Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 223

Va'etchanan | Fusion of Matter and Spirit Through Prayer





# MESILOT Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת ואתחנן | אנגלית

#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Leaving Egypt with Nowhere to Go 1
Three kinds of Stubbornness
Forty Years of Journeying
Sihon and Og - No Casuse for Fear
The Power of the Circle 11
Acceptance of Prayer — How?
Moses' Desire to Rectify the Land 13
Premature Attempt 16
Untiring Prayer
Two Kinds of Emanation
The Essence of It All — Connection 21
Bringing the Daily Offering 23
Summary and Practical Conclusions 25



#### Beit Hamidrash Hameir La'aretz

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Parshat Vaetchanan - Leaving Egypt with Nowhere to Go



# Leaving Egypt with Nowhere to Go

The walls of Pharaoh's magnificent palace in Egypt did not disclose the turmoil that raged within their master's heart; they remained stately erect and arrogant.

Surely, had they sensed Pharaoh's internal turmoil, they would have bowed and collapsed from the sheer intensity of his anxiety and dread.

Pharaoh, the most powerful man of his era, who ruled cruelly and mercilessly, found himself utterly powerless against Moses and Aaron.

Initially, Moses and Aaron had tried to explain their intentions to him with words, but after Pharaoh proved to be severely lacking any compassion, they resorted to other methods: blood, frogs, lice, and so forth.

Yet, astonishingly, it turned out that even this method left

Pharaoh unreceptive to their calls; however, the great educators, the holy leaders Moses and Aaron, did not despair and repeatedly returned to Pharaoh.

Only much later, during their ninth interaction with Pharaoh, did the seeds of understanding begin to take root and cause some positive effects to emerge.

Pharaoh asked them: "Please tell me, what do you want?"

Moses and Aaron patiently explained: "About 450 years ago, a great and righteous man named Abraham lived, and he served the Creator with all of his might.

Abraham had a son named Isaac, who was uniquely holy and called 'a pure offering,' and Isaac had a son named Jacob.

Jacob, through his spiritual endeavors, was able to discern good from evil, refining the Jewish

Parshat Vaetchanan - Three kinds of Stubbornness

souls in their source, and from that point on, all of the descendants of Jacob possess Jewish souls, souls connected to the Creator by an unbreakable silver cord."

2

Moses and Aaron continued: "Then, about 210 years ago, Jacob and his family descended to Egypt and entered your land. Through your terrible wickedness and impurity, you managed to cloud and poison their minds and hearts, thus enslaving them.1

Now, G-d has revealed Himself to us and commanded that we approach you and request the release of His people, Israel." Pharaoh heard this and declared with astonishment:

"I don't understand your claim at all. If our Egyptian impurity has clouded the minds of the Jewish people, know that if you take them out from my domain, not only will they not be redeemed, but to the contrary, they will fall into an impurity even harsher and darker than mine—"See that evil confronts you" (Exodus 10:10) — You have nowhere to go to escape!" Pharaoh concluded, signaling to his servants, who expelled Moses and

Aaron for the ninth time.

Let us explain this a bit further.

#### Three kinds of Stubbornness

With the words: "See that evil confronts you," Pharaoh revealed to them that leaving Egypt would bring about an even harder struggle; they would have to contend with the impure forces of Sihon and Og.<sup>2</sup>

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**1.** The Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote (Likkutei Sichot, Vol. 1, p. 109):

"The hardship of exile was so great, the darkness so overwhelming, that even Moses' intellect — the supreme

wisdom of holiness — could not grasp G-d's plan, and he cried out: 'Why have You harmed this nation?' (Exodus 5:22)."

**2.** As explained at length in Megaleh Amukot (section 130).

Parshat Vaetchanan - Three kinds of Stubbornness

To quote the words of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh:<sup>3</sup>

A Jewish soul is a part of G-d above, connected to the Creator by means of a silver cord. The soul resides in the brain, from where it sends rays of divine awareness into the heart, animating the person and activating all their abilities toward drawing close and adhering to G-d.

Yet, between the brain and the heart lies the throat, a narrow passage - the back of the neck that characterized by brazen stubbornness. One who stiffens his neck severs the connection between the brain and heart. effectively imprisoning the soul above, preventing it expressing itself and influencing a person positively. The spiritual concept of the 'neck' has several expressions and consists of several types, each acting in its unique way to separate the mind from the heart. Pharaoh thus explained: Surely you realize that the reason I successfully clouded the minds and hearts of the Jewish people stems from my spiritual root in the neck (פרעה) has the same Hebrew letters as "הערף" — the neck). Through this power, I prevented the divine abundance from descending from the mind to the heart and limbs, and furthermore, I prevented them from speaking holy words (שפרעה) spells "פה רע"

— an evil mouth).

Yet, despite my profound impurity, the stubbornness of Sihon and Og whom you stand to face on the path to the Holy Land is far more formidable.

As Rabbi Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz explained:4

Sihon and Og guarded the land of the seven nations. Even though the seven nations had significant impure powers, they required even stronger guardians of impurity to protect them.

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**<sup>3.</sup>** 'LeChiyot Im HaZman' (Vayikra — p. 72).

<sup>4. &#</sup>x27;Zera Kodesh' (Parshat Chukat).

#### Parshat Vaetchanan - Three kinds of Stubbornness

This is what the spies meant with their report: "We also saw giants there" (Deuteronomy 1:28). They weren't merely afraid of their physical strength and size; they saw their immense spiritual impurity, which was beyond any measure.<sup>5</sup>

The impurity of Sihon and Og was opposed and paralleled

Moses and Aaron, deriving their spiritual nourishment from the neck of Moses and Aaron, as their names hint at:

"סיחון" in gematria equals the Aramaic word "קדל", meaning "neck," and Og is called "הפליט" (the escapee, Genesis 14:13), whose name also numerically equals "קדל".

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**5.** When the spies returned, the nation of Israel gathered to hear their report.

The spies opened by saying, "We cannot go up against the people, for they are stronger than we" (Numbers 13:31).

Rabbi Shmuel Shemarya Heinah explains ('Zichron Shmuel,' Parshat Devarim):

The spies were essentially saying: "Know that near the border of the Land of Israel there are two very formidable impure forces, known as Sihon and Og.

We have no chance of overcoming or subduing them; therefore, we must not enter the Land, or we will be lost forever."

But their error was their not believing that Moses had the power to defeat all forms of impurity and evil.

Rabbi Natan Sternhartz of Breslov, writes in Likutei Halachot (Hilchot Erev, halachah 5:37): "The spies said: 'But the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are extremely fortified, and we even saw the offspring of the giant there... They are stronger than we are' (Numbers 13:28, 31).

They felt that it is impossible to conquer and enter the holiness of the Land of Israel — which comprises all holiness — because they are stronger than we are; the battle is too formidable.

This is analogous to the evil inclinations tempting a person. The spies thus frightened the Jewish people, as the verse states: 'We appeared as grasshoppers in our own eyes' (ibid. 33), claiming there was no way to overcome such fierce opposition.

But in truth, this merely stemmed from their arrogance, as they fell into desires for authority and false leadership, emboldening them to challenge Moses. They did not believe in his immense power, and thus they fell so greatly."

Parshat Vaetchanan - Three kinds of Stubbornness

Thus, they too drew their nourishment from the neck. spiritually speaking, like Pharaoh, preventing divine abundance and thoughts of repentance descending from the higher realms into hearts the the Jewish people, thereby obstructing their sincere return to G-d through the contemplation of His greatness.

Hence, Og is called "Og, the king of Bashan" (Numbers 21:33). "בשן" is a nonchronological acronym for 'גון שערי בינה' (the fifty gates of understanding, which are the roots of repentance), over which he ruled spiritually with impunity, preventing them from descending.

Similarly, "Sihon" relates to the word "sicha" (conversation), as explained by our sages (Bava Batra 78b), indicating that his impurity prevented heartfelt confession and sincere repentance before G-d. Thus, Pharaoh said in closing:6

You can now understand why I say that your departure from Egypt will not be worthwhile for you all.

You will have to face even more challenging impurities opposing you. While you, Moses and Aaron, receive your spiritual abundance from the front-facing spiritual sources, Sihon and Og derive theirs from the back of the neck: Og from Moses's, and Sihon from Aaron's.<sup>7</sup>

This is the inner meaning of the words: "See that evil confronts you" (Exodus 10:10) — The evil you will soon contend with is precisely that which "confronts you" (literally 'the back of your neck' - 'נגד פניכם').

Despite Pharaoh's thought provoking "sermon", Moses and Aaron ignored it entirely.

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- 6. 'Megaleh Amukot' (section 130).
- **7.** Another parallel: Moses and Aaron were brothers, and Sihon and Og were

likewise brothers, as recorded in the Gemara (Niddah 61a): "Sihon and Og were sons of Ahya bar Shemhazai."

Parshat Vaetchanan - Forty Years of Journeying

# **Forty Years of Journeying**

The famous principle, "there is no room for despair at all," proved itself yet again.

Ultimately, Moses and Aaron made Pharaoh understand his weakness and mistakes, and Pharaoh freed the people of Israel from Egypt.

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz writes the following:8

"G-d performed miracles and wonders for us and brought us forth from Egypt with a mighty hand, and the divine soul within the minds of the Jewish people emerged from the prison of the impure veils, spreading into their hearts and bodily powers until they received the Torah, whereupon their impurity ceased.

G-d then proclaimed: 'I am the L-rd your G-d who brought you out of Egypt' (Exodus 20:2); thus, the Exodus is the fundamental beginning of the Jewish people's service of G-d, and without which the separating barriers of impurity would have prevented the Jewish heart from aligning with the mind's counsel of the soul."

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- 8. 'Zera Kodesh' (Parshat Kedoshim).
- **9.** From the time of the revelation at Sinai and forward, every Jew, through prayer, could achieve whatever his heart desires.

It however, of course, depends upon each person's spiritual strength; the purer and cleaner the "silver cord" of connection of the Jew to G-d, the faster one's prayer will be answered.

If, Heaven forbid, the cord becomes somewhat soiled, one must pray even more intensely. Yet, there is no Jew who is entirely unable to request and merit that G-d fulfill all of his wishes through prayer.

In this context, we share the following story ('Besod Avdecha,' vol. 9, p. 69):

The extraordinary greatness and holiness of the revered and saintly Rabbi Avraham Gershon of Kitov, brother-in-law, and disciple of the holy Baal Shem Tov, were concealed behind a curtain of humility and modesty in Jerusalem, the Holy City.

To grasp his greatness, consider how his lifelong friend and renowned sage,

#### Parshat Vaetchanan - Forty Years of Journeying

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, Chief Rabbi of Prague, described him in his work Noda BiYehudah:

"The delight of my eyes, desire of my heart, my guide and mentor; wiser than a prophet, a lion and a fierce warrior, my beloved friend and cherished one, revered below and beloved above, the extraordinary Rabbi Avraham Gershon, may his light shine forth."

In their youth, Rabbi Yechezkel and Rabbi Gershon studied together in the famed "Kloiz," or study hall of Brody, alongside Rabbi Meir Margaliot, esteemed rabbi of Lemberg and Ostroh, author of "Meir Netivim," and a close student of the Baal Shem Tov.

At that time, a scandal arose in Brody concerning a matter of grave misconduct within an influential family. Despite their prominence and connection to the authorities, the family's elders refused to act, ignoring the situation completely.

As the scandal became public knowledge, outrage grew and demanded a clear condemnation from the community leaders. However, the family's influence silenced potential critics through intimidation.

Determined to uphold righteousness, the rabbis of the Kloiz investigated thoroughly, confirming beyond doubt the family's wrongdoing, but in response, the family secured a royal decree forbidding anyone from publicly mentioning the matter, punishable

either by an exorbitant fine of one hundred gold coins or public flogging.

Despite the threat, Rabbis Yechezkel, Meir, and Gershon courageously confronted the community leaders during a public gathering. Rabbi Yechezkel boldly declared the family's guilt, immediately paying the fine he had brought — his entire fortune. Rabbi Meir, lacking funds, bravely endured a public flogging, and Rabbi Gershon, unable to pay the fine, fled through the crowded streets to Mezhibuzh, to the Baal Shem Toy.

The Baal Shem Tov warmly greeted Rabbi Gershon, declaring that due to their courageous sacrifice and sanctification of G-d's name, each would merit great positions.

And so it was: Rabbi Yechezkel would become Rabbi of Prague, Rabbi Meir would lead Lemberg and Ostroh, and Rabbi Gershon would ascend to the Holy Land, achieving spiritual prominence.

The hostility had forced all three rabbis to leave Brody.

Rabbi Yechezkel first served as Rabbi in Yampol, later becoming Chief Rabbi of Prague.

Rabbi Meir served prominently in Lemberg and then in Ostroh.

Rabbi Gershon immigrated to the Holy Land, settling ultimately in Jerusalem; revered by both Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities as a spiritual giant and great mystic whose guidance

#### Parshat Vaetchanan - Forty Years of Journeying

This liberation marked the beginning of a lengthy 40-year journey to the Land of Israel, of which the Torah records the events of the first year and the first half of the second year and then skips directly to the fortieth year, bypassing the 38 intermediate years.<sup>10</sup>

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was sought by diaspora benefactors who supported the Jewish settlement.

In the Holy Land, however, a severe drought threatened the Jewish community's survival, intensifying the hardship already present in those difficult years. Despite extensive fasting and communal prayers, no rain fell, and anxiety deepened.

The community looked to Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, known as the Rashash, head of Jerusalem's renowned Kabbalistic Yeshiva Bet-El, famed for his profound understanding of the Arizal's mystical teachings.

Rabbi Shalom instructed the entire community to gather for a special prayer service, but although everyone expected him to lead the prayers personally, he humbly requested Rabbi Gershon to do so.

Rabbi Gershon prepared intensely throughout the night, meticulously rehearsing his prayers and sermon to meet the most exacting standards, but by morning, his voice became hoarse, silenced completely by exhaustion.

Feeling deeply responsible, Rabbi Gershon urgently informed Rabbi Shalom, who, distressed yet understanding, assigned another Torah scholar to lead in prayer. The community, sensing this as a divine rejection, wept fervently during prayer.

Miraculously, midway through prayers, Rabbi Gershon's voice returned powerfully, and noticing this, Rabbi Shalom immediately invited him to resume leading the prayers.

As Rabbi Gershon began, his strong, clear voice filled the hall, stirring intense spiritual fervor, but then suddenly, during the penitential prayers, Rabbi Gershon abruptly stopped and stepped down, declining further participation.

Later, pressed by his son for an explanation, Rabbi Gershon revealed that as he prayed, he sensed his prayers were miraculously accepted, and continuing further would have publicly demonstrated his spiritual power, something he feared could lead to arrogance, and he therefore humbly withdrew.

"Know," he said, "the rain we are all waiting and hoping for will come tomorrow."

Indeed, the following day, abundant rains finally drenched the parched land, continuing steadily for three full days,

Parshat Vaetchanan - Sihon and Og - No Casuse for Fear

We will now focus upon the fortieth year:

On the first of Nissan, in the year 2488 to Creation, the fortieth year began, and the nation of Israel arrived in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin; then, on the tenth of Nissan, Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron, died at the age of 126 and was buried there in Kadesh.

While the Jewish people were at Kadesh, Moses sent messengers to the King of Edom seeking his permission to pass through his land toward Canaan. The king refused, leaving the Jewish people no choice but to take another route.

The three months of Iyar, Sivan, and Tammuz swiftly passed, and on the first of Av, they reached Mount Hor, where Aaron passed away at the age of 123, and the protective Clouds of Glory departed.

When the Amalekites saw the Clouds of Glory vanish, they realized their moment to fight the Jewish people had come.

The Jewish people prayed: "If You indeed deliver this nation into my hand, I will utterly destroy their cities" (Numbers 21:2).

Then in the month of Elul, they reached the border of Sihon and faced his profound impurity.

#### Sihon and Og - No Casuse for Fear

As mentioned, Sihon drew his spiritual power from the spiritual aspect of the "neck," the 'other side' of the holy source from which

Aaron drew his strength. Even though Aaron had already passed away, Moses was not intimidated by Sihon and swiftly displaced him.

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demonstrating clearly that the gates of prayer are never truly closed.

**10.** As Rabbeinu Bachya explains (Numbers 20:1), all of the events recorded in

the Torah which befell our ancestors in the wilderness took place during the first year after leaving Egypt and in the fortieth year — during these two distinct years. Parshat Vaetchanan - Sihon and Og - No Casuse for Fear

After conquering Sihon's city, the month of Tishrei arrived, and following the holidays, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of Tishrei, they reached the land of Bashan.

There, confronting Og, Moses first felt a sense of fear.<sup>11</sup> G-d revealed Himself, saying: "Do not fear him, for I have delivered him, all his people,

and his land into your hand; do to him as you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon'' (Numbers 21:34).

Strengthened by G-d's promise, Moses went to war, invoking the sacred name of G-d, overcoming Og, and conquering him as he did Sihon's.

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**11.** The Gemara (Niddah 61a) teaches that Moses feared Og because Og had once served Abraham, and Moses thought, "Perhaps Abraham's merit will stand in his favor."

Additionally, the Arizal (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Introduction 36) provides another reason:

Within Og lay a holy spark of the Tanna Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel (mentioned in Pirkei Avot 2:8), and this is alluded to by the name "Og, king of the Bashan" — where "Bashan" is an acronym for (Rabbi) Shimon ben Netanel (מש"ב).

Since Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel was characterized by profound fear of sin, Moses worried lest he destroy the soul of a holy, G-d-fearing man, until G-d assured him, "Do not fear him," promising that the holy spark would not be lost.

We find a similar concept in Bereishit Rabbah (Parshat 63, sec. 2):

"When Abraham was cast into the fiery furnace, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'Abraham is destined to have a grandson named Jacob, and in Jacob's merit I will save Abraham.' This is what is meant by the verse, 'Therefore, thus said G-d to the house of Jacob, who redeemed Abraham' (Isaiah 29:22) — meaning Jacob redeemed Abraham."

From here, we learn that if the merit of a future descendant can save a person, how much more so do one's children — raised in the path of Torah and mitzvot — possess immeasurable power to bring salvation and blessing to the person.

Additionally, Regel Yesharah (entry "Sichon") by Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov cites another reason for Moses' fear: Og drew his vitality from the "back of Moses' neck," thus causing Moses to fear him.

Parshat Vaetchanan - The Power of the Circle

The Kabbalist Rabbi Natan Neta Shapira finds hints that allude to this deeper aspect of Sihon and Og:12

"Sihon and Og embody the mystery of the neck, called 'קדלי. The value of two times 'קדלי, numerically equals 'קדלי, which is associated spiritually with Moses, who defeated both, and Moses' face shone like the sun (יחרסי is another term for the sun).

'קדל' also spells 'קדל', or key, indicating that the defeat of these two giants was key to the defeat of the 31 kings of Canaan.

Moses opposed them with the sacred name אדנ"י of G-d, which is also mystically represented by 'קלד'."

Then, in a period of time that occurred about three months later, our Torah portion, Va'etchanan, begins.

#### The Power of the Circle

When Moses realized that G-d had sworn that he would not enter the holy Land of Israel, he gathered all his strength and cried out and pleaded to G-d to revoke the decree as our Torah portion begins:

"And I pleaded with G-d at that time, saying, L-rd G-d, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, and who in heaven or earth can do as Your deeds and might?

Let me please cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, this good mountain, and Lebanon'' (Deuteronomy 3:23-25).

Before we explain these verses, we pause to cite the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Parshat Vayelech):

Rabbi Yochanan stated: Ten statements of death are written about Moses; <sup>13</sup> Yet, nevertheless, the harsh decree against Moses was not sealed until G-d Himself

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<sup>12. &#</sup>x27;Megaleh Amukot,' part 130.

<sup>13.</sup> Eight verses are recorded in the Torah and two final verses in the Book of Joshua.

Parshat Vaetchanan - Acceptance of Prayer — How?

declared: "For you shall not cross this Jordan" (Deuteronomy 3:27).

Moses initially felt confident, believing if G-d forgave the Jewish people's many severe sins through his prayer, surely he, who had never sinned. would easily find forgiveness for himself.

Seeing Moses' confidence, G-d swore by His great Name that Moses would not enter, stating with an oath: "Therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them."

Realizing the decree was sealed, Moses drew a small circle and sat inside it, declaring he wouldn't move until the decree was annulled. He donned sackcloth. covered himself in ashes, and fervently pleaded with G-d until heaven and earth trembled, and creation itself wondered if G-d intended to destroy the world.

A heavenly voice proclaimed was not yet G-d's it that end the world, but will to nonetheless, it was decreed Moses' prayers would that not be accepted. G-d urgently commanded all heavenly gates closed, but Moses' prayer ascended regardless, its voice sharp, pure and unstoppable, piercing the heavens and resonating with the sacred power he had learned from his angelic teacher, causing the heavens themselves to quake and quiver.

Moses continued to pray, weeping and pleading before G-d.

# Acceptance of Prayer — How?

Our Torah portion opens and "And I pleaded with says: G-d at that time, saying" (Deuteronomy 3:23).

The holy Or HaChaim explains that Moses teaches us here the foundations of prayer:

This verse contains six words, divided into four distinct groups, each with its own meaning:

ואתחנן״ - And I pleaded" — a term of supplication.

אל הייי - with G-d" — addressing the divine source of mercy.

Parshat Vaetchanan - Moses' Desire to Rectify the Land

בעת ההיא" – at that time" — at the specific time known to be favorable for prayers; who knew what was a favorable time better than Moses?

"לאמר" – saying" — clearly articulating his prayer to avoid any misinterpretations.

The Or HaChaim continues, teaching that these four conditions are essential for a prayer to be accepted on High:

Prayer with supplications like a beggar knocking at the door;

"The poor use entreaties" (Proverbs 18:23).

Directing one's prayers to the divine Source of Mercy.

Praying at opportune times, as the verse states: "As for me, my prayer is to You, L-rd, at a favorable time" (Psalms 69:14).

Finally, it is vital to clearly express the prayers, avoiding ambiguous or foreign interpretations.<sup>14</sup>

Let us now continue on to the next verse.

# Moses' Desire to Rectify the Land

Moses continued, saying: "L-rd G-d, You have begun to show

Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what G-d is

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**14.** To illustrate this, the Midrash relates a tale (Esther Rabbah, 7:20):

A Jewish traveler, on the long journey home, was drenched in sweat, his forehead burning, and his eyes stinging.

He could not go on even a bit more and lifted his eyes heavenward, praying, "Master of the Universe, send me a donkey."

A few minutes later, he saw a strange sight: a notable official standing by the roadside with a Libyan donkey, seeking assistance. The Jew approached, and the nobleman greeted him joyfully: "Good thing you've come by.

My donkey just gave birth, and the newborn colt can't walk, please carry it on your shoulders." The Jew had no choice but to haul it along.

The Midrash concludes: He should have spelled out and specified his requests in his prayer and asked, "Master of the Universe, send me a donkey - to ride upon."

Parshat Vaetchanan - Moses' Desire to Rectify the Land

there in heaven or on earth who can perform deeds and mighty acts like Yours?" (Deuteronomy 3:24).

The Megaleh Amukot explains:

Moses stood before G-d and pleaded: Master of the Universe, during my lifetime You granted me the merit to subdue three formidable spiritual impurities:

First, You allowed me to overcome Pharaoh's impurity. Then, this year, You enabled me first to defeat the impurity of Sihon, and then You granted me the power of Your name to also subdue Og's impurity. Master of the Universe, I thank You for the past and plead for the future — please allow me to complete this sacred task. I beg you to please let me enter the Land of Israel and spiritually 'polish' it.

And thus, he interpreted the verse:

"L-rd G-d (recalling the divine name used to defeat Og), You have begun to show Your servant."

"Your greatness" refers to defeating Sihon, who corresponded to Aaron.

"Your mighty hand" refers to defeating Og.

"For what G-d is there in heaven or on earth who can perform deeds and mighty acts like Yours?" — recalling the miracle when G-d halted the sun during the battle with Sihon and Og, using the term for G-d "אל" to hint at the driving out of the 31 kings from the Land of Israel, beginning with Sihon and Og, who served as the gatekeepers for these kings.

Sadly, despite Moses' earnest prayers, G-d did not accept his request.<sup>15</sup>

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**15.** Rabbi Yoram Michael Abergel explained as follows ('Imrei Noam,' Va'etchanan, Essay 3):

The reason Moses so deeply desired to enter the Land, our sages have explained (Sotah 14a):

"Rabbi Simlai expounded: Why did Moses desire to enter the Land of Israel? Did he want to eat its fruit or to be satisfied with its bounty?

Rather, Moses said: 'Many commandments were given to the people of Israel, and they

#### Parshat Vaetchanan - Moses' Desire to Rectify the Land

can only be fulfilled in the Land of Israel. Let me enter the Land so that they might all be fulfilled through me."

Rabbi Simlai's question was posed rhetorically, expressing great astonishment, for it is obvious that Moses had no attachment whatsoever to the material aspects of this world. Clearly, Moses's profound yearning to enter the Land of Israel was not motivated by a desire "to eat its fruit and be satisfied with its bounty" or to derive pleasure from its physical delights; Moses's sole aspiration to enter the Land of Israel was to merit the spiritual opportunities dependent upon it — that is, to fulfill the numerous commandments that can only be observed within the Land of Israel.

As the Tanya writes (Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 27), the life of the righteous is not a life of physical indulgence; rather, it is a spiritual life of Torah and fear of Heaven.

The life of a tzaddik in this world is composed of three core emotions: faith (אמונה), awe (יראה), and love of G-d (אהבה).

That is, the entirety of a tzaddik's essence is faith in G-d, awe of G-d, and love for G-d.

These three holy attributes characterize a "tzaddik," whose bond with the Creator can never be severed, as in the verse: "A threefold cord is not easily broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

In contrast, someone who mixes other elements — of the pursuits of worldly pleasure — to these three sacred emotions is, as our sages say (Sukkah 45b): "Whoever mixes Heaven's Name with something else is uprooted from the world."

The Tanya further teaches that all three of the aforementioned emotions — faith, awe, and love — are referred to in Scripture as "life":

Concerning faith, it is written: "And the righteous live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4) - the tzaddik lives his life through faith and also seeks to infuse others with it. As Chassidut interprets, not only does 'the righteous shall live by his faith,' but moreover, the tzaddik 'shall enliven others by his faith,' transmitting it to others as well.

The Scripture uses the term "life" regarding faith, indicating that faith is a matter of life - only one who possesses faith truly lives a life of vitality.

Even if one loses some position or some property or possession that they greatly desired, through faith, one can carry on happily, knowing everything comes from G-d and that all that G-d does is ultimately good.

Concerning awe, it is written: "Fear of G-d leads to life" (Proverbs 19:23), showing that awe, too, is called "life;" thus, awe of G-d provides vitality, and anyone who possesses awe of Heaven lives a fine, joyous life.

Finally, concerning love, it is said: "He who pursues righteousness and kindness will find life" (Proverbs 21:21). The term "kindness" (chesed) in this verse alludes to love since in the holy Sefirot, the attribute of chesed corresponds to the attribute of love.

Of these three qualities noted by the Tanya, faith is mentioned first to teach us that the very first thing a Jew needs Parshat Vaetchanan - Premature Attempt

As Moses said to the Jewish people: "But G-d was angry with me on your account and did not listen to

me; and G-d said to me, 'Enough; speak no more to Me about this matter'" (Deuteronomy 3:26).

# **Premature Attempt**

This phrase, "But G-d was angry with me on your account" (Deuteronomy 3:26), is explained by our sages in various ways.

Rabbi Meir Simcha HaCohen, in 'Meshech Chochmah,' explains simply:

Moses desired to enter and complete the final rectification through building the Temple, as he said: "Let me cross over and see the good land, this good mountain and Lebanon" — "Lebanon" here refers to the Temple (Sifri, Devarim 6).

However, G-d showed Moses that the time for this completion had not yet arrived, similar to a pregnancy that has not reached term, and premature birth is not beneficial. Thus, Moses' death was necessary because the appropriate time for complete rectification had not yet arrived.

Because the time wasn't right, Moses didn't enter Israel, leaving spiritual impurities intact, and the Jewish people had to confront them independently.<sup>16</sup>

As is well-known, humanity is the pinnacle of creation because it uniquely combines two entirely distinct forms: the elevated soul and the physical body, spirit, and matter.

The soul is a divine spark that is a part of G-d Himself, granting the person wisdom and clarity; the

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is faith, and it is followed by both awe and love of G-d.

Hence, a true tzaddik strives above all to instill faith within himself and his family — and finally, also in the hearts of his followers and the broader Jewish community.

**16.** To quote from the 'Likutei Halachot' (Berachot HaRe'iyah V'Brachot Pratiyot, 5:5):

"If we had merited that Moses would have entered the Land of Israel, he would have drawn down a foretaste of the World to Come to all of the Jewish people.

Parshat Vaetchanan - Untiring Prayer

body, however, composed of flesh, tendons, and bones, gravitates toward materialism and ignorance.

G-d combined these extremes and commanded humanity to focus on the soul. But since the soul is naturally much more powerful, to add to this challenge, G-d placed man in a world that includes seventy nations by whose impurity strengthens the body in its rally against the soul.

G-d pleads with the Jewish people: Protect the spiritual spark that I entrusted to you, lest it dim or extinguish.

Now, considering we face spiritual battles from within (our own physicality) and without (the surrounding nations' impurity), how can we safeguard and illuminate the divine form within us?

Before answering this question, let us return to the beginning of our Torah portion.

# **Untiring Prayer**

When Moses heard he would not enter the Holy Land, he was overwhelmed by tremendous sorrow and wondered how to nullify this decree, and after much thought and contemplation, he realized that the only path to do so was through prayer.

This is truly astounding; since the very beginning of

time, there has never been anyone as great in Torah, good deeds, and prophetic stature as Moses, yet nonetheless, Moses understood that no merit of his could stand against this divine decree.

He recognized that his only recourse was to devote himself completely to prayer before G-d.<sup>17</sup>

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if they would not have sinned, the redemption would have lasted forever, without any subsequent destruction."

**17.** Moses was the source of the Torah for his generation and all generations, but he was also that generation's leader of prayer.

As our Sages expound (Devarim Rabbah 11:10) on the verse: "And I pleaded with G-d at that time, saying," (Deuteronomy 3:23), "And I pleaded" - "ואתחנו" numerically equal to the 515 prayers Moses prayed to G-d to allow him to enter the Holy Land.

Parshat Vaetchanan - Untiring Prayer

To quote the Gemara (Berachot 32b):

Rabbi Elazar said: "Prayer is greater than good deeds, for no one had more good deeds than Moses; yet even so, his prayers were only answered through prayer."

My father Rabbi Yoram Abargel, said the following in a talk he delivered (Imrei Noam, Parshat Va'etchanan, Essay 1):

Moses, despite his immense greatness and holiness, understood that the only way to attain his desired result was through prayer.

If that is true for Moses, all the more so for us in our generation.

We lack an abundance of Torah learning or exemplary deeds; we cannot achieve anything — material or spiritual — without abundant prayer. As stated in the holy Tanya (Kuntres Acharon), "In the era preceding the arrival of Moshiach, our primary divine service is prayer, and hence, "it is fitting and proper to give our very souls for it."

Therefore, a person should intensify their prayers before the Creator for every goal — whether material, such as livelihood or health, or spiritual, such as Torah study or character refinement, and through such prayer, success will illuminate all of one's endeavors.

Even more so, a person must pray fervently for their offspring so that they may all be whole in their reverence and sanctity, never straying from G-d's path all their days.

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Try requesting even a single thing — no matter how important — 515 times.

After two hundred times, you will feel exasperated, yet Moses, who was the epitome of prayer, prayed with great intention and intensity 515 times consecutively.

Although Moses was the greatest Torah scholar to have lived, when

he needed salvation, he prayed — because prayer has the power to change reality.

As our Sages say (Berachot 10a):
"Even if a sharp sword rests
upon a person's neck, he must
not refrain from begging for divine
mercy."

Parshat Vaetchanan - Two Kinds of Emanation

Every father and mother must pray daily for this, as it is not easily attained in our generation.

Ideally one should recite the wondrous prayer composed by the Shelah HaKadosh for this matter, and only through abundant and heartfelt prayer can one merit seeing one's sons and daughters — and all future descendants — blessed by G-d, flourishing in G-d's house throughout their lives.

#### **Two Kinds of Emanation**

Let us dwell a bit more on this topic:

It is well known that a lifetime spans three general stages:

When the soul is in the upper worlds, before its descent into this world; life in this world, beginning from conception in the mother's womb until the final day of man on Earth; after death, when the body remains on earth, and the soul returns to G-d.

Because every Jew's root is in the upper realms, they can draw down spiritual lights from the upper worlds into our own through Torah study and observance of the commandments.

By engaging in Torah and mitzvot, a Jew pulls divine bounty and lofty lights downward into the lower worlds, or as this process of "drawing down" is termed in Kabbalistic terminology - Mayin Dechurin (masculine waters).

Beyond drawing down spiritual energy, there is another aspect that takes place, namely: the "elevating" of these energies, or the transforming of the person's physical body into something spiritual.

This happens when a person arouses within their heart love and awe for G-d, and then those feelings ascend on high and draw forth the Infinite Light in an even more direct way — not just through a series of channels, but the true Light itself, directly.<sup>18</sup>

Kabbalah refers to this process of "elevation" as Mayin Nukvin (feminine waters), and this is accomplished by sincere and wholehearted prayer.

#### Parshat Vaetchanan - Two Kinds of Emanation

Our sages clarify that there are two distinct yet complementary forms of divine service — Torah study and prayer. Torah study brings the spiritual influence downward, while prayer lifts the lower realms upward.

Prayer is a much more difficult task, akin to two people who hold opposite ends of a rope — one at the top of a mountain,

the other at the bottom. If they have a tug-of-war, the one below will generally succeed more easily, for pulling downward is easier than lifting upward.

And although both Torah study and prayer are indispensable for every Jew's life, and one cannot survive without them, true purification of the self primarily comes through prayer. <sup>19</sup>

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**18.** To quote from the Tanya (Kuntres Acharon, 'LeHavin'):

"Prayer draws the Infinite Light, blessed be He, into Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah directly, not by way of mere enclothment, but rather the actual Light itself directly altering created beings from their status quo: healing the sick, bringing rainfall from heaven to earth that yields produce."

**19.** Rabbi Shalom Arush relates ('Chut Shel Chessed,' 5773, Parshat Beshalach):

"A certain Jew, who was raised his entire life within the Torah world — attending cheder as a child, then going on to yeshivah, and so on — was completely immersed in Torah since his youth.

Yet he confessed to me that for years he felt hollow inside, without any connection to Torah, devoid of vitality, and that he had fallen into severe sins.

He was already despairing of what he considered to be a life of falsehood, unable to comprehend how he ended up in such a state, having been immersed in Torah from such a young age.

I told him: 'I'll explain exactly what's happening with you:

Imagine a lone soldier, entirely unarmed and unprotected, stationed on the most volatile battlefront against an entire hostile enemy army, armed with the most advanced weapons and thoroughly trained in every warfare tactic.

He stands there helpless — and it's obvious what will happen to him; they'll make "mincemeat" out of him.

The same is happening to you. You're facing the evil inclination and its forces with no weapons. Your evil inclination fires away at you from every direction: at

Parshat Vaetchanan - The Essence of It All — Connection

While in earlier generations, subduing materiality (the body) was achieved primarily through study, from Torah the of Arizal the and onward an era known as Ikveta D'Meshicha the main method of refining our physical nature is through prayer.

(See Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, where the statement of the Pri Etz Chaim is quoted, that in our time, the main form of purification comes specifically through prayer, despite Torah study being on a higher spiritual plane.)

#### The Essence of It All — Connection

Let us delve a bit deeper.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman Gopin explains:<sup>20</sup>

A Jew's way and path in life is essentially an ongoing effort to fulfill G-d's will and connect with Him, and this is performed via three primary "channels": Torah study, prayer, and the performance of mitzvot.

In truth, a Jew should not

be satisfied with connecting to G-d only through these channels; rather, one should yearn and aspire to remain bound and unified with G-d even while involved in physical matters — such as eating, drinking, earning a livelihood, and maintaining health.

However, although this ultimate goal is lofty and worthwhile, its practice is not so straightforward.

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times igniting this desire in you, at other times a bad character trait, sometimes with the urge to sleep, sometimes with a pull to immorality; the same with quarrels, anger, despair, and sadness.

These are all weapons and arrows that are fired mercilessly and ceaselessly; there's hardly a moment of respite,

and you have no means to fight back.

The only way to fight is through prayer, as King David proclaimed of himself: "A Psalm by David. Blessed is G-d my Rock, who trains my hands for battle, my fingers for war" (Psalms 144:1).'

20. 'Lilmod Eich Lehitpalel' (vol. 1, p. 19).

Parshat Vaetchanan - The Essence of It All — Connection

Even during one's study of Torah and observance of mitzvot, a person might fail to sense and feel a palpable bond with G-d.

For example, when studying the Torah, one must "clothe" oneself in concrete physical cases, understanding them logically, thinking through the arguments, and reaching conclusions based on reason and halachic principles.

Such study can become an intellectual pursuit for personal enjoyment or, worse, can produce arrogance. As part of that process, one might entirely forget that this is "G-d's Torah," drifting instead to emulate the error of those who study Torah but forget the Giver of the Torah.

Even those who engage in Mussar (ethical teachings) to rectify their negative character traits — a study that is essential for everyone — are not dealing directly with G-dly matters but focusing primarily on their own self-improvement.

The same applies to performing mitzvot: while a

person is busy with the details — like making sure the parchment of the tefillin is especially fine or the etrog is particularly beautiful — one might forget that the whole essence of a mitzvah is "connection and bonding" (צוותא) with G-d. Likewise, performing mitzvot out of habit often becomes "מצוות נשים מלומדה" — a mechanical routine that fails to reflect a true sense of G-dliness.

All the more so with mundane matters like eating, drinking, earning a living, and health issues, which deal with materiality that conceals G-dliness; transforming these tasks into a clear, conscious act "for the sake of Heaven" is no simple feat.

Hence, even a person's daily divine service can be completely disconnected from G-d and spirituality.

Prayer, however, reveals and accentuates the G-dly dimension without being concealed by "garments." On the contrary, its very "garment" is occupied with G-dly matters: prayer is the process of connecting to G-d, pouring out

Parshat Vaetchanan - Bringing the Daily Offering

one's soul before Him, speaking to Him, praising Him, and requesting from Him. As such, one who prays is required to be openly and emotionally aware of G-d.

While with the other practical mitzvot, even if they are performed without deep intentions or a tangible sense of connecting to G-d, the mitzvah is still considered fulfilled, concerning prayer, mere verbal recitation without proper intent is, as Maimonides states (Laws of Prayer 5:2), "not considered prayer."

But after a person connects with G-d during prayer, he is more naturally able to focus on the G-dly dimension of all the other aspects of divine service: In Torah study, he senses that it is "G-d's Torah" and not just an intellectual pursuit; with the performance of a mitzvah, he

feels the presence of G-d, the Commander of the mitzvah; and even when involved in mundane matters, the awareness of G-d's guidance and involvement is evident, thus conforming will G-d's will throughout the day.

Thus, prayer is the "soul" of all of the aspects of the divine service. When compared to prayer, everything else — Torah study, observance of mitzvot, and ordinary life — resembles a "body" to the "soul."

Since prayer essentially means connecting with G-d, the deeper and more heartfelt one's focus on the Divine is in prayer, the higher the level of closeness achieved, and in turn, the greater the impact one's service of G-d has throughout the day.

This power of prayer we received at Mount Sinai.

# **Bringing the Daily Offering**

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot states (1:2): "Shimon the Righteous was one of the last survivors of the Great Assembly. He would say: 'The world stands on three things

— on Torah, on the service of G-d, and on acts of kindness.'"

Our world is sustained by these three: those dedicated to Torah learning with Parshat Vaetchanan - Bringing the Daily Offering

self-sacrifice and holiness, by the labor of prayer, and by the many acts of kindness.

In Temple times, the "service of G-d" referred to the offering of sacrifices in the Beit HaMikdash.

But after the Temple was tragically destroyed, we fulfill the verse "Let our lips substitute for bulls" (Hosea 14:3), and prayer became the substitute for those many sacrifices.

Among the sacrificial services, one stands out as constant and unchanging: the Korban Tamid (daily offering).

The Torah commands in Parshat Pinchas: "Command the children of Israel and say to them: 'My offering, My bread for fire offerings, of pleasing aroma to Me, you shall guard to offer at its appointed time... an offering of pleasing aroma to G-d'" (Numbers 28:2-6).

Thus, there is a daily obligation to offer two lambs on the altar, one in the morning and one in the evening — known as the Korban Tamid.

The Torah further states that

by offering the fats and blood upon the altar, a fragrant aroma arises — bringing a "pleasing fragrance to G-d."

Since we no longer have the Temple, our prayers stand in its place: Shacharit corresponds to the morning Tamid, and Minchah to the afternoon Tamid.

More specifically, the placing of the fats and blood on the altar is paralleled in prayer by the sincere intention we have, especially in the first verse of the Shema, whereby a person channels all of his passion and longing for worldly pleasures ("fats and blood") toward yearning for G-d instead; and through this, one ascends to a wondrous and profound closeness to G-d.

This capacity to achieve such closeness to G-d was granted to us at the Giving of the Torah at Sinai, where it is said, "All the people saw and trembled and stood at a distance" (Exodus 20:15), in utter self-nullification.

It has been so ever since then that our souls have been imbued with the capacity for a great and lofty Divine closeness.

Parshat Vaetchanan - Summary and Practical Conclusions

# **Summary and Practical Conclusions**

1. A Jew's soul is truly a "part of G-d above," a spark of the Creator who breathed into man from His own essence and granted him His wisdom.

On the other hand exists the body which is physical and craves all that is material and physical.

G-d took these two extremes, joined them together, and commanded man: Pay attention to preserve the sanctity of the soul.

- 2. Since the soul is far mightier than the physical body, in order to balance the vying powers, G-d placed man in this world a world inhabited by seventy nations, and through the power of their impurity, they stir up forces of defilement that unite with the body's power in battle against the soul.
- 3. The true way to refine the body is through prayer; by praying with proper intention, a Jew can connect to the Divine and draw closer to G-d, thereby illuminating his base animal soul with G-d's light.
- 4. A Jew's entire aim and way of life is an ongoing effort to fulfill G-d's will and to bond with Him.

There are three primary channels for this connection: Torah study, prayer, and performance of the mitzvot. Moreover, a Jew must not only utilize these methods of connection; rather, one must yearn and aspire to be embraced by and bound to the Creator even during physical pursuits like eating, drinking, earning a livelihood, and safeguarding one's health.

5. Actualizing this, however, is not so simple.

Even while a person is involved in spiritual matters, he may not actually engage with the spiritual dimension of what he is doing. One might study Torah or perform mitzvot yet feel no connection to G-d. For instance, when one studies Torah, there is the risk of developing pride, forgetting entirely that the Torah is "the Torah of G-d," becoming — Heaven forbid — like those who study but forget about the Giver of the Torah.

The same applies to mitzvah observance: While immersed in the details of a mitzvah — such as ensuring the tefillin scrolls or the etrog are of the finest quality — one might forget that the very essence of a mitzvah is joining and connecting with G-d. When a person keeps mitzvot by rote, "commandments learned by habit" with no awareness of G-d, it is sorely lacking.

#### Parshat Vaetchanan - Summary and Practical Conclusions

This is all the more challenging with mundane matters, and thus, one's entire day of divine service can, in effect, be disconnected from G-d and spirituality.

6. With prayer, in contrast, the Divine is visible and tangible, free of concealing "garments."

Indeed, in prayer itself, the "garment" and the means of connection to G-d are centered and openly focused on G-dliness, for the entire concept of prayer is communion with the Divine: pouring one's soul out to G-d, speaking to Him, requesting from Him, praising Him, and bonding with Him.

Consequently, one who prays must be unavoidably emotionally conscious of G-d's presence.

In practical mitzvot, even if one lacks deep intention or fails to recognize clearly that the mitzvah is a means of bonding with G-d, the physical act of fulfilling it is still considered done.

However, regarding prayer, merely reciting words without the appropriate intent is, as stated by Rambam, not considered "prayer" at all.

Hence, we might say that prayer is the soul of the divine service; by comparison, Torah study, mitzvah observance, and even permissible worldly matters are like the body that services the soul.

Since the essence of prayer is forging a bond with G-d, it follows that the more deeply and internally one meditates on and senses the Divine during prayer, the higher one's cleaving to G-d will be, and the greater its positive effect on one's daily divine service.

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# Shabbat Times Va'etchanan 15th of Av .5785

	Candle	Shabbat	Rabbeinu
City	Lighting	Ends	Tam
New York	7:45 pm	8:46 pm	9:13 pm
Miami	7:44 pm	8:37 pm	9:13 pm
Los Angeles	7:29 pm	8:26 pm	8:58 pm
Montreal	7:54 pm	9:00 pm	9:23 pm
Toronto	8:13 pm	9:17 pm	9:41 pm
London	8:18 pm	9:32 pm	9:46 pm
Jerusalem	7:14 pm	8:04 pm	8:55 pm
Tel Aviv	7:11 pm	8:01 pm	8:52 pm
Haifa	7:12 pm	8:05 pm	8:56 pm
Be'er Sheva	7:10 pm	8:03 pm	8:53 pm

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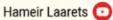
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