

SHABBOS CHAZON

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

How (eichah) can I bear your burden alone? (Devarim 1:12)

Until Moshiach comes, may it be very soon, Shabbos Parashas Devarim will always be 'Shabbos Chazon,' the Shabbos in advance of Tisha B'Av. This, of course, is not just because it works out well date-wise, but because it contains the word 'eichah' within it as well, the first word from Yirmiyahu's 'Lamentations' that we actually read on Tisha B'Av.

The 'eichah' of our parshah is Moshe's sharp criticism of how burdensome the Jewish people had become, given all their complaining and testing. Yirmiyahu's 'eichah' bemoans the result of such an attitude down the road: destruction of not just one house of G-d, but two, and of the lives of hundreds of millions of Jews along the way, not to mention thousands of years of often torturous exile.

Following this Shabbos, those who are aware of Tisha B'Av and its laws, will mourn for about 26 hours, much of the day being spent sitting on the ground like mourners. We will recite the traditional 'kinos,' special liturgies composed to help us focus on the destructive potential of Tisha B'Av, with the hope that in doing so we will merit, finally, the end of exile and the beginning of the Messianic era.

While many Jews will sit on the floors of Eretz Yisroel, even more will do so on the floors of Chutz L'Aretz, the Diaspora. Yet, how many will go back far enough? How many, while considering the loss of the Temples and perhaps even crying over them, will recall the root cause of all that destruction, even to this very day?

Recently, someone I know was at a simchah (here in Eretz Yisroel) at which she was present during a conversation of some 'Kollel wives' whose husbands were presently learning in yeshivos here in the Holy Land. She was shocked to hear how pleased these women were that their husband's 'tenures' were just about up, and how happy they will be to leave Eretz Yisroel and return 'home.'

It never occurred to them that they were echoing the words of the spies. It never occurred to them that they were furthering the cause of destruction embodied in the ninth day of Av. For, as the Talmud says:

"The entire assembly raised up and issued its voice; the people wept that night." (Bamidbar 14:1). Rabbah said in the name of Rebi Yochanan: That night was the night of Tisha B'Av; The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to them, "You cry without reason! I will fix a crying for the generations!" And, the First and Second Temples were destroyed. (Ta'anis 29a)

What is this talking about? This is talking about the night after the spies returned from spying Eretz Yisroel, and speaking loshon hara about the Land. The spies had unnerved the nation, resulting in national hysteria, and worst of all, a rejection of Eretz Yisroel.

As a result, not only did they die horrible deaths in the desert, but they caused untold destruction to their descendants throughout history until Moshiach's arrival. This is, ultimately, what we are mourning on Tisha B'Av. We are crying over the spies' rejection of Eretz Yisroel, and what it has done to us throughout the millennia that followed.

If Jews, particularly Torah-abiding Jews, can celebrate their departure from Eretz Yisroel - no matter what the situation or reason - or take comfort in the fact that they don't have to go there in the first place, then we are mourning for them and us, as well. All justifications, rationalizations, and excuses aside, rejection is rejection, one that is tantamount to making one an 'accomplice' in the destruction of the Temples. As the rabbis teach: Any generation in which the Temple is not built, it is as if it was destroyed in that generation.

Just because G-d hasn't sent lightning down and hit the ground upon which such a person stands, or because He hasn't completely overturned life in the Diaspora, should not be taken as Divine acceptance of one's exile-mentality. Don't mistake G-d's patience for tacit approval.

Shabbos Day:

"Except for Caleiv ben Yefuneh: He will see it, and to him I will give the Land on which he walked, and to his children, because he followed G-d whole-heartedly." (Devarim 1:36)

Look at what the posuk says. It does not say that Caleiv is to be praised because he did not speak badly about Eretz Yisroel, but "because he followed G-d whole-heartedly." That is, how Caleiv acted while being in Eretz Yisroel and when he returned to the camp in the desert was a function of his loyalty to G-d.

Why? Here's an analogy. Let's say your father takes you to his favorite vacation spot for a weekend. You can tell by the way he anticipates and prepares for the trip, that he loves this place. Such attention to detail can only mean love and attachment for the place of his dreams. You can't wait to see what makes this place so special, and why he can't help but whistle happily the entire journey.

After several hours of driving, you arrive. Getting out of the car, you look around and immediately feel a great sense of disappointment. Not one for hiking in the woods, you scan the area for a comfortable hotel into which you can settle and make yourself at home. There isn't any.

The smile from your face drops, and you are just about to express your extreme consternation when your father says, "Isn't it just wonderful? Can you find a better place to get away from it all and reconnect with G-d and life?"

You want to scream out, "YES! THERE ARE PLENTY OF BETTER PLACES TO DO JUST THAT!!" when you take stock of what kind of reaction it will create in your father, whom you love too dearly to hurt over one weekend in the woods. All of a sudden, you calm down and instead respond with, "yes, it IS a wonderful place," after which your father smiles, having derived great satisfaction from your acceptance of his cherished place.

Eretz Yisroel may not mean much, or enough to some Jews, but it does to their Father-in-Heaven, as the Talmud emphasizes here:

Rebi Shimon ben Yochai said: Three wonderful gifts The Holy One, Blessed is He, gave to the Jewish people, and they were only given through difficulty. They are: Torah, Eretz Yisroel, and the World-to-Come. (Brochos 5a)

Probably the women (mentioned above) who were rejecting Eretz Yisroel did not know Rebi Shimon ben Yochai's statement. Furthermore, they seemed to have forgotten Jewish history and Parashas Shlach-Lecha and Parashas Mattos. And if they, and countless others like them, value Torah because it is valuable to G-d, then how much more so must they value Eretz Yisroel, which is second in the list of wonderful gifts - from G-d's point of view - after Torah and before Eternity.

However, the analogy breaks down there, because Eretz Yisroel is not some wooded vacation spot that we grin and bear because we love our father dearly who loves this place dearly. It is Eretz Yisroel, a gift from a Father whose opinion is totally objective, and Who loves it for our good, not His own.

Thus, rejection of Eretz Yisroel on any level is not only a rejection of what G-d holds dear, but it is also a rejection of what G-d holds to be best for us. The fact that a person can't live there, because their personal circumstances prevent them from doing so, or because political circumstances prevent them from doing so, has nothing to do with making a Jew feel towards Eretz Yisroel as they might feel towards Poland, or Uganda, or any other place they'd rather leave than live within.

No wonder the Final Temple has yet to be built. No wonder so many Jews have little, if any, problem with that. It's as if yearning to live in Eretz Yisroel and love of the Land is one of those mitzvos that can't be done until Moshiach comes and the Temple returns, like sacrifices or something.

If you don't love Eretz Yisroel, and you don't want to live there, or even want to want to live there, something is very wrong - especially if you are learning Torah. There is some very important

information that is missing from your perspective of Torah and the will of G-d. This Tisha B'Av, given the situation as it presently stands, is an important time to find out what is missing, and to begin rectifying the problem.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

"Except for Caleiv ben Yefuneh: He will see it, and to him I will give the Land on which he walked, and to his children, because he followed G-d (Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh) whole-heartedly." (Devarim 1:36)

While on the topic of Caleiv, the above posuk offers an important insight into who he was. We already discussed how the Arizal revealed that Caleiv was the reincarnation of Eliezer, Avraham Avinu's trusted servant. Lavan had blessed him upon his arrival to Padan Aram in search of a wife for Yitzchak, thus bringing him from the side of 'cursed Canaan' to 'blessed Avraham.'

We also discussed how the twelve spies had some Divine help on their mission, in the form of the souls of the original sons of Ya'akov, each in his respective descendant's body. This remained so up until ten of the spies decided to speak loshon hara about Eretz Yisroel, at which time the souls of their respective ancestors left them for good.

Except, that is, for Caleiv and Yehoshua, who did not participate at all in the spies' evil plot to undermine national confidence in Eretz Yisroel. As a result, the soul of Yehudah remained inside of Caleiv, and this is alluded to by the Name of G-d in the above posuk. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 36)

The name 'Yehudah' is spelled: Yud-heh-vav-dalet-heh, which is the four letters of G-d's Ineffable Name, plus the letter dalet which also means many things. In this case, it refers to the rectification that occurred through Caleiv to an aspect of G-d's Name.

What is also interesting is that the name 'Caleiv' means 'dog.' One of the principle traits of a dog is often said to be loyalty, and that is why, very often, a dog will run forward while looking backwards to keep an eye on where his master is standing. As Caleiv ran to spy the land, his sight remained fixed on G-d and thus he never lost perspective regarding his mission, unlike the other ten spies who accompanied him.

On the other hand, the fiercest enemy of the Jewish people, Amalek, is said to be symbolized by the dog. Every biblical nation is represented by some animal, and for Amalek, it is the dog (whose spiritual representative is named 'Biladen' by the Zohar). Thus, the Talmud, when discussing the chaos at the End-of-Days just in advance of Moshiach's arrival, refers to that generation as having the face of a dog. (Sanhedrin 97a)

One idea, two extremes. However, it is really quite simple. According to Kabbalah, all forces and traits in creation can be applied in two opposite directions - zu l'umus zu ("this corresponding to

this"). If the energy is used in a positive direction then it cannot be used in a negative direction, and vice versa.

Therefore, Caleiv and Amalek represent two extremely different applications of one trait. If the Jewish people follow in Caleiv's footsteps, then Amalek is, by necessity, weakened. If the Jewish people, on the other hand, abdicate their right to such a trait by simply ignoring it, then the Amaleks of history use it instead - AGAINST US.

Curious how Eretz Yisroel is so connected to Caleiv and all that he represents?

MELAVE MALKAH:

G-d's kindness surely has not ended, nor are His mercies exhausted. They are new every morning...
(Eichah 3:22-23)

After watching the totality of the destruction of the First Temple; after seeing the seemingly unlimited flow of Jewish blood in the streets of Jerusalem; after witnessing the cruel exile of the remaining tribes of Yehudah and Binyomin into the Babylonian exile, the prophet wonders and hopes aloud. Have we seen the end of G-d's kindness to the Jewish people? Did we exhaust our merit so quickly?

Over two thousand years later, we can, thank G-d, answer Yirmiyahu's question with confidence. The Babylonian Exile was only the first of four to come, but still, there have been years of plenty and blessing in-between. Even in our own day-and-age, after surviving the Holocaust and wondering once again that which the prophet did a millennia before, we have since seen years of blessing.

"They are new each morning."

From the moment that we arise and regain consciousness, we see the blessing of G-d in that we are still alive. Even on days when some people might wish that they were not, G-d forbid, still, the miracle of life is the miracle of life, and it is not to be taken for granted. When we do, we walk a path to spiritual self-destruction, and after that, physical self-destruction as well.

As a change of pace, Kabbalistically, this verse has a deeper meaning as well. As is accepted tradition, every night when we go to sleep our souls leave our bodies (to some degree, at least), and rises to higher spiritual planes. There, they join up with other spiritual entities, the result of which is a level of spiritual rectification that might take much longer on earth than within the body.

Thus, in the morning upon gaining consciousness, we are like a brand new creation, and thus the posuk says,

"They are new each morning."

In fact, Rav Chaim Vital says, the Arizal used to look at the foreheads of his students before they would retire for the evening, and tell them which Torah verse to contemplate upon going to sleep, knowing that it was part of that particular student's tikun at that time. Knowing part of its interpretation before actually going to sleep would make it easier for the student's soul to rise higher that night and achieve even greater purification and perfection.

It is quite difficult to find someone these days capable of providing such insight into our personal need for perfection. However, it does point out that 'going to bed' for a Jew is more than a simple matter of 'crashing' and passing out. Daytime and life is one part of a person's spiritual journey; nighttime and sleep is another leg of that journey, both of which require some kind of ongoing spiritual preparation.

May we merit to see Tisha B'Av transformed into a day of joy and celebration by the arrival of Moshiach Tzidkainu.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston