

CHABAD
DED
RESEARCH UNIT

גה

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 27 July 2012 - 8 Menachem Av 5772
Sedra Devarim - Ninth of Av

THE OPTIMISTIC VIEW

THE SCENE IS ABOUT TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO. THE TEMPLE HAD BEEN DESTROYED, FOXES RAN IN AND OUT of the ruins. Titus, the Roman Emperor, had ordered the Temple site to be ploughed over, thus fulfilling the Biblical prophecy that “Zion would be ploughed like a field.”

Four Rabbis were making their way towards Jerusalem. As they approached Mount Scopus and perceived the ruins they tore their garments. Closer still to the Temple site they glimpsed a fox darting out of the Holy of Holies. Three of the Rabbis began weeping; their cheeks were drenched with tears. This used to be the most precious innermost chamber of the Jewish people, entered by the High Priest just once a year. Now it is in ruins!

Suddenly the three Rabbis noticed their friend, the fourth Rabbi, named Akiva. They were startled to see that he was smiling!

“Akiva, why do you smile?”, they asked.

“My friends, why do you cry?” he retorted.

“If the place which was barred to all except the High Priest on Yom Kippur is now overrun by foxes, shouldn’t we cry?”

“This is why I smile” answered Rabbi Akiva. “There are two Prophecies - one that Zion will be ploughed like a field, the other that old and young will dwell happily in the streets of Jerusalem in the time of the Messiah. Now that the first prophecy has clearly been fulfilled, we can be sure that the second one will also be fulfilled...”

“You have comforted us, Akiva, you have comforted us!” was their reply¹.

Rabbi Akiva lived through the cataclysmic Destruction of the Second Temple yet he was still capable of tremendous optimism: the Messiah will soon come and the Temple will be rebuilt. This optimism and expectancy suffused his Torah teachings², which live on vibrantly in the pages of the Mishnah and Talmud and in the reality of Judaism today.

Nearly two thousand years later, can we feel a similar optimism? The date of this Shabbat is 9th Av, the day on which both the First and Second Temples were destroyed. When Yom Kippur falls on Shabbat we indeed fast on that day, because Yom Kippur represents an exalted day of holiness. In the case of 9th of Av, a day of mourning for both Temples, and for all the tragedies which have since befallen us, we do not fast on Shabbat itself. The fast is pushed onto the next day. This means we stop eating at sunset on Saturday and the fast extends until nightfall on Sunday.

The 9th Av represents the tragedy of Exile – but also the hope in the Redemption. Now, do we look at things with the gloom of the three rabbis in the story, or with the joy of Rabbi Akiva?

Let us consider the Haftorah which is always read on this Shabbat, a mournful prophecy by Isaiah about the impending destruction of the Temple³. But this ends on a note of hope: the promise of Redemption. Further, the Haftorah begins with the words ‘A vision of Isaiah’. The great Chassidic leader Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev said – this is really a vision of the Third Temple⁴.

In addition, there this year, the 9th of Av falls on Shabbat, the day which expresses ‘a taste of the World to Come’. The Sages tell us that when the Messiah comes, the Fast of Av (and all mourning fasts) will be transformed into a festival. When the 9th of Av falls on Shabbat, this inner festive and redemptive quality is more apparent⁵.

With these points in mind, let us try to look with the gaze of Rabbi Akiva, and see not the darkness of destruction, but the visionary radiance of Redemption...

1. Makot 24b. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.6, p.126. 3. Isaiah 1:1-27. 4. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 2 p.357. 5. See *Sefer HaSichot 5751* vol.2, p.723-4.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL



53

SEDRA DEVARIM - NINTH OF AV

AIR SHOW IN JERUSALEM

“Mum, look at this! There’s an air show at Duxford this Sunday. Can we go? We could bring sandwiches and drinks and have a great picnic”. Sammy waved a colourful leaflet in his mothers face. His mother looked at it.

“Oh dear!” she said. “This show is on the Fast of the Ninth of Av. It’s a fast day. That day the Jewish people is in mourning for the destruction of the Temple. We can’t go. Sorry, Sammy.”

Sammy walked out of the room, his face clouded over. What was the big deal, he thought. So what - it was all so long ago anyway.

He stomped up to bed, sulking, and fell asleep. As he slept, he dreamt. He was somehow flying through a blue sky. Looking down he could see the sea, islands dotted here and there. Approaching was a shoreline, and soon he was flying over a beautiful, hilly land, studded with villages of white houses basking under olive trees. The roads, winding along, were full of people travelling by donkey cart or on foot, all moving towards one destination, which he soon saw to be a beautiful city upon a hill-top.

Jerusalem. Somehow, he knew this must be it, though he had never even been there. And yes, there was the Holy Temple, with streams of people going towards it. He could hear music and joyous singing coming from there, everyone united in joy in serving G-d. Sammy wanted to be there, but he knew he was only an observer from far above.

Suddenly, the scene changed, he was still in the air but the scene below, though still the same place, was quite different. The land was desolate. In the villages, instead of children playing in the streets, as he saw before, people were sitting and weeping. And, Oh! Jerusalem was no longer the golden, joyous city. It lay desolate, in ruins.

And the Temple! Where was it? In its place were blackened stones. Only one outer wall, on the west, stood up straight and proud. Sammy covered his eyes. He didn't want to see it! Then again, the scene suddenly changed... Sammy gasped.

Jerusalem was now a city of tall beautiful buildings, with shapes he had never seen before. There was an airport nearby, and a constant stream of large and small planes, helicopters and futuristic looking aircraft landing and taking off. This was better than any air show!

In the streets of the Old City crowds of people of all races surged towards the magnificent Temple. "Moshiach!" breathed Sammy.

He woke up, excited. It had been such a vivid dream! One thing was for sure - this Ninth of Av would be different from all previous ones. Now he really wanted the Temple to be rebuilt..

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***