Don’t Forget that You Forgot!

Ben-Zion, my beloved son, got married just before the Three Weeks. Before the wedding, I went to my mother, and placed an invitation on the bed my father used to sleep on – and I couldn’t help it... but then I burst into tears and became so angry with myself. Isn’t Mother’s grief enough – must I add to it? Yet to my surprise, after many months, I suddenly saw my noble mother so calm and relaxed. And she said to me, “At last, I see I’m not the only one missing him.”

A dear student of mine has a father with Alzheimer’s, whom she cares for with endless devotion. I constantly remind her of a different type of forgetfulness she may be stricken by: “Don’t forget your Dad as he was! Don’t drown in the depressing chores and forget about the glorious father you once had!” I know that it is only because of the memory of “that” father, she is able to continue the arduous treatment of “this” father. Memory is not a commemoration of what was but the eternity that awaits us if only we know that it is only because of the glorious father you once had! Memory is not a memory of “that” father, she is able to say the word ‘terrible’ (literally G-d is awesome, but also mean terrible).” In a situation in which G-d’s awesomeness was now absent, Yirmiyahu was not able to say the word ‘terrible’ at the start of the Amidah prayer – “Heret hakham be’mivzar – Yirmiyahu.

When you omit the word ‘terrible’ you are essentially saying ‘it’s not so terrible’. There’s no Temple anymore? ‘It’s not so terrible’. There’s no Temple anymore? ‘It’s not so terrible’.

Ben-Zion’s chupa was a different type of chupa, a Corona chupa. Without the elderly, without grandparents. And just like the inauguration of the Second Beit HaMikdash, when the young men rejoiced, the old men, remembering the real joy, stood and wept.

But with a magnificent view of the Temple Mount, as everyone sang: aes asher bereshit – “If I forget you, O Jerusalem...” I gazed into the distance and saw Mother, smiling and tearful. She was singing with us ikke melekh – “crown of her husband, enter in peace.” The crown had been returned to her head.

She remembered that we have forgotten.

One of the signs of the coming of Mashiach is הוהי אתך וקרדום – “And Truth will be lacking,” i.e. not present. Chazal say this means that it has become flocks upon flocks” (Sanhedrin 97a). The difference is huge: something that is no longer here will be forgotten, but if we understand that it (Truth) is actually still here, just broken into pieces, and we will gather together (flocks upon flocks) in peace, we will discover it.

In other words, if you don’t know how to yearn for the Mikdash, if you’ve forgotten what we’re yearning for... yearn for each other. That will be sufficient, for when the flocks gather, רוח כל על עוף צאן – “Rachel comes with the sheep.” Rachel Imeinu doesn’t need us to remember her; all she wants is that her children return to their borders.

When the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed, our enemies placed an idol in the Sanctuary. “Yirmiyahu stood and did not say נэр – Yirmiyahu was not able to say the word נэр at the start of the Amidah prayer – ליהי הָאֵל הַגָּדֹר הַגִּבֹּר, הקט נэр תבנש.”

When you omit the word ‘terrible’ you are essentially saying ‘it’s not so terrible’. There’s no Temple anymore? ‘It’s not so terrible’. There’s no Temple anymore? ‘It’s not so terrible’. My relationship with my children is cold and distant? ‘It’s not so terrible’. Hundreds of thousands are sick with Corona? It happens.

Yes, all year round I preach comfort: your relationship is difficult? Take comfort in your children. You’re finding it hard to make ends meet? At least you have your health.

Not now though. Not at this time of the year. Now we say: אני אפרט! It is terrible! And G-d is Awesome!

And that is why our Sages did indeed reinstate the epithet נא rather than נא into our prayers. Precisely in the place where His crown fell, so to speak, G-d asks that we restore it, that we remember our Father as He was in the Palace. We shouldn’t walk past His desolate House and say לא נא, it’s not so bad.

We should remember that we have forgotten.

Hadar was an Israeli soldier killed and captured by Hamas during Operation Protective Edge in 2014. His body has not been returned to Israel.

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