

A Vision of What?
Shabbat Chazon 5773
Rabbi Elie Weinstock

What is the *Chazon Yeshayahu*, the vision of Isaiah? I know what is written in the text, but what are we supposed to take away from Isaiah's vision of the destruction? What are we supposed to see? A vision of what?

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev explains that this Shabbat is called *Shabbat Chazon* because on this day every Jew is granted a vision from afar of the future *Beit HaMikdash*. He illustrates this teaching with a parable. A father once prepared a beautiful suit of clothes for his son. But the child neglected his father's gift, and soon the suit was in tatters. The father gave the child a second suit of clothes; this one, too, was ruined by the child's carelessness. So, the father made a third suit. This time, however, he withholds it from his son. Every once in a while, on special and opportune times, he shows the suit to the child, explaining that when the child learns to appreciate and properly care for the gift, it will be given to him. This induces the child to improve his behavior, until it gradually becomes second nature to him—at which time he will be worthy of his father's gift.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's vision is very different than Isaiah's. How are we to understand Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's positive and redemptive "vision" of *Shabbat Chazon*? It stands in marked contrast to the vision of destruction found in the haftarah. Which vision are we supposed to see? Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, explains this "vision thing" in a most creative way.¹ He weaves together Jewish law, Midrash, and mysticism to provide a glimpse into what we should see.

Jewish law states (*Rambam Hilchot Beit HaBechirah* 1:17) that it is forbidden to demolish even a small section of the *Beit HaMikdash* in a destructive manner. It is certainly forbidden to destroy the entire *Beit HaMikdash*. (See Rambam – *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* - Negative Commandment #65.)

According to the Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 30:9), God is bound, as it were, by the same commandments that He gave the Jewish people.

לפי שאין מדותיו של הקב"ה כמדת בשר ודם, מדת ב"ו מורה לאחרים לעשו' והוא אינו עושה כלום והקב"ה אינו כן
אלא מה שהוא עושה הוא אומר לישראל לעשות ולשמור

God's ways are different than those of flesh and blood. Human beings instruct others to do something but don't do it themselves. God is not like this. Rather, He does what He tells the Jews they must do.

Accordingly, how could God violate Jewish law and permit the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*?

Should you ask, what else could have happened? If the Jewish people were not worthy of the *Beit HaMikdash*, what else could God do? He could simply have concealed the Temple, as the Talmud (Sota 9a) records He did with the *Mishkan*. We are left with the original question: How could the Temples have been destroyed?

¹ See *The Chasidic Dimension*, volume 4 based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XXIX, pp. 11-17

Halakhah (Kesef Mishna, Beit Habechira 1:17) provides only one exception that permits destroying the Mikdash – or a shul for that matter. One may only damage and destroy when the purpose is to rectify and repair the structure and to rebuild it in the same place. Accordingly, the only justification for the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* is in order to replace it with an even more splendid structure. Thus we find the Midrash states (Yalkut Shimoni, Yirmiyahu #259) that the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* was conditional on God rebuilding it. In fact, the Mordechai, a leading 13th century rabbinic scholar, writes (beginning of the 4th chapter of Masechet Megillah) in connection with damaging or destroying the Mikdash:

דההיא נתיצה בנין מיקרי

When damaging or destroying the Mikdash in a permissible fashion, the very act of destruction is, in fact, classified as building.

This leads to an astounding conclusion regarding the destruction of the Temples and the difficulties and tragedies in Jewish history which followed. According to Rabbi Schneerson's approach, the destruction of the second Temple is part of the construction of the third Temple. When we pray for the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash* at the end of the *amida* prayer three times a day, we are not praying for a process to begin at some point in the future. We are praying for the completion of a process that has already begun. The destruction is part of the rebuilding process. Similarly, when we pray for the *geulah* (redemption), we are not praying for something in the future. We yearn for the end of a process that has already started. The exile is part of the redemption.

This idea can help us understand Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's enigmatic description of the vision of Shabbat *Chazon*. Glimpsing Isaiah's vision of destruction is not contradictory to a vision of the third Temple. Just as the Talmud teaches that Moshiach was born on Tisha B'Av, we can glimpse a glorious future within the images of a horribly destructive past. *Shabbat Chazon* is the most appropriate time to catch a glimpse of the third Temple and to see not only what is truly possible, but to realize that the destruction and hardships throughout history are paving the way for a glorious future.

What do we see? The Three Weeks are an appropriate time to consider the difficulties facing the Jewish community. There certainly are significant challenges facing us – from the instability in the Middle East to the divisions between religious and secular and even within the religious community in Israel. All one needs to do is read the headlines for a new example of strife, controversy, and even hatred within our people. Despite the very real reasons for reflection and introspection, I get the sense that we don't pay as much attention as we should. Dr. Daniel Gordis (*Jerusalem Post* 7/4/13) notes how he thinks the Three Weeks "are typically marked more by rigorous attention to fulfillment of halachic prohibitions (like music, weddings, swimming, etc.) than by introspection." As a further example, consider the practice of making a *siyum* (celebration completing Jewish learning) during the Nine Days to allow meat. This practice is rooted in Jewish law, and it is very appropriate to celebrate Torah accomplishment. At the same time consider the announcement for a gathering in support of a charity taking place this week. A *siyum* would be made so meat could be served. Better yet, there would a *siyum* every hour on the hour. This seems like taking things a bit too far, and we may be losing sight of what the Three Weeks are all about.

What should we see? In the spirit of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, we should take notice of our many challenges but also of the possibilities. Yossi Klein Halevi, a fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute, wrote an article about the Three Weeks (*Jerusalem Post* 6/27/13). I would like to quote a suggestion of his:

Finally, one spiritually useful way to mark the Three Weeks is for each Jew to consider the community he or she most resents, and then contemplate a positive Jewish value embodied by that community. Think of the settlers' love of the land of Israel, of left-wingers' love of peace, of the anti-Zionist Satmar ladies distributing kosher food to any Jewish patient in New York hospitals, of Reform rabbis struggling to keep Jews in an open society Jewish. Without compromising your convictions, allow yourself to feel a measure of gratitude toward ideological opponents who are trying in their way to be worthy of the Jewish story.

בְּאֵין קִוּוֹן יִפְרָע עָם

King Solomon stated, "Without vision, the people will perish." (Mishlei 29:18) As Tisha B'Av approaches, we cannot ignore the Temple's destruction and the difficulties right in front of us. At the same time, we need to seek a glimpse of the third Temple and for those things that can help repair our community. We need to tolerate a vision of the destruction and try to imagine a vision of the redemption. Even during dark moments of despair, Shabbat Chazon presents a vision of what is truly possible, of what light waits at the end of the dark tunnel. The redemption can be achieved if we can conjure up such a vision.