

Parshas Devorim – Colin Bergman

ט' מנחם אב תשע"ה – 24 July 2015 – שבת פ' דברים - חזון

At the beginning of this week's sedra Moshe begins to speak to B'nei Yisroel:

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel, across the Yarden, in the wilderness... (1:1).

Rashi comments that the description of the location of Moshe's speech does not match up with the current location of the B'nei Yisroel. As such, he explains how each described location is a hint towards one of the sins the B'nei Yisroel committed such as the Eigel Hazohov, the complaints against the Mon etc. One major sin, however, is omitted; namely that of the spies. It is instead described in detail during the third Aliya of the sedra.

It is worth noting that parshas Devorim always falls on the Shabbos before Tisha b'Av, so perhaps we can suggest that the recounting of the story of the spies is supposed to teach us a message for this day.

The gemoroh in Eruchin (11b) brings a Braisa in the name of Rabbi Yosi that bad things happen on bad days. This, in and of itself, is an interesting concept, as it means that Tisha b'Av itself is not sad because of the things that happened on it; rather these things happened because the day has a tendency for sadness. The gemoroh in Taanis (29a) tells us that the incident with the spies happened on the night of Tisha b'Av, so already we see a connection between these two events.

Another point which arises is that if Tisha b'Av is really such a sad day, then we might assume that it would be appropriate to leave a period of mourning after it, such as a shiva of some sort, yet one of the happiest days in the Jewish calendar, Tu b'Av, happens only 6 days later. This was a day when all the eligible girls would go out to hopefully meet a suitable match. How do we resolve this apparent conflict in the mood of this period that we are currently in?

To resolve the problems, we must first understand what, in essence, was the sin of the spies. There are many reasons given for how such great men could make such a terrible mistake, but we can suggest that the common theme is that they focussed on their present situation as an end, instead of a means to an end. The spies saw the miracles of the wilderness and assumed that this was the ultimate way to serve Hashem. As a result, the land was instead promised to their children (Devorim 1:39), to demonstrate that, as Jews, our focus must be on continuation, not stagnation.

The gemoroh in Rosh Hashonoh (18b) shows from a possuk in Zechariah that in the future, Tisha b'Av will become a day of simchah. Using the message of the spies, this begins to make sense. On Tisha b'Av, if we sit and cry crocodile tears, we are missing the point. The sadness is not an end in itself, but rather a means to make us understand what we have lost from this world; namely the sanctity and clarity of Hashem. If we internalise this message, we demonstrate our desire to see this past glory restored and thus the saddest day becomes a joyful one when this goal is reached.

It now makes sense why a day dedicated to marriage occurs so closely to Tisha b'Av. Marriage is the start of a new Jewish family to continue our traditions and goals. It is the ultimate declaration that we are looking ahead and not just living in the present. Thus, it ties in perfectly with the message of Tisha b'Av.

At the chuppoh, a glass is broken to remind us of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh; a tradition which occurred even in the time of the gemoroh (Brochos 30b – 31a). Of all the utensils which could be broken, we might suggest a glass is appropriate, as it is the vessel in Judaism which is often used for sanctification (e.g. Kiddush cup). By breaking the glass, we symbolise the reduced sanctity in this world and demonstrate that the couple intend to spend their future together working to correct this.

May we take this message to heart so that this year, our sadness is turned to joy and the sanctity of the Beis Hamikdosh is restored, now and for all time.

(In honour of my sister's upcoming chasunah, wishing the couple a future of simchah)