

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Va'etchanan Prayer Styles

This essay will explore the various types of prayer inspired by the verse in this week's parsha of "I (Moses) supplicated (vaeschanan) before Hashem..." (Deuteronomy 3:23). The Midrash (Rabbah and Yalkut Shimoni) on this verse states that there are thirteen types of prayers which people can utilize when praying to Hashem, G-d. I would like to briefly explain them and then answer a noteworthy question. Considering all of his choices, what is the reason that Moses begged Hashem to allow him to enter Israel specifically utilizing the tactic of וְאֶתְחַנֵּן supplication? The name of the parsha is in honor of that prayer- Vaeschanan. (Anyone wishing to get a fuller understanding of any of these beautiful prayer-styles is referred to the Hebrew book She'arim B'Tefillah by Rabbi Shimshon Pincus zt"l which is the basis for the following list of explanations.)

Various Tactics

The thirteen types are found throughout Tanach and are in no specific order. Different ones are appreciated and utilized by different people, with varied situations and emotions. Many of them can be used together as well. As one reads through the outline, one will see how these thirteen general categories cover all types of prayers and express many deep emotional chords of prayer in one's heart. Here they are in a nutshell:

- 1 - בִּצְוֹר bitzor: To call to Hashem when in need.
- 2 - שְׂאָוֶה shaavah: A hysterical yet verbally expressed cry to Hashem.
- 3 - זְאָוֶה zaavah: A hysterical cry to Hashem without words.
- 4 - נְאָוֶה naavah: A feeling of pain transformed into a vehicle to cry to Hashem.
- 5 - רִינָה rinah: Happiness and praise that we have Hashem to call to!
- 6 - פִּגְיָה pigiyah: A strong yet respectful demanding of one's needs.
- 7 - רִיָּה riyah: A full recognition that Hashem is listening to me.
- 8 - נִפּוּל nipul: A cognizance that only Hashem can help me!
- 9 - פִּלּוּל pilul: A moment of true accounting and bond with Hashem.
- 10 - תַּחֲנוּנִים tachnunim: A reliance only on Hashem's mercy and not on personal merit.



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continued ...

11 - חִלּוּי chiloy: An emotional plea reminding Hashem of the merits of our forefathers.

12 - אִמִּידָה amidah: To wholeheartedly accept to follow whatever Hashem's will dictates.

13 - תְּנִיטּוּר t'ni'tur: To daven again and never give up!

This list is by no means a complete explanation, but I hope that it provided a general picture or reminder for those already familiar with these ever-beautiful feelings and expressions.

Question

What remains is the need for an explanation as to why Moses chose type ten (תַּחֲנוּנִים) as his mode of prayer to gain entrance into Israel. Additionally, why did the Midrash wait to bring down these thirteen categories only now, these words of prayer appear numerous times before the word אֲנִי־אָמַר which is found only at the end of the Torah?! I believe that one answer explains it all!

Answer

Moses was a great man who certainly had many merits of his own. Yet, when he came before Hashem to plead for mercy, he never mentioned his own merits! Rather, he begged Hashem to have mercy upon him as a free gift of kindness which Hashem gives to those in need! This is the greatness and modesty of Moses!

The Midrash waited for this verse to lay out all of the prayer options in order to stress that Moshe had many choices. He could have focused on his pain or made strong demands. But he didn't! Why did he choose the expression that he used? Because of his great humility. (This explanation is almost explicit in the words of the Midrash.) This is the foundation of all prayer, to stand before Hashem in humility. May Hashem answer all of our prayers for the best!

Shabbat Shalom.

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