possession of his candlestick just so they wouldn’t sin in terms of mukseh! At that point they began to search their souls all through the night to determine if they were prepared to make an effort for the Creator...at which point the metamorphosis was complete. A few years later, the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Brisk recounted this incident to his students. After they were stunned to hear of the noble action of the Hafla’a, Rabbi Chaim asked them why they thought the Rav preferred to renounce possession of his candlestick rather than give it to them outright. The students had various suggestions, but Rabbi Chaim explained: If the Rav had declared that he was going to give his candlestick to these thieves after Shabbat, they would have transgressed the negative commandment “do not covet” throughout Shabbat. In fact the candlestick would not have belonged to them until after Shabbat, and they would have therefore been coveting and planning on taking something that belonged to another. On the other hand, when he renounced possession of the candlestick, it no longer belonged to anyone. Hence it was no longer subject to the prohibition “do not covet.”

The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family

The Holy Tzaddik and Kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Pinto

in Honor of His Hilloula on Av 16

Rabbi Yehuda Pinto, also called Rabbi Hadan, was the son of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol. He was known for his greatness in Torah and Kabbalah, as well as for his diligence in fulfilling mitzvot. He fulfilled the teaching of the Tanna, “Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven” (Pirkei Avot 5:20). Rabbi Hadan committed himself to diligently learning holy books both day and night. Beside the fact that he was great tzaddik and could produce deliverance and miracles, many people would come to see him for a blessing. His wisdom and keen intellect in every area of life attracted renowned personalities from all parts of the country. Foreign dignitaries and ambassadors went to see him as well, standing in line before his office in order to receive counsel and sage advice on current issues. Rabbi Hadan used his wisdom to efficiently advise anyone in need, both in the spiritual and material realms. He prayed for every Jew to be treated with mercy and to experience deliverance. He was completely infused with virtues such as kindness and supporting others, virtues that he inherited from his father. For example, people would say that he shared all his money with the poor. He was scrupulous in not going to bed if even a penny remained in his pocket, in which case he would hasten to give it to someone in need. He made certain to procure a tallit, tefillin, new garments, and food for boys in order to celebrate their Bar Mitzvah properly, without lack or unnecessary worries. Then when it came time for their wedding, Rabbi Hadan would fulfill the important mitzvah of Hachnasat Kallah. May his merit protect us.