

מעשה אבות סימן לבנים

כי מי כל בשר אשר שמע קול אלקים חיים מדבר מתוך האש כמנו וידו ... (ה-כג)

Tisha B'Av has past and we once again mourn the loss of the *Bais HaMikdash* and the untold millions of Jews who were killed as a result. Throughout our history, there have been numerous murderous time-periods when our people were persecuted by evil-doers who sought our destruction. And yet, through the doom and gloom, there were the rays of light, the amazing tales of individuals who emerged from the darkness and survived, serving as constant reminders that *Hashem* keeps an exact *cheshbon*, an accounting of who is meant to live and who is meant to perish.

In 5408 (1648) the fate of Eastern European Jewry became darkened with clouds and shrouded in heavy fog. A murderous Jew hater by the name of Bogdan Chmielnicki rose up from deep in the Ukrainian wasteland to marshal his hordes of Cossacks, and wage war against his Polish overlords. While battling the Poles, he went out of his way to attack Jewish communities throughout Poland and Lithuania, massacring tens of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children. Terrible stories of devastation are recorded and many of the most luminous *Torah* scholars, as well as their families and entire communities, perished during those perilous times.

The city of Vilna also drank from the cup of woe. The Cossacks invaded the city and brought terrible carnage upon its inhabitants. The city was overtaken with terror and many took to flight, among them the *Rosh Av Beis Din*, **R' Ephraim Hakohen ז"ל** (author of *Shaar Ephraim*), along with his brilliant son-in-law, **R' Yaakov Ashkenazi ז"ל** (father of the renowned **Chacham Tzvi**) and his newly married young wife. They eventually crossed the border and settled in the province of Mehrin. Nevertheless, many hardships awaited them while en route. In his haste, and amidst the chaos of evacuation and fleeing, R' Yaakov lost his way and became separated from his father-in-law and wife. He wandered alone for a while but eventually he was captured and fell into the hands of the murderous Cossacks.

The Cossacks took great delight in murdering innocent men, women and children, and often they would loot their valuables before dispatching them with the sword. When R' Yaakov was lined up to be executed, something inexplicable happened. The murderous Cossack raised his sword, preparing to kill the young Jew, when at the last minute and for no readily apparent reason, he took pity on him and said, "Get up and flee from here to save your life." R' Yaakov ran for his life.

Fearing that he would fall into the hands of other murderers, he hid himself during the day among the dead for about a week. During the night, he got up and gathered plants which he ate to stay alive. In the end, the Cossack murderers left the area and R' Yaakov began to wander in search of his wife and her father.

Meanwhile, a number of weeks went by and his wife hadn't heard of her husband's whereabouts. She feared the worst. After much inquiry, two people came forth and witnessed that R' Yaakov was slain by the sword of a Cossack, and they saw him lying on the ground with the rest of the *Kedoshim*. The witnesses were brought before the famous **Rebbe, R' Herschel of Krakow ז"ל**, and he ruled that she was permitted to remarry based on the eye witnesses' account.

The young woman, however, was devastated. She was not even twenty years old and refused to accept that her brilliant husband was killed. Months went by but she would not be comforted. And suddenly, after six months, her husband showed up! An unbelievable surprise! And he had an amazing story to tell. It was true that they held a sword to his head and it was true that he had lain there with the dead. However, unlike the others, his head hadn't been detached! His executioner hit him with the flat side of the sword and instead of beheading him he knocked him to the ground!

R' Yaakov was miraculously saved. R' Herschel, however, was so distraught over his erroneous *psak* which almost led to a terrible sin, that he resolved to never issue a *psak* on these matters ever again. **R' Yosef Eliyahu Henkin ז"ל** always recounted this story in order to illustrate just how careful one should be before allowing an *agunah* to remarry.

נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלקיכם ... (ישעי' מ-א)

A PENETRATING ANALYSIS OF THE WEEKLY HAFTORAH BY R' TZVI HIRSCH HOFFMAN

תורת הצבי על הפטרות

This week marks the beginning of the *שבועה דנחמתא* – the seven weeks of consolation in which *Hashem* comforts *Klal Yisroel* on their terrible loss – the holy *Bais Hamikdash*. The first of these weeks is the *Shabbos* following *Tishah B'av* – better known as *Shabbos Nachamu*, which is derived from the words of *Yeshaya HaNavi*, "נחמו נחמו עמי", depicting the greatest *Nechama* (comfort) *Hashem* gave *Klal Yisroel* and the joyous feelings they had afterwards. But what measure of joy and comfort could *Klal Yisroel* have possibly felt after such utter destruction and annihilation?

R' Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler ז"ל (*Michtav M'Eliyahu*) explains from the holy **Baal HaTanya**, **R' Shneur Zalman Liadi ז"ל**, that pain and suffering has an innate way of

bringing a person closer to *Hashem* – for someone who goes through a personal tragedy tends to finally see how nothing is in fact in his control. Feelings of self-importance will then break down and he will finally begin to believe in the fact that only *Hashem* can deliver him from his predicament.

In the aftermath of the *Churban*, the messages of the prophets finally penetrated the hearts of *Klal Yisroel*. This forced them to open their eyes to the realization that they had abandoned all that previous generations had held sacred – namely adherence to *Hashem* and His *Mitzvos*. Once this concept was realized by each individual Jew, the process of returning to *Hashem* could finally begin turning their sorrow and pain into hope and joy at being given the opportunity of renewal.

ראה למדתי אתכם הקים ומשפמים כאשר צוני ה' אלתי לעשות כן בקרב הארץ אשר אתם באים שמה

CONCEPTS IN AVODAS HALEV FROM THE FAMILY OF R' CHAIM YOSEF KOFMAN ZT"L

מחשבת הלב

At *Matan Torah, Klal Yisroel* saw that which is usually heard. They saw sound, which according to the laws of nature is not meant to be. So why does the *Torah* say here "SEE the laws"? It should say, "Hear the laws."

Most likely, the subsequent *posukim* answer this query. The *Torah* continues and states: "רק עם חכם ונבון הגוי הגדולהזה". In other words, the stark contrast between the *goyim* and the *aidelkeit* and integrity of a *Yid*, borne out of our adherence to the *Torah* is, in itself, a testimonial to the importance of following the *Torah* as our blueprint; our owner's manual, if you will. Hence, says the *Torah* - "ראה" - "Look" - look at yourselves and, *lehavdil*, the gentiles of the world, and when you recognize the glaring differences, that, in and of itself, will be an incentive to follow *Hashem*.

This week is called *Shabbos Nachamu*. There is a *nechama*, a feeling of comfort, that *Hashem* displays, year after year, even without the ultimate *nechama* of the rebuilding the *Bais HaMikdash*. The **Rebbe of Lechovich ז"ל** writes that the *posuk* of "נחמו נחמו עמי" which we say in the *Haftorah*, is the *nechama*. If a *Yid* is able to internalize and truly feel that we are His "עמי" - His Nation, then *Hashem* responds with, "אלוקיכם" - I am your G-d as well. And that special relationship, alone, elevates us over the *goyim*. Additionally, says one of the **Slonimer Rebbes zy"a**, *Parshas Vaeschanan* always coincides with *Shabbos Nachamu* for our greatest *nechama* and comfort to the *Churban*, is the *Aseres Hadibros* contained therein. Our *Torah* is itself the solace in our misery. As *Dovid Hamelech* says in *Tehillim* "אתה נחמתי בעיני".

May we all be *mechazek* ourselves through *Torah* and recognize how distinguished we are. This will serve as a temporary *nechama* until *Hashem* sends us the everlasting *nechama* "בבני בית המקדש במהרה בימינו".

משל למה הדבר דומה

ואתם הדבקים בה' אלוקיכם חיים כלכם היום ... (ד-ד)

משל: On one occasion when he was in the presence of his *Rebbi*, the *Gaon R' Moshe Feinstein ז"ל*, his *talmid Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss shlita* related that R' Moshe came out of the restroom and began reciting the *beracha Asher Yatzar*. He noted that R' Moshe recited the words, "It would be impossible to exist and stand before You - *Afilu Sha'ah Achas - even for one second*" at the end of his *beracha*. Rabbi Weiss was surprised as it was not R' Moshe's custom to say these three words. He questioned him as to why he did so, "Is this our *Nusach*?" he inquired.

R' Moshe responded that although it might not be their custom, these words express unequivocal thanks to *Hashem* for his continued existence by the virtue of being able to take care of one's needs. Rabbi Moshe Meir asked, "But don't the words mean that we would not be able to exist

even for an instant without taking care of our needs, when in fact we know that we can?"

R' Moshe responded that yes, one could exist for a short time, but to him, life is *Torah*, and one cannot learn if he is occupied or distracted by difficulties such as these!

משל: *Moshe Rabbeinu* says, "And you who bond to *Hashem* your G-d are totally alive today." It is critical that *Moshe Rabbeinu's* message is not simply a passing comment, but rather a profound understanding of *Yiddishkeit*. As **R' Tzadok ז"ל** writes (*Resisei Layla* 53): "The purpose and main point of everything, and all that is intended in the entire *Torah* and 613 *mitzvos* is to bond through them to the living G-d ... all have a connection to this bond because a part of *Hashem* is His people. This is a source of constant joy." Essentially, the underlying purpose of every *mitzvah*, prayer, or lesson is to connect us to *Hashem*. A life of *Torah* is the way a *Yid* bonds with *Hashem* and comes to truly know Him.

והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך ושננתם לבניך ודברת בם ... (ד-ד)

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS ON MIDDOS TOVOS FROM THE WELLSPRINGS OF R' GUTTMAN - RAMAT SHLOMO

דרגה יתירה

Everything in this world has two parts. There is the *חיצונית*, the outer, physical aspect, and there is the *פנימית*, the inner, non-tangible side. The most obvious example of this is a human being. We are made up of flesh and blood and yet our *neshama* is who we really are, the piece of *Hashem* inside of us that allows us to connect with Him. Every Jew is commanded to love *Hashem* with all his heart, his soul and all his possessions. Our goal in life is to come close to *Hashem* and truly love Him. But how? How do we bridge the gap between the two eternal enemies constantly pulling us in opposite directions? The body, only wants us to fulfill our physical pleasures and desires - "גוף" stands for "גוף וויל פרעסן" (the body wants to eat!). The *neshama* on the other hand is forever pulling us up, to reach greater heights in our relationship with *Hashem*.

After we are commanded to love *Hashem*, we are told how to accomplish this feat: "And all these things I have commanded you today on your heart, you shall teach them to your children." Shouldn't it say "in your heart" not "on your heart"? The **Kotzker Rebbe ז"ל** explains that the way to get to the spiritual heart is through the physical one! The heart is the place of *regesh*, feelings and emotions. We want to fill our heart with LOVE for *Hashem*, but what if we don't feel it? How do we create this love? We need to put the right messages and ideas ON our heart so that when our heart opens up in a moment of great inspiration, all the love will fall inside! We must learn about *ahavas Hashem* and speak about it! We must do actions that will lead us in that direction! **R' Avigdor Miller ז"ל** says to say, once a day, out loud, "I love you *Hashem*!" You don't really feel it? That's okay. Keep saying it. Put it ON your heart, and when the heart suddenly opens up in a moment of excitement, it will fall deep inside. This does not mean you are a hypocrite. A hypocrite is "אחד בפה ואחד בלב", there is one thing in your heart and something else in your mouth. But here it is one and the same. What is in your mouth is ON your heart, just waiting to get IN!