

Merciful Punishment

"Come, let's hurry! The bus is here!"

The father and his two little sons begin running toward the bus stop, hoping that the driver will wait for them. Someone had carelessly left a half-empty container of yogurt on the sidewalk. The father's foot slips on it and he turns his ankle. He falls to the ground in pain.

"Oy vey, Abba! What happened? Are you okay?"

"I'm not sure Chaim. My ankle is throbbing with pain. I'm afraid that it is broken. Please run home to Imma and tell her to come and take me for an x-ray."

"Okay, Abba. *Refuah shelayma.*"

Chaim's Imma comes and takes her husband to the emergency clinic. They are admitted promptly and the ankle is x-rayed.

"I have good news for you sir."

"Yes, doctor."

"The ankle is not broken, only sprained. Stay off it until the swelling goes down and the pain goes away. You will be fine."

"Chasdei (kindness from) Hashem. He is merciful even when He punishes."

"Amen. What do you mean my dear husband?"

"The gemora (Erechin 16b) relates that every unpleasant experience is called *yissurin* (suffering). Hashem sends *yissurin* as a punishment. It has a purifying effect, atoning for the sin committed (gemora Yuma 86a). However, He is merciful even when He sends *yissurin*. My ankle could have been much worse - it could have been broken. Hashem was kind and only sprained it."

"You are so wise, my dear, and you have so much *emunah*. Where did you learn this important principle?"

"It is in the very beginning of this week's parasha. The Torah lists the 42 places that Klal Yisrael camped during the forty years in the desert. Rashi makes a calculation, discounting the fourteen stops before the *Chet HaMeraglim* (Sin of the Spies), and the eight stops after the death of Aharon HaKohen. In 38 years, there were only 20 trips. Rabbeinu Bechaye elaborates even more. Klal Yisrael camped in one place - Kadesh - for 19 years. Therefore, they broke camp only 19 times in 19 years. Their traveling was very organized - following the *anan* (Heavenly cloud) - and pleasurable, with Hashem providing them with more food and drink than those people living in settled areas. All of this is to show us His Kindness. That generation was punished and sentenced to die in the desert. Their time spent there could have been very unpleasant. The desert, after all, is not a very hospitable place. However Hashem, in His Infinite Kindness, minimized their travels, and generously provided for all of their needs."

"That is truly beautiful."

"It is also a relevant message for these

three weeks of mourning. Each of the tragedies that befell Klal Yisrael over the generations was a punishment for sins. Yet we see time after time that the seeds of the rebuilding were sown before the destruction. The most striking example of this is the expulsion from Spain, on Tisha B'Av 1492. The very next day, Columbus sailed for America, to begin settling that land which would later be a haven for millions of Jews."

"Amazing."

"An earthly king vents his anger and cruelty when he punishes. Only The Holy King of Kings "signs" His punishments with kindness."

"May we merit the pure kindness without the punishment."

"Amen."

Kinderlach . . .

There is a positive side to everything, even suffering. First, we must realize that it is from Hashem. Although it is unpleasant, it is atoning for sins and gaining reward in Olam Habba (the Next World). It could always be worse. If you are sick, you could be sicker. . . much sicker. Even if you broke a bone, you could have broken more bones. If you lost money, you could have lost more money, or all of our money. Unfortunately, it is not difficult to find people who suffer more than we do. We have to thank Hashem every minute for His Kindness. Even His punishments are laced with kindness. May we merit seeing the final redemption during these three weeks, and see the end of all suffering.



Eretz Yisrael

"You will inherit the Land and you will settle in it, because I have given the Land to you to inherit" (Bamidbar 33:53). The sefer Eved HaMelech cites this verse as the source for the mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisrael - the Land of Israel. There is a famous dispute between the Rambam and the Ramban whether this mitzvah remains a *D'oraysa* (Torah) mitzvah in our days, or whether it has the status of *D'rabannan* (Rabbinic mitzvah). All agree, however, that the mitzvah remains in force even today.

How precious is this Land to Hashem! The Medrash Rabba relates that The Almighty said to Moshe Rabbeinu that Eretz Yisrael is dearer to Him than any other place. It is a land flowing with milk and honey, *eretz tzvi* (a cherished land). Similarly, Klal Yisrael is dearer to Him than any other nation. Therefore, He will bring Klal Yisrael in to Eretz Yisrael, as it is

written, "This is the land that you will inherit" (Bamidbar 34:2).

How great was the love of our ancestors for this Land! The Rambam (Melachim 5:10) recounts that our great sages would kiss the stones of Eretz Yisrael and roll in its soil. The Medrash Rabba (parashas Voeschanan) - explains that Yosef's bones were buried in Eretz Yisrael, while Moshe Rabbeinu did not merit this. Why? Yosef thanked Hashem for Eretz Yisrael. When he was asked his identity after being sold as a slave he said, "I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews" (Bereshis 40:15). He identified himself with Eretz Yisrael, therefore he was buried there, as the verse states, "Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him" (Shemos 13:19). Moshe Rabbeinu, on the other hand, did not express the same identification with The Holy Land. When the daughters of Yisro told their father about Moshe Rabbeinu, they said, "A Mitzri saved us from the shepherds" (Shemos 2:19). Moshe heard and was silent. He did not object to being called a Mitzri. Therefore, he did not merit burial in Eretz Yisrael.

How great is the holiness of this land! The Shelah relates that the *kedusha* (holiness) of Eretz Yisrael is comparable to Gan Eden. Yerushalayim is referred to as *Shaar HaShomayim* (the Gate of Heaven) because all of our *tefillos* (prayers) first travel to Yerushalayim, and from there they proceed up to Heaven. For this reason also, *tefillos* are heard better and accepted more in Eretz Yisrael. The Sefer Charedim adds that one who settles in Eretz Yisrael must have much more *Yiras Shamayim* (Fear of Heaven) than in Chutz La'aretz. Why? Because he is dwelling in the King's Palace.

Kinderlach . . .

Let us sum it all up with the words of Rav Yonason Eibushitz in his sefer, Yaaros Devash. A Jew reaches his ultimate perfection in Eretz Yisrael. There he can totally attach himself to Hashem, because there are no impure forces to separate him. A person's heart should always have a desire and yearning for Eretz Yisrael. Even if he fulfills all of his other desires, what does he have? The main thing is missing. As it is written, "If I forget you O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue stick to my palate, if I fail to recall you, if I do not elevate Yerushalayim above my greatest joy" (Tehillim 137:5-6). What good is simcha if the place of ultimate true fortune is missing? Kinderlach, may we all merit to fulfill this mitzvah.

Parasha Questions:

- What would happen if the Bnei Yisrael would not conquer the nations that were living in Eretz Yisrael? (33:55,56)
- What were the locations of the six refuge cities? (35:14)
- Does the refuge city save someone who was convicted of intentional murder? (Rashi 35:19)