

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Parashat Devarim / פרשת דברים

The Present-Memory of Yerushalayim

One theme of Tisha B' Av is the power memory. Towards the beginning of Eicha we read about Yerushalayim remembering her good times and bad times.¹

Yerushalayim remembers the days of her poverty and her miseries, [and] all her precious things that were from days of old.

Rashi explains that the setting of the verse is in exile where Yerushalayim sits and recalls her destruction – the days of her poverty. Then, thinking back further in time, she remembers her days of glory and all of the precious gifts that God bestowed upon her.

The Sefat Emmet² notes that while this act of remembering is painful, it also contains an element of hope. So many other cities, cultures and religions fade away from memory as their people move on in history. Yerushalayim, though, personifying the Jewish people will not and cannot forget its past. Her gifts are divine and therefore etched into her very essence. No matter how painful the act of remembering, Yerushalayim cannot forget her relationship with God that transcends time.

Perhaps another perspective on the ever-presence of Yerushalayim emerges from a different comment of the Sefat Emmet.³ He was puzzled by a well known Talmudic statement that any generation in which the Beit HaMikdash is not rebuilt is considered like the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed in its day.⁴ He asked that so many righteous and worthy generations have passed in the past two-thousand years – is it possible to say that these generations were worthy of having the Beit HaMikdash actually destroyed during their time?

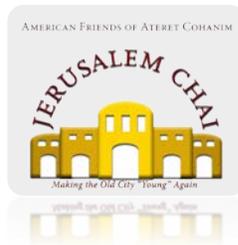
The Sefat Emmet response is penetrating. The Gemara cannot be taken literally that the responsibility to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash is placed independently on each and every generation.

¹ Eicha 1:7.

² Sefat Emmet, parshat Devarim, s.v. "be-Eicha"

³ Ibid, s.v. "Kol Dor."

⁴ Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1.



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Rather, it is the aggregate of merits amassed over the many generations of exile that will make us worthy of the Beit HaMikdash's rebuilding. Based on this, the Gemara's harsh statement does not refer to any generation that does not rebuild the Beit HaMikdash, but rather any generation that does not do its share to add to the amassed merits. Such a generation is truly worthy of having the Beit HaMikdash destroyed in its day.

Based on this, the Sefat Emmet noted that, from a spiritual perspective, Yerushalayim and the Beit HaMikdash are constantly being rebuilt, little by little by little. This, he said, is the meaning of the blessing that we recite every day in Yerushalayim: "blessed are you Hashem, the Builder of Yerushalayim (*boneih Yerushalayim*). Instead of identifying God as the *future* builder of Yerushalayim, we refer to this process in present tense – that Yerushalayim is constantly being built, minute by minute, second by second.

Perhaps this is another reason that Yerushalayim cannot forget its glory days. These memories are not an ancient relic – an item from the past that has no bearing on the present. Yerushalayim perceives itself as being constantly rebuilt with each *mitzvah* performed by the Jewish people. It is a present memory that is becoming a reality.

May we merit that our generation performs its job of furthering the rebuilding of Yerushalayim!