

PARTING WORDS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

This class continues from [Parshas Netzavim](#).

Melave Malkah:

This week we also read Parashas VaYailech. As Rashi points out (Devarim 31:1), this parsha begins on the very last day of Moshe's life, the seventh day of the Jewish month Adar, 120 years to the day that Moshe was born. As Moshe says, "I was born on this day and I must die on this day" (Sota 13b). From this the Talmud points out that righteous people merit to live out a complete life because they live every moment to its fullest.

In the midst of this parsha, the concept of "hester panim" is introduced (Devarim 31:18). It is the punishment of punishments for straying from Torah, for:

"... They shall be devoured, and many evils and distresses will occur to them, until they will say that day, 'Are not these evil things happening to us because our G-d is not with us?' And I will surely hide My face that day, because of all the evil they have done by turning after other gods." (Devarim 31:17)

Hmmmmmm. Sounds familiar, people asking, "Where is G-d? ... How could this happen in G-d's world? ... etc." Yet, again, the Torah anticipated such questions, and recorded them for all generations to read, and learn, and understand, and say, "Are we not that generation being spoken about here? Maybe we ought to try to repair the breach and 'allow' G-d to once again reveal His face." Yet, we don't do it. Millions of Jews reject the Torah without ever having read it from cover-to-cover. Millions of Jews accept the Torah as a book of ancient wisdom, but reject the notion of its Divine authorship, without having ever read Rashi, or the Talmud, or after ever having taken the time to find out how we know that the Torah and the Oral Law came from G-d. And millions of others take G-d's seemingly apparent "absence" from history as a sign that G-d just doesn't care anymore what we do with our lives, and then go ahead and play G-d by carving out their own reasons for existence, moral or not.

Why?

The Torah, and Moshe Rabbeinu, dealt with that question too:

"For I know your rebellion, and your stiff neck; behold, while I am yet alive with you this day you have been rebellious against G-d-how much more so will this be the case after my death!" (Devarim 31:27)

Spoken like a true prophet.

Perhaps this is why these parshios come up just before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which, when taken seriously, can't help but act like some kind of "deep heat" therapy to reduce our stiff necks. How many alarms have to go off before we wake up from our spiritual slumber to history and our Divine mission?

It's a tough question to answer, but answer it we must. Taking initiative to know Torah better, and to act as bridge between Torah and the unaffiliated Jew is an important first step to positively answering this question. There's a lot of stiff necks out there these days, in need of some very good spiritual therapists.

Have a great Shabbos,
Chasiva v'Chasima Tova
Pinchas Winston

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