



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

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This *Shabbat* we bless the month ahead of *Chodesh Menachem Av*. During these days of the months of *Tamuz* and *Av*, we are meant to focus our attention on both the absence of the *Beit HaMikdash*, the root cause of its destruction, the longing for its being rebuilt, and the work we must engage in to repair the world and bring that reconstruction to fruition.

There is a challenging passage in the *Gemara* in *Masechet Taanit* (29a), which describes the scene of *Churban Bayit Rishon*.

תְּנוּ רַבָּנִי: מִשְׁחָרַב הַבַּיִת בְּרִאשׁוֹנָה, נִתְקַבְּצוּ כִּיתוֹת כִּיתוֹת שֶׁל פְּרָחִי כְּהוֹנָה וּמִפְתָּחוֹת הַהֵיכָל בִּידָן, וְעָלוּ לִגַּג הַהֵיכָל, וְאָמְרוּ לִפְנֵי: רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם! הוֹאִיל וְלֹא זָכִינוּ לַהֲיוֹת גִּזְבְּרִין נְאֻמִּים – יְהִי מִפְתָּחוֹת מְסוּרוֹת לָךְ. וְזָרְקוּם כָּלִפִּי מַעְלָה. וַיִּצְתָּה כַּעֲשֵׂן פִּיסַת יָד וְקִיבְלָתָן מֵהֶם. וְהֵם קִפְצוּ וְנָפְלוּ לַתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ.

The Sages taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the first time, many groups of young priests gathered together with the Temple keys in their hands. And they ascended to the roof of the Sanctuary and said before Hashem: Master of the Universe, since we did not merit to be faithful treasurers, and the Temple is being destroyed, let the Temple keys be handed to You. And they threw them upward, and the image of a hand emerged and received the keys from them. And the young priests jumped from the roof and fell into the fire of the burning Temple.

How are we to understand this difficult teaching? What does it mean that the young *Kohanim* held the keys to the *Beit HaMikdash*

in their hands? What is the significance of the proverbial *Hand of Hashem* taking the keys back from them? Why does the passage end with the tragedy of these young *Kohanim* plunging into the flames below? Simply stated, how are to unpack this Talmudic teaching to uncover the take home message we are meant to glean from it.

Rabbi Moshe Wolfson, zy'a, wrote that in addition to the tragedies that have befallen *Am Yisrael* during these three weeks, there are actually two great events which are said to occur during these days. Rav Wolfson suggests that it is on the 17th of *Tamuz* when *Boaz* marries *Rut*, hence setting into motion the birth of *David Hamelech*, from whom *Mashiach* will be descended. So too, our tradition teaches us that *Mashiach* will be born on *Tisha B'Av*. Rav Wolfson, suggests therefore, that these three weeks are in their essence days of great joy and anticipation. However those great lights of hope, have been covered over and clouded by the darkness and tragedies which have subsequently come to be associated with these days. The work of these three weeks is to strive to uncover those great lights.

With Rav Wolfson's insight, perhaps we can now revisit and begin to understand our troubling talmudic passage as well. The young *Kohanim* represent the future of *Am Yisrael*. Indeed the keys to our future, the keys to a better and brighter tomorrow, remain in our hands. The work of these three weeks is the work of repairing the world, one kind

deed, one friendship, one *mitzva*, one *tefila* at a time. The keys to revealing those great lights are indeed in our hands and within our reach.

Yehi Ratzon, may we be blessed to use these days wisely, to do much good, to reveal those great lights, and bring about that brighter tomorrow. ■

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