

Parshas Va'eschanan Shabbos Nachamu

As we leave another Tisha B'Av and find ourselves still in exile, we can't allow another Tisha B'Av to come and go without any change. Yet, as true change is so difficult, how can we make any meaningful changes worthy of ending this millennia long exile? Moreover, we know our focus must be to improve our respect for others, even for those with whom we have had a rift in our relationship. Finding room in our hearts to mend those rifts, and to respect and even love them, is one of the most difficult changes to make.

There is a Ramba"n towards the end of this week's Parsha which sheds light on both of these questions. After enjoining us to eradicate the evil in Canaan, Moshe explains our relationship with Hashem. He says we are a uniquely holy people, chosen by G-d. We were not chosen because of our size and external significance. Rather we were chosen because of Hashem's love for us and Hashem's oath to our forefathers. (Devarim 7:5-8)

The Ramba"n notes that Moshe did not explain why we were deserving of Hashem's love. The Ramba"n explains that this is because we were chosen for the obvious reason that one would be chosen. The main reason one chooses a good friend, is when that friend is known to be one who will bear whatever challenges that friendship may bring. This is what Hashem saw in us, and why Hashem loves us. The Ramba"n illustrates the strength of our nation's commitment through the innumerable times throughout our history that we gave our lives rather than convert and deny our relationship with Hashem.

This Ramba"n, though powerful and inspiring, is also quite difficult. While there were many in our history, who did rise to the challenge, this was not always the case. Moreover, even those who did rise to the challenge, did not always live their lives in line with that commitment. When we think of ourselves, there are many times when we fall short in our commitment, and do not extend ourselves for Hashem as we feel we should. How can the Ramba"n say that Hashem's love for us is because we are committed to Hashem no matter the situation when there are so many times and so many ways in which we falter under pressure and do not seem to maintain that commitment?

Perhaps this Ramba"n can be understood based on the Sforno's commentary. The Sforno explains that Hashem's love for us is because we think of His name more than other nations. In other words, Hashem's love for us is because we are concerned with Hashem, think of Hashem and contemplate what He means in our lives. Perhaps this is what the Ramba"n means, as well. We all have limits to what we can bear, whether for ourselves or for the sake of another. The real measure of a person's commitment is the effort one puts in to overcome the challenges when they arise. Perhaps particularly after one falters is when one shows the greatest commitment. Do they simply walk away or do they continue to rehash their error and try to see how they could repair the damage? In short, do they or do they not continue to think of Hashem.

This Ramba"n begins to shed light on our responsibility now as we leave another Tisha B'Av. Our relationship with Hashem is rooted in our commitment to that relationship. To be worthy of ending the exile, the most important thing we can do is simply to take the time to think of Hashem, and think of how we can repair the damage. We need to simply try again and not give up trying to treat others as Hashem would want.

This Ramba"n also gives us a practical first step for crossing the gap and repairing the deeper rifts in our human relationships. While we may have been deeply hurt, is there truly no room for hope? We must ask ourselves, were I to somehow show that I want a relationship – even while the rift and the pain exist – would the other party respond in kind? If they would want a relationship, even if they are failing and hurting me now, that would be good enough for Hashem. If it is good enough for Hashem, is that not good enough for us?