



Words of Wisdom

By

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Vaeschanan: The Pain of Salvation

Every year the intense mourning of *Tisha B'Av* is followed by a joyous *Shabbos*, a *Shabbos* of consolation, *Shabbos Nachamu*. This juxtaposition allows for a unique confluence of emotions.

The *Sfas Emes*, the Rebbe of *Gur*, R' Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter (1847 – 1905), expounds on a verse in this week's *parsha Vaeschanan* that might shed light on this partnering of suffering and consolation., The verse states "For who is as great as the [Jewish] nation, G-d, Elokim is so close to them...". The verse lauds the Jewish people for their closeness to G-d, yet in doing so, the *Torah* uses the term *Elokim* which connotes G-d's attribute of judgement. Why would the *Torah* connect closeness to judgement?

To explain, the *Sfas Emes* begins by quoting the *Midrash*, which offers a parable, a *mashal* , to explain the verse in Psalms, *Tehillim*, chapter 20, "May the Lord answer you on a day of distress; may the name of the God of Jacob fortify you". The *Midrash* likens the idea represented in this verse to a woman who is having a difficult time during labor. Her companion has exhausted all words of comfort, exasperated, she says, "All I can offer is that the one that answered your mother will answer you as well!" Meaning to say, you, the birthing mother, know first-hand the rewards reaped in childbirth. It was precisely through this painful process that you, yourself were born. There is consolation when we understand that there is a reason and a process to the pain of childbirth.

The *Midrash* then applies this concept to all Jewish suffering. The *Sfas Emes* notes that in the *mashal*, the consolation offered to the woman in her distress is that the pain she is experiencing is necessary to deliver a child. The application to Jewish suffering is that all our communal pain is part of what is necessary to produce the ultimate salvation. We too must understand and find solace in all the suffering we endure, for it is all part of the process to forge something far greater and magnificent than the suffering itself.

There is a comfort us brought to light every *Tisha B'Av*. We are aware that however painful the *Golus* is, however long it seems to us, it is part of a calculated plan and necessary step forward to the ultimate salvation. Therefore, the *Sfas Emes* explains that when the *Torah* highlights the close feeling *Hashem* has towards us, the Jewish people, the *Torah* uses the name of *Elokim* which is associated with *din*, judgment. The lesson is that in times of *din*, strict and harsh judgment, the sort of *din* which is responsible for the tragic events that we read about on *Tisha B'av*, we can be assured of the close relationship G-d has to the Jewish people. Like the *mashal*, in which it is plain to see that the difficulty in childbirth is necessary to yield the most incredible return; so too our suffering will undoubtedly yield the most fantastic result.

Perhaps, the emotional rollercoaster we find ourselves this time of year when we move from a day of mourning to a *Shabbos* of joy and consolation can help us internalize the message of the *Sfas Emes*. All our sorrow which is sourced from G-d's attribute of *din* is a representation of his closeness to us, the suffering is inherently a harbinger of the great gifts that are in store. As the verse states in Jeremiah, "...and it is a time of distress for Jacob, through which he shall be saved". The ultimate salvation is in fact a direct product of our suffering.