

SEFER
ALIYOS REFOEL ZEV
ON THE PARSHA

Megillas Eicha

PRAYING WITH FEELING

In the introduction to *Eichah Rabbah (Pesichta 24)*, the following incident is recounted: At that time [of the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*] Hashem, as it were, was crying and saying, “Woe is Me for My house. My sons, where are you? My priests, where are you? Those who love Me, where are you? ... Then Hashem said to Yirmiyah, “I am like a father who prepared a wedding canopy for his only son, and his son died while under the canopy. And you have no pain for Me or My children? Go and rouse Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and Moshe from their graves, for they know how to cry.”

Hashem was telling *Yirmiyah HaNavi* that the prayers of his forefathers would be more successful than his at bringing salvation to *Klal Yisrael*, because Yirmiyah did not feel pained on account of the *Churban*. The *Eitz Yosef* explains that Yirmiyah saw *Klal Yisrael* in a state of wickedness; he had personally witnessed them performing many sins. Therefore, he could not empathize with their suffering, because he knew that they deserved their punishment and had brought it on themselves, so to speak. Consequently, a powerful element would be lacking from his *tefillas*; his prayers would not have the added dimension of one who is suffering from pain. Therefore Hashem, sensing this deficiency, instructed Yirmiyah to request the forefathers to *daven*, because their *tefillas* would be more successful in arousing Divine Mercy.

It is very difficult to understand how it is even possible to suggest that Yirmiyah did not feel tremendous pain at the suffering of *Klal Yisrael*. To attain prophecy, one must perfect his *midos*. Yirmiyah, who was on the highest rung of the spiritual ladder, was certainly permeated with *ahavas Yisrael*. Regardless of whether *Klal Yisrael* deserved their punishment, he should have felt their pain.

Furthermore, Yirmiyah's own actions demonstrate that he did identify with *Klal Yisrael's* suffering to an unfathomable degree. Yirmiyah *HaNavi* was commanded by Hashem to go to Anathoth. In his absence, Yerushalayim was taken and the Temple destroyed. The *Medrash* relates that when Yirmiyah, on his return from Anathoth, beheld smoke rising from the Temple, he rejoiced because he thought that the Jews had reformed and were

again bringing burnt offerings to the Sanctuary. Soon, however, he discovered his error, and began to weep bitterly, lamenting that he had left Yerushalayim to its destruction. He cried out, “Where are those who have been lost? I will be lost with them.”

He saw a path filled with corpses that was muddied by the blood of those who had been murdered. He saw footsteps in the blood made by those children that had been led into captivity. He bent down and kissed those footsteps. When he finally met up with the exiles, he kissed and hugged them. He cried bitterly when he saw their plight firsthand. Yirmiyah, by the express command of Nevuchadnezzar, was allowed to come and go as he pleased. Yet when he saw the captives, he voluntarily caused himself to be chained to them, notwithstanding that Nevuzaradan, anxious to carry out the orders of his master, always unchained him. At last, Nevuzaradan, totally bewildered by Yirmiyah's actions, contemplated that perhaps Yirmiyah was a masochist. He couldn't fathom that Yirmiyah could have such love and empathy for His people that he was willing to voluntarily suffer with them.

The *Medrash* relates that after Yirmiyah had marched with the captives as far as the Euphrates, he returned to *Eretz Yisrael* in order to counsel and comfort those who had remained behind. On the way back to Yerushalayim, he found severed limbs of the massacred Jews, which he kissed and caressed. Weeping incessantly, he picked the limbs up lovingly, while, one after another, he placed them in various parts of his garments.

Does this *Medrash* paint a picture of a *navi* who was apathetic to the plight of his brethren? On the contrary! He was tormented to the extent that Nevuzaradan couldn't even fathom that it was possible for any human being to feel such strong empathy. Further, even a commoner who has the slightest bit of human decency could not help but be moved to tears by witnessing the atrocities and bloodshed firsthand. How could it be that Yirmiyah, a *navi*, was unmoved?

We are forced to conclude that Yirmiyah was indeed excruciatingly pained and emotionally wounded by the events of the *Churban*. To suggest otherwise would be patently absurd. Yet there was some infinitesimal deficiency in his empathy toward *Klal Yisrael*. This would not be at all apparent to us, but Hashem, who delves into the hearts and minds of mortals, knew there was something lacking. The fact that Yirmiyah's many prophetic warnings to *Klal Yisrael* to repent went unheeded took away a minuscule amount of his empathy. To some small, probably subconscious, extent, Yirmiyah reasoned that *Klal Yisrael* had brought these many tragedies on themselves. Therefore, his *tefillah* could not be accompanied with complete empathy.

Chazal tell us that *tefillah* is *avodah shebelev*, service of the heart. The primary aspect of prayer is the feeling and emotion that accompanies it. The more powerful the emotions are, the more powerful the prayer is. Consequently, *Chazal* tell us that the most powerful prayer a person can recite is one that is uttered at a time of urgent need.

מדרש רבה איכה הקדמה פסקה כד

...באותה שעה היה הקב"ה בוכה ואומר...
לי על ביתי בני היכן אתם כהני היכן אתם
אוהבי היכן אתם מה אעשה לכם התריתי
בכם ולא חזרתם בתשובה אמר הקב"ה
לירמיה אני דומה היום לאדם שהיה לו בן
יחידי ועשה לו חופה ומת בתוך חופתו ואין
לך כאב לא עלי ולא על בני לך וקרא לאברהם
ליצחק וליעקב ומשה מקבריהם שהם יודעים
לבכות....

We never know how powerful a prayer must be to change a Divine decree. A slightly deficient prayer may sometimes be enough. Yet here Hashem told Yirmiyah that his slightly deficient prayer would definitely not be enough to bring about salvation for *Klal Yisrael*. He instructed Yirmiyah to look elsewhere for someone who did not witness firsthand the sins performed by *Klal Yisrael*, someone who would only witness the utter destruction and devastation. That person would be able to *daven* a *tefillah* with complete empathy, and only that *tefillah* could change the Divine decree.

We should all strive to work on our daily *tefillas*. The *Gemara* tells us that *tefillah* is one of the *mitzvos* that requires *chizuk*. It is a daily battle to *daven* properly, with the necessary concentration. Yet we should not be deterred. Any small improvement in our *tefillah* might be the step necessary to make it effective. Of course, we can never know for certain. However, that is the lesson that we can take from this Medrash — that even a small amount of extra emotion can possibly make a tremendous difference.

Perhaps if we just *daven* a little harder, our prayers will be answered. *Rabbeinu Bachye* writes that the Ultimate Salvation is dependent on our *tefillas*. We should merit to be able to achieve the quality necessary in our *tefillas* to be *zocheh* to the coming of *Mashiach* speedily in our days.

GREATNESS IN DEGRADATION

One of the most tragic and emotional *pesukim* in *Megillas Eicha* is *perek daled, pasuk yud*. The *Navi* tells us that in the time of the destruction of the first *Bais Hamikdash*, the famine in *Eretz Yisrael* was so severe that compassionate women were driven to cook their own children as a means of sustenance. It is very difficult to imagine the circumstances that would cause a mother to do something so antithetical to her nature. Hashem created all of us with innate compassion toward all things; we are *rachmanim bnei rachmanim*. How much more so a mother, who carries her children inside of her own body for nine months, and then raises and nurtures them from the day they are born and many years afterwards. Yet, in the face of abject starvation, even these compassionate women could commit acts so appalling that it is difficult to even speak of, let alone understand. The situation was so devastating and the outlook was so bleak that these women literally snapped, going against their very nature in a desperate attempt to survive.

When we analyze someone in such a situation we tend to think of them as somewhat sub-human. We cannot understand how a person with a normally balanced psyche could do such a thing. The Torah, however, shows us that the human spirit remains intact even in such sub-human conditions.

In the *Tochacha*, *Moshe Rabbeinu's* admonition of *Klal Yisrael*, the Torah describes the terrible calamities that will befall us if we sin. We are told of a time when our enemies would besiege our cities, causing widespread devastation and famine. The *pesukim* recount that the most tender and delicate of men would be driven to the point of slaughtering one of his own children to stave off his hunger. Moreover, he would be so desperate that he would become a *tzar ayin*; he wouldn't share his "meal" with his wife

or remaining children. *Rashi* comments that the term "most tender and delicate" refers to a person of extreme daintiness and finickiness, someone who is easily repulsed by something disgusting. Nevertheless, in that desperate time, he will find the flesh of his own child so sweet and tasty that he will refuse to share it with the rest of his children.

At first glance we understand what *Rashi* is saying; of course he wouldn't share. Someone who goes so far as to murder his own child to secure his own survival is obviously more concerned with himself than with others. If we look deeper, however, a different picture emerges. If our first impression is correct, why does the Torah bother adding that this man would not share with his family - wouldn't we know that on our own? After all, he has shown himself to be completely selfish. And furthermore, how does this add to the tragedy of the *Tochacha*?

The Torah is teaching us an insight into the makeup of man. A person can be driven to the point where he is willing to murder and eat a child, but still retain love and warmth for his remaining children. And if he doesn't display that love and warmth, that fact adds to the overall tragedy. The fact that he can still sink indicates his greatness.

At his lowest point, man is a *Tzelem Elokim*. How much more so when he is on a higher level, man can reach tremendous heights. Even at man's nadir, we can still see his greatness. ❖

איכה ד

(ו) ידי נשים רחמניות בשלו ילדיהן היו
לברות למו בשבר בת עמי:

דברים כח

(ג) ואכלת פרי בטןך בשר בניך ובנתך אשר
נתן לך יהוה אלהיך במצור ובמצוק אשר
יציק לך איבך: (נד) האיש הרך בך והענג מאד
תרע עינו באחיו ובאשת חיקו וביתר בניו
אשר יותיר

(נה) מתת לאחד מהם מבשר בניו אשר יאכל
מבלי השאיר לו כל במצור ובמצוק אשר יציק
לך איבך בכל שעריך:

רש"י

(נד) הרך בך והענג - הוא הרך הוא הענג לשון
פינוק ומהתענג ומרוך מוכיח עליהם ששניהם
אחד אע"פ שהוא מפונק ודעתו קצה בדבר
מיאוס ימתק לו לרעבונו בשר בניו ובנותיו עד
כי תרע עינו בבניו הנותרים מתת לאחד מהם
מבשר בניו אחיהם אשר יאכל. ד"א הרך בך
הרחמני ורך הלבב מרוב רעבתנות יתאכזרו
ולא יתנו מבשר בנייהם השחוטים לבניהם
הנותרים:

Sefer Aliyos Refoel Zev, organized liluy nishmas R' Refoel Zev Chait A"H, is a compilation of Mussar Shmuessin originated, developed and written by talmidim of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim of Queens. These submissions were written by Rabbi Avrohom Sebrov and Aryeh Davidowitz and edited by ARZ staff. Feedback and constructive comments are welcome at arzontheparsha@gmail.com Thank you to the many individuals who have helped with the forthcoming sefer.