

The Divine and the Defeated: The Paradox of a Fated Leader

REQUEST AND REFUSAL

1. דברים, פרק ג (פרשת ואתחנן)

(כג) וְאַתְּחַנֵּן אֵל ה' בַּעַת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: (כד) "אֱדַנִּי (יְהוָה) [אֱלֹהִים], אַתָּה הַחַלּוֹת לְהַרְאוֹת אֶת עֲבֹדְךָ אֶת גְּדֻלָּתְךָ וְאֶת יָדְךָ הַחֲזָקָה, אֲשֶׁר מִי אֵל בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה כְּמַעֲשָׂיֶיךָ וְכַגְבוּרֹתֶיךָ. (כה) אֶעֱבְרָה נָא, וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן, הַהֵר הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְבָּנוֹ".

(כו) וַיִּתְּעַבֵּר ה' בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם, וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלַי. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי: "רַב לָךְ; אֵל תּוֹסֵף דִּבֵּר אֵלַי עוֹד בְּדִבְרֵי הַזֶּה. (כז) עֲלֵה רֹאשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה, וְשֵׂא עֵינֶיךָ יָמָּה וְצַפְנָה וְתִמְנָה וּמִזְרָחָה, וּרְאֵה בְּעֵינֶיךָ כִּי לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה. (כח) וְצוּ אֶת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, וְחִזְקֵהוּ וְאַמְצֵהוּ; כִּי הוּא יַעֲבֹר לִפְנֵי הָעָם הַזֶּה, וְהוּא יַנְחִיל אוֹתָם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה".

(כט) וַיָּשָׁב בְּגִיָּא מִיַּל בֵּית פְּעוֹר.

23 And I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying: 24 "O Lord God, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do according to Your works and according to Your mighty deeds? 25 **Let me cross over, I pray, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly mountain country and Lebanon.**"

26 But the Lord was wrathful with me on your account and would not listen to me, and the Lord said to me: "Enough! Speak no more to Me of this matter. 27 Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward, and see it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. 28 But charge Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he shall cross over before this people, and he shall put them in possession of the land which you shall see."

29 So we remained in the valley opposite Beth-peor.

2. דון יצחק אברבנאל (1437-1508) על ג:כג

ואמנם הספקות אשר יפלו בזה הסדר כפי העיון הפשוט שבכתובים הנה הם שבעה ועשרים . . .

And indeed, the questions that will arise in this order according to the pshat examination, behold they are twenty-seven...

BUT WHY ASK AT ALL?? WHAT'S THE HAVA AMINAH?

1. CHIBAT TZION (LOVE OF THE LAND)

3. רש"י (1105-1040) על דברים פרק ג:כג

בְּעֵת הַהוּא. לֵאחֲרַי שִׁכְבַּשְׁתִּי אֶרֶץ סִיחֹן וְעֹג, דָּמִיתִי שְׂמָא הוּתַר הַנֶּדֶר!

At that time. After I conquered the land of Sihon and Og, I thought that perhaps the vow had been released

4. הרב אברהם אבן עזרא (1164-1089) על ג:כד

וטעם זו הפרשה לחבב את ארץ ישראל. ואם הארץ תהיה חביבה, ישמרו מצוות השם, שלא יגלו ממנה.

And the reason for this portion is to make beloved the Land of Israel. And if the land will be beloved, they will observe God's commandments, so that they will not be exiled from it.

5. הרמב"ן (1270-1194) על דברים פרק ג:כג-כד

וכאן הזכיר זה להודיע כי הארץ היתה חביבה עליו מאד, ולא זכה אליה בעבורם; וכל זה מתוכחותיו.

...

והנה השלים התוכחות, בזה שהודיע אותם שגרמו אבותיהם רעה על עצמם, וגם עליו גרמו עונש שלא יעברו לארץ. אבל הם הבנים יעברו ויירשו אותה, אם לא יהיו כאבותם דור סורר ומורה. ולכך יתחיל עתה להזהירם בכללי המצות, שלא יוסיפו עליהם ולא יגרעו מהם.

And here he mentioned this to make known that the land was very beloved to him, and he did not merit it because of them; and all this is from his rebukes

...

And behold, he completed the rebukes with this - that he informed them that their forefathers caused evil upon themselves, and also upon him they caused punishment that he should not cross over to the land. But they, the children, will cross over and inherit it, if they do not become like their fathers - a stubborn and rebellious generation. And therefore he will now begin to warn them regarding the general commandments, that they should not add to them nor subtract from them

2. TO PREVENT THE CHURBAN (EXILE)

6. הרב עובדיה ספורנו (1470-1550) על דברים. פרק ג. פסוקים כה-כו

אָעפֿרָה נָא. להכרית כל יושבי כנען, כדי שלא יגלו ישראל ממנה. וְאַרְאֶה אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה. אתן עיני בה לטובה בברכתי שתהיה טובה לישראל לעולם.

וַיִּתְעַבֵּר ה' בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם. מפני שהייתי מתאוה לקיים אתכם בה, שלא תגלו ממנה לעולם. והוא כבר נשא ידו לזרותם.

Let me cross over, I pray. To destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan, so that Israel will not be exiled from it. And see the good land. I will set my eyes upon it for good – with my blessing that it should be good for Israel forever. But the Lord was wrathful with me on your account. Because I was eager to establish you in it, so that you would never be exiled from it. But He had already raised His hand to scatter them.

7. הרב חיים בן עטר (1696-1743) אור החיים על דברים. פרק א. פסוק לו

והנכון הוא על פי דבריהם ז"ל שאמרו (במדבר רבה טז:כ), בפסוק "וַיִּכְפּוּ הָעַם בְּלִילָה הַהוּא" (במדבר יד:א) – "קבעו בכיה לדורות". כי ליל ט' באב היתה, שבו נחרב הבית. ואמרו עוד שאם היה נכנס משה לארץ, והיה בונה בית המקדש – לא היה הבית נחרב, שאין אומה ולשון נוגעת בו. ואמרו עוד (שוחר טוב עט) בפסוק "מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף; אֶל־הָיִים, בְּאֵי גוֹיִם [בְּנִתְלִתָּהּ]" (תהלים עט:א), וז"ל – "קינה מבעי ליה! אלא על שהשליך חמתו על עצים ואבנים".

מעתה, אם היה נכנס משה לארץ והיה בונה בית המקדש, ולהשליך חמתו עליו לא אפשר כנזכר, ויחר אף ה' בשונאי ישראל ויהיה כליונם במקום חורבן הבית! לזה גזר ה' בגזרת המרגלים גם על משה שימות במדבר. והוא אומר "גַּם בִּי הִתְאַפֵּף ה' בְּגִלְלָתָם", פירוש בגלגול דברים שלכם. כי אם לא היה עוון המרגלים והיו נכנסים, אפשר שהיה נכנס משה עמהם. והגם שיבנה בית המקדש, אין מיחוש – כי לא נתגבר בחינת הרע, והיו עומדים בצדקם בארץ. אלא מאמצעות עוון מרגלים, גברה יד רשעה. וידע ה' כי לא יעמדו בצדק; וצא ולמד משירת האזינו.

And the correct interpretation is according to their words, may their memory be blessed, who said (Midrash Rabbah Numbers 16:20), regarding the verse 'And the people wept that night' (Numbers 14:1) – 'They established weeping for generations.' For it was the night of the 9th of Av, on which the Temple was destroyed. And they said further that if Moses had entered the land and had built the Temple – the Temple would not have been destroyed, for no nation or tongue could touch it. And they said further (Shocher Tov 79) regarding the verse 'A psalm of Asaph; O God, the nations have come [into Your inheritance]' (Psalms 79:1), and these are their words – 'It should have said "lamentation"! Rather, [it is] because He cast His wrath upon wood and stones

Now, if Moses had entered the land and built the Temple, and to cast His wrath upon it would not be possible as mentioned, then the Lord's anger would burn against Israel's enemies and their destruction would be in place of the Temple's destruction! For this reason, God decreed in the decree of the spies also upon Moses that he should die in the wilderness. And this is what he means by 'The Lord was also angry with me because of you' – meaning, through the chain of consequences of your matters. For if there had not been the sin of the spies and they had entered, it is possible that Moses would have entered with

Many thanks to Rav Uri Cohen for his support in making this source sheet and shiur

them. And even though he would build the Temple, there would be no concern – for the aspect of evil would not have prevailed, and they would have stood in their righteousness in the land. But from the consequences of the sin of the spies, the hand of wickedness prevailed. And God knew that they would not stand in righteousness; and go out and learn from the Song of Ha'azinu

3. TO ENTER AS A CIVILIAN

8. הרב יצחק קארו (1535-1458), תולדות יצחק על דברים פרק ג:כג-כח
שהקב"ה נשבע "לכן לא תביאו את הקהל הזה אל הארץ אשר נתתי להם" (במדבר כ"ב). והכוונה: לא תהיו מנהיגים בארץ ישראל. אבל לא גזר שלא יכנסו לארץ. שאם גזר כן, היה ראוי שיאמר "לכן לא תבואו אל הארץ אשר נתתי להם". ולפי שנשבע שלא יהיו מנהיגים, לא שאל משה שרוצה להביא לישראל; אלא שיהושע יביאם, ומשה יכנס כאחד העם.

לפיכך מה שעשה בראשונה הוא שצוה את יהושע ואמר לו (לעיל ד:כא-ב) "עיניך הראות את כל אשר עשה ה' אלהיכם לשני המלכים האלה. פן יעשה ה' לכל הממלכות אשר אתה עבר שמה. לא תיראום, כי ה' אלהיכם הוא הנלחם לכם". ואחר שעשה ליהושע מנהיג, אז התחנן שיעבור הוא עם ישראל, לא שיעבירם. וזהו שאמר "בצעת הקוא" – אחר שצויתי ליהושע.

That the Holy One, blessed be He, swore 'Therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them' (Numbers 20:12). And the meaning is: you will not be leaders in the Land of Israel. But He did not decree that they should not enter the land. For if He had decreed thus, it would have been fitting for Him to say 'therefore you shall not come into the land which I have given them.' And since He swore that they would not be leaders, Moses did not ask that he wanted to bring Israel; rather, that Joshua should bring them, and **Moses would enter as one of the people**

Therefore what he did first was that he commanded Joshua and said to him (above 4:21-22) 'Your eyes have seen all that the Lord your God did to these two kings; so will the Lord do to all the kingdoms where you are crossing over. Do not fear them, for the Lord your God – He fights for you.' And after he made Joshua the leader, then he pleaded that he should cross over with Israel, not that he should lead them across. And this is what he said 'at that time' – after I commanded Joshua

9. במדבר, פרק כ (פרשת חוקת)

(יב) ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן "נעו לא האמנתם בי להקדישני לעיני בני ישראל, לכן לא תביאו את הקהל הזה אל הארץ אשר נתתי להם". (יג) המה מי מריבה, אשר רבו בני ישראל את ה', ויקדש בם. ס

Many thanks to Rav Uri Cohen for his support in making this source sheet and shiur

(12) But ה said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, **therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them.**”

4. A PLEA FOR OTHERS TO DAVEN FOR HIM

10. **Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik** (1903–1993), “The Community,” *Tradition* 17:2 (Spring 1978), pp.19–21. <http://www.traditiononline.org/news/originals/Volume%2017/No.%202/The%20Community.pdf>

The Halacha has taught the individual to include his fellow man in his prayer. The individual must not limit himself to his own needs, no matter how pressing those needs are and how distinguished he is. Halacha has formulated prayer in the plural. There is hardly a prayer which avails itself of the grammatical singular. Even private prayers, such as those offered on the occasion of sickness, death, or other crises, are recited in the plural.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים.

“May the Almighty comfort thee among all mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

שתשלח רפואה שלמה מן השמים בתוך שאר חולי ישראל.

“I beseech Thee to cure this individual as well as other sick people and restore them to full health” (*Shabbat* 12a–b). Whatever the needs, the prayer must not be confined to an individual. Moses prayed for the community forty days in succession, and God tolerated his intercession on behalf of the community. Indeed, He granted atonement to the people.

וְאֶתְנַפֵּל לִפְנֵי ה' פְּרָאשָׁנָה, אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה; לֶחֶם לֹא אֲכָלְתִּי וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתִיתִי, עַל כָּל חַטֹּאתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר חָטָאתָם. . .

And I fell before the Lord as before forty days and forty nights; I did not eat bread or drink water, for all your sins (*Deuteronomy* 9:18).

On another occasion, however, when Moses tried to pray to the Almighty, God stopped him in the middle. He did not permit him to continue praying; neither did He grant his wish. Moses prayed for himself; the Almighty rejected the prayer.

וְאֶתְחַנֵּן אֵל ה' בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר וְכו' אֶעֱבְרָה נָא, וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן, הֲהִיא טוֹבָה הִנֵּה וְהִלְכֵנּוּ. וַיִּתְעַבֵּר ה' בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם, וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלַי. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי: "רַב לָךְ; אֵל תוֹסֵף דִּבֵּר אֵלַי עוֹד בַּדֶּבֶר הַזֶּה.

And I besought the Lord at that time saying . . . “O Lord God . . . let me go over and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill country and Lebanon.” But the Lord was wroth with me . . . and harkened not unto me, and the Lord said unto me: “Let it suffice; speak no more unto Me of this matter” (*Ibid.* 3:23–26).

When Moses' prayer was recited in the plural, all the gates of prayer were open and the Lord allowed him to intercede many, many days for the people. When Moses changed his prayer to the singular, the gates of prayer and loving-kindness were slammed in his face.

The Midrash states that, had the community joined Moses in his prayer, God would have granted the request. He would not have rejected the prayer of the many.<19> Unfortunately,

Many thanks to Rav Uri Cohen for his support in making this source sheet and shiur

the community did not understand the secret of prayer-by-the-many. As a consequence of their ignorance, Moses died in the desert.