

WHY DO WE MISS THE BEIS HAMIKDASH?

PART 1 OF A SERIES ON THE BEIS HAMIKDASH

BY ARYEH GUREWITZ

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We are now beginning the period of the Three Weeks, when we are supposed to be mourning the loss of the Beis HaMikdash. But what is it that we really are missing? Of course, it would be nice to have a beautiful building as a “home” for Hashem, but, ultimately, aren’t we doing fine without it? To continue mourning almost two thousand years later almost seems a bit excessive.

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Chassidus has much to say about the Beis HaMikdash that could help us answer this question. Sometimes, though, it’s important to realize that we don’t need an answer from the deepest parts of the Torah. Some things are just part of our basic identity as Jews. If we really connect to what Jewish life is all about, even on the simplest, most practical level, it should become clear why we miss the Beis HaMikdash.

Consider these two basic features of our identity as Jews:

1. The purpose of our lives is to fulfill Hashem’s commandments, and our lives are structured accordingly.
2. We celebrate occasions when Hashem’s Presence, or at least His hashgacha pratis, was revealed in the world, no matter how long ago those occasions might have been.

Let’s delve into each of those a little bit.

Jewish life is structured around the fulfillment of mitzvos. It’s true that we sometimes get distracted or do mitzvos out of habit, but that doesn’t change the fact that, on a very practical level, we decide what to do with our days, weeks, months, and years based on our desire to fulfill Hashem’s mitzvos. We begin every day with tzitzis, tefillin, Krias Shema, and tefillah. We give a significant portion of our earnings to tzedakah. We make time every day to learn Torah. We send our children to Jewish schools to fulfill the mitzvah of chinuch—that is, the mitzvah to teach them how to do the mitzvos. On a good day, nearly everything we do is either a mitzvah or a preparation for a mitzvah (a hechsher mitzvah). Now, if we would be put in a situation where we can’t fulfill a certain mitzvah—let’s say, you can’t find a pair of tefillin, or you can’t send your kids to a Jewish school—we would find this quite upsetting and, in many cases, have self-sacrifice to find a way to do that mitzvah. Of course, anyone who isn’t a tzaddik still has times when he doesn’t feel like doing every mitzvah, but that doesn’t change the fact that the basic structure of life as a Jew revolves around Hashem’s commandments.

In a similar way, part of being a Jew is that we appreciate and even

celebrate any time or place where Hashem is more revealed than usual in this world of concealment. For example, many of our holidays—Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkos, Chanukah, and Purim, to name a few—commemorate miracles that Hashem did for us. We also celebrate the lives of tzaddikim—Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, for example—who made Hashem’s Presence in this world more apparent, whether through miracles, prophecy, incredible Torah wisdom, or other types of holiness. We are also careful to daven in a shul with a minyan because we want to daven in a time and place where Hashem is more revealed and accessible.¹ In short, we are עם קרובו, the nation that is close to Him, and we cherish any setting—past, present, or future—where that closeness is more revealed.

Based on these two aspects of Jewish identity, we can explain why the Beis HaMikdash is supposed to be so important to us.

In the Rambam’s list of the 613 mitzvos at the beginning of Mishneh Torah, we find that 142 of the mitzvos—67 positive mitzvos and 75 negative mitzvos—are found in Sefer Avodah and Sefer Korbanos, the books dealing with the halachos of the Beis HaMikdash itself and the sacrifices that were brought there. This means that by not having a Beis HaMikdash, we are missing the opportunity to do almost a quarter of all the mitzvos. If this doesn’t bother us, that is only because we are used to it, since that is the life we know. If we really value Hashem’s commandments for what they truly are, though, we should want to fulfill all of them, not only the ones we have had the opportunity to do until now.

Additionally, many sources explain that the Beis HaMikdash itself was not only a glorious building, but a place for the Shechinah to rest.² Because of that revelation of the Shechinah, anyone who went to the Beis HaMikdash—as we were obligated to do three times per year—would see miracles,³ as well as a deeper, more spiritual perception of Hashem’s Presence.⁴ There were also many more great sages and prophets than we have in the time of Golus, and their ability to achieve that spiritual greatness was partly due to the revelations of the Beis HaMikdash that were felt throughout Eretz Yisroel.⁵

If all of this is true, then the reason why we miss the Beis HaMikdash should be clear. It is a key part of our relationship with Hashem, both because of the mitzvos associated with it and because of the way it made Hashem’s Presence in this world feel so much more apparent and tangible. If at any time we find ourselves losing that clarity, one eitzah is to learn a maamar Chassidus about the Beis HaMikdash, but it could also be that what we need is not new information, but rather, a reminder of what being a Jew is really all about. Either way, the main thing is that we come to the conclusion that we want Moshiach to come and build the final, eternal Beis HaMikdash, teikef u’miyad mamash.

1 See Be’er Heitev on Orach Chaim 101:4 regarding a minyan and Shulchan Aruch HaRav 90:10 (at the end) regarding a shul even with no minyan.

2 According to the Ramban, this was actually the main purpose of the Beis HaMikdash.

3 Avos 5:5.

4 For a description of this and how it

compares to the revelation of לעתיד, see, for example, ד"ה נחמה עליו רוח הוי' תשכ"ה, סעיף ז'.

5 See Torah Ohr, Parshas Vayeitzei, ד"ה וללבו, שתי בנות בתחילתו.