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Connection Is the Key To Preventing Moral Depravity

Based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh

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In this week's Parsha, we find two different generations who both acted against Hashem. Yet, these two generations faced very different consequences. The generation of the flood was completely destroyed, while the Dor Haflaga had their languages confused, and were scattered around the world.

The Medrash Tanchuma defines the sin of each generation in the following way. "What is the generation of the flood and the generation of the dispersion compared to? It is compared to a king who had two sons, one son said to the king, 'I can't handle your demands and the troubles you're placing upon me.' The other one said, 'I want to be in the palace, and not you!' So too by the generation of the flood, it is said about them in Iyov, 'They said to Hashem go away from us' (we don't want the knowledge of your ways), we are not seeking the Torah's perspective. 'Who is Hashem that we should serve him?' 'Why are we Davening to him, there is no point!' The generation of the dispersion said, we want to be in the place and replace Hashem. 'Let us build a city and a tower.' 'He should not have chosen for Himself the upper realm and given us the lower realm. Let's switch, we should take the upper realm, and He should take the lower realm.'"

The Medrash seems to be identifying the root cause of each generation's sin. The generation of the flood was steeped in the worst sins. Sexual immorality, idol worship, murder, stealing and violence. They were the most decadent generation in human history. How did they sink so low, where was it all rooted in? It came from the feeling and attitude of, "I don't want to have anything to do with Hashem, I don't want His Torah, and there is no point to Daven to Him." The generation of the dispersion were unhappy with the hierarchy and wanted to switch roles. However, they didn't have a feeling that we want to totally disconnect and are not interested in Hashem at all.

The expression, "I want nothing to do with You, and even the attitude of, "We are not seeking out Your Torah," although we are not rebelling, it leads to the most extreme unimaginable immorality and corruption.

This level of disconnect from Hashem may be somewhat unrelatable to us, as most of us don't feel that we want to have nothing to do with Hashem. On the contrary, we want to connect and we may feel secure in our connection. However, the Maharal tells us in the Tiferes Yisrael, that although they were learning Torah during the period of the first Beis Hamikdash, there was something lacking in their appreciation. He then goes on to describe an interesting and bizarre phenomenon. Sometimes a Talmid Chochom is connected to Torah, and ironically it is due to his love for Torah, that his love for Hashem is reduced. His focus on his love for the intellectual stimulation of Torah, removes his focus on the love of Torah stemming from the fact that the Torah is from Hashem. This disconnect from Hashem is a direct cause for his children not becoming Talmidei Chachamim. We see from here that our connection to Hashem is critical in producing the next generation of Talmidei Chachamim. We are not in the clear merely because we are connected to learning Torah. Any slight breach in that connection, and lack of focus on Hashem can have devastating effects.

These ideas can help us be Mechazek Limud Hamussar and Tefillah. Limud Hamussar is the exact opposite of a person saying I won't seek out Hashem's ways. Mussar is the pursuit of understanding Hashem and refining our character to emulate him. The more we learn Mussar, the more connected we are to Hashem, and are fortified from corruption. This is true for Davening as well. When we Daven purely and sincerely we are expressing that Davening does indeed work, unlike the generation of the flood.

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

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Shir Hashirim Insights

In loving memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern

In this week's Haftorah, Hashem tells Klal Yisroel how He will comfort us at the time of our ultimate redemption: "For a little while I forsook you, but with vast love I will bring you back. In slight anger, for a moment, I hid My face from you; but with kindness everlasting, I will take you back in love." (Yeshayah 54:7,8)

We find the expression of Hashem "hiding His face from us" in the Parshiyos of the Tochachah as well: "Then My anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them. They shall be ready prey; and many evils and troubles shall befall them. And they shall say on that day, 'Surely it is because our G-d is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us.' And I will keep My countenance hidden on that day, because of all the evil they have done in turning to other god.

What is the meaning of Hashem "hiding His face" from us?

Perhaps this can be understood based on the following Pasuk in Shir HaShirim: Turn your eyes away from me for they overwhelmed Me. (Shir HaShirim 5:6)

The Vilna Gaon explains: "Klal Yisroel cries over their suffering and Hashem is full of mercy, however, it is not possible to redeem them before the proper time. Hashem says: 'Don't continue to cry out to Me, for your love comes before Me... and I can't bear it.'"

This is why when Hashem must punish us for our own wellbeing, we find the expression of "hiding His face" from us, for it is only through doing so that he can bear to punish them. Even when "they have turned to other gods" and they act as "a treacherous breed, children with no loyalty in them," when he looks through their eyes, the windows to the true depth of their infinitely great souls, he is overpowered by love for them, and He, so to speak, can't mete out the punishment that they need for their own good.



Emunah Highlights

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"For a little while, I forsook you, but with vast love, I will bring you back." (Yeshaya 54:7)

In this week's Haftorah, the Navi Yeshaya delivers a message of profound comfort and hope to Klal Yisroel. The Radak explains that the Pasuk is a testament to Hashem's unwavering commitment to us, assuring that His seemingly abandonment during Galus will be eclipsed by an outpouring of His boundless love and redemption, to the point that the 2000 years of Galus will seem like a mere few moments. This promise of the Geulah, combined with Hashem's enduring kindness, serves as a powerful source of comfort through the unfathomable pain that we have been enduring these past few weeks.

The Pasuk acknowledges the reality that throughout the tumultuous course of Jewish history, there have been moments when it seemed as if Hashem had forsaken us. However, Hashem's love is not extinguished; instead, it is preserved and concealed, ready to be unleashed with the Geulah.

Yeshaya's prophecy extends beyond mere consolation; it should instill a profound sense of Bitachon in our hearts. The promise of "vast love" signifies the extreme kindness and compassion that Hashem will shower upon us during the Geulah.

This assurance is mirrored a few Pesukim later, where Hashem declares that "Though mountains may be shaken and hills be moved, My unflinching love for you will not be shaken." This resolute commitment to boundless kindness demonstrates Hashem's unwavering loyalty and love for His people, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges.

This message has served as a wellspring of hope and fortitude for generations, reminding us that no matter the extent of the tragedy that we find ourselves in, we can be confident that we will soon see it as a fleeting moment.