



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת דברים תשס"ט 5769 Parshas Devarim

WHAT ARE WE MISSING?

In keeping with the atmosphere of *aveilus* (mourning) for the Beis Hamikdash, Jews the world over meticulously observe the various restrictions that are in effect at this time. In fact, as the Bach points out (*Orach Chaim* 551), many of the practices adopted and adhered to over the centuries go well beyond the letter of the law, as recorded in the Mishnah. For example, the Mishnah (*Ta'anis* 4:6, 7) states:

מְשַׁנְכֵּס אֶב, מְמַעֲטִין בְּשִׂמְחָה... עָרַב תְּשֻׁעָה בָּאֵב
לֹא יֹאכַל אָדָם שְׂגִי תְּבִשְׁלִין לֹא יֹאכַל בָּשָׂר וְלֹא
יִשְׁתֶּה יַיִן.

"Once the month of Av arrives, we minimize acts of joy... On the eve of Tisha B'av (at the *se'udah hamafsekes*, final meal before the fast), one should not eat two types of dishes; nor should he eat meat or drink wine (at this meal)."

The Mishnah forbids the consumption of meat and wine only during the *se'udah hamafsekes* on Erev Tisha B'av. We, on the other hand, refrain from these delicacies already from the beginning of the month! (The Mishnah only forbids certain happiness-generating activities, such as getting married, etc., beginning from *rosh chodesh*.)

While the added restrictions are commendable – and having been accepted by the collective Jewish community, have the force of law – there does seem to be a certain integral element that is somewhat lacking from our observance today: namely, real sorrow in our hearts. While the importance of observing the restrictions should not be discounted, our sages have emphasized that it is the *feeling* in the heart that is paramount (*Mishnas R' Aharon*, vol. 3, p. 47).

Why does this crucial element, which should have been central to our observance, seem so rare and even elusive? It may very well result from an unfortunate lack of appreciation for what exactly it is that we are mourning. Without a clear idea of what it is we have lost and what we are yearning for, it is indeed difficult to experience a deep sense of mourning.

Let us attempt to examine for a few moments what the central focus of our *aveilus* should be; perhaps this exercise will awaken within us an appropriate spirit of sorrow.

INCONSOLABLE

Through *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration), Shlomoh Hamelech composed Shir Hashirim, a beautiful work that describes – in dialogue form – the relationship between Hakadosh Boruch Hu and Klal Yisrael.

הַכּוֹנֵי פְּצֵעוֹנִי... אִם תִּמְצָאוּ אֶת דּוֹדִי מִה תִּגִּידוּ לוֹ
שְׁחוֹלֶת אֶהְבֶּה אֹנִי.

"I have been stricken, I have been wounded... if you find my Beloved, what shall you tell Him? That I have fallen ill from yearning," (*Shir Hashirim* 5:7,8).

The Vilna Gaon (*ibid.*) understands that this verse is spoken by the Jewish people from their station in exile, still reeling from the effects of the Churban (destruction of the Beis Hamikdash). "I have been stricken," they declare, by the destruction of both the first and second Beis Hamikdash and the slaughter of the myriad Torah scholars in the wake of the destruction. "I have been wounded," as Eretz Yisrael itself was ravaged and destroyed. Despite a lengthy and unfortunate list of numerous travails, there is only one thing, Klal Yisrael states, which they

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by his children, Mr. & Mrs. Nusie Rosenberg, Lawrence, NY

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit
of נתן אברהם בן פינחס ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with
no relatives to arrange for Torah study on behalf of his neshamah.

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simply cannot get over. "If you find my Beloved," should you wish to relate my *tzaros* (troubles) to Hashem, tell him only of the most difficult and tragic one: "that I am sick from yearning" – the absence of the Shechinah (Hashem's Divine Presence) trumps all of the other travails.

And so we begin to understand what the main source of the sorrow is. It is certainly true that the physical persecutions the Jews were subjected to at the time of the Churban and throughout history were of horrific proportions, but they are still not the main focus of the *aveilus*. In their pristine state, Klal Yisrael is able – to some extent – to survive and continue, even after pogroms, Crusades, expulsions, and annihilations. It is the separation from Hashem – Who was once so close to us – that Yisrael cannot bear. Now that He seems far and hidden, we feel completely lost.

ON THAT DAY...

This yearning will eventually build to an amazing crescendo. In a verse in a subsequent chapter of Shir Hashirim (7:1), Klal Yisrael cry out, "Return, return, Shulamis ('the Complete One'), return, return, and let us see You." The Vilna Gaon understands that the Jewish people will call out to the Shechinah to return His Presence to their midst. When the time of *kibbutz galiyos* (ingathering of the exiles) and *techiyas hameisim* (resurrection of the dead) arrives, all Yisrael will gather and storm the Heavens with a thundering call to "Come back... and let us see You."

In his *sefer Yibaneh Hamikdash* (p. 91), R' Shlomoh Brevda portrays the climactic scenario:

Together with all worthy Jews, the *tzaddikim* from past generations will assemble. Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov; Moshe and Aharon; Gidon, Shimshon, and all of the Shoftim (Judges); Yeshayah, Yirmiyah, and all of the Neviim (Prophets); Dovid Hamelech with his son, Shlomoh; R' Yehudah, R' Akiva, and all of the Tana'im; Abaye, Rava, and all of

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the Amoraim; the Geonim, the Rishonim (medieval commentators), and the Acharonim (later commentators); all *gedolim* (great Torah leaders), *tzaddikim*, and upright Yidden from all generations; all who remained faithful to Hashem, observed the Torah and *mitzvos*, kept strong in their belief, and mourned for the Beis Hamikdash and longed for the Redemption; all shall gather around the Temple Mount to beseech Hashem to once again rest His Presence amongst us. All at once, this holy assemblage shall address the Shechinah and cry out from the depths of their hearts: "Return, return, O Shulamis! Return, return, that we may see You!"

And the Shechinah – "In the presence of all Yisrael (*Devarim* 34:12)" – will respond in kind and descend from the Heavens to dwell amongst us... this time, for good.

May we all be *zocheh* (merit) to see it!

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