

# IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

In the Megillah of Eichah (1:12), read on Tisha B'Av, we find the following statement: "Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by? Behold, and see if there is any pain like my pain, which was brought upon me, with which Hashem has afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

On first blush, the statement seems difficult to comprehend. The prophet Yirmiya is discussing the destruction of the Bais HaMikdosh, the Holy Temple. Clearly, this loss was one felt by the entire nation of Israel. How then could Yirmiya say that, in essence to "those that pass by, it is nothing..?" Why was the destruction of the Bais HaMikdosh personalized in this passage, to the extent that Yirmiya writes "see if there is pain like my pain, which was brought upon me." Wasn't this an affliction that affected every member of the nation of Israel?

The poor man and his wife were counting down the days. His wealthy cousin was marrying off his child this week, and the wedding was to be an occasion not to be missed. The celebratory meal, sure to be composed of the finest delicacies in bountiful supply, would be a welcome change from the meager rations to which he was accustomed. In order to ensure that he would be able to appreciate the vast repast at the wedding, the poor man decided that he would not eat for two days prior to the wedding. In this way, he would be able to savor every morsel and appreciate the unique assortment of sumptuous cuisine he was sure awaited him.

Finally, the day arrived. He was awaiting his personal invitation and accompaniment to the wedding as was customary with an affair such as this wedding. The man and his wife took out their finest clothes and prepared themselves for this long-anticipated event. As the day progressed, the man became increasingly agitated, for two reasons: he was famished, as he had not eaten for two days; and his personal invitation had not yet arrived. The hour-hand on the clock moved forward and closer to the appointed hour, yet the invitation had not yet arrived. The man, now totally despondent, realized that it was increasingly looking like his dream may not come to fruition. He was too hungry to wait any more, and he begged his wife to please feed him something so that he would not succumb to his hunger. After searching through the cupboards and scraping up whatever she could, she put before him some dried bread, a clove of garlic, slices of onion and one lonely radish. The man devoured all that was before him in a matter of moments. As he was wiping the crumbs from his lap, he heard a knock on the door: his personal escort to the wedding had arrived.

He and his wife went to the wedding, yet the man went with heavy heart. His great plan had failed all because he was too impatient. Yet, he was hopeful that he could make the best of the situation.

After the ceremony, the guests were seated in a resplendent banquet hall, at tables adorned with the finest embroidered linen and set with the most elegant china, crystal and silver one could imagine. Waiters, attired in clothing suitable for royalty, attended to the needs of all the assembled. An orchestra, composed of the most renowned philharmonic musicians, entertained. And with great fanfare, the first course was served. Fresh fish, plucked that very morning from the ocean, prepared by celebrated chefs, was served on platters of gold, adorned with an exotic array of vegetables. It looked absolutely delicious. Once served, everyone immediately began sampling this delicacy. There was complete consensus at the table: they never tasted fish like this in their lives, it was simply the best they ever had. Only the poor man refrained from commenting. All he could taste was that radish he devoured right before the wedding. No matter how much he drank or ate, the radish taste just would not go away. The taste of the fish, for him, was overpowered by that of the radish, and he therefore did not share in the delight expressed by the others.

This scene repeated itself over and over as the night progressed. The soup, with a heavenly scent and superb texture, tasted like onions to the poor man. The main course, with select cuts of the finest meats and succulent fowl, tasted like garlic. This unique and sure to be unrivaled gastronomic experience was one totally lost on the poor man.

After the meal ended and people were making their way out of the hall, the poor man heard a group of his relatives discussing how amazingly tasty the food was. Each person in this group related his favorite part of the feast. When the time arrived for the poor man to offer his opinion, he simply stated his perception of the food: nothing tasted particularly amazing or out of the ordinary. Of course, everyone recoiled upon hearing this. They could not imagine how anyone could be of such opinion. The servant of the evening's host who had accompanied the poor man to the wedding heard that opinion as well, and he offered the group his insight on the matter. "What can one expect," he opined, "when right before partaking in this meal, the man ate garlic, radishes and onions? How is possible, right after eating such things, to possibly enjoy the tastes of a meal fit for kings?"

Rav Gedalya Schorr explains that it's true that the entire nation of Israel felt the loss of the Bais HaMikdosh. Yet, the loss was not the same for all. For some, for "those that passed by," they saw that an edifice was missing. The building that had been central to religious life was no longer there. But to Yirmiya, much more was missing. The revelation of G-d that occurred on a daily basis, the spiritual vibrations that emanated from its hallowed halls, the epitome of spirituality that influenced the entire nation was gone. Hence, for Yirmiya, the loss was much greater, the pain was much greater, and the tragedy was personal.

Two different people tasted the same item of food, yet only one was able to appreciate its true quality. Our experiences and focus in life clearly impacts our value system. Yirmiya and other in the nation of Israel suffered the same tragic loss. Yet only Yirmiya and those like him truly appreciated how terrible a fate they were forced to suffer. When the time comes for us to recall that we are still

in exile, we have to make sure that we truly appreciate why we are mourning. We have to understand why we are in exile. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma 5:1) writes that every generation in which the Temple is not built is considered as if it was destroyed in that generation. Clearly, we have the ability to understand the enormity of the loss. We can prevent prior experiences, prior tastes, from interfering with this ability. And we have the ability to be the generation that sees a rebuilt Bais HaMikdosh, with all its splendor and glory.

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