

Parshat VaEtchanan 5776 Shabbat Nachamu

always follows פרשת ואתחנן **באב** and its **תשעה** (Isaiah LX.1), **נחמו** has given the name **נחמו**. The **הפטרה** carries the beautiful and soothing prophetic words of HaShem to the broken remnant of Israel; (prophetic because the era of Isaiah was some 170 years before the **הורבן**, the destruction of the Temple). However, I believe there is much to comfort us in **פרשת ואתחנן** itself, both in its words and its central structure. However, before highlighting this, an overview of the **פרשה** is in order. The **פרשה** opens with **משה**'s heartfelt prayer to be allowed to enter the Holy land; however HaShem closes any further discussion on the subject. Immediately following this, **משה** opens his long peroration, the **משנה תורה**, with a strong exhortation against adding to or subtracting from the **תורה**. Either of these acts does not improve or detract from an element of the **תורה** as it is; rather it rejects the complete unified entity which is the **תורה**, in favour of the body of law that the individual would prefer. This injunction fits well in its context, namely reference to the cult of **בעל פעור**, which was worshipped by an act of disgusting abasement that actually set up the worshippers as very superior to the object worshipped. Having set the 'ground rule' - that the **תורה** is complete and perfect - **משה** relates to the people how the **תורה** is their wisdom and understanding [*even or particularly*] in the eyes of the other nations [italics mine]. The nations will admire the nation [Israel] which enjoys the closeness of the Al-mighty and has such a wise **תורה**. The Jewish people are given an important reminder, one which many recite every day:

השמר לך ושמור נפשך מאד.....והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך יום אשר עמדת לפני ד' אלקיך בחרב ... רק

Look out for yourself and guard your soul exceedingly, lest you forget those things that you saw and in case you will turn aside from your heart all the days of your life, and you will make known o your children and children's children: the day that you stood before HaShem your G'd at Horeb....' **משה** then continues his admonition, that the people should note that they saw no image at **סני** and they must take particular care not to make likenesses of what they might see on land, sea or in the air, of whatever gender or species; this also applies to the heavenly bodies. **משה** also warns that once in the land and comfortable, they might forget HaShem and turn to idols. In those circumstances, HaShem would punish them harshly, including exiling them and dispersing them among their enemies.

Despite this, if in their distress, if they seek HaShem with all their heart and soul and return to HaShem, He would not forget or forsake them but for the sake of his

Covenant and love for our forefathers, He would restore Israel to greatness and eternity.

After mention of the establishment of the cities of refuge and of the recent defeat of the superpowers ruled by **סיחן** and **עוג**, **משה** then rehearses the content - and in particular detail the circumstances - of the giving of the 10 commandments at **סני**. The **סדרא** concludes with extended **מוסר**, including what we have as the first paragraph of the **שמע**. It is of note that at the core of the **סדרא**, there is mention of **סני**, followed by an account of what would befall Israel because of neglect of the **תורה**, succeeded by a repetition of the Giving of the **תורה**, in a sort of A-B-A pattern. This is reminiscent of the **גמרא** in **ראש השנה** 17b, commenting on the **פסוק** (Ex XXXIV.6) in the name of **ר.יחנן**. 'HaShem HaShem - I am He before Man sins and I am He after Man sins and returns in penitence....' At the centre of our **פרשה** is a restatement of that most comforting of messages - that even if we will sin, then if we return in good faith, HaShem will accept us completely. And in what condition would he have us? That of **סני** **הר** - almost angelic in our closeness to Him and receptivity to His word.

The latter view is very elevated, but it is not fanciful. In fact we describe ourselves in such terms at least twice a day - each time we recite **קדושה** in the repetition of the **עמידה**, we stand to attention and declare that we will declare His Holiness just as the celestial beings do in the high places. Were it not for HaShem's instruction to us in **פרשת ואתחנן** to recreate, to a degree, the circumstances of **סני** **הר** every day of our lives, we could not dare even for a moment to aspire to such greatness.

There is a further major point here. On **תשעה באב** many have the practice of reading **איוב**, which outlines the terrible suffering of Job and the unhelpful efforts of his 'comforters' to offer him explanations for the inexplicable. Interestingly, at the end of his offering on the subject, **אליהוא** (Job 37.14) presents the only reasonable view - namely that we do not and cannot know Hashem's ways, but this is far from the end of the **ספר**. After **אליהוא**, Hashem appears - out of the whirlwind - (Chapter 38) with a call of **איפה היית ביסדי ארץ** - where were you when I founded the Earth? Actually this answer is not so different from the previous chapter except in one huge respect. Having brought such suffering on **איוב**, HaShem appears in 'Person' to offer a statement. It is HaShem Himself who addresses **איוב**. The greatest of consolations is expressed in **פרשת ואתחנן** - **אין עוד מלבדו** - there is none/nought but Him. It is HaShem Himself Who accepts us back after our return and, as so eloquently expressed in the **ילקוט** on Isaiah XL) it is HaShem who speaks directly to us 'be comforted, be comforted'. May HaShem complete our consolation, as so perfectly illustrated in our **סדרא** and **הפטרה**