It’s On Me

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma 5a) makes a stark statement.

‘Every generation in which the Beit HaMikdash is not rebuilt, it is as if he is responsible for its destruction.’

Rav Asher Weiss (Minchas Asher), highlights that the text of the Yerushalmi quoted above is often misinterpreted. The common understanding of the above statement is that if the Beit HaMikdash is not rebuilt in our lifetime it is because our “generation” was not worthy of its being rebuilt. In a way it is a bit of a relief for us to place responsibility for not merit the rebuilding of the Mikdash on others. There is so much Chilul Shabbat, sinat chinam and other transgressions being committed by the masses, and that is why we do not merit the redemption. Yet, if we look at the specific language used by the Yerushalmi, it states – K’ILU HU HECHERIVO - it is as if “he” destroyed it. The gemara does not state that it is as if the generation was not worthy, rather it uses the term HU- relating the responsibility to the individual! Each and every individual has to internalize that we are personally responsible for the fact that we did not merit the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash (yet) in our lifetime.

When there is a storm at sea, Yona HaNavi steps up to the plate and takes responsibility by stating: ‘This storm is on account of my behavior.’

The Gemara in Gittin (58a) informs us of a story whereby Rav Yehoshua ben Chananya, who was on his way to Rome was told that there was a young child who was taken captive. Rav Yehoshua goes to visit the child and asks him a question, which is actually a pasuk from the Navi Yeshayahu (42:24):

Who subjected Yaacov to plunder and Israel to spoilers? Meaning – why did this happen, that you were placed in captivity?

The young lad responded by citing the remainder of the verse in Yeshayahu:

Was it not HaShem? This, that we sinned against Him, and they did not want to go in His way and did not hearken to His Torah.

Rabbi Yehoshua hears his words and declares this child will grow to become a gadol hador and demands that he be redeemed by the community and freed from captivity immediately. That child was Rav Yishmael ben Elisha.

Asks the Minchas Asher, how did Rav Yehoshua recognize from this brief exchange that this child would be a great scholar? By analyzing the child’s response, we see his level of maturity. The pasuk he quoted answers Rav
Yehoshua’s question - why was this child taken into captivity? The child responds initially with a “we” sinned against Hashem. He includes himself. He takes responsibility. Then he uses more general terms, to include others - “they” did not want to go in His way. True the people were not all Torah abiding Jews, and they have to improve their ways, but first the child introspects and admits that he has to improve as well. That is the mark of a true scholar; one who does not point fingers at others, but who internalizes events in order to improve oneself and blossom.

The story is told of the Rabbi who gave a knockout drasha Shabbat morning. He pointed out to his congregation all the areas in which they needed improvement, in an inspiring and moving way. On his way down from the pulpit, one of his baalei batim ran over and exclaimed, “Rabbi, you really told them all they needed to hear! Yashar Ko'ach”. The Rabbi then continued walking to his seat bit now with mixed feelings. He did his best but he realized that someone will always look elsewhere to place the blame.

During this time of year when we mourn the loss of our Batei Mikdash, and yearn for the redemption, we should internalize the loss and take personal responsibility for not yet meriting the geula sh'leima in our time. To understand the words of the Yerushalmi, K’ILU HU HECHERIVO to refer to the personal contribution that each of us has toward the destruction of the Mikdash. Rather than look elsewhere and blame others for our fate, we should look in the mirror and direct our attention to that individual and “reflect” on how to improve our avodatHashem. How to improve our davening, our Torah learning, our patience with our children and spouse and the acts of chesed we could perform. If each and every one of us would take upon ourselves that responsibility, perhaps we would merit the building of the third Beit HaMikdash in our time!