

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Ya'akov ben Chayim a"h
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Re-examining the *Churban*: What Happened to the Beis Hamikdash? PARSHAS DEVARIM 5775

Was the Beis Hamikdash (Holy Temple) destroyed?

What a question! Of course it was. We have been, unfortunately, in exile for 2,000 years; there is currently no Beis Hamikdash at the Temple site; we yearn and pray daily for its rebuilding; and after all, isn't that what Tishah B'av is all about? That certainly seems to be the plain meaning of the Mishnah, which states (*Ta'anis 4:6*):

בְּתִשְׁעָה בְּאָב נִגְזַר עַל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁלֹּא יִכְנָסוּ לְאֶרֶץ, וְהָרַב הַבֵּית בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה וּבְשֵׁנִיָּה...

“On the ninth of Av, it was decreed on our ancestors (during the episode of the spies) that they would not enter the Land, and both the first and second Temples were destroyed...”

The central focus of the Tishah B'av mourning is the *Churban* (destruction) of the Beis Hamikdash. So how can the question whether or not it was destroyed even be posed!?

In truth, as we shall see, the matter may not be all that simple. Of course, as *ma'aminim b'nei ma'aminim* (believers who are children of believers), we have perfect faith in what our Sages have said. The only question is, what exactly did they say? For while the intimation of the Mishnah seems clear, other statements from Chazal seem to point in a different direction.

Your Eyes Can Deceive You

Consider, for example, the following teaching of Chazal:

“R' Yitzchak said: At the time that the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, Hakadosh Baruch Hu found that Avraham Avinu was standing in the Beis Hamikdash. He said to him: ‘What is My beloved doing in My house?’ (Avraham) answered: ‘I have come on account of my children’” (*Menachos 53b*).

There are a number of points to be raised concerning this Gemara. First of all, if the Beis Hamikdash was in the middle of being destroyed, how could someone be standing in the midst of it, able to carry on a conversation? Furthermore, Avraham lived well before the time of the building of the first Beis Hamikdash! And if this takes place during Avraham's sojourn in the World of Truth, where all the righteous reside after their departure from this world, what, then, was he doing in the earthly Beis Hamikdash?

The *Otzros Hatorah* (Tishah B'av) cites a very eye-opening passage from the Zohar (*parshas Pekudei*), which sheds much light on the issue. For it is here that Chazal seem to (explicitly) state that the Beis Hamikdash, in fact, was *not* destroyed at all:

“The Beis Hamikdash did not burn at all; nor did the hands of the nations damage it in any way. Rather, the *malachim* (angels) lifted it to the Heavens, with its interior completely intact. In its place, they constructed another (edifice) to fool the nations

and deceive their eyes. *This is the edifice that was destroyed down below, but the real Beis Hamikdash was stored up Above!*”

The remarkable statement of the Zohar, in fact, may even be reconcilable with the above-quoted Mishnah in Ta’anis. There is reason to mourn, of course, for the Beis Hamikdash has departed from its earthly site and the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) with it. Apparently, however, the Beis Hamikdash was not destroyed; the Mishnah that states that it was destroyed may very well be referring to the replica that was constructed there by the *malachim*.

In any event, this accounts for the “placement” of Avraham Avinu within the confines of the Beis Hamikdash. The episode related by the Gemara could have taken place inside the Beis Hamikdash, even at the time of the *Churban*. It transpired within the *real* Beis Hamikdash, which had been hoisted on High to the realm of the Heavens, completely accessible to the *tzaddikim* residing there in the afterlife.

Back Again

It should be noted, however, that it appears that this notion (of the real Beis Hamikdash simply being “placed in storage”) was said specifically of the second Beis Hamikdash. Such emerges from a discourse of R’ Yehonasan Eibshitz (*Ahavas Yehonasan, Haftarah for Shabbos Rosh Chodesh*) regarding the fate of the Second Temple.

R’ Yehonasan was addressing some difficulties that arise regarding the *navi’s* (prophet’s) characterization of the two Temples: *גָּדוֹל הֲיִהְיֶה כְּבוֹד הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה הָאֲחֵרוֹן מִן־הַרְאשׁוֹן אָמַר ד’* – “The glory of this last Temple shall be greater than that of the first one, says Hashem” (*Chaggai* 2:9). The *navi* was comparing the First and Second Temples; why, then, did he refer to the Second Temple as the “last”? Isn’t there supposed to be a Third Temple in the future? And how could it be described as “more glorious” than its predecessor? Chazal tell us that the Second Temple was missing certain key features that the First Temple had, such as the *Aron Hakodesh* (Holy Ark)!

In truth, R’ Yehonasan explains, the Second Temple is appropriately termed the “last,” for it *will* be the last; that is, it will actually return to serve as the Third Temple. In support of this idea, he quotes a *medrash* which – with some variation – resembles the aforementioned passage from the Zohar. The nations were tricked into thinking that they had burned down the second Beis Hamikdash. In truth, the structure had sunk into the ground – and it had done so in the manner of a seed. That is, in the future it will rejuvenate, sprouting forth from below to serve as the third Beis Hamikdash. This is also why it is considered to be more glorious than the First; as opposed to its predecessor, the second Beis Hamikdash has the advantage that it will return once again.

However, this is also not such a simple matter. While we know, yearn, and pray that the Beis Hamikdash will reappear soon, the manner in which this will take place is somewhat involved. From the above, it seems that it will sprout from the earth. But there are other intimations from Chazal, as well – a matter we will return to next week, *b’ezras Hashem*.