

# THE BALL IS IN OUR COURT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 340, The Pushka In Halacha. Good Shabbos!*

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## **Egyptian Anti-Semitic Techniques Foreshadowed those of the Nazis**

The Parsha begins with the Command to bring the First Fruits of each year's crop to the Bais HaMikdash [Temple]. When a person brings the 'Bikkurim' to the Beis HaMikdash, he recites several pesukim [verses] of thanksgiving as he presents his basket of fruit to the Kohen.

This recitation of gratitude does not merely contain a simple "Thank you G-d for the good year, and thank you for the fruits". Rather, it is an overview of the history of the Jewish people. We thank G-d for developments from our very birth as a nation. We describe Yaakov's sojourn with Lavan, who tried to destroy him. We describe the descent into Egypt and our trials and tribulations at the hands of the Egyptians, until finally we were taken out with great wonders and miracles.

Rav Mordechai Gifter (Telshe Rosh Yeshiva) comments on the grammar of the pasuk [verse] describing the cruelty of the Egyptians. It should have really read "VayaRei-u LANU..." (they were bad TO US). However, it actually says "VayaRei-u OSANU", which literally means, "THEY MADE US bad".

Rav Gifter therefore interprets the pasuk [verse] with new insight: How was it possible for the Egyptians to torture us (as the pasuk continues "Vaya-anunu" - "and they tortured us")? Didn't the Egyptians have any compassion? How could one human being treat a second human being so cruelly? The answer is that first "VayaRei-u OSANU" - they mounted a campaign to portray Jews as less than human, as disgusting and despicable beings. They made US into bad people and as a result of that they could begin to torture us.

Rav Gifter then comments that we have seen this phenomenon with our own eyes. We do not need to imagine what took place in ancient Egypt. This is precisely what anti-Semites have done in every generation. A text book example of this is what happened in Germany. They did not suddenly stand up one day and say "smash all their windows and kill them all". There was a gradual campaign to make us less than human.

Anyone who is ever in the vicinity of Washington, DC should take the time to visit The United States Holocaust Museum. The museum traces the history of anti-Semitism in Germany. The anti-Semitism was based on a "hierarchy of nations". They backed up their hatred of Jews with theories and philosophies. There were "higher races"; there were "lower races"; and there were "sub-human species". They considered the Jews "sub-human species". "Vayarei-u osonu" - they made us wicked, portraying us as less than human.

When I visited the United States Holocaust Museum, one picture really caught my attention. The picture depicted two Nazi soldiers (May their names be blotted out.) kicking a Jew who was laying on the street. In and of itself, that would not be novel. However the glee on their faces - that was note-worthy. Perhaps we could almost understand the scene if the emotions displayed by the soldiers were rage or anger. However, the Nazis were laughing. They were showing delight!

Such a feeling might be expected if a person has a mouse in his home and he finally gets rid of it by stamping on it. With triumph he can then smile and say "Aha - I won!" That is what they did to us. They would show their people hundreds of pictures of rats. Then they would show a picture of a Jew. Then they would show more rats and then more Jews. They continued this until the idea came across that the pictures interspersed between the pictures of the rats, were not humans - they were just mere rats.

They made us into "wicked" and \_then\_ they tortured us. This is the Ma'aseh Avos Siman LaBanim [action of the forefathers foreshadowing what will happen to the children]. There is nothing new under the sun. It has all happened before. It happened in Egypt. It happened in Germany. Let us hope it won't happen again.

### **The Pause Following The Curses of Ki Savo: The Ball Is In Our Court**

Parshas Ki Savo contains the terrible chapter foretelling the curses that will befall us. Again, we do not have to imagine what these things are referring to. We unfortunately witnessed it with our own eyes.

The Tochacha [rebuke] concludes with the words "HASHEM will return you to Egypt in ships, on the road of which I said to you, 'You shall never again see it!' And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves and maid-servants - but there will be no buyer." [Devorim 28:69]

This contrasts starkly with the end of the Tochacha that appears in Sefer Vayikra, which is also a terrible series of curses. The Tochacha in Vayikra ends on the following positive note: "I will remember for them the covenant of the ancients, those whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt before the eyes of the nations, to be G-d unto them, I am Hashem." [Vayikra 26:45]

Thus, the Tochacha of Sefer Vayikra (in Parshas Bechukosai) contains within itself a built-in consolation. It will be terrible, but in the end I will remember. However, the Tochacha of Parshas Ki Savo apparently has no such ending. What is the meaning of this?

I recently saw a beautiful insight from Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, (1903-93), published in a sefer [book] called "Divrei Hashkafa". Rabbi Soloveitchik advances the idea that the Tochacha here in Parshas Ki Savo is also followed by consolation - but the consolation does not come until next week's Parsha!

The consolation is some 50 verses later: "And it will come to pass when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse that I have presented before you - then you will take it to your heart among all the nations where Hashem your G-d has dispersed you; then you will return unto Hashem your G-d, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and all your soul. Then Hashem, your G-d, will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you, and He will gather you in from all the peoples to which Hashem your G-d has scattered you..." [Devarim 30:1-2]

There is a consolation. It is that you will realize that you did wrong; you will repent, and G-d will gather you from the four corners of the earth. The question then becomes, if both Tochachos have within themselves built in consolations - why does that of Bechukosai come immediately, but that of Ki Savo come only after a pause of 50 pasukim?

Rabbi Soloveitchik answers based on the Ramban. The Ramban tells us that the two Tochachas are reflective of the two destructions that befell the Jewish nation. The Tochacha in Vayikra (Bechukosai) foretells the destruction of the First Temple; the Tochacha in Devorim (here in Ki Savo) foretells the destruction of the Second Temple. The destruction of the First Temple came with a pre-determined, pre-announced limit: seventy years you will be in Exile, and then the Exile will be over. There was some ambiguity as to when the counting of the 70 years began, but they knew without a doubt that the Exile had a finite end point. Therefore, the corresponding Tochacha has a finite end - an announcement of consolation immediately at the end of the pasukim foretelling destruction and exile.

The destruction of the Second Temple was different. It did not come with any pre-determined and pre-arranged time limit. Not 70 years and not 700 years! But it, too, did come with a limit. The Rambam tells us [Hilchos Teshuva Chapter 7] that there will come a day that the Jewish people will repent.

And he appends to that prophesized prediction "And they will then immediately be redeemed." We can bank on it! When the Jewish people will eventually do Teshuva [repentance, return], this Exile will end.

Just as the first exile had an end, so too the second one has an end - but the second exile's end is conditional. It requires action on our part - repentance. If we would have done Teshuva after 70 years, then the Exile could have ended then. We did not do proper Teshuva even after 700 years; and consequently, it did not end then either. If it takes 2000 years and we still do not do Teshuva, it will still not happen. But in the end of the days, the Torah does give us a guarantee: Eventually the

Jewish people will do Teshuva... and immediately thereafter we will be redeemed.

These fifty pasukim from the end of the Tochacha in Ki Savo until the consolation of redemption in Parshas Nitzavim, are the pause. This is the period that we are experiencing now. We are in the midst of the pause. But we have no need to despair. Because the Torah promises that one day "You will return to Hashem your G-d, and listen to His Voice". And then "He will gather you in from all the peoples to which He has scattered you." It is up to us. The ball is in our court. It is a very simple matter. When we do Teshuva, the Exile will end.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#340). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: The Pushka In Halacha. The other halachic portions for Parshas Ki Savo from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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