

THE MOUNTAIN AND THE VALLEY

Parshas Devorim

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The ecstatic hymn LECHA DODI, chanted on Friday evening to introduce the receiving of the Shabbos, concentrates considerably on redemption. Based on the teaching that Shabbos contains the qualities to bring about redemption ("If the Jewish people would observe properly two Sabbos'n they would immediately be redeemed" - Shabbos 118b), the author, Reb Shlomo Alkabets, gives therein felicitous expression to this profound yearning.

On Shabbos CHAZON, when the craving for the long overdue redemption takes on a sense of greatest urgency, some sing this hymn melancholically to the tune of ELI TZION from the end of KINOS. Chasidim customarily take the more optimistic approach and sing it out as every other Shabbos with a joyous melody. Whichever style one espouses it is well founded. For the ninth of Av is not only the anniversary of the destruction of the Beth Hamikdosh; it is also an opportune day for its reconstruction, the designated day for the appearance of Moshiach (Pesikta Rabbati, Pesikta Al Naharoth Bavel, end). Even Tisha b'Av itself in some respects follows holiday customs (see Shaar Yisoschor, Yemai Hamtzorim 15).

Commentators searched for sources for most of the choice phrases in this eloquent hymn. One phrase deserves particular attention. "Rav Loch Sheves... Long enough have you (Jerusalem) dwelt in the valley of tears", the author cries out. This expression "Rav Loch Sheves" seems to paraphrase a clause in this week's portion: "Long enough have you dwelt in this mountain" (Devorim 1:6). One ventures to suggest that the author endeavored more than merely to borrow a phrase. He sought to draw a parallel of two areas, the mountain and the valley, each possessing qualities to earn the coveted redemption. In the Biblical passage the reference is to the mountains of G-d, Mt. Sinai. "Long enough have you dwelt in this mountain," "So much reward has your dwelling in this mountain earned for yourselves. You have received the Torah on it, appointed a Sanhedrin, officers of thousands and officers of hundreds..." (Sifri, see

also Rashi). Therefore: "Turn yourselves around and journey and come to the hill country of the Amorites... the land of Canaan, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold I have set the land before you, go in and possess the land..." (Devorim 1:7,8). It is clear that the Sinai achievement served as the springboard from which to launch the conquest of the Land of Israel, as it still remains today the everlasting claim of our people to the land, and to redemption.

A second approach in our claim to the Holy Land and redemption is the unbearableness of exile. When the cup of sorrow is filled to the brim, the tormenting heart overtaxed, and the valley is becoming a torrent of tears, as has been the experience of nineteen centuries, culminating with our generation's holocaust, it is high time to have compassion upon Zion and bring the Jewish people home. Even if the oaths on the mountain, SINAI, have not been kept as it should be, the hatred, SINAH, it evoked from the world to the chosen people is cause enough for deliverance. "Enough have you dwelt in the valley of tears."

In the last several decades, most Orthodox Synagogues include, in the traditional KINOS of Tisha B'Av, special lamentations crying out the pain of the holocaust, the greatest churbon in history. It is surely a credit to a Brooklynite, Reb Pinchas Herzka, z.l., who did not rest, traveled to many Geonim Tzadikim, who approved this inclusion. It is now printed in most KINOS.

Yet, the stronger of the two fortresses is the experience of the mountain rather than the valley. The Jewish people can speed the GEULAH with much faster pace through the rejuvenation of Torah, studying it and practicing it. Redemption can come "today if to His voice you will hearken" (Tehilim 95:7). When the Torah reader sings out the AICHO (Devorim 1:12), to the sad tune of AICHO, Lamentations, and reminds us of the agonizing exile, he follows up with the stronger solution to our dilemma: "Get yourselves men of wisdom and understanding..." (ibid. 1:13), who will teach and expound the Torah to Israel.

