

## Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

### פרשת ואתחנן

#### ואתחנן אל ה' בעת ההוא לאמר

**“And I beseeched Hashem at that time, saying” (3:23)**

The Meam Loez asks: Why did Moshe wait to pray that he should be allowed to enter the land until after the battles with Sichon and Og, the division of the land that they had conquered and the appointment of Yehoshua in his stead? Would it not have made more sense to beseech Hashem immediately after He issued the decree that Moshe would not enter Eretz Yisrael?

One answer is that Moshe waited because he wanted the people to daven on his behalf. The prayers of an individual are not always effective but the prayers of a large group of people davening together are always accepted. After all he had done for the Jewish people, leading them and often praying to Hashem at great length to forgive them, they gave no thought to the fact that Moshe would die in the wilderness and proceeded as if nothing had happened. When Moshe saw that the people seemed not to care about his impending death, he began to make preparations for the transition for the battle in Eretz Yisrael and the transfer of leadership. He acted as a dying man putting his affairs in order, hoping that the people would wake up and realize that Moshe would die and decide to pray for him. But it was to no avail. Only then, when Moshe despaired of the people praying on his behalf, did he himself turn to Hashem as a last resort, which he knew was less effective. Moshe was now rebuking the people by telling them that he prayed to Hashem at that time. He had waited so long because he wanted the people to pray for him. We learn from this that it is important to think of other people in our prayers. It helps us become more sensitive to the needs of others and it also enhances the efficacy of our prayers for ourselves. Chazal tell us that when one prays for his fellow, his own prayers are answered first. We also learn the importance of praying with a tzibur. When we daven with a group, our prayers are always answered. The prayers of a group are much more potent than those of an individual.

Another possible answer is that Moshe did not want to pray for forgiveness immediately after the decree because Hashem was angry with him. After the victories over Sichon and Og, Moshe felt that it was an "eis ratzon," a time when his prayers would be more readily accepted. The following story illustrates this idea. A king once levied a tax on his subjects. The people wanted to protest but they knew that the king would never listen to them. One day, the two biggest nemeses of the king were captured and killed. The people recognized that the king was exceptionally happy and they decided to capitalize on the king's joy and ask him to abolish the tax. Similarly, Moshe felt that after two wicked kings had been destroyed, Hashem would be happy and would be more open to Moshe's petition to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. He waited for an opportune moment and seized it when it arrived. There are certain times when our prayers are answered more readily, such as the upcoming month of Elul. We should be aware of the

special time and be sure to make the most of it.

**כי תוליד בנים ובני בנים ונושנתם בארץ והשחתם ועשיתם פסל תמונת כל ועשיתם הרע בעיני ה' אלקיך להכעיסו**  
**“When you beget children and grandchildren and will have been long in the land, you will grow corrupt and make a carved image, a likeness of anything, and you will do evil in the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, to anger Him” (4:25)**

The Torah says that when the people will enter Eretz Yisrael and will have children, they will eventually turn to evil ways. In relation to this, the Midrash Rabbah quotes the posuk in Mishlei (10:16) which states, "The deed of a righteous person brings life, but the produce of a wicked one brings lacking." The Midrash explains that the deed of the righteous refers to Elifaz, who was raised by Yitzchak. The produce of the wicked refers to Amalek, who were raised by Esav. Even though both were descendants of the wicked Esav, Elifaz developed good character traits, as evidenced by his hesitation at killing Yaakov as he was escaping to Charan, because he grew up around the righteous Yitzchak. Amalek could have become the same type of person, but because he grew up around the wicked Esav, he developed negative character traits.

A person's environment has a tremendous impact on him. Two people can be exactly the same, but when subjected to different influences, they can become completely different people. The greatest influences on the lives of Elifaz and Amalek were those who they had spent significant time with in their early years. The Midrash emphasizes that Elifaz grew up "in the lap of Yitzchak," stressing that this influence occurred at a very young age. What they saw in their formative years manifested itself many years later in their adulthood and contributed to their differing characters. It is essential that we provide children with good influences in their early years as they are developing. The people that they spend time with will have a lasting effect on them for their whole lives. Additionally, preschools are important and children should be provided with the proper environment in which they can learn from the people around them as they grow up.

**שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד**  
**“Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is the One and Only” (6:4)**

The recitation of Shema every morning and evening in its proper time is of utmost importance. The gemara on Sotah 42b quotes a posuk in Shmuel I (17:16) which says that Goliath would approach the camp of the Jewish army every morning and evening in order to intimidate the soldiers. The gemara asks: Why did Goliath specifically come out at those times? The answer given is that he wanted to prevent them from reciting the Shema. He understood the power of Shema and he thought that if he could prevent them from saying Shema, he would be able to defeat them. The Chofetz Chaim laments that today many people do not even understand what this Philistine knew. We should understand how important it is and be sure to say Shema before the end of the time for its recitation every morning and after nightfall every evening. If one davens Shacharis with a minyan that davens after the time limit, he should be sure to say it on his own beforehand within the

prescribed time. If one davens Maariv before nightfall, he should be sure to repeat Shema after night has begun. This is especially important to remember on Friday nights, when most people daven before nightfall. One should be sure not to take the mitzvah of Shema lightly.

**ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך**  
**“You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources” (6:5)**

How does one fulfill the mitzvah to love Hashem? The Rambam writes (Sefer HaMitzvos, Asei 3) that when one loves another person, he sings his friend's praises to all who will listen. He will do whatever he can to convince others of his friend's special qualities and how wonderful he truly is. Similarly, when one loves Hashem, he is seized with a desire to publicize to the world how great Hashem is. He strengthens his fellow men in their devotion to Hashem and tries to convince everyone to follow the path that Hashem has prescribed for us. Therefore, it is incumbent on every individual to inspire others to serve Hashem and to also feel the great love for Hashem that he feels.

How does one love Hashem with his money? The Chofetz Chaim explains that when one donates money to establish yeshivos and to support Torah scholars, he expresses his love for Hashem by spending money on causes that strengthen the learning of Torah. This is similar to Avraham Avinu, who brought people closer to Hashem by giving them food and drink and then directing them to thank Hashem who had provided for them by reciting a blessing. Thus, he brought people closer to Hashem with by putting his wealth to good use to provide for people.

**ושננתם לבניך ודברת בם בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך**  
**“You shall teach them thoroughly to your children and you shall speak of them while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise” (6:7)**

The Torah obligates a person to learn when sitting at home and when walking on the road. The Chofetz Chaim writes that this was easy to do before the Oral Law was written down because Torah was taught orally and one had to memorize Torah every time that he learned. Therefore, when one was home or on the road, he had Torah memorized in his head that he could review. Today, when our learning is done from sefarim and we no longer memorize Torah, it has become more difficult to fulfill this obligation. Therefore, he recommends that a person have sefarim with him at work to learn from when he has down time and that he memorize a few perakim of mishnayos so that he can learn anytime. Today, it is much easier to do this. Anyone can have shiurim on the go with audio shiurim on tapes, CDs or iPods that one can listen to in the car, on the subway or while walking down the street. We also have small printed sefarim that one can easily take on the road. There is always something to learn. Each person can find some area of learning on which he can focus that piques his interest. The Torah is so vast and covers such a wide range of topics that one's work in the study of Torah is never complete.

ועשית הישר והטוב בעיני ה' למען ייטב לך ובאת וירשת את הארץ הטבה אשר  
נשבע ה' לאבתך

**“You shall do what is fair and good in the eyes of Hashem, so that it will be good for you, and you shall come and possess the good land that Hashem swore to your forefathers” (6:18)**

R' Eliyahu Lopian explains this posuk in the following manner. Whatever a person does should be done because it is good in the eyes of Hashem. One should not do mitzvos merely to fulfill his obligation and to be done with it. Rather, he should strive to please Hashem and do what He wishes of him. His sole purpose when doing mitzvos should be to give pleasure to Hashem. While one who just wants to fulfill his obligation has done the mitzvah properly, he should try to act "lifnim mishuras hadin" and observe the mitzvah on a higher level by intending to please Hashem and to do what is right in His eyes. The gemara on Bava Metzia 30b says that Yerushalayim was destroyed because they acted in accordance with the law. This means that as long as the people went beyond the letter of the law and observed mitzvos to the highest degree, Hashem overlooked the letter of the law even when they deserved destruction. When they began to stick to the letter of the law and no more, Hashem also acted accordingly with the people and gave them the punishment that they deserved based on the principles of justice. It is important that we not seek to squeak by and do mitzvos with as little effort as possible. We should invest our strength and effort into every mitzvah that we do and seek to make our actions pleasing to Hashem. Hashem wants our hearts to be in the right place when we do mitzvos.

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