

BILVAVI

**A TIME
OF LIGHT
& DARKNESS**

BEIN HAMITZARIM

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The Beis HaMikdash: The Container of the Shechinah

In the future, the fast days will be transformed from sadness and mourning to joy and festivity. But in the time being, where we haven't yet merited this, we are missing the *Shechinah* (Hashem's Presence) from the world, ever since the *Beis HaMikdash* was taken from us.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was called '*oro shel olam*', the "light of the world", and it was also called '*eino shel olam*', the "eye" of the world. The 'eyes' act like a *kli*, a container, that holds light; in the same vein, the *Beis HaMikdash* was the *kli*, the 'container' on this world, that held the light (*ohr*) of the *Shechinah*. Hashem is called a 'consuming fire', thus the *Beis HaMikdash* was needed to contain Hashem's light on this world so that we not be burned up by it.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was thus the container, the *kli*, that contained and held the light of the *Shechinah*. The *Beis HaMikdash* was [physically] destroyed; it meant that the container that held the *Shechinah* on this world was destroyed.

Tikva \ Hoping – Connecting To The Inner Dimension

We hope and await for it to be rebuilt, and this is not just a mere hope, but a hope that enables us to personally connect to what the *Beis HaMikdash* was. It is not merely a hope for something that was here and something that will be here.

Hope is called "*tikvah*" in Hebrew language, from the word '*kav*', "a line", resembling a string that connects man to that which is at the end of the line. Through *tikvah*, through hoping, one is essentially standing on the *kav*, on the line, which connects him that which he wants to connect to at the end of the line: the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash* and return of the *Shechinah*.

So when we hope for the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*, it is not to be understood as a hope for something which used to be here and is no longer here. *Tikva* is rather *to connect myself to something that exists in the hidden and inner dimension*; our *tikvah* is essentially that that we have a hope to reveal it outward from its hidden state into the external layer of reality, the physical world we see in front of us. But even before it is revealed, *it is there*. It *fully* exists; and it is there *completely*, in the *pnimiyus* – the inner dimension of reality.

We must know that the *Beis HaMikdash* that exists in *pnimiyus* was never destroyed. Only the *Beis HaMikdash* of physical reality was destroyed.

Through the power of *tikvah* – hoping and awaiting the *Beis HaMikdash* - we can connect ourselves, in the here and now, to the *Beis HaMikdash* that still exists in the inner dimension. Hoping for the

Beis HaMikdash does not simply help us feel connected to the *Beis HaMikdash* that will come in the future to this physical reality, but to the *Beis HaMikdash* which still exists, which has merely become hidden away.

In simpler and clearer language, it is explained in terms of “higher *Beis HaMikdash*” and “lower *Beis HaMikdash*”. The “higher *Beis HaMikdash*” [in Heaven] still exists, while the “lower *Beis HaMikdash*” [of this world] does not exist right now. The *Beis HaMikdash* still exists - it is just not openly *revealed* right now. The destruction that took place was only with regards to its revealed state; its revealed state was destroyed, but it continues to exist, and it has simply gone into the hidden dimension.

There are famous words of Chazal that “Whoever mourns Jerusalem, will merit to see it in its rebuilding” – which implies that one can see it *already now*, in the present moment, if he mourns it properly. How does a person see the *Beis HaMikdash* in the present, though, if it is not here? It is because the *Beis HaMikdash* is still here in *pnimiyus*. It is only gone in the external and physical dimension of this world.

Our *avodah* with regards to mourning the destruction is thus really two-fold. We have an *avodah* to connect ourselves to the inner *Beis HaMikdash* which still exists, but we also have an *avodah* to hope for the revelation of the external *Beis HaMikdash*.

We cannot hope for its external revelation if we are not connected to its inner dimension, however. This because one cannot hope for something which he is not actually connected with. Our entire hope, then, is that what exists in the inner dimension should become revealed outward.

Therefore, if one is not connected to the inner and existing *Beis HaMikdash*, there is no possibility for him to receive the revelation of the external *Beis HaMikdash*. If a person does not recognize the inner and existing *Beis HaMikdash*, how can he mourn the external *Beis HaMikdash*, when he doesn't know what a *Beis HaMikdash* even is....?

We are already 2,000 years in exile and we haven't seen the *Beis HaMikdash*. “Praiseworthy are the eyes that saw Yerushalayim in its glory” – those who saw the *Beis HaMikdash* were able to mourn it, because they had seen it. But our own physical eyes have never seen it. So how do we mourn over something we only heard about with our ears, but we have never seen it with our eyes?

If one already recognizes what the inner *Beis HaMikdash* is, he truly recognizes what it is, and he has pain that he can't see it; he is capable of crying from the depths of his soul as he mourns it.

A person cannot mourn over something he never saw. The more a person is connected in his soul to the inner *Beis HaMikdash* – to the *Shechinah* that dwells in our heart, which is present in each Jew¹ – he is one who can mourn, from the depths of his heart, over the *Beis HaMikdash* which has been taken away from physical reality. But if a person is not connected to the *Shechinah* in his heart, he does not know what the inner *Beis HaMikdash* is, so he cannot mourn over it. He cannot relate to it at all.

We will try to explain here as much as we can to connect ourselves to the inner *Beis HaMikdash*; to try to conceptualize what it is, even though there are no words that can possibly explain it.

Seeing The "Light of the World" - Within

The *Beis HaMikdash* is called "*oro shel olam*", light of the world. This exists in the dimensions of time, place, and soul. It was in the place of the world that was Eretz Yisrael, in Yerushalayim, on *Har HaMoriah*. There, the "light of Hashem" shone. The Gemara says that by the *Simchas Beis HaShoievah*, the light reached every home in Yerushalayim; it was a fuller revelation of Hashem's light.

This was how it looked in the physical place that was the *Beis HaMikdash*. How does it look in terms of our soul?

The physical *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed, but the *Beis HaMikdash* in the soul can become built in any person. The *Beis HaMikdash* was a place of *ohr*, of *he'aras panim* with Hashem; so too in our souls, we can have *ohr* in our soul and thereby have an inner *Beis HaMikdash*.

What is this *ohr*? On the first day of Creation, Hashem said, "*Yehi ohr*" – "Let there be light". The Sages say that entire world was filled with this *ohr*; it was an *ohr* that spanned one end of the world to another. This *ohr* is deep in every soul. Hashem saw that the wicked will not use this *ohr* properly, so He hid it away until the future, reserved for the use of *tzaddikim*. Where was it hidden? There are several approaches in the words of our Sages concerning where this *ohr went* (some explain that it was hidden away into the Torah², and others say that it went to other places).

¹ See *Nefesh HaChaim, Gate I*

² A statement of the Baal Shem Tov

A Time of Darkness

But let us understand: Our period has been described by the words of the prophets as “*And darkness shall cover the earth.*” Anyone whose eyes are a bit open can see that there is a darkness getting stronger each day in the world. It is like the plague of darkness which affected Egypt.

There were two stages in that plague – first there was a regular darkness, and then came a palpable kind of darkness which could be felt with the hands. In this final generation we live in, in the days we are found in, we are in need of redemption no less than how much we needed to be redeemed from Egypt. We are past the first stage of darkness; we are already in the second stage, where the darkness is palpable.

If someone doesn't feel it, he is [spiritually] blind. Our soul must first understand where it is found right now: we are in a period of palpable darkness. The words of our Sages were written about this; and we are now found in it. It is a kind of darkness that we can *feel*.

There is only one difference between today's darkness and the darkness of the plague of Egypt. In Egypt, they could literally see and feel the darkness; they were paralyzed. But in today's times, we cannot feel this darkness with our hands; those who are spiritually sensitive can feel a darkness, but it is not physical darkness; it is darkness of the soul.

If someone feels a bit of what's going on today, if he is even minimally sensitive to the situation, he sees a world of darkness when he looks at the streets today. He feels it as a painful reality. We must know that this is not a parable or an exaggeration. It is a very precise definition of the times today, with all its effects. We are found in a world of *palpable darkness!*

One who has never seen light in his life will think that his life is entirely light, for he has no concept of light and darkness. But if someone has seen or felt even a little bit of light in his life, he feels how he is in a dark world today. The last couple of years, and each continuing day, is a palpable darkness that is getting thicker and thicker. Our soul is experiencing more and more of a feeling of heaviness as we wade further into the thick darkness, no less than how wading into water with clothing makes us feel heavier and heavier as we proceed into it.

Finding The Light

In Egypt, the Jewish people had light in their homes, while the Egyptians suffered in darkness. What kind of light was it? Was it just a physical light? If the Egyptians were experiencing palpable darkness, the Jewish people were experiencing a palpable kind of light. An Egyptian can palpably feel

the darkness; a Jew, by contrast, can palpably feel light. [The Jew's soul can feel, palpably, the *ohr* of Hashem].

We must know clearly that the time we are in now is a plague of darkness; it is absolute and total. The Sages say that four-fifths of the Jewish people perished in the plague of darkness. We must understand that for every single day of our life as well, just as in the plague of darkness in Egypt, souls are perishing each day! The cemeteries are getting filled with new graves each day, and so are there souls dying each day. The ones who didn't merit redemption in Egypt will merit to be redeemed in the future redemption, but we must still know that souls are dying each day.

We must have an inner lens towards this, and not merely view this superficially. The superficial outlook is, "There is *yeridas hadoros* (descent of the generations) today. There are so many *taavos* (desires); there is a *yetzer hora* (evil inclination); there are *nisyonos* (difficulties)." This is all true, but the inner perspective towards the situation, which comes from the lens of Torah, is that we are in a plague of darkness!

Anyone with a little bit of open eyes can see that the world is plummeting, that society is breaking apart, and it is happening everywhere, it is even penetrating into the places of Torah. It is total darkness. But we do have *bechirah* (free will) to choose if we will connect ourselves to the darkness of the world, or to the 'light' which the Jewish people had in their homes then.

To Feel Surrounded By Hashem's Light

Everything said until now was just an introduction of what is trying to be conveyed over here; now we will get more to the point of this.

The *Baal Shem Tov* describes how a holy Jew should look like, how a person looks like when he really lives a Torah life and his existence is attached to the Creator. One of the ways how a person can conceptualize this, the *Baal Shem Tov* writes, is by imagining that one is surrounded by light, and that he is found in the center of the light, so that he can feel the light surrounding him and enveloping him: the light of Hashem.³

This sounds like something we should "imagine". Therefore, most people cannot relate to it, because they feel that it is very hard to "imagine" such a thing....

But we must realize that if we are in a plague of darkness, souls are dying each day, just as in Egypt. Every moment of the day, there is more and more palpable darkness. But because there is so much

³ Brought in *sefer Tzettil Kotton*

darkness, Hashem has allowed an equal amount of powerful light to come here. There is light coming down each day as well, and it is a light which is very easy to feel.

In the generation of the *Baal Shem Tov*, they had to work very hard to feel this light. Therefore, it was an arduous *avodah* to feel this light of Hashem surrounding oneself. But in our times, where the darkness is so thick, it has become much easier for us to feel light; because the thicker the darkness is, the more light we can come across. If one can just open up a small window in his soul – a small opening that is true – he can enter, through that small opening, into a place of palpable light.

Hashem hid away the original light of Creation for the future, and it will be revealed fully in the future, but in the End of Days which we are in, where we are at the end of “*Erev Shabbos*”, in *bein hashemashos* (twilight)⁴ – there is light and darkness here at once. There is palpable darkness here, which is causing many souls to fall, but there is an equally powerful amount of light here on this world, which can be reached by anyone who penetrates into that place in himself.

We must understand that these words are not a ‘lecture’ and they are not speaking of mere ‘ideas’. We are speaking of something that exists, like a person who comes back from a trip and describes his experiences. The words here are not merely a story being told over, though; they are describing a picture of the situation we are in.

If we want to give some kind of definition to this concept, it can be said that our *avodah* on this world now is to live within the light of Hashem and to let ourselves feel enveloped by it. This was always the *avodah* of *tzaddikim* in the past, thus it was only an *avodah* for rare individuals; and others were able to be warmed by this light when they came into contact with the *tzaddikim*. But in today’s times, this light is required in order for us to survive spiritually. If a person does not know of this light, it is almost definite that he will fall into the darkness of today.

The light of Hashem fills the entire universe, and one who truly feels it can feel it no less than how a person can feel the heat of a candle when he puts his hand near it. So too, a person can feel the warmth of this light of Hashem - palpably. One who lives enveloped by the light of Hashem is one who lives a true life. Even his body will be physically warmed from it! It is a light that is *palpable*.

When most people hear of this concept the light of Hashem and they try to relate it, they think it means *hashgacha pratis* (Divine Providence); to be aware, intellectually, that Hashem is running our life. In that way, a person can relate to feeling the *he’aras panim* of Hashem. This is definitely true, but it is not the light which we are describing here.

⁴ *Ramban*, quoting the *Zohar*.

Here we are talking about a light that can fill the entire soul. It is the same light which is mainly revealed in the heart, which can be perceived by the intellect, which can fill one's entire sense of existence, which fills the universe. It is that light which our soul yearns for and needs.

What We Mourn About During The Three Weeks

It is that very light which we mourn for when it is absent from our lives. When the *Beis HaMikdash* stood, a Jew could go there and palpably feel the light of Hashem. He knew that he was facing Hashem and he totally felt this light. That was a true kind of life of a Jew. It was a life of “*nochach p'nei Hashem*”, where a person could clearly recognize Hashem's existence; it was always a feeling always in front of the person, and he never forgot about this feeling.

How can a person cry and mourn over a *Beis HaMikdash* which he never saw? It is impossible to mourn over something that we cannot relate to. But when a person already knows of a life of *nochach pnei Hashem*, when he knows of what it means to recognize Hashem, he understands what it means to cry over the loss of the *Beis HaMikdash*. He understands what it means when a life of feeling Hashem's presence is taken away from us; he is aware of what was lost from the world.

The Light Is Close Within Reach

A Jewish life that is truthful is not just about keeping the *mitzvos* and learning Torah, which we certainly need to do of course. It is not just about having good *middos*, which enables our Torah to be a Torah of truth. All of those things are necessary tools that *bring* us to living an inner kind of life, to a truthful life, to a life of the soul, where our body is not contradicting the light in our soul and we are aware of Hashem's presence in front of us.

It is the most simple recognition that exists, and it must fill every person's heart. It means that we are never living alone⁵. We can live a life in which Hashem's presence fills our being completely. We are not talking about feelings of love and fear of Hashem, which are certainly important and holy feelings. We are talking about what it means to live a life of truth, in which Hashem's presence is always in front of us.

There is palpable darkness today, but there is also palpable light today to counter it. In previous generations, only the *tzaddikim* had access to this great spiritual light. But today, it is very close in reach to any soul who searches for it. It is close to us because its light is so palpable. When one palpably feels it, he can feel it even though it is beyond his actual level. One would have to be very blind *not* to feel this light.

⁵ See *Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus #019 – You Are Never Alone*

Superficial Life Vs. Inner Life

We have tried to picture here a very inner kind of life which we do not see when we look around us.

A person can live a life in which he does the *mitzvos*, learns Torah, works on his *middos*, and smiles at others – but he lives a superficial kind of life, where he lives on the outside of life, and he doesn't live the inner dimension of life. Inner life is the only true "life" that exists. It is the place in ourselves where we know and recognize the Creator.

But most people are concealed from the depths of their soul, and therefore they are mostly living through the prism of the body. Thus, most people view Torah, *mitzvos*, *tefillah*, *chessed*, and love from a superficial view, from the view of the body, with very little presence of intellect and soul.

Many people think, therefore, that life is simply about balancing our body and soul, and that we just have to work hard at this balance. But the deeper and truer perspective towards life is totally different than this; because you can't work hard on something (such as being in touch with the soul) if you don't recognize it.

Becoming Internal: Listening To Your Innermost Voice

There are two kinds of inner sounds we can hear. The higher level is called *kol*, and a lower level than this is called *bas kol* ("daughter of the voice"). We must at least hear [the *bas kol*], the scent of the *neshamah*. We must try to listen as deep as we can to the depth that is in ourselves.⁶ The depth you recognize is the gateway and opening that you can use to go deeper and deeper into your soul.

All of us have an inner point which is already somewhat revealed to us. Each person is at a different level, but each person can still relate to an inner point in himself, on his own level; it is the deepest part of oneself that he currently recognizes. It is the task of each person to listen deeply to his *neshamah*, to the innermost voice in himself that he recognizes.

Each day, listen to the voice in yourself that wants the truth. (If one doesn't set aside time for this each day, he will still experience the inner voice of truth at times, but it will not be enough to penetrate into the soul.) When one gets used to listening to his inner point, during a time of quiet where he is disconnected from all people and he concentrates all his senses on trying to feel this quiet place in himself, he will slowly find it beginning to expand. Then he will be able to explore it deeper and deeper, as more and more entranceways become opened within him.

⁶ See *Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus #010 – Inner Listening*; and *Reaching Your Essence #03 – Hearing The Soul's Innermost Voice*

This is describing a very actual way to live life; it is not an idea.

Again, it is hard to describe the areas of our soul to anyone who is not in touch with it, who doesn't recognize it already from within himself. But one thing we must all know is that there *is* such a place in ourselves, and that one can keep going deeper and deeper into this place.

One needs to set aside time every day where he listens to himself each day, and if he does so every day, he will get further and further into his inner world, and he will undergo an inner transformation.

What To Think About During The Three Weeks

During these days of the Three Weeks, each person on his own level should become familiar with the innermost place in oneself, the inner voice in you which only listens to truth and doesn't hear any other voices. It is otherwise known as the 'private *Shechinah*' that is in each soul.

This is the deepest part in yourself which you already recognize: it is the point of truth in yourself which you can [consciously] hear each day, and you also hear it suddenly from time to time. Realize that it doesn't fill your life as much as it should. Then, you can feel pain at the fact that it doesn't.

That is the true mourning of the destruction of the 'inner' *Beis HaMikdash* which is equally accessible and within reach of all people. We can all mourn over its loss because we can all relate to the voice of truth in ourselves; we can all feel sad and mourn over the fact that the voice of truth within us is not as dominant in our lives as it should be.

Beyond this level of mourning can come another level of mourning. The level described until now pertains to the self, but the next stage of the mourning involves *ahavas Yisrael* (love for the Jewish people). The more a person has grown internally, the more he recognizes truth; therefore, it should bother a person that other Jews are not living with those very truths he knows about. This is how one can connect himself to the general "pain of the *Shechinah*", which mourns over the absence of G-dliness in the world.

External Inspiration Vs. Inspiration From Within

When it comes the Three Weeks, many aspiring people want to truly mourn and to feel the pain of the *Shechinah*, so they learn the words of the Sages that describe the *Beis HaMikdash*, such as *Maseches Middos*, and the places in the Gemara that discuss what was there and what we are now missing, and through this, people inspire themselves. There is some truth contained to this approach, but it is an external form of inspiration, in which a person awakens himself using sources that come from outside of the soul.

In contrast, the *avodah* described in the words here are about how a person can connect to the meaning of the destruction, from *within his soul*. It connects a person on the soul level to feel the meaning of the destruction and to have true mourning that comes from within. However, it is an approach that can only be understood by a person who lives an inner kind of life.

Mourning and Yearning

During these days (and ideally, during the rest of the year as well), each person should set aside time each day and listen deeply to his innermost voice of the *neshamah*. He should feel pain over the fact that this voice of truth is not recognized by most of *Klal Yisrael*.

But we also await each day for “*the new light [that] shall shine forth on Zion.*” One must try to conceptualize what a world will look like when it is filled with the light of Hashem, where Hashem’s presence is recognized by every person in the world, where His endless light fills the world; and then one should try to live in this light.

When a person does this, and he also begs Hashem to open his mind and heart to know this and feel this, and that he should be able to live within Hashem’s light - he can keep doing this (contemplating it and praying to Hashem for it) until he clearly feels Hashem’s presence in his life and how His endless light fills all of existence.

In Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, these concepts really cannot be described or expressed by any words. But we can all conceptualize and try to imagine a kind of life where a person is living an inner life, where he recognizes and feels Hashem in his heart, where he can palpably feel the light of Hashem.

May we all merit complete *teshuvah* from the depths of our heart and accept His *malchus*, willingly and happily, and that the *Beis HaMikdash* be rebuilt, completely. *Amen, V’Amen.*



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