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GUEST DVAR TORAH

To Live Torah: An Insight into Galut and Geulah

As we find ourselves deeply entrenched in the *avodah* and *aveilut* of the Three Weeks, the words of a once longing and heartbroken prophet, linger in my mind:

על מה אבדה הארץ נצתה כמדבר מבלי עבר?¹

“Why has the land been destroyed, laid waste like a wilderness with no passerby? “

This outcry of Yirmiyahu HaNavi, which appears in the haftarah of Tish’a B’av itself, is called out amidst a lament of what has become of society and a deep sense of mourning for the churban that is speedily and surely on its way. Yirmiyahu himself presents us with an answer straight from Hashem:

ויאמר ה' על עזבם את תורת אשר נתתי לפניכם
ולא שמעו בקולי ולא הלכו בה.²

God replied: Because they forsook the Teaching I had set before them and have not hearkened to My voice, nor walked by it.

An important discussion relating to this *pasuk* appears in the Gemara Nedarim³ in which our *chachamim* try to understand the repetition in Hashem’s answer. What is the difference between not listening to Hashem’s voice and not walking in the way of Torah? Rav Yehuda says in the name of Rav that

the expression “nor walked by it” refers specifically to: “שאין מברכין בתורה תחילה”, they did not first recite a blessing on the Torah!

This is a true wonder! We are talking about a generation of Jews who have been engaging in the three cardinal sins along with other abominations and societal corruption! How can we understand the gravity of the failure to recite a blessing over the Torah – a failure which, according to Rav, led to the churban itself?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch⁴ offers a powerful insight into the significance of ברכת התורה. The fact that they said no Bracha before learning Torah means that they approached Torah like any other subject worth learning. “The Torah was to them merely one of their possessions. It was merely one of the things with which they occupied themselves. It was only another one of the tasks which they must accomplish in life.” When we make a bracha, according to Rav Hirsch, it places us before Hashem with a commitment to bring blessing to Him, fulfill His will and further His Kingdom. It removes self service and gives us the right mindset that the action following the bracha will be meaningful in our lives and for Hashem’s sake. The failure to recite the bracha can then be understood as a failure

1. ירמיהו ט"ז.

2. ירמיהו ט"ז.

3. נדרים פא עמוד א.

4. Collected Writings V. I, Tammuz III

to recognize that Torah is not just meant to be learned, it is meant to be lived. Torah is a pathway to the fulfillment of Divine Will, not a science to be studied.

While every bracha we make should ground us in our understanding that the physical actions we take here on this earth contain a spiritual element, the words of ברכת התורה in particular should serve as a constant reminder that Torah study must impact our hearts deeply as *Yidden*.

Rebbe Nosson of Breslov⁵ explains that the fault of *Am Yisrael* in the generation preceding churban lay in the lack of emunah, belief, in the words אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים וכו', that we are the chosen nation, different from all other nations. *Am Yisrael* was aware that they had sinned and strayed from God, and therefore assumed that He would not see them as the chosen people any longer and so, they “gave in” to their (already mistaken) belief that they were just like the nations.

According to Rebbe Nosson, there was a general lack of *emunah* that our relationship with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* could withstand our mistakes and treachery. Had they continued to bless the Torah and allow themselves to **believe** the words they were saying: that we were chosen by Hashem many

5. ליקוטי הלכות ברכות השחר ה:ז

generations ago, the *pintele yid*, the Divine spark that exists within us does **not** cease to exist however much we stray, then we would have been able to do Teshuva.

Instead, what we find is a generation that did not find its way back. The Torah became a source of information but not a wellspring of life and tragically the generation preceding churban engaged in sins we never want to dream of. Our task in this time is to right their wrongs, to pray fervently to Hashem to understand the merit and responsibility of being His chosen nation and to allow the words of Torah to shape us in every way so that our actions are favorable in His eyes.

A story is told that a student came to the Kotzker Rebbe and said “I finished learning all of Shas!” and the Rebbe responded: “And what did Shas teach you?”. Torah is most valuable when we let it seep from our minds into our hearts. When we *live* Torah we have really learned Torah. May we all be *zoche!* ■

Atara Starr is a passionate Jewish educator currently working in Midreshet HaRova. Atara teaches Tanach, Topics in Chassidut and Jewish Philosophy. One of the highlights of her time in HaRova is joining the girls for their annual trip to Poland where her passion for Chassidut and Jewish History come alive. Atara is originally from New York where she studied Bible and Jewish History in Stern and earned her Masters degree in Azrieli in Jewish Education. She lives in Mitzpeh Yericho with her husband and four children.

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