****

“RABBI’S MUSINGS (& AMUSINGS)”

*Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Pinchos*

*20 Tamuz 5777/ July 15, 2017 - Avos Perek 1*

This past Sunday, Camp Dora Golding hosted it's first (of two) Visiting Days of the 2017 summer season. Hundreds of excited parents packed onto the campus, for a few hours reunion with their sons, and to get a glimpse into their summer experience.

This past Shabbos morning, Rabbi Meir Erps, a veteran of camp, and our talented Night Activity Director, recounted to the campers a story that Rabbi Mordechai Finkelman, former camp Manhig Ruchani (Spiritual Director), would relate each summer before Visiting Day:

Years ago, one Visiting Day morning in a different camp, Rabbi Finkelman witnessed a camper running excitedly towards his parents. The eager parents opened their arms in anticipation of a big hug. To their disappointment, their son ran past their open arms, and scooped up their little poodle, who was waddling behind them. While caressing the poodle gently, the boy looked up at his parents and asked, "where is all the nosh I asked for?"

This week, we began the Three Weeks of Mourning for the Bais Hamikdash. The Navi declares in the Name of Hashem: "If I am a father, where is My honor?"

We constantly refer to Hashem in prayer as "our loving/compassionate Father". Hashem, as it were, in turn, asks us why we don't accord Him the respect of a loving father?

It is no coincidence that the month containing the greatest tragedies to befall our people, is called "Av". It's a not-so-subtle reminder that behind all of our past, and current, challenges is a loving Father.

A century ago, a delegation was sent from Brisk to ask the revered Bais HaLevi to become their town's Rav. To their chagrin, the Bais HaLevi refused the position. No argument would persuade him, until one member of the delegation asked him how he could disappoint 20,000 Jews in Brisk who were looking to him hopefully.

At that point, the Bais HaLevi stood up and said that he indeed cannot disappoint 20,000 Jews, and accepted the position.

When the Chofetz Chaim heard the incident, he began to cry. He explained that if the Bais Halevi felt he could not disappoint so many anticipating and hopeful Jews, how could the all-merciful Almighty turn down the insistent pleas of His nation to usher the final redemption?! The only viable solution, is that we don't adequately await and hope for the arrival of Moshiach.

On a daily basis, we pray - as we should - for health, nachas, sustenance, shidduchim, etc. But perhaps the greater tragedy of all - is the pervasive feeling of disconnection.

 If one feels deeply connected to Hashem, He can tolerate almost any challenge that confronts him. It may be painful and tears may flow, but if he feels he is in the embrace of his Loving Father, he can deal with it.

But what of the masses who, for whatever reason, don't have that feeling?

We are taught from our youth that Hashem is everywhere, and that He is always with us. The Three Weeks of Mourning begin with the fast of the 17th of Tamuz. Among other tragedies, it was the day when the Roman forces of the wicked Titus penetrated the previously impregnable walls of Yerushalayim. Three weeks later they burned down the Bais Hamikdash.

In a sense, mourning begins when one feels disconnected. When one feels surrounded by love and warmth, he feels a sense of security and can endure almost anything. But when that feeling of physical, or emotional, security is breached, and one feels vulnerable and unprotected, everything becomes far more painful and complicated.

Isn't that at the root is so much of our pain? Those who wait so long for their bashert, those who lack financial comfort, those who lack shalom bayis with their spouses or children, those with questions on religion, etc. Isn't it all rooted in feelings of loneliness, being ostracized, or disconnected?!

It is not that G-d's love for us is ever diminished (love and disappointment are two vastly different things...). However, a big component of exile is to sort through our inner rubble, to discover and feel the love that's omnipresent.

It is not only about feeling connected ourselves, but about helping others recognize that connection as well.

Once that breach is repaired, our yearning for connection with our loving G-d, will be automatic.

And when we truly pine for the return of the Divine, the all-Merciful will be only too happy to fulfill our centuries-old-prayer, "let our eyes envision Your return to Zion with compassion".

Shabbat Shalom & Good Shabbos,

R’ Dani and Chani Staum