



Ohr Yerushalayim News

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News This Week

מזל טוב

Mazal Tov to Dr & Mrs Michael Wilks on engagement of their grandson Shloimy Saperia to Ettel Brochah Davis.

על אלה אני בוכיה

Dani Epstein

The search, discovery and rescue of the 12 boys and their coach in Thailand has gripped the world with their story. Myriads prayed for them in a multiplicity of languages and people from across the globe offered their help. Every twist and turn of this daring and dangerous operation has been covered in great depth by the world media.

Since the Chofetz Chaim was well-known for his observation on world events, and how they either affect or ought to influence us, what do the Thai boys have to offer us, if anything? Allow me to meander a little.

I have been around for a few years, and like most people my opinions have either matured or evolved over time. My experiences, knowledge that I have gained, events I have observed and studied all contributed towards the mindset I have today. So as the years rolled by, when the period of the three weeks came around my thoughts slowly altered, shifting with the sands of time and events that affected me directly, indirectly or apparently not at all. This naturally meant that my approach to this annual event subtly evolved, as did the accompanying emotions. I went from mourning to mild confusion and lethargy through to frustration. Why, you might rightly ask?

For nigh on two millenia we have been doing much the same thing – we have fasted, sat on the floor as mourners and lamented a national disaster, a spiritual conflagration, the massacre of hundreds of thousands – later millions – of innocents and the brutality of regimes that have come and gone.

When I was a child, these weeks served to bolster the feelings that simmered under the surface. The loss of the two Botei Mikdosh was compounded by the horrors that remained unspoken. I grew up in the shadow of the Holocaust. If one of the older members of the family occasionally suffered a bout of irrational annoyance with one of the children, the poor soul on the receiving end of the invective would be shushed with "He's a survivor." We had no idea what that actually meant, other than vague notions and that because of the horrors they endured we had to put up with whatever they dished out. No-one spoke about the actualities. The topic was never discussed. We somehow absorbed by osmosis that a numbered tattoo on the arm represented a yawning chasm of nightmares. Tish b'Av was the apogee of that unspoken suffering. It made perfect sense.

As time moved on, however, these weeks were one of confusion. Almost every year occasioned a pivotal historical moment. When the Berlin Wall fell, the reactions were a mixed bag of amazement, elation, complete surprise and great hope. From one moment to the next, the lumbering bear went from a global threat to failed economy and a third world country. The Soviet Union's vast empire dissolved overnight, and the impending doom of an East-West confrontation evaporated in front of our eyes.

Tienanmen Square. A simple white flag that stopped a column of main battle tanks. The Twin Towers collapsing live in front of a world audience. The advent of the Internet, a world-girdling network straight out of science-fiction that has now shaped and evolved our lives, that affects every human on the planet even if they have no access to it. Computers

לעלוי נשמת דוב יצחק ב"ר אפרים אלחנן ז"ל

Motzei Shabbos

Some men have the custom to fold their Tallis soon after Shabbos to occupy themselves with a Mitzva immediately. It is debatable if this Motzei Shabbos one should do this or rather wait until after midday on Sunday.

Kiddush Levono, if the moon is visible, should be said after the fast. Preferably one should change one's shoes and eat something beforehand.

evolving from room-sized machinery to devices that slip into your pocket. So much change, so much progress, yet so much backsliding as well.

When the three weeks would come around, I would wonder: where do we stand in all this? Why has history, technology, science and politics evolved so rapidly? Are these the precursor days of Moshiach? If not, then why all this chaos and upheaval and tremendous acceleration of everything? If yes, what are we supposed to do, if anything?

Well, way back then I was still under the impression that the arrival of Moshiach will be these monumental, singular event and that in one moment the world would flip from a vast chaotic machine running out of control to a smooth, calm, ordered unity. Moshiach would turn up on a white donkey, shofar in hand, and all the world would bow its knees before him and Hashem, and we would all sing "War is over" as the world's armies hammered their guns into ploughshares. What did I know?

My greatest concern was that I had no guidance as how to correlate

The Week Ahead

שבת פרשת דברים	שבת חזון
Mincha	7.30pm
Candle Lighting	7.43pm - 7.55pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.11am
1st Mincha	2.00pm
2nd Mincha	6.00pm
Ta'anis Starts	9.22pm
3rd Mincha	9.26pm
Shiur	Following
Motzei Shabbos	10.31pm
Tisha B'Av	
Maariv followed by Eicho	10.40pm
Shacharis followed by Kinnos	8.30am
1st Mincha	2.00pm
Tisha B'Av Programme	6.15pm
Tefillin	8.55pm
Second Mincha	9.00
Maariv	following
Ta'anis Ends	10.19pm
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.45pm
Late Maariv	10.20pm

these events to our ongoing history. What should our response be? What should we take from all this? Do we change our mourning during the three weeks somehow to reflect this, or do we carry on as always?

We have developed the ability to resist change, like a vast supertanker that takes several kilometres to slow down and stop, or turn left or right. This has served us well in the past, often protected us from the harms of rapid change. Conversely, it has prevented us from pre-empting disasters, responding to change rapidly enough, and so during the enlightenment and thereafter we lost more of our tribe to assimilation than we did to the Holocaust.

How many times were we told that “כל דור שאינו נבנה בימיו מעלין עליו” – every generation that the Beis Hamikdosh is not constructed in is considered as if they destroyed it (Yerushalmi 5:1)? How many times did I wonder why I would be responsible for something I had no control over?

Then, not so many years ago, I came across the Rambam in Hilchos Melochim concerning the era of Moshiach. This was a game-changer to me. All of a sudden I realised that the arrival of Moshiach was a process, a confluence of events that will result in the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdosh, not a sudden cataclysmic event. We won't even know who Moshiach is until he rebuilds the Beis Hamikdosh, among other things.

From this juncture forward, having observed what was happening around me and the broader world, my confusion changed to frustration. Why? Because I questioned the above-mentioned Yerushalmi. How could one possibly blame the generation of the Rambam? Rashi? The Abravanel? The Vilna Gaon? The Chofetz Chaim? They all lived under the intolerable dominion of their fickle overlords, who brutally suppressed them, ejected them, burned them at the stake, gassed them. What chance did they have?

So I don't believe it referred to them at all, since they didn't stand a chance. Let us look at ourselves instead, rather than judge other generations. Are we responsible for the fact that we still don't have a Beis Hamikdosh? To this I say: Yes! Without question.

Hang on, you might ask, what exactly are we supposed to do about it? In what way are we responsible? What can we do any more than previous generations did?

Answering that is simple, yet complex. I never said this was going to be easy.

Let us cast our minds around current events. Pivotal events. Events whose historicity is evident today, but will be blindingly obvious in hindsight.

For the past two millennia we as a nation have been subjugated by every nation we have lived amongst. In fact, ever since the first Churban, even in the times of the Chashmonoim, we were never a sovereign nation, and in less than a century we have gone from the subjugated to the dominators. We have back our land. More so, Eretz Yisroel is the superpower of the region, feared by every surrounding nation. No-one in history has ever achieved anything like it.

Sure, all is not rosy. Chilul Shabbos, kashrus, poverty and a host of issues plague our country. Many of us still live abroad. Infighting between the various religious factions is beyond stupid; mindless, hate-ridden and a pox on our house. All true. However; a big however; we have to look beyond the trees in order to focus on the forest.

Despite all our problems, we can no longer excuse ourselves and claim we are still in golus and can achieve nought. The mightiest nation on earth elected a president of whom many predicted would be a train wreck if only based on his tweets, each one of them a delicately sculpted Bonsai of nonsense and thoughtlessness. Yet he said he would move the embassy to Yerushalayim, and he did, in the face of opprobrium from just about every other country on the planet. He appointed a largely unknown governor to the UN, and now she does a better job of defending us in the hallowed halls of rabid, naked and virulent anti-semitism than we ever did.

If we look back into our history, this is but a replay of the Purim story, with Trump starring as Achashveirosh and Nikki Haley as Esther. With one big twist. This time, they are defending our homeland, and not simply our nation. So what is our job in all this? It is simple, yet complex.

What is really holding back the Beis Hamikdosh? Is it politics? Are we worried about clearing Har Habayis? Are we concerned that we don't know how or where to build the Beis Hamikdosh? Do we have kohanim meychosim? What about the Poroh Adumoh? All valid questions, but these all have an answer. Or, more correctly, there is a body that can

answer these questions, and that body is the Sanhedrin. Every issue raised can be solved by them, since they can create the necessary legislation to deal with them.

We have an ongoing mitzvoh de'oraysoh to reconstruct the Sanhedrin. That applies to us as a nation, it is a collective mitzvoh. Can we re-create the Sanhedrin? Absolutely. With a caveat. It has to be accepted by the majority of Klal Yisroel. This simply cannot happen in our current climate, where the infighting between otherwise Shomrei Torah or mitzvos and their leaders is beyond a scandal, it is a vicious, morbid cancer. And we will be held responsible for it. We can turn the tide if we demand and fight for Sholom. We are being led astray by politics, by ridiculous cheshbonos that we will look back to and simply fail to understand how we could have ever thought that this was what Hashem wanted of us.

Is this remotely possible? Surely I am way too quixotic and divorced from reality? Say what you will. The truth of the matter is that we have no way forward in our current state. Without a universally accepted Sanhedrin, we stand no chance.

So how is this possible? Impossible things happen. I have lived through the impossible. No-one, literally no-one, not one single person on the good lord's earth, predicted the fall of the Soviet Union even a month before. Glasnost, perestroika, oh these were all wonderful catchphrases, yet none of them served as a precursor to this tremendous event.

Man landed on the moon in the year I was born. How is that not an impossible dream? The whole world got together to save these boys in Thailand, whether it was with practical efforts or prayers. In my lifetime, Eretz Yisroel went from a country huddling under the loose protection of various countries who dropped their support when it was no longer politically expedient to becoming an industrial, technological and military regional superpower. Nothing, quite frankly, is impossible. We can rebuild the Sanhedrin. We must rebuild the Sanhedrin. It's our job, and if we fail, we have only ourselves to blame.

The exact methods by which we achieve this is anyone's guess. It will require people far more knowledgeable, dedicated and intelligent than I; but one thing I do know - it can be done. Much, much more complex and harder things have been achieved in my lifetime. We are not short of intelligent people, we are not short of Talmidei Chachomim, we are not short of the dedicated, the wise, the movers and shakers.

And all this leads to my frustration. We all mumble about Moshiach, we end off every second drosho about Biyas Hamoshiach, but no-one seems to take it seriously. Why oh why? We are no longer in the age of hoping, we are now positioned to actually achieve something that is not impossible at all, but we simply have too much golus in our mindset to look beyond the trees and see the forest. We are, all, in fact responsible. And I rail against the system to nought, I am regarded as a dreamy idealist. Just last week we read “וְהִיְתָה הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְכֶם לְאֶזְרָה לְפָנֶיךָ”! How many more signs are we asking for?

In which case, what is our job during the three weeks now? Well, that should be obvious. First of all, if we fail to understand what we are missing, how can we possibly be motivated to actually get round to doing anything about it? If we forget our history, how can we analyse current events? If we fail to take lessons from our past, see what havoc, damage and carnage machlokes has wreaked upon us, how can we even attempt to unify under the banner of a re-instated Sanhedrin? It is only once we realise that we have to weep over our loss that we can then face ourselves and ask: “What have I done to bring Moshiach?” If, however, we perpetuate our golus, we only have ourselves to blame, and we perpetuate this evil to the next generation.

How did Rabbi Akiva laugh in the face of a fox crawling out of the Kodshei Hakodoshim while his colleagues rent their clothing (Makkos 24b)? Because at the forefront of his mind was not the destruction, the stench of death, the downfall of our nation; golus, golus, golus. He was constantly waiting for one prediction to come true in order to confirm: “עוד ישבו זקנים וקנות בחובות ירושלים”. We have all witnessed this nevuoh. Old men and ladies hobbling along with their zimmer frames, little children playing in the streets of Yerushalayim. An impossible dream, and yet, and yet – it came true.

For the very first time in our history for over two millennia, we are now in the position of fulfilling the very last of the nevuois. We are the generation that has to undertake this, because everything is now almost perfectly aligned, and this ought to be obvious to everyone. Realising this is but the first step in a journey of a thousand steps. It is, however, the hardest.