

NATION DESTINED FOR GREATNESS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vaeschanan

Nation Destined for Greatness

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Sponsored by
Nathan and Rikki Lewin
in memory of his mother Peppy Lewin
(Pessel bas Reb Naftali a"h)

Ed and Linda Zurndorfer and children
on the 1st yahrzeit of Ed's mother
Hannah Zurndorfer (Chana bat Yehuda a"h)

In memory of Dovid Moshe ben Rivka a"h
(David M. Goldberg of Lorain, Ohio)
by his family

Today's Learning:
Chagigah 3:7-8
Finish Seder Mo'ed on Shabbat;
begin Seder Nashim on Sunday
O.C. 595:1-597:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yoma 59
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ma'aser Sheni 6

The haftarah 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 (first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel; died 1959) 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 are destroyed, disappear. They assimilate and no memory remains of them, and, at the same time, their suffering ends. 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)

"But you who cling to Hashem, your G-d -- you are all alive today." (4:4)

R' Naftali Herz Wiesel z"l (18th German rabbi and prolific author) asks: To whom else would Moshe be speaking if not to the living? Rather, Moshe is teaching that one is truly alive only when he clings to Hashem.

What exactly is involved in the mitzvah of clinging to Hashem? R' Wiesel explains: This commandment instructs those who are wise and understanding to prepare to attach themselves to the Ohr Elyon / The Light Above at any and all times. It means devoting one's mind to pure thoughts relating to love and awe of G-d. It means elevating one's thoughts above the mundane thoughts of the world, as if G-d is hovering over one's self.

R' Wiesel adds: This mitzvah is not for everyone, for (as we read in Tehilim 24:3), "Who may ascend to the mountain of Hashem, and who may stand in the place of His sanctity?" Only a person who has awe of G-d within him, who loves Hashem with his entire heart, who studies Torah, who serves G-d with his entire soul, and who understands the concept of yirat Hashem and the teachings of the Sages--after all this, one can begin to prepare himself to cling to Hashem, each person according to his ability.

(Gan Na'ul)

"You shall know this day and take to your heart that Hashem, He is the G-d -- in heaven above and on the earth below -- there is none other." (4:39)

R' Yishayah Halevi Horowitz z"l (rabbi in Prague and Yerushalayim; died 1630) writes: This verse requires us to know G-d in our hearts as a result of investigation, in addition to believing in Him as a result of the received tradition. This also is alluded to in the verse (Divrei Hayamim I 28:9), "Know the G-d of your father," i.e., in addition to the fact that you have received a tradition from your father, know G-d yourself. Likewise, the verse (Shmot 15:2), "This is my G-d, and I will adorn Him; the G-d of my father, and I will exalt Him." He is my G-d, and He also is my father's G-d. Moreover, writes R' Horowitz, if I only know the G-d of my father, but have not discovered Him on my own as well, then the verse tells us that G-d will be too exalted--i.e., distant--from me. [Therefore, R' Horowitz adds, one is obligated to study the work Chovot Ha'levavot, especially the section entitled Sha'ar Ha'yichud, where the existence and uniqueness of G-d is proven.]

(Asarah Ma'amarot, Ma'amar Rishon)

R' Tzaddok Hakohen z"l (1823-1900; one of the leading thinkers of the chassidic movement) offers a very different explanation. Our belief, he writes, is based on our tradition regarding the revelation at Har Sinai. We have no use for philosophical speculation of the sort advocated by the Chovot Ha'levavot. Our verse, which commands us to know that Hashem is the sole G-d in heaven above and on the earth below and that there is none other is teaching only that we should reflect on the lessons of the Revelation at Har Sinai.

(Quoted in Ba'mesilah Na'aleh p.451)

"You shall greatly beware for your lives." (4:15)

R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato z"l ("Ramchal") writes: Among the deterrents to serving Hashem with zeal is excessive trepidation and fear of what time may bring, of heat and cold, of accidents, of illness, of winds, etc. As King Shlomo wrote (Mishlei 26:13), "The lazy person says, 'There is a lion on the road'." Chazal condemned this trait, attributing it to sinners. Rather, the proper rule of conduct is (in the words of Tehilim 37:3), "Trust in Hashem and do good, dwell in the land and cultivate faith."

One might ask: Chazal have instructed that a person be especially attentive to his well-being and not place himself in danger, even if he is righteous. In line with this, the Gemara (Ketubot 30a) says, "Everything is in the hands of Heaven except chills and fevers." The Torah [in the verse quoted above] commands the same thing, indicating that a person should not place his trust in G-d when his life (i.e., health) is at stake! Does this teaching not contradict what was stated in the first paragraph?

Ramchal answers: Know that there is fear and there is fear. There is appropriate fear and there is foolish fear. On the other hand, there is confidence and there is recklessness. Hashem has invested man with intelligence and judgment so that he may follow the right path and protect himself from the instruments of injury that have been created to punish evildoers. One who chooses not to be guided by wisdom and exposes himself to dangers is displaying not trust, but recklessness.

The type of fear and self-protection which is appropriate is that which grows out of wisdom and intelligence. It is the type about which it is said (Mishlei 22:3), "The wise man sees evil and hides, but the fools pass on and are punished." "Foolish fear" is a person's desire to have multiple levels of protection, such that he devotes himself to building up these layers of protection and neglects Torah and Divine service. The criterion by which to distinguish between the two types of fear is implied in Chazal's statement (Pesachim 8b), "Where there is a likelihood of danger, it is different." Where there is an identifiable risk of injury, one must be careful, but where there is no apparent danger, one should not be afraid.

(Mesilat Yesharim, ch. 9)

"And you shall repeat them to your sons and speak of them, when you sit in your homes . . ." (6:7)

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)

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 [i.e., "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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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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