

MA CHADASH?

A WEEKLY NEWSLETTER FOR SHALOM TORAH ACADEMY OF CENTRAL NEW JERSEY



Parsha Lesson

Netzavim- Pain and Suffering

For this year's Parsha Lesson I will be applying the lesson that can be derived from the Dvar Torah to the world as we know it today.

Background

This week's Parsha (Torah portion), Parshas Netzavim, opens with Moshe continuing his farewell speech and saying to the Jewish nation- 'behold you are all standing here today before Hashem.'

Rashi explains, based on the Midrash Tanchuma (*one of the earliest Midrashim- Rabbinic commentary on the Torah*), that there is a deeper plot and context one needs to understand to properly understand the full meaning of what Moshe was saying here. In the previous Parsha, Moshe listed 98 curses which would befall the Jewish people if they would violate the Torah, if they would transgress the will of Hashem. Upon hearing all of these curses, on top of the previous set of 49 curses which were listed at the end of the Book of Vayikra (the 3rd of the 5 books of the Torah) the Jewish people's spirits fell and they questioned- who can stand such punishment?

In response to this, Moshe begins this week's Parsha by saying- 'behold you are all standing here', despite your having angered Hashem many times throughout these 40 years in the desert, nevertheless you are still alive and well today, Hashem did not destroy you. And furthermore, even though there will be dark times, those dark times will be followed by light- Hashem will light up for you, just as the day follows the night. And finally, Moshe told the Jewish people, the punishments, curses and suffering are all necessary ingredients in order for you to be able to survive, to last and to be able to stand strong.

Question

On a logical level, none of this makes any sense. Why is it important that they are still standing alive and well? That is because they did not suffer all of those terrible curses while in the desert! They may have angered Hashem, but apparently not so much to deserve all of these punishments that Moshe had previously mentioned. The generation of the desert was really an excellent generation and had many exceptionally righteous people in it. So true, they are alive and well, but in the future when the Jewish people will inevitably sin even more and be on an even lower level, they are concerned that their descendants will be destroyed. What is Moshe showing from them being alive and well today?

Furthermore, why is Moshe saying to them that 'look, you were not destroyed'? Where in the curses did it say anything about destruction? And, presumably, what the Jewish people meant when they were concerned about not be able to 'stand the punishments', is in a sense of being able to function properly as people with aspirations, goals, dreams, etc., people who can move on and be productive, functional and successful. Not to merely be alive and not destroyed. So why is Moshe saying to them- 'look, you were not destroyed.' Who said anything about concerns of being destroyed?

Why does Moshe continue and say that 'there will be light, just like the light of day follows the night', and then conclude by saying that the suffering and the curses are necessary for them to be able to 'last and stand strong'? If the Jewish people's concerns were that they would be destroyed, re-assuring them that destruction will never happen would seem to be sufficient. How is what Moshe is saying further a response to the Jewish people's concern? It may be good encouragement, but it does not seem to be necessary to 'answer' their concerns.

And finally, what is with the poetic and flowery reference to the 'light of the day following the dark of the night'? It may sound nice, but what is the operative purpose of Moshe making such a reference in response to the concerns of the Jewish people? These were intelligent and serious people, if he needs to explain that there will be good times, say it straight! No need for flowery poetry.

Answer

The first step to understanding this speech of Moshe, is to understand that Moshe was responding not to a logical concern that the Jewish people had but rather to the emotional state that they were in. As is clear in Rashi and in the Midrash, what Moshe was responding to was the spirits of the Jewish nation falling. They were in despair, they had succumbed to 'yish', giving up of hope. What caused this? The impending, inevitable, suffering of their descendants from the terrible curses that they just heard. As such, Moshe saw the need to 'strengthen' them, to give them 'chizuk'. And from this we learn how to properly raise the spirits of someone else, or yourself, when someone falls into despair.

Parsha Lesson (cont.)

The first step is that the Jewish nation was clearly concerned about 'complete destruction', which was not part of the curses, but that is the nature of what happens when someone falls into despair- they go 'off the rails' and 'spiral out of control' as they think of far worse things than what actually happened or will happen. Moshe needed to first address this. He did, but not by telling them that destruction will not happen, but rather by showing them from the past that such apocalyptic thinking, in fact, did not happen.

Next Moshe had to raise their spirits and give them reason to hope, within the terrible events and catastrophes that they were dreading in the future. That hope was of better days to come. Things will improve. The Jewish nation will not be 'stuck in the darkness', light and good times will come. And in order to drive this message home, emotionally, Moshe needed to give the Jewish people something simple and tangible to hold onto and to use as the context for their hopes, and that was the example of night preceding day. Even intelligent and serious people, when gripped by despair, need very simple, easily relatable examples to wrap their heads around in order to begin pulling themselves out of their hopelessness.

And finally, Moshe needed to assure them that these curses and this suffering was in fact necessary for their survival and would be productive in helping to make them stronger and better. Senseless and meaningless suffering crushes the spirit in a way which is almost impossible to fully heal from. A person must be able to comprehend and understand well, after being pulled out of their 'rut' and being infused with some hope, that the suffering they are enduring is going to build them and make them stronger. They must be able to understand as clearly as they can, and the clearer and more 'real' it is, the more effective it is, that the difficulty and hardship they are going through is purposeful and will make them and their descendants better and better people. If someone is suffering through the physical pain of an intense workout, it encourages them and makes them happy, when someone suffers through pain for no rhyme or reason, it beats the life and spirit out of a person.

Lesson for our world

The way to deal with pain and suffering, particularly emotional, is not by avoiding it, hiding from it and pretending as if it doesn't exist- rather, it is by understanding it and dealing with it. When someone can come to an understanding of how their challenges and how their pain and suffering is productive and helpful, then a person can really engage with it in a reasonable manner which they can grow from.

When one looks around the world, with all of the physical comforts and pleasures- with an ease of life and enjoyment unknown to thousands of years of humanity- one cannot help but to be bewildered at the level of pain, suffering and despair that people suffer through. Levels of depression, anxiety, and complete hopelessness are off the charts and skyrocketing further. Commensurately, drug use, and addictive and harmful pleasure seeking is off the charts as well, as people seek a balm for their suffering- an escape from their misery.

So what is the answer? Where has society gone wrong?

It is in the belief that the epoch of humanity is physical comfort and delight. It is in the mistaken belief that man is merely an animal, with primarily physical needs. That is incorrect. Man is *primarily* spiritual with needs for fulfillment and meaning. Man is here not for the maximization of physical ease and pleasure, but rather to develop their character and to 'make something of themselves'.

When a person realizes that there is a higher, more elevated purpose to life on this world, above and more meaningful than physical comforts, then that person will have the proper foundation for a happy and successful life on this world. A life in which the person understands that they are on a mission, a mission to constantly improve, develop and 'rise up'. Such a mission will infuse meaning into everything in life and lead to a life of happiness. And with this understanding, this person will have the foundation with which to begin to deal with pain and suffering.

As a person begins developing their character, the person will begin to have their eyes opened to new understandings of challenge and difficulty. This will lead a person to the ultimate cure for the difficulties and challenges they face- the understanding of how that which they are going through and struggling with, will develop them and make them better people.

Friday, September 15	Rosh Hashana - No Sessions
Wednesday, September 20	Back to School Night at 7:00 p.m. - 2:45p.m. Dismissal
Monday, September 25	Erev Yom Kippur/Yom Kippur - No Sessions
Fri. - Fri, Sept.29 - Oct. 5	Succos - No Sessions
Monday, October 9	Classes resume - Delayed Opening at 10:30 am
Fri. – Sat., October 13–14	Parent/Student Shabbaton



Attendance Policy:

Elior Levy - September 2
 Oriyan Levi - September 4
 Noah Weissman - September 6
 Natanel Levi - September 7
 Benjamin Faber - September 8
 Sion Najar - September 8
 Avi Nemirovsky - September 8
 Amit Feit - September 11
 Michael Korenblum - September 11
 Nicholas Avizov - September 13

Reporting Student Absences: If your child will be absent from school, please email attendance by 10:00 am. Include the reason for the absence.

Dismissal Changes: To make a change for dismissal, emails must be sent to attendance before 3:00 pm (12:00 pm on Fridays)

attendance@shalomtorah.org

September School Lunch Menu

Monday, 9/11	Tuesday, 9/12	Wednesday, 9/13	Thursday, 9/14	Friday, 9/15
Mac & Cheese Sliced Veg.	Cheese Boureke, Scrambled Eggs, Veg. Soup & Sliced Veg.	Fish Sticks with Rice, Vegetables	Bagel (choice of Egg Salad, Tuna or Cream Cheese), Veg. Soup & Israeli Salad	Erev Rosh Hashana No Sessions
Monday, 9/18	Tuesday, 9/19	Wednesday, 9/20	Thursday, 9/21	Friday, 9/22
Penne ale Vodka (contains no alcohol) & Garden Salad	Sicilian Pizza and Sliced Veg.	Scrambled Eggs, Sweet Potato Soup, Garlic Knots, Israeli Salad	Fish Sticks with Rice, Vegetables	1 Pizza Slice
Monday, 9/25	Tuesday, 9/26	Wednesday, 9/27	Thursday, 9/28	Friday, 9/29
Yom Kippur No Sessions	Rotini in Alfredo Sauce, Split Pea Soup & Veg.	French Toast & Scrambled Eggs, Sliced Veg.	Sicilian Pizza and Sliced Veg.	Erev Succos