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OU ISRAEL FACULTY

Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

בס"ד

From Yericho to Yerushalayim

During Chanukah, we took advantage of the rare opportunity to visit the palaces of the Hasmonean kings in Yericho. This rich archaeological site is generally not accessible to the Israeli public, but opens several times a year through the coordinated efforts of the Binyamin regional council and the IDF. One of the many unique features of this site is the ruin of what is considered the oldest synagogue in Israel, dating to the Second Temple era. The synagogue faces west, toward Jerusalem. In keeping with the spirit of Chanukah, costumed street actors enacted a scene that may have taken place two thousand years ago, when the synagogue was about to be built. While one of the actors played the role of the urban Jerusalemite who advocated for building the synagogue, his foil, a simple farmer from Yericho, was initially shocked at the idea of a center for prayer outside of the Beit HaMikdash. A place in which prayer

would be distinct from the sacrificial rites of the Temple, in which people could assemble without the Kohanim conducting the service and blessing the people? Unheard of! A chance to pray and merit divine attention without having to make the costly and sometimes difficult trip to Jerusalem? Too good to be true! It was a thought-provoking presentation. We are so desensitized to the privilege of gathering together in our shuls and batei midrash to daven, learn and celebrate life cycle events, that we often don't fully appreciate what was once a tremendous novelty.

As we study the chapters of Divrei HaYamim detailing Shlomo HaMelech's building of the Beit HaMikdash, let's pause to reflect upon its relevance. Rav Wolbe teaches that in order to achieve the necessary degree of concentration when standing before Hashem in prayer, preparation is required. The first stage of preparation is based on a teaching in the gemara: Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Shimon bar Rebbi were sitting together. One of them opened by saying, 'One who prays must direct his eyes downward [toward the earth of the Land of Israel], as the verse [in Divrei HaYamim] states: *והיו עיני ולבי שם* and *My eyes and My heart shall be there for all time.*' The other responded, saying, 'One who prays must direct his heart



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upward [toward Heaven], as it says (Eicha 3:41) “נשא לבנו אל כפים” - *Let us lift our hearts with our hands.*” Meanwhile Rabbi Yishmael ben Yosi came over to them and inquired what they were discussing. They told him they were discussing prayer. He offered: My father taught that one who prays must direct his eyes downward and his heart upward, in order to fulfill both of these teachings.¹

Rav Wolbe explains that preparation for prayer requires that we nullify all thoughts of physical pleasure, elevating ourselves above the material world, and then imagine ourselves standing in the Beit HaMikdash. The very same eyes that can lead us astray should be used to visualize ourselves standing in the Temple, the locus of holiness on Earth.²

This degree of concentration requires a great deal of consistent effort. The more we know about the Beit HaMikdash, the greater the chance we have of achieving the visualization described by Rav Wolbe. The Beit HaMikdash was the ultimate expression of Kedushat Makom, holiness of place; it was a nexus of Heaven and Earth where the presence of the Shechinah could be most fully experienced. After the destruction of the Temple, we strive to connect to that source of holiness by directing our prayer toward the place where it once stood and where Hashem’s “eyes and heart” remain focused, and by directing our hearts toward the Heavens to where the full force of His presence has withdrawn. The paradigm for this attitude was set even while the Temple still stood, as evidenced by the ruins of the synagogue in Yericho. May we

merit to realize the great privilege of standing in prayer in all of the places in which we currently pray, and in so doing achieve greater power in our prayers, leading to the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash where we will once again serve Hashem as envisioned by Shlomo HaMelech. ■

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women’s Initiative Nach Yomi program

In the **OU Women’s Initiative Nach Yomi series**, currently in its third cycle, women scholars deliver a daily shiur on the books of Prophets (Neviim) and Writings (Ketuvim) at the pace of a chapter a day. Shiurim are geared toward learners of all levels who would like to participate in the two-year Nach Yomi study cycle. Visit the OU Women’s Initiative to register for additional content.



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