



RABBI JUDAH

MISCHEL

Mashpiah, OU-NCSY  
Executive Director, Camp HASC

Dedicated L'Iluy Nishmas HaChaver  
Shlomo Michael ben Meir z'l

## Ker a Velt!

The *mikvah* in a small shtetl near Radin had fallen into disrepair; the community had neglected to make necessary improvements, until the mikvah was finally deemed unfit for use. When the Chofetz Chaim in Radin heard that the town had a non-kosher mikvah, he wrote a strong letter appealing to the community activists urging them to raise funds for the rebuilding of the mikvah, reminding them of its essential function in Jewish life. However, the heartfelt and direct appeal of the *Gadol haDor* went unanswered, and the local *Yidden* found every excuse why the project was not their priority.

Though advanced in years and of precarious health, the Chofetz Chaim called for an emergency communal *asifa* and travelled to the shtetl to address the *kehillah*.

“Friends,” he addressed them, “I’m already an old man, and don’t know how much more time I have in this world. Soon it will be my turn to stand before the *Beis Din shel Ma’alah*, the Heavenly court, and give an accounting for all I have done and not done. No doubt I will be taken to task

for allowing the town near my home to go without a kosher mikvah...”

The townsfolk shifted uncomfortably in their seats.

“To this *kitrug*, I will respond in my defense that despite my frail health and the immense demands on my time I tried my best; I wrote letters and made appeals that fell on deaf ears. What more ought to I have done?”

“Therefore,” said the aged sage and tzadik, “I have come this evening to ask a different favor of you. I am passing around a *shtar*, a legal document that attests to the truth of my words, so that I may present it before the Throne of Glory in my defense. I ask every man and woman of this town to please affix their signature as testimony that I have done my best and can not be held accountable for this great affront to Jewish tradition and embarrassment to *kedushas Yisrael*.”

Within minutes, a committee formed dedicated to the repair and renovation of the local mikvah.

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אלה הדברים - These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan in the desert, in the plain opposite the Red Sea, between Paran and Tofel

and Lavan and Hazeroth and Di Zahav.”  
(*Devarim*, 1:1)

Sefer *Devarim* begins with Moshe Rabbeinu’s ‘closing remarks’ at the end of his life, a lengthy *sichas mussar* of sorts. *Eileh ha-devarim*: Rashi explains these to be words of rebuke, where Moshe enumerates all the places where Am Yisrael angered Hashem. Therefore, מפני כבודם של ישראל, “out of respect for the Jewish Nation”, the Torah makes no explicit mention of the incidents in which we sinned, but rather merely alludes to them by mentioning the names of the places. They are referenced only with the names of cities, points on the map, where Jewish history unfolded — recorded in our sedra *b’derech remez*, by way of allusion, for the sake of the honor of our Nation. The exhortation and *mussar* inherent in their mention is enough for us to get the point, to remember our past indiscretions and to take heed for the future.

At a memorable *farbrengen* marking Yud Beis Tammuz in 1984 (marking the liberation from Soviet imprisonment of Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak, the Sixth Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch), the Lubavitcher Rebbe delivered an impassioned plea and urgent message:

“The destruction of the *Beis haMikdash* was not a one-time event. The *churban* is ongoing as the exile unfolds, and it continues to happen every day: כל דור שלא נבנה בית המקדש בימיו כאילו נחרב בימיו ‘Any generation that the Temple was not rebuilt in its days, it is considered as if that generation destroyed it.’ (*Yerushalmi, Yoma*, 1:1)

“Though more than 1,900 years have

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passed since the Temple's destruction, still, since today (and as of this writing), the *Beis haMikdash* is not built, it is considered as if it were destroyed today. Day after day, through it all, Jews have cried out עד מתי, 'Until when?! How long will this exile last?' Yesterday, and the day before that, for generations, we have been screaming עד מתי, and yet our Sages tell us that *today* the Temple was destroyed once again!"

The Rebbe painted a searing image. Imagine: the *Beis haMikdash* is burning before our eyes and standing nearby is a *Yid*. Even the most stone-hearted Jew would not stand idly by. They would cry out with all their strength and קער א וועלט, "overturn worlds", and do anything within their power to prevent the destruction. Who wouldn't do all they could to stop the burning?

.....

We don't know the name of the shtetl near Radin where townsfolk allowed the mikveh to fall into disrepair. Perhaps the omission of its name in the transmission and oral history of the story is deliberate, מפני כבודם של ישראל, for the sake of the honor of Am Yisrael, and in order not to shame the townsfolk who ignored the pleas of the Chofetz Chaim.

The *Churban* represents our world which is in a state of disrepair, in desperate need of renovation and fixing. Beginning with Moshe Rabbeinu's rebukes in Sefer Devarim, all the prophets and tzadikim of all generations have warned us regarding the causes of our exiles and tragedies, described the potential tribulations and horrors, and also urged us and

strengthened our hearts with the bright promises of repair and redemption.

Without going into shameful detail and rewatching the painful and embarrassing clips, isn't it enough just to make mention, *b'derech remez*, of Lod, Ramleh, Acco and the holy neighborhood of Shimon haTzadik? Have we forgotten the suffering of our brothers and sisters and the National degradation we endured from the rockets over Sderot, Ashkelon, Beer Sheva, Tel Aviv and even *Yerushalayim Ir haKodesh*? The image of foxes meandering across a desolate Temple Mount (*Eicha*, 5:18) is horrific enough; how can we even bear to watch our professed enemies' dark "victory celebrations" on *Har haBayis*?

This Shabbos, Erev Tisha B'Av the Rebbe's message is more urgent and relevant than ever: קער א וועלט היינט, *Ker a velt heint*, Overturn the world... Today! Now!"

Let us not delay in doing anything we can to awaken the honor of the Jewish People and bring redemption-consciousness *into every facet of Jewish life*.

Are we ready to sign our names on a legal document attesting that we have already done all we can? *Ker a Velt, heint*, now! ■

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