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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת כי תבוא

אלה דברי הברית אשר צוה ה' את משה לכתוב את בני ישראל וכו'. (דברים כח, ט)

These are the words of the covenant that Hashem commanded Moshe to forge with the Bnei Yisroel. (Devorim 28:69)

In this week's *Sidrah*, the *Tochachah* reveals all the terrible calamities that will befall Klal Yisroel when they sin. It concludes with the *possuk* above, expressing how "these are the words of the *covenant*" which Hashem instituted with Klal Yisroel. R' Simcha Zissel of Kelm questioned this description: would it not be more appropriate to say "these are the *curses*" that Hashem promised Klal Yisroel?

R' Leib *zatzal*, in *Meorei Sheorim*, introduces R' Simcha Zissel's explanation with a fundamental concept that is particularly relevant to Elul, the month in which we find ourselves preparing for the Yamim Noraim. The *possuk* in *Koheles* (3:14) states: *יְדַעְתִּי כִּי כָל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹקִים הוּא יִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם, וְעָלְיוֹ אֵין לְהוֹסִיף וּמִמֶּנּוּ אֵין לְגַרֵעַ, וְהָאֱלֹקִים עֹשֶׂה שְׂיָרְאוּ מִלְפָּנָיו*, *I realised that whatever Hashem does will endure forever: Nothing can be added to it and nothing can be subtracted from it, and Hashem has acted so that (man) should stand in awe of Him*. This *possuk* highlights Hashem's eternal creation and man's transient nature, which form part of Hashem's plan to foster in man a sense of dependence and a spirit of reverence. The *Meforshim* further enumerate many miracles by which Hashem changed the course of nature, thereby instilling His fear in man.

We further find an emphasis on *יִרְאֵת שָׁמַיִם* in *Pirkei Avos* (3:17): *אֵין חֵכְמָה, אֵין יִרְאָה, אֵין הִסְתַּיְתּוּת, אֵין יִרְאֵת שָׁמַיִם*, *if there is no fear of Hashem, there is no wisdom*. The concept of one who has Torah without *Yiras Shomayim* is illustrated in the *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 31a) with the analogy of a custodian who has been given only the inner keys and not the outer ones, thus being unable to enter the chamber. Rashi explains the comparison that only one with *Yiras Shomayim* is concerned with observing and performing the Torah he has learnt. Without this fear, having knowledge of the Torah is seen as having no access, as there is no guarantee of it being followed.

The *Ba'lei Mussar* placed a phenomenal emphasis on *Yiras Shomayim* more than any other trait that one must acquire. They did not focus on loving or cleaving to Hashem, or developing good *middos*, in any way comparable to the great prominence they attributed to possessing *Yiras Shomayim*. They taught that *Yirah* is the foundation and groundwork for all further *avodas Hashem* and therefore of utmost importance. This is clearly stated in the *possuk* (*Devorim* 10:12): *וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ שְׁאַל מֵעַמָּךְ כִּי אִם לִירְאָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ*, *And now, Yisroel, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you but to fear Him*. Only with the foundation of *Yirah* does a person have a chance to aspire and reach great *madreigos*.

R' Leib further explains that the required *Yirah* is not something lofty or unattainable. Instead, Hashem created the world so that by simply "opening one's eyes," one can obtain fear of Hashem. As

stated in Pirkei Avos (3:1): *הִסְתַּכַּל בְּשִׁלְשָׁה דְבָרִים וְאִי אֶתָּה בֹּא לְיַד עֲבָרָה. דַּע מֵאֵין בָּאתָ, וּלְאֵן אֶתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, וְלִפְנֵי מִי אֶתָּה עֹתִיד לִתֵּן דִּין וְחֶשְׁבוֹן*. *Consider three things and you will not come into the grip of sin: Know from where you came, where you are going, and before Whom you will give justification and reckoning.* Additionally, R' Yisroel Salanter (*Igros*) wrote that the first step in serving Hashem is to believe and acknowledge that Hashem is the Judge who rewards and punishes each person according to their deeds.

With this introduction to the vitality of fearing Hashem, R' Leib brings the answer from R' Simcha Zissel to the above question. The Torah was not written to curse or punish Klal Yisroel, but rather to guide them like a stick guides a stubborn horse. Although a simple branch can control a manageable horse, a larger cane or whip is necessary for a more difficult horse. Similarly, as Klal Yisroel were now entering Eretz Yisroel, Hashem needed to use the terrifying "stick" of consequences, the *Tochachah*, to keep them anchored to Torah. These were not simply curses, but rather "words of the covenant", meant to instil a fear of Hashem to ensure faithfulness to Him and His Torah. Hashem acted in this way to instil His fear and awe in people, as it says in Koheles.

R' Simcha Zissel also mentions the Midrash (*Yalkut*) which tells the story of an *Amora* who was reading Parshas Ki Savo and was faltering. Another *Amora* responded by saying, "These aren't curses, but rather *tochachos*." Rashi (*Devorim* 29:12) explains that after Klal Yisroel heard the frightening ninety-eight curses, they turned colours in fright at what seemed to be a hopeless future. Thereupon, Moshe comforted them, assuring them that despite their past sins, they were still standing. He told them, "Just as Hashem has not destroyed you in the past, He will continue to sustain you in the future. The curses and punishments serve to sustain you and keep you standing before Him." The *Tochachah* is the staff and threat with which Hashem instils fear and keeps us on the right path.

We are taught that one of the primary purposes of Rosh Hashanah is to inspire fear in Hashem. If not, why would only Klal Yisroel be notified that this is the Day of Judgement. Hashem revealed the importance of the day to grant His people the opportunity to increase their fear in Him, which could lead to a more positive outcome in judgment. This is supported by the *possuk* regarding the Shofar (*Amos* 3:6): *אִם יִתְקַע שׁוֹפָר בְּעִיר וְעַם לֹא יִחָרְדוּ: Is the shofar ever sounded in a city and the people not tremble?*

R' Yisroel Salanter explained that Rosh Hashanah comes before Yom Kippur so that people can feel fear and awe of Hashem during Rosh Hashanah. The awareness that these are the days when the Books of Life and Death are open should cause us to shudder and tremble, strengthening our fear in Him. This, in turn, should prompt us to repent and recognise our shortcomings, ultimately leading to a better judgment for us.

May we internalise the above message and "open our eyes" to fear Hashem. We should make an effort to focus on this aspect in our *avodas Hashem*, as it is crucial for everything, especially during this time of the year. With this may we be deserving and merit a *kesivah vechasimah tovah*.

This Devar Torah is adapted from ספר מאורי שערים and is presented by the Gateshead Yeshiva Alumni Association. To receive by email, please register your interest by sending an email to parshasheet@gyalumni.org.