

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Reflections on Rosh Chodesh Kislev 5769

Today is November 27, 2008, the national holiday of Thanksgiving. At this time, the fate and whereabouts of hostages remains uncertain after the terrorists killed and kept hostage those in the Chabad House in Bombay India. I am anguished regarding the fate of Rabbi and Rebbetzin Holtzberg and still hope to hear besoros tovos. And there are many dead and injured. Quite a few victims were Israelis and Jewish people. Korbons on erev Kislev.

The only clear message we are to derive from all sufferings and tragedies is teshuva. Hashem desires for us to come closer, to do mitzvohs to enhance our connection to Him, to improve our middos so that we emulate His Attributes, to offer kindness to others in the form of good deeds and charity, to cry out in prayer to Hashem for rachamim and to speak to Hashem and include Him in every moment of our day.

The message of teshuva on erev Kislev is, to me, significant because I am remembering the messages from Tisha B' Av from Rabbi Mattesyahu Salomon and Rabbi Brevda. In brief, Rabbi Salomon spoke to us through the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation Tisha B' Av event about jealousy and how we suffer from it. His was a call to us to realize this as the cause of all sinas. His overall message was that in order to be worthy to receive the third Bais HaMikdosh, the third temple, all we need to do is eradicate the reason we lost the second Bais HaMikdosh in the first place, which was because of sinas chinum. What teshuva have we to claim toward eradicating sinas chinum amongst us so that we are unified? His message was to comprehend and overcome within us the midda of jealousy, kinna by telling ourselves when we suffer from it, we don't want suffering Hashem, we only want YOU.

Rabbi Brevda spoke also about Tisha B' Av. What moved me was his humble admission of the shame he feels year after year, reading the story of Kamsa and Bar Kamsa. He tells over the story in elaborate detail about how the disagreement began, and how the story unfolded. A person needs to listen to Rabbi Brevda's shiur on this subject to see that this was something that is understandable now and happens every single day, and is not relegated to "the past" by any stretch of the imagination. Without going into the details, the bottom line was that Bar Kamsa could not get over the shame and humiliation that was unjustly thrust upon him, and that none of the guests attempted to protect him from. And, since all of the guests were prominent religious people, he did not subdue his anger, nor accept as a kaparah the total humiliation. And, calling Bar Kamsa an apikoras, Rabbi Brevda retells how Bar Kamsa sabotaged the temple with a damaged offering and the results of his revenge were the loss of the second temple and exile. All because Bar Kamsa could not rise above the affront to his ego and the pain the entire matter had been causing his family for many years. Not an easy test, but he surely did not rise to the occasion.

Not that Kamsa did...could he have tolerated the presence of this man at his simcha? Could he have not spared his feelings, even when asked? Again, the pain that he felt was handled in an openly embarrassing way. He did not quietly seek the advice of any of the wise, learned guests who might have been able to gently escort Bar Kamsa home, with a respectful word of shalom. Whatever the issues were, the lines were drawn in the sand, and the dispute and issues of kina last to this very day.

Are we closer or farther from overcoming the causes of sina (e.G., kina, ego)? Are we in touch with the ways these aspects of our makeup affect us enough to subdue them when need be? And what would be a good enough reason to subdue them, when would that need actually be to choose to subdue our natural selves?

In our area, a drama unfolded regarding a 12 year old boy who was on life support. His doctors declared him brain dead, including his brain stem. The hospital wanted to turn off the life support and allow the boy to pass on. Being ultra-Orthodox, the family asked for the life support to remain until the child pass on his own. The hospital petitioned the courts to remove the support, wanting to give these life-saving resources to patients who could, in fact, recover. Before the courts could decide, the boy did pass away, as soon as Shabbos came in on the Friday night after being declared brain dead. He was niftar on Shabbat, like a tzaddik.

In those few days, the matter was on the front pages of the Washington Post. In there, the reporters went around to get all the varying Jewish opinions. And there it was, in one article, for all the whole world to see. Who thinks he should stay on, why so-and-so says it is okay to take him off life support, how brain dead qualifies people as organ donors, and all the various justifications with halachic proofs. All the world who was following this story saw this variety of opinions, diversity. Not that there is anything wrong with diversity or at fault with sharing an opinion and view. But I ask, how did we look to the world? Does the non-Jewish world understand all these distinctions? Of course not. To the outside world, what must it look like? It certainly did not look like unity. And to Hashem, how did it look?

Focus now on the matter at hand in Israel regarding the Road Map and all the diverse opinions there. Are we going to undergo a much larger

scale microscopic examination by the world? Do we realize that all these varying opinions, one Jewish view arguing with another Jewish group, weaken us and make us look foolish?

Our holy Torah is the blueprint for the world. It is the path of peace and of life. It is an absolute. It conveys the morals and laws by which the HaKodosh Baruch Hu wants us to live so that we can rise above ourselves and remain connected to Him. He knows what we are. Is it within our ability to make an attempt to reclaim our Torah as an absolute? Within the discussion of differences within the Torah, is there a stream of thought that we can all recognize as absolute and thereby grab onto in order to unify? With all the varying opinions about how to accomplish peace, giving the land, not giving the land, the IDF, etc, what can we do within our control to find an absolute Torah value that can unify every Jew? It may have nothing to do with Israel – it may simply be respect and love for every Jew as King Shlomo offers in Shiur HaShirum, that no matter how covered over we are, our essence and our ability to connect are beloved to Hashem. This is what comes to my mind. That we see every Jew for his neshama alongside his opinions and practices, and thereby, when we see another Jew, we see behind him a someone that Hashem loves. If we can restore Ahavas Yisroel in some way, perhaps that might be the teshuva to evoke the rachamim of Hashem to bring the redemption, may we be zocheh to see Moshiach Tzidkeinu speedily and dedicate the Third Bais HaMikdosh as Chanukah approaches!