

RISING FROM THE ASHES

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Rising From the Ashes ¹

"I know the thoughts (Yirmiyah 29:11)." - The *shevatim* involved themselves with the sale of Yosef. Yosef busied himself with his sackcloth and fasting. Ruvain busied himself with his sackcloth and fasting. Yaakov busied himself with his sackcloth and fasting. Yehudah was busy attempting to take a wife. HKBH involved Himself in creating the light of Mashiach. (Bereishis Rabbah 85:1)

The holy *seforim* emphasize that life sprouts and blossoms only after deterioration and destruction. Before a seed takes root, it rots and disintegrates, leaving behind only the smallest germ of vitality, the *kusta d'chiyusa*, from which life springs anew.

HKBH orchestrated the conditions that would be necessary to create the light of Mashiach, to germinate and sprout the light that would eventually illuminate the world. Here too, renewal and life had to rise from within decay and disintegration. And so it was. The thrust of the *midrash* is that wherever you looked at the nascent Jewish people at that point, nothing whole and together could be found. In every corner, someone was dealing with some deficiency or other². The *Klal Yisrael* of the time was broken and crushed. Ironically, precisely such a sorry state provides the fertile ground for planting the tiny kernel, the *kusta d'chiyusa*, that Hashem planted just then, and would nurture until the coming of Mashiach.

How are we to understand this magic, vital element that survives disintegration and provides the essential vital force of future growth? We do not have to look long or hard. It was their broken-heartedness itself. Each one of those mentioned in the midrash had some past mistake or miscalculation weighing heavily upon him. It was not the activity of donning sackcloth or fasting that made them noteworthy, but the mental anguish that they evidenced. Each one carried a heavy burden that burst his heart. The *kusta d'chiyusa* was not their incredibly lofty achievement of other, happier times, but their dejection and downtroddenness³.

The very last verses of the Torah showcase a small handful of Moshe's most significant accomplishments. Among them is his breaking of the *luchos*. Now, we understand that Hashem gave His after-the-fact approval to what we could have imagined might have met with Divine wrath. How, though, can his breaking the *luchos* be seen as one of his crowning achievements? After the awful sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe knew that there would need be a process of *tikun* and rebirth.

But where and how would such *tikun* begin? Moshe knew of but one way. The hearts of the 600,000 members of *Klal Yisrael* needed to burst; the rebuilding a failed nation would begin with the broken hearts of its members. He broke the *luchos* in their presence, the shock of which completely demoralized them. Their broken state was the *kusta d'chiyusa*.

We could propose an alternative to the identity of the *kusta d'chiyusa*. Many people are so crushed by their failures that they sink into an abyss of despair. This is not what the *midrash* describes. None of the figures accepts his fallen state, but does something about it. This is what they mean by busying themselves with their sackcloth and fasting. It represents a confidence that mistakes can be rectified and repaired. They did not just mourn for the past, they did something about it.

Put more simply, they refused to make peace with their deficiency. Their intransigence towards their errors, their refusal to accept - this itself is the *kusta d'chiyusa*.

It is in our blood as a people. We sunk to the 49th level of degradation in Egypt, but we merited redemption because we refused to accept our subordination to the Egyptians. Chazal teach that it was in the merit of our *emunah*, our faith, that we were redeemed. What was this faith? It was faith that we would be redeemed. What nurtured it? Chazal⁴ speak of scrolls which they delighted in on Shabbos. These scrolls spoke of a future redemption. Flat rejection of their status quo was the *kusta d'chiyusa*, the kernel from which sprang the beginning of their redemption. These are the "thoughts" that Hashem says He knows: the sackcloth and fasting are not emblematic of despair, but of the certainty of rising above it.

This has played a central role in our survival as a people for the two millennia of our exile. Only through our refusal to accept *galus* have we survived it.

What is true of ourselves as a nation holds true of us as individuals. Each one of us must absolutely refuse to accept the position of failure. Whenever we should stumble, we must realize that Hashem is prepared to right him, to pick him up and hold him erect once more. We need just believe that it will happen, and He will do it. This is the key to our redemption, personal and collective.

This is also the theme that unites the two holidays that Chazal gave us. Chanuka and Purim both commemorate great miracles Hashem wrought for us. Their celebration provides illumination for the long path of our *galus*.

Both happened only because we refused to accept our failures.

At the time of Chanuka, the Jews were mired in despair. A small band of people resisted a mighty power. They did not fight because they were so desperate they had nothing to lose. To the contrary, their attitude was one of utter confidence in the impossibility of losing. They would not make peace with their situation; in that merit, Hashem assisted them miraculously. Much the same happened at Purim. There, it was a single individual who refused to resign himself to their state. Mordechai had

complete confidence that "relief and deliverance will come to the Jews⁵."

So it is with all the miracles and wondrous deeds that were shown to us. We helped bring them about by our refusal to accept our fallen state. The light of Mashiach depends on this as well. Our faith in his coming, our refusal to be without it, is the *kusta d'chiyusa* that sustains and nourishes his long-awaited light.

¹ Based on Nesivos Shalom, pg. 250-251

² The Rebbe assumes here that each of the incidents mentioned in the midrash deals with some sort of aveirah and its aftermath.

³ As could be imagined, the Rebbe explains our *avodah* on Tisha B'Av in the exact same terms in his section on *Bein HaMetzarim*. The beginning of the rebuilding of the *Bais HaMikdosh*, the *tikun* after the *churban*, is in the broken- heartedness we display on Tisha B'Av.

⁴ Shemos Rabbah 5:18

⁵ Esther 4:14