

Sat 9 August 2008 (Shabbat Chazon)
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D'var Torah on Devarim

The Third Temple

Tonight the saddest day on the Jewish calendar will begin: Tish'a B'Av, the ninth day of the month of Av. This is the day when tradition tells us both of our Temples were destroyed. The first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in the year 586 BCE, and the second was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 CE. We have not rebuilt it.

Our history is full of catastrophic events that befell us on Tish'a B'Av. The Mishnah (Ta'anit 4:6) lists three other events that occurred on Tish'a b'Av:

- The spies Moses sent to scout the Promised Land brought back a largely negative report which demoralized the Israelites,
 - Bar Kochba's revolt against Rome failed in 135 CE when he was killed and the city of Betar was destroyed, and
 - Jerusalem was razed just a year later.
- All on Tish'a B'Av.

Also on Tish'a B'Av:

- In 1095, the declaration of the Crusades by Pope Urban II. The ultimate goal of the crusaders was to wrest the Holy Land from the Muslims, but their first actions turned out to be to destroy dozens of European Jewish communities on their way and kill tens of thousands of Jews.
 - In 1242, 24 cartloads of handwritten Talmuds were burned in Paris.
 - In 1290, the decree expelling all Jews from England was signed.
 - In 1492, the decree expelling all Jews from Spain, including my own ancestors, was signed.
 - In 1626, Shabtai Tzvi, the false messiah who dashed the hopes of millions of Jews and severely disrupted their lives, was born.
- In 1914, World War I began, with Germany declaring war on Russia. This ultimately led to the Holocaust and facilitated the Communist Revolution, ushering in 70 years of darkness for Soviet Jews.

-In 1941, Goering the Nazi ordered the implementation of the Final Solution, leading to the murder of six million Jews -- the Holocaust.

But remember: The Jerusalem Talmud (Berachot 2:4) tells us that the Messiah will be born on Tisha B'Av. Maybe this year is the year!

But back to the Temple. For 2000 years our liturgy has been full of references to the golden day when the Temple will finally be rebuilt. For 2000 years we have yearned to build this Third Temple, the Bet HaMikdash.

-We say, "Le-shana habba-ah b'Yerushalayim habnuyah -- Next year in Jerusalem rebuilt".

-We reiterate this hope in all three daily services.

-We face the location of the Temple when we pray -- Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

-Even though we control Temple Mount today, we don't dare rebuild the Temple because the Muslims put a big house of worship there when *they* controlled the site, and we are not in the mood to start World War III with them.

Please close your eyes for a few moments. Close your eyes and relax. You are in Jerusalem, the Holy City. The Temple has been rebuilt. See that shiny big house up on the hill? That's the Third Temple. Slowly go up the steps that lead to the Temple. Marvel in its beauty. This is the spiritual home of all the Jews, so you feel right at home. You can give it the architecture you want. You can give it the shape you want. You can give it the colors you want, the sounds you want, the smells you want. You can populate it the way you want and witness all the activities you want. The people you see around you look just the way you want them to look. You walk around and explore every room, as richly decorated as you wish. Here a group of young Jews is studying Talmud. Over there a rabbi is lecturing on the holiday of Sukkot. Further up they are singing psalms with the lute and the harp. Yes, musical instruments will be brought back for worship. It feels unreal, but you are there. You feel deeply at peace. This is the House of the Lord, One HaShem Street.

You can reopen your eyes now. This Shabbat, the Shabbat before Tish'a b'Av, is called Shabbat Chazon -- the Shabbat of the Vision. Our tradition says that on this Shabbat, once every year, and

only once every year, God grants every Jew a vision of the Third Temple. You have just been granted this vision.

The great Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev left us the following parable. A man made a beautiful suit for his only son, a young man who was spending his life in enjoyment and merriment. Before too long the suit was stained, torn and ruined as the son got into fights, stumbled and fell in his drunkenness, and did not care properly for his clothes. The man forgave his son, and made him a second suit. This suit lasted a little longer, but eventually he still ruined it as badly as the first. The man then thought of another approach. He still wanted to give his son the finest things, but he wanted him to appreciate the value of his father's gifts. So he made a splendid suit, even finer than the other two, and hid it in the closet. Every once in a while, on special occasions, he would take the suit out of the closet and show it to his son. This made the son want it very badly. The son eventually mended his ways and promised to take good care of it. The man then gave his son the third suit.

The three suits are the three Temples. The first Temple was destroyed -- by the Babylonians, to be sure -- because the people had largely stopped being observant. The second Temple was destroyed -- by the Romans, to be sure -- because the people engaged in sin'at chinam, senseless hatred, as the Talmud tells us. Perhaps the people were being TOO observant and started fighting each other because of differences in their interpretation of Torah. The Third Temple, our tradition tells us, has already been built in heaven and will descend on earth fully assembled once we prove ourselves worthy.

Back to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's parable. Why, you may ask, are the Temples represented by suits? Would houses not be more appropriate? After all, a Temple is a house. The answer is that a suit, unlike a house, is made to fit only the person who wears it. Likewise, our commentators explain, the Third Temple, unlike the first two, will mysteriously fit every Jew's unique and personal spiritual needs, according to his or her intimate relationship with the Almighty.

So, therefore, let me conclude by saying: May the vision you just had a few minutes ago be realized in your lifetime, in precisely the way that YOU understood it.

Shabbat shalom.