

BS"D Parashat Aikev 5782

Historic Patterns of the 15th of Av

The 15th of the month of Menachem Av (which was last Friday) is not a major holiday even in the calendars of the most observant among us. However, if one looks beyond the individual incidents to analyze the entire repertoire of this day, the message is explosive. It reveals no less than one of the fundamental ways that HaShem controls history and where He is leading the Jewish nation in our time. Tu Be'Av is a guarantee that the words of the prophets will come true, that we shall return to Eretz Yisrael, and the third Bet HaMikdash will stand erect on the Temple Mount.

I will explain:

Six important, but seemingly unrelated events occurred on the 15th of Av in different generations:

1- In our desert experience:

On this date, it became apparent to the generation of the meraglim (scouts) who refused to enter the Land and were sentenced to die over a 40-year period, that the punishment had been paid in full.

Every year on the 9th of Av, the anniversary of the meraglim's rebellion, the men who had refused to enter the land would dig their graves and lie in them the entire night; many would die (about 15,000) and the living would return home to wait for the next 9th of Av. In the final year the routine was

repeated, but no one died. The feeling was that perhaps there was a mistake in determining the new month and the 9th day, so they waited every night in the graves until the 15th when the moon is full, and it was certain that the 9th had passed.

Henceforth the 15th became a day of memorial and thanks to HaShem.

2- The first generation in Eretz Yisrael

In order to ensure the orderly distribution of the homesteads among the twelve tribes of Israel and within the respective tribes, restrictions were placed on intermarriage between the tribes. This was done to prevent a situation of land transfer between the tribes. For example, if a woman of tribe A had a parcel of land, and she were to marry a man from tribe B, there was risk of that piece of tribe A land being transferred to tribe B.

This ordinance was binding on the first generation. The restriction was lifted on the 15th of Av and was considered a cause for celebration.

3- The tribe of Binyamin

There was a prohibition on marrying into the tribe of Binyamin after the disastrous incident of the "Concubine at Givah". The prohibition was later revoked on the 15th of Av.

4- Gathering of the Wood

During the periods of the Bet HaMikdash, this day marked the end of the yearly cycle of gathering wood for the altar, and a special sacrifice of thanksgiving was offered.

5- From Yeravam to Hoshea

Upon the division of the Holy Land into two kingdoms following the death of King Solomon, Yeravam Ben Nevat, ruler of the breakaway northern kingdom of Israel, set up roadblocks to

prevent his citizens from making pilgrimage to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, capital of the southern kingdom of Judah. These were finally removed after 200 years by Hoshea ben Elah, the last king of the northern kingdom, on the 15th of Av.

6- The martyrs of Betar

The Jewish dead of the city of Betar were permitted by the Roman authorities to be buried after an extended period of prohibition imposed by Hadrian (Adrianus).

The fortress of Betar was the last holdout of the Bar Kochba rebellion. When Betar fell, on Av 9, 3893 (133 CE), Bar Kochba and many thousands of Jews were murdered with great cruelty, and there was a prohibition on burying the dead. When they were finally brought to burial on Av 15, 3908 (148 CE), an additional blessing Hatov Vehameitiv was added to the Grace After Meals in commemoration.

At first glance these six historical incidences have no connection; but in fact, they all possess a common denominator. Each episode began with a normal and desired state of affairs, with the situation changing radically due to the sins of the people, proceeding to HaShem's intervention to bring closure of the undesired, deviant and unnatural period and restoration of the inherent, positive, natural flow of our lives, as follows:

1- In the normal sequence of events, all the Jews who left Egypt were destined to enter the holy land. However, the meraglim caused a radical change in "normal" events and six hundred thousand Jews died in the 40-year sojourn in the desert. On the 15th of Av in the 40th year the normal status of Jews entering Eretz Yisrael came about.

2- In the normal flow of lives, halachic Jews can marry each other. The prohibition on tribal intermarriage was a pause in this natural flow of life. It was revoked in the following generation and normalcy restored.

3- The prohibition on marrying into the tribe of Binyamin, which was enacted after the disastrous incident of the "Concubine at Givah", was revoked on the 15th of Av and we returned to the previous status of full tribal intermarriage.

4- During the periods of the Bet Hamikdash, this day closed the yearly cycle of gathering wood for the alter, and to be continued the following spring, and a special sacrifice of thanksgiving was offered.

5- On this day, the last king of the northern tribes Hoshea ben Ela revoked the 200-year prohibition placed by Yeravan Ben Navat closing the border between north and south. These were removed more than 200 years later by Hoshea ben Elah, the last king of the northern kingdom, placing closure on this sad period in our history.

6- The Jewish dead of the city of Betar were permitted by the roman authorities to be buried after an extended period of prohibition imposed by Hadrian (Adrianus). It was an important closure to the infamous dictates of the Romans.

So, the schematic outline of these auspicious events is inherent normality followed by an undesirable interruption, ending with closure and return to normality.

Based on these historic patterns one could reach some interesting conclusions:

1- In the long history of our people, the inherently normal state of affairs, as desired by our Father in Heaven, is our presence and sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael. However, 2000 years ago as a result of our deviating from the dictates of the Torah this natural mission was interrupted and we were exiled to the four corners of the world, creating a grotesque imbalance in our historical goals as HaShem's chosen people. And in our own time, HaShem has begun the closure of this interruption and we are on track to rebuilding our national home, with the eventual return of the Jewish people and the

restoration of classic Jewish life centered around the holy Temple on the Temple Mount.

2- The inherent “natural” presence of a Jewish neshama is to be in Gan Eden, from where we all came. The interruption of this natural state occurred with the reality of our birth in this material world. The death of a Jew is the closure of his personal mission and return to his inherent natural state in Gan Eden.

3- The only true inherent “natural” state is pre-creation when HaShem was the only entity that WAS. Creation of heaven and earth with all their innumerable, miscellaneous, myriad spiritual and material entities interrupted this state of total perfection, which will be followed in, who knows, how many billions (or hundreds of billions) of light years with the closure of creation and return to “nothingness.”

In the meantime, we exist as Jews, as HaShem’s chosen people. We need not dwell on thoughts which are beyond our rational scope, when all that HaShem demands from us is to love and be in awe of Him and live our lives according to the mitzvot in our Torah.

Shabbat Shalom

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