

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Nitzavim-Vayeilech 5769

Lest there be among you a man or woman, family or tribe, whose heart turns aside from Hashem our G-d...and when he hears the words of this curse he will bless himself in his heart, saying, I will have peace, for I will walk in the waywardness of my heart...Hashem will not be willing to forgive him, for then the anger and jealousy of Hashem will burn against this man, and the entire curse written in this book will rest upon him, and Hashem will blot out his name from under the heavens. (Devarim 29:17-19)

The "curse" refers to the prophecy of exile in Devarim 28:15-68. If the entire Jewish people will go into exile, why does this man think he will avoid it by walking in the waywardness of his heart? And what does it mean that Hashem will punish this man by giving him the entire curse – did not the whole Jewish people receive this punishment of exile?

The Ksav Sofer resolves these problems by saying that the exile is atonement for the sins of the Jewish people, as we see in the Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 44:21) that Avraham Avinu chose the exile in lieu of Gehinom. By virtue of their suffering the exile, they are spared punishment in the World to Come. The wicked Jew says that by throwing off the yoke of Torah observance and assimilating with the gentiles, he will be able to escape from the suffering of exile. The Torah tells us here that not only will he not be successful, but he will lose his atonement as well. "Hashem will not be willing to forgive him" as he forgives the rest of the Jewish people when they suffer the exile. "The entire curse will rest upon him" – he will suffer the exile just like all the other Jews – "and Hashem will blot out his name from under the heavens" – he will be banned from the World to Come as well.

The Ksav Sofer is clearly referring to the Reformers and Maskilim of his time, who thought that Jews could alleviate their suffering by assimilation. However, it would seem that the same would apply to Zionists, even religious ones, who think that they can throw off the yoke of exile on their own. According to the Ksav Sofer, they will suffer exile in spite of their efforts, and moreover they will not reap the benefits of exile: atonement and escape from Gehinom.

The Shelah (Parshas Lech Lecha) quotes two Midrashim about the Four Exiles, one saying that they are alluded to in the first verses of Bereishis, and the other saying that they were shown to Avraham at the Covenant Between the Parts. The Shelah asks why these unhappy events had to be mentioned at such times. Seemingly, at a time when the world or the Jewish people is being built, the Torah should focus on the good, saving punishments and misfortune for another time.

He answers that since man is imperfect, the exiles are a necessary element of the building of the world and of the Jewish people. Just as in the laws of Shabbos, a destructive act is considered work only if it leads directly to a constructive act, so too the exile is ultimately not destructive but accomplishes the purification of the Jewish people and of the entire world, to prepare it for the purpose of creation, the messianic era.

We say in Tehillim (30:2), "I will exalt You, Hashem, for You have lifted me up (dilisani)." The Shelah (Parshas Balak) comments that the root letters daled-lamed have two meanings – poverty and uplifting – because the poverty and misfortunes of exile are the reason for future uplifting. The Jewish people are children of Hashem (Devarim 14:1), and even when Hashem is angry with us and brings destruction, it is for our own good. "As a man chastises his son, Hashem chastises you." (Devarim 8:5) The purpose of the misfortunes is the purification in the refinery of the exile: to destroy sin and be clean, without impurities, for the future.

The Jewish people accepted several oaths, which contain the terms and regulations of exile. Rabbi Moshe Hager, the Kossover Rebbe (in Leket Ani, Chayei Olam), says that the reason for the oaths is that every Jew must accept upon himself the yoke of exile lovingly, until the time of the redemption arrives. The exile is of great importance, because it atones for the sin of Adam eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Furthermore, exile was chosen by Avraham Avinu at the Covenant Between the Parts to spare us from Gehinom. We must not try to force the hour, for in so doing we will really just be delaying the redemption - G-d will in any case make us return to exile to serve the remainder of our term.

With this in mind, says the Kossover Rebbe, we can explain the two versions of the text in Kesubos 111a as being identical in meaning. According to one version, G-d adjured the Jewish people not to force (yidchaku) the end of exile. According to the other version, the oath was not to delay (yerachaku) the end of exile. Seemingly these two versions are opposites, but according to the above, the oath forbids pushing for the end, since by so doing we will really be delaying the end.

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