

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

D'VARIM - TISH'A B'AV 5785

There is a fascinating story based upon a passage in Rama's Torat HaOlah (1:11) which tells the tale of the encounter between the prophet Yirmiyahu and the Greek philosopher, Socrates, or some say Plato. When Yirmiyahu returned to Jerusalem from having accompanied the exiles after the Churban and saw the ruins of the Holy Temple, he fell on the wood and stones, weeping bitterly. At that moment, the renowned philosopher passed by and witnessed the scene. He stopped and inquired, "Who is that crying over there?" "A Jewish sage", they replied. So, he approached the great prophet and asked, "They say you are a sage. Why, then, are you crying over wood and stones?" Yirmiyahu answered, "They say of you that you are a great philosopher. Do you have any philosophical questions that need answering? "I do", admitted Plato, "but I don't think there is anyone who can answer them for me." "Ask", said Yirmiyahu, "and I will answer them for you." Plato proceeded to pose the questions that even he had no answers for, and Yirmiyahu answered them all without hesitation. Asked the astonished Plato, "Where did you learn such great wisdom?" "From these wood and stones," the prophet replied.

Whether this event actually occurred does not detract from its essential message.

Ed. note: According to dates obtained from the internet, the philosopher could not have been either Socrates or Plato - they weren't yet born in Yirmiyahu's lifetime.

To wit: that we, living some 2000 years after the destruction of the Temple, have hardly a sense of the intense spiritual energy that once permeated the entire atmosphere of Jewish life during the period of Bayit Rishon. In Yerushalayim, the Presence of HaShem was palpable - real and immediate. The Mishna (Avot 5:7) lists the ten miracles that occurred every day in the Holy City. The music of the Leviyim and the aroma of the ketoret both had the extraordinary power to elevate the Jew to ethereal heights of unimaginable spirituality. Prophecy was common; HaShem actually communicated with many qualified people. And the Divine wisdom, radiating out of the ancient Torah text was the patrimony of everyone.

And what shall we say of ourselves, much like a person born blind who cannot enjoy art, or one deaf from birth who cannot delight in the sounds of music? Can we, today, in the cold and terrible absence of all that was, really appreciate that spiritually innervating sacred past?!

They tell the story of some religious soldiers who were at the Kotel on Tish'a b'Av and began to weep as they reflected upon the Churban. Standing by them was a secular soldier who also began to cry. When the religious soldiers asked their non-religious comrade why he was crying, he said: "I'm crying because I cannot cry; I don't know enough to cry!" Perhaps many of us are much like this soldier. We feel so far removed from the Churban - its impact is so terribly dim and weak - that mourning over its loss is a huge challenge.

Therefore, as we approach the fast of Tish'a b'Av and commemorate the Temple's destruction, it behooves us to reflect upon what once was if only to experience some measure of mourning over what was - without exaggeration - the most astonishing - simply mindboggling - levels of wisdom that once had to power to decipher and resolve all the great mysteries of existence, not to speak of the intimate closeness that every Jew felt with his Maker. Just think of all the imponderables that vex our understanding today, all the perplexing issues that disturb our feeling of wellbeing, all the painful questions of the suffering of the righteous and innocent that constantly confound our sense of justice and mock our self-confidence. Imagine a world where these and other enigmas and uncertainties saw the light of day;

where remedies for every illness were available, where all worry was calmed and peace reigned.

Tragically, the potential for all of the above was attainable during the First Temple period - and portions of it actually were realized, but for the many reasons enumerated by Chazal, the people failed to appreciate what they had and ... lost it! And that was the real Churban! And we must not be similarly guilty!

One suggestion, of many, is to concentrate upon one of the pivotal questions that we will all have to answer in the Olam HaEmet (AD MEI'A V'ESRIM SHANA). The Talmud states (Shabbat 31a) that our judgment will depend upon how our lives answered a number of questions. One of the six is: TZIPITA LISHU'A?, "Did you eagerly await salvation?" The Chofetz Chayim wrote a brief treatise on this topic with the same title, and there (chapter 3), he quotes the Pesikta which rebukes Torah scholars who, while quite learned, nevertheless neglected to be a TZOFEH, to metaphorically stand like a ready lookout, intently watching for the coming of someone important. After all, continues the saintly sage of Radin, in the Aleinu prayer recited thrice daily, we declare: "Therefore, we place our hope in you, Lord our Gd, that we may soon see the glory of Your power... when the world will be perfected under the sovereignty of

the Almighty... " Do we really believe this? And when, in the daily Amida, we recite: ET TZEMACH DAVID, "May the offshoot of Your servant David soon flower... for we wait for Your salvation all day...", do we genuinely pine for David's messianic descendant?

The Kol Bo (13-14th c., Spain, siman 62) records that on Tish'a b'Av in the afternoon, women would wash their hair (something normally forbidden on the fast). Why? Says R. Aharon ben Yaakov HaKohen because the women wanted to emphasize how strongly they believed in the coming of Mashiach, so much so that they wanted to appear physically kempt for his imminent arrival. Rabbi Breitowitz cites the custom here in Yerushalayim that women would sweep and clean their stone floors on Tish'a b'Av for the very same reason.

And should we seek an additional motivator to be M'TZAPEH LISHU'A, to passionately anticipate Mashiach, we have only to reflect upon Rambam's depiction of the Messianic era (Hilchot Melachim 12:5), a veritable restoration of all that was and so much more: "In that era, there will be neither famine or war, envy or competition, for good will flow in abundance and all the delights will be freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know Gd. Therefore, the Jews will be great sages and know the hidden

matters, grasping the knowledge of their Creator according to the full extent of human potential, as the prophet declares (Yeshayahu 11:9) - 'The world will be filled with the knowledge of Gd as the waters cover the ocean bed.'"

The Shabbat before Tish'a b'Av is denominated as Shabbat Chazon, principally because the Haftara from Yeshayahu begins with the same word, CHAZON. Rabbi Breitowitz, in the above referenced shiur, quotes ancient texts which mention that on this Shabbat, one is enjoined to envision - a play on the word CHAZON, a vision - in one's mind-eye, to imagine the revelation of HaShem's Presence once again in the rebuilt Beit HaMikdash, to picture a world of redemption where what Rambam vividly describes will become a wondrous reality. Indeed, if we all pray and demonstrate how much we truly want to experience this, hopefully, HaShem will respond!

KEIN Y'HI RATZON 🙏