

# PARSHAS NETZAVIM: STANDING BEFORE HASHEM

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

*"Atem nitzavim hayom - You are standing today, all of you (Devarim 29:9)"*

Moshe gathered the B'nei Yisroel on the day of his death (see Rashi 29:9) in order to renew their covenant with Hashem before Moshe took leave of this world. Rashi quoting a Midrash Tanchuma, notes that after hearing the ninety-eight curses of the "Tochacha" (the "rebuke" of the B'nei Yisroel, found in Parshas Ki Savo), the Jews became despondent and asked, "Who can withstand all of these curses?" Moshe Rebbeinu attempted to lift their spirits by reminding them that despite their numerous complaints in the desert, Hashem did not destroy them. "You are standing today," said Moshe, encouraging them to look forward to the future with confidence.

One can certainly understand Moshe's approach as he attempted to comfort his people. However, was he not guilty of undermining the rebuke of Hashem? It would seem that the Tochacha had its intended effect of frightening the B'nei Yisroel into carefully considering their future actions and avoiding avaros (sins). Why did Moshe tell the Jews that they were not destroyed for their previous misdeeds - and offer them a sublime message that they need not fear retribution?

## **Serious and Somber; Not Terrified**

I would like to suggest that Moshe spoke words of encouragement to the Jews once he saw that the B'nei Yisroel were frightened by the Tochacha to the point that *"Horiku p'nei hem - their faces turned pale,"* due to their fear - (See Rashi, Devarim 29:9). Moshe wanted them to be serious and introspective, not terrified. Once he saw that they were frozen by fear, he wanted to redirect their understanding of the rebuke from dread to awe and reflection.

A close friend of mine, Mark Grunwald, recently shared with me a poignant thought on this subject of fear vs. introspection that he heard many years ago from Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, the Noviminsker Rebbe s'hlita. The Rebbe pointed out that the tochacha of Parshas Ki Savo is read about two weeks before Rosh Hashana each year, and the shorter version of rebuke in Parshas Bechukosai is read approximately two weeks before Shavuot.

The Rebbe explained that the two-week lapse was intended to see to it that the Teshuvah of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur be driven by sincere regret for our misdeeds combined with an earnest commitment to improve in the future, as explained by the Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva). Our Kabbolas HaTorah of Shavuot should be inspired by our quest to grow close to Hashem and our willingness to accept His eternal Torah. Neither of these spiritual commitments should be undertaken as the result

of the raw fright caused by listening to the Tochacha. The two-week delay is intended to allow the messages of the tochacha to be absorbed with reflection. Crying and Rejoicing

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov remarked that the roshei tevos (first letter of each word) of the phrase, "*B'shimcha yegilun kol hayom*" (we will rejoice with your Presence the entire day), which refers to the Days of Judgment, spell the word *bechiyah*, which means to cry. He notes that the two contradictory emotions, jubilation and crying, are expressed in the literal meaning of the phrase and its roshei tevos. Rabbi Nachman explains that this refers to a "*Bechiyah Shel Simcha* - a crying of happiness." However, this cryptic comment of Rabbi Nachman requires explanation as well. How can one cry and be happy at the same time? And why do we mention this right before we daven musaf on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?

By way of explanation, I would like to suggest a contrast between a lonely person who cries him or herself to sleep with a child who cries to a parent. They are both expressing deep pain with their tears. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two. The lonely person feels just as sad after he or she finished crying. Not so with the child, who feels relieved having unburdened him or herself to a loving parent.

This would offer a deep insight into the stirring words we recite on the Yomim Noraim (Days of Awe). We cry to Hashem as we daven to Him. But it is a *bechiyah shel simcha* - a crying of happiness - as we are confident that Hashem is listening to our prayers.

### **Moshe's Comforting Words**

Moshe was certainly not looking to undermine the tochacha of the Torah. Once he saw, however, that the Jews were so frightened by the ninety-eight curses found in Parshas Ki Savo, he offered his people words of encouragement. He reminded them of Hashem's Fatherly mercy. He spoke words of *chizuk* that gave them hope for the future; words that give us strength and inspiration as we prepare to face the Yomin Nora'im.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

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