

Parashat Devarim – Tisha B’Av 5772, 2012:

Encountering Yermiahu and Ourselves

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, my sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, and Shifra bat Chaim Alter, and the *refuah shelaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, Yehonatan Binyamin Halevy ben Golda Friedel, and Moshe Reuven ben Chaya.

“Hashiveinu Hashem alechah v’nashuvah chadash yemeinu kekedem”
 (“Enable us to return to You Hashem and we will return, renew our days as they were in former times”)

We recite this famous verse, found at the end of *Megilat Eichah* (Lamentations), on the night of Tisha B’Av. It was written by the 7th century BCE prophet Yermiahu nearly 2700 years ago, and contains some of the most memorable words of this *sefer* (book). In my opinion, this statement defines the entire period of the Three Weeks, the Nine Days, and Tisha B’Av proper. By focusing upon this verse and what it is trying to teach us, I believe we can find new meaning during this time of national mourning for the destruction of the *Batai Mikdash* (Holy Temples), and for all of the tragedies that have befallen our people.

Yermiahu is calling upon the Jewish people to do *teshuvah* (repentance) and, in doing so, asks Hashem to be the motive force behind this undertaking. Note that we first beseech Hashem: “*Hashiveinu Hashem alechah*” and only afterwards do we proclaim, “*v’nashuvah*.” The theme of Hashem taking the lead in the *teshuvah* process is one that is well known to us all. It is the conceptual and practical basis of one of the 19 *berachot*

(blessings) that we recite three times a day in the silent prayer known as the *Shemoneh Esrei*, or the *Amidah*: “Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near, our King, to Your service, and cause us to return in perfect repentance before You. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who desires repentance.” (Translation based upon the *Artscroll Siddur*) Clearly, the formulators of this prayer, the *Anshei Knesset Hagadolah* (the Men of the Great Assembly), saw Hashem as the facilitator of our national return. This theme is repeated, as well, in the Monday and Thursday *Tachanun* (Supplication) portion of our morning prayers: “You [G-d] Who opens a hand for repentance, to welcome rebels and sinners: our soul is confounded by the abundance of our depression – forget us not eternally. Arise and save us for we take refuge in You.” (Ibid.)

Without a doubt, we need Hashem to help us initiate the *teshuva*h process. He helps us begin this spiritual journey, and welcomes us in our quest to draw close to Him. Our journey, however, cannot begin unless we recognize that the need to do *teshuva*h through self-analysis. *Chazal* (our Sages of Blessed Memory) called this course of action “*cheshbon hanefesh*” (“self-accounting”). In modern terminology, we call it “introspection.” Dictionary.com defines this as: “observation or examination of one's own mental and emotional state, mental processes, etc.; the act of looking within oneself.” This is actually a very difficult act to perform properly, since it requires great integrity and the willingness to recognize, rather than to rationalize away, one's faults. It is far easier to see the failings of others. The ongoing challenge, however, is to unabashedly find these shortcomings within ourselves, for only then can the possibility of authentic *teshuva*h exist. Perhaps, therefore, when Yermiah asks Hashem, “*Hashiveinu Hashem alechah*,” he is asking the Master of the Universe to help us engage in this

difficult process of introspection, and thereby enable us to examine our actions in the light of unadulterated truth and honesty. Then, and only then, will we gain the necessary self-insight to return unto Him in *teshuvah shelaimah* (complete repentance).

May *Hakodesh Baruch Hu* (the Holy One Blessed Be He) “*Hashiveinu Hashem alechah*,” so that we may truly “*v’nashuvah*.” Then, we will finally renew our relationship with Him as in former times, “*chadash yemeinu kekedem*.” May this happen soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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My audio *shiurim* on *Tefilah and Haskafah* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/7sp5vt3>

*** I have recently posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik’s** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here:
<http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

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