

Homesick

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

Here we are again in the period we call the Three Weeks, soon to be followed by the Nine Days and Tisha B'Av. We have gone another year without deserving that the Bais Hamikdosh be rebuilt. We are still in golus. Sometimes, golus is just a word, and it is used so often that it loses its meaning. We hear speeches about golus. Each speaker, in his or her own words, gets up and speaks about being in golus and the fact that we need to get out of golus.

At times, though, it is like back in the first grade, when we began learning Chumash and the teacher would translate a Hebrew word we didn't understand into an English or Yiddish word we didn't understand. We would chant, "Bereishis, in unfang, in the beginning, bara Elokim, Hashem created." We didn't know what Bereishis meant, what unfang meant, what the beginning meant, and what created meant.

Golus. We are constantly reminded that we are in golus. We understand that golus is not a good place to be, but we wonder what golus is and what is so bad about it. We live in a nice home and have space outside where the children can play. We have a job, an income, and a car. During the summer, some pack up and go to their summer home. What's wrong with that? What's so bad?

Everyone wants to be in the place they call home. Going away is nice, especially for a simcha, but everyone who's slept in a hotel or in someone's guest room will tell you that they missed their own bed. "There is no place like home" is an oft-used cliché, but it happens to be true. People feel more secure, satisfied and productive when in their own home and not on the road in a motel somewhere.

Wherever people travel and for whatever purpose, they generally go for a set amount of time and eventually get itchy to get back home.

Children wait all year for camp. They count down the days until the end of June, when they can put away their study books and head off to camp. But when they get to camp, as good a time as they are having, many of them get homesick. They like camp, they like their friends, and they love running around, playing games, and color war, but they also like their homes and miss them.

Golus means that we are not home. It means that we are not where we are supposed to be. It means that we are in a place where we can't be as productive as we are meant to be. We are in a place where we can't be happy, where there is always an emptiness in our heart.

Golus means always being homesick.

In autocratic countries, one of the ways that they punish people is by sending them into exile. Opponents of a regime are either jailed or sent out of the country. They are free to go live anywhere they want. They can be living in a place on the French Riviera. But they can't be truly happy. There is always an emptiness in them, because they want to be home in the country in which they were born and grew up, where they dreamed of great achievements.

Two weeks ago, a Russian general staged a failed insurrection. He was not killed, but was sent into exile in a neighboring country friendly to Russia's autocrat, where he will live in constant fear.

Golus means to be in exile.

Another form of punishment is to place people in jail. They are separated from their family, friends, home, job, business, and everything and everyone they know. They are locked away in a strange place, with strange people, strange laws, and tough guards. Everything in jail is meant to cause pain to the person. There's nobody to love there and nobody to love you. There's not much to do besides being sad and waiting to go home.

Golus is jail.

There is a growing phenomenon of people who have no home. Usually, they suffer from mental disease, but some of them simply can't afford to live in a home. They don't have enough money for rent and basic necessities, so they end up sleeping on the street. Some sleep on sidewalks, some in alcoves, others on park benches, and some in subways. They don't have a good day. Ever. Even the homeless who are taken in to government-run shelters, while they have a roof over their heads and a bed, they don't have much else and are always sad.

Golus is being homeless.

As I was writing this column, the power went out. The computer shut down, the lights and air conditioner went off, and it became very quiet. Then the generator kicked in, making a racket. The lights flickered and gradually went back on, duller than they were just before, but they were on and giving light. It took longer for the computer and its connections to return. The air conditioner didn't go back on and remained off. The generator only powers the lights, refrigerator, computer, and a few outlets. It creates much background noise as it completes its task. I'm not complaining; it's not optimal, but it's better than having nothing.

Golus is living life on a generator. There's always noise in the background, you're never at peace, you're missing a lot, but you have enough to get along, as you wait for the real energy source to get reconnected and give you everything you need.

Moreover, we need to know that we were all created for a purpose. Hashem didn't go through all the effort, *kevayachol*, of creating the world and sustaining it for all these years so that we should curl up on a comfy couch or beach chair with a good book and a can of Coke. He didn't create us so that we should sit around with the guys talking about every silly topic under the sun. That's not what life is about or for.

Hashem created us with a *guf* and a *neshomah*, with a body and a soul, with physical and spiritual components. While a physical life can be lived in most places, the spiritual life is more sensitive. As Jews, we are here for a higher purpose than others. We are here to learn Torah and perform *mitzvos*. When we merited the *Mishkon* and the *Bais Hamikdosh*, they were centers of *kedusha*, places in our world where the *Shechinah* could dwell and from which we could all draw our spiritual sustenance, allowing us to realize our potential and bring us happiness and fulfillment.

Our lives centered around the *Mikdosh*. We were in our own country, the land that had been set aside for us at the time of creation. We had *korbanos* to raise us and to erase our sins and bring us closer to Hashem. We were able to be in a constant exalted state of *kedusha* and *taharah*. We weren't overcome by the *tumah* that overwhelms us in our day.

We had nevi'im to guide us. We had kohanim, the Sanhedrin, and good people to lead us. We were able to learn Torah and reach a deep understanding of its halachos, sevaros, and teachings. People had their shevet group where they belonged and land that had been in their family for generations and centuries. Everyone was able to achieve their tachlis on the highest levels possible.

Today, we have no Mikdosh, no taharah, no nevi'im, no Sanhedrin, and no kohanim performing the avodah. We don't have the ability to arrive at the essence of Torah or to perform many of its mitzvos. No matter what we do, we won't be able to realize the great potential of man.

We are in golus. We can't get to the top of the ladder.

It is for these reasons, and more, that one of the first halachos in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 1:3) is that every yorei Shomayim should be sad about the loss of the Bais Hamikdosh. Later on (560), he discusses various practices that Chazal instituted for us to remember the destruction of the Bais Hamikdosh.

Additionally, six of the tefillos of Shemoneh Esrei concern asking Hashem to return us to the land in which we belong, and every time we recite Birkas Hamazon, we ask Hashem to rebuild Yerushalayim, meaning the city and the building that stood at its heart, reflecting the heart of every Jew.

We are sometimes referred to as "Golus Yidden." We must know that our identity in golus is tied to the knowledge that we are a people without a proper home, lacking spirit and deficient in our essence. We are a people haunted by sad memories and invigorated by hopeful visions of a bright future.

When we arrive home and look up, we are greeted by a blank space opposite the front door. Every home of a Golus Yid has that unpainted spot to proclaim that we are empty and lacking. No matter how majestic the house, it cannot replace the home we loved, the holiness we embodied, and the spirit that resided within us when it existed.

At every chupah, at the apex of the great joy, poignancy, optimism and elation, the baalei simcha stand surrounded by family and friends, the chosson and kallah enveloped by a cloud of euphoria and good wishes, and then there is a pause. It is quiet and then the sound of the chosson breaking a glass is heard. For no matter how good things seem, no matter how happy and safe we appear to be, we must never forget that we are not home. Every time we are at a chupah and hear the sound of the chosson stomping on the glass, we need to remember that what we have now is but a fraction of the world we once had and the world of our destiny.

Chazal teach (Taanis 30b, Bava Basra 60b) that those who mourn the loss of the Bais Hamikdosh will merit to see it rebuilt. In order to merit the Bais Hamikdosh, we have to appreciate the loss. Those who do so will take upon themselves improvements and actions that will help lead to its reconstruction and thus merit benefiting from it as in the pre-churban days.

Those who mourn the loss of the Bais Hamikdosh know that if it is not rebuilt in our generation, it is as if it was destroyed in our generation. They know that it is incumbent upon them – and us – to rectify the sins that caused the Bais Hamikdosh to be destroyed. It is not sufficient to pay lip service to ridding our world of sinas chinom and working to attain achdus. We have to strive and really work to make those concepts real to us and to our people. Enough with

hatred, enough with division, enough with senseless machlokes. We don't have to agree with everyone and adopt their practices in order to love them and accept that there are twelve shevotim, each with different legitimate, Torah-based customs.

The Alter of Kelm would explain our situation with a moshol of a man who is shouting desperately for help. "Help! Help!" he screams. "My father is dying! Run to help save his life!" When the people come running to help, they see that this man is standing on his father's throat, trying to choke him. They look at him and scream, "Are you crazy? If you want him to live, get off his throat! Then you won't need us to save him!"

During these three weeks of bereavement, as we mourn the loss of the Bais Hamikdosh and cry for its return, let us work to engage in acts that will help to return it to us and rid ourselves of the behaviors that caused it to be destroyed in the first place.

May we all be zoche to experience and benefit from its return with the coming of Moshiach now.