**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Vaeschanan – Vol. 12, Issue 40**

**Compiled by Ozer Alport**

**נחמו נחמו עמי (ישעי' 40:1 – הפטרה)**

The Shabbos after Tisha B’Av is commonly referred to as Shabbos Nachamu, based on the Haftorah read on Parshas Vaeschanan that begins נחמו נחמו עמי – Comfort, comfort My people – and this Shabbos is widely observed as a minor Yom Tov. However, Rav Yehuda Wagshal of Yeshivas Mir in Yerushalayim points out that it is difficult to understand what actual comfort we are celebrating when the Beis HaMikdash still lies in the same ruins that it did a few days ago when we mourned its destruction on Tisha B’Av. Further, even on Tisha B’Av itself, we begin lifting some of the signs of mourning at midday, such as putting on tefillin and sitting on regular chairs. In light of the fact that it was on the afternoon of Tisha B’Av that the Temple began to burn, why is this considered a time of consolation?

The verse in Zechariah (8:19) enumerates the four Rabbinical fasts – Shiva Asar B’Tammuz, Tisha B’Av, Tzom Gedaliah, and Asarah B’Teves – and prophesies that there will come a time in the future when they will be marked as Yomim Tovim and times of tremendous happiness and rejoicing. Even if the Messianic redemption enables us to forget the pain and suffering that we endured in exile, a Yom Tov commemorates a time when something joyous and positive occurred. What transpired on these days that makes them fit to become Yomim Tovim?

One of the berachos (blessings) promised in Parshas Ki Savo (Devorim 28:3) for those who observe the mitzvos is, “Blessed are you in the city, and blessed are you in the field.” To what city and field is the verse referring? The Daas Z’keinim explains that “blessed are you in the city” refers to Jerusalem, while “blessed are you in the field” refers to Zion, as the verse states (Micha 3:12), “Zion will be plowed like a field.” Rav Simcha Wasserman notes that this is difficult to understand, as the verse in Parshas Ki Savo is intended as a beracha, while the verse in Micha is obviously intended as a punishment. Why would we cite a curse to elucidate the meaning of a blessing?

Rav Wasserman explains that in order to answer this question, we must first understand the nature of the act of plowing. When a farmer plows his field, he tears his beautiful grassy land asunder and reduces it to a plot that looks barren and desolate. Thus, if plowing is viewed in a vacuum, it appears to be an act of destruction, and if the farmer stops at this point and does nothing further to his field, he has indeed ruined it. However, if he follows up by planting new seeds and watering them, the seemingly harmful act of plowing will be transformed into a constructive prerequisite that facilitates the growth of a new harvest.

Similarly, when Hashem is compelled to punish the Jewish people for their sins, we describe it as churban (destruction), but in reality, Hashem does not destroy; He plows. If we neglect to engage in self-introspection to learn the appropriate lessons and instead opt to leave the plowed field as is, then it indeed becomes a churban, for nothing positive resulted from it. If, on the other hand, we take the message to heart by correcting our mistaken ways and rebuilding our relationships with Hashem, we transform the churban into a constructive act that enables us to rebuild and reach spiritual levels that could never have been attained without experiencing the plowing. This explains how the beracha in Parshas Ki Savo can be interpreted based on the verse, “Zion will be plowed like a field,” for when Hashem metes out punishment, He does not view it as a curse, but rather as a productive opportunity to plow and create new crops.

  With this introduction, Rav Wagshal suggests that the four Rabbinical fasts enumerated by Zechariah marking various aspects of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash will be transformed into Yomim Tovim to commemorate the fact that the destruction of the first two Temples enabled us to enjoy the third Beis HaMikdash, which will be even greater and more magnificent than the two that preceded it. Thus, when Moshiach comes, we will celebrate these days for their role as days of plowing, which set the stage to make the ultimate redemption possible.

  Just before Rav Elchonon Wasserman was murdered by the Nazis, he addressed the other Jews of Kovno who were about to be killed together with him. In discussing the unparalleled opportunity to die Al Kiddush Hashem (in sanctification of Hashem’s name), he quoted the words that we recently said in Nachem (console Jerusalem) on Tisha B’Av: כי אתה ד' באש הצתה ובאש אתה עתיד לבנותה – Hashem, with fire You burned the Temple, and with fire You will be rebuild it. Similarly, Rav Elchonon added that the same fire that consumed their bodies would be the fire that would rebuild the Jewish nation. Rav Wagshal explains that he was not merely saying that if a punishment happens through fire, so too correspondingly will the rebuilding be through fire. Rather, Rav Elchonon meant that the fire of destruction would become fire of plowing that would facilitate the growth of the field.

  With these insights, Rav Wagshal concludes that we can now appreciate why Shabbos Nachamu immediately follows Tisha B’Av, as well as why the comfort begins in the afternoon of Tisha B’Av itself, for even at the height of the destruction, we trust that Hashem’s churban is not truly a churban, but rather an act of plowing that enables us to rebuild our relationships with Him.

**ט"ו באב**

The 15th day of the month of Av is commonly referred to as Tu B’Av, and it traditionally falls close to Shabbos Parshas Vaeschanan; this year it will be on Monday. Our Sages teach (Taanis 4:8) that Tu B’Av and Yom Kippur were the most festive days in the Jewish calendar, and on these days maidens would go out in the field in order for the eligible males to select their matches. Although the unique holiness of Yom Kippur’s is well-known, what is special about Tu B’Av, and why was it considered a day particularly suited for the making of shidduchim (marriage matches)?

Rav Moshe Shapiro posits that Tu B’Av is not inherently a day for matchmaking, but rather its essence is a yom tefillah – day of prayer for our needs, which certainly includes shidduchim. The Gemora (Taanis 30b) teaches that after the Jewish people were sentenced to wander in the wilderness for forty years as punishment for the sin of the spies, each year on Tisha B’Av they would dig graves and sleep in them. Every year, more than 15,000 Jews would die on that night.

In the final year, all of those who went to sleep in their graves were shocked to discover in the morning that not one of them had died. They assumed that they had been in error about the date, so each successive night they again slept in their graves. On the 15th day of the month they saw the full moon and recognized that Tisha B’Av had clearly passed. The fact that they were all still alive was a sign that Hashem’s anger had ended and they had been forgiven for the sin of the spies, and those who were supposed to die would remain alive, which was a cause for tremendous celebration. When they realized that they had received a reprieve from the Divine death decree, they attained a newfound confidence in the efficacy of their prayers on this day.

Along these lines, Rav Yisroel Reisman cites the calculation of the P’nei Yehoshua (Berachos 32a) in support of Chazal’s teaching that Moshe beseeched Hashem 515 times to be permitted to enter the land of Israel. Rashi writes (Devorim 3:23) that Moshe began to entreat Hashem after conquering the lands of Sichon and Og, because this area would later possess some of the holiness of the land of Israel. Since Moshe was permitted to enter this region, he thought that perhaps Hashem had revoked His oath prohibiting him from entering Eretz Yisroel. Even before the actual military battle, Moshe know that the Jewish people would emerge victorious, for Hashem told him not to fear Sichon and Og (2:31, 3:2) since He had already delivered the angel in charge of their lands into Moshe’s hands. The Gemora relates (Bava Basra 121a) that Hashem told this to Moshe on the 15th of Av.

From the 15th of Av until the day of Moshe’s death on the 7th of Adar, there are 200 days. If Moshe implored Hashem during each of the three daily prayers, he would have petitioned a total of 600 times. However, it is forbidden to pray for one’s personal needs on Shabbos (Mishnah Berurah 288:22). Subtracting the prayers that he was not permitted to say on Shabbos, of which there were 28 during this period, leaves a total of 516 prayers. However, prophecy did not return to Moshe on the 15th of Av until the morning, leaving him without a reason to beseech Hashem during that day’s evening prayers. Thus, from the morning of the 15th Av until his death on the 7th of Adar at the time of Mincha (Tosefos Menachos 30a), Moshe prayed for the nullification of the decree precisely 515 times.

 In line with Rav Shapiro’s insight, Rav Reisman suggests that Moshe also recognized the power of prayer on Tu B’Av. Just as the rest of the nation saw on this day that Hashem’s ruling that they would die in the wilderness had been lightened, so too did Moshe understand that it was an auspicious time for him to begin imploring Hashem to annul the decree preventing him from entering Eretz Yisroel. Tu B’Av offers us a unique opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Moshe and our ancestors in the wilderness by strengthening ourselves in our commitment to prayer – for shidduchim, health, and success in all our endeavors.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. After Hashem decreed that Moshe and Aharon would not merit leading the Jewish nation into the land of Israel, Moshe repeatedly petitioned Hashem to reconsider and rescind the decree, but Hashem did not accept his prayers (3:23-26). Was there anything that Moshe could have done differently to nullify the decree? (Maharil Diskin, Yishm’ru Daas, Darkei HaShleimus)
2. Parshas Vaeschanan contains the first paragraph of Shema (6:4-9). The three paragraphs of Shema contain 245 words, which when combined with the three words repeated out loud by the prayer leader – אני ד' אלקיכם – come to 248 words, the number of limbs in a person’s body. A person who recites Shema when praying without a minyan adds the words ק-ל מלך נאמן at the beginning to make up for the missing three words of the prayer leader. In light of the fact that women have 252 limbs, not 248, are women required to say ק-ל מלך נאמן when praying without a minyan? (Shu”t Minchas Elozar 2:28)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) **Rav Dovid Povarsky** quotes a Medrash which teaches that had Moshe prayed for the annulment of the decree preventing him from entering the land of Israel immediately after it was made, it would have been rescinded. When he did not pray right away, this demonstrated that he did not properly value the overturning of the edict, at which point Hashem made an irreversible oath that He would not annul it. Alternatively, the Medrash teaches that Moshe petitioned Hashem 515 times, which is the numerical value of the word ואתחנן, to rescind His decree and allow him to enter the land of Israel. The **Maharil Diskin** and **Rav Shlomo Margolis** quote a Medrash which teaches that had Moshe prayed one more time regarding this subject, his request would have been granted. As far as why Moshe did not do so when entering Eretz Yisroel was so valuable to him, Rav Margolis notes that Hashem answered him (3:26) רב לך – it is enough; Rashi explains that Moshe’s repeated requests had the potential to cause a desecration of Hashem’s Name. Even though Moshe recognized that one additional prayer had the potential to bring him to his precious goal of meriting to enter the land of Israel, he was willing to give it all up in order to honor Hashem’s request and to avoid the possibility of decreasing Hashem’s Honor in the world.

2) The **Minchas Elozar** cites the Arizal, who explains that the 248 words of Shema are not intended to rectify and complete the 248 limbs of the individual saying Shema, but rather they correspond to the 248 “limbs” of esoteric mystical concepts. As this rationale is gender-neutral, the Minchas Elozar rules that women should also say these three words when appropriate.

© 2017 by Ozer Alport. To subscribe, send comments, or sponsor an issue, email oalport@optonline.net