

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Netzavim–Vayeilech

“AND IT WILL BE, WHEN ALL THESE THINGS COME UPON YOU THE BLESSING AND THE CURSE WHICH I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU... AND YOU WILL RETURN... THEN, [HASHEM] WILL BRING BACK YOUR EXILES...” (DEVARIM 30:1-3)

The curses should actually cause every Jew to feel simcha – happiness

RABBEINU YONAH on this week’s *parasha* explains that Hashem promised us that even if we sin and the horrible curses described in the Torah befall us – as they have throughout the last two millennia – we can be certain that we will return to Hashem in *teshuva* and eventually be redeemed from exile. It turns out, Rabbeinu Yonah continues, that Torah’s listing of the curses should actually cause every Jew to feel *simcha* – happiness. This is a puzzling statement – how can curses make us happy? To answer this question, Rabbeinu Yonah explains further: If the curses were not listed in the Torah, we would have thought that this miserable exile was a proof that Hashem has abandoned his Chosen People. But now that the curses were foretold in the Torah, we can understand that, just as the promise of the curses came true, so too, the promise of our return and redemption will certainly come to pass.

Could those Jews feel happy over the promise of eventual redemption?

It seems from Rabbeinu Yonah’s choice of words (“...every Jew to feel *simcha*”) that all Jews can feel this joy; that even a Jew in the midst of suffering the curses just described in the Torah can feel assured that the redemption is on its way. This is an astounding concept. The pain that the Jewish people suffered through has no comparison in the history of man. The torture and torment that each Jew felt during the siege of Jerusalem, during the Inquisition in Spain, or during the Holocaust in the concentration camps, was agonizing and intense. Could those Jews feel happy over the promise of eventual redemption? Could they find it within themselves to focus on the fact that if Hashem’s promise to exile us came true so too His promise to redeem us will also come true?

The promises Hashem made to us, are seared indelibly into our souls

This is the grandeur of the human spirit. Under the most horrifying and inhuman conditions, we have the ability to rise above our pain, to see beyond our tragic situation and to focus on Hashem’s promise to us and His unceasing love for us despite our sins and rebelliousness. Countless stories are told of inmates in the concentration camps who, at the brink of death, sang songs of joy, of faith and of redemption. Even those who did not express joy nonetheless sang *Ani Maamin*, the Jewish anthem of hope in the coming of *Mashiach* and the ultimate redemption, on the way to the gas chambers. How were they able to do it? Because the Torah’s words, the promises Hashem made to us, are seared indelibly into our souls and hearts and remain as pillars of strength and even joy in the most trying times we can experience.

As we approach Rosh HaShana, and focus our prayers on the restoration of Hashem’s kingship over all humanity, it is reassuring to know that we all can feel the certainty of that glorious day’s arrival, when we are gathered back to our land and proclaim once again our unswerving loyalty to the King of all kings. Let us hasten the coming of that day by undergoing the process of a sincere and realistic *teshuva* – as foretold and promised in this week’s *parasha*. May this be the year in which all these promises are realized and that *simcha* and hope, which perhaps were not always apparent during our long and painful exile, will then burst forth in a new song of eternal joy for the Jewish people.