

Ve 'Etchanan – 5783

I have never been very good at being able to see the symbolism hidden between the lines of a book that I am reading or have read. However, I am struck by the symbolism that weighs down the days between last Shabbat and this Shabbat. I know I often remark on this, but it is very hard not to see the genius of the sages of old, the rabbis that spent time trying to figure out how to read the entire Torah and when to read what section and then also what to do with the other two parts of the Tanach, the Nevi'im or Prophets, and the Ketuvim or writings. Then we add in the background to what we read between the two Shabbatot in terms of the drama unfolding in Jerusalem and it becomes almost overwhelming. I find myself lost in a sea of thoughts and emotions as I try to deal with it all.

To begin with, last week we began the reading of the last book of the Torah, Devarim, which paints a picture of ALL the Children of Israel sitting in the presence of Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our teacher, as he recaps what has been the story of our people and what is going to happen under the guidance of Caleb and Joshua as the tribes cross into the Holy Land. In order to understand and make sense of the deeper meaning of what transpires, the commentaries point to how Jacob gathered his family around him as he lay dying and as he blesses each of the sons in turn. As was pointed out to us last week in the fascinating Davar Torah by our visitor, Emily Simon, Moses proceeds to hearken back to the episode of the spies and the dying off of an entire generation or possibly even two and remind those gathered at his feet and hearing his lessons, they must have confidence in HaShem and derive strength from appreciating that he will always be with us. He will help us defeat our enemies as he has in the past. That we can accomplish every task that life puts before us because we have been chosen by him to be a light onto the nations and

he does not expect us to do it alone, as long as we agree to our half of the bargain, the compact if you will.

Then, on Wednesday night and Thursday, we mark Tisha B'Av and the destruction of the First and the Second Temples at the hands of our enemies. We fast, we pray, and we recite Lamentations, in which we are reminded of what has happened to Jerusalem and why. Not only have we been defeated by our enemies but, as the prophets want us to remember, we are suffering because we are not holding up our part of the compact. WE have lost faith in HaShem and have lost our way. And so, we suffer. We mourn.

Then we get to this week's Parsha, and we read that which is so important to ponder that we recite it every time we pray, when we rise in the morning, and they are supposed to be the last words we say and hear upon our deathbeds. Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad. But let's think about the fact that we say the word hear, but we are supposed to cover our eyes when we recite the Shema in prayer. Rabbi Jonathan Saxe draws attention to the fact that the Torah contains many instances of the how, the what, and the when of our faith and the way we practice it. But it seldom contains the whys as well. But here is where the question WHY is answered. To understand ask yourself what covering our eyes has to do with hearing. Rabbi Hillel used to cover his eyes to draw attention to the understanding and comprehending of the words of the Shema. We are meant to HEAR in the still, small voice that each of us has that we turn to in times of need and despair, in times of doubt and wonder.

And what exactly are we meant to hear. We accepted the oneness of HaShem back at the very beginning. When Abraham left the home of his father Terach because HaShem told him to. When Abraham took Isaac to the wilderness to

sacrifice him as he had been commanded by HaShem. When Jacob had his dream about the ladder. When Moses stood at the burning bush and accepted the call of HaShem. So, The Lord is One is not meant to imply that oneness of our deity. It alludes to HaShem being the focus of our love, our devotion, our one and only. WE are reminded by Moshe that everything we do, we do because we love HaShem. We love God.

When I was thinking about how I wanted to approach the Davar Torah and this concept of the love of HaShem, I played with the idea that that certain generation that I am a part of and so many of you are a part of, learned the words to the song Jesus Loves Me, This I know For the Bible Tells Me So. We are not hearing HaShem Loves Us Yet, we are being reminded first that WE love HaShem. WE do what we do out of love and not the opposite.

But then we have to question why if we are so devoted to HaShem, how could he have allowed our enemies to destroy the temples? How can he allow his people to act the way they are once again in the Holy Land? After all, the commentators in not just HaAretz but the Jerusalem Post as well, all point out that what is happening is a repeat of the struggles over religiosity within the ranks of our very own people.

Now we come to today which is also called Shabbat Nachamu, which means the Shabbat of Consolation. We read the first of seven Haftorot of consolation culminating at Rosh Hashanah. Today's Haftorah is from Isaiah, and he is consoling the Jewish people. It is true we have sinned; it is true we have lost a great deal; it is true that we have lost our way. But have faith because there is a purpose to everything that happens. And why? Because if we love HaShem, he loves us back. He chose us on purpose. He tried three times – with Adam, with Noah and then

with Abraham and Abraham reciprocated the love HaShem bestowed upon him. AS long as we reciprocate HaShem's love, he will continue to work with us to perfect creation, to make the world a better place. He favours us among all the nations, not because we are better but because we are meant to be the leaders. We are meant to find the strength to understand that there is a purpose for everything, and we are meant to go on. When we sit shiva, we sit and mourn and then we get up, we put one foot in front of the other and we continue to strive to make a better world than we have inherited and so it must continue.

At Rosh Hashanah we look inward and promise to return to the covenant, to try to be better and to reengage with HaShem in the work of perfecting the kingdom of the Almighty. Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto LeOlam VaEd. Praised be His Glorious Sovereignty throughout all time. WE only say those words aloud on Yom Kippur for a reason.

Shabbat Shalom.