



## We Are Still Here

“Abba, where are the Babylonians today?”  
 “Gone, Chaim.”  
 “How about the ancient Greeks?”  
 “Non-existent.”  
 “The Persians?”  
 “You won’t find one of them anywhere.”  
 “What about the Romans, Abba. They were so powerful.”  
 “True, Chaim. However their nation fell, never to rise again.”  
 “Is there any ancient nation that still walks the face of this earth?”  
 “Yes, Chaim. Our nation! Hashem’s chosen people, the Bnei Yisrael! We are the only ones who have survived! All of the others rose and created great empires. They looked invincible. Yet, they all fell. Just our little nation, few in numbers and physically weak, has managed to outlive them all.”  
 “How did it happen, Abba?”

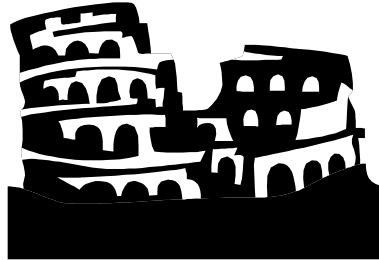
“The Medrash Tanchuma at the very beginning of this week’s parasha answers your question, Chaim. It begins by quoting the verse. ‘You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers – all the men of Israel’ (Devarim 29:9). You may ask, ‘Why were the nations condemned to destruction? Why are we still alive?’ The two questions have one answer – *yissurin* (suffering). The difference between Hashem’s holy people and the other seventy nations is how they react to *yissurin*. During good times, when Hashem showers his blessings upon the world, it is easy to say that you believe in Him and love Him. The Creator’s love and kindness are so open, that you naturally gravitate towards Him.”

“His kindness is endless.”  
 “Yes, Chaim. However, when times get rough, we see the difference. When the Gentiles are afflicted with difficulties in life they kick and rebel. They never even mention Hashem’s name. Dovid HaMelech recognized this when he said, ‘Pour out Your wrath upon the nations that do not recognize You, and upon the kingdoms that do not invoke Your name’ (Tehillim 79:6). When the nations are afflicted with Hashem’s wrath, they do not turn to Him. Klal Yisrael, on the other hand, has a completely different reaction. When *yissurin* come upon us, we humble ourselves and pray, as Dovid HaMelech says, ‘I found trouble and sorrow. But I called upon the name of Hashem’ (Tehillim 116:3,4). Therefore, the Almighty says to us, ‘Although these curses come upon you, they elevate you to return to Me.’ Similarly, in parashas Eikev, Moshe Rabbeinu recalls all of the *yissurin* of the midbar and explains that it was to test us, to see what was in our hearts (Devarim 8:2).”

“Did we pass the test, Abba?”  
 “We surely did, Chaim. Moshe tells Klal Yisrael that although the *yissurin* have come upon them, they have withstood

them! They grown from them!  
 They are all standing upright before Hashem today!”  
 “What an inspiration, Abba! We are still standing this very day, over 3000 years later. We have met the challenges of life’s difficult situations and have grown from them. We are members of the greatest nation that has ever walked the face of this earth. Your thoughts, Abba, give me the strength to meet life’s tests.”  
 “May you always succeed, Chaim.”

*Kinderlach . . .  
 Life has easier times and harder times. When everything is going well, it is easy to turn to Hashem and thank Him for His goodness. The real test comes when we run into rough waters. How do react to yissurin - life’s difficulties? We turn straight to Hashem. The Chazon Ish zt”l (Emunah and Bitachon Chapter 2) says that difficulties do not come by accident. They were decreed from Heaven. One who has bitachon (trust in Hashem) realizes this and turns to Him. He pours out his heart in tefillah (prayer). This is the hallmark of a Jew. This is what keeps us alive. We are all standing here today.*



## Closer Than You Think

“For this mitzvah that I command you today - it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven...Nor is it across the sea...Rather the matter is very near to you” Devarim (30:11-14). Which mitzvah is the Torah referring to? There are two opinions among the *meforshim*. The Ramban explains that the mitzvah of *teshuva*, mentioned in the previous verse, is very close to us. Never is this fact more obvious than in these days of Elul and Tishrei. Hashem is close to us during these *Yimay Ratzon* (Days of Special Favor). His door is open to all who truly wish to return to Him. The Dubno Maggid has a compelling parable on the subject. This story is based on that.

“Dovid, my good friend, I haven’t seen you in many years. How are you?”

Dovid forces an uneasy smile to his face.

“I feel okay. However the doctor tells me that I am not well.”  
 “Oh my.”

The two men continue talking and discover that they both suffer from the same disease.

“Do you have a good doctor, Dovid?”  
 “I hope so Shlomo. He has prescribed a very uncomfortable treatment for me. The medications are powerful and unpleasant.”

“Oy vey. Do you want to contact my doctor? He has a different approach. He uses mild medications, which are actually pleasant. He has an excellent reputation.”  
 “That sounds fantastic. How do I get in touch with him?”

“I will give you his telephone number, but before you call him you should know one thing. He has one condition that must be fulfilled before he begins treating a patient. He will only help someone who is interested in helping himself. This disease is caused by eating foods that damage the body. Therefore, the doctor will only treat you if you promise to follow his instructions and refrain from eating those damaging foods.”

“I see. I must consider this carefully before calling the doctor.”

That is the parable. The sick people are those Jews who are laden with *tumah* (impurity) from their sins. Hashem is the wise doctor who will purify them. As Rebbe Akiva said, “Fortunate are you, people of Israel! Before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven” (Yuma 85b). These *Yimay Ratzon* from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur are especially suited for *teshuva*. But wait! Is it really true? Year after year, we pass through Yom Kippur and we do not find ourselves purified from the *tumah*. What went wrong?

We did not fulfill the doctor’s one condition. To refrain from the bad foods. Our sins are compared to the unhealthy foods. Just as they bring the sickness, so too the sins bring the *tumah*. Hashem, the wise doctor, will only heal and purify us if we agree to refrain from the sinning, which brings the *tumah*. That is *teshuva*. That is our part. When we do our part, He will do His part.

*Kinderlach . . .  
 Is teshuva difficult? Not at all! It is not in heaven...Nor is it across the sea...Rather the matter is very near to you...In your mouth and in your heart to perform it” Devarim (30:14). The Torah promises that teshuva is right in front of you, waiting for you to reach out and grab it. When you do, Hashem will welcome you with open arms, like a long lost father. My little Yiddle has come back to Me. Let Me clean him up and hold him close to Me. He loves Me and I love him.*

### Parasha Questions:

- Which mitzvah is not in heaven? Where is it? (30:11-14 and Rashi)
- What choice was placed before us, and what were the results of each choice? (30:15 and Rashi)
- What did Moshe command to Yehoshua? (31:23)