

Parsha Pearls

Nitzavim/Vayeilech 5767

אתם נצבים היום כולכם לפני ה' א-להיכם (דברים כט, ט).

"You stand here today before Hashem your G-d." (Devarim 29:9)

Rashi (on v. 12) says: When Israel heard the 98 curses at the end of last week's parsha, in addition to the 49 curses in Vayikra, their faces turned green and they said, "Who can survive these?" Moshe then began to comfort them: "You have already angered G-d a lot, yet He has not totally destroyed you. Just as the day gets brighter and darker at various times, so too G-d shined His light upon you and in the future will again shine His light upon you. These curses and afflictions are what keep you alive and allow you to stand before Him."

Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman explained that the reason affliction allows the Jewish people to survive is because of the principle stated in the book of Koheles (3:15), "G-d looks after the pursued."

"At a time when anti-Semites raise their voices against the Jewish people," Rabbi Wasserman wrote in the 1930's, "and advocate our total destruction, G-d forbid, then we begin to be persecuted and chased, and this triggers the principle that 'G-d looks after the pursued' – which applies no matter what, even when the pursuer is righteous and the pursued is wicked. G-d's attribute of justice, whatever claims it may have against the Jewish people, cannot argue

with this principle, it is silenced, and thus the Jews are saved from total destruction.

"We see from this that our whole strength and survival depends on us being in the role of the persecuted. G-d forbid for us to try to become persecutors! One of the three oaths that G-d made the Jewish people swear is "do not rebel against the nations" (Kesubos 111a). "Some come with chariots and some with horses, but we call in the name of Hashem our G-d." (Tehillim 20:8) (Article entitled "The Calm Words of the Wise are Heard," printed in Yalkut Maamarim Umichtavim, pp. 101-102)

The words of Rashi together with Rabbi Wasserman's explanation seem to be a prophetic description of our era. After seeing the 98 curses – the terrible destruction experienced by European Jewry – many Jews said, "Who can survive these? We can no longer tolerate this exile. Let us found a state in order to prevent another Holocaust." The Torah tells them, no! It is precisely the exile that allows you to survive. G-d takes care of the persecuted. If you turn the tables and become persecutors of other peoples, who knows if G-d will protect you?"