

WHICH BEIT HA'MIKDASH WAS THE REAL ONE?

Historically (see Britannica.com, "Temple of Jerusalem"), the First Beit Ha'Mikdash was completed by King Solomon in the year 957 BCE and destroyed by the Babylonians in 587/586 BCE. Subsequently, the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash was completed by Ezra in the year 515 BCE and destroyed by the Roman Empire in the year 70 CE. Since that time, the Jewish people have been awaiting the establishment of the Third Temple.

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, in a lengthy discussion in his commentary *Emet L'Yaakov* on Shemot, 12:2, develops a rather unique and creative perspective regarding the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash. Essentially, Rabbi Kamenetsky posits that the Second

Beit Ha'Mikdash was not a completely authentic Temple. In fact, he describes the presence of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel upon their return as still being in *galut* (exile). In addition, the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash was, from its outset, designed to be temporary and relatively short lived. Its purpose was not so much to serve as a traditional location of sacrificial offerings as it was to provide the Jewish people a necessary respite from the existing diaspora. Rabbi Kamenetsky bases his thesis, in part, on the absence of the Aron, the Ark of the Covenant, during the entire Second Temple period. He demonstrates that its absence was not merely due to lack of knowledge of its location. It could not be present in the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash by

virtue of that Temple's status of being inauthentic and transient.

After a relatively short exile period of seventy years, the spiritual character and wellbeing of the Jewish people were profoundly compromised, and the potential danger of a continued existence in exile was ominous.

Thus, G-d saw it necessary to pause the exile with the establishment of a Second Beit Ha'Mikdash, which would reinvigorate the Jewish people spiritually, and perhaps, emotionally. It would allow Jews the opportunity to recommit to the basic principles of Jewish faith. Somehow, the Second Temple injected the Jewish people with sufficient, spiritual stamina to survive until the third and final Beit Ha'Mikdash is built.

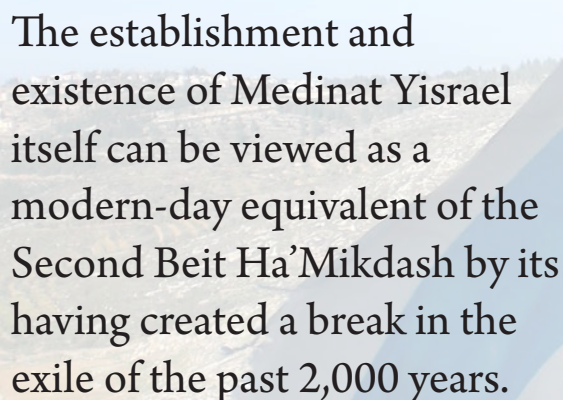
I would suggest that Rabbi Kamenetsky's concept can be employed to understand a fundamental discussion in the Talmud regarding the cause of the destructions of the two Temples. The Talmud states (*Yoma* 9b) that the First Beit Ha'Mikdash was destroyed in response to the Jewish people violating the three cardinal sins of Judaism: murder, idolatry, and immorality. With respect to the Second Temple's demise, the Talmud attributes it to the sin of *sinat chinam* — baseless hatred among the Jewish people.

It seems that the respective causes of the destruction of the two Temples are quite disparate. During the Second Temple, Jews were fundamentally observant in all ways, engaged in Torah study and the performance of mitzvot. The Second Temple Jews didn't come close to committing the serious transgressions of the previous Temple's era. There was internal discord and divisiveness. Yet that doesn't seem to rise to the threshold of sin that should prompt the absolute destruction of the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash and the exile that accompanied it, compared to the guilt of the three most egregious sins of the Torah.

However, if we understand the existence of the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash as a pause in the exile and an opportunity to replenish the spirituality of the Jewish people, then *sinat chinam* is readily understandable as a trigger, rather than a cause, of destruction. The sin didn't have to be on the level of murder, idolatry, or immorality, since the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash was not a truly authentic institution. It was pre-designed to collapse at some point. A reason for its destruction was not necessary; a reason for its continued existence was. When the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash was no longer accomplishing its goal of strengthening Jewish values and religious commitment, its presence was without meaning. If animosity pervaded the Jewish people, then it is inconceivable that, in that context, the Beit Ha'Mikdash was providing any substantive, spiritual regeneration. If *bein adam l'chaveiro* responsibilities (interpersonal relationships) were deficient, then *bein adam l'Makom* observances (relationships with G-d) were not likely of significant virtue. Thus, the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash no longer served a purpose, and was, by default, to be destroyed.

One additional, more contemporary,

application of Rabbi Kamenetsky's perspective relates to the establishment of Medinat Yisrael, the State of Israel. We state in the Tefillah for Medinat Yisrael that it is *reishit tzemichat geulateinu* — the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption. Medinat Yisrael is incomplete in terms of a final redemption, due, in large part, to the void that exists without a Beit Ha'Mikdash. The Third Beit Ha'Mikdash, which will be everlasting, will obviously fill that void in so many ways. Yet, the establishment and existence of Medinat Yisrael itself can be viewed as a modern-day equivalent of the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash by its having created a break in the exile of the past 2,000 years. Medinat Yisrael has infused a resurgence of spirituality for the Jewish people beyond quantification. It is *reishit tzemichat geulateinu* because this respite from the previous exile is not designed to be temporary. This "Second Temple" establishment of the State of Israel is designed to revive our spirituality and religious commitment, in order to lead ultimately to the third Beit Ha'Mikdash, which will be the most authentic and permanent one of Jewish history.



The establishment and existence of Medinat Yisrael itself can be viewed as a modern-day equivalent of the Second Beit Ha'Mikdash by its having created a break in the exile of the past 2,000 years.

