

No Matter How Bad it Gets, Keep on Hoping and Working

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BH

We're going to step away from Yerushalmi this week and learn from Bavli. The situation everywhere: Gaza/Israel, Syria, Iraq/Kurdistan, European anti-Semitism, militias at our border here in Texas, just seems to have reached a pitch that just seems hopeless. The Bavli tells us that this is the time to keep on hoping:

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: Blasted be the bones of those who calculate the end (i.e., the coming of the messianic era). For they would say, "Since the predetermined time has arrived, and He has not come, He will never come." But even so, we wait for him, as it is written, "Though He tarry, wait for Him. (Habakkuk 2:3)

Should you say, we look forward to his coming, but God does not, therefore Scripture says,

And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you and therefore will he be exalted that He may have mercy upon you. (Isaiah 30:18)

But since we look forward to it and God does likewise, what delays God's coming?

The Attribute of Justice delays it. And since the Attribute of Justice delays it, why do we wait for God? To be rewarded for hoping, as it is written,

Blessed are all they that wait for Him (Isaiah 30:18). (B. Sanhedrin 97b)

In other words, no matter how crazy and hopeless the world seems (and it seems pretty hopeless and crazy right now, I grant you) the solution is to keep hoping WITHOUT EXPECTATION of anyone coming to rescue you.

Discussion Questions

1. I will grant you, keeping hope while realizing hope will only come from your own actions can be difficult. Frankly, it reminds me of physical therapy. The doctor can do the surgery, but unless you follow through on the physical therapy exercises, nothing will really get better. No one can do them for you but you. How could we apply this principle to what is going on all around us?
2. What would happen if all parties in all these disputes, instead of pointing guns at each other would look at the other side and say, "The only way we're getting out of this is if we work together to fix what's bringing us to this point. What can I do for you? What can you do for me?"

From my Facebook feed and everything I read, the idea that sides would work together seems so hopeful as to be ludicrous. Both this Talmud passage and my favorite biblical verse argue that this isn't so.

My favorite verse is this one:

He who goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come back with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126:6)

Why would you cry when planting seeds? When they are your very last seeds. If these seeds don't come up, you're finished. But the psalm teaches that we plant them all the same—we hope even when it's our very last hope.

May hope come to us, to our foes, whoever they may be, to all the world, for hope is the seed of peace.