

GIFTS FOR TISHA B'AV

Category: Devarim,Devarim

When will Tisha B'av become obsolete?

Is It That Kind Of Holiday?

This week, a woman asked me if Tisha B'Av is considered a holiday. When I inquired about her reason for asking, she replied that she'd heard me say many times that the law states that in honor of every holiday, a husband must give his wife a gift, whether it is clothing or jewelry, so she wanted to know if this was that kind of holiday.

A similar question is asked right at the start of the era of the second temple. The Jews of Babylonia asked the Kohanim and prophets in Jerusalem whether they still needed to observe Tisha B'Av as a sad day. Now that the Temple and all the sacrifices and services were restored, did they still need to mourn the destruction of the first temple on the 9th of Av as they'd been doing for so many years?

In order to understand why this question came up, it is necessary to understand what was going on around the building of the second temple.

The Second Temple

In the year 539 B.C., Koresh, King of Persia, conquered Babylonia. This marked the end of the Babylonian Exile and the beginning of the days of resettling Israel. The Persians gave freedom of religion and autonomy. The moving of resettling Israel was at first very exciting, but in actuality only 42,000 Jews returned to Israel. The majority of the people stayed in Babylonia, modern day Iraq, (approximately half a million Jews.)

When they built the Temple, the congregation was very poor. The boko of Ezra says that at the dedication of the Second Temple, "Many of the Kohanim, Leviim, heads of the nation and elders who had seen the First Temple, cried loudly at seeing this one, while many people rejoiced loudly and one could not distinguish between the voices of celebration and the voices of crying."

In other words, the Second Temple was much simpler than the first one, built by King Shlomo. The elders, who saw the splendor of the First Temple, cried from anguish while the younger ones rejoiced at having a Temple.

The Second Temple was also missing some things that were in the First Temple. When King Shlomo built the Temple, he knew that it would one day be destroyed, so he built underneath it secret tunnels to hide the Ark. During Yeshayahu's reign, when he saw the demise of the Kingdom of Judah, he ordered the Ark hidden in the tunnels. When the Second Temple was built, the Ark was not in it; the Holy of Holies held only the Even Hashesiya (foundation stone).

In the Torah portion of Terumah, where G-d commands "Build for me a Temple and I will dwell amongst you," the first thing G-d commands them to do is build an Ark. Why? Commentaries agree that the Ark the main purpose for building the Temple, yet here, in the Second Temple, it was lacking!

There were also other things hidden away, in addition to the Ark. In the Book of Exodus, when the Torah first tells of the Manna, we read an interesting command. "And Moshe said '...take a jar of Manna and place it before G-d as a remembrance for generations."

Rashi comments that "During the days of Yirmiyahu, when he rebuked the Jews for not studying Torah, they responded that if they stopped working and started studying Torah then they would have nothing to live on. Yirmiyahu then took out the jar of Manna and said to them, here you see the word of G-d...this is what your forefathers lived on, G-d has many messengers for providing sustenance to His followers."

This jar, which reminded the Jewish people of the longest lasting miracle in history, 40 years of bread from heaven, was also missing from the Second Temple.

In the Book of Numbers, after Korach objected to the Priesthood and was punished, the Jews were still not satisfied and wanted it proved beyond all doubt that Aharon was the true Kohain. G-d then commanded Moshe to take a staff from each tribe, write the name on each one and place them in the Tent of Meeting. "And the man whom I choose his staff will blossom....and it was the next day...and behold, Aharon's staff had blossomed and grown almonds."

G-d then commanded Moshe to place Aharon's staff beside the Ark as a remembrance. That staff was also missing from the Second Temple.

Two additional items were also missing from the Second Temple:

Everyone recognizes the word "Moshiach". What is the meaning of this word? Moshiach refers to anyone anointed with the Anointing Oil. During the times of the Temple, when a High Priest was chosen or a King from the House of David was appointed, they were anointed with this oil and the Kohain that was anointed was called the Kohain Hamoshiach, the Anointing Kohain. This anointing oil was also missing from the Second Temple.

The High Priest wore a Breastplate, which had stones with the names of the 12 tribes engraved on them. Within the folds of this garment was a parchment with G-d's name, the Urim V'tumim, through which the High Priest was able to ask G-d whether or not to go out to war. The answer would appear through different letters on the Breastplate lighting up, yes or no.

The story is told about Chana, the mother of Shmuel the prophet—that she went to the Temple in Shiloh to pray for a child. Eli, the High Priest, inquired through the Urim V'tumim about the woman. The letters that lit up were kaf shin reish and hey, which spell out the word k'sheira, meaning acceptable. Eli, however, put them together differently and read the word shikora, a drunkard and thought that she was drunk. This is an example of how the Kohain asked questions through the Urim V'tumim. Yet the Urim V'tumim, too, was missing from the Second Temple.

What Was the Answer?

If so, we can now understand the question of whether there was reason to mourn the Temple's destruction or not.

Now, the Rambam writes that "during the Second Temple they did not fast on the 10th of Tevet or the 17th of Tammuz...and even though they did not have to fast on the 9th of Av...they fasted on that day."

But it would be interesting to know what the prophet's answer to this question was!

While there is an answer, it is not clear and decisive. The prophet says "The fast

of the fourth (month) and of the fifth (month) will be for Judah days joy and happiness and holidays.”

At first glance, it is not clear if this answer applied to the days of the Second Temple or the days of Moshiach. But the answer is found in the preceding verses where the prophet Zecharia gives the conditions for when this will happen: “And let no one think evil of his neighbors in your heart.”

Everyone knows that it is forbidden to do something bad to your fellow. There is a higher level than that, which is not speaking badly of your fellow, which is the prohibition of Lashon Hara. But the highest level is of not even thinking bad of your fellow!

The Alter Rebbe says about this verse that if such a thought should enter his head, he must push it away, literally like a thought of idol worship. Just as it is unthinkable for a Jew to worship idols or to renounce his beliefs, it should be as unthinkable to have bad thoughts about another person. When we behave in such a way, then the 9th of Av will become a day of joy and happiness and a holiday.

As to the question when to buy one’s wife a gift for Tisha B’Av... the answer is when Moshiach will come....

May it be speedily in our days.