

JULY 24, 2010 13 Av 5770 Parshat Vaetchanan/Nachamu

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What to Pray For

It is a question that every religious person has been confronted with and confounded by. Even those of us who are not theologically inclined have struggled with this question: Why are my prayers not answered? After all, we do believe in the efficacy of prayer. Why, then, is it so often a frustrating experience?

Every rabbi (myself included) has found himself challenged by very sincere individuals who ask them to explain the point of prayers if they are so seldom answered. I especially remember one such challenge.

It was on a *motza'ei Shabbat* some years ago, when I was still with my former synagogue in Baltimore. A group of women would meet every week after Shabbat to recite *Tehillim* and pray for the sick in that community. Over the months, they had accumulated a long list of individuals who were seriously ill and for whose recovery they fervently prayed.

One week they asked me if I would join them, offer them some words of inspiration, and answer some of their questions. Of course, I complied, delivered a short homily, and opened the floor for questions. Although the question took a variety of forms, they were best expressed by the individual who said, "We cry our hearts out in prayer every week, and we feel compassion for every person on our list. But hardly anyone becomes cured, and names come off the list only when the person has died. So what is the point of prayer?"

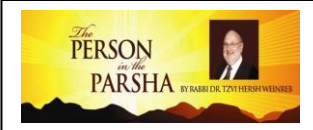
I do not remember my exact response, but I do remember that it was inadequate.

Later that week I received a hand-written note in my office mailbox. It began,

In a recent talk you said that many people complain to you about having said *Tehillim* for a friend who was ill, but that the prayers didn't help and the person died. They asked if you could explain the point of their prayers."

The woman who wrote the letter was a nurse in the intensive care unit of a local hospital. She obviously spoke from profound personal experience. She went on to say that the reason people find praying frustrating is because they expect a total cure, and that they need to realize that there is much more to pray for with regard to a seriously ill individual than his or her complete recovery.

Here are some of the things she suggested people pray for: that the sick person not suffer too much pain, anxiety, depression, or loneliness; that the sick person be treated gently and with dignity by the medical staff; that the veins of the sick person be easy to find for



intravenous injections; that the family have the strength to hold up under the strain and to not abandon the patient; that the correct decisions, medical and ethical, be taken by the family, patient, doctor, and rabbi.

"If you pray for all of the above for a sick person, you will find that many of your prayers will be answered."

Words of wisdom, for sure. And words that are especially timely in this week's Torah portion of *Va'etchanan*, which contains the story of Moses' prayer, and how that prayer was not heeded by the Almighty.

Moses asked that he be permitted to enter the Promised Land of Israel. His prayers were deep and numerous. Indeed, the sages suggest that he offered no less than 515 prayers. But, as Moses himself tells us, God did not regard his prayers. On the contrary; God told him not to bring the matter up again.

Were the prayers of Moses indeed not heard at all? If we pay careful attention to the text, as I hope you will this week, dear reader, we come to realize that God did respond with at least two pieces of good news for Moses. Number one, He granted him the ability to see the land. Not a total fulfillment of Moses' prayer, surely, but a gift nonetheless. And number two, and perhaps more importantly, He told him that his successor, Joshua, would lead the people into the land and would help them settle there. A leader who is assured of a competent and successful successor has surely had his prayers answered.

We have, then, an entirely new perspective on prayer. We must pray for a greater range of outcomes and not limit ourselves to asking for total success. We must be satisfied in our prayers for what the Lord has chosen for us. The outcomes may be modest, or even insufficient, from our mortal points of view, but they are substantial if we could but open our minds to them.

A wise man once said, "Be careful what you pray for, because you might just get it!" The truth of that humorous piece of advice is that we are ignorant as to what is good for us. We don't know what we should pray for. How consistent this message is with the lessons I learned from that scribbled note written by a wise congregant many years ago.

We must consider carefully what we pray for and expand our list of requests to cover the entire range of human needs. Only then we will find that it is not that God listens to prayers or ignores them. Rather, in His wisdom, He responds to them selectively. He says "no" to some of our entreaties, but He pronounces "yes" resoundingly to a great deal of what we ask for.

Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
Executive Director, Emeritus,
National Orthodox Union

UPCOMING EVENTS @ OU WEST COAST

October 22-24

Come join us for an
OU Weekend in La Jolla, CA

Sheraton Hotel--La Jolla
Meals at Adat Yeshurun

\$350 per/couple

Info: EstherR@ou.org

Programs in the works:

Attorney Continuing Education

Medical Ethics Conference

Kallah Class Part II

Parenting Workshop

Israel Advocacy Event

Trustees Event

Annual Torah Convention

THURS, DEC 23 --

SUN, DEC 26, 2010

ISRAEL'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD

Israeli aid team first to reach the Congo

Once again, Israel is first on the post-disaster scene, as its specialists in burn treatment and plastic surgery rush to the aid of the Congolese following the recent tragic fire.

A cancer turn-off

Israeli researchers believe that a biological 'switch' found in plants may hold the secret for a new cancer treatment for humans.

Smoking - a habit not an addiction

Smoking is a habit, not an addiction according to new research from Israel.

Antioxidants improve cardiovascular health, say researchers

Long-term use of antioxidant supplements may provide health benefits for people with heart disease, according to a new study by Israeli scientists.

www.israel21c.org

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OU SYNAGOGUES AROUND THE REGION

Beverly Hills: Cong. Beth Jacob (310) 278-1911

- **Shabbat JUL 24:** Board Installation lunch w/Rabbi Kenneth Brander, RSVP
- **WEDS JULY 28, 7pm:** Former head of CIA Ambassador R. James Woolsey – "Spies, Energy and the New World of the 21st Century...."

Beverly Hills: Young Israel-North BH: (310) 276-7650 info@YINBH.org

- **Shabbat JULY 31:** Guest Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz, Jews4Judaism
 - **Shabbat AUG 14:** Guest Ofir Fisher, of The OR Movement
 - **Shabbat AUG 21:** Guest Rabbi Baruch Sufirin, Harkham-Hillel Academy
 - **Shabbat AUG 28:** Guest Rabbi Zvi Schindel, Maimonides Academy faculty
- Calabasas Shul: (818) 591-7485

Canada-Calgary: House of Jacob-Mikveh Israel (403) 259-3230

Canada-Edmonton: Beth Israel (780) 488-2840

Canada-Vancouver: Schara Tzedek (604) 736-7607

Denver, CO : BMH-BJ Cong (303) 388-4203

- **SUNS JUL 25 & AUG 1:** Rebuilding & renovating the Shul Sukkah
- Denver, CO: EDOS (303) 322-7943

Irvine, CA: Beth Jacob (949) 786-5230

LA: Adas Torah (310) 203-9659 www.adastorah.com

LA: Aish Hatorah (310) 278-8672 x 305 or tsullivan@aishla.com

LA: B'nai David-Judea (310)-276-9269 or amram@bnaidavid.com

LA: Etz Jacob (323) 938-2619

LA: Mogen David Cong. (310) 556-5609

- **SUN JULY 25, 6pm:** Viewing of the autobiographical memoir, "Dying to Live" by Ben Mittleman, Discussion and Q&A (following movie) with Rabbi Elias & Mr. Mittleman, subject, star, director, producer. *RSVP*

LA: Young Israel of Century City: (310) 273-6954

- **TUES JULY 27, 7:30pm:** "Is Materialism Corrupting the Soul of America?" Moderated by Rabbi Muskin w/Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, Eric Garcetti, Danielle Berrin, Rabbi Naomi Levy.

LA: Young Israel of Hancock Park: (323) 931-4030

LA: Yeshiva of LA (YOLA) 310-203-3197 yeshivarabbi@juno.com

MINCHA/MAARIV: SUN-THURS, 15 minutes before Shkiah;
LATE MAARIV: SUN-THUR 10pm. M-TH am/pm: adults/students chavrusas

Laquna Woods, CA: Beth Torah (949) 587-1967 (*a retirement community*)

La Jolla: Adat Yeshurun (858) 535-1196

• **OCT 22-24: OU Shabbaton in La Jolla.** Info EstherR@ou.org

Las Vegas, NV: Shaarei Tefila (702) 384-3565 (Mikva 384-3317)

- **SUN NOV 7:** Annual Gala

Oakland, CA: Beth Jacob (510) 482-1147

Palm Springs, CA: The Desert Synagogue (760) 327-4848

Palo Alto, CA: Emek Beracha (650) 857-1800 (Mikva 493-5555)

Phoenix, AZ: Beth Joseph (602) 277-8858

Portland, OR: Kesser Israel (503) 222-1239

- **SUN JULY 25, 12-5pm:** Sunday at the Schleiffer Farm. Family fun.
- **SUN AUG 1, 5-7:30pm:** Community BBQ.

Sacramento, CA: Keneset Israel Torah Center (916) 481-1159

San Diego, CA: Cong. Beth Jacob (619) 287-9890

San Diego, CA: Kehillat Ahavat Yisrael-KAY (858) 633-0181

San Francisco, CA: Adath Israel (415) 564-5665

Seattle: Bikur Cholim Machzikay Hadath (206) 721-0970

- **SUN AUG 15, 12-3pm:** Annual BBQ. *Food-Fun-Friends-Attractions-Fair!*
Contact info: Julie@bcmhseattle.org

Seattle: Ezra Bessaroth (206) 722-5500

Seattle: Sephardic Bikur Holim (206) 723-3028

Valley Village, CA: Shaarey Zedek Cong. (818) 763-0560

Venice, Pacific Jewish Center-The Shul on the Beach:(310)392-8749

Washington-Mercer Island: Shevet Achim (206) 275-1539

Woodland Hills: Beit HaMidrash (818) 999-2059 (5850 Fallbrook Ave.)

- **SUNS @ 8:30am:** following 8am minyan-Shiur-Baba Kama w/Rabbi Yaakov Rechiniz

West LA: Westwood Kehilla (310) 441-5288x2 director@kehilla.org

- **AUG 3-10:** Group trip to the Canadian Rockies. Info at 310- 927-1853 or asherbrander@gmail.com

THIS Sunday, July 25, 9:30am

at Beth Jacob Congregation-BH

Community Kollel Yom Rishon

with

Rabbi Kenneth Brander,

The David Mitzner Dean of YU's Center for the Jewish future

Chavruta learning followed by a shiur by Rabbi Brander on
**"Is All Fair in Love and War? Just and Unjust Wars Through
the Prism of Jewish and Secular Thought"**

For men and women

Sponsored by Beth Jacob Cong., Bnai David-Judea,
Young Israel of Century City and the YU Summer Kollel

NCSY-JSU-YACHAD ANNOUNCEMENTS/EVENTS



Office contact: 310-229-9000 x 209 www.westcoastncsy.com

Want to help run a chesed project? call Solly at 310-557-6582

For more info on CITY NCSY or JSU call Solly 310-557-6582

CITY NCSY: Call Solly @ 310-557-6582 or Shess@westcoastncsy.com

Latte&Learning-is going strong!**-TUEs 7:30pm:**@CB&T-233 S. Beverly Dr.

with **Rabbi Josh Horwitz**

DNL is on break for the summer - have a great summer!

JR. NCSY: (6-8 grade) Call Josh 310-694-2976 or ncsyjosh@gmail.com

... **NCSY Bar/Bat Mitzvah** tutoring available. *Talmud Torah* classes.

***Jr. NCSY Dodger Baseball Event:** call Josh for details 310-694-2976

YACHAD: Call Perri @323-228-4191.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

► THE ALLIANCE FOR JERUSALEM: SUN JULY 25 7:30PM

At Stephen S. Wise Temple-15500 Stephen S. Wise Dr. LA 90077

YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND

Consul General Jacob Dayan will introduce Representatives of the
'Atalef'-Israeli Naval Special Forces (*equivalent to U.S. Navy SEALs*)
vets will discuss their personal real-life experiences from the field,
including the recent flotilla activity.

This is your opportunity to hear first hand from those in the field who must
fight Israel's defensive war against those who attack while under a white
flag. They will also describe Israel's practice of purity of arms (moral
conduct in warfare).

Major (Res.) Yair Schindel, MD, MBA, IDF special forces combat medical
officer and its Chief Medical Officer for a total of five years, will head the
team. He participated in numerous highly dangerous special ops and was
awarded the Navy's highest decoration for valor in saving the life of a
comrade while under fire.

*Net proceeds of the \$10 donation will go to the Atalef Foundation in
support of the Israeli Navy Seals.*

RSVP: Alliance For Jerusalem at icnexus.info@gmail.com

4629 Van Nuys Blvd., #E, Sherman Oaks, Ca 91403 818 390-7172

►► MON JULY 26, 10:30am-12:15pm: NEFESH B'NEFESH invites
you to bid farewell to the Olim embarking on our **FIRST Group Aliyah
Flight from the WEST COAST** at Tom Bradley International Terminal-
LAX-EI AI ticket counter.

RSVP/Info: 201-291-1060 or deena@nbn.org.il

► SUN AUG 22, 4pm THE CANTORS-*Marcus Feldman; Sam Cohen;*
and Nati Baram, with a program of songs in Yiddish, Hebrew & Italian to
welcome the 5771. Plummer Park Fiesta Hall-7377 Santa Monica Blvd, WH
90046-Tickets: \$20. At the door: \$25. Sr/Child: \$15. RSVP: 323.868.2623.

► ONGOING: OU'S WOMEN'S TORAH NETWORK (WTN)

Classes with Geri Wiener—Sessions will continue after the summer

→ **MONS-Valley (private home):** → **WEDS-City (OU Hqtrts):**

► West Coast NCSY presents Torah High, a revolutionary after school
Jewish learning program for Public School teens, grades 9-12. Torah High
classes will provide meaningful and engaging Jewish learning experiences
for teens, foster identification with and support of Israel, strengthen positive
Jewish identity, and develop Jewish literacy. *Please call Solly Hess at*
310-557-6582.

B'NEI AKIVA OF LA ANNOUNCEMENTS

→ **Office:** 310-248-2450 bneiakivaLA@gmail.com

→ **Upcoming Events:** *Have a great Summer!*

