

Parashat Devarim - Tisha b'Av 5784, 2024:

“*A Time of Reconciliation*”

Rabbi David Etengoff

ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

“*Hashiveinu Hashem alecha v'nashuvah, chadeish yameinu k'kedem*—Cause us to return to you Hashem and we will return, renew our days as in days of old.” This verse at the end of *Megillat Eichah* is a well-known *pasuk* in Tanach, as it is the concluding verse of *hachnasat sefer Torah*. The *Targum Ketuvim* suggests it refers to *teshuvah*: “Bring us back to You and we will return to You in complete teshuvah, renew our days to be good, once again, as they were in the good times of the past.” In contrast, the Ibn Ezra (12th century) interprets *hashiveinu* in a physical sense, as a plea to Hashem to return us to *Yerushalayim*. As such, *v'nashuvah* is an appeal to Hashem to enable us to worship Him in the rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash*. These very different analyses led the contemporary Israeli scholar Dr. Yael Ziegler to opine:

Whatever its precise meaning, this verse features striking mutuality between God and Israel. Though the community petitions God to initiate reconciliation (“Return us to You”), it continues with a promise to mirror God’s action (“and we will return). Without God’s initiative, reconciliation seems impossible, but Israel assumes its share of responsibility for the reestablishment of the relationship. (*Lamentations: Faith in a Turbulent World*, page 465)

Dr. Ziegler opines that the first part of our *pasuk* gives voice to the “striking mutuality between God and Israel,” our overture to Hashem to “initiate reconciliation” and our willingness to share in the “responsibility for the reestablishment of the relationship.” These crucial themes bespeak the depth of loneliness we endure when we feel divorced from the Almighty and our consequent longing to bridge the gaping chasm between us. In her general observations on the second part of our verse, Dr. Ziegler notes that it summarizes the way we have always viewed history:

The request [for reconciliation] simultaneously looks forward and backward, encapsulating a timeless Jewish perception of history. Steeped in an unbearable present, the beleaguered community yearns for a glorious past (*kedem*), anticipating the reinstatement of that glory in a revitalized future.

What historical moment is being referenced by the term, “*kedem*?” *Midrash Eichah Rabbati* on our *pasuk* suggests its meaning parallels that which we find in *Sefer Malachi* 3:14: “*kimei olam uchshanim kadmoniot*—as in past days and former years,” namely, “like the years of *Shlomo HaMelech*.” In his commentary on *Megillat Eichah*, Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein *zatzal* (1860-1941) describes the years of *Shlomo HaMelech* in this manner: “The glory of Hashem filled the *Beit HaMikdash*, *Yehudah* and *Yisrael* were as numerous as the sand on the seashore, and every man sat under his grapevine and fig tree.” (Translation my own) With Hashem’s help, may the realization of this vision, come soon, and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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