

TISHA B'AV

תשע"ט

The halachos of mourning for the Beis Hamikdash before Tisha B'Av are structured so that we gradually increase the mourning for the Beis Hamikdash until we reach the climax on Tisha B'Av.

Ashkenazim start the mourning on Shiva Asar B'Tammuz. It corresponds roughly to the restrictions of the twelve months of mourning for a parent. Then, from Rosh Chodesh Av, we start to observe the restrictions of shloshim. On Tisha B'Av we act like we are sitting shiva. The seudoh hamafsekes in some aspects resembles the period when one is an onen, i.e. after the relative has passed away until the burial.

Many people do not understand why we mourn, and look to avoid these restrictions. They search for all sorts of heterim to avoid them. People habitually make siyumim on mesechtos during the nine days in order to enjoy meat. Someone once approached Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zatzal, with an idea of how to be lenient on some aspect of mourning during the nine days. Rav Shlomo Zalman responded that no-one ever approached him with ideas of how to be lenient when they were observing shloshim for the loss of a parent. Our problem is that we don't consider the churbon Beis Hamikdash to be as tragic. We have to realize that the Beis Hamikdash was the mother and father of all of us. We lost our parents.

In 1967, after the Old City of Yerushalayim was conquered, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, the chief rabbi of the IDF, announced that we need not say "Nachem" in the tefillos of Tisha B'Av. After all, he reasoned, Har Habayis is now in Jewish hands! My Rebbi sharply responded that this approach betrays a deep misunderstanding of what mourning for the churbon is about. We mourn over the great distance that now exists between Klal Yisroel and Hashem as a result of the churbon. There is still golus haShechinoh—a pervasive lack of Hashem's Presence in our world and in our lives. No amount of Jewish sovereignty or construction of buildings in Yerushalayim can mitigate this loss of the experience and feeling of the Shechinoh in our midst.

I asked my Rebbi—what about the line which says that we mourn over the fact that foreign armies are occupying the mokom hamikdash? He answered, it is still true that the primary aveilus is over golus haShechinoh. But if Chazal included this line, it means they had the insight to know that there will never be full Jewish sovereignty over Har Habayis until Moshiach comes. This will be to remind us of the depth of the loss. We can do nothing to connect with the Shechinoh on Har Habayis until the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt.

And so it came to pass. After the war, Har Habayis was turned over to a Jordanian authority called the Wakaf.

The posuk in Eichoh says, "Who will give my head water and my eyes ducts for tears?" We are saying: Hashem, help me cry—help me feel the depth of the loss intensely enough to bring forth genuine tears. We also mourn for the fact that we do not understand the churbon enough and do not mourn sufficiently.

What was the mikdash? The posuk commands us to have fear of the Mikdash. Chazal ask: what is there to fear about a building of wood and stone? They answer that we do not hold value for the place itself but for the Shechinoh that rests itself and reveals itself to us at this place.

What is special about this place? This is what we need to appreciate. We do not relate to it as a national or historical symbol—which is how the secular Israeli government looks at it.

The Rambam writes we have a unanimous mesorah that the mokom hamizbeach is the place where historically, the avos and the founders of humanity always offered sacrifices to Hashem. Avrohom brought up his son there on the akeidoh. Noach brought korbonos there after he survived the Mabul. Kayin and Hevel brought their korbonos there. Odom Horishon brought a korbon there on the day he was created, and the place of the mizbeach was the place from which the earth from which he was created was taken. He realized that his entire existence came from Hashem, because without his neshomo that Hashem gave him he would be a simple clump of earth, lying lifeless on the place he was now standing. He wanted to show how much he owes to Hashem and offered a korbon.

The first two human children—Kayin and Hevel—brought a korbon after they achieved some satisfaction from their labor. They intuitively knew that Hashem is really the One providing their success and they wanted to demonstrate that awareness and they did it by giving back to Hashem a token of that which they received.

Noach emerged from the teivoh and saw a completely desolate world. The purpose for which humanity was created utterly failed to come to fruition and it needed to be destroyed. Humanity's behavior could not justify their continued existence. So Hashem decided to start all over again with Noach, whom Hashem found "chein" in. Chein means chinom—undeserved. Noach was a tzaddik, but he needed Hashem's help to remain above his generation. Noach realized he didn't deserve to be spared and wanted to show his dependence on Hashem—again—through bringing a korbon.

The akeidoh taught Avrohom Ovinu many lessons. One of them was expressed in the name Avrohom gave to the mountain: Har Ye'roeh—Hashem is seen on this mountain. Hashem chose this spot to manifest His Presence and accept korbonos.

There are two periods of history—one before the mikdash was built and one after. This place has significance all the way from the creation of Odom Horishon. He offered a korbon to Hashem out of the recognition that he didn't just develop from random, natural forces. Hashem gave him everything he has. This was the basis for all korbonos until Avrohom. Afterwards, it became the place where Hashem manifests His Presence in the most intense and tangible way. All this was lost by the churbon. This is the golus haShechinoh.

Despite all the pomp and ceremony that the IDF conducts every year at the swearing in ceremony of its new recruits, the Kosel is a symbol of our past spiritual glory and our failure to maintain it. We still mourn our loss of Shechinoh that once dwelled most deeply there. There was a time in history where we lived with Hashem's Presence and now we cannot.

Why?

The Nefesh Hachayim quotes an unbelievable Zohar. Klal Yisroel at the time before the churbon couldn't conceive of the possibility that the Beis Hamikdash could be destroyed by invading armies. Everyone knew that the intensity of the Shechinoh was so great that any false move by the kohanim meant instant death. How could goyim even dare to approach it?

The Zohar says that Nevuchadnezzar wasn't really the one who destroyed the Beis Hamikdash. It was as if he was merely re-grinding already ground—finely ground—flour. Nefesh Hachayim explains that

the level of Shechinoh present in the Beis Hamikdosh is not static. It increased and decreased in its intensity depending on Klal Yisroel's spiritual level. When we fulfilled the dictates of the Torah, Hashem responded with more Shechinoh and His Presence was felt—no non-Jew could approach it. People died on the spot with a single mistake in avodoh. But by the time of the churbon, the drastic decline in our spiritual level was too great to maintain the level of Shechinoh necessary for the maintenance of the Beis Hamikdosh. It was possible to be invaded and destroyed. Klal Yisroel themselves turned it into an empty shell—a mere building of wood and stone.

Chazal tell us that every generation during which the Beis Hamikdosh is not rebuilt is as if it was destroyed. When we are at the requisite level, then a Beis Hamikdosh will be built. When we are not it will be destroyed. The existence of a Beis Hamikdosh is a reflection of the level of the Jewish People.

The pesukim at the beginning of Bechukosai say that when we act on the proper level then Hashem's Presence will be felt and all of nature will act in harmony. The natural world will function. There will be no wars and there will be a Beis Hamikdosh. Our descent brings disharmony to the world in all aspects and then the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh.

So, on Tisha B'Av we mourn two things. We mourn the loss of Shechinoh from our world and from our lives, and we mourn our failure to keep the Torah in the way it is supposed to create that more intense relationship with Hashem which we are capable of.

Chazal say any generation which doesn't have the mikdosh rebuilt in their time is as if the Beis Hamikdosh was destroyed in their time. It means that we determine the possibility of a Beis Hamikdosh being built with our mitzvos and aveiros. It all depends on our level. It has nothing to do with Arabs, or Israeli political authority or military control of Har Habayis. If we would take it over tomorrow and try to build a Beis Hamikdosh, it would not be able to stand—as long as we are not on the level to sustain Hashem's Shechinoh within it.

This is what we mourn—we once had an opportunity to connect with Hashem in the most intense way—our lives were once infused with tangible kedushoh. The kohanim, and those who lived in Yerushalayim certainly felt this, as well as all the Jews who came for aliyoh l'regel three times a year. We used to have a true simchas beis hashoeivoh—seeing the gedolei tannoim and talmidei chachomim being someach lifnei Hashem mamash—experiencing ruach hakodesh!

This is what we lost.

The posuk in Eichoh describes Klal Yisroel as being alone and abandoned. Rejected and forlorn. We read about the spiritual failure of the time—it was because we put all our trust and hope in the other nations to protect us, and they betrayed us. But in truth it was because we betrayed Hashem and we were faithless to Him.

We have the same problem today. How many Jews feel more secure and safe because of the professed friendship of Donald Trump and now Boris Johnson—instead of being secure in Hashem's commitment

to our survival? Yes, these people have Jewish relatives and Jewish friends, but we cannot afford to be complacent because of it. Klal Yisroel is an outcast in the world precisely because she wants so deeply to be accepted and be treated as equals among the nations.

There is only one way to rebuild what was lost: Kumi roni balaylo—through limud HaTorah. The gemara says roni does not mean tefilloh here—only limud Torah. Why? Look at the continuation of the posuk—learning at night brings one to closeness to Hashem. We are talking about someone whose learning is a song—an expression of an inner yearning for closeness to Hashem deep in the night. When Klal Yisroel do this on a massive scale, the aggregate of being nochach pnei Hashem will bring back the Shechinoh and trigger the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdosh.

The midrash describes the scene of Yirmiyahu sitting and crying over the churbon. Then a Greek philosopher came by and was puzzled. He asked Yirmiyahu, "How can such a wise man like you—someone from whom I learned so much deep wisdom—be mourning over a mere building of wood and stone?" Yirmiyahu answered that he is mourning because that building—when it was standing—was actually the source of all the wisdom of the world. It means our own personal understanding of the Torah is impoverished and diminished without the Beis Hamikdosh and without the Shechinoh. The distance from Hashem's Presence means our wisdom in all aspects of the world decreases. We mourn all this on Tisha B'Av.

We also mourn the fact that without the Beis Hamikdosh and the Shechinoh within, there is no harmony in the natural world. There is strife and competition and violence on all levels of life on Planet Earth.

It is a serious time of year when we need to take inventory—to reflect on the root causes of churbon and how to rectify it.

The spiritual failings which brought about the churbon of bayis rishon, Chazal identified as avodo zoro, gilui arayos, and shefichas domim—and bittul Torah. The cause of churbon bayis sheni was sinas chinom. The cause of the death of the 24,000 talmidim of Rabbi Akiva after the churbon was a lack of respect for one another.

None of these failings were truly rectified. The failings of each era were carried over to some degree into the next era. We never remedied the avodah zoroh, gilui arayos, shefichas domim, bittul Torah and sinas chinom of the past. We need to look at all of them during these days and weeks. But the problem is we have a hyper focus on the details of aveilus and we ignore the bigger issue. Everyone is hyper vigilant not to have chasunos, listen to music, and shave during the three weeks. Everyone knows that it is an aveiroh chamuroh to fly on airplanes during the nine days—but everything else has a heter in some way or another.

We need to use these days to understand the potential of hisgalus haShechinoh we have when we connect to Hashem through limud haTorah and raise our level. We need to accept the responsibility that is on us if we neglect our potential and perpetuate the golus haShechinoh. These are days for serious thought and introspection.