

REBUILDING THROUGH MOURNING

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

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We don't travel down memory lane for the memories. At least as a national exercise, we do not revisit the past unless it has a bearing on the present and future.

Why, then, the elaborate build up over the space of three weeks towards Tisha B'Av, seemingly for the purpose of getting us to more tearfully remember the past that was? Furthermore, Chazal tell us[2] that Hashem decreed upon each deceased that he should, in time, be forgotten. Yet, regarding the *churban*, the pasuk proclaims[3] "If I forget Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget its skill." After some two thousand years, we urge ourselves to remember, to not let go.

The inescapable conclusion we must reach is that we only forget the dead, while Yerushalayim is very much alive. The essence of the Three Weeks is to be stubborn and obstinate, to refuse to accept the destruction of Yerushalayim. We cannot find "closure," not after all the centuries that have passed, because we cannot come to terms with life without the *Beis Hamikdosh*.

A man unburdened himself to the Opter Rov, reciting his list of personal tragedies and failures. Somewhere in the conversation, he sensed that the Rov did not show sufficient signs of commiserating with him. Noting his dissatisfaction, the Rov explained. "So you are deeply pained by your circumstances. What about the *korban tamid* that was not brought this morning? Tell me, are you also pained by that?"

Two thousand years after the last time the *korban tamid* was brought, the Opter Rov could not understand that another Jew might not be disconsolate regarding our inability to properly perform the *avodah* of the *Beis Hamikdosh*. In his reaction, we get to the heart of what *avodah* we should be performing during the Three Weeks. The single most important ingredient is refusing to accept "reality." We cannot and should make peace with the loss of the *Beis Hamikdosh*.

Our longing for it rises to the level of an offering. Ironically, without a *Beis Hamikdosh*, we can still offer *korbanos* - the offering of shattered hearts, pining for reconnection with the *Shechinah*. (Longing for something can sometimes be more valuable than the thing itself.) This longing for the *Beis Hamikdosh* is an important component of its rebuilding. The Three Weeks, our focused longing for the *Beis Hamikdosh*, amounts to the beginning of its reconstruction.

Our attitude in mourning differs from the way others mourn. Rav Meir Chodosh zt"l saw an allusion to

this in the Torah's description of the infant Moshe. "She opened it [the basket that bore Moshe] and saw the child, and behold, a youth was crying. She took pity on him, and said, ??This is one of the Hebrew boys." [4] From his crying, Paroh's daughter understood that the baby was Jewish, because Jewish crying is different from others. Most crying comes from a sense of rupture, hopelessness and often despair. Jewish crying is forward looking, and is rooted in longing and hope for the future. (For this reason, many Holocaust victims were unable to cry. Having given up any hope for the future, they were not able to cry the Jewish crying they were accustomed to.)

A teaching of the Besht highlights the value of our mourning. Between (in a manner of speaking) our world and Hashem's, there are numerous "worlds" that bridge the distance. Many of us are familiar with the names of some of these conceptual worlds, like *Atzilus*, *Beriah*, and *Yetzirah*. Among these worlds is one so rarified and lofty, that nothing connected to physicality in any manner or form can penetrate.

When we stand in *davening*, we send our *tefilos* aloft, launching them on what we hope will be the shortest trajectory to the *Kisei Hakavod*. When they reach this particular world, taught the Besht, they hit a barrier. Our *tefilos*, after all, are distilled into words. Words are products of human speech, of physical beings. Words still belong in our imperfect world, not in this lofty place we send them.

Only one kind of *davening* makes it through this world. One element makes its way through the barrier. The earnest feeling and sentiment of our hearts, completely divorced from any limiting agents like mere words. This inner will, this spiritual essence, fits right into this world. If the words of *davening* are like a body, their inner essence is its soul. Souls, indeed, are welcome in this world. (On the other hand, in this particular world, words expressed that spring more from the lips than the heart have no value. It is not that they count as something, albeit less than *davening* with earnest *kavanah*. Here, the words alone count for nothing at all. *kavanah* is the only currency accepted. Without it, the *tefilos* have not meaning at all.)

In this world, our contemporary *avodah* during the Three Weeks makes perfect sense. Even the *korbanos* have a physical side to them. They all utilize objects and elements of the world around us. Our sincere longing for closeness to Hashem, however, does not come from a physical place. It can penetrate this world, and take its place there. The destruction of the *Beis Hamikdosh* did not close the gate on this kind of service to Hashem! In this world, the *avodah* of the *Beis Hamikdosh* is still feasible. We perform it entirely from within; our *korban* is the sadness, the longing that grows out of our having been separated from the immediate Presence of our Creator.

There is an oblique reference to this lofty world in the Gemara[5] which describes a "place" in Heaven where mourning does not reach. That place is the world we have been describing, where the *avodah* of our broken hearts accomplishes its task in the same way it did when the *Beis Hamikdosh* stood. Ironically, in one sense the *churban* of the physical *Beis Hamikdosh* had a positive impact on the quality of our *avodah*. While the *Beis Hamikdosh* stood, it was used by people who

could long and yearn for those special sweet moments of the year when they were touched by the direct contact with the *Shechinah*. People of those times powerfully felt the general aura of kedushah brought by the *Shechinah*'s presence in the Land and in their midst. How they must have yearned for even more and greater closeness!

We, however, have an ironic advantage. We know only of separation and distance. We have only reconstructions and our imagination to use, to gain some inkling of what it was like. We are capable of an intense longing and yearning born of centuries of deprivation of the *Beis Hamikdosh*. Hashem responds to it with great *Ratzon*.

Chazal tell us^[6] that the enemy, entering the *Heichal*, discovered the *cheruvim* locked in embrace. Not understanding what those *cheruvim* represented, they mocked them. We, however, should have a different problem with them. The gemara^[7] relates that the *cheruvim* were an accurate barometer of the relationship between Hashem and His people. When *Klal Yisrael* did His bidding, the *cheruvim* faced each other; when their obedience slackened, the *cheruvim* faced the *Heichal*, but not towards each other. How could it be that the *cheruvim* were positioned on the very day of the *churban* to display love and closeness between Hashem and us?

Our development above presents a solution. The *churban* led directly to great longing and expectation within us. Similarly, *kivayachol*, it initiated great *Ratzon* within Hashem to bring about reconciliation with His people, and the return of His *Shechinah* to its appointed abode in Yerushalayim.

This *Ratzon* paves the way for the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdosh*. Our *aveilus* for the *Beis Hamikdosh* is thus a powerful factor in its reconstruction. There is wonderful irony in this, and great hope. It is also a challenge to us each year as we enter our national period of mourning.

1. Based on Nesivos Shalom, Bamidbar, pgs. 190-192

2. See Soferim, hosafah 1, 1:3

3. Tehilim 137:5

4. Shemos 2:6

5. Chagigah 5B. The reference is puzzling. While the gemara does say that in this world there is no crying, it also says that mourning for the *churban* is the exception, and does take place there!

6. Yoma 54B

7. Bava Basra 99A