

PARSHAT VE-ETCHANAN - 5765

Is there any logical reason why God couldn't grant Moshe Rabeinu's request to simply allow him to 'cross the Jordan River and see the Land'?

To any answer that the mind may contemplate - the heart immediately answers - it just doesn't make sense.

Nonetheless, God tells Moshe to stop praying; God's decision was final.

Back then, like today - there are times when God doesn't answer our prayers; no matter how sincere, no matter how logical our requests may be - and we don't always understand why.

That doesn't mean that those prayers had no value. In fact, from what God instructs Moshe to do immediately afterward, we can possibly learn an important lesson for our own time - that tragedy can sometimes provide a rare opportunity for deeper insight.

In the following shiur, we explain how and why.

INTRODUCTION

Even though God refused Moshe's request to allow him to enter the Land, He instructed him instead climb to the top of Mount Nevo to get a glimpse of the land from afar:

"Climb to the top of the mountain, and **lift up** your eyes to the **west, north, south** and **east** - and see with your eyes, for you will not cross the Jordan. Then, charge Yehoshua, and encourage him, for he will lead the people to the land... that you can only see." (3:27-28).

It's clear why Moshe must entrust the leadership with Yehoshua - but why does God command him to ascend the mountain, to take a view of the land, before doing so?

It would appear that both these commands relate to God's refusal of Moshe's request.

A GREAT VIEW

Take another look at 3:27, noting the difficulty in those directions - for God tells Moshe to look in all **four** directions, i.e. not only to the west, north, south - but also to the **east**.

Recall that Moshe now stands on Mount Nevo in the Moabite Mountains - directly east of Eretz Canaan. Hence, it makes sense that he should look towards the west, and even to the north and south, for that could be understood as northwest and southwest - but why would he look to **east**? After all, to the east, the only area in sight would be wide plains and desert areas of modern day Jordan, Iraq and Saudia Arabia.

So why does God tell Moshe to look to the East?

The answer can't be that God wanted to show him the fullest borders of the Land of Israel, for Moshe had already seen them in his battle against Sichon, and furthermore, Moshe's request dealt specifically with the **other** side of the Jordan, i.e. to the west!

Furthermore, we find a similar problem in Moshe Rabeinu's original request - where he asks to: 'see the **good land** on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain **and the Lebanon...**' (see 3:25)

We can easily understand why Moshe wants to see the 'good land', for that seems to imply the Land of Israel - as it was described in 'spy-report' by Yehoshua and Kaleb:

"The land that we have passed to scout it, the land is very very **good**" (see Bamidbar 14:7).

But why does Moshe express interest to see Lebanon as well? True, Lebanon is located on the northern border of Eretz Canaan, but Moshe doesn't ask to see any of the other bordering

areas of Israel.

Finally, why is Moshe only interested in seeing mountain ranges? What about the Negev, the lowlands, and the coastal plain?

In fact, when he is shown the land (as recorded later on in Devarim 34:1-4), God shows him the Negev, the mountain ranges, and even the Mediterranean. Yet, in those psukim, Lebanon is not even mentioned!

There seems to be something deeper that 'geography' in both Moshe Rabeinu's request and in God's answer.

To answer these questions, we must note an interesting parallel between these psukim and similar psukim in Sefer Breishit.

A SIMILAR VIEW FOR AVRAHAM AVINU

Recall our discussion of the centrality of Bet El in Avraham Avinu's first journey to the Land of Israel (as discussed in our shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha).

There we explained how the climax of Avraham's original arrival in Canaan (from Aram) was his building of a **mizbeiach** in Bet El - where he called out in God's Name (see Breishit 12:1-8). Similarly, upon Avraham's return to Canaan from Egypt, he ascended once again to his **mizbeiach** in Bet El - to call out in the Name of God (see Breishit 13:1-4).

At that same time (and after Lot had left him), God appeared to Avraham once again in Bet El, and reiterated His promise that this Land will one day become the homeland of his offspring.

However, note the special preface that God adds to this promise at that time, and its similarity to our pasuk in Sefer Devarim:

"And God said to Avram after Lot had left him: **Lift up your eyes** and **SEE** from the place where you are - to the **north** and **south, east** and **west**, for this land that you see I will give to you and your offspring" (see Breishit 13:14-16).

Note how God tells Avraham to lift up his eyes and look in all **four** directions from Bet El, just as He later tells Moshe Rabeinu to look in all four directions from Har Nevo.

Of course, this parallel could simply be incidental, for this is usually the directions that one looks when he is on a high place. However, we find one additional instance where these four directions are mentioned, and once again in relation to Bet El.

THE FIRST 'BET ELOKIM'

Recall that when Yaakov Avinu was running away from Esav on his way to Aram, he stopped overnight at Bet El, at the same site where Avraham had built his mizbeiach.

There, God appeared to him in a dream, confirming that Yaakov would be the inheritor of His covenant with Avraham. In that blessing, note how we find once again all four directions:

"...And your offspring will [numerous] be like the dust of the earth, and you spread out to the **west** and **east, north** and **south**, and through you will be a blessing to all the nations on the earth" (see Breishit 28:10-15).

Here again we find all four directions, and in fact these three sources are the only times in Chumash where these 'four directions' are found. However, this source concerning Yaakov is most significant, for when he awakes from his dream Yaakov makes a special promise concerning this site.

"And Yaakov awoke in the morning and took the rock that was by his head and erected it as a monument and anointed it with oil. Then he named this spot **Bet El...** and he vowed that when he returns... this monument will become a **Bet- Elokim** [House for God]..."

(see 28:18-21).

These psukim establish a connection between this special site of Bet El and a House for God - a **Bet Elokim**. [In case you didn't notice, that's why it is called Bet El.]

This site was destined to house the "bet ha-mikdash" - that would become the symbol of the very purpose of God's choice of the Jewish nation, and a site where man will be able to focus on perfecting his connection [through prayer] to God.

VIRTUAL JERUSALEM

With this background, we can suggest an alternate reason for both Moshe's request and for God's response.

Surely, Moshe wants to see the land, but not simply as a tourist; rather Moshe wants to see the achievement of the ultimate goal for Am Yisrael, as reflected in Yaakov's dream at Bet El and Avraham's vision from Bet El. When Moshe requests to see 'ha-har ha-tov' - the **good mountain** (3:25), one could suggest that he wants to 'see' the Temple Mount [note 'tov' in Breishit 1:4,10,12 etc.], and when he requests to see **Ha-Levanon** - he may be hinting not only to that northern mountain range, but [as Chazal suggest] to the Temple that will one day be constructed from the wood of the cedars of Lebanon (see I Melachim 5:16-32, and Rashi on 3:25!).

In a similar manner, we can now understand God's response to Moshe. He instructs Moshe to climb to the highest mountain and to look out in all four directions, just as Avraham Avinu had done at the dawn of Jewish History. Moshe wishes to see the dream of God's promise to Avraham Avinu fulfilled, and God allows Moshe an experience that would reflect its fulfillment.

Moshe looks in all four directions for God has 'virtually' placed him in 'Bet-El' - the site of the Bet ha'Mikdash. He is reminding him of the vision that He showed Avraham Avinu.

With that vision, not only of the physical land of Israel - but more so of its spiritual purpose - Moshe can then proceed to charge Yehoshua, for he will lead Bnei Yisrael into the land (see Devarim 3:28), and it will become his mission to make this vision a reality.

Moshe's request is denied, but he is consoled - for God has shown him how to pass on his vision to the next generation.

SHABBAT NACHAMU - 5765

This week, our request that God allow us to keep Gush Katif was also denied. We prayed, but God said no. God didn't tell us precisely why, but surely He must have his reasons - and surely, we must strive to understand them.

To do so - requires vision. Hopefully, our heartbreaking loss will challenge us to climb a mountain - to take a refreshed look, not only of the physical land - but also its purpose; and to take a refreshed look at ourselves - not of how great we are, but at how great we need to be; and to pass that vision on to the next generation.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. See Rashi on Devarim 3:25. Note how our shiur attempts to explain the pshat of the drash that Rashi quotes!

See also Chizkuni on 3:25. How is his peirush different? How does he explain the connection between Levanon and the bet ha-mikdash (based on Yoma 39b!).

B. In your opinion, does Moshe also want to remain the leader of Bnei Yisrael, or does he just want to enter as [sort of a] 'rabbi emeritus', while allowing Yehoshua to lead the nation?

Which possibility does 3:28 support?

Relate your answer to Bamidbar 20:12 [& our conclusion in regard to this topic in our shiur on Parshat Chukat.]

Does God explain to Moshe why His answer is no?

If so, what is that answer? [Does it relate to 1:36?]

If not, can you explain why He doesn't?

C. Note the use of the 'shoresh' ayin.bet.reish. in both 3:25, 3:26 and 3:28. Does this shoresh have the same meaning in each of these psukim, or different meanings? Explain.

Now read Bamidbar 27:12-14 (see also 27:15-23).

In your opinion, is this the same story or a different one?

[How do these two accounts complement each other?

See Rashi & Chizkuni on 27:12.]

Now, note the name of the mountain that Moshe is instructed to ascend - 'Har Ha-avarim'. Note again the shoresh ayin.bet.reish!!

What is the 'real name' of this mountain - see Devarim 32:49!

Based on the above questions, why do you think that the Torah refers to it as Har Ha-avarim instead of Har Nevo?

Is there a geographical reason as well for this name?

See Ramban 27:12.

[Note also the use of ayin.bet.reish. in Bamidbar 27:6-11!

Note also the use of verb 'latet' - to give - both in 27:7 and 27:12! (cute?)]

Relate your answer to this question to the above shiur.