

And many evils and distresses will encounter it, it will say on that day, “Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?” But I will surely conceal My face on that day. (31:17,18)

Our nation has suffered immensely throughout the millennia. Hounded and persecuted, physically and emotionally, no words can describe the travail that has often been our lot. The secular streams stick to their usual reneging by denouncing these “isolated occurrences” as an anti-Semitic reaction to the Jews’ refusal to assimilate into their host country’s way of life, religion, etc. They posit that, if we would be more like *goyim*, then they would treat us like *goyim* – not Jews. Any person with a modicum of intelligence understands the futility of this argument. We, who study Torah as our primer of faith, know the truth. It is there that we read the Torah’s portent for the future, for the End of Days. “The people will rise up and stray after the gods of the foreigners of the Land... and it will forsake Me... My anger will flare against it on that day and I will forsake them” (ibid 16:17). The Crusades, Inquisition, *Auto-De-Fe*, pogroms, and, most recently, the Holocaust, were not isolated occurrences as a result of anti-Semitism. They were manifestations of Hashem’s concealment, His *hester Panim*.

It was this *hester Panim* that led many of our people to declare that Hashem is no longer with us. What they either do not understand, or refuse to accept, is that we are not looking hard enough. Just because we do not see Him does not mean He is not there. To those who ask: “Where was G-d during the Holocaust?” we respond, “Where was He not?” This is why, explains the **Malbim, zl**, the Torah forthrightly writes exactly what would transpire, predicting the ensuing reaction. People will look to blame anyone and anything but themselves. It is all for the purpose of justifying their negative behavior. In this *parsha*, Hashem speaks to “our” generation. This is what is going to happen, and you will disavow yourself from any sort of blame. Indeed, you will say, “Bad things happen to good people because G-d does not care; He is not in control; He has no purview over the bad things.” Indeed, even if this ludicrous disavowal were true (which, of course, it is not) one might ask: What did we do to catalyze such a Heavenly reaction? Why did He forsake us? Why is He concealing Himself?

Our Torah writes the “concealment” in a redundant manner, *Haster, astir*, “I will surely conceal myself.” The **Baal Shem Tov, zl**, observes that the double *hastarah*, concealment, refers to an instance in which the actual concealment is enshrouded. In other words, one does not even realize the truth: Hashem is concealing Himself. When one believes that he is living through a period of concealment he is able to maintain his faith that a benevolent G-d is doing good, only he does not see it – yet. When the concealment is obscured, however, he does not believe that he is going through a period of Heavenly concealment, thereby allowing him to fall into depression and give up on life as a Jew. This is why the *Baal Shem Tov* would say, “I have the greatest fear of the *haster, astir*, when the actual concealment is concealed.” When the hidden is hidden, we do not know

where to look – or for what to look. Consequently, we do not bother looking, and we just throw in the towel. Why bother looking when the discovery might make us uncomfortable?

I believe it was **Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, m'Berditchiv** who said: "One can be for Hashem, or (Heaven forbid) against Hashem, but one can never say that he is not with Hashem." The Almighty never leaves us. If we do not see him, we should look harder.

The following story made the rounds of the various media sources. Even the non-observant crowd was moved by the incident. Sadly, they moved right back to their original position (in relationship with the Torah). Moti Dotan, the head of the lower Galilee Regional Council, had recently returned from a ceremony to honor the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Twin Cities pact between the Regional Council and the Hanover district in Germany. At the event, Dotan was approached by a member of the Hanover District Council, who said, "My father, Werner Herzig, recently died; before his death, he wanted to share a dark secret that had accompanied him for the major part of his life. He told me that as a young, healthy German male, he was drafted into the German Luftwaffe and fought in World War II. He was personally involved in some awful crimes against the Jews, whose only 'sin' was their being Jewish. One of those sins was the burning of a *shul* on the Russian front." He quoted his father as saying, "It is important for me to tell you this, since today we are confronted with Holocaust deniers, who contend that it never happened. Well, let me affirm for you – it did happen!"

Then Herzig gave Dotan a piece of parchment which he had received from his father. Apparently, the German Luftwaffe officer had sliced a piece of parchment from a Torah scroll (that had been ensconced in the Ark of the *shul* prior to burning it) and fashioned it as a cover for his officer's ID document! "My father asked me to find a holy man in the Lower Galilee and give it to him. Let this be proof that the atrocity did happen."

Dotan was quite well aware of the work done by *Horav Yitzchak Dovid Grossman* of Migdal Ha'Emek; so, he delivered the parchment to him. When he related the story to *Rav Grossman* prior to giving him the parchment, the *Rav* began to cry. Seventy years had passed since that fateful day, and now that *Sefer Torah* remnant had come home.

The story in and of itself is powerful, but what follows is mind-boggling. *Rav Grossman* opened up the piece of parchment to see what part of the Torah the Nazi had selected as a cover for his ID. Clearly, it was a random choice, but we Jews understand that nothing is random; nothing is by chance; there is no such thing as coincidence.

Rav Grossman turned over the piece of parchment and began to read from the text. It so "happens" that it was from *Parashas Ki Savo*, the *parsha* which details the ninety-eight *kellalos*, curses, to befall our nation for its disobedience. Yes, the *Tochachah*, Rebuke, was the "chosen" text for the ID document. The *Rav* read, "In the siege and distress that your enemy will distress you in your own cities... then Hashem will make extraordinary your blows and the blows of your

offspring – great and faithful blows, and evil and faithful illnesses. Even any illness and any blow that is not written in the book of this Torah... them will Hashem bring upon you until you are destroyed. You will be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of the heaven in abundance” (*Devarim 57-62*).

Undoubtedly, this parchment bespeaks *Hashgachah pratis*, Divine supervision. After seventy years, this document made its way to *Eretz Yisrael* as a wake-up call. The Nazi could have cut out any other number of verses from the Torah. He was guided to cut out specifically the part that relates to the rebuke and punishment, but gives us hope for redemption.

There is so much to learn from this story. We see the embodiment of evil; how, after destroying a *shul*, the monster who destroyed it had no qualms about taking a Torah scroll and defacing it by using its parchment as a suitable way to preserve his document. Little did he realize that he was truly preserving the relationship that Hashem has with His children. It is all about concealment, but, after time, the ambiguity clears up, the veil is lifted, and we are able to see what many of us have always known: Hashem has always been there. He never leaves us.