

# The Secret to the Success of the Jewish People

*Parashat Va'etchanan*



## Parashat Va'etchanan

This Shabbat we learn about Parashat Va'etchanan. Parashat Va'etchanan is a Torah portion that is very rich in content. It talks about a wide range of topics centered on the Ten Commandments and the Shema Yisrael prayer. This is a very central and profound parasha.

Also, this week is Shabbat Nachamu, the Shabbat after Tisha B'Av. In it, we read the haftara, the weekly reading from the prophets, from Isaiah chapter 40. In this reading, the prophet informs us, as a people, that we have paid double for our sins and it is now time for comfort:

*“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” – Isaiah 40:1,2 [NIV]*

## The Plea of Moses

I would like to begin with the first word of the parasha in Hebrew – “va’etchanan,” which means “I pleaded”:

*“At that time I pleaded with the Lord: ‘Sovereign Lord, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do? Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan—that fine hill country and Lebanon.’” – Deuteronomy 3:23-25 [NIV]*

Who was pleading? It was Moses, the great, honorable, and beloved prophet, the same man who spoke to God face to face. That very same prophet succeeded in saving the people of Israel from destruction on numerous occasions when the people sinned, and God sought to destroy them. During these events, Moses would speak with God and change the severity of the decree.

What was happening here at the beginning of the reading? Moses was pleading, he wanted to see the Land of Israel, however, God’s answer was a firm “no.”

## The Difficulty of Accepting the Answer “No”

It’s hard for us to accept the answer “no,” especially today. We live in a generation in which we think we deserve everything. No matter what, if we make an effort and work hard enough, we can receive all of our heart’s desires.

This is a tremendous lesson for me. All of us, myself included, should be prepared to accept the answer “no” from God. For instance, no to healing, to success, to our various requests and pleas. It is not pleasant, but in our prayer, there must be a willingness to accept the refusal of God.

We can and should continue to plead for the members of our community, our family, our health, but in the end, our prayer should be, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” We will continue to serve God in sickness

and in health. We are vessels in the hands of God. We are faithful servants, instruments of blessing, vessels of honor in the hands of God.

If God wants us to continue to serve Him in sickness, so be it; we will serve Him to the best of our ability.

## **The Dangers of Forgetting God**

Moses' many pleas were not enough, he begged to enter, touch, and taste the Land of Promise, but God answered negatively. The same person who gave his life to the people of Israel, whose prayers for the common good had been accepted time after time, was now rejected. Despite this, Moses accepted this answer humbly.

We have much to learn from this week's parasha.

Moses continued his speech, speaking of wealth, success, fruit, peace, and strength. Here is where the danger lies. Moses said that the people were to enter into the Land of Promise, a land that is good, but he warned against the danger of forgetting God, the source of abundance.

When I talked about it at home, with my wife, Lydia, she raised the possibility that as believers, on a global scale, we have forgotten our source of abundance, we take God's blessings for granted. What's more is that we take life for granted, we have lost our first love and our zeal for God as well as our uniqueness as believers.

Perhaps it's time to wake up and remember that everything comes from above. Furthermore, God wants more of our lives, more of our gratitude and appreciation, of our actions, more of our caring for each other. God wants more of our love.

## **The Jews' Secret to Success**

Moses continued and touched on another interesting and profound point. Our wisdom, and our wisdom as Jews.

More and more people are asking in the world, "What is the secret of the Jews? Why and how do they succeed?"

We try to analyze all the reasons for our knowledge, such as our education, languages, mathematics, money management, music, and a thousand different studies that try to put our finger on our best-kept secret as Jews.

Our Torah portion cracks open this secret and reveals it to everyone:

*“See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’” – Deuteronomy 4:5,6 [NIV]*

The secret of wisdom is the Word of God, the Bible.

## **God is the Source of Our Prosperity**

As a people and as human beings, if we keep and obey the laws, the decrees, and the commandments of God, we will succeed, we will be blessed, and all that we do will succeed:

*“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.” – Psalms 1:1-3 [NIV]*

The source of the success, inspiration, and wisdom is the knowledge of God and His Word.

When I was in the army for three years, I had many ups and downs, I was in the paratroopers, and the training and activity were very intensive.

During times when I read the Bible and prayed regularly, I felt the blessing and protection of God on me in a tangible way, “Whatever he does shall

prosper.” I would be sitting down, idling, and by chance see that there was some small task that needed to be done. I would get up and do it, and right then the commander would pass by and praise me. I helped out for a moment, and I was caught at the very best moment. All I did, all the exercises, activities, and operations, were a success.

It also worked the other way around. There were times when nothing worked out. I would work hard, and for a moment sit down to rest – and at that precise moment the commander would pass by and ask me why I was sitting, why I was idle. Whatever I did, there was no blessing, and no good came out of it.

Then after a while, I would think – wait, I stopped reading and praying regularly, here lies the problem. I went back to reading, I returned to God, and as you can guess – back to the blessing.

## **The Lord Chooses the Weak and Powerless**

In the army, it is very common that a Messianic Jew is an outstanding soldier, what is his secret? The unequivocal answer is: God, faith, and God’s Word. It’s not me, it’s God living inside of me.

The New Testament teaches us that God actually chooses the weak and the fools. Why? That it will be clear that it is not from our own ability or strength. Indeed, God stands out in the small and weak people, surrounded by 100 million enemies that could not be subdued by a large and powerful army 50 times the size of its own. It is clear beyond any shadow of a doubt – there is a God and He protects us.

*“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.’” – 1 Corinthians 1:27-31 [NIV]*

God did not choose this people, because they were the most powerful, or the most intelligent, or the most successful.

God chose this people because He swore to our forefathers that He would do so. Our God is a faithful God and He does this out of love. This week's parasha ends with precisely this idea.

## Don't Abandon the Spring of Living Waters

*“The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.” – Deuteronomy 7:7-9 [NIV]*

We are the least and the weakest of all peoples. This wisdom is not our own, but it is God who lives within us.

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...” – Proverbs 9:10a [NIV]*

Moses asked the people of Israel not to abandon the spring of living waters, not to leave God's instruction (the Torah), which leads to life.

The heart of this instruction is the Ten Commandments, and in our parasha Moses repeats them. The first time the Ten Commandments were spoken was in Parashat Yitro, in the Book of Exodus, and once more they are repeated in this week's portion, in the beginning of Deuteronomy.

*“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” – Deuteronomy 5:6,7 [NIV]*

Our constitution opens with a declaration of human liberty, who is God?

He defeated slavery and enslavement and gave us liberty.

## **Yeshua is Our Redeemer**

I think that this is the heart of faith in Yeshua the Messiah. Yeshua bought us by His blood, He took the curse of sin upon Himself.

A redeemer is someone who pays the debt of someone else, and thereby extricates him from the situation he is in. The redeemer does not forcibly break the prisoner out of prison in order to release him. He pays the debt of the redeemed until the last cent.

In our case it is our debt to God Himself.

“For the wages of sin is death,” I will call sin by another name: the lack of observance of God’s commandments, when we do not put God at the center of our lives, and when we as a people take advantage of the weak amongst us. For example, we mistreat the foreign workers and the elderly, and when we live in an immoral way, when we do not insist on loving our neighbor as ourselves. All of us are in “overdraft” – we are all guilty.

What Yeshua did and continues to do on my behalf, is redeem me from the punishment I deserve, from a commandment that I did not obey, and from my noncompliance.

Who is Yeshua? He defeated slavery and enslavement and gave us liberty.

Yeshua takes us out from slavery to a new beginning. We are born again and given a second chance to do and to keep the will of God. Yeshua gives us the opportunity to be better, more caring, and loving people.

## **The Word of God Must be Passed Down to Our Children**

I would like to end this parasha with perhaps the most well-known sentence in the Hebrew Bible, “Shema Yisrael.” Shema Yisrael became the main tenet of the Jewish people throughout the generations. It appears in our parasha, starting with Deuteronomy 6:4.

One of the central instructions of the Shema is the direction to teach and pass down the Word of God to the children, to have them memorize God’s

Word, and to teach them to place the commandments within their hearts.

Again and again Moses' words convince us, our sons, and our son's sons, to learn to memorize, and to keep in mind the laws and commandments of God. The Shema ends with a slightly strange phrase:

*“Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” – Deuteronomy 6:8,9 [NIV]*

## Dedicating Your Entire Being and Household to Serving God

In Judaism there is the outward mark of the tefillin. This is a very strange external sign, there is nothing more noticeable than a black leather box on the forehead.

This box is a statement, it is the same statement that is seen in many houses in the world, in which a verse from the end of the Book of Joshua is framed:

*“But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” – Joshua 24:15b [NIV]*

I love to seeing this verse, it encourages the members of the house and reminds them that in this house, we serve God.

By that same token, this box on the forehead must declare, “We are holy and consecrated to God.” In Judaism we wear tefillin on a daily basis, and this reminds us that our thoughts throughout the day must be focused on God. Our focus must be positive, for God is in power, “His will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

The same goes for the works of our hands, as seen with the tefillin. Today, we will do good deeds, these hands will be used for blessing, they will serve God. Also, the doorframes of our houses and gates, our houses are consecrated to God. In this house there will be the fear of God, God's Word will be studied and discussed. When we enter into a room, or a house, and we see the mezuzah, we are reminded that this house, this room, these hands, and this head are dedicated to God.

Our thoughts, actions, and dwellings are marked with the word “Shema,” the tefillin and the mezuzah. We will serve God faithfully.

Let us have a Shabbat of peace, blessing, and comfort, especially on this Shabbat, Shabbat Nachamu. Let us, our people, families, and our communities, receive consolation and true comfort from God.

---

# **The Teachings of Messiah Yeshua *in a Jewish Context***

**LEARN MORE AT:**



**NETIVYAH.ORG**