

COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION!!!

by Rabbi Naftali Reich

In this week's Torah portion, we read the tochacha, a grim litany of frightening curses that Hashem promises will befall the nation if they stray from Him. The Torah also outlines the tochacha in the parsha of Bechukosai at the end of Leviticus. There, too, the Torah elaborates on the outpouring of wrath and the chilling punishments that will afflict the Jewish people should they abandon the Torah.

However, there are significant differences between the two portions. Most interestingly, the conclusion of the tochacha in Bechukosai ends on a positive note with the words of consolation, "I will remember for them my covenant with Yaakov and my covenant with Yitzchok and my covenant with Avraham, and I will remember the land". However, the tochacha in this week's Torah portion ends off on a calamitous note: "You will be offered as slaves to your enemies yet - but no one will even want to buy you."

The Zohar, commenting on the difference between the concluding notes in the two parshios, explains that the tochacha in Bechukosai addresses a specific failure distinctly different from the one in Ki Savo. There, Hashem is responding to our callous indifference to Him, described as "walking with Him "b'keri" -casually. "If you walk with me casually, I in turn will treat you casually," Hashem warns us. My relationship to you, says Hashem, will reflect your relationship to Me. If you show no concern for my commandments, I will show no concern for your needs!

In this weeks tochacha, however, we find the expression, Hashem will smite you. This choice of words signifies the fact that Hashem Himself will dispense the punishment-as opposed to abandoning the Jewish people to the whims and cruelties of their enemies-will offer a measure of comfort and consolation.

I once asked my Rebbe, the Nesivos Sholom of blessed memory: Who is in a worse position, an individual who is so immersed in material indulgences that he totally neglects his spiritual obligations, or one who is skeptical, agnostic and constantly locked in philosophical battle with his Creator? He told me that the former has sunk to a lower level, for although he is not directly defiant, he is prone to wander further from his moorings and completely lose sight of his purpose in the world.

On the other hand, one who is rebellious and angry with Hashem is at least engaged in some form of dialogue, and subliminally acknowledges His Creator.

Perhaps this is Zohar's meaning. The tochacha in Bechukosai reflects the one who walks with Hashem casually, completely forgetting his father in Heaven as he immerses himself in a materialistic and narcissistic life. To such a person, the Torah first outlines the frightening consequences of his heedless way of life, and then offers the reassurance that although the person will have drifted far from his legacy, he will ultimately remember his rich ancestral roots and will be assisted from Above on his journey "homeward."

However, the tochacha in Ki Savo refers to those who openly rebel against Hashem, embracing false gods and the popular "isms" of the day. In response to Klal Yisroel's abdication of their special relationship with their Creator, Hashem smites back with relentless force. Embedded in His "retaliation," however, are the seeds of comfort arising from the realization that Hashem is not "finished" with us. No matter how blindly defiant and disloyal we are, Hashem will never sever His relationship with us; by afflicting us with hardships, exile and suffering, he will force us to turn back to Him.

In our own lives, we are often confronted with stormy relationships that result in acrimonious interaction. Nevertheless, as long as we keep the lines of communication open and maintain some form of dialogue, we can work on keeping alive a sense of mutual respect and brotherhood. It is only when we throw the relationship overboard and completely write one another off that hope for reconciliation dies, leaving both sides poorer.

Have a good Shabbos, Rabbi Naftali Reich Text Copyright © 2014 by Rabbi Naftali Reich and **Torah.org**.

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