

COMFORT MY PEOPLE

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Today's Learning:

Kelim 19:4-5

O.C. 61:23-25

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Zevachim 61

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shekalim 14

The haftarah, which gives this Shabbat the name "Shabbat Nachamu," opens: "Nachamu, nachamu / Comfort, comfort My people - says your G-d. Speak to the heart of Yerushalayim and proclaim to her that her time [of exile] has been fulfilled, that her iniquity has been conciliated, for she has received from the hand of Hashem double for all her sins."

R' Yitzchak Isaac Halevi Herzog z"l (Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel) commented on these verses as follows in a 1948 address: How are these verses different when we read them today from when they were read in the past? In the past, the fulfillment of these verses was in the distant future. Today, these verses relate all at once to the present, the near term, and the distant future. How so?

Chazal comment on these verses, "She [i.e., Yerushalayim] sinned doubly, she was doubly punished, and she was doubly consoled." Yisrael / the People of Israel has a double nature. On the one hand, it is a nation; anyone who says that Judaism is only a religion is mistaken. On the other hand, anyone

who thinks that Yisrael is a nation like any other nation is mistaken and is misleading others. Yisrael is a holy nation, with the loftiest mission, given from G-d, of any nation. Therefore, when Yisrael sins, its sin is a double sin.

Yisrael is not the only nation that has been exiled from its land; many nations, large and small, have experienced this fate. However, those nations, once they were destroyed, disappeared. They assimilated and no memory remains of them, and, at the same time, their suffering has ended. Such is not the lot of Yisrael. An invisible "hand" forced Yisrael not to assimilate, but rather to remain apart and dispersed, and to suffer without end. Why? Because Yisrael is a nation destined for greatness, specifically, for moral greatness - for that greatness which in the awesome future will be the lot of all of mankind. Therefore, they were doubly consoled: In the future, there will be open miracles. For now, the time for open miracles has not yet come, but certainly miracles have taken place and will continue to take place . . . (Ha'techukah Le'Yisrael Al Pi Ha'torah III p.258)

"Now, O Israel, listen to the decrees and to the ordinances that I teach you to perform, so that you may live, and you will come and possess the Land that Hashem, the G-d of your forefathers, gives you." (4:1)

R' Moshe Sofer (the preeminent Hungarian posek and rosh yeshivah; died 1839) writes: Our Sages teach, "Words that come from the heart enter the heart." A corollary to this is that the higher the teacher's spiritual level, the more successful he will be in imparting his lessons. And we are taught, "One who studies Torah in order to put it into practice is greater than one who studies in order to teach."

At this point in the Torah, Moshe arguably had the status of one who was studying in order to teach. Since he would not enter the Land, he would not have the opportunity to put many of the laws into practice. This could have negatively affected how much Bnei Yisrael learned from him. Therefore Moshe said, "Now, O Israel, listen to the decrees and to the ordinances that I teach you to perform." I, Moshe, have not given up hope of entering the Land, and we can therefore study together "in order to perform." [Ed. note: This may also explain the introductory word, "Now!" This verse follows immediately after Moshe's description of his prayers to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. "Now," while I am still hopeful that I will enter the Land and perform the mitzvot, "listen to the decrees . . ."]

(Torat Moshe)

"When you are in distress and all these things have found you, at the end of days, you will return to Hashem, your G- d, and hearken to His voice. For Hashem, your G-d, is a merciful G-d . . ." (4:30-31)

R' Ovadiah Hadayah z"l (1890-1969; halachic authority and kabbalist in Yerushalayim) asks several questions about these verses:

(1) Why does the Torah say, "when all these things [i.e., punishments] have found you" rather than "when all these things have come upon you" (as in Devarim 28:15)? (2) Why will the punishments spoken of come specifically "at the end of days"? (3) What is it about these punishments that will cause us to return to Hashem? (4) How is the statement, "For Hashem, your G-d, is a merciful G-d," a reason for what came before?

In interpreting the verse in Tehilim (32:6), "For this let every devout one pray to You when [misfortune] finds him . . .," Midrash Tanchuma states that this is a reference to disease. Says R' Hadayah: Here, too, the phrase, "when all these things have found you," refers to disease. This verse is foretelling that at the end of days, there will be horrible diseases that man, with all his ingenuity, will not succeed in conquering.

Why? The Gemara (Pesachim 56a) states that in the time of the first Bet Hamikdash, there was a Book of Cures in which one could find a cure for any illness. However, when King Chizkiyah saw that people no longer recognized illness as a message from G-d to improve their ways, he hid the Book of Cures so that people would have to pray. In our times, too, says R' Hadayah, too many people place their trust in medicine rather than in G-d. Therefore, to remind us that He is the one who brings illness and Who cures the ill, Hashem causes the "natural" cure for some terrible illnesses to remain undiscovered.

This is particularly important "at the end of days," for Chazal say that if we do not repent on our own, Hashem will force us to repent so He can bring about the Final Redemption. He does this because He is a merciful G-d, who wants us to repent so we can attain the ultimate reward.

(Shalom Avdo)

"And you shall repeat them to your sons and speak of them, when you sit in your homes . . ." (5:7)

R' Daniel Movshovitz z"l hy"d (head of the yeshiva in Kelm, Lithuania; killed in the Holocaust) writes in a letter that the reference here to the home does not refer to the wood and stone structure. It refers to the family. The beginning of a person's judgement in Heaven will address whether he set aside times for Torah study and, in particular, whether he dedicated times to study Torah and discuss the subjects of faith and trust in G-d with his family.

It doesn't matter so much what one learns at these times. R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l, a great teacher of mussar, used to read the Tze'enah u'Re'enah (a Yiddish translation and commentary on the Torah) at meals. The simple lessons of faith contained in that work often make a more long-lasting impression than do complicated discourses.

(Kitvei Ha'Saba Mi'Kelm V'talmidav p. 610)

"Honor your father and your mother . . ." (5:16)

R' Eliyahu Capsali z"l (16th century rabbi in Candia, Crete) writes: R' Yehuda Hachassid z"l (Germany; author of Sefer Hachassidim; died 1217) quotes an otherwise unknown midrash, as follows:

When G-d said, "Honor your father and your mother," the guardian angels of each and every nation stood up and said (Shmot 15:18), "Hashem will reign for all eternity."

Therefore, continues R' Yehuda Hachasid, one should take great care not to transgress the will of his parents. Merely for walking alone at night in a place where his parents will worry that he could be killed, one will not escape the judgment of Gehinnom, unless, of course, he repents and honors his parents doubly over how he honored them before.

R' Capsali adds: I do not know the source of the quoted midrash, so I cannot be certain of its meaning. However, it appears to refer to the fact that honoring one's parents is a logical mitzvah. Accordingly, when Hashem gave the Torah, this mitzvah alone was accepted by all of the nations. Each angel accepted this mitzvah on behalf of the nation that he represented.

Alternatively, writes R' Capsali, the angels' exclamation reflects the fact that one who honors his parents is likely to honor Hashem as well. Therefore, when the angels heard Hashem command that parents be honored, they said, "If people honor their parents, Hashem will reign for all eternity."

(Meah Shearim, Ch. 51)

Letters from Our Sages

This week's letter was written in 1951 by R' Eliezer Zusia Portugal z"l, the Skulener Rebbe in Romania (and later in Brooklyn). R' Portugal was particularly known for his work on behalf of Holocaust orphans and for his spiritual resistance against Romania's communist government. R' Portugal died in 1982. This letter is printed in Kedushat Eliezer p.44.

Life and peace and all good things to my son-in-law, the young scholar who is wondrous in his Torah and fear [of Heaven], R' Moshe, may his light shine forever. . .

I again wish you and your wife, my daughter Gittel, may she live long, Mazal Tov on the birth of your new son. May he be, G- d willing, full of old [an allusion to the phrase, "A new barrel full of old wine"]. [May you merit] to bring him into the covenant of Avraham. May Hashem bless you and show you favor, and may you merit to raise [your son] to Torah, marriage, and good deeds with ease and comfort among all of the Jewish People. "May this small one become great" in Torah and fear [of Heaven - a paraphrase of the Brit Milah blessing], for only when a child is educated, and follows, in the ways of Torah and love and fear of Hashem can he rise from the level of a small person to a great person. The holy books explain that a person can be eighty years old, but only two years old [spiritually], for the years of a person's life that are called "years of life" are only those in which he did

something useful. If he used all his days to eat and drink, to sleep and to work, just like animals do, and especially if he used his years to sin, such days are not considered "years of life." . . . The years of a person's life are only those days and years in which he accomplished and did good - learning [to do good] and teaching others, observing [the Torah] and fulfilling it. . . .

This may help explain the verse (Shmuel I 13:1), "Shaul was one year old when he reigned." In his humility, he viewed himself not as the accomplished adult that he was, but as an infant. This is what we read [in this week's parashah (7:7), "Not because you are more numerous than all the peoples did Hashem desire you and choose you,] for you are the fewest of all the peoples." This does not mean, G-d forbid, that we are less worthy than the other nations. Rather, G-d loves us because we view ourselves as unworthy.

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