

VAESCHANAN (DEUTERONOMY 3:23-7:11)

Thou Shalt Not Pray?!

2007 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz

Moses wanted to enter the Land of Israel. He REALLY wanted to enter the Land. He wanted to fulfill the Mitzvahs such as tithing that can only be done in Israel. He wanted to see the Temple built.

G-d said no. But that didn't stop Moses from trying. He prayed, he entreated, he begged. He even tried to negotiate.

G-d's answer was unambiguous:

"Enough! Do not continue to speak to Me further about this matter." (Deuteronomy, 3:26)

G-d made it very clear to Moses that the case was closed; there was nothing more to talk about. The answer was a clear, resounding, "NO!" Moses would not be permitted to enter the Land. (See "Stone Drunk".)

Why did G-d tell Moses to stop? Let him ask if he wants! He'll eventually get the message when he sees that G-d won't let him in.

The Talmud (Yevamos, 64) states that G-d "longs for" the prayers of the righteous. When holy people praise G-d and make requests of Him, they bring sanctity to the world. So what was wrong with Moses' prayer?

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin writes that the reason G-d wants the righteous to pray is that the name of Heaven is sanctified when people see that prayers are answered. Even if it takes years for a prayer to be answered, when in fact, the prayer is answered; people see the greatness of G-d.

The problem here, says Rabbi Sorotzkin, is that this prayer already had an answer, and that answer was "No." G-d had sworn that Moses was not to enter the Land; the decree was non-negotiable. There was nothing to be gained by prayer, and therefore, Moses was told not to waste his words.

"Enough! Do not continue to speak to Me further about this matter." A fascinating retort. To my knowledge, there is only one other place where we read of someone being told not to pray. That person was Moses. The event was the Golden Calf. G-d was furious with His Nation, and He wanted no

interruption from Moses. Or, so He SEEMED to suggest:

“Now, leave me alone. Let My anger flare against them and I will annihilate them; and I will make you a great nation.” (Exodus, 32:10)

Rashi points out that until that point, Moses hadn't been praying to G-d to forgive His People. Only when G-d told him NOT to pray, so that He could be “free” to destroy them, did Moses understand that his prayer was exactly what was needed to save the day. G-d was hinting to him that he SHOULD pray.

Other than these two situations, I have never heard of anyone being told not to pray. Do you know why that is?

The reason, I believe, is obvious. One time and one time only, G-d made it clear that prayer was not appropriate because it was impossible for that prayer to accomplish its intended goal.

We all know sick people. We all know individuals who are suffering. We all know that the world is a very precarious place, full of deranged, wicked people who seek to destroy Israel, America, and all that is good.

Pray. You're not Moses. G-d never told you not to pray. He never told you not to pray because, unlike Moses' prayer, yours qualifies for a positive response. So what are you waiting for? Go pray!

I have a friend who went into the hospital yesterday to have three stents inserted into his arteries. X-rays taken six months ago showed that three of his arteries were 80% blocked and the purpose of the surgery was to prevent a heart attack.

My friend asked many of us to pray for a successful surgery. We recited prayers for Avraham Aharon ben Roza Leah.

Yesterday, as he was being prepped for surgery, they took a new x-ray, to see how much worse his arteries have gotten since six months ago. The arteries were clear. That doesn't happen without some sort of procedure being done. The surgeon thought he knew his patient's complete medical history. But now he wasn't so sure.

“In the past six months, have you had any intervention?” he asked his patient.

“Sure,” my friend said with a smile and a thumb pointed upward. “Divine intervention!”

Have a great Shabbos.

