

PTDT

PhiloTorah D'var Torah

Elul's 5 sedras

Any month in the Jewish calendar can have 4 or 5 Shabbatot - it depends upon what day Rosh Chodesh is and this year's Elul has five - sort of. It's first day of R"Ch was a Shabbat.

For the three previous Shabbatot, the first three of five Shabbatot in this year's Elul, we read sedras that totaled 170 mitzvot among them.

We can say that the first item on the Elul agenda is a recommitment to mitzvot (not just these 170, but all of the Taryag) and a strengthening of that commitment.

This week's sedra of Ki Tavo, begins with six more mitzvot related to Bikurim and Vidui Maasrot.

But then, Ki Tavo gets down to its main job - reiterating the Deal that HaShem makes many times in many different ways, throughout the Torah. Sometimes the Deal is made gently. Sometime a bit forcefully. And sometimes it is presented with a sledge hammer. Parshat B'chukotai and the first Tochacha portion in the Torah and here in Ki Tavo, we find the second one.

And this one is extremely brutal.

The Deal begins with the simple, straightforward offer: If we follow G-d's commands, then things will be good.

Wonderful.

But if we turn from G-d, then bad things will happen.

With the promise of good things, the Torah suffices with relatively few p'sukim. The bad stuff comes in a flood in the longest aliya of the Torah - Shishi of Ki Tavo.

The description of bad things that will befall us as a nation if we turn to avoda zara, and if we don't harken to G-d's Voice, is truly frightening. Read it carefully and it will send shivers up and down your spine. Pay attention to all the things it threatens/promises/prophecies and you might not be able to finish reading it.

No wonder the custom has developed in shuls to read the Tochacha in a low voice, and quickly.

Too bad. We should slow it down, read it aloud, and ponder the problems within ourselves and our communities - and do something to change for the better. Another important Elul-agenda item.

Amidst all the horrors that will befall us if we turn away from G-d, we find what is perhaps even more frightening than all the rest.

All the bad things will come upon us for turning away from G-d... AND because

we did not serve G-d with joy and a good heart.

Whoa! Wait a minute. Can it be that not serving HaShem with joy is somehow just as bad as idol worship. As turning one's back to G-d? Can this be so?

Maybe the point the Torah is making is that we cannot be complacent in thinking - I don't worship idol. I don't turn away from G-d. I do listen to His commands and I do them. (At least most of the time.)

So the Tochacha is not talking to me. It is for generations long ago that were plagued with idolatry. Maybe even it is addressed to Jews of our own time who intermarry. Who assimilate. Who reject the Torah and its teachings.

But the Torah is most definitely speaking to each and every one of us.

Ask yourself the question: Do I serve G-d with joy and a good heart, a positive attitude, motivated by Love of G-d (not only Fear of Heaven)? Do I instill this higher level of love and commitment to Torah to my children, grandchildren, family, and friends?

Put that on your Elul agenda!

(and we will complete the 5-sedra Elul theme, next week, IYH BN.