



THE CHURBAN AND BAD MIRACLES

חָטָא חָטָאָה יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל-כֵּן לְנִידָה הִיָּתָה כָּל-
מִכְבְּדֵיהָ הִזְלוּהָ כִּי-רָאוּ עֲרוּתָהּ גַם-הִיא נֶאֱנָחָה
וַתִּשָּׁב אַחֲזָר: (איכה א:ח)

Jerusalem grievously sinned; therefore, she has become loathsome; all who once respected her disparage her, for they have seen her nakedness. She herself sighs and turns away.

The Gemara explains the phrase “they have seen her nakedness” as a reference to an incident during the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash:

אמר ריש לקיש בשעה שנכנסו גוים להיכל ראו כרובים המעורין זה בזה הוציאון לשוק ואמרו ישראל הללו שברכתן ברכה וקללתן קללה יעסקו בדברים הללו מיד הזילום שנאמר כל מכבדיה הזילוה כי ראו ערותה: (יומא נד:)
Reish Lakish said: When gentiles entered the Sanctuary, they saw the keruvim, cherubs [male and female] entwined with each other. They took them out to the market, and said: These Jews, whose blessing is a blessing and whose curse is a curse should they be occupied with such matters? They immediately disparaged them, as it is stated: “all who once respected her disparage her, for they have seen her nakedness.”

The immediate problem with this story is that the relationship of the *keruvim* to each other reflected the relationship between the Jewish people and God. The Gemara tells us that when we were not fulfilling the will of God the *keruvim* turned away from each other, and when we were fulfilling God’s will they turned toward each other (*Bava Batra 99a*).

The Ritva (*Yoma ad loc.*) raises this question:

בשעה שנכנסו גוים להיכל מצאו כרובין מעורין זה בזה. הקש' הרב בן מאוש ז"ל דהא בב"ב אמרינן שלא היו פניהם איש אל אחיו אלא כשהיו עושין רצונו של מקום ... והנכון כמו שפי' הרא"ם ז"ל דהני נמי בנס היו מעורין עכשיו אלא שנעשה נס לרעה כדי לגלות ערותן.

When the pagans entered the Heichal they found the keruvim entwined in each other. The Ri Migash asked that according to Bava Batra 99a, which states that the keruvim only faced each other when the Jews were fulfilling Hashem’s will [how could it be that at the time of the destruction and punishment for Israel’s sins they were embracing each other?] ... the correct

answer appears to be that the keruvim were entwined miraculously, however in this case it was a miracle for the bad, in order to expose the shame of the Jews...

The Ritva uses the unique phrase *nes lera’ah* “a miracle for bad” to describe this debasement of the Jewish people. Sometimes we see something terrible and tragic and still recognize it as an act of Hashem, a miracle. A miracle is something that clearly indicates Divine involvement in the world, and at times that involvement can be seen in a negative occurrence. Antisemitism is an example of this “miracle for bad.” Antisemitism is unfortunately a phenomenon that has plagued us throughout history and continues to this day. There is a hatred for the State of Israel that is inexplicable in its intensity, universality and irrationality. It is a hatred that is found among Muslims, Christians, right-wing fascists and left-wing socialists.

This was pointed out by Rav Soloveitchik decades ago: *Communist Russia together with the*

Vatican, Nehru, the student of Gandhi, together with the devoutly Catholic Franco, the British Foreign Office with Chiang Kai-shek, have all joined in the attempt to isolate Israel and are being assisted by [Israel's other] enemies in other lands. This conspiracy began specifically after the establishment of the State, at a time when many of Israel's leaders thought that the Jewish problem had been solved, that Jewish isolation had been eradicated and normality had been introduced into our existence. The assumption that the State of Israel has weakened antisemitism is erroneous. On the contrary, antisemitism has grown stronger and employs false charges against the State [of Israel] in the war against us all.

Kol Dodi Dofek, translated by David Z. Gordon, 2006. Ch. 11

I believe that one explanation for this extraordinary “miracle for bad” is that all these groups may have consciously or unconsciously sensed that the return of Jews to their land, the establishment of an independent Jewish state and the success of the state, are indications of the coming redemption. They are afraid, perhaps not even knowing why, as the Gemara (*Megilah* 3a) states, “Even though they did not see the vision, their souls saw it, (*mazlayhu chazu*) and therefore they sensed that there was something fearful...”

The Jewish national revival in Israel is as though a fossil, to borrow Arnold Toynbee's phrase, has come back to life. Frightening indeed for those who have based their ideology on the assumption that the Jews were rejected by God because they rejected a “messiah.” Threatening for those who predicate their faith on the belief that the Jews and the Torah have been superseded by the later “revelation” of the seal of all prophets. Terrifying for those who

believe that there is no God, no Divine Providence and no Chosen People. The same events that cause fear and hatred on the part of others, cause joy and anticipation for us. We, like Rabbi Akivah (*Makot* 24a-b), although witnesses to destruction and hatred, hear in the hatred a “bad miracle” — bad, yes, but a miracle, nonetheless.

Others see Israel and its success and perceive the eternal nature of the Jewish people as a threat to their beliefs and their convictions. We understand these same phenomena as testimony to the imminent redemption. If you see dinosaur footprints in stones in the Jerusalem Forest near Bait Zayit, there is nothing to be afraid of — they have been extinct for eons and only exist as fossils. If, however, you are on the beach in Costa Rica and see fresh velociraptor footprints in the sand — be afraid, very afraid. While others see footprints of an extinct fossil that has come to life, we see the footsteps of the Mashiach, *ikveta d'Meshicha*.

Israel's success in agriculture is obvious as we walk through a Costco in New Jersey and see Israeli fruits and vegetables on display. “There is no greater indication of the redemption than this, ‘And you, mountains of Israel, shall bring forth your branches and bear your fruits for My people Israel’” [Ezekiel 36]. Rashi — When the Land of Israel gives its fruits in abundance, then the redemption is approaching (*Sanhedrin* 98a). This is something that always inspires me, but I can imagine it as something that is threatening and sinister to others.

We can identify with the reaction of Rav Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, the Netziv, in 1882, to receiving one of the first bottles of wine produced by the Carmel (East) Wine Company in

Rishon LeZion. He put on his Shabbat clothing to greet the wine and cried with joy when he held the bottle. We can also understand, although clearly not identify with, someone of another faith who saw that as a contradiction to his deeply held belief in the extinction or obsolescence of the Jews.

Abba Eban spoke at Yeshiva University in 1955 and addressed the idea of the Jews as fossils with his signature eloquence: *Now, the doctrine of the fossil is the very core of the Toynbee heresy. If Israel was a fossil centuries ago, then its survival is certainly an archaism and its restoration is a grotesque paradox. On the other hand, if the concept of Judaism as something petrified and embalmed cannot be sustained, then it is difficult to challenge the right of a sentient living spirit to seek survival and restoration. Prof. Toynbee fails, indeed declines, to substantiate the fossil theory, despite the fact that it is the absolute premise and starting point of all his subsequent judgments. But the fossil, not having read Dr. Toynbee's eight volumes, is unaware of its own petrification. It clings to its sense of mission, and even strives for national restoration.*

We are indeed still in exile and are therefore called “prisoners.” But the prophet Zechariah (9:12) describes us as “prisoners of hope” — “Return to the fortress, you prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.” We are “unaware of our own petrification” and therefore filled with hope and with a will to live, to build and to restore our nation to its former glory.