

We are standing in the days before Rosh Hashono, and Shabbos Shuvoh comes right afterward. This year we are reading Ha'azinu for Shabbos Shuvoh. Sometimes we read Vayelech. Both parshiyos have similar themes. They tell about the future of Klal Yisroel when we fail in our spiritual mission. Hashem abandons us and leaves us prey to the evil that is always awaiting us.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּךְ שָׁכַב עִם אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וְקָם הָעָם הַזֶּה וַזָּנָה אַחֲרַי אֱלֹהֵי נֹכַח הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הוּא בָּא שָׁמָּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ וַעֲזָבֵנִי וְהִפָּר אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אִתּוֹ: וְהָרַח אִפִּי בּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַעֲזָבְתִּים וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פְּנֵי מַתְּנֵם וְהָיָה לְאֹכַל וּמִצָּאֵהוּ רַעוּת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְאָמַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא הֲלֵא עַל כִּי אִין אֶלְקֵי בְּקִרְבִּי קִצְאוּנִי הַרְעוּת הָאֵלֶּה: וְאֶלְכִי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עַל כֹּל הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרָיִם: (דברים לא, טז-יח)

The way history works is that Klal Yisroel perpetually find themselves in a precarious situation.

The moment Avrohom Ovinu decided he is going to publicly renounce the culture of avodo zoro and spread the truth about Hashem to the world, he put himself in constant mortal danger. He says this directly to King Avimelech. Targum Onkelos says:

וְהָיָה כִּד טַעוּ עַמִּמְיָא בְּתַר עוֹבְדֵי יְדִיהוֹן וְתֵי קְרִיב ה' לְדַחֲלֵתָהּ מִבֵּית אַבְרָם וְאַמְרִית לָהּ דִּין טִיבִיתוּיָךְ דִּי תַעֲבָדֵי עִמִּי לְכֹל אֲתֵרָא דִּי נְהָר לְתַמְנָן אַמְרֵי עֲלִי אַחֲרֵי הוּא: (בראשית כ, ג)

Hashem called upon Avrohom to represent Hashem in the world, and it is his job to tell the world about the existence of absolute morality and right and wrong. Everything is controlled by Hashem and He makes decisions about what happens in the world based on moral judgments.

This is a very unpopular idea because it is diametrically opposed to how avodo zoro operates. The philosophy behind avodo zoro is that there are many different powers and forces that make things happen in the world, and if you worship these powers you can influence them to your advantage. You can control your life though manipulating all these forces and you don't have to worry about doing what is good and what is right. There are no consequences for failing to live up to any moral demands. Each nation follows their own standards of behavior by worshiping the gods that benefit them, and there is no absolute correct code of moral conduct.

But we believe there is one G-d in this world, one system of right and wrong, and Hashem makes demands on us and there are consequences if we don't fulfil those demands. Most people don't want to hear such an idea, so they try to suppress it by force. But we bear this message to the world, whether we like it or not. This makes us a target.

Hashem sets up a protective shield around us, to allow us to fulfill our mission unharmed. But when we fail to carry out this mission, Hashem abandons us. He takes down that protective shield and we become vulnerable to all hatred and resentment that the non-Jewish world has for us, and they can now succeed in harming us.

In Parshas Ha'azinu, we read that Hashem showers us, drowns us, with all kinds of good. So much bounty and fertility and prosperity. But Klal Yisroel have a bad habit. We take all this goodness for granted and we take credit for it. Our ego gets inflated and we don't think we need Hashem, or we think we can buy ourselves protection with other means. But Hashem doesn't allow it. Hashem works with the concept of middoh k'negged middoh. We delude ourselves into thinking we are powerful and can manage our own lives without Hashem. We are

essentially relying on futile, powerless gods, and in return, Hashem sends a non-people – a nation that doesn't really have an identity – to attack us and persecute us.

This is what we are living through today. The people attacking us today are a nation without any real history.

The parsha predicts everything that has happened in our tragic history – past and recent. People are always baffled by Jewish tragedy. How could the Holocaust happen? How could October 7th happen? Where was Hashem? The truth is that it doesn't make sense. There is no logic to really explain the rise of Hitler and the Nazis in Germany, who went on to quickly conquer most of Europe. After seeing how far-thinking and sophisticated the Israeli intelligence apparatus is, it makes no sense that they didn't see October 7th developing well in advance. It doesn't make sense that the IDF couldn't respond in time to save people after it started.

If nothing makes sense, then it points to the fact that there are spiritual reasons why Hashem allowed it to happen. These pesukim are teaching us this lesson straight – you don't need any meforshim to explain the message.

But not only should Klal Yisroel have understood it, the nations who try to destroy us should also have understood that their ability to easily persecute us is only coming from Hashem's abandoning us. But these nations – like the Nazis, and the branches of Islam who want to destroy all Jews world-wide – have a deep hatred for Hashem. It is expressed by their desire to destroy the nation which represents Hashem in this world. This is an important yesod – the enemy of Hashem is an enemy of Klal Yisroel and vice-versa. They should have realized that just like there are serious consequences to not listening to Hashem, and we have to see Hashem's hand in everything, there will also be consequences for the nations who try to destroy us. The time will eventually come when everything gets reversed.

When Klal Yisroel will finally come to the conclusion that there is nowhere else to turn other than Hashem, and they stop putting their hopes for salvation in various schemes and plans, then the turnaround begins.

Chazal tell us a very interesting thing about the Purim story. When Esther gets taken to the palace of Achashveirosh, Mordechai tells her not to reveal her Jewish identity. Why? Because Mordechai was very nervous. He previously warned Klal Yisroel not to participate in the feast of Achashveirosh, and when they refused to listen, he realized there would be a serious gezeiroh that would put them in danger. This would be necessary to get them to do teshuvoh. Mordechai reasoned that if Klal Yisroel knew that there was a Jewish queen in the palace, they would ignore the danger and rely on their queen to save them from the gezeiroh. They wouldn't be motivated to do a proper teshuvoh when they think they can turn somewhere else.

The time will come when we realize there is nowhere else to turn, and this is a critical time in people's lives. The gemara at the end of Sotah says the time for Moshiach will only arrive when we give up hope in these other means of salvation and turn exclusively to Hashem to save us. As long as we depend on the United States, or our money and political influence, or our intelligence or superior technology, we will not see an end to the tragedies.

At some point, Hashem turns everything around and He punishes all

the nations that attacked us.

The nations will eventually recognize that throughout everything we went through, Klal Yisroel stuck with Hashem and never severed their relationship with Him. But what exactly is it which gives us the strength to hold on to that deep connection with Hashem and never let go despite all the tragedies and persecutions? The posuk says: "ואתם והדבקים בה' אלוכם חיים כולכם היום".

Just imagine what happened after living 40 years in the desert surrounded daily by miracles and supernatural living. They see the Shechinoh all the time – hearing the shiurim from Moshe Rabbeinu directly, and they encounter Moav. They are tempted by these Moabite girls. They are told, just worship this idol and you will get all the zhus you want, and on the spot, tens of thousands of Jews simply abandon everything they know to be true! They run after the biggest abomination you can think of – at the drop of a hat! When you lose your connection to Hashem and His Torah, you are capable of losing everything and sinking to the very bottom very quickly.

What keeps Klal Yisroel going? How do we stay connected to Hashem and focused on what's important? Learning Torah. And the zechus of Torah protects us in return.

The posuk says:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים שִׁימוּ לְבַבְכֶם לְכָל הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מַעֲיֵד בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר תִּצְוּ אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם לְשָׁמֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת: כִּי לֹא דָבָר רַק הוּא מַכֶּם כִּי הוּא חַיִּיכֶם וּבְדָבַר הַזֶּה תִּאָּרְכוּ יָמִים עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: (דברים לב, מו-מוז)

Rashi explains:

כי לא דבר רק הוא מכם. לא לחנם אתם יגיעים בה, כי הרבה שכל תלוי בה, כי היא חייכם. דבר אחר, אין לך דבר ריקן בתורה שאם תדרשנו שאין בו מתן שכר.

Don't think that it is for nothing that you break your head trying to understand the Tosfos and the various shittos Rishonim and Achronim. It isn't for nothing. It is your life.

Earlier in Parshas Vayelech, Moshe says this Torah will stand by you throughout all your persecutions. It will never be forgotten, and this is what will preserve you through history.

We live in a world that has changed radically in the last 12 months. A year ago, when we said in tachanun that we are a lowly, despised nation who are slaughtered like sheep, we thought, what does this have to do with our reality? We are so secure and accepted and admired by the world! But overnight, antisemitism shed its disguises and flourished out in the open across the western world. There is only sympathy for Jews when they are the victims being butchered. The minute they take steps to defend themselves, they are immediately and roundly condemned as aggressors and warmongers feeding the next cycle of escalation.

We have to understand that the Torah already told us all of this in advance and told us why it will happen.

We are living in a totally different dynamic than the routine lives we lived a year ago. And what is going to solve the crisis we are in? Is abandoning Torah and joining the army the solution? Taking away the very power that protects us? The only thing that keeps us balanced and focused in the crazy and upside-down world we live in, is limud Torah – as the Rambam says in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah. All the

distractions and depravity of today's modern culture confuses and disorients everyone all over the world. The Torah gives us clarity and the proper insight and orientation to what is really happening. Torah is not just a set of rules and information. It is our life.

People are confused about what life is supposed to be about. There are a lot of things we need to take care of while living in a material world, and it can easily get us off track. So while we are engaged in taking care of the necessities of life, we need to constantly stay connected to limud haTorah. Some have the merit to learn Torah primarily and not be so involved in the world. But those who are, need to maintain that connection throughout everything they do. They need to remember who they are – they are learners who also take care of other things. Torah is their life.

And the reason we have the merit to have almost a majority of Jews living in Eretz Yisroel is not from our defense forces or our technology. It comes from our learning.

כִּי לֹא דָבָר רַק הוּא מַכֶּם כִּי הוּא חַיִּיכֶם וּבְדָבַר הַזֶּה תִּאָּרְכוּ יָמִים עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:

We need to remember this, especially at this time in history when the necessity to learn Torah on a massive scale is being put into serious question. Because the posuk says this is what guarantees our security in Eretz Yisroel more than anything else. This is where we draw our identity from. We remind ourselves at Ma'ariv after a long day that Torah is the defining aspect of our lives – regardless of anything else we may have been doing throughout the day. Those things don't define who we are, those activities aren't what we live for. We live to learn Torah and everything else is to allow us to do that.

When a person makes a cheshbon hanefesh at the end of the year, he needs to ask himself how much time he actually spent on the things he was created to do – how much of his life was worth living, and to what extent was everything else just a means to living those moments that were important. Torah is what gives our lives meaning and it justifies our living here in security in Eretz Yisroel.

This is a very powerful message to remind ourselves of – for anytime during the year. But these parshiyos need to be read especially between Rosh Hashono and Yom Kippur, to understand what is the real meaning in life and what is just the means to get to that meaning.

Over the past 12 months, there has been a sharp middas hadin on the Jewish world. Many Jews have suffered tremendous losses during this year. The Shofar is designed to change the middas hadin to the middas harachamim. But it is also a call to wake up and do teshuvoh and realize we cannot squander the gifts we have been given on fleeting things that have no intrinsic meaning. These two things are strongly connected. The Rambam says the shofar wakes us up from the trance of transitory, frivolous living.

Hashem has a lot of tools at His disposal in order to give us various messages. He can use the Israeli Army and intelligence to work well and eliminate our biggest enemies, and He can cause it to break down and leave us vulnerable to experience the worst atrocities. They are the same tools and Hashem uses them in different ways – because He is running everything.

This is recognizing malchus shomayim and we have to wake up from our slumber. We have to keep up our connection on a daily basis – our lives are about Torah.