



## WORDS TO THE WISE

*Rabbi Aryeh Dachs*

### 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*<sup>1</sup> 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 a *Midrash*, which offers a parable, a *mashal*, to explain the following verse in chapter 20 in *Tehillim*, “*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 comforts her friend, “the one that answered your mother will answer you as well!” The *Sfas Emes* explains that the companion is communicating to the birthing mother, to understand the rewards reaped in childbirth. It was precisely through this painful process that her mother bore her. Even during the most difficult birthing pains there is consolation when we understand that, that there is purpose to the pain.

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. So too, all our communal pain is a necessary part of the process to produce the ultimate salvation. We comfort ourselves by recognizing that the pain is a part of the process to forge something far greater and magnificent than the suffering itself.

In the pain we relive every year on *Tisha B'Av* also comforts us. However painful the *Golus* is, it is part of a calculated plan and necessary step forward to the ultimate salvation. Therefore, the *Sfas Emes* explains, when the *Torah* highlights the close feeling *Hashem* has towards us, 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 we just read about on *Tisha B'Av*, we are also assured of the close relationship G-d has to the Jewish people. It is plain to see that the pain of childbirth is a step in the process to yield the most incredible return; so too every extra bit of suffering we endure in *golus* is a step in a process to 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*. Our sorrow is sourced from G-d's attribute of *din*. Each manifestation of that *din* is a representation of his closeness to us. Every birth pain brings the mother closer to delivering her baby. Every bit of suffering brings us closer to 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 a direct product of our suffering.

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<sup>1</sup> תרנ"ז