



Think Positive for the Future, For a Jew it's Never Too Late

An interesting story is recorded involving the famous Greek Philosopher, Plato and Yirmiyahu Hanavi. It was at the time of the first Churban Beis Hamikdash at the hands of the Babylonian Empire. Among the people who traveled to Eretz Yisrael to see first-hand the tragic events taking place and revel in the great military victory was the Greek philosopher, Plato. One day while walking past the smoldering ruins of the *Har Habayis* he noticed an old, distinguished looking man sitting on the rocks and weeping uncontrollably. Plato walked over to him and asked "Who are you and why do you weep so much?" The old man replied, "I am the prophet Yirmiyahu and I mourn the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash". Plato then said to him, "If you are truly the prophet Yirmiyahu, the wise leader of the Jewish people, then I have two questions to ask of you: First, why does such a wise man like yourself mourn over the loss of a building made of mere sticks and stones? And second, don't the wise spend time thinking about the future and not the past? Yirmiyahu then asked the philosopher, "Tell me, do you have any questions that have been bothering you and you have no answer to them?" In reply, Plato began enumerating all his questions and the prophet proceeded to answer them all with ease. When he finished, Yirmiyahu turned to him and exclaimed "All my wisdom has come from this building of sticks and stones and now it is gone. Shall I not mourn?! "And your second question," he continued, "I cannot answer you because you will never understand!"

The *meforshim* explain that he could not explain to a non-Jew the concept that our mourning over the Beis Hamikdash is really **rebuilding** the future Beis Hamikdash. Our mourning is not simply supposed to be dwelling over our nation's past misfortunes. On the contrary, it is really looking toward the future. The Beis Hamikdash is the place where Hashem rested his holy *Shechinah*. Hashem wants to dwell among us, his beloved children. But when we sinned and showed that we didn't want that closeness to Him, he left us. When we show our longing for Him,

once again, through reminiscing our lost glory of the Beis Hamikdash in our homeland and realizing how much suffering we go through **because He is no longer with us**, in that way we are causing Hashem to want to come back to us.

Every sigh and tear expressed during the past three weeks was laying the bricks and the cornerstones for the future Beis Hamikdash. And as we come away from *Shabbos nachamu* and the culmination of the three weeks our thoughts must be on how to act and make our lives better and holier that Hashem will once again return to our midst.

In fact, if we just take a glance at the calendar for a moment, we would see that this coming *Shabbos Parshas Eikev* (August 8th) is actually *Shabbos mevorchim* of Elul! Inevitably in our minds we will ask ourselves, "Wow, is the month of Elul here again, are the Yamim Nora'im really just around the corner?!"

But in truth, if I may suggest, perhaps that is precisely why the month of Elul follows the Three Weeks in such close proximity. The message of the month of Elul is, now we have another final chance to better ourselves before the end of the year. Even if eleven months passed without any change, we shouldn't become disheartened. Now is the time. Now after the feelings of longing for Hashem's *Shechinah* we are ready to make use of the final month of the year in the best way possible.

It was the custom of the holy Chafetz Chaim zt"l, from time to time to seclude himself in his attic while making a *chesbon hanefesh* and giving himself *mussar*. In fact many stories abound from people who overheard some of the private "confessions" of this great *tzaddik*. Once during Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, he was overheard saying the following. He began to describe himself getting old and sick and then passing away. He continued describing the way his *neshamah* went up before the *Beis din shel maala*, where the angels began judging him weighing his *mitzvos* and *aveiros*, until they found him exactly half and half. He then began begging the *Beis din shel maala* that they be lenient and sway the scale in his favor. But then the voice of Hashem rang out answering him, "That is only for a dead person. You are alive and can go on accomplishing more. "And thereby the Chafetz Chaim began repeating over and over to himself with great emotion "You are still alive Yisrael Mier! You are still alive! You can still accomplish..." This can apply to us as well. Yes, one month can make "all" the difference! One month can tip the scale of the

whole year in your favor.

In a similar incident, a student once approached the holy Vilna Gaon with the following question. What should I do if I am nearing the end of the *Shemoneh Esrei* and suddenly realize my mind had wandered totally from the words? The Gaon immediately countered back, "What's the question? Start concentrating now!"

The *mashal* is told with thieves who tipped over a barrel of apples from a vendor and began grabbing the apples and fleeing. The hapless fruit vendor began to yell and shout for help until a passerby commented, "Instead of shouting for help, why not bend down and gather some of the fruits still left, so at least you'll salvage something for yourself."

The message that chodesh Elul gives us is that it is never too late. Even if the entire year we did not quite accomplish as much as we had planned, it is still not too late. The Mashgiach of Lakewood R' Nosson Vachtfogel zt"l, always used to say the mission of Elul is not to "*klopp Al Chete* and say *Vidui*, it is a time to rev up our energies and accomplish more than before in *avodas Hashem*." He repeated R' Yisrael Salanter's message that in his yeshivah, the *bochurim* were able to spend much more time learning on less sleep in *chodesh* Elul since we are given abilities in Elul to do more and accomplish more than the rest of the year.

For a Jew it's never too late. As long as the year is not over we can still do it. Think positive and get moving. The best tactic of the *yetzer* is to say "It's too late, this year is almost over, **next** year I will be better..." Don't wait, grab the moment!

I would like to conclude with mentioning, that with the help of Hashem, we have started a new Sephardic Torah Center here in Marine Park just this past month. Our members are very excited to now be able to follow their proper *Derech Hachayim* (way of life), and continue the rich Sephardic heritage, which has been passed down for generations. Although it is the end of the year, with many people away in the summer, what better time than now the final moments of the year to get this great project started and end the year with our correct *mesorah*. May Hashem continue to shower us with His goodness, giving our Torah center the success it needs to decimate the study of our holy Torah among our Sephardic brethren, Amen. | JE

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