**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Devorim – Vol. 12, Issue 39**

**Compiled by Ozer Alport**

**איכה ישבה בדד העיר רבתי עם (איכה 1:1)**

Parshas Devorim is traditionally read on the Shabbos preceding Tisha B’Av, on which we read Megillas Eichah in which Yirmiyahu mourns the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. Eichah begins by questioning how it is possible that Yerushalayim, the city that was once so populous and thriving, now sits בדד – all alone, which clearly indicates that the state of being בדד is undesirable and painful.

However, Rav Yisroel Reisman points out that we also find that when Bilaam was compelled to bless the Jewish people, he remarked (Bamidbar 23:9) הן עם לבדד ישכן ובגוים לא יתחשב – behold, they are a nation who will dwell alone and will not be reckoned among the nations. Similarly, we find in Parshas V’zos HaBeracha (Devorim 33:28) וישכן ישראל בטח בדד – Israel shall dwell securely and in solitude. These latter two sources clearly imply that the condition of being בדד is praiseworthy and beneficial. How can this be reconciled with Yirmiyahu’s lament of Yerushalayim’s post-destruction status as בדד?

Rav Reisman explains that there are two different types of being alone. In the first form of בדד, a person feels completely forlorn and abandoned, and every ache that he experiences is exacerbated due to his loneliness. However, there is a second type of בדד, in which a person is so connected to someone else that he becomes oblivious to the rest of the world and nothing else matters to him. For example, young newlywed couples are often so infatuated with one another that they appear to be in their own bubble, blissfully unaware of everything else transpiring around them. This is also a form of בדד, but in contrast to the first type of painful loneliness, this second kind is positive and enjoyable.

Applying this dichotomy to the Jewish people, Bilaam was blessing them that they should reach the level of the second type of בדד, in which they are so connected to Hashem and the Torah that ובגוים לא יתחשב – they view themselves as walled-off and separate, which enables them to shrug off the pernicious influences of the society around them. However, there is also a form of בדד in which we cut ourselves off from Hashem and other Jews, and as a result, we are left alone and forlorn with nobody to interact with, and it is this situation that Yirmiyahu was lamenting.

Applying this insight to our own lives, there are some people who are so connected to Torah study and prayer that they become בדד, casting aside all other concerns to focus their energies on serving Hashem. Sadly, there are others who are so distant from Him that they embody איכה ישבה בדד, and whenever they attempt to engage in spiritual pursuits, they become so distracted by everything else going on in their lives that they are unable to concentrate. In the summer, they have ample free time for relaxation and leisure, yet throughout the year they are never able to find even a spare moment for serious Torah study. If we find ourselves in this latter category, at least on Tisha B’Av itself we should cry over this very situation of איכה ישבה בדד and how skewed our priorities and values are. Let us utilize the day to mourn the sadness of being distant from Hashem, and be inspired by our pain to rectify the disconnect by recommitting ourselves to a life of spirituality and closeness to Hashem.

**אין שאלת שלום לחבירו בתשעה באב, והדיוטות שאינם יודעים ונותנים שלום**

**משיבים להם בשפה רפה ובכבד ראש (שלחן ערוך אורח חיים 584:20)**

Parshas Devorim is normally read on the Shabbos before Tisha B’Av, which commemorates the tragic destruction of both Temples. Because Tisha B’Av is a day on which we are supposed to remain focused on mourning the unparalleled national suffering that transpired, the Shulchan Aruch rules that if a person encounters a friend or acquaintance, he should not greet him, and if the other person is unaware of this law and ignorantly extends greetings, one should answer quietly and with difficulty.

Rav Mordechai Druk points out that this ruling seems quite counterintuitive. The Gemora in Yoma (9b) teaches that the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash, which resulted in the exile in which we still find ourselves today, was caused by the sin of sinas chinam (baseless hatred), and our Sages teach (Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1) that the key to ending this exile and rebuilding the Temple is to rectify the sins that led to its destruction. If so, Tisha B’Av would seem to be a day when we should specifically be commanded to work on increasing feelings of peace and unity by warmly greeting everyone that we encounter. Why on the day that we mourn the catastrophic consequences of divisiveness are we told to ignore everyone we meet?

To appreciate Rav Druk’s answer, Rav Yisroel Reisman notes that quite frequently, when a computer freezes or malfunctions, the simple solution is to turn it off and turn it back on. Very often, a simple reboot enables the system to correct itself, and it will immediately begin working properly again. Similarly, there is a documented treatment protocol for certain speech impediments which involves remaining completely silent for a period of time, at which point a speech therapist begins to reteach the correct way to speak and pronounce various letters and sounds. The logic behind this approach is that when we act out of habit, we often do things incorrectly. Therefore, just as with the computer, the appropriate remedy is to completely shut down the system and enable it to reset, at which point it can be consciously “rebooted” and taught to work properly.

Applying this concept to Tisha B’Av, Rav Druk explains that quite often, when we encounter and greet people, we don’t truly mean what we say. He cites the verse in Yirmiyahu (9:7) which is read as part of the Haftorah on Tisha B’Av, in which he criticizes his contemporaries for שלום את רעהו ידבר – speaking peace to his friend, while ובקרבו ישים ארבו – inside of him, he lays a trap and plots an ambush against the very person he is treating as his friend. Sadly, greetings today have become hollow, and the perfunctory, “How are you doing” has become meaningless. If a naïve person begins to actually respond to the query, the questioner will quickly find a reason to excuse himself. Hashem despises such hypocrisy, and therefore on Tisha B’Av we engage in a reset process in which we intentionally do not greet others. This is intended to enable us to reflect upon the meaning of true empathy and concern for others, which will enable us to “reboot” and consciously begin anew the following day, with a newfound appreciation of the importance of sincerely and genuinely greeting another Jew.

**Parsha Point to Ponder (and sources which discuss it):**

1. Rashi writes (1:1) that Moshe mentioned the words Di Zahav - abundance of gold - to hint to the sin of the golden calf, which was produced because of the large amount of gold that they had. Rashi writes (Shemos 32:31) that Moshe argued that Hashem indirectly caused the sin by giving them so much gold when they left Egypt that they had nothing to do with it but sin. How can this be reconciled with Rashi’s comment (Bereishis 3:12) that in blaming Hashem for giving him Chava who caused him to eat from the forbidden fruit, Adam was guilty of a lack of gratitude to Hashem for all of the good that He had bestowed upon him? (Ayeles HaShachar Shemos 32:31)

**Answer to Point to Ponder:**

1) **Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman** suggests that the two situations are not comparable. Adam was considered to be displaying an improper lack of appreciation because he defended himself by blaming his sin on a kindness which Hashem had personally done for him. Moshe's argument, on the other hand, pertained to a blessing that Hashem had given not to him, but to others, and was therefore appropriate. He adds that even so, only somebody on the level of Moshe could speak to Hashem in such a manner.

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