



PARSHAS DEVORIM – SHMAYA ORMONDE

The ninth of Av, the day when many calamities have fallen upon the Jewish people is a very difficult day for us to relate to. It is very difficult to feel a loss for the Beis Hamikdash if we have no idea what we are missing. We generally do not like to focus on the idea of death and destruction as this makes us feel very uncomfortable. A couple of years ago I heard an insight from Harav Moshe Shapiro which gave me an insight into the day of Tisha Bav. He prefaced the insight with an amazing story. (Rav Moshe read this story in the memoirs of a Rav who suffered in the camps. He could not recall precisely the name of the Rav).

During World War II the Nazis in charge of one of the concentration camps appointed a priest to be in charge of orchestrating the killings of the Jews who “deserved” to be killed. After many months and much blood had been spilt the priest suddenly became very worried. He ripped off the cross from one of the buildings and started smashing it on the ground whilst shouting “they (the Jews) are the chosen people”. Upon seeing this, the Nazis immediately took the priest and killed him.

This story amazed me. How could this priest who was having such success in his endeavours consider that the Jews are the chosen people. What was the priest thinking?

Rav Moshe explained the story as follows:

There is an incredible Gemara in Gittin(57b) which has a remarkably similar ending.

The Gemara describes how during the destruction of the 1st Beis Hamikdash the blood of the slaughtered flowed until it touched the blood of the prophet Zecharia whose blood had been bubbling ever since he was killed many years before. Nevuzarden(chief executioner for Nebuchadnezar) asked why the blood of Zecharia continued to boil and the Jews eventually told him the truth. They told him how the people had killed Zecharia who had reproved them and his blood had been boiling incessantly for many years. Nevuzaraden sought to appease Zecharia. First he slaughtered the large and small *Sanhedrin* but the blood did not rest. He then murdered the young men and women, but the blood continued to seethe. He then killed the schoolchildren, yet the blood did not stop boiling. Nevuzaraden finally exclaimed “Zecharia! Zecharia! I’ve killed the best of them! Shall I kill them all?” The blood stopped boiling. At that moment, after killing millions Nevuzaraden did teshuva and converted. How can this scene of bloodshed lead Nevuzaraden to the absurd conclusion that he should convert to become a member of the people he had slaughtered.

The answer to these two stories is simple. Sometimes Hashem performs open miracles and gives goodness to the Jewish people. However, sometimes Hashem sometimes can deal with the Jewish people with strict judgement but in a way that it is clear that it is beyond the natural order of the world .Both the priest and Nevuzaraden realized that the success they were “enjoying” was beyond the natural. They understood that sometimes Hashem can deal with us with judgement but he is still dealing with us. He never forsakes the Jewish people and the Jewish people will never be destroyed. All the suffering is for a purpose even though we cannot understand the grand master plan at the moment.

Let us understand that all the suffering of Tisha B’av doesn’t mean Hashem does not love us. There is a grand masterplan and there will come a day when all the world will realize what the priest and Nevuzaraden realized. May that come speedily and in our days.