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MOURNING FOR OUR ANCIENT PERFECTION

Based on the teachings of Rabbi Avigdor Miller זצ"ל

The More One Yearns for the Days of Old, The More Opportunities for Joy He Earns

The prophet Yeshayahu declared, שִׂמְחוּ אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וְגִילוּ בָּהּ כָּל אוֹהְבֶיהָ, *Be glad in Jerusalem and rejoice in her, all you who love her*, שִׂישׂוּ אִתָּהּ מְשׁוֹשׁ כָּל הַמְתְּאֲבָלִים עִלֶיהָ, *exult with her in exultation, all you who mourned for her* (Yeshayah 66:10). The Gemara comments on that verse: all who mourn for Yerushalayim will merit to witness her joy (*Taanis* 30b).

When the Gemara tells us that those who mourn will merit joy, it implies that the more you yearn for the days of old and the wonderful spiritual opportunities that they offered, the more Hashem will give you such opportunities. He will help you realize your ambition to develop the very best of personalities; all in the merit of mourning for what was lost with the destruction. The mere fact that we regret that loss is a great achievement.

The Torah relates that when the Israelites brought the Pesach-offering in the Wilderness, some people were unable to participate because they were *tamei*, since they had come in contact with dead bodies (*Bamidbar* 9:6).

The law is that if it is impossible to perform a particular mitzvah, one is not held responsible [אָנוּס רַחֲמֵנָא פְּטָרִיהָ]. But even so, the men who could not bring the Pesach-offering were not satisfied with being absolved. On the contrary, they grieved that they could not participate. In their anguish they came to Moshe Rabbeinu and said, לָמָּה נִגְרַע, *Why should we be diminished by not offering it?*

Moshe asked Hashem what to do, and He replied there is a second chance: these men will be able to bring the offering a month later, on Pesach Sheini. Because their desire to have a share in the mitzvah was so strong, Hashem made them the catalyst for His giving of this new mitzvah of the Torah. Had they not come forward to express their desire to perform this mitzvah, Hashem would have transmitted it to Moshe at an appropriate time, but because these men had such desire to perform it, Hashem waited until these men came forward and issued this mitzvah in their merit.

This is a very strong message for us: *Whenever we realize that we are not going to be able to do a certain mitzvah, we should not feel relieved that we are not responsible for it.* On the contrary, we should feel unhappy and should desire to perform that mitzvah; the desire itself is a merit. Don't say that it is a waste of time to think about it; "I missed the chance already, so why should I worry about it?" No! Your desiring it is in itself a

virtue! When these men in the Wilderness demonstrated that their lack of the mitzvah hurt them,
that showed the high level of *shleimus* - perfection - that they had achieved.

We Yearn for the Greatness of the Mind so that We Should Be Able to Devote Ourselves Entirely to the Study of Torah

A ccording to the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 9:2 *Hilchos Melachim* 12:4), *tzaddikim* who mourn for Yerushalayim and yearn for its restoration do so not because they desire the happiness of living in the glorious land that is flowing with milk and honey (although there is no doubt that at the time of the Redemption the land will be restored to its former physical, as well as spiritual grandeur). What they yearn for -is to be free of the exile that is accompanied by subjugation to other nations. The reason for their yearning, Rambam goes on to say, is so that they will once more be at liberty in their own land, so that they will be able to devote themselves entirely to the study of the Torah, and as a result they will merit the World to Come.

We are mourning that in our times we don't have the opportunities to rise to greatness, to perfect our character and personality, as we had in the days of old when we lived in a world of holiness. We wait and hope for the redemption so that we will be able to fulfill our potential.

Rambam's words refer not only to Torah study. We yearn for all the opportunities that the ancient days offered to our forefathers, because we long to be in a situation once more in which we will not waste our lives, but rise to greatness of mind and soul. After all, we don't live forever, and any serious person would like to become the best that he can be. In our times a great portion of our lives is necessarily expended on necessary pursuits that do not lend themselves to elevation. When we are back on the holy soil of restored Jerusalem, we will be able to devote ourselves entirely to pursuing that task of perfecting ourselves to the greatest possible desire.

What we are mourning for, then, is the *shleimus*, the perfection, that was available in the days of old.

Three Tragic Reasons for Tears

When Yirmiyahu spoke about the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, he said (*Yirmiyah* 13:17), וְדָמְעַתְּ תִדְמַע וְתִרְדַּד עֵינַי דְּמָעָה כִּי נִשְׁבָּה עַדָּר ד', *tears will flow freely, my eye will drip tears, for the flock of Hashem will have been captured*. To be carried off into captivity is one of the worst punishments. The Torah says that being captured as a slave is worse than being put to death; it is worse than dying of famine. Of all the fates one can suffer, it is the most tragic.

The Sages (*Chagigah* 5b) note that this *passuk* contains three words containing the root דמע, *tears*. Rabbi Elazar explains that this verse alludes to three separate tragedies: the destruction of both Temples and the exile of the Jewish people.

The Talmud, however, makes no mention at all of what is stated explicitly in the verse: that the people were taken into captivity. In fact, the Talmud says merely that they "left their place." Actually, captivity is much worse than leaving one's place, but, the Talmud explains, the tears were not because of the misery, the affliction, the suffering of being captives. The tears were because they left their place, that they were taken away from the Holy City and Holy Land. The *navi* is telling us that this is the very worst of all the things that happened then.

The loss of the First *Beis HaMikdash* was something that was never restored; even during the time of the Second *Beis HaMikdash* the people wept for the loss of the first. The Second *Beis HaMikdash* was much larger and more beautiful than the first, but what the First *Beis HaMikdash* meant to *Am Yisrael* was much more precious than ornate physical beauty, and that has not been recovered to this day.

The *Shechinah* Resided in the *Beis HaMikdash*

The *Shechinah* resided in the First *Beis HaMikdash*. Hashem's Presence fills all the earth, but the center of the entire world was the *Beis HaMikdash*. For endless miles on all sides, Creation stretched out, and Hashem was in control everywhere. But if you would ask, Where is the Place of His Glory? We wouldn't have to look any further; we could point to that building.

Even Moshe Rabbeinu was amazed when he first heard this concept. Hashem said, וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם, *They should make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them (Shemos 25:8)*. Moshe was surprised. "We put up some boards here and some boards there, and You will dwell inside that structure?"

But that is exactly the point. When there was a *Mishkan*, whenever the angels wanted to seek Hashem they had to come there. He had no address other than that little portable edifice that people took apart and put together, and that they carried with them when they traveled. Small as it was, that was the place where *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* dwelled. When the nation is exiled, we lose that closeness.

And so the prophet wept, and Hashem is weeping as well.

The *Beis Hamikdash* Transformed the People

The second weeping was for the Second *Beis HaMikdash*. Although its holiness was not equal to that of the first, it was a tremendous treasure for our nation, and having the *Mikdash* in their midst transformed the people. A visit to the Second *Beis HaMikdash* was so impressive that it would change a person's way of thinking for the rest of his life. The Kohanim were trained to perform the service in the *Beis HaMikdash* like men in the palace of a king. Every step was measured; they walked slowly and carefully. In those days you could learn to serve Hashem with the greatest awe and awareness of His Presence merely by looking at the Kohanim performing their service.

The Levites were trained for generations to play on instruments and to sing the most beautiful, inspiring songs while the Kohanim were performing the Temple service meticulously, with great awe. We know from eyewitnesses who described it in ancient manuscripts that when this was lost, the nation felt that it had lost its very heart - and it was true!

The prophet's third weeping was for Hashem's flock that, as we explained, left its place, the place where it had experienced God's Presence.

Living in Eretz Yisrael was an Extraordinary Experience

To live in Eretz Yisrael in the most ideal days of old was an extraordinary experience. The nation's constitution was the Torah, its leaders upheld its every detail, as did the people. Every detail of their lives was directed by the strict law of the Torah, and it was all under the eye of the Jewish king.

That experience was a treasure that was lost when they left the land. And so Hashem mourns not only because of the misery that they were carried off to be slaves to their conquerors - which certainly warrants weeping - but because His people were no longer living in the holy atmosphere of Eretz Yisrael.

The Talmud expresses the reasons for this weeping in another way as well: One of the "weepings" is for the First *Beis HaMikdash*, one is for the Second *Beis HaMikdash*, and one is for *bittul talmud Torah*, the cessation of Torah learning. Thus, the fact that Hashem's flock was carried off into captivity is so tragic because the study of Torah was diminished at that time. People did not *stop* learning Torah when they were exiled, but all the Torah they learned anywhere else was a mere echo of the Torah they studied when the *Beis HaMikdash* stood.

Josephus was no *tzaddik*; he was a general, a writer, and a traitor to his people. He depicted Yerushalayim in his time, just before the *Churban*. He described how in Yerushalayim there were teachers of Torah who taught thousands of Jews, and that the people studied Torah standing up; they would stand for hours, as though they were davening *Shemoneh Esrei*. These teachers were everywhere in Yerushalayim. When you walked through the streets you were in a *beis midrash*.

When our righteous nation was suffering so terribly in exile, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* participated in their suffering and sorrow. And yet when the Gemara explains Yirmiyahu's words, it does not mention the distress of captivity but rather explains that Hashem is in pain because the people left their place where they could have attained greatness, and He is in pain because of the great tragedy of *bittul talmud Torah*, the cessation of Torah study!

Hashem's Desire is That People Should Make Something of Themselves

This is the great principle of what *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* expects of His people: He wants them to achieve *shleimus* - to make something of themselves in their lifetime - because that is their preparation for their eternal existence, and *that is* what they were able to achieve when the *Beis HaMikdash* stood.

In fact, the Torah tells us that the purpose of bringing *maaser sheni*, a tenth of one's crop or its monetary value, to Jerusalem and remaining there until it was eaten is לַמַּעַן יִלְמְדוּ לְיִרְאָה אֶת ד' : פֶּלֶא הַיְמִיִּם ; *so that you will learn to fear Hashem all your life (Devarim 14:23)*. So one aspect of this mitzvah is to bring people to the Holy City, where they will absorb the powerful influence of being there, in the presence of the *Beis HaMikdash* and the great sages and *tzaddikim*.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed in order to make the people realize what opportunities they had lost. When people are sorry for such a loss, that is a degree of *shleimus* in itself, like those in the Wilderness who had been deprived of the mitzvah

of bringing a Pesach-offering. In the same way, when people are sorry that they cannot take advantage of the opportunities that their forefathers had, that in itself is a degree of *shleimus* (perfection).

When the First *Beis HaMikdash* stood, there were three outstanding conditions that enabled sincere, devoted, and energetic people to become all that they hoped to become, all that they looked forward to in perfecting their lives: the fact that there were prophets; the fact that the people were not dispersed - every Jew lived in Eretz Yisrael; and the existence of the *Beis HaMikdash* itself.

Prophecy and Rebuke

The benefits of hearing rebuke is a principle that is repeated in various ways throughout *Mishlei* / Proverbs. For example: אֹזֶן שְׁמַעַת תּוֹכַחַת חַיִּים, בְּקֶרֶב חֲכָמִים תִּלְוֶן, *The ear that hears life-giving rebuke will abide in the midst of the wise* (*Mishlei* 15:31); and, חַיִּים תּוֹכַחַת מוֹסֵר, *reproving discipline is the way of life* (*ibid.*, 6:23).

Today, of course, we cannot follow this advice in the way that it was practiced in ancient times. In our times, if we rebuke someone and tell him what's wrong with him, we may never see him again. As *Mishlei* tells us, אַל תּוֹכַח לַץ, פֶּן יִשְׂנֵאָךָ, *Do not rebuke a scoffer lest he will hate you* (*ibid.*, 9:8), and most people today are in the category of scoffers. We have to suspect ourselves as well, especially those of us living in Western cultures, of being scoffers.

Generations ago there were *maggidim*, preachers, who would go from community to community to speak for hours admonishing the people, and their listeners would delight in hearing these things. That was nothing compared to the days of the prophet. A prophet would speak with the utmost vigor to denounce anything that was wrong. No one was immune to his criticism. Of all the tasks of the prophets, the most important was to rebuke people for their wrongdoings, and as a result, the Jewish people were always close to *teshuvah*.

Toward the end of the era of the First *Beis HaMikdash*, false prophets began to appear on the scene, because the people no longer wanted to hear criticism; they wanted other kinds of prophecy. As Yirmiyahu tells us in *sefer Eichah* (2:14): בִּיאֲיֵךְ חָזוּ לְךָ שְׂוֵא וְתַפֵּל וְלֹא גָלוּ עַל , וְיָגִיד לְהִשִּׁיב שְׁבוּתֶךָ, *Your prophets [not My prophets] envisioned for you vanity and foolishness; they did not expose your iniquity to bring you back in repentance.*

In those days, people used to flock to the prophet. They would travel great distances, by donkey or by foot, and would throng to listen to him every Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh, even though he would criticize them harshly. He didn't tell jokes or anecdotes; he told them what was wrong with them, and he described even "minor" sins in the harshest terms, because to a prophet, nothing is trivial.

This, Shlomo Hamelech tells us in *Mishlei*, is the path to success, both in this world and in the World to Come. Life is all about rebuke. We can compare life to a marriage: a marriage has a good chance of succeeding when there is someone to tell the couple,

"*You're* wrong and *you're* wrong; you're both wrong." Nowadays, each partner is sure that he or she is right and the other one is completely wrong.

When there was a prophet, the couple would go to him and he would tell them who was wrong. He was not merely guessing; he knew the truth and he would tell it not only to people who, came to him, but even to the people who ran away from him. He would stand in front of the palace and shout accusations against the king. Often, the king would come out, humbled, and say, "I'm sorry. Teach me how to rectify my ways."

People Live Better When They Know What Is Wrong

When people have someone to criticize them, they will succeed in this world, and there will be peace. People live more successfully when they can correct their errors, and they live longer! There is more harmony when they know they have made mistakes and they are urged to make amends and ask forgiveness from each other. We need criticism, and we are missing it in our times.

The prophet Yeshayahu tells us, ... הַחֹשֶׁךְ כִּסָּה אֶרֶץ , *Behold, darkness may cover the earth (Yeshayah 60:2)*. The Gemara explains that Hashem created darkness so that people would not see the truth so readily. Of all the things that are difficult to know, the most difficult of all is to know yourself, to recognize who *you* are. It takes a great deal of diligent study to understand that.

In this world we cannot succeed unless we know the truth about ourselves. That's why we find so much failure in life. People are failures in business because they're not behaving properly. They are failures in health because they're not behaving properly. They are failures in their family lives because they're not behaving properly. Unhappy, they go to other unhappy people who claim to be experts in helping people, and they pay these "experts" huge sums. It's a waste of money, because unhappy people can't make them happy. What they need is for someone to speak up and tell them what is wrong with them and what is wrong with their experts. That is *derech chayim*, the path of life!

We Must Have Someone to Steer Us in the Right Direction

In this world, it is of the utmost importance that we have someone to steer us in the right direction. Otherwise, it is like a man sitting at the steering wheel of his car with his eyes closed; he can't steer! Someone has to open our eyes. We must see where we are going in order to succeed in this life.

A person cannot have success in the World to Come unless he had someone who set him straight. This world is so full of pitfalls and errors, and there are so many opportunities to stray from the path of fulfilling our purpose here, that it is impossible for anyone to succeed in gaining *Olam Haba* unless there is someone who will point out the right path to follow. There are thousands of paths that lead to nowhere, and most people are wandering along those paths, and their lives are being wasted.

Thus *derech chayim*, the path of life, means both the path of life in this world, which results in happiness, and the path of life in *Olam Haba*. There is nothing we need more than someone to guide us, to advise us, to criticize us, to point out our faults, and to show us how to correct them. Nothing is more valuable than that!

A prophet would give advice even in worldly matters, as Shmuel did for Shaul when the family's donkeys were lost (*Shmuel I*, Ch. 9), but his advice in matters relating to people's behavior with other people was far more important. He would tell people how to relate to their wives, to their in-laws, to their neighbors, even to themselves: Were they ruining their health? Were they serving Hashem properly?

The Loss of the Nevi'im - No One to Tell the Truth

Toward the end of the era of the First *Beis HaMikdash*, when the people's spiritual level was deteriorating, some people did things that demonstrated that they were not interested in prophecy anymore. Hashem's reaction was, "I gave you this great gift to help you in both this world and the next - it's a *path of life* - but now that you're becoming tired of it, I'm taking that gift away." That's why prophecy stopped. After the era of the First *Beis HaMikdash*, prophecy was taken from us.

We can never forget that loss! To this day, thousands of years later, when we sit on the ground on Tishah B'Av, one of the things we are mourning is that *there is no one to tell us the truth*. Our fathers and mothers used to tell us when we were Young, and that was a great gift. But we don't live with our parents forever. Who will tell us the things that are so necessary for our lives?

When people have a dispute, one side says that he's all right and the other is all wrong, and of course the other one says just the opposite. Isn't it a tragedy that everyone thinks he's right? Nobody knows the truth about himself: *how wrong he really is!*

In the days of old we had the glorious privilege of being told that we were wrong, so that we could get on with our lives. Now we sit on the ground on Tishah B'Av and we weep. We are weeping for the perfection, the *shleimus* that was once so available to us,

and that is now gone. We contemplate how great was the criticism that the prophets gave us, and we miss it terribly. Of course if you're mourning for that, it means that you're willing to hear criticism today. Many years ago, when I was a *mashgiach* in a yeshivah, one of the *talmidim* said to me, "If you see anything wrong in me, please tell me." This happened only once, and I don't know how much he meant it, but it sounded good!

In the olden days people wanted to get better, and it would be wonderful if we could try to emulate them. We ought to be ready to hear criticism; we ought to go to places where someone will criticize us, or at least we should choose someone in whom we have confidence, and say, "I want you to tell me whenever you see something wrong in me." We mourn that we don't do that, as they did in the days of old. We have lost a treasure that would have set us straight in our lives and that would have brought us so much happiness.

When the sun was shining, and people would complain, "It's hot!" the *navi* would have said, "Hashem is causing the grapes to bulge with grape juice! The figs are swelling with their sweetness! The dates are growing big with syrup, all because of the sun! And you're complaining - blaming Hashem because He's cooking all these meals on the trees and making the fruits ready to eat?!"

If snow fell and someone would say, "The snow is nasty!" the prophet would have said, "Don't you know that farmers are praying for snow? The more snow there is in the wintertime, the more moisture goes into the earth, and the better the crops will be in the summertime. How can you complain when you get a gift like that?!"

People would learn to be happy with the weather! Imagine, everyone learned to be happy when it was hot and happy when it was cold. When it rains, do you say, "Rain, rain, go away"? The prophet would say, "*Chas veshalom!* Didn't you stand last Hoshana Rabbah for two or three hours and pray for rain? And now, when it comes, you're unhappy?!"

The Pursuit of Happiness

When *Bnei Yisrael* were in the wilderness, they began to complain, and Moshe Rabbeinu told Hashem that he could not handle the situation all alone. Hashem told him, *אָסְפוּ לִי שִׁבְעִים אִישׁ*, *Gather to Me seventy men (Bamidbar 11:16)*. Hashem went on to tell Moshe Rabbeinu that He would make those seventy men prophets.

The question is: How would the seventy men help? Would they be able to supply the people with all the things they wanted to eat? After all, they would not be bakers or butchers.

What those seventy men would give the people was the most important commodity of all: they would give them *seichel*, common sense. They would scatter among the people and deliver speeches; a prophet is a good speaker! They would explain how good it was to have *mann*, and they would tell him, "Imagine that this *mann* is now a seven-layer chocolate cake," and when anyone would take a piece of *mann* and bite into it, it tasted like a seven-layer chocolate cake.

When you want to feel that taste, you'll feel it. And if you want to be happy, you'll be happy! You have happiness inside of you; it's only your foolishness that doesn't let you feel it. You need a prophet to teach you how to live properly, and that's what the seventy men were for: to explain to the people how lucky they were. They would point out their many blessings: how safe they were and how good their lives were. The nation needed seventy people who were capable of speaking properly to explain it all.

The prophet was a tremendous gift in the days of old. He brought people happiness, he kept harmony among them, and, of course, he showed them how to merit *Olam Haba*.

If You Mourn Perfection Now, You Will Have Happiness When Mashiach Comes

And so today when we mourn for what we once had, then, we will be rewarded in that we will see the *simchah* of Yerushalayim, and one way we will see that *simchah* is that we'll see the prophets again.

But didn't Rashi sit on the ground on Tishah B'Av and mourn for Yerushalayim? The Rambam, the Rashba, all the Rishonim - and before them all the Tanna'im - all sat and wept for Yerushalayim, but no prophets came. So what do the Sages mean when they say that those who mourn it will see the simcha of Yerushalayim?

According to some, when Mashiach comes there will be *techiyas hameisim*, the resurrection of the dead, as Rashi says (*Sanhedrin* 51b). According to this approach, all those who mourned properly for Yerushalayim will merit to be resurrected and they will see the *simchah* of Yerushalayim then.

But there are some problems with this approach. First of all, we don't rule that way. The Rambam rules according to Shmuel, that in Mashiach's time *olam keminhago noheig*, the world will function as it always has. Of course, it will *be a world of truth - yakiru veyeidu kol yoshvei teiveil* ...everyone in the world will recognize the truth - and *Am Yisrael* will be known as Hashem's chosen people, but everything will continue as it is today: people will live and die, just as they do today. Only some time later - we don't know when - will there be *techiyas hameisim*.

Second, even according to that approach, if those who mourned the *Churban* arise at *techiyas hameisim*, and will want to experience the *simchah* for which they wept on Tishah B'Av, it will be too late; after *techiyas hameisim* they will have no *bechirah*, no free will, and without free will no one can perfect himself. No one can make himself better than he was. The way he died is the way he will remain after returning to life. People are mourning that they don't have a prophet to set them straight and give them guidance in life, but if a prophet comes to help them after *techiyas hameisim*, it will be too late to help them.

True, Rambam and most others hold that when Mashiach comes it will be an ordinary existence, but, of course, it will be a happy existence. Eretz Yisrael will become as fruitful as it was in the days of old, and the Jewish nation will be recognized *Banim atem laHashem Elokeichem*, as the children of Hashem. All the nations will gladly honor us and help us in our function of serving Hashem, studying His Torah, and gaining perfection.

According to that approach, when the Gemara says *zocheh veroeh besimchasah*, that one will merit to see the joy of Yerushalayim, it doesn't mean that they will see the *simcha*, of Yerushalayim *itself*; it means that they will see the *simchah* that Yerushalayim could give them. For instance, a *tzaddik* like Rashi mourned for Yerushalayim in a perfect manner, weeping and saying, "Oh for the days of old when we had prophets. What a glorious period that was!" Then Hashem responded, "You are looking for someone who will set you straight in life? If so, then right now I will give you what you are wishing for: You will merit that perfect guidance. I will give it to you in the form of *siyata diShmaya*, assistance from Heaven." When a person yearns for a good thing with all his heart, Hashem says, "I will give it to you." So even though no prophet came to Rashi or to the other *tzaddikim* who sat and mourned for the *Beis HaMikdash*, Hashem granted them greatness.

When you study Rashi thoroughly, it becomes obvious how wise and clear headed he was in understanding character, in recognizing the ins and outs of *middos*, of human nature. Rashi became one of the greatest experts in *chochmas hamussar*, the wisdom of *mussar*, in addition to being one of our foremost commentators. One of the reasons Rashi merited all this wisdom is that he yearned for it. His feeling was, "I'm so sorry that I don't have a rebbi who is like an angel to teach me."

Hashem Will Help You Succeed If You Want Perfection

If you truly regret that you missed an opportunity for perfection, then Hashem will give it to you. If you truly regret that you didn't have a chance to become a big *lamdan*, then Hashem will help you succeed. Of course, your yearning has to be strong enough. If you regret that you are not a *lamdan* but you don't open a *sefer*, that shows that you don't really regret it. Are you yearning to be a *tzaddik*? What are you doing to *become a tzaddik*? Are you learning *Mesillas Yesharim*, and do you make it your business to read *sefarim* that teach you the ways of *tzeddek* and *avodas Hashem*? If you do that, and then you say, "Ah, if I had a prophet to guide me, then it would be so much easier! I wouldn't wander around searching for the right path," then Hashem says, "Because you're truly mourning Yerushalayim, I'm going to give you that *simchah* of Yerushalayim now - and you'll succeed."

The Element of *Dei'ah* - Sensory Emunah

T rue knowledge of Hashem - called *dei'ah*, knowledge - is the most precious thing in the world. The Gemara (*Nedarim* 41) tells us, *דעה קנה מה חסר*, *if you have this (dei'ah), what do you lack?* We must realize that the presence of the *Beis HaMikdash* brought true knowledge to the Jewish nation. True knowledge of Hashem means that a person is so clearly convinced of the Presence of Hashem that all he lacks is actually seeing Him. This is what we call *emunah chushis*, "sensory faith." It's when a person has gained such clarity in his awareness of Hashem's Presence that he feels at all times that he's standing before Hashem and that Hashem is looking at him.

This type of knowledge doesn't come easily. Someone may be an observant Jew, but his head could be empty of *emunah*. He says "*Ani ma'amin...*," but he's very far from living those

words, Do you actually feel that Hashem is looking at you? That doesn't happen by itself; you have to work hard for it. *Mesillas Yesharim* tells us that when we're standing and davening, it's important that *דַע לִפְנֵי מִי אַתָּה עוֹמֵד*, *Know before Whom you stand*.

"Sure I know!" you may say, but you don't know at all. You know how to say the words, but you don't have a sensory experience of it; you don't actually feel it. It's not easy to feel that you're standing before Someone when you daven, and that He's listening to you, as we say, *פִּילַת עֲמֵד יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרַחֲמִים*, *You, Hashem, are listening to the prayers of Am Yisrael with compassion*. Hashem is truly standing before us and listening with compassion. Do we have that feeling?

When we had the *Beis HaMikdash*, we could go there and gain *dei'ah: emunah chushis*, sensory faith. We saw how the Kohanim walked with the utmost reverence, with complete fear of Hashem, and tended to every detail of their service with such precision; anyone who saw this was so impressed that he gained complete understanding and awareness that the *Shechinah* rested on the *Beis HaMikdash*. We have no idea how powerful was the impact of *korbanos* on the minds of all those who witnessed them. Once you saw the *avodas Beis HaMikdash* it left an indelible impression on your mind that lasted forever! You would tell your grandchildren, "I was once in the *Beis HaMikdash*," and you'd tell them what you saw, and *they* would be impressed. Even those people who didn't manage to go to the *Beis HaMikdash* - perhaps they lived very far away - knew with perfect clarity that Hashem dwelled in their midst: There is a big, beautiful building where Hashem "resides"!

In the times of the First *Beis HaMikdash*, the prophets told us that again and again, and every person saw for himself how the *Beis HaMikdash* was the Place of the *Shechinah*. In those times many miracles took place in the *Beis HaMikdash* to demonstrate Hashem's Presence.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was a source of *emunah chushis* - of genuine sensory perception - and that is why today we sit on the ground and mourn that, alas, we don't have it anymore. We shed tears over its loss because it's our loss! We yearn for the opportunity once more to witness the *avodas Beis HaMikdash*, when our hearts would swell with feelings of loyalty and devotion!

Every time we finish *Shemoneh Esrei*, it's important to say slowly and with full concentration the verse: *זָנַעְבָדְךָ בְּיָרְאָה כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשֵׁנִים קִדְמוֹנִיּוֹת* ..., *there we will serve You again with awe, as we did in the days of old*, *וְתֵן חֶלְקֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ*, *and give us our share in Your Torah*. Our share in Torah is the *Beis HaMikdash*. We need it to infuse us with *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim*.

The Gemara (*Berachos 33, Sanhedrin 92*) tells us just how great *dei'ah* is: "If someone has *dei'ah*, it's as if the *Beis HaMikdash* was built in his days." This is a remarkable statement! If you build *dei'ah* in your mind, you're making yourself into a *Beis HaMikdash*, because the purpose of the Temple is to enable people to acquire *dei'ah*. That's why, when a *tzaddik* passes away, we weep for him "*kisreifas Beis Elokeinu*, as if the *Beis HaMikdash* had been burned down" (*Rosh Hashanah* isb). This *tzaddik* worked so hard, for years and years, to feel the Presence of Hashem no matter where he was, no matter what he was doing. In the process, he made himself a *Beis HaMikdash*, and when he passed away, we have to weep for him just as we weep over the *Churban Beis HaMikdash*.

The Element of Unity

Ever since the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed we have lived in a state of פיזור, of being scattered among the nations.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 52) asks: What caused Korach's contemporaries to side with him against Moshe Rabbeinu? Korach was a Levi, and the Levites envied Aharon Hakohen, who was chosen to perform the Divine service, so the Levites wanted to become Kohanim. But the other members of that rebellion were from Reuven. They had nothing to gain, so why would they join Korach in his *machlokes*?

The Gemara explains that it was because Korach was a generous host. He was wealthy, and he gave many parties. He entertained everyone who came to his table, as Scripture tells us (*Tehillim* 35:16), בְּחִנְפֵי לַעֲגֵי מְעֹג, *with flattery and ridicule, for the sake of a cake* (the Hebrew word *ma'aog* is related to the word עֵינָה, cake). He served them all sorts of cakes, and they sat at his table and laughed at his jokes. When you sit at someone's table, if he says *divrei Torah* you applaud him, even if his *divrei Torah* are not good. That's human nature. If a host entertains people with good times and a good meal, they'll applaud his Torah. By the same token, if the host says *lashon hara*, they'll applaud that too.

This is the pattern that the verse in *Tehillim* points out: because they catered to Korach and flattered him (*bechanfei*), then when Korach ridiculed (*la'agei*) Moshe Rabbeinu, they agreed with him, because of the cakes (*ma'og*) that they ate at his table. Even if they didn't agree they nodded their heads. It was a terrible thing just to nod their heads. The verse continues: *charok alei shineimo*, the *Satan* began to gnash his teeth at them, and said, "They're my customers now!" You have to be careful where you eat! Sitting at Korach's table, you're the *Satan's* customers.

Today we're in *galus* and eating at the table of our gentile hosts. We sit in their countries, in Spain, in Germany, in Poland, in France, in Russia, in America ... and they're the ones who are entertaining us. Therefore, our *chanufah*, our Flattery, is for them. You may think you're independent, but that's not true. Even the greatest among us are somewhat humbled, kowtowing before our host countries.

When David had to flee Eretz Yisrael because he was afraid for his life, he said (*Shmuel* 1 26:19), "Today they drove me away from joining Hashem's possessions, saying, 'Go, worship other gods'." The Gemara (*Kesubos* 110b) asks: Who told David to serve other gods? No one told him that. But, the Gemara explains, once someone leaves Eretz Yisrael, it's as if he is serving other gods.

The Gemara is telling us that even if you're a *frum* Jew, if you live among people who serve *avodah zarah*, like it or not, part of you is serving idols.

In the Days of Old We Did Not Have to Flatter Any Nation

In the days of old, Eretz Yisrael was entirely for *Am Yisrael*. We didn't have to flatter any other nations. It was hardly necessary. We were the owners of the land, and non-Jews who lived there were eating at *our* table. Everyone spoke *Lashon Hakodesh*. Everyone ate

kosher. Everyone kept Shabbos! They wouldn't touch something that was impure. They kept *tumah vetahorah*, the laws of what was impure and what was pure. Everyone kept the Torah!

Even in the worst times, when our nation was divided, the Ten Tribes kept the Torah. They had broken away from those whose lives centered around Yerushalayim, they were not the better element of the nation, but even their evil king Achav's kitchen was perfectly kosher. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 113a) tells us that ravens used to take food from Achav's kitchen to bring to Eliyahu Hanavi to eat. If Eliyahu ate it, then it was surely from a glatt-kosher kitchen!

Everything was according to the Torah. Of course, people committed sins; there was *lashon hara* and *machlokes*, and sometimes they were even influenced by the gentiles among them to sneak in a little *avodah zarah* secretly. But the nation was a Jewish nation.

Even in the holiest neighborhood in America, everyone must submit to the law of the land, to the state laws and to the Constitution. But in Eretz Yisrael when the *Beis HaMikdash* stood, the law of the land was *Chumash* and *Torah Shebe'al Peh*! There was no constitution other than the Torah. Achav and his evil government followed the Torah! Imagine living in such a country. We have no idea what perfection was available then.

On Tishah B'Av we sit on the floor and mourn the pizur, the fact that we're dispersed among the nations. Of course, we should try as much as possible to surround ourselves with only good Torah influences, but anything we can do to that end is nothing compared to the circumstances our people lived in, in the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*. Nowadays, when you walk in the streets you have to close your eyes. In ancient times, if a person walked in the street the way people walk in public today, he'd be punished by the court! When the *navi* criticized the women of his times, he criticized them for their arrogance in having very fine, expensive dresses and shoes (*Yeshayah* 3:16). But no one would have dressed indecently, *chas veshalom*! They all lived as Jews, according to halachah.

Summary: Why We Sit on the Ground on Tishah B'Av

And so, we sit on the ground on Tishah B'Av and we weep over the loss of the prophets of old who used to guide us through this world and into the Next World. We weep over the loss of the *Beis HaMikdash*, which gave us *dei'ah* and *emunah chushis* - a true concept of Hashem's Presence among us. And we weep over the loss of the nation that was all together in its own land, that was not dispersed among other nations.

When Tishah B'Av comes, and you sit on the ground and mourn the Destruction, keep in mind the main purpose of the day: to mourn the loss of the opportunity for genuine perfection, which could have been ours. We could have elevated ourselves with such glorious opportunities as there were in the days of old. And if we regret the loss of these opportunities, that in itself is a very big *zechus* and a level of *shleimus*.

So whatever effort you put into mourning for the *Beis HaMikdash*, understand it as a loss of your personal opportunity: "If only I could have been there in days of the *nevi'im*! If only I could have been there in the days when I could visit the *Beis HaMikdash*! If I had lived in those days, I would be a different personality in every respect. If only we could have been there when our people lived in the clear, pure air of

Yerushalayim Ir Hakodesh, when they could breathe the *kedushah* of the *Beis HaMikdash*, the fragrance of the *Shechinah*, our lives would have been transformed!"

And Hashem says, "If you mourn for it now, then to a great extent you'll be able to experience the *simchah* of that perfection in this lifetime." If you'll mourn the loss of the *Beis HaMikdash*, Hashem will give you a taste of the perfection of having someone show you the right path in life. You'll bump into the right teachers. You'll come across the right *sefarim*. You'll receive guidance as if it were coming from a prophet. Of course it can't be the same, but it will be a taste of what was once given by prophets.

If you mourn the loss of the *Beis HaMikdash*, eventually you will get a certain amount of *emunah chushis*. Hashem will show you how to learn *Shaar Habechinah* in *Chovos Halevavos* - which teaches one how to recognize Hashem in nature - and other *sefarim* that teach *emunah*. You'll daven with a strong focus that will awaken within you a feeling that you're standing before Hashem. That will be your reward for weeping on Tishah B'Av.

If you mourn because you're dispersed among the nations, Hashem will step in and arrange things so that you'll be able to be among good Jews. You may find a *parnassah* that will keep you among Jews, or you may be strong enough to overcome the influence of your environment. You'll live an independent, *frum*, Jewish life. The environment you're in will help you more and more.

If you sit on the ground together with other Jews and weep for these and other qualities that are no longer with us, Hashem says: If you mourn for Yerushalayim - for what Yerushalayim was able to give you, which you don't have now - then you will see in your life some of the happiness that Yerushalayim was capable of giving in the times when the *Beis HaMikdash* stood.

שִׂמְחוּ אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וְגִילוּ בָּהּ כָּל אֹהֲבֶיהָ, *Be glad with Jerusalem and rejoice in her all you who love her (Yeshayahu 66:10)*. All those who loved the privilege of what Yerushalayim was then should rejoice that someday it will come back again. Even though we may not be able to see it with our own eyes, Hashem assures us that a great measure of that perfection will come to us in this life, whether or not we live to see Mashiach. Nevertheless, let us always pray that we will see him speedily, in our days. Amen.

(Introduction to "The Laws of Daily Living")

(ח"א דף ע"ר-ער"א בדפוס חדש)

לב אליהו ❖ שניבי לב

איכה

הרמ"א ז"ל, בספרו תורת העולה - מביא מעשה שאפלטון הפילוסוף הגדול בא לירושלם עם נבוכדנצר, ולאחר חורבן המקדש נכנס להר הבית, וראה את ירמיהו הנביא בוכה מאד ומרים קול נהי וקינה על החורבן. וישאל לו אפלטון ב' שאלות:

(א) שאל לו: 'אתה החכם בישראל, מדוע אתה בוכה על עצים ואבנים?'. (ב) הרי הבית כבר נחרב, ואין ראוי לחכם לבכות על העבר!

והשיב לו ירמיהו ואמר לו: 'אתה בתור פילוסוף - יש לך ודאי כמה ספיקות פילוסופיות אשר עדיין לא ידעת פתרונם!'. אמר לו אפלטון: 'ודאי כן הדבר! ויש לי הרבה ספיקות אשר חושבני שאין אף אחד בעולם שיפשוט לי אותם!'. אמר לו ירמיהו: אמור לי אותם הספיקות - ואני אפשוט לך!', ויאמר לו ספקותיו - וירמיהו פשט לו את כולם כלאחר יד. אפלטון נדהם מאד מזה, ותמה אם עומד לפניו ילוד אשה שיהיה מלא בחכמה רבה כל כך... ויאמר לו ירמיהו: 'כל זה החכמה ששמעת - שאבתי מעצים ואבנים אלו!...' 'ועל שאלתך השניה, האיך נאה לחכם לבכות על העבר? - לא אוכל לענות לך, כי אינך מסוגל להבין זאת', ע"כ סיפור הדברים.

והוסיף ע"ז הסבא מקעלעם ז"ל ואמר, כי התשובה על שאלתו השניה - פשוטה, שאין אנו בוכים על העבר - אלא על העתיד, כי שערי דמעות לא ננעלו, ועי"ז נזכה לראות שוב בבנין ביהמ"ק בב"א. אלא שזה אין גוי יכול להבין... והוסיף הסבא ז"ל עוד, שיש להתבונן מכאן גודל קדושת נשמת ישראל - שדבר כזה אשר ההדיוט שבישראל מבין בפשטות - לא היה מסוגל להבין אפילו חכם גדול שבחכמי אומות העולם כאפלטון!!

