

It's Time

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We are now in the saddest period of the year, a time when we observe halachos associated with mourning. They are not intended to become rote habits, but were instituted to remind us of the loss of our home, country, and spiritual base. The absence of meat, for example, is to teach a lesson and remind us that our lives are lacking.

We get comfortable and forget that there is a giant hole in our hearts and souls that must be filled. We have been away from home for so long that we tend to forget where home is and what it was all about. We forget that the lives that we lead here are lacking in many ways. We look around us and everything seems so perfect and good that we wonder what could be better than what we have now.

We say that in Mitzrayim, the Jews were slaves and were lacking much in life, so they desperately wanted to be redeemed, but what is so bad about our situation today? Boruch Hashem, there aren't any blood libels, or pogroms, or the abject poverty and deprivation of the shtetel. Memories of the Holocaust are receding, German cars are "in" today, and most of us don't feel that what happened in the past is about to happen anytime soon.

Thus, the Nine Days interrupt our summer, just as we are settling in to our summer places and schedules. These days remind us that this is not the way it is supposed to be and this is not the way we are meant to be living life. Tisha B'Av has its roots in the day the meraglim returned from their tour of Eretz Yisroel to report back to the nation that they would not be able to capture the

land Hashem had promised them. They weren't too sure how good a land it was anyway.

It was on this day that the Botei Mikdosh were destroyed, the nucleus of Yiddishkeit was ripped out from our midst, and we were driven into exile in strange lands where we weren't wanted and were poorly treated. For example, on this day, we were chased out of England and Spain [and more recently Gaza], and the Crusaders began their deadly march. The list of tragedies that took place during this period and specifically on Tisha B'Av is, as they say in Yiddish, "lang vi der Yiddishe golus" – way too long.

During these nine days of privation, we should be reading the Chazals that depict the churban, the sefer Yosifun, works such as that of Rabbi Leibel Reznick on the churban, and the plethora of books on Jewish suffering throughout the ages and during the Holocaust. We should be getting a refresher course on what golus is all about and how we ended up here. Thankfully, in this pre-messianic period, Hashem is extending His kindness to us, and we have the luxury of learning about golus from books and not from personal experiences such as those of our parents and grandparents during the Holocaust and our ancestors over the past 2,000 years.

We need to know that we didn't end up here accidentally. The majority of our families were wiped out in the Holocaust, and we are here only because Hashem allowed our grandparents to somehow survive. Everyone has their own story. There is no happenstance in Jewish life. Nobody just happened to be in the right place, or happened to escape a day early, or happened to be on the last boat to sail from Europe, or happened to have had a secret source of food and strength in a concentration camp. They survived because Hashem wanted them to, for

reasons we don't know. Some had obvious zechuyos and others went on to live lives of greatness, helping their brethren and rebuilding what was lost. They gave birth to us and we are here to fulfill their missions and demonstrate that their rescue had long-lasting positive effects on the world. And, of course, we are here to rectify the sins that caused all the pain and misery, helping to bring Moshiach.

The churban took place many years ago and reverberates until this very day. It is up to us to right our situation.

Parshas Devorim is always lained the Shabbos prior to Tisha B'Av. In it, Moshe Rabbeinu recounts the struggles of life in the midbar, as he chastised the people through hinting at their failings, beginning with the sins of the meraglim.

The Chiddushei Horim (cited in Sefas Emes, Devorim 5656) explains why much of the admonition is delivered through veiled hints. The sins that Moshe referred to as he addressed the nation were committed by the generation that had left Mitzrayim. By now, they had all died as punishment for the sins of the meraglim.

The people to whom Moshe was speaking were their children, the next generation, who played no role in those sorry acts. However, the sins they committed created a black hole that exists until our day.

Moshiach can only come when that sin is thoroughly rectified. It is for this reason that Chazal say that a generation in which the Bais Hamikdosh hasn't been rebuilt is equivalent to the one in which it was destroyed. Because we

have not fully rectified those sins and have not stopped committing them, we are still in golus.

We have all been taught that the second Bais Hamikdosh was destroyed because of the baseless hatred that was prevalent at the time. As the Gemara (Yoma 9b) states, "What was the main sin that brought about the destruction of the Bayis Sheini? Mikdosh Sheini shehoyu oskin baTorah uvemitzvos ugemillus chassodim, despite the fact that the people of that time busied themselves with Torah and mitzvos and charitable acts, it was destroyed because there was sinas chinom among them..."

The Yerushalmi presses the point further and proclaims, "We know that the people during the time of the churban Bayis Sheini would delve into Torah and were punctilious in their observance of mitzvos and the laws of maaseros, and possessed every proper middah, but they loved money and hated each other for no reason," and that is why the churban was brought on.

Our task in golus is to repair those faults that caused us to go into golus to begin with. Instead, petty squabbles intensify and cause hatred and division. People view skeptically others who dress differently than they do and view people outside of their clique as inferior. We aren't thoughtful of others' feelings and do things that impact others negatively because we don't value everyone as we should. Disputes are born, and then they fester, involving more and more people, growing so intensified that arriving at a solution becomes more difficult.

When the Torah (Shemos 3:2) describes the incident with Moshe at the burning bush, the posuk states that Moshe viewed the bush and behold, "hasneh bo'eir

ba'eish, vehasneh ainenu ukol, the bush burned on fire and the bush was not consumed."

The Kli Yokor questions that since the fire was burning and not the bush, instead of saying that the bush burned on fire, hasneh bo'eir ba'eish, the posuk should have said that the fire burned within the bush.

He answers that the word sneh being similar to sinah hints to the idea that hatred that people have for each other causes aish, fire, to burn within the Jewish people and is the leading cause of why we are still in exile after all these years.

We have discussed previously that the shikchas haTorah that was caused by the churban contributes to the disputes that we have in golus, and thus it is incumbent upon us to overcome sinas chinom, so that we may merit a return of the Torah and kedusha lost when the Bais Hamikdosh went up in flames.

It is amazing that for over two thousand years, we have had the curse of sinas chinom hanging over our heads and we have not been able to overcome it. Petty fights, jealousies, and battles that seem senseless in hindsight and to people who aren't participating in them have shaken our people for centuries and continue until this very day.

We must rise above the petty issues. We must find the grace, nobility and strength to beat back this scourge and defeat it. We can if we would really join together with achdus. We don't have to agree on everything, but we have to be able to respect each other enough to get along despite the disagreements, as long as they have a basis in Torah.

Our essence is one of kindness and compassion. Go anywhere in the Jewish world and you will find charitable people who support Torah and chesed in their communities. Ask any good Jew to help another, and even if he has never met the person in need, he will open his wallet. It's in our DNA, ever since the days of Avrohom Avinu.

Somehow, in the midbar so many years ago, sinas chinom also crept into our DNA. It is not enough to be baalei chesed. It is not sufficient to be charitable, to be medakdeik bemitzvos, and to learn Torah day and night. We have to also stop the sinas chinom. We have to bring people together. We have to stop the machlokes that rages in our world. We can all agree that it is enough already.

In 1943, a group of 719 children from Poland who had been saved from the Nazis were brought to Eretz Yisroel by way of Teheran and became known as the "Yaldei Teheran." Most of the children were dispersed to irreligious kibbutzim, where they were robbed of their heritage. People fought valiantly under the direction of the Chazon Ish to save as many as possible. The Ponovezher Rov was able to take a group of those children under his wing and brought them to Bnei Brak, but he had no mattresses, pillows and linens upon which the children could rest their weary bodies.

The Rov, a master orator, let it be known that he would be speaking after Maariv in the emerging city's Bais Knesses Hagadol. When the shul was packed, he got up to speak.

"I have a question," he began. "It's a stirah between two Gemaros." The two Gemaros seem to dispute each other. The Gemara in Bava Metziah (62a) states that if two people are in the desert and one of them has a small amount of

water, enough to sustain one person for the distance they need to traverse until they arrive at the next source of water, he is not obligated to give any to the other person.

This is based on the principle of "chayecha kodmin," meaning that your life takes precedence over someone else's.

The Rov continued, citing the Gemara in Kiddushin (20a) which states that if a person buys for himself a Jewish slave, it is as if he has procured a boss – namely, if he has only one mattress or one pillow, he must give it to the slave. The Rov explained that this halacha is derived from the posuk (Devorim 15:16) which states, "Ki tov lo imoch," literally meaning "because it is good for him to be with you."

Asked the Rov, what does the word "imoch – with you" teach us, that the owner comes first or that the slave comes first?

He answered that a person's concerns always take precedence over those of someone else. Therefore, when there is a question of who gets to drink his life-sustaining water, he comes first and he gets to drink it and keep himself alive. When it comes to who gets to sleep on the single mattress he has, he also takes precedence over the slave.

The Rov explained: "This poor Jew was sold into slavery because he didn't have enough money to provide for his family, so he resorted to stealing. When he got caught, he wasn't able to pay back what he had taken, so he was sold into slavery, the ultimate embarrassment.

"Imagine how, after going through that, he comes to the home of his owner and the man tells him that he doesn't have a mattress for him. 'Tonight you'll sleep on the floor,' he is told. Is there any way that man would be able to sleep that night? No way.

"Now, how about the owner? Will he be able to sleep? No way! How can he sleep when he knows that the man he just bought and is now responsible for is not sleeping?

"Therefore, the Torah tells the new owner to give the new slave his mattress. This way, the slave will see that someone cares about him and he will be able to sleep. And when the owner realizes that the man in his care is able to sleep, he will sleep as well."

And so, explained the Rov, this is the meaning of the posuk, "Ki tov lo imoch." It will be good for him to be with you, because in order for you to be able to sleep, you need to give him your mattress.

Getting to his point, the Ponovezher Rov said to the packed shul, "I have brought children who were orphaned in the war. They don't have a father and they don't have a mother. They have nothing. I don't even have mattresses and pillows and linens for them to sleep on.

"Can you imagine these children not being able to sleep? And now that you know about them and their situation, you also won't be able to sleep. So you need to go home and bring your mattresses here. (In those days, and even today, Israelis slept on a thin piece of foam that is easy to carry.) That way, these poor children will be able to sleep...and so will you."

It is said that the people flew out of the shul and ran home, and in no time at all, there were enough mattresses and pillows for the children to sleep on.

That is the way we are supposed to view every Jew, with care and concern. The Ponovezher Rov did, and that's why he was able to accomplish so much, rebuilding people and communities after the war that ravaged Klal Yisroel. And that is the way we must view others, working to bring everyone together with love, compassion and respect, so that we may be zoche to Moshiach Tzidkeinu very soon.