The Cause of the Churban

Flaunting what we have and what we have accomplished comes naturally to many people today. Social media particularly is bent on making sure everyone knows everything about anything that one deems important to know. One of the fallouts of this phenomenon is found in a fundamental Kli Yakar on Parshat D’varim.

After the sin of the Spies, the Torah tells us that the Jews spent a long time going around Har Se’ir, instead of crossing it to enter the land of Israel. The D’varim 2:3 states: “Enough of your circling this mountain, turn yourselves northward [tzafona].” The Kli Yakar comments that this pasuk is alluding to the reality of Jewish History. It is a description of the quintessential wandering Jew, continuously traveling from place to place until the time of the final redemption. The end of the pasuk, however, is perhaps most informative: when a Jew finds success and riches in places of galut, then “tzafona” (from the root tzafun-hide) one should conceal what he has and not display it.

Further, it is not accidental that this verse is referring to the travels around the mountain of Se’ir, the territory of Eisav. Eisav has never forgiven Yaakov for stealing his brachot and believes that all earthly riches belong to him exclusively. Such feelings of being cheated are still present in his descendants who are jealous of any wealth and grandeur that any Jew possesses. The Kli Yakar warns the people of his generation and generations for all time to be careful about public exhibition of their wealth so as not to arouse the envy of the nations.

Parshat D’varim is always read right before Tish’a b’Av. Perhaps the lesson of the Kli Yakar can be extended to include interpersonal relationships between Jews as well. We are all still struggling with the great offense of sinat chinam, baseless hatred -- the ultimate cause of the churban. It is appropriate to ask ourselves at this time if we are in any way responsible for igniting this baseless hatred. What are we gaining by posting every detail of our riches, successes and vacations for all to see and “ooh” and “aah”?

The path to rebuilding the Beit HaMikdash is through improving our inner selves in the way Hashem desires. The navi Micha teaches us the three fundamental building blocks of serving Hashem: doing acts of justice, loving kindness, and walking modestly with Hashem. Modesty is not only in dress; it is in knowing how to appreciate what we have without creating resentment and antagonism from the nations or among our own brethren. When we can “hide” our wealth we begin to “reveal” our greatness.