

CLEAN-UP TIME

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

"Elazar the Kohen (Priest) said to the men of the legion who came to the battle, 'This is the decree of the Torah which G-d commanded to Moshe: Only the gold and the silver, the copper, the iron, the tin, and the lead - everything that comes into the fire - you shall pass through the fire and it will be purified...' (Bamidbar/Numbers 31:21-22) The Torah has many Divine decrees, commands that are humanly unfathomable. What makes the purging of non-Kosher content from captured vessels "THE decree of the Torah"?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1) expounds that there is a fundamental lesson in appreciating the ability to cleanse an object of absorbed contaminants. G-d has given us the Torah and its mitzvos (Divine commands) as a guidance system for self perfection and spiritual elevation; He gave us our physical selves and all of our possessions to facilitate our achievement of this lofty goal. When we choose not to capitalize on these opportunities, we become sullied by our pursuit of the mundane and the inappropriate. But no matter how much our souls become choked by the filth of our material quests, we are free and have the capability to cleanse ourselves of all this spiritual grime, to renew ourselves and rededicate ourselves to our Divine relationship as if we had never sinned. This, explains Rabbi Feinstein, is the decree of the Torah: never surrender to the errors of the past, never capitulate to prior failure. The commitment to return to G- d's path affords us the opportunity to purge the poisons of the past and move forward refreshed and renewed.

The current three weeks of mourning and reflection preceding Tisha B'Av, the anniversary of the Destruction of the Holy Temples in Jerusalem and many of the great calamities that have befallen the Jewish nation, give us pause to contemplate the teaching of our Sages that any generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt is considered as if it had destroyed it (Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1). We have already started the period of contemplation and self-improvement that will continue through Elul and the High Holyday season. As we reflect on the ten months passed since last Rosh HaShana we see many accomplishments in our spiritual growth, but are discomforted by the many lost opportunities, shocked by the build-up of spiritual "filth". No matter how thick the grime, we can get through it. Rosh HaShana is but a couple months off; it is time to start cleaning!

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) 1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor of his time and one of the principal leaders of Torah Jewry through much of the last century

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