

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

These are the things that Moshe told to all of the Jewish people on the east side of the Jordan in the desert, in the plain opposite the Red Sea, between Paran, and Tofel, and Lavan, Chatzerot, and Di Zahav, 11 days from Chorev by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-Barnea. (Bamidbar 33:1- 2)

Thus begins Moshe Rabbeinu's parting address to the Jewish nation that he led for 40 years, and his summary of the major events that occurred during that time until that point. However, it would be a mistake to assume that he was talking only to the Jewish people of that time, and not to all of the generations that were destined to follow.

For, unfortunately, the grand plan for the Jewish people and Creation was not actualized in Moshe Rabbeinu's lifetime, and not since then, for that matter. What the greatest prophet who ever lived began we are still trying to conclude. Indeed, the Jewish people are a work in progress, which is why, the Arizal explains, Moshe Rabbeinu reincarnates into each generation, to finish the job he started (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20).

Just like you "don't fix what aint broke," you can't fix what you don't know is broken. Yes, the Jewish people sinned here, and the Jewish people sinned there. However, if we don't understand the essence of what they did wrong each time they erred, then how can we guarantee that we don't perpetuate the same errors, rather than rectify them?

This is what the Talmud means when it says that, "A generation in which the Temple is not built is considered to be one in which it was destroyed"(Yerushalmi, Yoma 1:1). For, the generation in which the error that caused its destruction is corrected, is the generation in which the temple will be rebuilt. Therefore, if the temple has not returned in a specific generation, then it means that the error is still being made, and that it would cause the destruction of the temple in that generation, if it was still standing.

Conversely, the Talmud states, "If one has dayah, it is as if the Temple was rebuilt in his time" (Brochos 33a). For, it is dayah that allows one to see truth, recognize error, and appreciate the importance of correcting it. With dayah, a person can rise to the level of spiritual awareness and perfection that can, eventually, result in the return of the Temple.

Well, it is about to be Tisha B'Av, 5768. It is 1,938 years since the destruction of the Second Temple, and 2,430 years since the destruction of the First Temple, which the Second Temple never really replaced. And, not only has the temple not returned to its holy abode, but its holy spot is being

occupied by an enemy, while the Jewish people show little if any movement in the direction of rebuilding it.

Indeed, 80 percent of world Jewry is assimilated, and over 50 percent is intermarried, while those who still adhere to a Torah lifestyle are mostly concerned about personal local issues and needs. Even when outreach is done, it focuses little on the reality of the temple, or our role in bringing about the Final Redemption having the Temple returned to us.

It is not being rebuilt in our time.

Therefore, it is as if it is destroyed in our time.

So, isn't it about time to sit down and ponder what, after over three millennia of history, is missing from the Jewish people?

Since the Talmud makes a strong connection between the sin of the Spies, and Tisha B'Av itself (Ta'anis 29a), it is as good a place as any to get to the bottom of the matter. Understanding the essence of their sin will reveal to us the essence of our sin, and why the Temple has not returned until this very day.

As Rashi points out, the Torah twice mentions the departure of the Spies on their mission, the second time to inform us that, just as they returned with bad advice, so too had they left with bad advice (Bamidbar 13:26).

However, one could argue, what difference does it make when the Spies went bad? The bottom line is that, when they returned to give their report to Moshe and the nation, they spoke badly about Eretz Yisroel and weakened the resolve of the people to go up and conquer the land.

After all, they could have changed their minds about what they were going to say to the people upon their return, between the time they had departed and the time they had returned, a dozen times. Would it have mattered? The important thing is that, at the moment of truth, when they stood before the Jewish nation, which waited with baited breath to hear their report, they said the wrong thing.

The answer to that question is also in Rashi. As Rashi points out, one of the very complaints they had about the Land of Canaan, that "the land swallows its inhabitants" (Bamidbar 13:32) had been arranged God to their advantage. He had arranged for the Canaanites to be too pre-occupied with burying their dead to chase down a few strangers investigating their land, a blessing for the Spies to be sure.

Yet, the Spies did not notice the wonderful Divine Providence in that, but rather, instead, saw it as a curse of the land. What God had intended to be a blessing for them they perceived as a curse, as a reason to not go up and claim their destined inheritance. Rather than see an opportunity to fulfill the prophecy given to Avraham Avinu hundreds of years before, they chose instead to block it, begging

the question: How could they have been so off?

The answer is, as Rashi alludes, the attitude with which they left to perform their mission. Indeed, explains Rashi, the verse is telling us that what they said on the way back was completely a function of what they thought on the way there, long before they had even seen the land. For, perception is a function of assumption, and their incorrect assumptions about life as a Jew and in Eretz Yisroel meant that they could only perceive reality one way, and it caused them to see God's blessing as a curse.

What assumption had they incorrectly made? They had assumed that the ideal life which they enjoyed in the desert was the ideal way for a Jew, who wants to serve God, to live. That is why they could reject the land right before God and not be afraid of Divine retribution. They had assumed that God would read their hearts and see that it was their drive to learn Torah unhampered by the menial concerns of daily survival that had brought them to that point, and that He would praise them for it.

How shocked were they when they found out that, not only did God not praise them, but rather, He cursed them instead. Then, and only then did they wake up and realize how that had not been on the same page of God as they had previously assumed. However, by that time, even though retroactively they saw everything differently, it was too late to do anything about the situation, and they died in the desert instead.

As the rabbis point out, on Yom HaDin, God will only have to say, "I am God," and we will fall back, as Yosef's brothers did when he revealed himself to them, speechless. Why? Because "I am God" means that God will reveal to us each and every time He tried to direct us through the events and people in our lives, and how we just ignored the significance of both. How many times have we ignored Hashgochah Pratis, passing up opportunities for growth, and perhaps, on some occasions, even freedom, because we lack the eyes to see it for what it is?

Well, first of all, there had been the 12,000,000 Jews who died in the Plague of Darkness, because they had ignored Hashgochah Pratis and chose to remain in Egypt instead. Then later on, there had been the Spies, who had mocked Yehoshua and Caleiv, choosing instead to remain in the desert rather than take the land that had been meant for them since Creation. And, who knows how many countless others have followed in the same crooked footsteps, and suffered similar fates as well?

Therefore, Hashgochah Pratis inserted the word "eichah" into this week's parsha (Devarim 1:12), the future Yirmiyahu's lamentation about the fall of the Jewish people and the destruction of the Temple. It is also a word whose letters are the same as the word "aiyekah" which God asked to Adam HaRishon after he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil — words whose gematrios are 36 — the number that refers to the light of Hashgochah Pratis.

It means only one thing: the events of history are a function of Hashgochah Pratis, but the perception of them are completely a function of our own assumptions about life. Just because we perceive reality a certain way does not mean that is the way it actually exists. It is possible to live day-to-day

with the wrong assumptions about life, and get by, until truth overtakes them and we have a rude awakening.

How can one be sure about their perception of reality? Check out your assumptions about life, about Torah, about Jewish history, etc. False assumptions result in false perceptions, and false perceptions result in an acute inability to read the "writing on the wall" that God leaves behind for us in order to know what He wants from us at any given point in time, personally, or nationally.

Correct your assumptions and you correct your perceptions, and you gain the invaluable ability of being able to speak God's language and understand His messages. Tisha B'Av is the day on which we are asked to do this, in order to avoid adding another reason, God forbid, to make the ninth of Av the national day of mourning that it has become.

Text

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