

## **Still Standing**

**Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

Last week, the parsha we learned listed ninety-eight curses that Hashem foretold would befall the Bnei Yisroel if they would not follow in His way. This week's parsha begins with the words, "Atem nitzovim – You are standing."

Rashi explains that when the Jewish people heard the multitude of curses, they turned green from fear, certain that they would not be able to withstand them. When he saw their reaction, Moshe called everyone together and proclaimed to them that they need not be so overwhelmed. He reminded them that they had been together in the desert for forty years, experiencing many ups and downs. He consoled them and said, "Despite it all, you are still here, standing upright."

He told them that Hashem stood with them and kept them alive so that they and their future generations would be able to enter a bris with Hashem. They will promise to be His nation and He will be their G-d.

Moshe Rabbeinu then reminded them what will happen if they sway from Hashem's path and the destruction that would befall them. He then consoled them and foretold that they will never be totally destroyed, and when they do teshuvah and return to Hashem, He will accept them and return them to the land He promised them.

We are now somewhat in the position in which the Jews found themselves at the time this originally happened. In the timeline of history, it was very recent that six million of our people were killed, while millions more were displaced, running around the world, seeking places of refuge. Some gave up all hope and forsook the life of Torah. They didn't imagine that it would ever again be possible to live Torah lives. They sought to blend into their new surroundings. They looked for new beginnings, new starts, and restarts.

Others were more blessed and looked to start over, but on the foundations upon which they had lived prior to the upheaval and annihilation of all that they had known. They established themselves in countries and cities in which they could continue observing Torah and mitzvos, and Hashem enabled them to raise observant children and grandchildren, and to earn a decent living.

The tragedy of the Holocaust knocked the wind out of everyone, hovering over our people for many years after it finally ended. Until today, we are affected by it. People now look around the world with fear that another horrific tragedy could be festering, ready to burst in the open.

Anti-Semitism had sort of gone into hiding. It wasn't popular, and although Jews were never fully accepted and we often got dirty looks in public, we turned away and pretended not to notice. Laws in Western countries prohibited outright discrimination and seemed to be gaining in effectiveness. Industries and schools that had shunned Jews throughout the decades dropped

those practices. Jews became accepted in the best universities, corporations, political positions, country clubs and high society.

But now, once again, all types of Jews, no matter where they are, have become fearful. In the United States, it is no longer verboten for political leaders to be openly anti-Semitic, in word and deed. Their parties don't bother admonishing them for their behavior. Instead, they gain increased power. The media is increasingly hypocritical as it discusses Jews and Israel, displaying open double standards and not being concerned with the truth.

Students march against Jews on campus and make their lives miserable. It takes an act of Congress for anti-Semitic leaders of colleges and universities across this country to be canned. Hamas sympathizers march so often in major American cities that it isn't news anymore and the media ignores it.

Employees of airlines and other high profile industries feel comfortable mistreating Jews. Such conduct is increasing, not decreasing.

We are in a presidential election year, and the incumbent party and its president and vice president openly castigate Israel as it fights existential battles with terror groups sworn to its destruction, while holding back the weaponry it needs.

In European countries, which have been overwhelmed by immigrants, Jews fare much worse.

Since October 7th, Israel has been at war on its southern and northern borders. Thousands were killed, thousands were wounded, and tens of thousands were forced from their homes and towns, their lives upended. Lacking a home, school, work, or friends is not a recipe for normalcy or physical and emotional health. The northern border is now heating up more than it has during the entire war. Hezbollah, which has been bombarding border towns since the conflict began, has intensified its attacks, increasing their frequency, strength, and range.

People fear that a ground war is imminent, with massive rockets potentially reaching every corner of Eretz Yisroel. They are anxious for their lives and livelihoods. Western airlines have nearly ceased their Israeli operations, drying up the tourist dollars that entire industries rely on. The value of the shekel continues to plummet and interest rates remain high.

Adding to the tension is the deep divide being fueled by leftist Netanyahu opponents, who are targeting the religious community with punitive measures and cuts to government aid. This presents a whole other problem, with no clear solution in sight. The reduction of funding for religious teachers, playgroups, schools, and yeshivos, coupled with the courts overturning long-standing draft laws, has left many with even more to worry about.

As Rosh Hashanah approaches and people fear what the coming year may bring, Moshe Rabbeinu calls out to us with the words, "Atem nitzovim hayom kulchem." Look around. Look at

yourself, your families, your relatives, and your friends. Despite everything that has been happening over the past few years, you are still here, and you are still standing.

Through all that our people endured during the Holocaust and the years that followed, we are still here, standing and growing each year. Despite the rockets and bombs aimed at us by terrorists, we remain here, still standing. Despite the invective, the hate, and the hypocritical lectures hurled at us, we are here, and we are standing.

An elderly woman who has experienced much in her life recorded a short video message. This is what she said: "My name is Ella Blumenthal, a survivor of Majdanek, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. I am now one hundred and three years old and there are a few things that I know.

"I know what it means to lose your whole family just because they are Jewish. I know what it means to survive on just one piece of bread a day. I know what it means to hope to live just one more day, in the hope that tomorrow will be better than today. I know what it means to never give up, no matter what.

"Some say that my survival is due to the irony of fate, but I know that Hashem has always been on my side, both then and now.

"In this month of Elul, I feel this stronger than ever. I want you to remember always to carry Hashem's light and Heaven in your heart forever, just as I have."

We haven't lost faith in Hashem, and He hasn't lost faith in us. The bris of this week's parsha is still extant, and through it we live and survive. We cleave to Hashem, follow His Torah, and maintain our emunah and bitachon, living another day and hoping for a better tomorrow.

"Achakeh lo bechol yom sheyavo." We believe every day that Moshiach will come, and if not today, then tomorrow. We know that Hakadosh Boruch Hu placed us in this world for a reason, and we strive to be the best we can in living the life we are meant to lead.

From a very young age, Rav Avrohom Ausband was trained by his parents to fulfill the mission for which he was placed in this world. Money and fame played no role in his life, which was centered around Torah, talmidim, and family.

Once a year, when he felt weak, he would go to Florida to regain his strength. He would daven in a local shul, finding a seat in the rear of the sanctuary. The rabbi would recognize him and approach, asking him to sit in the front, on the mizrach. Every year, the rabbi would extend this invitation, and every year, Rav Avrohom would decline, explaining that he was comfortable in the back as well.

One year, the rabbi was especially insistent and seemed to take the rosh yeshiva's refusal personally. "Why won't you sit on the mizrach, where you rightfully belong?" the rabbi asked. "Why do you turn me down year after year?"

Rav Avremel explained that the real reason he wouldn't go up was because he found the mechitzah lacking.

The rabbi looked at him and said, "But the rosh yeshiva surely knows that according to Rav Moshe Feinstein's ruling, the mechitzah is good."

"I'm not looking for good," Rav Avremel responded matter-of-factly. "I live my life looking for better."

That should be our motto, especially during Elul as the Yomim Noraim rapidly approach. We know why we are here. We understand that we are avdei Hashem, on a mission to learn Torah, perform mitzvos, and sanctify Hashem in all that we do, striving not just to do good, but to do better and better.

Rosh Hashanah is the day when man was created, and therefore, on this day, we celebrate the anniversary of Hashem's Kingship. It is when man recognizes Him as King that His kingship truly begins. [See Rav Dovid Cohen on Maamar Hachochmah, p. 29.]

We can suggest that just as we celebrate this anniversary through the pesukim and tefillos of Malchiyos recited on Rosh Hashanah, so too, since it is the day man was created, there is a special power in effect on Rosh Hashanah that allows man to be recreated. This is accomplished through teshuvah, which removes sins and blemishes, returning him to the state he was in before he sinned.

By doing so, he can become better than he was previously and draw closer to Hakadosh Boruch Hu, thus being granted a better year than the one before.

May all of us who were granted life last year and the ability to still be here standing (nitzovim) be inscribed in Hashem's book for a good and better year this year. Amein.