



Parashat Bechukotai

Holy People are Smelly People

ספר ויקרא
וְנִתְּתִי אֶת-עֲרֵיכֶם תְּרֵבָה וְהִשְׁמֹתִי
אֶת-מִקְדְּשֵׁיכֶם וְלֹא אֶרְיֵת בְּרִיחַ נִיחֹתְכֶם

“I will lay your cities in ruin and I will make your sanctuaries desolate; I will not savor your satisfying aromas.”
Leviticus 26:31

Kenneth M. Duberstein, who was President Reagan's last White House chief of staff, said, “The Oval Office is wherever the president of the United States is.” If a leader of a country, being merely a man, is attributed that much power and presence, how much more so should God, the Creator of the Universe and our King, be given that kind of recognition? Of course He is; Scripture is full of the acknowledgment that Heaven and Earth are full of His glory. But this week's verse comes to teach us that the Divine Presence in the Temple was something extra special.

Ibn Ezra states that the words “and I will make your sanctuaries desolate” refer to the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* (the Holy Temple in Jerusalem). He explains that the previous verse prophesies that the Spirit of God will reject the people, which refers to the departure of the Divine Presence from the Temple. Unlike the Oval Office, when the Divine Presence leaves the building, it is no longer called “My Sanctuary,” but “*your sanctuaries*,” and is subject to destruction and desolation.

Rashi, however, does not allow for this explanation. He says that the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* is described in the following phrase: “I will not savor your satisfying aromas.” This is a clear reference to the offerings of the Holy Temple, which have the effect of giving a satisfying aroma to God. Now, in His rebuke, there will no longer be any offerings to provide that satisfying aroma. Therefore *Rashi* says that the previous phrase cannot refer to the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* itself, but to another aspect of the offerings. In quite a twist, *Rashi* renders the Hebrew word מִקְדְּשֵׁיכֶם (*mikd'sheykhem*) as “*your prepared ones*” from קָדַשׁ (*kadesh*) which means “to make ready,” and explains it as a reference to the multitude of pilgrims who would come to Jerusalem after purifying themselves. The verse therefore prophesies that Jerusalem will become desolate and the throngs of pilgrims will come no more.

A different explanation of this verse is offered by the *Netziv* in his work *Haamek Davar*. He says that the first part of the verse has to do with the physical destruction of the Holy Temple (as *Ibn Ezra* explained). However, even after the

Holy Temple is destroyed, it would theoretically be possible to bring offerings on the Altar even without a Temple! This verse declares however that these offerings will not be accepted by God and precludes the bringing of offerings on the Altar when there is no *Beit HaMikdash*, because the offerings are not valid without having the effect of providing this *satisfying aroma* to God (*Zevachim* 46b).

Interestingly, there is one exception to the above rule—the *Pesach* (Passover) offering—because it is not brought with the purpose of causing a *satisfying aroma*, and could therefore be offered even at the time when God is not savoring the satisfying aroma of the other offerings. It is even documented (*Haamek Davar*) that there was a while, even after the destruction of the second Holy Temple (in 70 C.E.), when there was an Altar intact upon which they did bring the *Pesach* offering!

An important question is, when will the promise of God not smelling the satisfying aroma end? *Netziv* writes that when the nations will give permission to rebuild the Holy Temple, it will be a clear signal of Divine favor and the nullification of this curse. At that time, Israel will once again be able to bring all the offerings on the place of the original Altar.

So as we have seen in discussing this verse, part of God's rebuke means that He will withdraw His Divine Presence from among the people, as it is written in Leviticus 26:30: “My Spirit will reject you.” It is noteworthy that in the beginning of that verse, God promises to remove idolatry from the land of Israel: “I will decimate your sun-idols.” The proximity of these two promises seems hard to understand. If there will no longer be any idols, I would have thought that the Land of Israel should be freely available for the Divine Presence to flourish. Why, then, does the decimation of idols result in the Divine Spirit leaving as well? Let us hear from *R' Simcha Bunim of P'shit'cha*.

R. Simcha Bunim explains that in this world, holiness and impurity must always be in a state of balance; there cannot be only one without the possibility of the other. Just as there cannot be only the possibility of evil, so too there cannot be only the possibility of holiness (in this World) without a balancing potential for impurity. Therefore, after the idols are destroyed, the Divine Presence must also leave Israel.

This basic rule has applications for both the Body of Messiah and for the individual members: **the potential for evil and sin is a reflection of great spiritual potential as well.** Those generations that had a desire for idolatry also had great potential for serving God; a potential that we cannot begin to fathom because we, as a body, have grown lukewarm.

If we apply this to personal development, every one of us possesses one area in which we have a particular difficulty. This may be a source of embarrassment and often we might think that we have an undue inclination to impurity, and we are therefore helpless in the matter; that it would just be best to sweep it under the rug, so to speak, and deal with it as little as possible.

On the contrary, it is important to know that what for one person is an easy thing may be for another a source of great difficulty. More than that, our uniqueness as an individual lies at the root of the very sin against which we struggle the most. To ignore this hardship is to miss an essential opportunity. A particularly strong desire in one area, or a particular character failure, should serve as a signal that this is the area that contains the greatest potential for a person to accomplish spiritually. For it is where one can grow the most that the *yetzer hara* (the evil inclination) tries the hardest to cripple him.

It takes persistence and perseverance to deal with one's hardest challenges, and one must know how to go about it. The first step is to know that the challenge is there for us to address, not ignore. And we know that for those in Messiah Yeshua there is victory over the evil inclination, as Paul writes, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Messiah, and manifests through us the satisfying aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place" (2 Corinthians 2:14).