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TORAH STUDY

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God's love

RABBI YAKOV BRONSTEYN
Ki Tavo, Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8

Most of us have or had a relationship with our parents. For some, it was functional. For others, it was dysfunctional. Some interactions were exhilarating, while others were extremely painful.

Nevertheless, one thing most of us are conscious of is that our parents love us.

Imagine a child calls her parents and tells them that she just attained a Ph.D. What would be the worst reaction that they could have? To say that they are happy? To say she could've done better? Or not to react at all, communicating their ambivalence?

My teacher used to say that the last reaction is the worst. When a parent says, "It doesn't matter to me whether you are a success or a failure," then the searing pain is too much for the child to bear. Even when our parents show displeasure, anger or disappointment, regardless of the appropriateness of the message, the point is that they care.

As Jews we know that God loves us; as it says in Deuteronomy 7:8 "Because of God's love for you," and in Malachi 1:2 "I love you, says God."

God loves us and relates to us as a parent, as it says in Deuteronomy 14:1, "You are the children of God your Lord."

We utter this idea in a prayer called "Our Father Our King" found in the Siddur. This prayer appears in Tractate Taanis 25b. It was recited by Rabbi Akiva during a drought, effecting God's positive reaction in the form of rain. Since then, we recite this prayer on the High Holidays and fast days.

Because God is our Father and loves us, He cares about us. Therefore, He reacts to what we do positively or, in our perception, negatively.

Therefore, when we encounter the rebukes in this week's Torah portion we know in the inner recesses of our hearts that God is saying that He cares about what we do or say.

The truth is that the unspeakable horrors of the predicaments that the Jewish people will find themselves in, if they don't follow the word of God as described in this week's portion, are impossible to fathom.

What can anyone do to deserve such pain? As children of God we may never understand, as all children don't when their parents give them consequences. But we will always know in our collective consciousnesses that God cares and loves us.

From this perspective, the reason we read this portion before Rosh Hashana is crystallized.

The Talmud in Tractate Megilla 31b declares that the reading of this portion was specifically instituted by the men of the Great Assembly to be read before Rosh Hashana. We read these rebukes in order that the year and its curses should finally end.

However, we may suggest that the Great Rabbinical Court had a multitiered intent with the institution of reading this portion at this particular time.

The theme of the day is the coronation of God as the King of the Universe. Therefore, in his capacity as the King, the first task that He performs is to judge His subjects.

The fact that He judges His subjects presupposes that they are held accountable for their actions.

Therefore, the men of the Great Assembly instituted that we read this week's portion to communicate to us

the message that God loves and cares about us and that's why He judges us.

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