

"G-D IS NOT IN OUR MIDST" IS AN INAPPROPRIATE RESPONSE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayeilech

"G-d Is Not In Our Midst" Is An Inappropriate Response

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion. Good Shabbos!

In Parshas VaYelech, on the last day of his life, Moshe Rabbeinu is given the following prophetic news: "Behold, you will lie with your forefathers, but this people will rise up and stray after the gods of that which is foreign to the land, in whose midst it is coming, and it will forsake Me and annul My covenant that I have sealed with it. My anger will flare against it on that day and I will forsake them; and I will conceal My face from them and they will become prey, and many evils and distresses will encounter it. It will say on that day 'Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?'" [Devorim 31:16-17]

It would seem that these words 'Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?' would represent a positive action on the part of the people. So much of the Tochacha (Chastisement) in Parshas Bechukosai contains the refrain "And you have conducted yourself with me b'keri [as if they were just matters of chance or bad luck]." It seems like this attitude on our part is itself the cause of the Almighty's anger with us. We are not supposed to attribute personal tragedy to "statistics" or to the fact that "our number is up".

It would seem that the reaction foretold in Parshas Vayeilech ('Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?') is a very positive one! If that is the case, the subsequent pasuk is very surprising. The very next pasuk, portraying the Almighty's reaction to what immediately preceded, is: "But I will surely conceal My face on that day because of all the evil that it did, for it had turned to gods of others." [Devorim 31:18]

Why would that be? If people are doing what they are supposed to be doing and asking all the right questions of self-introspection, why would the Almighty hide His face from us? We see from here that apparently "Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst?" is NOT the reaction that Klal Yisrael should have.

The Rebbe Reb Bunim of Pshische explains why this is NOT the proper reaction. No matter how bad troubles may seem, a Jew should never say and should never feel that the Almighty has abandoned him. It is heretical to say: "G-d died in the Holocaust." This in no way minimizes the tremendous fortitude it took for someone who went through the Holocaust to remain a full believer and "no one should judge his fellow until he has been in his place," however theologically, it is an unacceptable response to say "G-d is no longer in our midst; He is dead!"

The correct response is that G-d remains in our midst, but for some reason (perhaps not-understandable to us) this is His will. For this reason, according to the Rebbe Reb Bunim, the reaction of the Almighty to such a statement was "I will surely hide My face on that day."

The Gemara [Yoma 54b] states that the Keruvim atop the Aron in the Kodosh HaKedoshim were male and female forms. When the Jews would fulfill the Will of the Almighty, the Keruvim would embrace one another. When the Jews would not fulfill His Will, they were separated.

The Talmud says that when the enemy came into the Kodosh HaKedoshim during their destruction of the Bais HaMikdash, they saw the male and female figures intertwined in an embrace and they mocked the Jews over the fact that they maintained in their Bais HaMikdash male and female figures in obscene poses.

The commentaries question why the Keruvim would be embracing during the time of the Bais HaMikdash's destruction. Superficially, we would think that there was no greater moment when "Israel did not fulfill the Will of the Almighty" than the time when He saw fit to have the Bais HaMikdash destroyed. At such a time, we would have expected to find the Keruvim separated from one another.

The answer is because at the moment the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed, the punishment had already been delivered. Immediately afterwards, the love of the Almighty towards us was restored. It is like when a father spans his child. Right after administering the spanking, he embraces the child. The child may have deserved the spanking for doing something wrong, but once that debt was paid the love of father to son is immediately made evident again.

"Behold the L-rd is not in my midst" is never our situation. The message is always "I am still with you, Klal Yisrael."

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