

# KNOCKIN' ON HEAVEN'S DOOR

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Being able to enter into the Land of Israel and dwell there permanently is not an easy achievement. It is not easy today to integrate one's self into modern-day Israel, even if somehow one accomplishes "making aliyah." There is obviously a wealth of factors that are factored into one's decision and actions regarding moving to Israel. But the Torah teaches us that coming to Israel is dependent upon heavenly approval as well. There have been many great, brave, pious, stoutly determined Jews who have attempted to arrive in the Land of Israel and failed in that attempt. In the past centuries, some of the greatest leaders of the Jewish people, such as Rabbi Elijah of Vilna (the Gaon of Vilna), Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaCohen Kagan of Radin (the Chofetz Chaim) and Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv) among others, attempted to leave their Eastern European exile and move to the Land of Israel and failed to realize their goal. Heaven seemingly always intervened to deny them the realization of this life-long, fiercely-held dream. And Heaven always has its own inscrutable calculations and It also has the last word on the matter. This is certainly obvious from the narrative that appears in the Torah reading of Chukat.

Moshe is denied entry into the Land of Israel by God. His striking the rock at Meriva instead of speaking to it as God had instructed him is the proximate cause for his punishment of being excluded from leading the People into the Land of Israel. How this apparently severe punishment fits the transgression of Moshe, is the subject of much discussion among the commentators to the Torah. But, however we will resolve this matter of crime and punishment, transgressions and retribution, the basic fact of the Torah remains - Moshe was prevented by Heaven from realizing his goal of entering the Land of Israel. And Moshe's tragic disappointment led to dramatic consequences for all of Jewish and world history. Midrash teaches us that if Moshe, instead of Yehoshua, had led the people of Israel into the Land of Israel, the Jewish people would never have been exiled from the Holy Land. Another, more deadly and dreaded heavenly punishment would have then been devised to punish Israel for its sins. And, according to this line of interpretation, this fact was also taken into consideration in the heavenly decision to bar Moshe from entering the Land of Israel. Thus, it is not only the merits of Moshe that decided the issue but other variables, unconnected to his direct behavior, also played a role in the sad result. Probably the same type of insight and logic can be applied to the failures of other great Jews to achieve their dream of returning personally to Zion and Jerusalem. Heaven, from its eternal point of vantage, intervened to thwart their hopes, but perhaps that was somehow for the benefit of the people and Land of Israel in the long run.

Man proposes but God disposes. Yet man must always continue to propose and attempt. If Heaven decrees otherwise, that in no way frees us from our responsibilities to struggle to achieve the dream of the Jewish ages - Zion and Jerusalem rebuilt, secure, faithful and strong, and teeming with Jews. It is therefore mysterious, if not downright disappointing, that millions of Jews have not attempted to avail themselves of the opportunity to pursue their dream of entering the Land of Israel in a more meaningful, concrete, practical fashion. Every day when I walk in the streets of Jerusalem, I remind myself that I am doing what the great Moshe was forbidden from doing - living in the Land of Israel. Why God has allowed me, and millions of my fellow-Jews to enjoy what Moshe could not, is beyond me. But I thank Him daily for so doing.

Shabbat Shalom.  
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