

CLASS 56 - TISHA B'AV

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The Sages, who see in the first words of Breishis the entirety of Jewish history, discuss as well the origin of Messiah, whose appearance will reintroduce the world to the spirit of its Creator.

"...V'Ruach Elokim Merachefes Al Pnei HaMayim - this is the spirit of Moshiach...." (Breishis Rabbah 2:5)

The spirit of G-d is manifest immediately after the darkness and chaos of "Tohu VaVohu, V'Choshech Al Pnei Tehom" (Breishis 1:2) and in a similar vein, the revelation of the Messiah is destined for a day that begins with suffering and grief - "On Tisha B'Av the Messiah is born." (Yerushalmi Berachos)

Apparently, it is darkness and pain that produces the ultimate redemption. In our shiur this week, we will explain why this is so.

1

This month is referred to as Av, and it is a name that is quite puzzling. What is the connection between this month of destruction and a father who produces offspring?

Let us first try to define the word Av.

Av is spelled 'Aleph' - 'Bais', for this is the beginning of the proper Seder in life. When things begin thus, all of life continues in a productive and worthwhile manner, and the ongoing process of Divine revelation continues its uninterrupted growth.

This true beginning is the basis of all existence, and the foundation of our world. It is the 'Even HaRoshah' (Zechariah 4:7) - the rock of creation. Upon this altar, Avraham Avinu offers his son Isaac as a sacrifice to G-d, and it is this sanctity that subsequently pervades the Holy Temple.

The word 'Even' is also rooted in the 'Aleph' - 'Bais', with the all-encompassing 'Nun' that is the middle of the alphabet immediately following - and it alludes as well to the 'Av' and 'Ben' - father and son.

"MiSham Ro'eh Even Yisrael" - this [Even] is an acronym - 'Av' and 'Ben' - fathers and sons, Ya'akov and his children." (Rashi, Breishis 49:24)

In the language of Chazal - stones are the building blocks of language, each 'Even' being a letter, while 'Batim' connote their formation into words. The message is the same: it is only through this father, or this stone, that something of lasting substance can be produced.

The Torah describes one particular stone as being strong enough to support a lasting edifice - "Even Mo'asu HaBonim Haysa L'Rosh Pinah - the stone the builders despised has become the cornerstone." (Tehillim 118:22)

This verse refers to David HaMelech, the brother whom noone deemed worthy. It is this initial despair that sparks his ultimate rise, and it is here that the Messiah is born.

Let us now explain.

2

When all of life is arranged in the proper order, this world is connected to its Creator, revealing in absolute harmony the framework of a higher dimension. This is a 'Chibur' - 'Ches', 'Beis', 'Reish'. But, if this order is distorted, the world devolves towards destruction, and 'Churban' - 'Ches', 'Reish', 'Beis' - is the natural result.

This idea is highlighted in Megilas Eichah. While the first chapter follows the order of the alphabet, the subsequent change in order highlights the particular cause that stands at the root of all the day's woes.

"Said Rava in the name of Rebbe Yochanan: Why does the letter 'Peh' precede the 'Ayin'? Because of the Meraglim, who related with their mouths [B'FiHem] what they had not seen with their eyes [B'Ayneihem]." (Sanhedrin 104b)

It seems puzzling that the sin of the spies is attributed to this seemingly minor fault. Was it giving precedence to hastily spoken words that defines their sin? Was it not that they had lied, denying the goodness of the land, that is their primary sin?

Apparently, Chazal are teaching us the hidden cause of all falsehood, and the reason our Temple remains lost to this day.

Man's words are an expression of his consciousness and perception, a means of relating his own view of life. Once these ideas are crystallized in his mind, with a coherent worldview established, all subsequent revelations are compartmentalized into the structure that he has already established. From this point on, he sees only what he wants to see.

Here's an example: As a young infant, a human being first begins to grasp his surroundings by learning to identify a few familiar images; his mother's face, his own crib, his siblings. As he grows, and as his mind continues to develop, he slowly begins to comprehend ever more; traveling the world around him, and finding his way with ease. For this reason, modern man has few existential problems, as he pretends to understand the mysteries of life. In this way, he lives out the balance of his days, comfortable with his own self, and blissfully unaware of any higher existence.

Oblivious to any deeper sort of truth, there is nothing left to learn, and any heavenly lesson G-d wishes to send simply glides off his impenetrable exterior.

This is 'Peh Kodem L'Ayin' - the mouth precedes the eye.

His worldview already established, from this point on, he will see what he wishes to see.

In the ideal order of things, this process should work in reverse, and the 'Ayin' would precede the 'Peh'. In our own terms, this idea indicates that man's conceptions should originate outside himself, and he begins his study of the world with an empty slate, waiting patiently to see what G-d is destined to show him.

With this trait perfected, he merits a higher vision, and three times a year he goes up to Jerusalem, to see and to be seen. This is the Mitzva of Re'iah - alluded to in the very name of this city - "B'Har Hashem YiRa'eh" (Breishis 22:14)

In a sense, his life begins with Tohu VaVohu, for only after he recognizes the limits and futility of his own perception, is he worthy of 'VaYehi Or'. With his vision now perfected, his words take on new meaning, and the 'Peh' will subsequently speak words that man is meant to deliver.

In a world of chaos and turmoil, man has no choice but to turn his hopes towards a distant horizon. In this faraway dimension, beyond the gaze of mortal man, he sees the promise of a more wholesome existence.

With the Temple destroyed, and the world in disarray, we too can recognize the loneliness and despair of a world lined with darkness.

With this sense of desperation, and the knowledge that we are left with only one place to turn, we recover the stone that supports the Bais HaMikdash, the building blocks of existence.

We mourn in silence, waiting to be seen.

On Tisha B'Av the Messiah is born.

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