

KI SAVO (DEUTERONOMY 26:1-29:8)

## Let There Be Light

2001 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

The world is not always a pleasant place. Our People have been subjected to persecution since the dawn of history. It is often difficult to comprehend G-d's ways. It is difficult to understand why bad things happen to good people.

Some people deal with this problem by deciding not to believe in G-d. Others, including a well-known Jewish author, come to the conclusion that evil exists in the world because G-d is powerless to prevent it. (This is a theory I like to call "religious atheism." It conveniently allows one to believe in G-d without being angry with Him.) While some find comfort in this belief, it has no connection with Torah Judaism.

As uncomfortable as it may be to acknowledge, evil exists because G-d, for reasons known only to Him, allows it to exist. I am not going to attempt to explain it, because I can't, but one need only look into this week's Torah reading to see that the Holocaust was predicted. Chapter 28 of Deuteronomy is replete with warnings of G-d's hiding His face from us and allowing the most terrible things to take place, *R"l*. It describes situations of starvation, slavery, and destruction. It depicts families torn apart, and an enemy devoid of human compassion.

(It is customary for the reader to chant this section in a lower volume and at a faster speed than the rest of the reading. In order to avoid insulting someone by calling him up to the Torah for the reading of these curses, many congregations have the custom of giving this *Aliyah* to the Torah reader, the *Gab\*\*bai* -- the person who summons people to the Torah, or the rabbi.)

Among the misfortunes predicted are blindness and confusion: *"You will grope ab\*\*out in broad daylight just like a blind man gropes in the darkness, and you will have no success in any of your ways. You will be constantly cheated and rob\*\*bed, and no one will help you."* (28:29)

Rabbi Yose in the Talmud (Megillah, 24b) was bothered by this verse. "... *just like a blind man gropes in the darkness...*" What is the significance of a blind person groping *IN THE DARKNESS*? Isn't it equally impossible for a blind person to manage, whether it is dark or light?

Rabbi Yose goes on to explain that he discovered the answer to this question one night when he observed a blind man walking with a torch. Rabbi Yose asked him what possible use he could have for a torch. The man responded that the purpose of the torch was to allow others to see him and guide him away from

pitfalls along the way. Without the torch, his friends would share his blindness, and he would be totally helpless. As difficult as life can be for a man who is blind, the pain is mitigated by the fact that he has friends to help him. Rabbi Yose understands this verse to mean that there will be a time that people will not help each other in times of crisis.

When reading stories of the Holocaust, one is often touched by the simple acts of humanity that fellow victims demonstrated. Whether they were sharing meager food rations or helping fellow inmates get their work done, many people demonstrated the unconquerable spirit of our People. (Similarly, it is inspiring to hear about the bravery of rescue workers who selflessly labored to evacuate victims of the pizza shop bombing. I recently read that there was a second bomb in the shop that the police eventually detonated. Sometimes terrorists place a second bomb close to the first one to explode a few minutes later so it can kill the crowds that gather after the first explosion. The rescue workers risked their own lives to provide emergency treatment.)

But not every Holocaust story delivers such inspiration. All too often, people thought of themselves first and ignored the needs of others. (We all have heard stories of the capos, Jews who collaborated with the Nazis in order to save themselves. It is not, of course, our place to sit in judgment of any decision made by any person under such horrendous circumstances. May we never need to know of such horrors.)

Rabbi Yose's point about the blind man with the torch is that it is bad enough when our enemies attack us. As long as there is unity within our nation, as long as we watch out for each other, there is hope. The real curse comes when our attitude becomes one of "every man for himself."

There is plenty of unity among our enemies. Fidel Castro, that great symbol of freedom and human tolerance, has condemned Israel for committing genocide. His friends in the European Union and the Arab world join him in criticizing Israel for defending herself. Arafat's Holocaust goes on, and the world is silent once again.

We must stick together. We must live in harmony and mutual respect. We must hold that torch that allows us to help each other, and therefore, help ourselves.

Let us show our Father in Heaven that we are no longer interested in strife, gossip, and selfishness. Let us show compassion to G-d's children and beg Him to do the same.

With Rosh Hashanah right around the corner, let us pray that 5762 will be a better year than 5761.

Have a great Shabbos.

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