

PARSHAS PINCHAS 5778

This week begins the three weeks between shivah asar b'Tammuz and Tisha b'Av. The haftoros of these three weeks are ones that prophecy impending disaster—purity.

We are supposed to begin these weeks with introspection. The Rambam writes in Hilchos Taanis that we need to reflect on the golus and the reasons for tragedy. Many people today think that golus is just a social and political phenomenon. They think that we can end the golus the minute we exert sovereignty over Har Habayis and build the Beis Hamikdosh. The Rambam writes differently. Chazal say each generation wherein the Beis Hamikdosh is not rebuilt is as if it was destroyed in that generation. What does this mean?

The Nefesh Hachayim says in the name of the Zohar that the armies that destroyed the Beis Hamikdosh took great pride in their destruction. They claimed that they had conquered the G-d of Yisroel. But that was a mistake. The Zohar likens their actions to grinding already ground flour. The Beis Hamikdosh was already destroyed from within.

Klal Yisroel at the time were very confident in the power of the kedushoh of the Beis Hamikdosh to withstand an invasion. After all, the Kohen Godol was in danger of dying by going into the kodosh hakodoshim if he did the wrong avodoh. A non-kohen would die on the spot. So of course goyim couldn't destroy it due to the intensity of the kedushoh! But the Zohar says the level of kedushoh in the Beis Hamikdosh is parallel to the level of kedushoh within Klal Yisroel. By the time of the Destruction, Klal Yisroel has sunk so low in their level that when Nevuchadnezzar came, the Beis Hamikdosh was like an empty shell. He was only grinding already ground flour.

There can be a Beis Hamikdosh only when the Jewish people are on the requisite level. The reason there is no Beis Hamikdosh today is because our level does not allow it. If it were to be built prematurely, it would be immediately destroyed.

The purpose of the aveilus of the three weeks is to spur introspection as to why we still have churbon and why we aren't on the level necessary to have a Beis Hamikdosh today. We need to understand what we aren't doing and what we can do to deserve another Beis Hamikdosh.

The posuk says who can give me water to cry tears. We mourn over the fact that we do not properly mourn. We do not genuinely appreciate the loss of the Beis Hamikdosh.

After the Six Day War when the IDF reoccupied the Temple Mount, there was tremendous celebration. A famous rabbi declared that we should no longer recite Nachem because we conquered Yerusholayim! Mori veRebbi, zatzal, said this was wrong. Who cares about having political control over Har Habayis? Even if it would be under the control of only frum Jews. Who cares about political control? We mourn over the churbon habayis and the loss of the Shechinoh.

I remember asking him though, the tefilloh of Nachem also says there are conquering armies occupying Har Habayis. But now there aren't any. (This was before the current situation where the Arab Waqf took complete charge of Har Habayis). He responded that Chazal made a takanah to say Nachem. This can only be reversed by a Sanhedrin after Moshiach comes. They knew that Har Habayis would be under non-Jewish control until Moshiach. Chochom odif mi'novi.

We are mourning over ourselves and the fact that we haven't brought ourselves up to the level that we need to deserve another Beis Hamikdosh. Whenever there is churbon, we need to introspect. Chazal identified the spiritual failings of Klal Yisroel which precipitated the churbon. We do not focus on political control over Har Habayis and exercising sovereignty. Some people want to assert Jewish control over Har Habayis by going there and davening there. This is anti-Jewish and is a serious sheiloh of chiyuv koreis. There are so many different shittos about the exact position of the mokom hamikdosh. It misses the entire point.

We will now go through the first haftarah.

Hashem gave Yirmiyahu tremendous kochos hanefesh from birth in order to have the powers and stamina to fulfill his mission of prophecy. He was sent to give nevuos to Klal Yisroel and to the nations of the world. It doesn't mean he achieved these powers of ruchniyus automatically. He had to work on himself to actualize his potential. So initially, Yirmiyahu hesitated to accept the mission claiming he wasn't ready. Hashem reassured him that Hashem has invested Yirmiyahu with the necessary power to overcome any obstacles to his mission—despite all the forces and authorities, of Jews and non-Jews alike, that would stand against him.

Hashem gave Yirmiyahu power over the world events of his time. All the military might of Bavel or Ashur came from Hashem through Yirmiyahu—whether to build or to destroy through his nevuos. There will be churbon only because Hashem decreed it. It is very simple. These nations are just tools Hashem is using to execute Hashem's plans. The nevuoh that communicated Hashem's will is irresistible. The kings and ministers will try to deny your mission and imprison you to try to stop you. But you will be unstoppable.

Yirmiyahu predicted that the enemy would come from the north of Yerusholayim to destroy it. This is the only way the conquering army would come. Bavel is a nation which lives in the north. No military force will be able to thwart them. Nothing will help. They will try to shut you up and deny your truth. People do not want to hear uncomfortable truths—that they are not in charge of victory.

Hashem did not bring the churbon out of vengeance—because he hates Klal Yisroel. But immediately, Yirmiyahu declared that Hashem is simultaneously expressing His love for Klal Yisroel. He

is already planting the seeds for the future geuloh. He never destroys out of hatred but out of love. It is like a child being punished by a father—it is a childish way of thinking to believe the father hates the child. Hashem only punishes us for a positive purpose.

The Smag—one of the greatest baalei haTosfos—counts as a mitzvas aseil the obligation to reflect on every trouble and disaster and try to understand what lesson is being taught. Nothing happens by accident. Just as in the physical universe, everything that happens in the world is precise and coordinated in order to produce a specific result, so too in the spiritual world everything is precise and coordinated to produce the results that will eventually promote the geuloh. He brings churbon on the Beis Hamikdosh to prevent Klal Yisroel themselves from being destroyed.

Klal Yisroel are the cause of their own calamities. The gemara refers to Klal Yisroel causing their own calamity by doing aveiros as 'soneihem shel Yisroel' – the enemies of Israel. When we don't use the land we were given and the powers we were given in the way Hashem wants, Hashem brings churbon and takes it away. But with every churbon, Hashem is simultaneously planting the seeds of rebirth. He gives us the tools to rebuild ourselves with. The Crusades brought tremendous churbon and it also brought a large group of baalei haTosfos to Eretz Yisroel. The expulsion of Spain was a great devastation to the Jewish communities in Spain. But it also spurred the refugees to migrate to Tzfas and there was a flowering of Torah there. We can't always understand at the beginning how the churbon brings geuloh in its wake. Chazal say the Moshiach is born on Tisha B'av.

But first we have to understand what we lost in order to know how to rebuild. We didn't just lose sovereignty and independence. Those things don't mean anything. Eretz Yisroel isn't supposed to be a place to impress the non-Jews with our material accomplishments. It is set up to be the ideal place to serve Hashem and come close to Him. When we climb up high enough, we will deserve to build the Beis Hamikdosh.

The midrash tells of a philosopher who observed Yirmiyahu crying and mourning over the churbon and he asked him, "You are such a wise man who taught so much wisdom, why are you crying over sticks and stones?" He answered, "All the wisdom I have and you have—came from those sticks and stones." Yirmiyahu is saying the closer you are to Shechinoh, the closer you are to the source of understanding the Torah and understanding the world. True wisdom comes from our connection to Hashem and our understanding of the Torah—it brings an outpouring of wisdom and insight. Losing the Beis Hamikdosh means losing that connection with Hashem and losing that outpouring of wisdom. We have to appreciate what we lost on as many levels as we can.

So what can we do to get back up to where we should be?

History has no accidents. There are certain times of the calendar that are set up for troubles. Jewish history has borne this out. The churbon Beis Hamikdosh happened during the three weeks, and we find that throughout history, these days are revisited by destruction repeatedly. The Spanish expulsion of 1492, 1914, WWII, these three weeks are the times when Klal Yisroel experienced tragedy and it must inspire a deep and profound process of introspection.

During sefirah we spoke about the tragedy of the death of Rabbi Akiva's talmidim and why it is so relevant to us today. Klal Yisroel were recovering from the devastation of the churbon and the yeshivos were full and overflowing. But Hashem said "I don't care." If 12,000 chavrusos can't be respectful to one another, it's all gone. The world became desolate. Rabbi Akiva started all over again with five worthy talmidim and he rebuilt everything again.

In each generation we go through this process. Sometimes Hashem approves of how we rebuild from churbon and sometimes He wipes it away and tells us to do it over again.

We lost the first Beis Hamikdosh from avodo zoro—why did Klal Yisroel go after avodo zoro? One reason was to be like all the nations. Another reason was to try to control the world without having to go to Hashem and do His mitzvos. Hashem showed us that it doesn't help. There is no power or control over the world without Hashem. Another problem was that Torah has too many demands on our lifestyle—we need to find a way to justify abandoning the Torah and believe in avodo zoro.

The second churbon came because of sinas chinom and we are still under this churbon today. We can't shake it. The Netziv asks how could there be sinas chinom when there was so much Torah. These were talmidei chachomim! He answers that each group insisted that only their way of Torah is the proper way to serve Hashem. They kept knocking all the other ways and couldn't see the value in the way other people sincerely served Hashem. They insisted that their way is the only way to learn, to daven, and to do chessed. So Hashem said I give up. I have to start over again.

We have to stop and think about what is supposed to happen during these three weeks.

Yirmiyahu controlled Nevuchadnezzar. Nevuchadnezzar thought he was the one in charge to bring destruction but Yirmiyahu told him it is only because Hashem wants the Beis Hamikdosh destroyed that you will be successful. He wants it to be rebuilt by recovering from our fallen madreigoh. People don't want to hear the truth—it is too difficult and painful.

We also have to take a hard look at ourselves and not shy away from the hard work towards rebuilding and bringing the Shechinoh back to us and rebuild the Beis Hamikdosh speedily in our days.