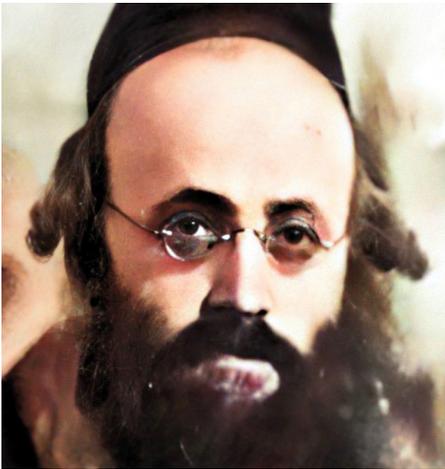




The Importance of “Seeing” the Churban

ominous clouds of destruction and dispersion hang heavily over the Three Weeks. On the one hand, Shabbat Chazon is just one day, no different than the others during this period leading up to Tisha B'Av. On the other hand, an insight of Rav Kalonymous Kalmish Shapiro, the Piaseczner Rebbe, suggests there might be more to it than that.

The Rebbe, as is well known, delivered inspirational *derashot* during the last years of the Warsaw Ghetto, a collection of which were published as *Aish Kodesh*. As it happens, the final piece in that remarkable work, the very last *derasha* Rav Shapiro delivered, just a few short days before the deportations from the ghetto began, took place on Shabbat Chazon, July 18, 1942.



The Piaseczner Rebbe.

Imagine discussing the *Churban* while living through one: what would you say?

The Rebbe begins with a simple question. Why is the universal custom to call this Shabbat “Shabbat Chazon”? While the name comes from the opening words of the *haftarah*, וַיִּזוֹן יִשְׁעָיָהוּ בֶן אֲמוֹץ (the vision of Yeshayahu), this is insufficient to truly answer the question; after all, we read a *haftarah* every Shabbat and Yom Tov and yet Shabbat Chazon is one of the very few

instances when the words of the *haftarah* define the entire Shabbat. What deeper message is conveyed by these words?

The Midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 3:2) notes that 10 different expressions are used throughout Tanach to describe the process of prophecy. The Midrash lists terms such as *dibbur*, *amira* and *tzivui*, but it is *chazon* which is characterized as קָשָׁה מְכֻלָּן, the most difficult and painful form of prophecy.

Rav Shapiro explains this assertion based on the experience familiar to us all – but highlighted poignantly by what was occurring to him and others in the ghetto – that there is a vast difference between *hearing* about something and actually *seeing* it. It's one thing to hear about a tragedy, but it's quite another to witness it.

Typically, the prophet was told about a future or potential calamity – he *heard* the bad news. However, there were rare instances when G-d actually *showed* the prophet something terrible that was going to happen to the Jewish people. וַיִּזוֹן יִשְׁעָיָהוּ – the prophet had a vision, he actually saw the calamities that would befall the nation, and that was קָשָׁה מְכֻלָּן, a uniquely painful experience.

Nevertheless, continues the Rebbe, it's typically from the most intense pain that a glimmer of hope emerges. He notes that when G-d first spoke to Moshe and told him the time of the redemption had arrived, He mentions both that רָאָה רְאִיתִי and כִּי יִדְעֹתִי אֶת מַכְאֲבָיו וְאֵת עֲנֵי עַמִּי, “He has seen the affliction of His people,” and “He knows of their pain” (Shemot 3:7).

Obviously if G-d sees what's happening then He knows about it as well; why the need for both phrases?

The *Aish Kodesh* explains that even though there was a higher, positive purpose to the servitude in Egypt, once G-d truly saw, as it were – רָאָה רְאִיתִי – the pain of the Jewish people, then כִּי יִדְעֹתִי, all G-d knew, all He cared about, was how He could relieve

their pain. In other words, it was only after the true depth of *Bnei Yisrael's* suffering was seen that the process of redemption began.

The Rebbe suggests that it is because of this dialectic we refer to “Shabbat Chazon.”

The word *chazon* gives appropriate expression to the horror of the impending destruction and, at the same time, it also indicates that G-d truly “saw” the pain of the Jewish people. As a result, He was already planning the future redemption. Thus, the *haftarah* concludes on a high note, צִיּוֹן בְּמִשְׁפָּט תִּפְדָּה, “Zion will be redeemed through justice and righteousness” (Yeshayahu 1:27).

Rabbi Shapiro's powerful words – inspired by a prophecy from the original *Churban* and delivered during the *churban* of the Holocaust – articulate a profound principle of Jewish belief.

The arc of Jewish history bends inevitably towards redemption. No matter how difficult or painful it may be at times, the overall direction remains the same – *chazon* is followed by *nachamu* and *galut* eventually leads to *geula*.

A few years after the Piaseczner Rebbe and millions of others were murdered, we merited the establishment of a Jewish State!

In the merit of our continued mourning over the original *galut* may we soon merit the complete and final *geula*.

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