

THE THREE WEEKS: KERNEL OF REBIRTH

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

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The Three Weeks: Kernel of Rebirth The Three Weeks: Kernel of Rebirth Children get it wrong, and that might not be so bad. They delight in learning that all living things begin with some tiny seed.

For children, this is a wondrous discovery, fully appropriate to their years. Adults might be better prepared to handle the full truth, which is less romantic but more profound. Living things begin with decay. Every seed must disintegrate before it participates in a spurt of growth. Within every small seed is an even smaller essence, surrounded by supporting material that wastes away before this *kusta d'chiyusa*, the vital kernel begins its dramatic ascent.[2]

It should not seem so strange, then, that the process of *churban* could and does generate a precious remainder, the basic stuff upon which rebuilding is ultimately based. This is the way of the natural world.

It is also part of our history. Before our redemption in Egypt, we lost spiritual ground, slipping so badly that we descended to the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, approaching a nadir of decay and emptiness. The redemption came from within that void. This holds true in the lives of individuals as well. Michah wrote,[3] "Although I fell, I arose; although I dwell in darkness, Hashem is my light." The Yalkut[4] adds, "From within the falling is the rising; within the darkness there is light.

All these sources tell a similar story: the solution is born within the problem itself.

In regard to the *Bais Hamikdosh*, the "vital kernel" that begins the growth of the next one is *Klal Yisrael*'s mourning for the last one. The cries of hope and longing lead directly to the next *Bais Hamikdosh*.

In truth, they lead to much more. The arrival of *Moshiach* himself is contingent on the belief and expectation of his arrival. Without our yearly exercise in mourning for the lost *Bais Hamikdosh*, in understanding what we have lost, in pitying ourselves for our unbearable deficiency of Hashem's radiance, we would become inured to our condition, and forget what we ought to be looking towards. The *yetzer hora* to divert our attention from the *Bais Hamikdosh* is therefore unusually

potent, because so much depends on our proper focus, including our long-awaited redemption.

It is a mistake to think of our practices leading up to Tisha B'Av as mere "customs." They are part of a coordinated plan to rivet our attention to our loss, and to shore up our *emunah* and confidence in the future. As such, they are nothing less than facilitators of the arrival of *Moshiach* !

The end of history also follows this pattern. Just before the covers are removed from the light of *Moshiach* , we will experience a terrible period of catastrophic darkness, in the period we know as *Ikvesa DeMeshicha*. We have already seen decades of terrible pain, then the horrors of the Holocaust, and a precipitous erosion of our *ruchniyus*. This collapse of Jewish life as we knew it also releases a vital essence that can grow into something new and better. Disintegration precedes rebuilding once more.

Yet, for all its effectiveness, stewing in the misery of mourning seems wrong. Ordinarily, the hardest *kelipah*, the toughest barrier between us and genuine *ruchniyus* and *avodah*, is sorrow and depression. Addressing this, Pri Ha'aretz cites a medrash that comments on the words of Eichah "Hashem has afflicted her for her abundant transgressions." The medrash adds, "I might suppose that for naught. Therefore the verse teaches, ??for her abundant transgression." Pri Ha'aretz explains that "for naught" refers to our mourning. We might think that we shed tears and cry laments for a *Bais Hamikdosh* in the distant past that will not be reclaimed through our sorrow. Such crying is indeed for naught. But this is not the case. We mourn not for the past, but for our sorry state, when we behold the abundance of our transgressions, without which a new *Bais Hamikdosh* would have long been built.

Moreover, our faults do double-duty in the tragedy arena. On a national level, they are responsible for the continuation of our long exile, of nothing righting the toppled stones of our Temple. Individually, however, each of us is a small *Bais Hamikdosh*, ready to receive the enlightenment of the *Shechinah*. Instead, we find our inner sanctuaries in a state of ruin, devoid of the Divine spirit that should inhabit it. This, too, owes to an abundance of transgressions, giving us good reason to mourn.

Our mourning leaves us shattered and broken. Dismantling the fortresses of our egos is healthy in its own right. Thus, taught R. Pinchas Koretzer, Tisha B'Av brings about atonement. Furthermore, he said, we draw from it yearlong. Just as we draw joy for an entire year from Sukkos, the holiday of rejoicing, so too we draw a healthy, therapeutic brokenness from Tisha B'Av.

"All her pursuers caught up with her *bein hametzarim*. " The Magid of Mezeritch detected something positive in this image. A king must usually hold himself remote from every ordinary subject. Not everyone is freely admitted to the court. The rules change when the king travels, when he is away from the palace. Those who encounter him on the road have much freer access. Similarly, he taught, the Three Weeks offer us a time to catch up with the King, to enter His Presence even when we have failed the rest of the year. This would make little sense if our *aveilu* focused on the past alone. Recalling a spiritually glorious past will not bring a person closer to Hashem. Contemplation of the

ruination of a person's own soul, of the shambles he has made of himself, can begin a process of drawing closer. He will gain speed when the feeling of internal rawness is replaced by an intense longing and desire to get to a different place. He will pick up even more momentum when he can focus on an image of that place.

During the Three Weeks, that image comes into much sharper focus. It is the image of the *Bais Hamikdosh* in its physical and spiritual splendor. This is what the period is all about.

1- Based on Nesivos Shalom, Bamidbar, pgs. 193-195

2- In other words, it is not so much that big oaks from little acorns grow, as big oaks from decayed acorns emerge.

3- Michah 7:8

4- Yalkut Shimoni, Ekev 852 s.v. kum reid

5- Eichah Rabbah 33:1

6- Eichah 1:5

7- Eichah 1:3. Literally, the last phrase, bein hametzarim, means "in dire straits." It also alludes to the three weeks of mourning between the two fast days - the 17th of Tamuz and the 9th of Av - marking the final phase in the destruction of Yerushalayim.

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