

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Devarim

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Shmuel *ben Yosef a"h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

The Emori and the Bee

In this week's *parshah*, Moshe Rabbeinu begins recounting and reviewing some of the major events of the nation's forty-year history. It is particularly timely that this section is read as we approach Tisha B'av, as one of these experiences – the incident of the spies – not only took place on this day, but was a precursor and catalyst of the *churbanos* (destructions) of coming generations. As the Mishnah in Ta'anis (4:6) states:

בְּתִשְׁעָה בְּאָב נִגְזַר עַל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁלֹּא יִכְנָסוּ לְאֶרֶץ, וְחָרַב הַבַּיִת בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה וּבְשֵׁנִיָּה...

“(The following events occurred) on the Ninth of Av: it was decreed on our forefathers (in the desert) that they would not be granted entry to the Land of Israel; and the first and second Temples were destroyed...”

The decree came in response to the debacle surrounding the report of the spies, who instigated fear and rebellion amongst the people. The nation abandoned their trust in Hashem and complained that they no longer wished to take the Land. They were soon to regret their stance, as their sentiment on that fateful night prompted the following Divine proclamation, whose consequences would reverberate for centuries: “You cried tonight over nothing; I will therefore establish this date as a time for crying – over real tragedies – for generations to come” (*Ta'anis 29a*).

Indeed, throughout the ages, there have been aspects of the tragedies that the Jewish people have had to endure, which bore an eerie resemblance to the events of that first Tisha B'av...

The Kamikazes of the Desert

The people were devastated to hear that they had forfeited their opportunity to enter the Land and would live out the remainder of their days wandering in the desert. The Torah describes that there was a regretful group who declared that they were now indeed ready to enter the land and take it by force. Moshe tried to dissuade them, warning that – lacking the accompaniment of Hashem's guidance – their escapade was doomed to failure. These people did not heed Moshe's warning and insisted on continuing with their plan. The Torah describes their ill-fated mission:

“And you wantonly ascended the mountain; and the Emori nation who dwelled on that mountain came out... and they pursued you as bees would do, and they smote you...” (*Devarim 1:43-44*).

Explaining the analogy of the bees, Rashi reveals a most remarkable aspect of this encounter. The attack of the Emori on the Israelites shared the same characteristic as a bee's attack on a human: Stinging an opponent is the final act for a bee, for the bee dies as a result of its assault. The same was true with the Emori: upon striking B'nei Yisrael, they themselves would fall and expire. Whereas the Emori dealt these renegades a death blow, they apparently shared in their demise.

Which gives rise to the obvious question: what were they thinking? Why would they indulge in an attack on the Israelites if it came at the expense of their own lives?

While it is an irrational prospect, explains the Brisker Rav, this was the nature of the Emori enemy. If Reuvein clobbers Shimon, and Shimon merely slinks away in response, we do not necessarily see that Reuvein bears such strong feelings against his fellow; perhaps on the spur of the moment, Reuvein merely gave vent to a passing whim. When is the depth of Reuvein's hatred exposed? Only if Shimon fights back. In this way – with Shimon giving back “as good as he gets” and then some – Reuvein's continued efforts to harm Shimon are truly revealing. When Reuvein strikes at Shimon *despite the fact that he himself is receiving quite a pummeling*, it is crystal clear that Reuvein's hatred for Shimon is limitless. So much so that he is willing to take a beating just so that he can inflict some harm on his foe.

The Emori bore similar sentiments against the B'nei Yisrael. It was so important for them to strike their enemy that they were willing to do so at any cost – even their own lives.

Such intense loathing toward the Jewish people is not limited to the Emori nation. Rather, it seems – from the words of *Tehillim* – that such feelings are the hallmark of all nations. As the verse states, כָּל גּוֹיִם סָבְבוּנִי ... סָבְבוּנִי “All the nations have surrounded me... they have surrounded me like bees” (*Tehillim 118:10-12*). The enemies of Yisrael are willing, like bees, to give up their very lives if it means taking the Jews down with them (*Chidushei HaGriz al Hatorah*).

One recent manifestation of this horrifying malady took place during the destruction of European Jewry. Anyone even remotely familiar with Holocaust history is well aware of the extent of the wicked Germans' campaign against the Jewish people. Even when they fought against numerous armies on multiple fronts, the cursed Germans diverted much needed resources toward their extermination program. Their most elite units were busy murdering Jewish children, while the whole “Reich” was going up in flames.

Attacking the Source

What could be the remedy against such an implacable foe? Even today we see plainly how bloodthirsty Arabs have perfected the art of the tactic of the bee, marching headlong into suicide missions just to spill Jewish blood, *rachmana litzlan*. What protection can be afforded against such nefarious forces and senseless hatred?

As Tisha B'av approaches and our thoughts turn even more to the Exile, it may be worthwhile to recall that this precarious state of affairs is all a direct result and manifestation of the greater *Churban* (destruction [of the Temple]) (*see Mishnas Chayim, Mattos, 5768*). And, as mentioned in the outset, it was the episode of the spies that was the catalyst for the resulting destructions and exiles. As such, the Chofetz Chaim exhorts us to focus on repairing that very sin.

At the root of the sin of the spies was the infamous transgression of *lashon hara* (evil gossip). As this served as the basis of our exile for generations – and the array of vicissitudes and enemies that came with it – the removal of this malady will be instrumental in ushering in the ultimate Redemption and returning us to our Land and our Temple – speedily in our days (*Introduction to sefer Chofetz Chaim*).

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