

PARSHAS SHLACH: ROSH CHODESH TAMMUZ

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

Why are the months Tammuz and Av months of national destruction and suffering, and how, despite this, are they destined in the future to become transformed into the major moadim?

Hashem's creation of the world was done in such a way that even the material things in it were nourished by Divine Holiness; all food contained in it the word of G-d. So the Arie explained that the verse 'Mankind lives not by bread alone but by the word of G-d' means by the word of G-d that is in the bread. [The Admor of Kotz taught that the purpose of the birchat hamotzi is to teach us to remove the earthy from the bread]. It would seem to be demeaning for holiness to be clothed in petty materialism, yet the purpose of the whole creation is to make the material holy. Just as the gemara says: 'One plants a seed in the ground in order to reap a large quantity of grain' (Pesachim 87b) to thereby get bread, so the soul came down to make all the earthy parts of man's body spiritual and holy.

The months of the year are similarly structured. During the first 3 months the spirituality and holiness came from on high down to earth; Nissan with its revelation of miracles in this material world, Iyar with the heavenly food of Mannah and Sivan when Hashem descended to this material world to give His Torah. Then follow the months of Tammuz and Av when that holiness was supposed to reflect what came from Heaven and transform the earthy and material into the spiritual and sanctity. However, we know that the sin of Adam Harishon, who was created from the soil, perverted the original plan of creation, so that his body could not reflect the holiness that poured down from heaven; that required suffering and death to enable the holiness within him to ascend heavenward and even then only the neshama could ascend without the body. That same sin perverted these months as well, so that they were unable to transform the material and could only release that holiness that had descended from above while the material in the tragedy and suffering remained with us. Therefore we can only exist from the outpouring of kedusha from above that is granted to us in

However, in the future when Adam's sin will be corrected then the merit of justice that is holiness from below, ascending upwards to Heaven will predominate; halakhah will be according to Midat Hadin that is Bet Shammai. That is why Chodesh Tammuz is, according to the order of the flags of the encampment in the desert, the month of Reuven. Reuven showed that teshuvah has the power of transformation, so too does Chodesh Tammuz have the possibility of change; that is why these days of tragedy and disaster will be turned into festivals in the end of days.

'The mitzvah is for Kiddush Hachodesh to be done through eye witnesses who actually saw the New Moon' (RoshHashanah, 20a). Reuven's name is similarly linked to seeing, even as Leah said at his birth: 'Hashem has seen my humiliation... and has given me a son...and she called him Reu-ben' (Ber. 29:32). This month then, with the seeing that is required for this mitzvah that involves klal Yisrael, is the rectification of the sin of the Meraglim. We see that the source of their sin was through their eyes as Moshe commanded them to see the Land. So too, the sin of Adam was induced through the power of sight, as we read: 'And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes' (Ber. 3:6). Rashi comments that this means that the words of the Nachash found favor in her eyes; "I see the words"; this means that they find favor with me) (Ketubot, 109a).

Since to the Midrash, the galut of Israel from its Land is analogous to the expulsion of Adam Harishon from Gan Eden, it should follow that their entry into Eretz Yisrael should parallel his entry into Gan Eden. So if their entry would have been in perfect wholesomeness they would have atoned for his sin. This atonement should begin with seeing the holiness that is enshrined in the material Eretz Yisrael, that is, it should have found favor in their eyes. After all, the eyes are the doors to the heart. So everything is dependent on them and the power of sight, for good or otherwise. Through Ayin Tovah all good aspects enter the heart from where they permeate the rest of the body. However the converse is also true as we read; 'Samson sinned through his eyes as he told his parents concerning the women, 'for she is fitting in my eyes'; therefore the Philistines gouged out his eyes in Gaza' (Sotah, 9b). Therefore if the Meraglim would have been able to use the power of their eyes for good, then they would have made an entrance through which Israel could have entered the Land with the perfection of all their spiritual feelings and urges.

We know that the word Chet has a dual significance. 'It can mean lacking in something as in 'then I and my son Shlomo will be missing' [chataim] (Melachim Alef, 1:21). However, it can also mean cleansing or purifying as in 'purify [teichateini] with hysop' (Tehilim, 51:9) or 'and he shall cleanse the house[vachitah]' (Vayikrah 14:42). This is exactly the same dual nature of the power of sight-for good or for evil. So every one who wishes sincerely to have a pure heart, should train his eyes to see only the good.

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