

# **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.

The MISPALELIM at the Bercher Beth Medrosh surely remember Reb Pinchas z"l, a prominent member of Debritziner Beth Medrosh, who spent Shlosh Seudos for many years in Bercher Beth Medrosh.

It is imperative to explain Mr. Hertzka's efforts, regarding the churban of our generation a bitter Tisha B'Av experience.

In the last decade the custom has been developed to spend hours of Tisha B'Av teaching and learning the history of Jewish suffering throughout the generations since the destruction of the Beth Hamikdosh. The 9th of Av became the day of "Bechia L'doros", the valley of tears for generations. Scores of synagogues developed special learning programs during the hours of Tisha B'Av afternoon.

Among the first Torah scholars who utilized Tisha B'Av as a day of profound study and delving was Rav Joseph Soloveichik zt"l. Already thirty-five years ago, scores of his talmidim traveled to Boston for Tisha B'Av to spend the many afternoon hours with Rav Soloveichik. Some of his KINOS commentary is now available in a book form. To quote just his response to the so relevant question why fast and lament today for the Jewish tragedy of Churban Beth Hamikdosh two thousand years ago. First, he responds, it is not ancient history; it is the contemporary experience. The Jerusalem Talmud teaches: "Every generation in which the Beth Hamikdosh has not been rebuilt is like the generation in which it was destroyed". We mourn for what happened just now.

A second answer Rav Soloveitchik suggested was that during the second Beth Hamikdosh some kohanim were still saddened by

the loss of the first. This inspired them to pray more fervently that churban should not happen again chas v'shalom. And tragically it did happen.

The mourning today for all the current suffering enhances our supplication against the threat by enemies who seek and plan for our destruction. The prayers are more serious on this day of recollection of all the tragedies over the centuries, from the destruction of both Botei Mikdosh, through Beitar, the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the expulsions of Jews from many lands, and finally the Holocaust. Our history has been a long cry "Eicho" How and why could such tragedy happen to us?

No doubt that the prayers with broken hearts and fasting can speed the long awaited redemption. From the Lecho Dodi stanza "Too long have you dwelt in the valley of weeting" we move on to our Parsha "Too long have you dwelt in this mountain". It is time to come to the Promised Land...

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.

