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Acknowledge God's goodness

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Ki Tavo/Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8

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COMING UP

This Week

This week we read strong words spoken by Moshe to the Jewish people. The tochacha or "rebuke" is a fierce warning spoken to the Jewish people to observe the Torah that they received from God.

"But if you do not obey the Lord your God to observe faithfully all His commandments and laws which I enjoin upon you this day, all these curses shall come upon you and take effect." (Deuteronomy 28:15)

They sadly have come true:

"You shall be a consternation, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples to which the Lord will drive you." (Deuteronomy 28:37)

"The Lord will scatter you among all the peoples from one end of the earth to the other." (Deuteronomy 28:64)

"Yet even among those nations you shall find no peace, nor shall your foot find a place to rest. The Lord will give you there an anguished heart and eyes that pine and a despondent spirit." (Deuteronomy 28:65)

What could be the justification for such harsh words? These words are so harsh that a custom has developed not to call anyone to the Torah for the "rebuke" but to call the reader instead so that these harsh words not be misconstrued as directed toward the person called to the Torah.

What sins could possibly be the cause of such harsh punishments? One would imagine idolatry, adultery or murder, but the text tells a different story.

"Because you would not serve the Lord your God in joy and gladness over the abundance of everything." (Deuteronomy 28:47)

How and why could a lack of joyfulness justify such gruesome punishment?

The answer lies in God's basic manifestation as "our Father, our King." The Kabbalists explain that as a father, God seeks to help us grow with love and nurturing, marked by an abundance of goodness. A lack of joy and happiness indicates that we don't see the good in which we are enveloped; indeed, we are blind as many children are, to our father's love and caring. The lack of joyfulness is in fact the greatest sin possible because we deny God's love.

The entire existence of the world is because of God's love. When we don't see that love, the relationship dissolves. We leave our father with only one way to awaken us to the true nature of that love - the removal of all that he gives. The absence of God's abundance all of a sudden becomes a tangible presence. We begin to see what we had

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TORAH STUDY

Acknowledge God's
goodness



and appreciate it in its absence. We regain our sense of purpose and our position in the world. We yearn for that love to return, and it does.

We live in a world that asks us to be blind to God's love and kindness. It really is very hard to see the good around us. The news we are inundated with is about tragedies and disasters, entertainment is a vast abyss of fiction and lies we can never actually experience. It almost seems as if we prefer to live in a barren, empty, sad world than a bright, joyful one.

As the High Holidays approach, let's appreciate what we have. Let's open our eyes to the wonders of the world we live in, our spouses, our families, our communities, our country, our people, our land. Let's take a serious look at the Torah and see that it is the fountainhead of all these wonders. Let's strive to be excited, inspired humans and Jews loving each other, the Torah and the world God gave us. Let's do it now so we don't lose what we already have.

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