



RABBI AARON GOLDSCHIEDER

EDITOR, TORAH TIDBITS
RAV, THE JERUSALEM SHUL
BAKA, JERUSALEM

Faith in the Future Promise

(Midot HaRa'aya: Emunah # 11)

“That worldview, which will become apparent to all in the future, when the world will be renewed and emerge from its crushed state, when illumination will flow freely, without any blemish, is in truth the Jewish worldview even now...People of understanding go about it and taste at all times tidbits of sweetness of that higher delight to be disseminated by the universal enlightenment of the future.”
(Midot HaRa'aya, Emunah #11)

Rav Kook, in his powerful prose, is speaking about faith in the promised perfection of the future. Perhaps an effective way to illuminate this notion is to cite a teaching from Rabbi Soloveitchik who articulated a similar concept. He said that a Jew

experiences a distinctive concept of “time consciousness.” What he meant by that is that the Jew re-experiences past events in our history (**Retrospection**); and simultaneously places great value on the present moment as being precious and a sacred possession (**Appreciation**); and alongside these two sectors of time a Jew lives with “one foot” in the future, not as some distant point but as that future that is within reach and a future that directly shapes one’s present perspective and actions (**Anticipation**). (Reflections of the Rav)

One finds throughout Rav Kook’s writing the special emphasis he placed on the third component, to borrow the term which Rav Soloveitchik chose, “Anticipation.” “Anticipating salvation refines the life of a person, it expands a person’s wisdom, it enhances a person’s spirituality” (*Orot Hakodesh* 3, p. 353).

The well-known Talmudic passage concerning the specific questions a Jew will be asked by the heavenly court after passing from this world suggests that “awaiting the salvation” is of utmost importance. Rav Kook, in his commentary on this passage, employs the allegory of a watchman who vigilantly stands guard waiting days, months and even years, to see any sign or disturbance that requires his attention. He never leaves his post. However, perhaps more importantly, the guard, upon seeing something of note, must act upon it. Rav Kook said that the same is true regarding anticipating the redemption. The Jew must constantly be on guard to see if there is any




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movement that might need a response. And as soon as there is, an immediate and an intelligent reaction is called for and must be put into action. (*Ain Aya, Shabbat*, Chapter 2, *piska* 164).

Rav Kook expresses his unwavering confidence and faith that the Jewish people will take note of the signposts of the redemption which is unfolding: “The redemption continues. The redemption from Egypt and the complete redemption of the future are one unending action: the action of the strong hand and the outstretched arm, which began in Egypt and works through all the eventualities. Moses and Elijah are redeemers in a single redemption; the beginner and the ender, the opener and the closer together fill the unit. **The spirit of Israel hears the sound of the movements, the redemptive actions**, brought through all the eventualities until the sprouting of redemption will be complete, in all its plenitude and goodness. (*Orot, Yisrael U'techiyato*, chapter 28)

ZECHER LE'CHURBAN - ZECHER LE'MIKDASH

Jewish law established a category of practices and rituals to be observed in order to mourn the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. This category of *zecher le'churban* observances include the custom of leaving a small portion of one's home unfinished. This category of *zecher le'churban* is intended to be solemn and mournful. However, Rabbi Soloveitchik clarified that there is a similar but distinctive category with which we memorialize the destruction, called *zecher le'mikdash* which are meant to be educational and uplifting. They are meant to ignite an inner spiritual desire to once again restore those days.

A prime example of such a law is the use of



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salt on the table when eating bread. The use of salt is a reminder of salt which was placed on the altar along with the sacrifices brought in the Beit Hamikdash. The use of salt is not meant to be mournful. Rather, it serves as a regular reminder and perhaps bolsters are longing to once again see the restitution of the rites of the holy *avodah* (service in the Temple).

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's esteemed forebear, the Netziv of Volozhin, offered a distinctive reason for the custom of many to wear the white *Kittel* at the night of the Pesach Seder. When the paschal offering was eaten in Temple times, the law required that fine clothing be worn by all those that would partake in the holy meat of the *korban Pesach*. The custom was to wear white linen garments. The *Kittel* is meant to symbolize this dress. This custom is another example of a practice which is *zecher le'mikdash* in which one's yearning

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for the Temple's rebuilding is awakened and a taste of the future is felt in real time (*Hag-gadat Ha'Netziv Imrei Shefer, Introduction*). It is noteworthy that Rav Kook, in describing a Pesach Seder that he shared with the Netziv as a young man in the Volozhin Yeshiva, remembered the Netziv sharing this novel insight at the start of the Seder. Apparently the notion of longing for the Land and the Temple's rebuilding contained in this minhag left an impact on the mind and heart of Rav Kook. (Ibid. p. 309)

CHANUKAH MENORAH - ZECHER L'MIKDASH

Rav Kook suggested that the multiple branches and lights of the Menorah should be viewed as a symbol for the nation of Israel's multiple spiritual gifts: Torah, wisdom, morality, prophecy, justice, and compassion. These unique qualities are inherent in the people of Israel. These "lights" appear distinct and divided, leading, at times, to strife between the multiple camps. It is natural that each branch emphasizes their own principle and promotes it as being supreme. However, such competitiveness leads to internal friction among the nation of Israel.

Rav Kook believed that these internal conflicts will not exist forever. As we inch closer to the redemption, it will become clear that the

disparate lights actually share a common root and are really all part of one resplendent light.

This exalted vision, said Rav Kook, is reflected in the language of the *bracha* we recite over the lighting. The *bracha* recited is *l'hadlik ner* (to light a candle), in the singular (not *neirot*, in plural). The blessing we recite hints to the glorious future of the nation when brotherhood and the blending of disparate ideals will become a reality and will be fully celebrated. (*Olat Re'iyah* vol. 1, p.435)

In this sense, the lighting of the Chanukah Menorah represents the spark of the future lighting and an envisioning of the Menorah being lit once again in the Beit Hamikdash in Jerusalem.

FEELING THE LACK

"If a person comes along and says that they experience all the light of the Torah and mitzvot in the current time period, do not believe them. It is a sign that such a person does not understand the depths of *Tzfiyat Yeshuah* / anticipating redemption." (O. Orot Yisrael 7:6)

Rav Kook, in the teaching above, highlights the fact that a Jew, sensitive to a lack in true mitzvah performance in the absence of the Temple, is one who lives with a palpable yearning for the "geulah shlemah." Perhaps a good example of this is one who observes the "Sefirat HaOmer." Following the count each night for forty nine days, it is customary to recite a prayer for the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash. Rabbi Soloveitchik points out that praying for the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash is generally not said following the observance of any other mitzvah. Why here for Sefirat HaOmer? One is to recognize the deficiency in our counting the Omer in our day. The central component of the mitzvah, namely the offering of the Omer (barley) on

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the *mizbeach*, cannot be carried out without the Temple and the altar in place. (See Mesorat HaRav Siddur, p. 322-324).

RAV KOOK'S LONGING

It is known that during the first years that Rav Kook lived in Jerusalem, he regularly recited *Tikkun Chatzot*, the midnight prayer over the destruction of the Temple, at the Kotel. Rav Kook's childhood friend Avraham Sho'ar described how they would recite *Tikkun Chatzot* together during the Three Weeks: Every night at midnight, Avraham Yitzchak (Kook) would close the Talmud. We would descend the bimah, where we learned at night, and stand near the large furnace, remove our shoes, and sit on the floor to recite *Tikkun Chatzot* - two young boys weeping over the destruction.

"I once asked him in my childish naivete, 'Why do you weep so intensely during the reciting of *Tikkun Chatzot*? I also love Eretz Yisrael and my soul, too, yearns to immigrate to the precious Land.'" His answer, spoken with natural innocence, startled me into silence: 'You are not a *kohen*. I am a *kohen*!'" (Celebration of the Soul, Neriya, translation Jaffe, pp. 250-251)

Rav Kook, from a young age, internalized the longing for the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash and in a personal way, as a

kohen, envisioned a day that would bring him and of the people of Israel back to Jerusalem and witness the fulfillment of the *geula shlema* (full redemption).

LESSONS FOR LIFE:

- Create a permanent "brightness adjustment" to a dark situation.
- Add a prayer for the long-term welfare and safety of the world
- Thank God for living at this time in history. Think of the possibilities, blessings and opportunities that we have, which earlier generations couldn't have even dreamed of. ■



Rabbi Goldscheider's most recent OU Press Publication, "Torah United" on the weekly Parsha, can be ordered directly from Rabbi Goldscheider at aarong@ouisrael.org at a special price for Torah Tidbits readers.

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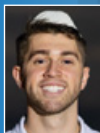
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