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A Day of Mourning, A Day Of Hope

By Rev. Gary Cristofaro

Wisdom is not “an uncommon degree of common sense. ...**wisdom is the ability to look at all things from the point of view of God**”, (1) ... then one should align themselves with His divine will. The fact that the Jewish people would return to the land of Israel has never been in doubt based on a multitude of scriptures. Yet historically only a remnant in every generation have had the “wisdom” to recognize this truth.



This year the Hebrew day of mourning Tisha B'Av falls on August 14th. Tisha B'Av is the 9th day of the fifth Hebrew month. It commemorates the many evils that have befallen the Jewish people over the centuries and that have occurred on this very same day of the year. Among them is the fact that both Temples were destroyed on Tisha B'Av. The First Temple in 586 BCE by the Babylonians and the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.

Rabbi Akiva, a sage who lived during the time of the Second Temple, was able to see the destruction for what it really was, even while living in an intensely challenging time. He was once walking in Jerusalem with a group of fellow sages soon after the Temple was destroyed. They passed the Temple Mount and saw foxes roaming freely there. All the sages cried at the site of the desecration, but Rabbi Akiva laughed.

When confronted about his seemingly inappropriate reaction, he said: “Now that the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple has come true, surely the prophecies regarding the rebuilding of the Temple will come true, too.” He saw the destruction as an event in a sequence, allowing something even greater and more eternal to happen. He was able to celebrate destruction since he could envision a truer and even more beautiful reality. In his mind’s eye, the Temple was already being rebuilt.

Exile may seem to be our reality. We live in a construction site strewn with tools and nails. In this setting, however, there is both exile and redemption. In exile, we both mourn the destruction of the first two Temples and build the Third Temple.

As we mourn the destruction, we acknowledge the beauty that has been lost—yet here we stand, on the threshold of a new reality. Let us celebrate destruction so that we can embrace our ability to build a greater future. (2)

Rabbi Akiva had the ability to see reality from God's viewpoint. This is a lesson for all children of God in good times and especially in bad times. Rabbi Akiva could respond with great confidence due to the words of the prophets. The same prophets from whom we too can draw confidence.

For example, Isaiah said; ***It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people... (Isaiah 11:11a)***. Notice Isaiah says a "second time". The Jewish people had been scattered after the destruction of the First Temple and subsequently regathered. This is why Rabbi Akiva and his disciples were still in Jerusalem in the first and second century. Now the Second Temple had been destroyed and the Jewish people again were being scattered. This was all the proof he needed. Since God had promised a second return, Rabbi Akiva was convinced a third Temple would be built.

Since there is no mention of a third regathering in all of scripture we too can be confident that the Jewish people are returning to Israel to stay. Although Tisha B'Av is a day we remember great tragedy we also have reason to rejoice. You see, on Tisha B'Av in 1290 Jewish people were expelled from England. On Tisha B'Av in 1492 Jewish people were expelled from Spain. But on Tisha B'Av 2016 Jewish people are coming home to Israel to stay.

I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them," Says the LORD your God (Amos 9:15)

It is my firm belief that Ezra International donors are people who have confidence in the word of God. They are people who have aligned themselves with His divine will. Ezra International's donors have confidence that if God said it, then it shall come to pass and they have become the vessels of hope to thousands of Jewish people every year. **The return of the Jewish people is happening right before our eyes and we are grateful to all of our partners who are making it possible.**

- (1) Heschel, Abraham Joshua. God in Search of Man page 75
- (2) Strasberg, Chaya. Celebrating Destruction