[**The Ox in the Field – Parshat Va'etkhanan**](http://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-ox-in-the-field-parshat-vaetkhanan)

A disciple of Rabbi Yitzhak Meir of Ger came to the *rebbe*with a complaint: “I’ve been trying for twenty years, and still I don’t feel like I’m getting anywhere! If a craftsman practiced their craft for twenty years, they would either be much better at their craft, or at the very least they would be able to do it much more quickly. But with me, I’ve been praying and praying, and I don’t feel any closer than when I began.”

“It is taught in Elijah’s name,” replied the *rebbe,*“that a person should take Torah upon themselves as an ox takes the yoke. You see, the ox leaves its stall in the morning, goes to the field, plows, and his led back home. This happens day after day. Nothing changes with regard to the ox, but the ploughed field bears the harvest.”

In the course of our *avodah*(spiritual practice), there can be times of tremendous transformation, but there can also be times of plateau, times when it seems we are plugging away without much result. At such times, it is good to express any dissatisfaction we may have through prayer, just like Moses pleaded with the Divine:

וָאֶתְחַנַּ֖ן אֶל־יְהוָ֑ה בָּעֵ֥ת הַהִ֖וא לֵאמֹֽר׃
*I pleaded with the Divine at that time, speaking…*

Moses is pleading with *Hashem*to let him enter the “land.” Like the *hassid*who complained to his *rebbe,*Moses is saying, “I’ve been leading this people toward the land for forty years – please let me at least enter along with them!”

The “land” is a metaphor – in relation to our spiritual path, it represents the fruit of the practice – that sense of coming home into the Oneness, coming home into the present. When we feel the angst of separateness, when we feel like an ox that goes on day after day with the same old routine, don’t hold back – cry out in prayer! *Va’etkhanan!*

But then listen for the Divine response:

 רַב־לָ֔ךְ אַל־תּ֗וֹסֶף דַּבֵּ֥ר אֵלַ֛י ע֖וֹד בַּדָּבָ֥ר הַזֶּֽה׃
*“Too much of you! Do not increase your words to me about this thing!”*

That separate self-sense, the “me” that thinks and speaks and acts, is the “ox.” The truth is, the ox will always be an ox. At some point, we need to give up on all this “me” – *Rav lakh! Too much of you! –*and discover the aspect of our being that is silence – *Al tosef daber! Do not increase your words!*

In that silence we can discover the other aspect of our being – the deep, vast, boundless “field.”

This is not to deny or devalue the “ox” in any way; we need the ox. We need to organize our lives and set aside time for practice. But just as the ox cannot become the field, just as Moses cannot enter the land but must die outside the land, so too we must let go of this self-ness and recognize the aspect of ourselves that is beyond the ox. The truth is, on the deepest level, *we already are the field.*

עֲלֵ֣ה רֹ֣אשׁ הַפִּסְגָּ֗ה וְשָׂ֥א עֵינֶ֛יךָ
*“Ascend to the top of the cliff and raise up your eyes…”*

Moses climbs up the cliff and sees the “land” from afar, and there he dies. Similarly, we can understand the goal with our minds, but that is only a “seeing from afar.” To truly enter the “land,” we must discover what is beyond the ox-self. *Alei rosh – elevate the head –*recognize that beneath all the content, you are simple awareness, totally transcendent of your thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

How do you do that?

*V’sa einekha – raise up your eyes –*“see” whatever is arising in your awareness, right now; be the transcendent space within which this moment unfolds. In this way, prayer leads to silence, and you can make that shift from being the “ox” to being the “field” – the vast field of silent Presence, beneath the thoughts, beneath the words.

A rabbi once asked Menachem Mendel of Vorki, “Where did you learn the art of silence?” Menachem Mendel was about to respond, but then he changed his mind and said nothing...

***More on Parshat***[**Va'etkhanan**](https://4246290-338316515408691068.preview.editmysite.com/editor/main.php)***...***

[**A Little Less Salt – Parshat Ve'etkhanan**](http://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/a-little-less-salt-parshat-veetkhanan)

There's an old episode of All in the Family where Gloria is cooking something in the kitchen. "Ma, can you taste this and let me know if it needs anything?"

"Sure Gloria," says Edith. She takes a bite, contemplates the flavor a bit and says, "I think it needs... a little less salt!"

Salt is absolutely necessary, but you don't want too much. And just like salt, our thinking is something we can't do without, but most of us have way too much of it. Thinking is so compulsive that we have no idea what life would feel like with less thinking and more Presence. But let your mind relax, and you can realize: the present moment is spacious, beautiful and alive with magic. And though there are certainly disturbing a traumatic things that can and do happen, it's mostly the movement of our minds that creates all our tension, fear, and stress.

Of course, we need to think in order to decide, to know how to proceed. But when the thinking has accomplished its goal, then we can let it go and simply be, even as we act. Our beingness can be an offering, an act of love that shines through our actions, once the mind relaxes.

As the old parable goes: once you take the boat across the river, you don't have to drag the boat around with you. Let it go. Use the mind to cross the "river" of your next decision, but then let your thoughts go and move into the present.

Two rabbis were traveling on foot together, a younger and a senior, and they came to a shallow river. They took off their shoes and began to wade across, when a young woman called to them. "I need help getting across please!"

The senior rabbi picked her up and carried her across on his back.

When they reached the other side, the woman thanked them and went her way. As the two rabbis walked together in silence for an hour or so, the younger became withdrawn and tense. Finally, the younger one could no longer restrain himself: "How could you have done that! The halakhah clearly forbids touching a young woman, let alone putting her on your back!"

"Look at you," replied the senior. "I only carried her across the river, but you are still carrying her!"

In this week's reading, Moses speaks to the Israelites as they too are about to cross a river: "Va'etkhanan el Hashem – I implored the Divine... please let me cross this river Jordan and see the good land!"

But Moses was not allowed to cross; he had to die before the Israelites that he had led for forty years could cross over without him.

Have you ever worked hard for something you really wanted, but once you achieved it, you didn't feel the sense of achievement you thought you would because YOU were not the same person anymore?

The mind thinks, figures out, navigates, decides. If you want to cross over into the promised land, if you want the inner freedom that is your nature and birthright, you must decide; you must commit to it. You need your mind for that. But to truly achieve the Goal, you have to then let "Moses" die, so to speak, and discover the deeper "You" beneath your thoughts.

[**No More "Rather-ing"! Parshat Va'etkhanan**](http://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/no-more-rather-ing-parshat-vaetkhanan)

 ***“Va’etkhanan el Hashem ba’eit hahi- I implored Hashem at that time…”***

This *parsha* opens with Moses imploring God to enter the Promised Land,*ba’eit hahi – At that other time, I implored –*at *that* time, and not at *this*time.
​
I just got back yesterday from a two-week trip with my family to Italy. I am blessed to have such amazing parents-in-laws who, *ba’eit hazeh,* at this time, can choose however they want to spend *their*time, and they chose to take our whole *mishpakha* on vacation with them for their fiftieth anniversary.

At one point in Rome, we had split up into two different cabs, and I was in a cab alone with Lisa’s father, who we call Poppi Normy. Poppi said to me *ba’eit hahi,* at that time, “So, Brian – are you enjoying yourself or would you rather be at some ashram in India?”

I replied, “Well, I don’t really put energy into rather-ing things.” He was silent for a moment, and then said, “I get that. That’s good. I’m going to eliminate ‘rather’ from my vocabulary.” And then I said, “I’ll use this story in my next drash.”

So, what does it mean to not “rather” something?

It doesn’t mean that you can’t make good judgements. It doesn’t mean that you don’t take yourself out of an undesirable situation, or that you don’t help to make things better for yourself or others, it just means that whatever your experience is, in whatever situation you find yourself in, you don’t put mental and emotional energy into wishing things were different. You first of all accept the moment as it is, and then do whatever you do from this place of openness and surrender.

If you’re familiar with Musar, the Jewish practice of cultivating character traits, you might recognize “not-rather-ing” as Equanimity, known as *menukhat hanefesh*or *shivyon nefesh,*but it’s important to understand that this is not merely a character trait; it’s not something that you add on to your personality, but rather it’s a quality of Presence – a quality inherent within your field of awareness that is underneath your personality, underneath your thoughts, underneath your feelings. And while your thoughts and feelings are always flowing and changing, awareness is the background against which your thoughts and feelings are happening.

So, when you shift from feeling that “I am this personality, I am these thoughts and feelings,” into knowing yourself as the field of Presence within which your thoughts and feelings are happening, then Equanimity is very natural, because awareness itself is never preferring one thing over another thing; it’s simply open to whatever there is to perceive in the present moment – that’s why it’s called “Presence.”

So when Moshe says, *“Va’etkhanan el Hashem ba’eit hahi- I implored Hashem at that time,”*it’s saying, “I implored that I should be at some other time, at a time other than this moment. I don’t want to be here, I want to get to the Promised Land.

But God says, no –*“Alei rosh hapisgah- ascend to the top of the cliff- v’sa einekha- and raise up your eyes…”*Now the expression for *“ascend to the top of the cliff”*begins, *“Alei rosh,”*which literally means,*“Raise up the head.”*Meaning, get out of your head. Don’t be so identified with your own opinions, with your emotional reactions and so on. How do you do that? *“v’sa einekha- and raise up your eyes,”* meaning, instead of putting energy into judging, into “rather-ing,” simply see what’s happening in this moment. Be the witnessing Presence within which your present experience is unfolding.

On this *Shabbat Va’etkhanan,* the Sabbath of Imploring, may our prayer lead us to deeper connection with Hashem Who is constantly incarnating as the fullness of this moment,*ba’eit hazeh* – in this moment!

Good Shabbos!

[**The Acceptance of Rejection- Parshat Va'etkhanan**](http://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-acceptance-of-rejection-parshat-vaetkhanan)

When I was in the fifth grade I went to a summer camp called, “Le Camp.” It was a day camp, so every day I was schlepped back and forth by my parents- except for one day.  Once per summer, we had a sleepover. The sleepover evening would begin with a dance in the barn. Later, we slept in our sleeping bags out in a huge field.

​I was at the age when girls were first becoming interesting. During the dance part, there was a girl I was dancing with for most of the night. I guess I got it in my head that this girl liked me, and during the sleeping-bags-in-the-field part, I kept trying to sneak out of the “boys area” and into the “girls area” so I could go see her.

At some point a counselor caught me. “Brian, stop bothering the girls!”

“No you don’t understand,” I pleaded *(etkhanan)*, “they *want*me to be here!” after which that girl and several of her friends cried out, “NO WE DON’T!”

Rejection!

Sometimes we think we are wanted, but we are not. That’s just the truth. The person who thinks he’s wanted despite all protestations is an egomaniac. Kids can be like egomaniacs sometimes, and at some point, the delusion is toppled: “No, you really are annoying the hell out of me and I want you to STOP!”

But these kinds of hurtful childhood experiences can also create another kind of misperception into adulthood: it can create a self-image that you have *nothing* to offer, that people don’t need or want you.

Recently I was in a situation where I wanted to help someone, but I wasn’t being asked for help. In my post “LeCamp” psychology, I didn’t offer anything, because I thought that if my help was wanted, I would be asked.

As time went on, however, I could see that I would never be asked- not because my help wasn’t wanted, but because the person wasn’t comfortable asking. So, I gathered my will against my personality, offered my help directly, and it was promptly accepted! So easy.

In this week’s reading, Moses tells the Israelites about how he pleaded *(etkhanan)*with God to let him enter the Promised Land.

Moses says:

*“Va’etkhanan el Hashem baeit hahi leimor-*
*"I pleaded with God at that time, saying… please let me cross and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan!”*

But God doesn’t let him.

Moses, the beloved prophet who “knows God face to face” is rejected.

But does Moses develop a bad self-image and stop doing his job? Not at all. A few verses later, Moses says:

*“V’atah Yisrael sh’ma-*
*"And now Israel, listen!”*

He then goes on teaching them the Torah that he was called upon to transmit.

Sometimes our offers are accepted, and sometimes they are rejected. But if you shut down when you are rejected and stop offering, you may miss your real calling.

And furthermore, what’s wrong with being rejected anyway?

If rejection feels bad, it’s because there is a self-image that is feeding off the desire to be appreciated. That ego, that separate self-sense, is quite natural, but ultimately it is a burden. When the ego is bruised, take that as medicine. Accept the pain- let it burn away the ego’s substance. Ultimately, the pain will be liberating, and in that liberation is real intimacy- intimacy with the plain and radiant present, with the simple bliss of being.

After all, when you are pleading for something, it’s because you desire some kind of completion. But when the pain of rejection burns away the very *source of incompleteness,*then the rejection itself can actually be the fulfillment!

There is a story that Reb Beirish of Alisk once went to spend Shabbos with his childhood friend-turned-rebbe, Reb Uri of Strelisk.

At the Shabbos table, Reb Uri turned to his hassid: “Rav of Alisk! Could you perhaps honor us with some spontaneous words of Torah, some words that you have not prepared?”

Immediately Reb Beirish answered, “It is written, *‘Va’etkhanan el Hashem ba eit hahi leimor- I pleaded with God at that time, saying.’* You see, in order for me to *say* something spontaneously *at that time*- meaning at this time, unprepared, I have to *plead with God!*

Reb Beirish had nothing to say except his plea that he should have something to say, and that plea itself became his words of Torah!

On this *Shabbat V’etkhanan,*theSabbath of Pleading, may you be blessed with the confidence to know that you are needed for something quite unique, something no one else can offer. And, when your offerings are rejected, may you be blessed to bring your awareness deep into the present experience of that rejection, so that any trace of the “Wounded Me” gently dissolves into the spacious calm of the Timeless.

​Good Shabbos!
**What Prayer is Answered Instantaneously?**

 This week’s reading begins:

*“Va’etkhanan el Hashem- I implored Hashem at that time saying: You have begun to reveal Your Greatness…”*

The word for “I implored” is *ethanan-*from the word *hein,*which means “grace.” To “implore” is to beg for grace.

​What "grace" is being prayed for? The revelation of God's "Greatness." But this "Greatness" is not something separate from you; it's the revelation of your own being. It is "great" in the sense that it is far more spacious than anything within your experience; it's the space within which all experience arises- the space of awareness itself.

In Pirkei Avot 3:18, Rabbi Akiva says:

*“Haviv Adam shenivra v’tzelm- Beloved are human beings, for they are created in the Divine Image…”*

The Divine, or Reality, expresses Its Greatness as your own awareness. Rabbi Akiva calls us “beloved” because of this gift- the gift of our Divine Greatness.

Then he says,

*“Hibah yeteirah noda’at lo shenivra v’tzelem- It is indicative of an even greater love that our Divine Image is made known to us…”*

In other words, though our Divine Greatness is a wonderful gift, it doesn’t do us much good unless it’s made known to us, unless we experience the Infinite directly. To experience your Divine Greatness is the greatest gift, the Supreme Grace, because it’s the revelation of your own being, something that can never be taken away.

But your Divine Greatness is not really hidden; it’s just that your awareness is always looking at everything except Itself, so it can be difficult to notice. But if you ask for grace, if you implore God to reveal your Divine Greatness to you, the prayer itself helps you open to the truth of this moment. Then, your prayer is answered- instantaneously.

Try it- *“Oh Hashem, please reveal to me my own Divine Greatness, the place in me that is free, spacious, that allows everything to be as it is...”*

Then, notice- this moment is complete- sensation, feeling, thought- all arising in the space of this moment, which is awareness itself, free and open, complete and miraculous, the Divine Greatness...​