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Parshah

SPLENDID ISOLATION OR LONELINESS – 'IN'-SIGHT

The Shabbos before Tisha Be'av is one of the few שבתות that has assumed a designated name – שבת חזון- the Shabbos of Vision.

ר' צדוק הכהן identifies the 3 הפטרות of פורענותא (evil tidings) which we read in the Three Weeks before 9 Av, as corresponding to the faculties of Sight, Hearing and Speech. This insight is based on the opening words of these הפטרות, שמעו, דברי & חזון – these, in turn, correspond to the three higher ספירות of כתר, בינה & חכמה.

These lofty, esoteric ideas are beyond our comprehension, yet, there is a level at which we can gain some understanding. There is a deep connection between sight and insight – חזון[1] & בינה. The גמרא[2] identifies the change in order of פסוקים in איכה that puts the letter פ before the letter ע, as reminiscent of the distorted outlook that precipitated the tragedy of the מרגלים, which, in turn, made חורבן inevitable.

רבא אמר רבי יוחנן אמר בשביל מה הקדים פ"א לע"ן
בשביל מרגלים שאמרו בפיהם מה שלא ראו בעיניהם.

The מרגלים crafted a narrative based on their choice of perspective, seeing everything coloured through their lens of cynicism and despair, even projecting that on to others - ונהי בעינינו כחגבים וכן היינו בעיניהם - and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them".

It is well-established that sight is not merely a physical process, rather a cognitive faculty, influenced heavily by perceptual set, culture, expectation and emotion, all playing a part in swaying the interpretation.

The מלבי"ם[3] explains the difference between ראיה and חזון as follows;

שראיה הוא ראות העין החושי, וחזה מורה על צפיית הרוח והנפש – in simple English, the difference between sight and insight!

This subjectivity is particularly poignant when we ponder the opening phrase of מגילת איכה

"איכה ישבה בדד" How has it come to pass that the holy city that was משוש כל הארץ – the joy, the jewel of all the earth, is now desolate and unloved. It sits forlorn and alone. Its fortune shifted so dramatically from a dynamic, vibrant city teeming with life and learning, to a ghost town, rivers of blood, coursing through its streets-as-veins, isolated and abandoned.

The implication is clear – loneliness is a perjorative. In 1867, Mark Twain visited Israel. He describes this in his book *Innocents Abroad*.

"Jerusalem is mournful, dreary, and lifeless. I would not desire to live here. It is a hopeless, dreary, heartbroken land. Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies. Palestine is desolate and unlovely. And why should it be otherwise? Can the curse of the Deity beautify a land? Palestine is no more of this work-day world. It is sacred to poetry and tradition– it is dream-land.."

"There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country".

"A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action. We reached Tabor safely. We never saw a human being on the whole route".

"We traversed some miles of desolate country whose soil is rich enough but is given over wholly to weeds, a silent, mournful expanse. A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action. We never saw a human being on the whole route. We pressed on toward the goal of our crusade, renowned Jerusalem. No landscape exists that is more tiresome to the eye than that which bounds the approaches to Jerusalem"

And yet – we find the selfsame words used as a tribute, both by בלעם in his stunning prophetic vision – הן עם לבדד ישכן - we dwell apart and alone – our singular mission necessitating distance. In the words of the רמב"ן, כי כאשר אני רואה אותו עתה שוכן לבדו, כן ישכון לעולמים בטח בדד עין יעקב, והוא יהיה לראש לעולם ואין אומה שתתגבר עליו

Here, the Ramban provides a link to another instance of this word being used in a positive sense – both in Shiras Haazinu – ה' בדד ינחנו – Hashem alone guides us – and in Moshe Rabbenu's final ברכה to us – וישכון ישראל בטח בדד - we dwell in confident isolation! We are governed by a unique, intimate relationship with Hashem – the proximity itself becomes a liability when it is violated. But, at its root, it is a positive, special thing.

The שפת אמת[4] sees the word בדד as a hint to the phrase בכל דרכיך דעהו – make an effort to perceive the guiding hand of Hashem even from within tragedy (the תפארת שלמה explains the פסוק in this weeks sedra ה' אלוקינו דיבר אלינו בחורב לאמר as a hint to Hashem speaking to us even through חורבן).

The famous episode of R Akiva[5] laughing at the sight of foxes frolicking in the makom hamikdash, whilst his colleagues cried, highlight this capacity that he had for seeing beyond the here and now.

'V'chol yekar ra'asa eino' – that which was not revealed to Moshe Rabeinu was revealed to R' Akiva[6]. R' Akiva representing the depth of תורה שבעל פה, with the capacity of insight, was able to interpret the tragic events as part of a pathway leading to גאולה.

The צל"ח[7] offers an amazing insight in the Chazal that in the future we will make the ברכה of הטוב והמטיב, whereas in this world we are forced to make the ברכה of דיין האמת . He says that in essence, we will revisit those selfsame painful events, and with the benefit of spiritual 20/20 hindsight we will be able to make a new ברכה of הטוב והמטיב, recognising the good that they really were!

The חת"ם סופר[8] adds a beautiful level of understanding to the נבואה of ציון[9] כי **עין בעין** יראה בשוב ה' את ציון - the curious expression is telling us that there is an 'eye within an eye' – literally עין בעין - the צפיית הרוח והנפש of the Malbim quoted earlier.

R' Tzodok is thus teaching us that with בינה, with true 'in-sight' one can access another world, one can survive loss and pain. That is the challenge of fostering and cultivating a world of חזון. A world in which we alone, but never lonely – we recognise בדד as a necessary quality to stand apart, and live up to our mission, disseminating light and Torah, and Kedusha, as befits His people.

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1 עיין לקו"ט שמות ט"ז כ"ט – ראיה זו בינה
2 סנהדרין ק"ד:
3 שמות י"ח – כ"א
4 פרשת דברים תר"ס
5 מכות כ"ד
6 מנחות כ"ט
7 פסחים נ':
8 תורת משה החדש בראשית על הפסוק ותפקחנה עיני שניהם (בשם רבו בעל ההפלאה)
9 ישעי' נ"ב -ח'

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QUOTE OF THE WEEK

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2. Rashi (1:11) brings that Moshe was saying over two blessings. One from Hashem and one from Moshe to multiply a thousand times. Surely Hashem's blessing is all inclusive and if so how could Moshe add anything? Why bless them specifically with the number of a thousand times more?