



Shabbat Table Talk
Parashat Chol HaMo'ed Sukkot - Erev Shabbat 28th September 2018
Week of 23rd – 29th September, 2018
Torah Portion: Exodus 33:12-34:26 Haftarah: Ezekiel 38.18-39.16

Theme: In Crisis, Creation Takes Place

Today's readings fall on the 20th of Tishrei of Sukkot VI. At first glance, we might not see the connection of the Torah portion with today's Haftarah, and it is worthwhile to see these readings' close connection. The Israelites in both accounts of the book can be said were in their troubled times, that is in exile: in the wilderness in Exodus, and a seemingly "wilderness" in Babylon at the time of Ezekiel. Nonetheless, there is a promise of an exodus, a "drawing out" and this settles them to their "home", to the Promised Land and a return to Israel. In this case, both readings depict, exile and exodus, of a promise, of G-d's presence, and of hope. Let us appreciate the readings' parallelism.

It was on the mountain that G-d manifested the Divine presence to Moses, when the latter requested G-d to include in the Divine favor the entire people of Israel. Surely, G-d promises to bestow favor on the people and this is sealed with a covenant. Moses, I suppose made the plea in solidarity with his people who seem to experience a sense of loss and are on the edge of hopelessness. G-d's assurance of the Divine presence in the midst of crisis through the covenant is enough for them to move forward and hope for the moment. The people must remember the covenant with G-d to sustain them through their sojourn in the "wild". The Israelites who are in "exile" will soon experience "exodus" from the unsafe territory to a land flowing with milk and honey. On the one hand, Ezekiel assures the people of a return to Jerusalem, for they who are in exile will soon find themselves in "exodus". Ezekiel's prophecy is to bring hope to the people and portrays a dramatic and graphic pictorial of G-d's redemptive action, which is fiery and furious towards Gog (which in Hebrew means, "mountain"). Gog's downfall and destruction will manifest Israel's G-d, but more that this is a revelation of the Divine presence, not on a mountain but against Gog (mountain). Ezekiel describes the destruction that is apocalyptic beginning with a terrible earthquake, mountains overthrown, cliffs topple and walls crumble, there will be pestilence and bloodshed, torrential rains, hailstones and sulfurous fire. It seems that they who are in exile are being prepared for their future exodus from crisis, and it matters that the land be cleansed, for them to start anew.

How can we make sense of this in our lives today? There are varied ways to seeing all these, yet I would like to focus on Gog, which as mentioned above also means "mountain". A mountain can represent either our inflated ego or humongous crises in life; and in both cases, we can fail to sense G-d's reality in our midst, because the mountain has blocked our sight of the Divine presence. We could forget that G-d is on "top" of everything, thus we at times will be tempted to lose hope and even doubt G-d's presence. Yet G-d's way for us to see the Divine presence is to allow a quake that will crumble, swipe and consume to ashes our worries, crises, or inflated ego. It is only when we crash that we see and know where we stand, and who stand beside us, who never fail to lift us up, gives us a chance to begin anew.

Remember: God's presence to Israel is not a promise, but a reality, which forever will be a guarantee. In crises, or troubled times, hope sustains, because G-d remains.

Reflection and Discussion: 1. What is the "Gog" in my life? 2. Are you experiencing as sort of "exile" today? Is this about your relationship with others, self-struggle, a decision to make, emotional turmoil, or something else (identify it)? 3. How do you want G-d to intervene in this poignant point in your life? (Suggestion: express all to G-d, who will sustain, and who surely remains)

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