

Loss of Temple Teaches Us Pain That is Caused by Senseless Hatred

By Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller.
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Jerusalem — On the 9th of Av we seek to understand the source of the senseless hatred that caused the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and dedicate ourselves to “senseless love.”

Mourning is never easy, nor is it meant to be.

Recognizing that there is an empty space that can't be filled with distraction or replacement is one of life's most awesome experiences. There are losses so profound that words, no matter how carefully selected, are cheap and banal at best, patronizing at worst.

When we have no words, there is no way to transmit information. A tragic result is that the losses that are most profound are often the ones least understood and most forgotten.

We have never met anyone who can begin to understand the enormity of the loss of the Temple, or Beit Hamikdash. When it stood, the Temple let us experience our spirituality directly. No external catalyst was needed. God's presence could be felt in every stone and corner. We have been mourning the loss of this connection for

thousands of years, and no longer have the words to convey its meaning. We go through the motions of mourning, but we need words to make it real.

Let us focus on what the loss of the Temple in Jerusalem two thousand years ago means to us in the new millennium.

The Temple as “Home”

The words Beit Hamikdash literally mean “The Sanctified House.” A house by definition is a place to find shelter and comfort and express our identity.

Without a house to call our own, we Jews are not comfortable in the world. We are not comfortable physically in the face of the persecutions from which our generation is relatively free. We are not psychologically comfortable unless we have spiritual means to be ourselves. Without it, our collective life is not only gray but painful.

Our need to express our most genuine selves is expressed sometimes in pursuit of justice. This is reflected in our social activism. Our collective need to give has been reflected in our caring and generosity. We are an extraordinary

interactive people, but still restless. The inner serenity that we seek eludes us; we are not quite at home.

The reason for this is that the world that fulfills us also distracts us from our search for our deepest sense of identity, and at times corrupts us. Other religions have recognized this and idealize “rising above” worldly desire. We recognize the power and beauty of the world as a catalyst for our capacity to live meaningfully, and we embrace it. But our two worlds, the outer and the inner one, sometimes remain separate realms. In the Beit Hamikdash, the spiritual world was not obscured by the physical; the two worlds existed perfectly together through the grace of God's presence.

God himself is referred to as “The Place” — He is the place in which the world exists. The engaging nature of the world conceals God from us and we drown in the endless pursuit of what the world cannot give us. The exception to this was intense realization of God in the Temple, where the physical stones revealed more holiness than they concealed. It was a place of intense joy. There we were truly home — we were ourselves, at our best.

The Temple as a “Bond”

The Beit Hamikdash was the glue that held us together as a people. This resulted in our developing a collective identity. Not only were we “at home” but we were one family with common goals and identity, while retaining our individual roles. The external differences between us faded, leaving

only our yearning for goodness.

When our ability to see the common bond of goodness that binds us together fades, our focal point changes. Inexorably, we focus on the limitations that separate us. Our sense of justice is degraded into ceaseless negativism and biting criticism. This eventually leads to senseless hatred.

Hatred is senseless when there is no desire to improve the relationship between oneself and another person. The fact that “they” are not you is enough of a threat to first fear and then hate them. The more different they are, the greater the threat.

The Temple's destruction was caused by senseless hatred. The factionalism and xenophobic fear of others set us on a 2,000-year journey toward rectification that is still incomplete. We are not at home. The world has not always been kind to us and we have not always been kind, to ourselves or to each other. We are held together by the world's hatred, rather than by love for each other.

While the physical return to Israel has given us for the first time in centuries a physical means of redefining our nationhood, is there anyone dishonest enough to say that we have successfully done so? Will we ever be truly home? Is there a way out?

Maimonides gives us a formula that has often been referred to as “senseless love.” We must reach out to each other without “agendas” that corrupt into another form of acquisition. The process is transformative in the way that it

changes our focus. This is what it consists of:

We are obligated to speak well of our fellow Jew. When someone displays his or her inner beauty, let us share it with another. The act of speaking positively allies us to each other. It makes us aware that we are on one team.

We are obligated to care for each other's material needs. By being aware of how frail and needy our bodies make us, we become more forgiving and tolerant.

We are obligated to seek out situations that will bring status to others. We give them the precious gift of self-esteem and simultaneously remove ourselves from center stage.

This three-step process is deceptively simple, yet it can change us dramatically. It can change not only our relationship to others, but can lead us to rediscover ourselves. The endless mourning for our lost selves and our tragic history will cease.

The 9th day of Av, which is the day we lost the First and Second Temples, is also the day the Inquisition edicts were signed more than 500 years ago. It is also the fateful day in 1914 that started World War I.

We have been defined again and again through hatred and persecution. Things can change. This year can be the beginning. It is a day that God himself has promised will be turned into a day of rejoicing when we use it to finally inspire ourselves to come home. ✪

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Tisha B'Av in Jerusalem

We climb an exotic path of narrow side streets, centuries old mud huts, stone houses lead us to The Wall. We are overwhelmed by a large crowd, equipped with prayer books, sitting on the ground reading “Lamentations” with sad voices, falling tears.

They remember Zion destroyed, exile to Babylon harsh years of captivity in Rome, the sufferings, our people endured through Nineteen Centuries ... I suddenly realize that I cry not from sadness For I hear the voice of redemption in the “Aicha” ...

The redeemed are sitting right next to me bursting forth with song in many dialects, I can hear the footsteps of the Messiah in the banging of hammers, noise of drills, building homes, schools, restoring Jerusalem.

With my ears I hear the lamentations of the past, within my heart I feel happiness and joy, to be with the returned exiles from lands of oppression, the vision of the prophets are visible reality: The city of despair is turning to cheerful glory!

—Herman Taube