



Parshat Devarim: The Spiritual Wars of Israel

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

In Parshat Devarim, Moshe discusses the sin of the spies and then mentions the judges who were appointed to help him. He recounts, "I told them to be fair and honest judges and to carry out the laws of Hashem in the right way." Chazal ask why Moshe goes off on this puzzling detour.

The Arizal teaches that the physical world is only a reflection of many spiritual worlds above. This idea is not unique to Judaism. Greek philosophers, most notably Plato, wrote about the concept of the ideal in some other sphere working its way into the reality of this world. It follows that in order to conquer the physical land of Israel, it needed to be subjugated in the upper world.

When the Jewish people are in conflict with another nation, we are actually reflecting a higher spiritual struggle in the upper worlds between the ideals which each of us embodies. Hashem orchestrates our enemies' confrontations *middah k'neged middah*. When

foreign nations distort justice, it is a reflection of our own weaknesses. It must be that somewhere in our own world we are guilty of injustice. Our external enemy is meant to awaken our internal enemy. Winning the battle against the angels in heaven involves conquering the *yetzer hara* within us. In fact, the Zohar writes that our worst enemy, Satan, gets its power from our sins.

The Shem MiShmuel explains that there are two types of evil tendencies. The first is evil which is clearly wrong, but it is difficult to overcome, because of our inherent *taavot* (desires). The second is secret and insidious. The *yetzer hara* has seven names, but the last one *tzefoni*-the hidden one, is the worst because it catches us unaware and penetrates deeply into our soul. It appears harmless or even good, much like the *chazir* who shows his split hooves, but doesn't chew his cud. Rome signifies this hidden *yetzer hara*. They represent beauty and culture, but their essence is completely corrupt. Such insidious falsehood can only be overcome with *din* and

emet.

The judges were sent to spy out the land. They were victims of this hidden *yetzer hara*. They thought they were recounting the truth and saving the Jews from destruction. Instead they caused disaster and mourning. If they would have had *emunah*, the seven nations would have fled before them. It wouldn't have been necessary to battle them at all. The *meraglim* didn't know this because they weren't committed to truth in the absolute sense. And that is why Moshe detours from the story of the spies. He admonishes the Jews to be truthful and fair so that they will not come to stumble again.

The Navi writes, "*Tzion b'mishpat tipadeh..*"- Zion will be redeemed with justice. Defeating our spiritual enemies, whether they are revealed or hidden, means committing ourselves to *mishpat* and *emet*. In this way we will defeat not only our own *yetzer hara*, but the evil angels above who represent distortion.

The Halochos of The 3 Weeks

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

The Mishna says, "When the month of Av comes we reduce our joy." We take on more mourning practices as we get closer to the ninth of Av, the day of the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*. One is not permitted to build a new house. However one may do so for a newly married couple who would otherwise not have where to live. If a non-Jewish builder is building a home for a Jew, the best thing would be to persuade him to cease working during the nine days. If this is not possible and the non-Jew is working for his own benefit so that he can finish the job and get on to his next job, he may carry on working and the Jew may live in the house after *Tisha B'av*. We refrain from eating meat and drinking wine. Some *sefardim* only refrain the week that *Tisha B'av* occurs. There are different customs regarding drinking the *havdala* wine. Some give it to a child to drink

while others say that the person who made *havdala* can drink it but should not pass it on to others.

One may not shower or bathe for pleasure and one may not wear freshly laundered clothes. The Aruch Hashulchan writes that this does not apply to underclothes that absorb sweat but there are opinions that are stringent about this too. One can wear one's freshly washed clothing for about a half hour before the nine days begin, so they aren't considered new anymore. In case of need, one can throw them on the floor and trample them a bit so they aren't fresh and clean anymore. It is permitted to wash one's hands, feet, face, and other parts of the body but one should not wash one's whole body at once. Some opinions hold that in our times when people are more sensitive, one can take a cold shower. If one needs to, one can mix in some warm water to

make it bearable, but one may not take a hot shower with soap.

One of the tragedies that happened on the 17th of Taamuz was the breaking of the *luchot*. How can we understand that the Jews had just received the *Torah* on *Har Sinai* and a mere 40 days later were worshipping an idol? The sages explain that the Jews merited to receive the *Torah* because they were united, "As one man with one heart." Yet a short time later when they confronted the trial of the golden calf, they were no longer as one. That is how the satan was able to get them to sin. When we're united we're unbeatable. But when we're argumentative and divided we become vulnerable to sin and destruction. May these days of evil turn into days of unity and rejoicing. May we merit the coming of *Mashiach* and the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash* speedily in our days.



The Three Weeks: Continuous Crying

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

In Megilat Eichah it says, “*Boche tivche b'layla*.” She weeps continually in the night. What are we mourning for and why is it all pervading and never ending? The Sifsei Chaim explains that the *beit hamikdash* was the medium through which we felt Hashem's presence radiating throughout the world. When it was destroyed, the *Shechina* departed and in its place came darkness and concealment. Our feeling of connection to Hashem was severed. The Gemara writes that before the churban the angels had six wings. After the destruction, only four wings remained. The Gra explains that the two middle wings were inscribed with the words *kavod malchuto* (the glory of his kingship). In essence, Hashem's glory departed along with the *beit hamikdash*. We can no longer see the manifestation of Hashem's Presence in this world.

Perhaps the best description of what we are mourning for is reflected in an insight by Rabbi Tatz. During the period when prophecy ended, the Men of the Great Assembly enacted the *birchat hanehin*, the blessings said over physical pleasures. When prophecy existed the world was alive with the glow of the *Shechina*. Every object radiated its source. Today the darkness is so thick, the materialism so oppressive, that we need the blessing to arouse us to identify Hashem as

the source of material blessing. How many of us stop and reflect on the Divine Providence so intimately involved in every physical gift we enjoy? We not only lost the *beit mikdash* but the ability to see the incredible Hidden Force that runs this world. The core of baseless hatred which triggered the destruction was failing to recognize the inherent divine spark within every person. We lost that x-ray vision of being able to discern divinity behind the mask of nature.

When a Jew feels uninspired in his study and prayer and feels estranged from his immediate and life-long goals and purpose, he and the *Shechina* are suffering a mutual alienation. We can be praying, saying blessings, even learning, and unfortunately never once think about Hashem. The Three Weeks is about reexamining ourselves, “How am I serving Hashem? Am I involved or am I distant?” It's not just *Shechinta begaluta*, that Hashem has abandoned us, but that we have left Hashem. We are so far from the reality of closeness to Hashem that we are mourning over the fact that it is difficult for us to mourn.

The medium that will bring the *geulah* will be our yearning for Mashiach. A seed must decompose before it can grow into a flowering plant. Similarly the destruction of the *beit hamikdash* and our exile was intended to strip

away all of Israel's superficial aspects and allow us to blossom into Messianic fulfillment. The Three Weeks is not just about weeping and mourning for what was. It is also about anticipation, desire and yearning for the House of David to flourish once more. This, says the Nesivos Sholom, is what mourning over the *beit mikdash* is about. It's not just about being sad over the destruction but desiring it to be rebuilt again.

The Nesivos Sholom points out that the 22 days of *bein hametzorim* parallel the 22 Days of Awe between Rosh Hashana and Shemini Atzeret. It's like painting a picture. First you paint a black background and then you paint the different colors. The Three Weeks is the black background meant to bring out the yearning for Hashem that comes to the fore during the Days of Awe. It's about recognizing that we are missing that divine link in our life on a national and personal level and in our relationship with others. It's sensing the lack of *malchut Hashem* so that we enter Rosh Hashana with a desire to crown Hashem king. It's approaching Yom Kippur with newfound sensitivity to others and celebrating Simchat Torah with Hashem in the center. When we have this recognition of what we are missing and the yearning to fill it we can approach the *yomim noraim* with the right perspective.