

להביא לימות המשיח

MIKDASH IN MITZRAYIM

Winter, 5752. In a year in which Chassidim have already seen so many unexpected giluyim from the Rebbe, perhaps the sequence of almost nightly “surprise” sichos is not actually such a surprise after all.

But on Wednesday, Motzoei Rosh-Chodesh Adar I, the Rebbe offered unprecedented insight to an age-old issue; in a surprising twist, he brought this story into new light against the backdrop of its classical explanation.

Speaking of all the stages in revealing G-dliness in our world, beginning with the Mishkan and culminating in the Mikdash HaShlishi, the Rebbe also counted the “Mikdash Chonyo” of Egypt as a noteworthy step in this process.

Who was Chonyo? And why is it indeed so novel an idea to ascertain that he takes part in this holy chain?

THE STORY OF CHONYO

The *Navi Yeshaya* describes “ביום ההוא יהי מזבח לה' בארץ מצרים.” In fact, the Mishna records an instance in which a mikdash was built outside of Eretz Yisroel, in Alexandria, Egypt.

The events leading up to the construction of this *Mikdash*, as well as its halachic definition, are basis for a fascinating Torah discussion.

The Gemara describes² the drama that unfolded in the aftermath of the passing of *Shimon Hatzaddik*, who served as *Kohen Gadol* for eighty years. At the time of his passing, he instructed that his younger son, Chonyo, replace him as *Kohen Gadol*. However, the changeover did not run smoothly, as Chonyo's older brother by two and a half years, *Shimi*, was jealous and sought out ways to disrupt the new heir to the position of *Kohen Gadol*.

Posing as having righteous intentions, *Shimi* approached Chonyo and offered to teach him all the skills required for the

job. Subsequently, he instructed Chonyo to wear woman's leather clothing and a woman's belt, and to stand on the *Mizbeach* in this manner. *Shimi* then reported to his other brothers that the *Kohen Gadol* had donned his wife's clothing on the occasion of his new appointment, as he had promised her to do so. As a result of Chonyo's alleged misconduct and the disgrace it caused to the family name, his brothers sought to kill him. Scared for his life, he was forced to flee Eretz Yisroel altogether, relocating to Alexandria, Egypt. At the time, Alexandria was home to tens of thousands of Jews.

In his new home, he built a replica of the *Mikdash* in Yerushalayim, replete with a *Mizbe'ach* and *Korbanos*. He attracted a crowd of followers, known as the “*Kavatzter*”³ whom he mentored in carrying out *avoda*. He was so successful that his *Kavatzter* group appointed him a *Kohen* of Hashem, and his replica *Mikdash* became a landmark. Even the local non-Jewish Egyptian population served

Hashem at the *Mikdash* and offered *Korbanos* there.

The Alexandrian replica *Mikdash*, under the administration of the former *Yerushalmi Kohen Gadol* Chonyo, was in use for two hundred years.

CHONYO'S STATUS IN JEWISH HISTORY

Halachically, such practice is strictly forbidden, as from the time that the *Mikdash* was permanently established in Yerushalayim, *Korbanos* may only be offered there. At any other location, sacrificing *Korbanos* is strictly prohibited by halacha.

Notwithstanding the halachic prohibition, an argument ensued between the *Tana'im* of the Mishna, as to the intentions of Chonyo himself. R' Yehudah argued that though Chonyo's actions were prohibited, he personally was a righteous man, and his intentions were pure. Animals sacrificed at his *Mikdash* were offered to Hashem alone. R' Meir disagreed, stating that Chonyo's intentions were evil and that he offered sacrifices at his replica *Mikdash* to other gods.

Holy intentions or not, an Egyptian *Mikdash* is certainly beyond halachic boundaries, to the point that a “*Kohen*” who had served in Alexandria at Chonyo's place was no longer eligible to serve Hashem in Yerushalayim, and was forbidden from doing any form of *avoda*. Similarly, utensils used at Chonyo's *Mikdash* were considered unfit for use at the house of Hashem in Eretz Yisroel.

In the view of halacha, Chonyo, the former *Kohen Gadol* in Yerushalayim, was shunned from his roots, his landmark institution considered a breakaway of sorts, and any form of supplies, human or vessel, banished from the Chosen House of Hashem.

THE REBBE'S APPROACH

When the Rebbe addressed the subject in the *sicha*, referring to the abovementioned saga of “*Mikdash Chonyo*”, the Rebbe’s take on the issue is in sharp contrast to the classic approach.

Instead of stressing the negative aspect of this breakaway institution from the *Mikdash* in Yerushalayim, the Rebbe views the “Chonyo” narrative in a very positive light, explaining how the function of the *Mikdash* in Egypt is very much in line with that of the *Mikdash* in Yerushalayim, the divinely chosen home of Hashem. For just as Hashem chose a dwelling place in Yerushalayim, the Egyptian *Mikdash* serves the same function, drawing down G-dlines into this world.⁴ In fact, the construction of the replica Alexandrian *Mikdash* is, in the spiritual sense, a fulfilment of the *Mitzvah* to build a *Mikdash* – “*Ve’asu li mikdash veshachanti besocham*”, the very same commandment which refers to the building of the *Mikdash* in Yerushalayim; first, second and third.

Moreover, the construction of a home for Hashem in the land of Egypt is a beginning and preview of the final *Geulah*. At that time, as the *Navi Yeshaya* states:



“*Uv’au ha’ovdim be’ertz Ashur vehanidachim be’ertz Mitzrayim*“. Hence, beginning the process of revealing G-dliness in Egypt specifically through erecting a home in which Hashem lives (in accordance with the abovementioned opinion of R’ Yehudah that animals were sacrificed at Chonyo with the sole intent of serving Hashem) is very much the function of the third and final *Geulah*, as the *possuk* clearly connects *Geulah* with the redemption of Egypt.

Regarding the negative view of Chonyo as a halachicly unacceptable breakaway, the Rebbe focuses on its positive aspects. The function of the Alexandrian replica, though halachicly unacceptable, was very much the same as that of its look-alike in *Yerushalayim*, namely, a house of Hashem in which *Korbanos*

are sacrificed to Him, to the point that its construction is in the spiritual sense a *Mitzvah*, just as the construction of its *Yerushalmi* counterpart. Moreover, says the Rebbe, its construction began the process and provides a taste of the third and final *Geulah*, spreading Divine light in the land of Egypt. ■

1. *Sichos Kodesh* 5752 vol. 2 p. 698.

1. See *Menachos* 109B. See there for an additional, different version of the story.

3. See *Rambam Pirush Hamishnayos* *ibid*.

4. See the *farbrengen* of *Shabbos Parshas Pekudei* 5741. The Rebbe explains that the *Yerushalayim* and Egyptian *Mikdash* differ in location only. The revelation of G-dliness at both *Mikdashos*, however, is identical. See *Or Hatorah Parshas Chukas* (quoted in the above *Sicha*), that the difference of location is of great significance, as drawing down G-dliness into Chonyo’s *Mikdash* creates “*Chayus Eloki*” in a place of *Kelipa*.