



RABBI GROSSMAN ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA



The Harshest Admonishment

Parshas Ki Savo

My hands were shaking as I received the torn piece of parchment which contained within it the identification papers and picture of an SS officer, wearing the uniform of the Third Reich, a blood curling smile on his face. I wondered what use has a Nazi with a piece of Torah parchment?

Moti Dotan, the head of the lower Galilee municipality, was crying. He wept as he told that he had just returned from a trip to Germany. What were you searching for there? I asked. "I wasn't searching Rabbi, but I have found something". He told me he was a member of a delegation of mayors who travelled to Germany. During the visit they had a meeting at the Bundestag. All addressed the assembly. Dotan spoke of the Jewish People and their glorious history in Germany. As they were leaving, one of the parliament members approached him and requested to speak with him. He then told him the most unbelievable story. "My father has recently died. He called me on his death bed. He told me of a hidden secret, of his past as a Nazi soldier in the Wehrmacht".

"I froze", he continued, "My father was a Nazi?" The member of the Parliament's father saw his sorrow, and then referred him to a drawer beside the bed. He was never allowed to approach the drawer, and now he opened it to discover a leather bound wallet. His father had never told him a thing about his past, and now he was looking at an old picture of him, wearing an SS uniform. He asked his father about the wallet. What is this leather binding? What is written on it?

His father looked him in the eyes and stated that he was a pilot in the air force. We bombed Jewish targets. On one of his sorties he flew over a

Synagogue. He bombed the target, as the crew members roared with laughter. Sometime later he decided to go and witness the results of his deeds. He entered the *Shul* and opened the ark. He found the 'Torah of the Jews', standing there, its parchment still intact. He thought to himself, this is good leather and I can use it as a "souvenir", a befitting cover for my military identification. He took out his military ID and placed it on the Torah. He cut out a piece which served as a perfect envelop for his papers.

My father turned to me: "I know this has significance to the Jews. Find a Jew and give it to him".

"I went pale and then blushed, I promised my father to do so, and he closed his eyes forever".

I told Moti Dotan the Holocaust has remained a bleeding wound in every Jew's heart. The righteous have said that there is a parallel between the rebuke found toward the end of the Torah - the biblical admonishment, which appears in our weekly Parsha, and with the experience of the Jews at the end of their long exile.

The Holocaust is still a living book of moral instruction. All of us, the generation after the Holocaust, are still living the Holocaust. Our parents, relatives and acquaintances have experienced the worst of the world's atrocities, which have been brought upon us by Divine decree.

Throughout the generations the Jews have viewed the verses of the Torah as indicators to the greatest calamity in history. During the Holocaust the verses came to full realization: "Then the Lord will bring

upon you and your offspring uniquely horrible plagues, terrible and unyielding plagues, and evil and unyielding sicknesses... Also, the Lord will bring upon you every disease and plague which is not written in this Torah scroll, (almost) to destroy you. And you will remain few in number".¹

These verses have accompanied many throughout those distraught days. A survivor who lived in Los Angeles had no connection to his Jewish heritage; he could not even pronounce the *Shma* correctly. He knew only one verse: "Because you did not serve the Lord, your G-d, with happiness and with gladness of heart".² When asked how he knew this verse he said that he worked with the Tzanzer Rebbe in one of the forced labor camps, and this is the verse the Rebbe continuously repeated throughout the war...

I took the torn parchment into my hands, and embraced it with great warmth. I opened it to see where the piece was torn from. I was shocked. The disgraced parchment, which had been in exile for seventy years, contained the verses of admonishment which appear in our weekly Parsha:

"In the siege and in the desperation which your enemies will bring upon you... Then the Lord will bring upon you and your offspring uniquely horrible plagues, terrible and unyielding plagues, and evil and unyielding sicknesses... And you will remain few in number".³

Lord of the Universe, I raised my eyes to the heavens. There are 600,000⁴ letters in the Torah, and from all of them that wicked man chose to cut and keep the harshest verses of admonishment. This is a G-dly revelation within the deepest concealment in history. This is also a ray of hope: "They kneel and fall, but we rise and gain strength",⁵ "The Strength of Israel (G-d) will neither lie nor repent".⁶ The Jewish people will live forever.

Translated by Rabbi Aryeh Savir



¹ Dvarim, 28, 59-62.

² Dvarim 28, 47.

³ Dvarim, 28, 55, 59-62

⁴ This is a mystical number found in the Kabbalistic writings; the actual number is 304,805. The larger number includes the spaces, which are of great kabbalistic significance. Together the letters and the spaces represent the souls of the Jewish people.

⁵ Tehilim 20, 8.

⁶ Shmuel I, 15, 29.