

A Home for G-d – The Three Weeks

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What if the Nine Days could be an exciting time of year? I don't mean a time of partying and celebration, but more along the lines of a meaningful time that we feel grateful for having experienced.

Not only does this opportunity exist, but this was certainly the intent of our Sages when they established the laws and customs of this period. Real Judaism is never about cultural or historical practices, and it's certainly not about imposing archaic, difficult and meaningless restrictions on us. This time period is no different, and in our fast-paced, ADD world, it behooves us to slow down and discover the many essential parts of lives that can be accessed only through the lessons of these more somber days.

Every person has his home or base where people get to know and experience him. For example, a boss has his office and a Rabbi has his study. Without limiting themselves to specific places, it wouldn't be possible to create the relationships they desire. Similarly, a husband and wife live together in their home or apartment; this is an environment where they get to know each other in the most intimate way.

The *Beit HaMidash* (Holy Temple) literally means "the sanctified house." It was a house for God, the one place on earth where God's Presence would rest among us and create the optimal environment for spiritual development and experience on Earth.

But let's take a step back. The idea of God, the Infinite and most Awesome Being, constricting His Presence and clothing His Majesty in an earthly house is difficult to understand. He is so incredible great, why would He limit, so to speak, His Presence to this one place?

As this election cycle has once again vividly demonstrated, politicians cannot get elected without convincing (and sometimes begging) people to vote them for them. Similarly, a king can't exist without a people. In an incredible display of humbleness, God desired to bestow His Kingship upon us. In order to effectuate this act, He requires our acknowledgement and loyalty to Him. Nevertheless, out of His incredible love for us, He desired to do such and therefore constricted His Presence by clothing His majesty in the *Beit HaMikdash* so that we may know Him and become His intimate People.

Unfortunately, as time went on, we lost our sense of appreciation for this unique opportunity. This can be seen by the misdeeds our Prophets and Sages spell out, one of which was that we did not make the blessings on the Torah before engaging in its study. It was not that we didn't study the Torah, but that we didn't first make the blessings on it. What's so bad about this that it caused the exile?

Reb Noson explains that in the blessing we say, "Who has chosen us from among the nations." We may indeed have studied, but the essence of Torah is its special nature that allows us to forge a relationship with God. If we did not recognize this relationship, we would no longer be deserving of it. Because of our lack of appreciation, God no longer concealed and constricted His majesty to this one place, and therefore it could no longer withstand His greatness and was subsequently destroyed.

As we reflect upon our enormous loss during these days, we should feel a renewed sense of hope. God has not changed His mind; had He wished to, we would have been destroyed rather than exiled. His greatest desire is to once again rest His Presence among us. Our spiritual exiles, whether national or personal, remind us that if we humble ourselves and lessen our egos, God will immediately reciprocate, lessening Himself by clothing His Presence once again in the *Beit HaMikdash* and in our personal lives.

Now is a time of great introspection. We can look at our lives and humble ourselves before God by admitting to our various deficiencies, whether in Torah study or prayer, or in our relationships with loved ones and friends. True, we may not immediately change, but by taking the first colossal step and honestly evaluating ourselves, we lessen our egos and make room for God within our hearts and lives.

Let's begin to rebuild.

Based on Likutey Moharan I, 219