

## Why Aren't My Prayers Answered?

### Deut., Ch. 3

23. I beseeched G-d at that time, saying.

24. "O L-rd 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. Pray 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 the L-rd was angry with me because of you, and He did not listen to me, and the L-rd said to me, "It is enough for you; speak to Me no more regarding this matter.

27. Go up to the top of the hill and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward and see with your eyes, for you shall not cross this Jordan.

28. But command Joshua and strengthen him and encourage him, for he will cross over before this people, and he will make them inherit the land which you will see.

*I beseeched G-d at that time (3:23)*

#### Midrash

Prayer is called by ten names: cry, howl, groan, song, encounter, stricture, prostration, judgment, beseech. Moses prayed 515 prayers, the numerical value of va'etchanan, to be allowed to enter the land.

#### Rashi

This is one of ten terms for prayer, used when one seeks an undeserved favor. Moses could have asked because of his good deeds, but truly righteous people never feel that they have a claim on G-d's mercy.

#### Yalkut Shimoni

When Moses saw that the decree had been sealed against him, he went and drew a circle and sat inside it, and said: I am not moving from here until You nullify the decree! ... He then wrapped himself in sackcloth and covered himself with ashes, and stood in prayer and supplication before G-d until the heaven and the earth and the very laws of creation began to tremble, and said: Perhaps the time has come for G-d to destroy the world?...What did G-d do at that moment? He announced at every gate of every heaven that Moses' prayer should not be admitted... for the voice of Moses' prayer was like a sword that slices and which nothing can stop... Said Moses to G-d: "If You will not allow me to enter the land, allow me to [enter] as a beast of the field, which grazes on the grass and drinks water and sees the world that way -- let my soul be as one of those!" Said G-d: "Enough!"

#### Saying

#### Midrash

Moses meant this as a statement to Jewish posterity, saying to them that just as he never despaired and continued to pray even though G-d had told him that Land was closed to him, so we should never give up on G-d's mercy. The gates of tears are always open.

*You, O G-d, have begun to show Your servant Your greatness (3:24)*

#### Midrash Rabbah

Said Moses to G-d: "Why are You doing this to me? 'You have begun'-- You began it all by coming to me in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush... After raising me up, you cast me down from my greatness?"



#### פרק א

כג. וְאַתְחַנֵּן אֶל ה' בְּעֵת הַהוּא  
 לְאמֹר: כִּד. ה' אֵתָהּ הַחִלּוֹת לְהִרְאוֹת  
 אֶת עֲבֹדְךָ אֶת גְּדֻלָּתְךָ וְאֶת יְדֹךָ הַחֲזָקָה אֲשֶׁר מִי אֵל  
 בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה כְּמַעֲשֵׂיךָ וְכַגְבוּרֹתֶיךָ: כה.  
 אֶעֱבְרָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר  
 הַיַּרְדֵּן הַקָּדָר הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְבָּנוֹן: כו. וַיִּתְעַבֵּר ה' בִּי  
 לְמַעַנְכֶם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי רַב לְךָ אֵל תּוֹסֶף  
 דִּבֹּר אֵלַי עוֹד בְּדִבְרֵי הַזֶּה: כז. עֲלֵה רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה וְשֹׂא  
 עֵינֶיךָ יָמָה וְצַפְנָה וְתִימְנָה וּמִזְרְחָהּ וּרְאֵה בְּעֵינֶיךָ כִּי  
 לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה: כח. וְצוּ אֶת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְחַזְקֵהוּ  
 וְאִמְצָהוּ כִּי הוּא יַעֲבֹר לְפָנַי הַעַם הַזֶּה וְהוּא יִנְחִיל  
 אוֹתָם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה:

Said G-d to him: "But I have sworn [that you shall not enter the Land]!" Said Moses to Him: "You have desecrated" --when You so desired, did You not violate Your oath? Did you not swear that You would annihilate Your children when they worshipped the Golden Calf, and then, [when I appealed on their behalf,] did You not retract Your oath?" [*atah hachilotan* = "You have begun" and "You have desecrated."]

*But G-d was angry with me for your sakes (3:26)*

## Midrash

G-d said to Moses: You can't have it both ways. I have already nullified My decree and upheld yours. I said: "I shall destroy them" (when Israel worshipped the Golden Calf), and you said "forgive them" -- and your desire prevailed. Now, if you wish that your desire, "let me cross over," should be upheld and My decree (that you not enter the land) be nullified, then you must retract your "forgive them"; if you wish "forgive them" to be upheld, then you must retract "let me cross over." When Moses heard this, he proclaimed: May Moses die, and a hundred like him, and not a fingernail of one of them be harmed! ...

## Talmud, Sotah 14a

Why did Moses desire to enter the Land? Moses said, "The Jewish people have been commanded to observe many mitzvot which can only be observed in the land of Israel. I will enter the land so that all the mitzvot will be fulfilled through me."

## The Lubavitcher Rebbe

All Moses' achievements are eternal and everlasting. Moses gave us the Torah, and never shall the Torah depart from Israel. Even the Mishkan, the "temporary" Sanctuary built by Moses in the desert, was never destroyed (as were the permanent Divine abodes built by Solomon and Ezra in Jerusalem), but mysteriously hidden away in an undisclosed place, where it remains intact to this very day. This is the deeper reason why Moses was not allowed to enter the Land of Israel. If Moses would have settled us in the Land, we could never have been exiled from it. If Moses would have built the Holy Temple, it could never had been destroyed. If Moses would have established the people of Israel in their homeland as a "light unto the nations," that light could never have been dimmed. If Moses would have crossed the Jordan, that would have been the end: the end of the struggle, the end of history.

G-d wasn't ready for the end yet. So He decreed that Moses remain in the desert. But He did allow him to see the Land. And because Moses saw it, and because the effect of everything Moses did is everlasting, we, too, can see it. At all times, and under all conditions, we have the power to ascend a summit within us and see the Promised Land. No matter how distant the end-goal of creation may seem, we have the power to see its reality, to know its truth with absolute clarity and absolute conviction.

## SUMMARY

- Moses teaches us to never give up on our prayers being answered. The gates of mercy are always open. "There is nothing sought by G-d except to hear the prayers of Israel." (Midrash). The Biblical commandment to pray is anytime we have a need.
- The results of prayer are often not manifest here in the physical world, but only in the "highest places of the universe." (Baal Shem Tov)
- We weren't ready for Moses' prayer to be answered because it would have meant the end of all struggle and exile. But Moses was able to "see" the land which enables us to also "see" the Promised Land and know that we will reach our end goal.

