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Reflections on Galut During the Three Weeks

I recently completed Sefer Melachim II. Finishing the sefer left me with a profound sense of both sadness and responsibility. As I reflected on the rise and fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Yehudah, I realized that Melachim is not merely a record of our past — it is a mirror that asks us to examine our own lives today.

I learned about the righteous and wicked kings of Israel and Yehudah and read how those who abandoned the ways of Hashem ultimately brought tragedy upon themselves and the nation.

Today, we no longer have the same *ta'avah* (desire) for idol worship, making it even more difficult to understand what drew so many people to it. Yet countless lives were lost because they turned away from Hashem. Learning Nach and watching our galut unfold throughout our history is deeply saddening. We brought this galut upon ourselves. We had a choice. Although some kings returned to the ways of David HaMelech and led the people back to Hashem, others threw it all away, bringing about the destruction of the Beit

HaMikdash and our exile from Eretz Yisrael.

What does galut mean to me during the Three Weeks leading up to Tisha B'Av?

Galut means a lack of connection to Hashem and His Torah. Galut means a lack of unity among Am Yisrael. It can also mean a

lack of closeness within our own

communities and even with-

in our own families. That distance should make us sad. We should feel the pain that we are not doing enough to strengthen our relationship with Hashem and with one another.

The first step in addressing that sadness is recognizing it. We are not yet

where we need to be as Jews. The

fact that Mashiach has not yet come reminds us that our work is not finished.

So how do we improve ourselves? How do we acknowledge what is missing without allowing it to discourage us? How do we draw closer to Hashem?

I can only share the thoughts that come to my mind. We do not know Hashem's plans, but we do know the Torah He gave each and every one of us. We know the mitzvot He asks us to keep.



Perhaps the challenge is not that we don't know enough, but that we need to relearn what we think we already know. Sometimes reviewing familiar material, or learning it through a different lens, can open our eyes to new perspectives that deepen our connection to Hashem and to our nation.

Perhaps our commitment to learning — our desire to keep growing in Torah — is one of the messages of the Three Weeks. Maybe this is the perfect time to begin learning a new sefer or to return to one we haven't opened in years. While living in galut, we must look toward the future while learning from our past. History has a way of repeating itself if we fail to learn its lessons.

Although we no longer worship idols, we may still allow other distractions to pull us away from what truly matters. Perhaps spending less time on our phones would allow us to "find the time" to open a sefer, attend a shiur, or simply spend more meaningful time with family.

In this past Shabbat's special Haftarah, one of the Haftarot of the Three Weeks, we read words filled with sorrow and mourning. Yet they also contain hope — the hope that through teshuvah we can grow from our past mistakes.

So too, we can repair what is lacking through greater Torah learning and acts of chesed. Bikur cholim, hachnasat orchim, preparing meals for those in need, visiting the elderly, and simply calling a friend are all opportunities to strengthen the bonds between us.

Every day is a gift from Hashem. Time is one of Hashem's greatest gifts, and how we choose to use it says so much about who we are and who we aspire to become. Using it wisely should be one of our greatest priorities.

Our son, Eli Moshe ד"ה, understood how precious time was. He did his best to make every minute count. His example reminds us that each day is an opportunity to grow in Torah, mitzvot, and chesed—opportunities that should never be taken for granted.

The Three Weeks arrive just before Elul, giving us the opportunity to begin our process of teshuvah even before the month of mercy begins. We should always be working on ourselves. During the summer our routines often become more relaxed, and sometimes our spiritual routines do as well. While taking a break is healthy, we should never take a break from Torah and mitzvot.

Perhaps the Three Weeks, arriving in the middle of summer, remind us to remain on Hashem's path even while on vacation. Vacation where you can daven with a minyan. Keep your tzitzit on, even when it's unbearably hot. Dress with tzniut, even on water hikes. Listen to shiurim while traveling.

Poverty and *tzarot* do not take a summer vacation. Neither should our tzedakah or our chesed.

We may go on vacation, but we should never go on vacation from Hashem.

Every single mitzvah we perform brings us one step closer to the Geulah Sheleimah.

As I finished Sefer Melachim II, I realized that I was not simply reading Jewish history — I was reading the consequences of the choices our people made. That same story did not end with the last chapter of Melachim. It continues with us. Every decision we make, every mitzvah we perform, every act of Torah, tefillah, and chesed becomes another line in the story of Am Yisrael.

The Three Weeks are not meant to leave us in despair. They are meant to awaken us. Mourning is only meaningful when it

inspires growth. May we each use this time to strengthen our connection to Hashem, to His Torah, and to one another. If we do, then we will be writing the next chapter of Jewish history — a chapter that, with Hashem's help, will conclude with the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash and the coming of Mashiach במהרה בימינו, אמן. ■

Sara Zimbalist made Aliyah with her family almost 20 years ago to Bet Shemesh. She volunteers as an EMT in Ichud Hatzala.

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