

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Bechukosai 5768

And they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers, regarding the trespass they committed against Me, and their acting as if everything happened by chance. I, too, will act as if everything were chance, and I will bring them into the land of their enemies, for then their hard heart will be humbled, and then they will atone for their sins. (26: 40-41)

The Ohr Hachaim asks two questions here: 1) Why will they have to confess the sins of their fathers? Once a person repents on his own sins, he is not punished for his father's sins, as the Targum says on Shemos 20:5. 2) After they have already repented, why will Hashem act as if everything is chance and bring them into the land of their enemies?

He explains that G-d is merciful and often lets sins go unpunished for many generations, allowing the sinners numerous opportunities to repent. In the final years of the First Temple, the prophets rebuked the people, warning them of the exile and the other punishments detailed in the Torah. But the people did not listen, for they said, "Our fathers sinned and none of these punishments came upon them, so what we are doing cannot be so wrong." Even as their situation became worse and worse, they refused to believe that their misfortunes were punishments, and instead attributed them to chance. Therefore, when they finally repented many years after the destruction, they were required to admit their mistake and say, "Yes, we were wrong to attribute all these things to chance. These were punishments for our sins and our fathers' sins. We suffered this punishment because we continued in the ways of our fathers."

The second verse, "I, too, will act as if everything were chance, and I will bring them into the land of their enemies" is actually part of their words of confession. At the time Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were sent into exile, they grumbled, "Why did G-d do this to

us? If He had to punish us, why didn't He punish us in our land?" And they added a pious complaint: "If the purpose of the punishment was so that we should repent, sending us out among the nations of the world is counter-productive. We will only get worse there by learning from the ways of the gentiles." But it was wrong of them to doubt G-d's wisdom and justice, and therefore when they repented they had to admit this mistake as well, saying, "Since we sinned by attributing our misfortunes to chance, G-d acted measure for measure and brought upon us more punishments that seemed purposeless, such as exile."

Later on, says the Ohr Hachaim, the Torah gives us a different answer to the question of why the Jewish people had to leave their land – a question which "troubles everyone who has a wise heart". Verse 44 reads: "And also this: when they were in their enemies' lands, I did not reject them nor revile them to destroy them, to annul My covenant with them, for I am Hashem their G-d." The Ohr Hachaim explains: And also this – an additional answer to the question – is that by virtue of their being in their enemies' lands, I did not destroy them. I took my anger out on the land, sparing the Jews themselves.

This is similar to the idea expressed in the Midrash on Eichah 4:11, that G-d took out His anger on the wood and stones of the Temple and the Jewish people were thereby spared. That is why it says (Tehillim 79:1), "A song of Assaf: G-d, the gentiles entered your property, they have defiled Your holy sanctuary, they have made

Jerusalem into rubble.' This chapter is called a song, not a lamentation, because through the destruction of the Temple the Jewish people were saved. This is also the meaning of Eichah 4:11, "Hashem used up His anger."

Moreover, says the Ohr Hachaim, when G-d sees such an exalted and noble people degraded, serving their enemies, His mercy is aroused and He does not exact full punishment from them. Their degradation thus saves them from further punishment.

The Satmar Rav (Vayoel Moshe 1:15) points out that here the Ohr Hachaim calls those who question the purpose of exile "wise of heart" whereas earlier he wrote that they were wrong for asking the question. He answers that the wise man is bothered by the problem but at the same time accepts the decree as just and righteous. For the sinner, on the other hand, this unanswered question leads him to a rejection of exile.

The Ohr Hachaim spoke with a prophetic spirit, and his words outline the events of our time. The Zionists enjoyed success in their early years, and so they

conclude that G-d must be on their side. Even today, as their situation deteriorates, they say, "What we are doing cannot be wrong, since our fathers were not punished." They cannot believe that current events are punishments, and instead attribute them to other factors.

And among some religious Jews who claim not to be Zionists, we hear the argument that living in Eretz Yisroel is really exile. Like the sinful Jews mentioned by the Ohr Hachaim, they argue that the punishment of exile can be fulfilled even while living in the Holy Land, adding that it is actually better not to live among the gentiles lest we learn from their ways. Unlike the "wise of heart", they reject the Divine decree under which we were expelled from the Holy Land, and they support the military efforts of the Zionists to maintain a Jewish government in the Holy Land. These people will eventually be forced to confess their sin and the sins of their fathers, admitting that their ways were wrong and that G-d's decree was just. They will eventually see that, as the Ohr Hachaim says, living under the nations is our best guarantee to merit G-d's mercy and protection.

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