

# REBUILDING THE TEMPLE WITH DEVOTION

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

The Fast of the 17th of Tamuz, which marks the beginning of the Three Weeks, was on Thursday, July 20, 2000. The Fast of the 9th of Av, which concludes the Three Weeks, begins at sundown on Wednesday, August 9, 2000 and ends at nightfall on Thursday, August 10, 2000. (For more information on these fast days, see I:27, 28, 30 and 31.)

One of the reasons why we fast on the 9th of Av stems from an incident discussed in the Torah portion read a few weeks ago. In the Parsha of Shelach, we find that Moshe sent spies to scout out the land of Israel, who were to return to the nation with the status of the land. The spies, instead of telling about the wondrous sights they witnessed, painted a dark and dreary picture, and spoke of how attempting to enter the land would end in disaster. The nation became despondent and lost faith in Hashem, although He had promised the nation that they would enter into the land. Because the nation wept unnecessarily, they were punished: they would have to wander in the desert for 40 years, and males above the age of 20 at the time the incident occurred would not enter into the land of Israel. This decree, which led to deaths every year on the date it was issued, occurred on the 9th of Av. Since then, the 9th of Av has remained a day of weeping.

What was it that caused the spies to sin against G-d, and present a highly negative opinion of the land of Israel to the nation? The verses seem to explicitly spell out why G-d was angry with spies (Bamidbar 14:11): ""And the Hashem said to Moshe, . . . And how long will it be before they believe me, for all the signs which I have shown among them?" The spies did not trust in G-d, and hence they feared the worst would befall them should they enter the land of Israel. Their opinion of the land was colored with lack of faith, which led them to relate only negative aspects of the land. Had their faith in G-d's word been solid, they would have related the unbiased truth: it was a beautiful and desirous land to live in.

However, a verse elsewhere in the Torah gives a different reason behind the sin of the spies. In Bamidbar, the Torah states (26: 63): ""These are those who were counted by Moshe and Eleazar the priest, who counted the people of Israel in the plains of Moav by the Jordan near Jericho. But among these there was not a man of them whom Moshe and Aharon the priest counted, when they counted the people of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai, for the Hashem had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Calev the son of Yephunneh, and Yehoshua the son of Nun.""

The verses say ""but among these there was not a man."" The commentator Rashi explains that the

use of the term ""man"" in this instance teaches us a lesson. Only the men died. The women were not punished because they loved the land of Israel. The explanation of Rashi implies that the men were punished because they did not love the land of Israel. This view is borne out in Tehillim, (Psalms 106), which states: ""Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not understand your wonders; They forgot God who had saved them, who had done great things in Egypt; And they despised the pleasant land, they did not believe his word."" It appears from here that the sin of the spies was not that they failed to believe in G-d. Their fatal flaw was in their lack of love for the land of Israel.

However, when one analyzes the reasons the spies gave for not entering the land of Israel, it is difficult to find lack of love for the land underlying them all. They said ""the people, who live in the land, are strong, and the cities are walled, and very great . . . The Amalekites live in the land of the Negev; and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, live in the mountains; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and by the side of the Jordan . . . We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than us."" Their concern appears to be for the safety of the nation, a concern, which if they had proper trust in G-d, would not be any cause for worry and would not need to be voiced. However, Rashi and Tehillim do connect a lack of love for the land of Israel with the sin of the spies. How exactly was this lack of love manifested?

R' Avrohom Pam, in Sefer Atarah L'Melech, writes that a passage in the Talmud (Bava Basra 142b) sheds light on this issue. The Talmud says there: R. Yitzchak said in the name of R. Yochanan: If possession was given to an embryo [through the agency of a third party] it does not acquire ownership. And if objection [to this law] should be raised from our Mishnah [which, in the context of father and child implies otherwise], [it may be replied that there it is different] because a person is favorably disposed towards his son."" Why is it that the laws of agency differ when a father is acting as his unborn child's agent, as opposed to any other individual?

Rav Pam writes that he heard the answer once from a great man. An unborn child faces many challenges. The child must first survive gestation, and then birth. Once the child is born, if he fails to thrive, he may not properly develop and he may not survive. Because of all of these trials and tribulations, an individual does not have completeness of thought when acting as an agent for an unborn child. Doubts exist, and therefore the finality of the transaction that must exist in the agent's mind for proper effectuation is simply not present. However, a father, a parent, has an entirely different perspective on his child's future. Because of the great love a father has for a child, he never doubts that his child will live and thrive. He sees his unborn child as an actuality, and therefore when he acts as his child's agent, he does it with a completeness of mind and the finality needed to effectuate the transaction.

The spies lacked faith in G-d. Their lack of faith and resulting expression thereof was their sin. Underlying this lack of faith was a lack of love for the land. If the spies truly loved the land of Israel and desired to live there, any doubts or worries about their ability to conquer the land would have dissipated. Their drive to live in the land out of their love should have been so strong that nothing

would stand in their way. They would have clearly believed that G-d would help them, and despair and gloom would not have set in. Just as a father ""knows"" that his unborn child will survive, so too should the spies have ""known"" that they would enter the land, notwithstanding potential roadblocks. They did not have the requisite love, and they therefore did not have requisite faith in G-d.

This lack of love for Israel, this lack of drive, had effects that we feel nowadays. The sin of the spies started the association between the 9th day of Av and calamities. The Talmud Yerushalmi writes that every generation in which the Temple, which was destroyed on the 9th of Av, is not rebuilt, should consider itself as if the Temple was destroyed in its days. We mourn the loss of the Temple on the 9th of Av. However, do we yearn for the Temple to the extent that we have a drive to improve so that we should merit it being rebuilt? Do we feel the spiritual void that exists and therefore strive to perfect our character, to deal with our fellow man properly in business and social relationships, to adhere to G-d's commandments and study His Torah with faith and devotion? If we do not attempt to better ourselves, we show, as the spies did, a lack of love for G-d's Temple, His Bais HaMikdosh. We would be just as responsible for the destruction of the Temple as the generation in which it was destroyed.

May we truly merit to see the rebuilding of the Bais HaMikdosh, speedily, in our days.