

VA'ETCHANAN (And I Plead)

Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11, Isaiah 40:1-26, Matthew 23:31-39

When God Says No

This parashah (portion of Scripture) begins with Moses' remembrance of how he **pleaded** with God for a chance to cross over and see **the good land beyond the Jordan** (Deuteronomy 3:23-25). But God said, "**thou shalt not go over this Jordan.**" (Deuteronomy 3:27)

What do we do with the times when God simply says "No!"? We want to have or do something with all our heart and soul and might. We plead with God over and over again, but in the end, for reasons that perhaps only He knows, God refuses to grant our request.



We can learn a lesson about how to respond in these situations from Moses and other great Biblical characters.

When the Lord struck King David's infant son, the result of his adulterous affair with Bat Sheva, David pleaded with God to spare his life. "**David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.**" (2 Samuel 12:16)

But on the seventh day, it came to pass that the child died. How did King David react? When David came to know that the child was dead, **he arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, changed his clothes and went into the house of the Lord and worshipped. Then he went home and ate food.** (2 Samuel 12:20)

What a picture of gracious submission to the will of God! The first thing David did after learning of the child's death was to worship God! David realized that God had made his judgment in His Divine wisdom, and that all David could do now was to accept it.

As Job said when God allowed Satan to destroy everything he valued and everyone he loved, "**The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name יהוה.**" (Job 1:21)

In the Brit Chadashah (New Covenant), we see another example of this in the **Apostle Paul**. Three times he pleaded with God to remove this **thorn in the flesh**. And three times God refused, saying, **My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.**" (2 Corinthians 12:8-10)

Although this unidentified thorn in the flesh must have caused Paul a great deal of distress, God chose to allow it to remain to refine Paul's character. There may be situations in our lives that aggravate us so terribly that we may plead with God to remove deliver us. But if the sovereign God allows the thorn to remain, we can also trust in the sufficiency of His grace to endure the suffering it causes.

I am thinking of a situation right now, and I'm sure you can too, where it seems that God just said no and shut the door.

Even Yeshua (Jesus) faced the answer 'no' from his beloved Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Yeshua asked if the cup of suffering could be taken from him:

“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:39)

Although it caused Yeshua deep sorrow and distress to realize the anguish he would be facing, even unto death on a cross, he submitted to the will of God, saying,

“O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” (Matthew 26:42).

*The **Garden of Gethsemane** is called, in Hebrew, **Gat Shemanim**, a word which is the plural form of the Hebrew word for **oil, shemen**. Oil represents the **anointing of the Holy Spirit**. It is when Yeshua submitted to his Abba (Father) in this place, that God anointed him for his mission.*

We may also find, in our own personal Gat Shemanim – places of deep sorrow - when we submit to our Heavenly Father, saying, ‘Thy will be done’ – the shemen (oil) of God’s anointing will begin to flow over our lives as well.

There are times when God's answer of **No** may cause us pain and sorrow; but if we will graciously accept this as the perfect will of God, then these trials may refine our character and make us more like Yeshua:

“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.” (Hebrews 5:8)

Surely there are times when we need to persevere to accomplish our heart's desire and not to give up or give in; but there are also times when we need to accept that this may not be God's will and that *NO is His final answer*.

God told Moses not to ever bring up the subject again: **“Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter.”** (Deut. 3:26). You know how it is when our kids ask us for something that they want and there is no way we are going to give it to them; but they keep pleading, and begging...and nagging...and – you know what I mean. ☺

I'm wondering in my heart if there is some issue in our lives we've been praying about, asking God for over and over again that perhaps He is saying, "*Enough! I've said no and I don't want you to even ask me about it again!!*"

And yet, we know that there are times when we are to persevere in prayer, like the widow with the unrighteous judge – to ask and to keep on asking - until we receive the answer to our prayer. (Luke 18:1-8)

And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.
So how do we know the difference? For this we need the wisdom which comes from above, as is expressed so beautifully in the Serenity Prayer:

The Serenity Prayer



God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.

--Reinhold Niebuhr

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will direct your paths.

Proverbs 3, 5-6

Encouraging the Next Generation

Not only did God refuse to allow Moses into the Promised Land, He also asked Moses to encourage his successor, Joshua! **“But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him, for he shall go over before this people....”** (Deuteronomy 3:28)

Here is a true test of our character: can we graciously accept that we will never see our heart's desire in this lifetime? And then even more than dealing with our disappointment - can we also be happy for someone who *does* succeed in fulfilling *our dream* - and even go on to encourage them?

We may set goals for our lives that we want to achieve but at the end of the day, we may fail to see the full realization of our dreams. Perhaps, like Moses, we will be allowed *a glimpse* of the 'Promised Land' before we die. Or it could be that our children or children's children may go further towards the fulfillment of our dreams than we were ever able to accomplish.

King David wanted to build a grand house for God but his request was denied because he was a man of war and had too much blood on his hands. Instead, God said that his son, Solomon, would build Him a house. Solomon's Hebrew name, Shlomo, comes from the word for peace, Shalom, therefore he was allowed to build the Second Temple. David made all the preparations in his lifetime, but it was his son, Shlomo, who actually saw the realization of his father's dream.

Just as God told Moses to encourage Joshua to cross over the Jordan and to take the next generation into the Promised Land, we may also be called to pass on the torch of faith. This parashah discusses this very thing – *the importance of encouraging and strengthening the next generation to follow God even more wholeheartedly!*

God has commanded us to teach His Torah to the generations to come: **“but make them known unto thy children and thy children's children.”** (Deut. 4:9)

In all your getting, get wisdom...

Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. (Proverbs 4:7)

Observing and doing the commandments of God is to be *our wisdom and understanding in the sight of all the peoples*. According to God's word, His people should be known **as a wise and understanding people** (Deuteronomy 4:6).

And yet sometimes, doesn't it sometimes seem like we can do the dumbest things that get us into so much trouble, just because we consider ourselves 'super spiritual' or believe that '*God told me to do it*'. Maybe what we need is a good dose of common sense. We also need honest people

who have the courage to speak into our lives when we're about to do something crazy, and the humility to receive correction.

Delving deeper into the richness of the Hebrew language, we can discover a beautiful relationship between wisdom, understanding, building, discernment, and the Son.

The word of God tells us that the person who finds wisdom and understanding will be blessed (**Ashrei** in Hebrew). This word means more than simple happiness or prosperity. It is someone who enjoys the abundant life in every sense of the word: a long and healthy life, peace, prosperity and happiness. (Proverbs 3:13-18)

Obviously, finding wisdom and understanding is crucial to our well being and success. Nothing that we desire is more precious than wisdom. **“She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.”** (Proverbs 3:15)

It is by wisdom that God founded the earth; and by understanding He established the heavens; (Proverbs 3:19)

The Hebrew word for understanding, **t'vunah**, **תבונה** comes from the same root as the word **‘boneh’ בנה build**. This shows us a strong relationship between **wisdom, understanding and building**.

We need a great deal of wisdom to build our house, especially as women, who are the ‘heart of the home’. Without this wisdom, we can end up destroying our homes with our own hands: **A wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands.** (Proverbs 14:1)

In order to build a strong house that cannot be shaken, we need wisdom and also understanding:

“Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established;” (Proverbs 24:3)

In order to build a solid house, we also need discernment – which is the wisdom to be able to judge between good and evil. The word for **‘between’** in Hebrew is **‘Bein’**, **בין** which also uses the same Hebrew root as for ‘understanding’ and ‘build’.

And even further to this, the Hebrew reveals an amazing relationship between wisdom and understanding, building our house, discernment, and Yeshua, the Son of God! The Hebrew word for **son** is **BEN**, **בן** which comes from the same Hebrew root as for the words build, understanding, and discernment (between).

Yeshua told us that to have a house that will withstand the storms of life, it must be built on a solid foundation of the Word of God (Luke 6:48).

Yeshua is the Living Word, the Foundation Stone, upon which we must build.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain.” (Psalm 127:1)

The Sh'ma: Hear O Israel

This Parashah, Va'etchanan also contains the most famous prayer in Judaism - **The Sh'ma: “Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad (Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is One...) (as seen on this Hebrew parchment)**

This prayer is a declaration of the nation of Israel's faith in the oneness of the God of Israel, while surrounded by a sea of pagan nations who worship many false gods. The concept of a sole, unique creator God was, and still is, the most sacred tenet of Israel's national heritage. It is also the reason why most Jewish people vehemently reject Christianity – since it is perceived as a religion that worships three gods (or at least a 3-part God) rather than the one, true, indivisible God of the Universe, Creator of Heaven and Earth.



In order to reinforce the oneness of God to Israel, and so that there could be no mistake or misunderstanding, God instructed the people through Moses: **“Know therefore this day, and lay it to heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is none other”** (Deut. 4:39)

Yeshua affirmed these words as the central truth of the Torah. When the Scribes asked Yeshua which was the first and most important commandment, he answered with the Sh'ma: “Hear O Israel.....” (Mark 12:29-31).

Many Jewish people recite this prayer every morning upon arising and every evening before retiring. It is the last prayer recited by a Jewish person on their deathbed. Many Jewish martyrs recited the Sh'ma as they were being put to death for their devotion to the One true God. The first great principle in the Ten Commandments is that of faithfulness and undivided loyalty to the one true God: **“You shall have no other gods besides Me.”** (Deut. 5:7, Exodus 20:1-3)

The Jewish people are a diverse group with many different sects and religious beliefs, but faith in the absolute oneness of God has been the binding thread that has united the Jewish community over the centuries. The *worship of statues and carved images*, even as seen in some denominations of Christianity and in some Churches is *absolutely forbidden* in the Word of God for His people, whom He calls **‘His inheritance.’** (Deut. 4:15-19, 20, Psalm 94:14)

Through the prophet, Isaiah, Israel was again reminded of this truth: **“You are My witnesses... and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me” “I am the first, I am the last, and there is no God besides Me”** (Isa. 43:10, 44:6)

The Sh'ma expresses the devotion of the Israelites' entire being to love God with all their heart, soul, and might. This is the first instance in human history that the love of God was demanded in any religion. Love of God is the distinctive mark of a true worshipper. What is love of God? **“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”** (1 John 5:3)

The book of D'varim (Deuteronomy) is a beautiful testimony of how much God loves us and how much He wants us to love Him in return. We love God because He first loved us! (1 John 4:19) [1 John 4:10](#) “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

Teach your children

We are to remember God's commandments, keep them in our heart, and ***teach them diligently to our children*** - to speak about the word of God with our children all day long – when we sit down and when we walk by the way; when we arise, and when we lie down. (Deut. 6:6-7)

I remember my interesting experience with homeschooling – one of the most challenging and ‘flesh burning’ assignments I have ever undertaken. It was the best of times; and it was the worst of times. I know that many Believers are choosing to home school their children and I applaud them totally! I, on the other hand, seem to be much too selfish and undisciplined to pull it off successfully. And yet, it seemed that God was calling me to do it.

One summer, after a not so wonderful experience at the Hebrew school in Canada, I began to pray about where to send the children for the coming year in the fall. I prayed and prayed, but received no direction. Frustrated, I decided to really seek the Lord and His word for an answer. I opened my Bible randomly and it opened supernaturally to this very chapter and verse:

“You shall teach them diligently to your children...” (Deut. 6:7) “*Who me? Oh, no, not me!*”, I thought, dismissing the idea. But I continued to struggle with the issue. Later in the summer, we went to see a movie at the big IMAX theatre and guess what was the theme song? Of course, Crosby Stills Nash and Young's, “Teach your children”

O.k., ok., I surrendered, and ‘taught my children’ at home for a year and a half before we left for Israel, where they attended school to become fluent in Hebrew. I acknowledge that teaching our children about God and His word in His way, is not in a fifteen minute designated ‘family devotion time’ but continuously, all day long, as we wake up and as we go about our day, and as we drive around, and as we shop.... This is hard to do if our kids are in school most of the day, being taught by other teachers and probably more so, by their peers.

We are even to bind God's word as a sign on our hand and between our eyes. (Deut. 6:8) Observant Jewish men keep this commandment literally with the custom of putting on 'tefillin', little leather boxes containing these verses that are worn on the head and wrapping leather straps around their arms (as seen in this photo).



In Israel, Orthodox Jewish men set up booths on the street to encourage even secular Jews to fulfill this commandment, especially before the Sabbath.

The Mezuzah

The word of God is also to be written on the doorposts of our house and on our gates. (Deut. 6:9) Jewish people observe this commandment by affixing a mezuzah to the entrance of every home or place of business and usually every room of the house as well. The mezuzah is a little box fixed to the right hand doorpost of the outer entrance of every dwelling room in the house. It contains this section of the Sh'ma as well as Deuteronomy 11:13-20.



The word Shadai (Almighty) is written on the back of the parchment. The mezuzah is a symbol of God's watchful care over the house and its occupants. It is a reminder to everyone who goes in and goes out that this house is devoted to God and keeping His commandments. The Mezuzah declares, **"As for me and my household we will serve the Lord."** (Joshua 24:15)

Haftorat Va'etchanan

"Comfort, yes, comfort My people, says your God.

Speak comfort to Jerusalem,

and cry out to her that her warfare is ended,

that her iniquity is pardoned,

for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (Isaiah 40:1-2)

This prophetic reading follows Tisha B'Av, a time of severe judgment against Israel. Now, through the prophet Isaiah, God speaks messages of comfort and encouragement to His people, Israel. Therefore this is called the Sabbath of Comfort, **"Shabbat Nachamu."**

God's prophet, Isaiah, is a voice crying out to comfort Israel, and to proclaim to her the **Restoration of Zion**. All those who love Jerusalem are commanded to comfort Israel.

“Get yourself up to a high mountain, m’vasseret (female messenger of good tidings) to Zion, raise your voice with strength to Jerusalem; fear not...” (Isaiah 40:9)

God is calling His people to come up into the high mountains of Israel and tell ‘good tidings’ to Jerusalem. In Hebrew, the word for this is “**Mevasseret Tziyon**”, which is also a city in Israel on the outskirts of Jerusalem near our home.

To share the ‘good news’ (gospel) in Hebrew is **levasser**. The word used here is the feminine form – a female messenger is to bring the good news to the people of Israel: “**Behold, God is coming as a mighty one with power, but also as a gentle shepherd carrying his little lambs in his bosom and gently leading those who are with young.**” (Isaiah 40:9-11)

Yeshua is both the gentle shepherd and the Lion of Judah who roars out of Jerusalem!

Will you volunteer to be a ‘mevasseret’ – to partner with God, the Compassionate One, in bringing comfort to those who mourn in Jerusalem?

So many people today are hurting and in need of some comfort. One day, I tripped over Avi's bike in the laundry room, fell on the same knee that was still not healed from my car accident, broke my toe, and further injured my hip. Oye! As I sat on the concrete floor of the laundry room crying out of pain and frustration, how I longed for a bit of comfort.

Finally, the fear of being bitten by something creepy on the concrete outdoor laundry floor motivated me to get up and hobble into the house. “*I fell*”, I said, to no one in particular. “*Oh, sorry Mom*”, one of the kids answered.” O.K., they're kids, I understand... But a little comfort and a hug would have gone a long way towards not only healing my body, but also my heart.

This week I visited a woman whose husband just left her with four children including a new baby 3 weeks old, a 2 year old boy, a 4 year old girl and a down's syndrome child. She desperately needed someone to just sit with her and offer comfort, love and hope in Yeshua.

Few states are as emotionally painful as feeling that no one cares. Yeshua experienced this on the cross, as expressed in this Messianic prophecy from the Psalms (tehillim): “**Reproach has broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness, I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.**” (Psalm 69:20)

When we feel alone and abandoned, hurting and broken, whether over something as trivial as a broken toe or as deep as the trauma of abandonment & abuse, we can receive and experience the comfort of our Heavenly Father, who always cares for us:

“As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him...” (Psalm 103:13)

As God comforted Rachel, weeping for her children (Jer. 31:15-19); as Ruth brought comfort to Naomi, bitter from her losses (Ruth 1:16-17), we can ourselves become messengers (mevasseret) of God's comfort. With the same comfort we have received from God in our troubles, we can comfort others.

He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. (2 Corinthians 1:4) (NLT)

May the God of all comfort, bring comfort to you this day. In the name of Yeshua Hamashiach. Amen.

[Isaiah 66:13](#) **"As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem."**

Shabbat Shalom

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