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Teveth I

The Tenth of Teveth—The Wanderdoo (Galuth) of the Jewish People and its Significance

The Tenth of Teveth is the first of the four fasts which perpetuate amongst Jews the memory of their twice-suffered catastrophe, the downfall of the Jewish State.

This memorial is no mere form.

You are not invited to a merely idle mourning, to look back a little, to tie crêpe on your sleeve, and to dedicate a tear of sadness to the departed great. The anniversaries of the fall of Jerusalem and Zion find you fasting. This fasting beckons you on. It reminds you that Jerusalem and Zion have not fallen for ever. It reminds you that it lies in your hands to make "the fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth month to become to the House of Judah days of joy and delight." (Zechariah 8, 19) It reminds you that you have but to will it and Jerusalem and Zion will rise again.

For look, you fast on these days of remembrance in order to tell yourself that your fate and your life's task are still linked with this catastrophe, and you have to go on repeating this fast until your destiny is fulfilled and until you can comprehend and accomplish your life's task.

Your fate is called "Galuth" and your life's task "Teshuvah."

When on such days of remembrance you look back on the last two thousand years of your history—and you belong to the only race of mankind now living which can look back to the fourth millennium of its history—what a glorious picture meets your eyes! Everywhere at home yet everywhere a stranger, everywhere a stranger yet everywhere at home—mixing in the affairs of all peoples yet not taking root in them, in its thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, movements and activities, belonging to every period yet transcending every period, taking part actively in the cares and strivings of other people yet not

sharing their final catastrophe—the most sorrowful yet the most joyous of peoples, at once the most tortured and the most triumphant, the most despised human group upon earth and the most esteemed! “The most disfigured and belaboured of peoples, and yet the nation most feared from the time of its appearance on earth,” as the prophet says (Isaiah 18, 7).

Were you to know nothing more than this history of yours, would you not feel impelled to look round for some element of unconquerable strength and endurance in Jewry which keeps it alive in the midst of, and in spite of, hostile forces and circumstances and in the teeth of adverse conditions under which no other group could survive—and in so doing proclaims its presence to the dullest eye?

Take up your Torah, this “guidance” and instruction of your God and read how this Galuth, this “doom of wandering” so unique in history did not come by accident or by surprise in the course of the ages. Read how warning was given a thousand years before of this unique event with all its sorrows and all its glory. Read how the whole destiny of your people down to the present day was already foretold in that moment when for the first time you were about to enter the land on which you were to begin your history as a people. Compare your own history and that of the land with its predictions then made to you; and you will see in this land, in yourself, in every Jew a perpetual, ever-present memorial, witness and proof of the omnipotent, ubiquitous and eternal Providence which determines and shapes the fate of peoples and individuals, and you will rejoice sincerely in your lot, so bitter and yet so glorious.

Therefore seek not to withdraw yourself from this Galuth-doom of yours, least of all when you feel too weary to endure it longer, when you think to procure a change, and, as it seems to you, an improvement in your lot by renouncing your Jewish task. In this way you will in fact never change and improve it.

Consider now. God has scattered you among the nations as a touch-stone. He has committed you unarmed and defenceless to the voice of God-fearing justice and love in the heart of man. Man’s justice, love and knowledge of God are your only protectors on earth. The louder or more powerful the voice of justice and love in the breast of men, the more cheerful, the more easy is your Galuth-wandering on earth; and again, the purer, the more clear-cut, the more commanding the idea of God in their minds, the louder will be the voice of justice,

the more powerful the voice of love. And it is only in the justice which is rendered even-handedly to the weakest, in the love which is bestowed on the weakest, that we can see whether the sense of justice is genuine, whether the love is pure. Thus the justice and the love which the Jew finds on earth is a gauge of the progress of the human race, and his deliverance goes hand in hand with the deliverance of the human race from injustice, selfishness and the crass denial of God.

Thus your future is linked with the final and genuine ennoblement of the human race—but first and foremost with your own.

When from the silence of the night you cry to the Watchman and Guide of the ages, "Watchman, what of the universal night? Watchman, what of my night?" then the Watchman answers: "The morning is coming, but to be sure night also. But if you wish—and certainly you should wish—return and come at once!" (Isaiah 21,11–12)

"When all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt bethink thyself among all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God and hearken unto His voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thy heart and with all thy soul, then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the peoples whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of heavens, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will He fetch thee. And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shall possess it; and He will do thee good and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart and the heart of thy seed to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. . . . And thou shalt return and hearken to the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command thee this day. And the Lord thy God will make thee over-abundant in all the work of thy hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good; for the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good as He rejoiced over thy fathers; if thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law; if thou turn unto the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deuteronomy 30, 1–6, 8–10).

You see there how your future is laid down unchangeably by the Watchman and Guide of the Ages and of your own destiny by your God. And just as no word which He has pronounced concerning you has ever been falsified, just as up to this moment every one has been fulfilled, so the allotted span of humanity will not be ended before this word of your God which He has uttered concerning you and the future of His Torah and your salvation which is bound up with this Torah has been gloriously fulfilled.

Like the pillars of cloud and the fire in the wilderness, so this word lights up the way for you in your Galuth-night; it levels all heights, raises all depressions, and consumes the thorns and thistles which entangle your feet as you wander on towards the noblest of all goals.

The days which commemorate the loss of your national prosperity find you fasting. This fasting should remind you of this word of your God, and should bid you retire into yourself and return to Him and His holy teaching with your whole heart and soul. You must return with your children to the whole unabbreviated content of His word if you desire ever to raise yourself again from your downfall.

As you raise your foot to return, error and delusion twine around it saying: "This Torah is antiquated, it belongs to the past, much, most of what it contains is no longer of any use for you and your children, you must emancipate yourself from it if you wish to emancipate yourself from your Galuth." "This is not true," says the word of God. The Torah belongs not to the past but it belongs with its whole content to the living future. Your return, your genuine and permanent return to its full content is the goal of the whole of your Galuth-wandering, the sole condition for your future welfare. We should be foolish indeed if, after hearing this word of God, we should still imagine that we can place our welfare and that of our children on a firm basis while we forsake the path of the Torah. Every step away from it leads to ruin. Every step towards it leads to salvation. Why have you been condemned to Galuth-wandering? Because you have forsaken the Torah of your God. Why does this Galuth still continue? Because you have not yet returned to His Torah with your whole heart and soul, because you have not yet put it into practice in its totality. What will bring this Galuth to an end? Only a complete return to the whole Torah will deliver you. It is God who speaks thus. And you would first have to deny this God, the truth of His word and His ubiquitous and eternal providence, if you think you will be able to find salvation for yourself and your children by any other way.

On the day of fasting, open the books of your prophets and the sayings of your wise men and read what has brought you into your sorry plight. ויחצברו בגוים וילמדו מעשיהם, “they mingled among the heathen and learnt of their ways”—this is the epitaph written by all the prophets on the first tombstones of Jerusalem and Zion. And further: מפני שנאה חנם, “causeless hatred has brought us to our graves”—this is the cry that echoes from the ruins of Jerusalem’s second downfall.

Here are portrayed for you our national sins, from the effects of which we are still suffering at the present day.

We lack the courage and the independence of spirit to walk firmly and resolutely in our own path. We lack the strength, we lack the enthusiasm, we lack the self-knowledge and self-respect, we lack the unflinching adherence to God and His holy word, which would enable us to live among the people of the earth, to participate in their cares and strivings, and to attach ourselves to them in harmonious and friendly co-operation without giving up one jot of our specific Jewish duties to God; which would enable us to be men among men and yet in spite of this, or rather all the more by means of this, to be Jews through and through, according to our original mission: “Keep and practise, for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples, that when they hear all these statutes shall say: Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (Deuteronomy 4,6). This lack of God-fearing self-respect, of proper respect and esteem for our Divine Law, is one of our national sins.

The second is a deplorable splitting-up of the single Law of God, a meaningless division of the indivisible Torah into מצות שבין אדם לחברו and מצות שבין אדם למקום, duties of man to God and of man to man, and the still more deplorable transference of this idea from theory into practice.

Neglect of the specific Jewish duties towards God has dug our first grave, and neglect of our duties towards our human brethren produced our second downfall. Never shall we be at ease again until we have become wholly Jews, until we grasp life in its totality and unity and so “observe and practice” the Divine Law also in its unity and totality—תורה ה' תמימה משיבת נפש, only the whole unabridged Torah brings salvation.

Whether you are רע למקום or רע לבריות, in either case you sin against God and undermine your salvation. You can never boast of progress, neither you nor the age in which you live, so long as we do not progress with equal resolution in both spheres, so long as we contaminate our virtues in one sphere with our shortcomings in the

other, so long as we do not make atonement for חורבן בית ראשון and חורבן בית שני by being whole Jews, by fulfilling all our duties both to God and to man, “unabridged and whole as God has commanded us, we and our children with all our heart and all our soul.”