

A DAY OF REBUILDING

by Rabbi Label Lam

"There is nothing that solidifies and strengthens a nation like the reading of the nation's own history, whether that history is recorded in books or embodied in customs, institutions or monuments." (Joseph Anderson)

"A generation which ignores history has no past and no future." (Robert A. Henlein)

"That men do not learn much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons that history has to teach." (Aldus Huxley)

"A nation that mourns for its temple for more than 1700 years deserves to see it rebuilt." (Napoleon to the Jews of France after inquiring about their practice of mourning on the 9th of Av)

The 9th of the Hebrew month Av will soon be observed. It is a fast day, and a day of mourning for the 1st and 2nd Temples, 2,500 and 2000 years ago respectively, which were located on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, as well as other Jewish tragedies which are connected to this day.

A story stranger than fiction from a few short years ago left me with a feeling of shock and comfort in one moment. A close acquaintance of mine who neither knows or cares much about Jewish history or custom called me a few days after the 9th of Av. He was distraught about a few things and so I lent him my ear.

He was in the middle of planning a move to the western U.S. for business reasons. He needed to sell his house in the New York area and buy a house "out west". He had already gone to contract on his new home in the new location but the whole deal was hanging on the sale of his house here in New York. He couldn't afford to buy one until he had effectively sold the other.

On the 9th of Av, he received a call from the lawyer of a hopeful buyer of his N.Y. house. Apparently, they had no real serious intent to buy the house, and were now casually backing out of an imminent closing based on some technical breach.

My friend was devastated. He elaborated on his righteous indignation at having been misled and the great setback he was now enduring because of this sudden disappointment. Then, after a long tirade at the conclusion of his monologue he calmly apologized for all the venting and excused his hostile attitude by saying the following amazing words, "I feel like I've lost not just one house but two houses, sorry for all the lamentations!"

He didn't know it was the 9th of Av that this news came to him nor did he know that the book

Lamentations is the English Language name for the book Eichah that is read in Synagogue on the 9th of Av. I was amazed by the innocence of his words and comforted by the fact that there is a present reality to the day, and rhythm to history.

When tragedy or disappointment is manifest, be it on a grandiose or microscopic scale, the biggest part of the pain is the nagging lack of sense. If the bigger picture somehow comes into view, then the stinger of cynicism is removed and the seed of hope begins to take root. Hope, that just as a parent (as the name of the month indicates - Av - Hebrew for "father") punishes with love for the purpose of improvement, the same purpose is behind Jewish suffering and tragedy. There is hope for the future.

When the Jews of Spain saw that their expulsion in 1492 was on the 9th of Av, they were on a certain level able to take great comfort. In the midst of the bad is buried good. Assured that evil is not random and life is not ultimately chaotic, we can even live with unanswered questions. We learn trust and hope through the study and living of Jewish History. Even though on the 9th of Av we lost both Houses of G-d, and suffered unforgettable tragedy, when we lament, we are intimately attached to our history and can honestly hope for a day of rebuilding.

Good Shabbos!

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