



Parshas Vayelech

For the week ending 6 Tishrei 5758
25 - 26 September 1998

Overview

On the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent bidding farewell to his people, encouraging them to “keep the faith.” Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, Hashem is with them. He summons Yehoshua, and in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as leader of the Jewish People. Thus, he strengthens Yehoshua’s status. Moshe teaches the mitzvah of hakhel: Every seven years on the first of the intermediate days of Succos, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather at the Temple to hear the King read from the Book of Devarim. The sections that he reads deal with faithfulness to Hashem, the covenant, and reward and punishment. Hashem tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the Mishkan, where Hashem will teach Yehoshua. Hashem tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land, the people will be unfaithful and worship other gods. Hashem will then completely “hide His face,” so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, hunted by all. Hashem instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song — Ha’azinu — which will serve as “witness” against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to Bnei Yisrael. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah and instructs the levi’im to place it to the side of the Holy Ark, so that no one will ever write a new Torah Scroll different from the original, for there will always be a reference copy.

Insights

COSMIC HIDE AND SEEK

“I will surely hide My face.” (31:18)

Once, there was a great rabbi who came upon a young child crying his heart out. “What’s the matter, yingele?” asked the Rabbi, his eyes shining with sympathy and concern. “We were playing...” The child struggled to speak between sobs. “We were playing hide and seek...and I was the one who was supposed to go hide...” The boy looked up into the Rabbi’s face. “Yes, I’m listening,” said the Rabbi. “So I went and hid but...but...” The child broke down again in gales of sobs. “Tell me what happened,” said the Rabbi softly. Finally, the boy managed to finish the sentence “...but nobody came to look for me!”

After a few moments, the Rabbi smiled his warm smile and said, “You know, you shouldn’t feel so bad. You’re in very good company.” The child heaved a little, his tears abating. The Rabbi looked into the child’s eyes and continued: “You’re in very good company indeed. G-d feels a lot like you — not many people are coming to look for Him.”

This world is a cosmic game of hide-and-peek. We are given an invitation to this world; the invitation is called life. This invitation itself is a challenge: Who brought us here? Who sustains us here? What are we doing here?

To make the game more challenging, and our success more meaningful and rewarding, there are various distractions and “false leads” which can take us away from the game. But our “Host” has not left us without a “crib sheet” to help us navigate this ultimate virtual adventure. He has provided a clear manual which is guaranteed to allow us to unmask Him and the purpose of our existence. This manual is called the Torah.

When we keep the Torah, we see our “Host” more and more clearly. But if we don’t keep the Torah, He will hide himself more and more deeply, and finding Him will be very difficult indeed.

“I will surely hide My face.”

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In the Hebrew language, the emphatic "to surely do" something is expressed by the repetition of the verb. In other words, the literal translation of the phrase "I will surely hide My face" is "Hide, I will hide My face."

The very structure of the Hebrew language gives us an insight into this "hiding." There are two kinds of concealment. One is a concealment where you know someone is there but you just can't see them. The other is a concealment where you don't even know if they are there at all. In this second type, the very fact of their being hidden is concealed. This is the ultimate hiding — where the very hiding is hidden.

When we are aware that G-d has hidden from us, He is not really concealed, because we realize that our hiding from Him has been reciprocated by His hiding from us. And so, we humble ourselves and return to Him, imploring his forgiveness. However, when the hiding is itself hidden, and we think that this is the way the world is supposed to be, then we are in big trouble, because nothing awakens us to return to Hashem. We think to ourselves: "This is the way things are supposed to be — isn't it?"

Ignorance, they say, is bliss. But only while we're ignorant of our ignorance. One day, we will all wake up in the real "Supreme" court, and we will then have to pay the price for our years of "bliss." On Yom Kippur, we have a chance to shake ourselves out of our self-inflicted ignorance. A once-a-year opportunity to throw ourselves on the mercy of the King. If we search with all our hearts, we will find Him.

DON'T WORRY BE HAPPY

"And he will find many evils and worries and say on that day 'Behold, because G-d is not in our midst these evils have befallen me.' "

(31:17)

How would you define happiness? Having lots of money? Status? Security? Youth and beauty?

Someone once said "Happiness is knowing things are important, and knowing that you have a connection to them."

A person who believes in G-d, believes things to be important: The world has a purpose and everything happens for a reason. I may not understand the reason but that doesn't mean that events are random. The

person of faith sees everything in life as important. The Divine scriptwriter leaves no plottwist unresolved. No one's life is insignificant. No event is without importance. If G-d created me, I must be important; I must have significance. This is the essential source of happiness: "If G-d created me, my life must be significant." This attitude is a tremendous weapon against feelings of depression and loneliness.

If happiness is the knowledge that things are important and I am connected to them, then unhappiness is the reverse. Feeling that nothing is important. The antithesis of happiness is apathy. Apathy is the voice that says "I am worthless; my life is worthless; things are worthless... Why get out of bed?"

"And he will find many evils and worries and say on that day 'Behold, because G-d is not in our midst these evils have befallen me.' "

The structure of this verse is asymmetrical. It starts off talking about "evils and worries" and ends by mentioning only "evils." What lesson is the Torah hinting to here?

"Evils" refers to the event itself. In this world, tragedy is no stranger. Many are the lives which must bear "evil" of some kind. In our world, we divide events into good or evil. Our vision is limited. We cannot see the ultimate good of everything that happens. "Worries" refers to the mental anxiety, to depression; when all the world looks bleak. This comes in addition to the "evil" itself which has been visited upon a person. When we have no faith in G-d, not only are we afflicted by the pain of events, but worse, we have no means of putting these events into perspective. We see things as the spiteful indifference of a random universe.

However, when we put our trust in G-d, we walk through the valley of the shadow of death without fear, because we know that G-d is always with us.

Sources:

Don't Worry - Be Happy - Rabbi Elazar Menachem Man Shach in Lekach Tov; Rabbi Noach Orlowek

Cosmic Hide-and-Seek - The Sfas Emes in the name of the Chidushei HaRim in Mayana shel Torah; a story heard from Rabbi Zev Leffr

Haftorah Shabbos Shuva

Hoshea 14

Shabbos Shuva is the first Shabbos of the year. It is the prototype, the blueprint for the whole year. Because of this, we must be especially careful to guard its sanctity — as it is the first. The Talmud tells us that if the Jewish People had kept the first Shabbos properly, no nation nor tongue could have ruled over them.

On Rosh Hashana a new order is created for all the days of the year — thus if the first Shabbos of the year is correctly observed, then the whole year follows suit. Man was created on erev Shabbos, on Friday afternoon, in order that he could immediately enter into Shabbos. But before Shabbos came, Man had already sinned.

Shabbos is an aid to teshuva. As our Sages teach (Berachos 37), a person who never sinned cannot stand in the place of a ba'al teshuva — someone who returns to Judaism.

Tzaddikim uphold the world, as it says in Proverbs "A tzaddik is the foundation of the world;" however, "teshuva preceded the world" (Pesachim 54). Therefore, the level of a ba'al teshuva is before the world, and thus above the world.

Just as the ba'al teshuva is before and above the world, so Shabbos too has a radiance which is higher than the six days of the week — a reflection of the world to come.

A BURNING SENSATION

An unbelievable sight. A young fellow with all the visible signs of an Orthodox Jew walks into MacTreife's Burger Bar and orders a cheeseburger! He then proceeds to eat it in full view of everyone.

Later he suffers tremendous heartburn from the indigestible fast-food. Much later however, he suffers an even greater "burn" in the spiritual department. The Shabbos between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is called Shabbos Shuva — the Shabbos of Return. The name is taken from the first verse of the Haftorah "Return O Israel to Hashem, for you have stumbled in your iniquity..."

The Meshech Chochma asks, "What does it mean to 'stumble' in 'iniquity?' If a person is already doing something wrong, how can he make it worse by stumbling in it?"

There are two aspects to wrongdoing. The offense in itself, and the desecration of Hashem's name that may result from it. It's one thing for a Jew to slink into MacTreife's with a baseball cap and blue jeans, in "plain-clothes." It's quite another to waltz in wearing full uniform. It's one thing to commit iniquity — to give in to one's desires — but it's quite another to stumble and desecrate Hashem's name in public.

Heard from Rabbi Calev Gestetner

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

ZECHER LEMIKDASH — SEEKING ZION

Zecher Lemikdash — this term, literally translated as a “remembrance of the Sanctuary,” expresses the effort of Jews not privileged with actually experiencing the Beis Hamikdash to at least connect with it in some way.

The gemara mentions two examples of zecher lemikdash which take place on Succos. One is in regard to the mitzvah of taking the four species. In the time of the Beis Hamikdash, this mitzvah was fulfilled all seven days of Succos only in the Beis Hamikdash itself, while everywhere else it was limited to the first day only. After the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash a decree was instituted by the Sanhedrin under the leadership of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai to take the four species all seven days everywhere, in order to remember what was done in the Beis Hamikdash — zecher lemikdash.

The other example relates to the mitzvah of taking the aravah which was done every day of Succos by the kohanim in the Beis Hamikdash. We do our mitzvah of taking the aravah on Hoshanah Rabbah, the seventh day of Succos, once again as a zecher lemikdash.

In addition to these two Talmudic examples, we have the custom of circling the bimah in the synagogue each day of Succos (except Shabbos) with our four species as a remembrance of the circling done in the Beis Hamikdash each day around the altar. We also recall the singing and dancing which accompanied the drawing of the water for the water libation offered on the altar by conducting our own “simchas beis hashoeva” on Succos evenings as zecher lemikdash.

What is the source for doing anything as zecher lemikdash? Rabbi Yochanan (Succos 41a) cites a passage (Yirmiyahu 30:17): “For I shall restore your health and heal your wounds, says Hashem; for they have called you an outcast, saying: This is Zion whom no one seeks.” The implication of the Prophet’s words, concludes Rabbi Yochanan, is that there is a need to “seek Zion” by doing things which were done in the Beis Hamikdash.

It may be suggested that all of our zecher lemikdash actions are not only designated for the purpose of remembering but also for traversing time and space to somehow connect with the sanctity we seek in our love of Zion.

