

Va'et'chanan-Tisha B'Av 5780

BS"D Parashat Va'et'chanan Week of Tish'a Be'Av 5780

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The Temple Mount as the “Truma” of Eretz Yisrael

This Wednesday night is the 9th of Menachem Av (the 9th day of the 11th month of our calendar year Menachem Av, counting from the previous month of Tishrei [Rosh HaShana] - that is our 9-11). For the 1950th time, we will mourn – in that exquisite unity that binds all Jews – the death of the 600,000 Jews in the desert who turned their backs on Eretz Yisrael and will feel the fresh anguish at the destruction of our two temples and subsequent expulsions into galut.

Notwithstanding the depths of our sorrow, there exists an ongoing reminder that the third Temple will be built and that HaShem will restore our nation to the grandeur that was once Am Yisrael. That reminder is Har Habayit – the Temple Mount – in Yerushalayim.

What makes Har Habayit the eternal repository of sanctity?

The Midrash (Devarim Raba 11,10) teaches that Moshe beseeched HaShem 515 times to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. This equals the gematria (number equivalent) of the word Va'et'chanan. Moshe did not request a homestead of lush rolling land, nor did he request a palatial home befitting the first king of Israel. He desired to enter the land for one

sole purpose, as the Gemara (Sota 14a) says: "Was it to eat of its fruit or find pleasures of the Land that Moshe wished to enter? No! It was for one reason. Moshe prayed for the opportunity to keep mitzvot in Eretz Yisrael."

It would appear that the Gemara is at odds with the Midrash in describing Moshe's prayer to HaShem.

The Midrash relates that when HaShem denied Moshe the privilege of entering the Land, Moshe pleaded: "If I cannot enter in a living state, let my body be brought into the land." HaShem's answer was no! "Let me enter in the form of an animal so I can tread on the Land." No! "Then let me enter as a bird without touching the Land." No"!

Now, if according to the Gemara, Moshe wanted to enter the Land to keep its mitzvot, why would it satisfy him to enter as an animal or a bird?

We must, therefore, conclude that there is a spiritual experience that even an animal or a bird can experience – and that is fulfilling the mitzva of just being present in the land.

If the Land is so holy that even its air space is sanctified (the Zohar says that Eretz Yisrael is directly under the kisay ha'kavod – the Heavenly Throne – and the earthly Yerushalayim is directly under the heavenly Yerushalayim, influencing the spirit of all who are present there), the question arises: How can we live as "normal" human beings, doing the things people must do in order to maintain their personal and national lives? How do we get up in the morning and go to work, deal in commerce and industry, fix our cars when they break, eat, sleep, and attend to our bodily needs? The whole Land should be as the Kodesh HaKodashim (Holy of Holies) of the Temple, if even an animal is stirred by the sanctity of the Land.

I suggest:

Newly grown crops of wheat, grapes, and olives in Eretz Yisrael are designated in the Torah as “tevel,” and no part may be eaten because of their sanctity (all other fruit and vegetables are “tevel” by rabbinic decree). The resultant punishment for this transgression is the termination of one’s life prior to the time allotted to him at birth. The prohibition is annulled by separating the required tithes as stated in the Torah. One of the tithes is “teruma gedola,” which is given to a kohen. The amount of teruma from the Torah is one grain of wheat (or grape or olive) from an entire crop. Not being a farmer, I would give a wild guess that there are millions of grains in a decent-sized wheat crop, which would make the teruma gedola totally insignificant in terms of quantity. Nevertheless, this tithe and the others are the factors determining one’s life expectancy.

We can conclude that this one single grain concentrates in itself the sanctity of the entire crop; because the spiritual world has a different set of physics and chemistry where size, space and numbers are irrelevant.

Thus, I suggest we live normally and function in Eretz Yisrael despite its inherent sanctity. This is feasible because HaShem has separated a piece of teruma that contains in it the necessary amount of kedusha, rendering the rest of the country kadosh – but less than the status of the Holy of Holies.

That “piece” of teruma is Har Habayit.

The Rambam states that, even in the period when the halachic status of Eretz Yisrael in terms of the agricultural laws was changed by the destruction of the first Temple, the halachic status of the Temple Mount was never altered since the time of King Solomon. Hence, we may offer up sacrifices even in our times (if we could overcome several halachic obstacles, such as the exact place of the altar and who is an authentic kohen).

The Temple Mount is the holiest site in the Jewish world, and proof of this is what the great Ramban wrote to his son after arriving in Yerushalayim, “Whatever is more holy is more desecrated – Yehuda is more desecrated than the Galil, and Yerushalayim is the most desecrated of all.”

If you are shuddering at the thought of how many “karet” transgressions one performs when ascending the Mount, permit me to fill you in on a little halachic geography.

The Temple Mount is made up of two distinct areas. In the center is solid bedrock, which is surrounded by landfill made by Hordus (Herod) when he turned the Temple Mount from a square into a rectangle. His Bet Hamikdash was 100 amot high (50 meters) – equivalent to a 25-story building. Hordus built it with huge stones, like those in the Kotel. The sheer weight of the Bet Hamikdash was much too heavy to be held up by landfill. This means that even though we do not know where the exact site is, we do know where it is not; and, therefore, we tread only on the landfill. Indeed, the Kotel is no more than a supporting wall for the landfill to prevent slippage. The only area where karet is punishable is on bedrock in the area of the Temple. There is no punishment of karet for entering the surrounding Mount even for the most severe types of tuma.

[On a personal note: Were it in my power, I would close off the Kotel and hang a big sign on it saying, “All this because of sin’at chinam (unjustified hatred),” and then direct the people to Har Habayit.]

In the reality of our contemporary religious, geopolitical and military situation, whoever controls the Temple Mount controls Eretz Yisrael emotionally and religiously – and his G-d is victorious. It is clear that religious emotions are the dominant factors here in the Middle East.

On the human, practical level, the reality on the Temple Mount will be decided by numbers. If in the past very few Jews

ascended the Mount in a year, the numbers are now in the tens of thousands. Things will change when the numbers will be in the hundreds of thousands. At that time, the pressure from the population will force the changes necessary to remove the abominations which are presently there.

The Haredi segment will join and even lead the great numbers, as they are beginning to see that the halachic decisions of the Dati-Leumi rabbis are the ones which are pertinent for our generation.

The most important mitzva in our time is the one that Jews “tread on with their heels” (Parashat Aikev) – to ascend the Temple Mount and declare that here we will build the third Bet Hamikdash.

It is enlightening to recall the words of our leaders at the time the second Bet Hamikdash was being built, as recorded in the book of Ezra chapter 4:

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: אֲמֵן אֶת־מִצְוַת־יְהוָה

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1: When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin (Samaritans and others) heard that the exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the G-d of Israel,

2: they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, “Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your G-d and have been sacrificing to Him since the time of

Esarhaddon King of Assyria, who brought us here."

3: But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the other heads of the families of Israel answered, "You have no part with us in building a temple to our G-d. We alone will build it for the Lord, the G-d of Israel..."

When the time comes (may it be soon) for us to rebuild the Bet Hamikdash, the nations will offer the Medina "foreign aid" to be partners in HaShem's new world. And we shall say to them, as did our fathers, "You have no part with us in building a temple to our G-d. We alone will build it for the Lord, the G-d of Israel."

This Tish'a be'Av will mark the 1950th year since the destruction of the Second Temple, by the cursed Romans in the year 70 C.E.

Look around. Do you see any descendants of the ancient Romans, or for that matter, a descendant of any of our long-lost enemies? And with just a little patience, we will not be able to find a descendant of any of our latter-day enemies.

So, for now, we will have to weep for what was and contend with our increasing anxieties stemming from the realities of our present-day challenges, but never taking our eyes off the three Bs:

B careful **B** healthy **B** here

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Have a meaningful fast and Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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