

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future  
Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

# Tisha B'av To-Go

# 5769



## Featuring Divrei Torah from

Rabbi Kenneth Brander  
Rabbi Reuven Brand  
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman  
Rabbi Josh Flug  
Rabbi Eliyakim Koenigsberg  
Ms. Miriam Krupka  
Dr. David Pelcovitz  
Rabbi Dr. Jacob J Schacter

Plus a collection of insights  
to the Tisha B'av Kinnot

Richard M Joel, President, Yeshiva University  
Rabbi Kenneth Brander, Dean, Center for the Jewish Future

Rabbi Robert Shur, General Editor

Copyright © 2009  
All rights reserved by Yeshiva University

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future  
500 West 185<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 413, New York, NY 10033  
office@yutorah.org • 212.960.5400 x 5313

# Table of Contents

**Tisha B'av 2009/5769**

## Introduction

Rabbi Kenneth Brander ..... Page 4

## History Re-actualized

Rabbi Reuven Brand ..... Page 5

## The Double Kindness: Nichum Aveilim

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman ..... Page 8

## Tisha B'Av: A Day of Multiple Perspectives

Rabbi Joshua Flug ..... Page 23

## The Thin Line Between Love and Hatred

Estee Goldschmidt ..... Page 29

## What Mourning Means: Reflections of the Rav on Tisha B'Av

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg ..... Page 32

## The Legacy of Yirmiyahu

Ms. Miriam Krupka ..... Page 37

## Megillat Eicha: Catastrophe, Creativity, and Catharsis

Sarah Medved and Esty Rollhaus ..... Page 45

## Coping with Loss and Terror: Jewish and Psychological Perspectives

Dr. David Pelcovitz ..... Page 50

## Tisha B'Av: Some Introductory Thoughts

Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter ..... Page 62

## Collected Insights into the Tisha B'av Kinnot

..... Page 64

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 549) relates that while Tisha b'Av commemorates the loss of both Temples our mourning begins on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz, as it marks the beginning of the destruction of the second Temple. Rav Karo explains that we do not begin the mourning process from the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tamnuz, when the destruction of the first Temple began, because the loss of the second Temple is more significant.

As the central kinot for Tisha b'Av is Megillat Eicha, it is important that we recognize that the word itself holds the critical ingredient necessary for us to transform this day of sadness and mourning to a day of solace and jubilation. To solve the problem of *Eicha*, “How could this happen?” we need to scrutinize how the realities of this *Diaspora* came to be. While the first Temple was destroyed due to the lack of embrace of the Sh'mittah year, acts of idol worship and sexual promiscuity, the second Temple was destroyed for a singular issue, si'nat chinam – baseless hatred, the lack of respect for one another.

Rabbi Soloveitchik was fond of saying that the best way to understand a word is to analyze the first time it appears in the Torah. The word *איכה*, *eicha*, first appears in the Torah as *איכה*, *ayekah* (Bereshiet 3:9) - when Hashem asks Adam and Chava – where are you? If we are to solve the national calamity of *גולה* *golah*, exile and Diaspora, and move to a state of *גאולה* *geulah*, redemption then we must recognize that the phonetic difference between these two words is one letter aleph representing the role of *אני*, the individual. For each of us must ask ourselves *ayekah* – where are *we* in responding to *eicha* – how did this happen?

Rav Naphtali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin explains in his introduction to Sefer Bereshiet that the calamity of the Diaspora occurred when those involved with Torah study were not willing to recognize that there are multiple gateways of service to God. “The pious, the righteous and those steeped in Torah study were not virtuous in their interactions with others. They had baseless hatred of others in their hearts. They looked askance at those who served Hashem differently [then they]; thinking that they were *Zadukim* and *Apikorsim* – apostates and heretics. It is for this reason that death and civil unrest [came to our people], and all the evils that happened in the world culminating with the destruction of the [second] Temple occurred.”

It is not coincidental that the *troph*, cantillations, for *Megillat Eicha* and *Megillat Esther* are similar. What separates these two megillot is not the mesoretic musical notes, but rather the tone in which they are enunciated. It is a keen reminder that the Moshiach is born on this day of Tisha b'Av. Moshiach is found in each of us. When we answer the question of Ayekah, where are we in the way we treat other Jews and other human beings, we solve the problem of Eicha, how could this have happened and how do we change the status quo. Our personal commitment to engage in the solution instead of being part of the problem changes *golah* to *geulah*.

It is our hope that this To-Go becomes an annual occurrence not marking a fast but a day of joy. Hopefully the learning we share will empower and enable us to become the change agents to make *geulah* happen. I wish you all a meaningful three weeks and fast.

Sincerely,

**Rabbi Kenneth Brander**

*The David Mitzner Dean, Center for the Jewish Future*

# History Re-actualized

Rabbi Reuven Brand

Rosh Kollel, Yeshiva University Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago

Many families have a custom to eat an egg at their Pesach Seder meal, as explained by the Rama (Rabbi Moshe Isserles, 16<sup>th</sup> c.) in his comments on the laws of Pesach:

*In some places there is a custom to eat eggs at the meal as a symbol of mourning. **It seems to me that the reason is because the night of Tisha Bav is established as the night of Pesach**, and, in addition, as a memorial to the destruction [of the Beit Hamikdash], where they used to offer the Korban Pesach.*

**Rama, Orach Chaim 476:2**

הגה נוהגים בקצת מקומות לאכול  
בסעודה ביצים זכר לאבלות ונראה לי  
הטעם משום שליל תשעה באב נקבע  
בליל פסח ועוד זכר לחורבן שהיו  
מקריבין קרבן פסח  
רמ"א אורח חיים תע"ב

The Rama explains the presence of mourning at the Seder night in light of the curious “coincidence” that the eve of the Pesach Seder is always the same night of the week as the eve of Tisha Bav of that year.

In his comments on this passage, the Chok Yaakov (Rabbi Yaakov Reisher, 18<sup>th</sup> c.) finds an allusion to this idea in the traditional calendar mnemonic called “א-ת-ב-ש.” This pairing of Hebrew letters, connecting the first and last and the subsequent pairs, is mentioned by the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 428:3) as a way to arrange the holidays in the Jewish calendar. According to this pattern, the first letter (aleph) connects to the last letter (tav) hinting to the first night of Pesach (aleph) coinciding with the letter tav, which stands for Tisha Bav.<sup>1</sup>

This parallel between Pesach and Tisha Bav surfaces on Tisha Bav as well. It is featured in the kinnah “A fire kindles within me (aish tukad bekirbi)”:

*A fire kindles within me as I recall- when I left Egypt,  
But I raise laments as I remember- when I left Jerusalem.*

*Moses sang a song that would never be forgotten- when I left Egypt,  
Jeremiah mourned and cried out in grief- when I left Jerusalem.*

*The sea-waves pounded but stood up like a wall- when I left Egypt,  
The waters overflowed and ran over my head- when I left Jerusalem.*

*Moses led me and Aaron guided me- when I left Egypt,  
Nebuchadnezzar and the Emperor Hadrian- when I left Jerusalem... ”*

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the second night of Pesach (bet) corresponds to the letter shin, which stands for Shavuot, and so on.

This lament highlights the contrast between the celebration of Pesach when we left Egypt triumphantly and the catastrophe of Tisha Bav when we left Jerusalem in mourning. The question remains: what is the thematic connection between Pesach and Tisha Bav?

Let us begin our exploration with an unusual ruling in the Shulchan Aruch.

*If there is a mourner in the city, he goes at night to the synagogue and also at daytime until they conclude the kinnot.*  
**Shulchan Aruch 559:6**

אם יש אבל בעיר הולך בלילה לבית  
הכנסת וגם ביום עד שיגמרו הקינות :  
שלחן ערוך תקנ"ט:ו

This ruling is puzzling. We know that during the period of mourning, a mourner may not leave his house (Yoreh Deah, 393)?

The Magen Avraham (Rabbi Avraham Abele Gombiner, 17<sup>th</sup> c.) in his commentary on this ruling resolves our question with three words, which set the tone for our experience of Tisha Bav: “*Since we are all mourners - אבלים שכולם*”

On Tisha Bav each year we re-actualize<sup>2</sup> the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, and we all experience mourning firsthand. Hence, although the mourner leaves his personal home, he is still in a house of mourning when he enters the shul. On Tisha Bav, all of our homes are houses of Aveilut, as we are all in mourning. In a similar vein, some communities had a custom to recite the beracha of Dayan Haemet on Tisha Bav before the reading of the Torah<sup>3</sup>, much as a mourner would do immediately after the loss of a close relative. We now also understand why the Rama writes (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 552:5) that some have the custom to eat eggs in the Seudah Hamafseket, the pre- Tisha Bav meal, as eggs are eaten by mourners, and on Tisha Bav, we all experience mourning. The destruction of the Beit Hamikdash is not a matter of history. On Tisha Bav we re-actualize this calamity and all Jewish suffering, and we relive the memory of mourning.

Perhaps now we can appreciate the connection between the egg of the Seder and the Seudah Hamafseket; the experience of Pesach and the experience of Tisha Bav, in light of a passage in the Rambam. On Pesach night, one of the salient features of the Seder is the responsibility for each of us to see ourselves as if we are actually marching out of Egypt on the Seder night, as the Rambam describes:

*In each generation, a person is obligated to demonstrate as if he himself is leaving the servitude of Egypt right now as the Torah states, and He took us out from there and on this Hashem commanded in the Torah, and you should remember that you were a slave, as if to say that you yourself were a slave and you went out to freedom and were redeemed.*

**Chametz UMatzah 6:7**

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם להראות את עצמו  
כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא עתה משעבוד מצרים  
שנאמר דברים ו' ואותנו הוציא משם וגו', ועל  
דבר זה צוה הקב"ה בתורה דברים ה' וזכרת כי  
עבד היית כלומר כאילו אתה בעצמך היית עבד  
ויצאת לחירות ונפדית.  
הלכות חמץ ומצה ו:ז

<sup>2</sup> This term is coined by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi in his volume on Jewish History and Jewish Memory, *Zakhor*, which served as an inspiration for this article.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this practice, see *Minhagei Yisrael*, vol. 4, p. 24.

The essence of the Seder is to re-actualize the Exodus. Each year we sit and reflect not on a historical event, an exodus of old, but on the current experience of redemption. Much like Tisha Bav, Pesach is a time of re-actualization. Both of these are days in which history becomes reality and memory becomes experience. On Pesach each of us experiences freedom firsthand as we feel a sense of immediate redemption, while on Tisha Bav we experience acute mourning as we feel an immediate sense of destruction. We demonstrate these experiences visually; on Pesach we recline as kings, and on Tisha Bav, we sit on the floor as mourners.

This parallel between Pesach and Tisha Bav is found in the Tisha Bav liturgy in another interesting place. Some Sephardic communities have a kinnah which begins with Ma Nishtana, why is this night different than other nights. In an obvious allusion to the Pesach Haggadah, the author of the kinnah reflects on how the night of Tisha Bav is unique in its sadness, in contrast to the night of Pesach which is singular in its exaltation.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in his exposition of the kinnot of Tisha Bav, suggested that these poems of lament are a fulfillment of a requirement to tell over the story of our misfortune, much as there is a mitzvah of sippur yetziat Mitzrayim:

*Just as there is a mitzvah on Yom Tov to stimulate every member of one's household to be happy and rejoice (Rambam, Hilkhos Yom Tov 6:17-18), so too on Tish'ah be-Av is it important for the head of the household to stimulate the members of his house to feel a sense of mourning? In the kinah beginning "A'addeh ad hug shamayim," Kalir writes, "I will stimulate everyone I know, all who come into my house (agoreh itti kol benei vayit)." This refers not to telling the story of the exodus from Egypt (sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim), but to telling the story of the destruction of Jerusalem (sippur hurban Yerushalayim)...*

***There is apparently a mitzvah to engage in sippur hurban Yerushalayim. Although it is not a biblical obligation, the story is told in the same manner as sippur yetziyat Mitzrayim. Just as the latter is told to the son within the frame of reference of his intelligence- the son who understands more should be told a different story than the son who does not understand as much (Pesachim 116a)- so too should we engage in sippur hurban Yerushalayim.***

***The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways, pp.186- 187***

We now understand that the placement of Pesach and Tisha Bav on the same day on the calendar is no coincidence. It reflects the common character of these two days as days of re-actualization, and it highlights the painful contrast between the height of redemption and the nadir of exile. This notion of re-actualization is purposeful. On the Seder night the sippur yetziat Mitzrayim enables us to focus on the key themes of the evening and convey these lessons to our children. Similarly, on Tisha Bav, the experience of mourning and the sippur hurban Yerushalayim should give us pause to contemplate our current state of exile, its origins and various ways in which we can merit an end to our current state of mourning.

# The Double Kindness: *Nichum Aveilim*

Rabbi Daniel Feldman

Faculty, Stone Beit Midrash Program

Director, Rabbinic Research, Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

Excerpted from **Divine Footsteps: Chesed and the Jewish Soul** (Yeshiva University Press, 2008).

For more information, please visit [www.yutorah.org/yeshivapress](http://www.yutorah.org/yeshivapress)

## A Dual Kindness

A prominent manifestation of *chesed* is the comforting of mourners, *nichum aveilim*. While Maimonides, as noted, considers the specific formats of *chesed* to be rabbinic institutions,<sup>4</sup> Rabbenu Yonah, among others, asserts that comforting mourners is a Biblical obligation.<sup>5</sup> God himself modeled this behavior, as the Torah tells us that He blessed Isaac after the passing of his father Abraham, apparently as an act of comfort.<sup>6</sup>

Maimonides states that the precept of *nichum aveilim* is of particular significance because it involves kindness to both the living and the dead.<sup>7</sup> This idea is apparently derived from a statement in the Talmud that the soul mourns for itself for seven days. Consequently, the deceased benefits from the comfort offered by the visitors.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, even in a situation where there are no mourners, it is appropriate for ten men to go and sit together in the place where the deceased lived<sup>9</sup>. Maimonides understood this notion to imply that these men would

---

4 This is also the implication of Rashi, *Sanhedrin* 70b, s.v. *devar mitzvah*, particularly in reference to comforting mourners.

5 Rabbenu Yonah, *Berakhot* 11b in pages of the Rif. See R. Meir Auerbach, *Imrei Binah*, *Orach Chaim* 13:3. See also *Sefer Yereim Ha-shalem*, 219; *Ahavat Chesed* 3:5 and *Bi'ur Halakhah*, *Orach Chaim* 72, s.v. *ba-yom*; R. Yitzchak Elchanan Spector, *Responsa Ein Yitzchak*, *Even Ha-Ezer* II, 62:60; R. Shlomo Schneider, *Divrei Shelomoh* I, 6; *Yad Ha-Melekh* on *Mishneh Torah*, and R. Mordechai Meshulam Babad, *Minchat Machvat* I, 245.

6 Gen. 25:11, per *Sotah* 14a; see *Torah Temimah*, Gen. 18:8. Similarly, God blesses Jacob when Isaac dies (Gen. 35:9). See also R. Yitzchak Oelbaum, *Responsa She'eilat Yitzchak* II, 147.

7 *Hilkhot Eivel* 14:7.

8 *Shabbat* 152b. An alternative interpretation of this idea can be found in R. Aharon David Grossman's *Ve-Darashita Ve-Chakarta al Ha-Torah* IV, 149, where he cites the *Penei Menachem* of Ger as explaining that the reference of "kindness to the deceased" is to allowing the deceased to accrue merit. As the earthly existence has ended, there are no opportunities to fulfill *mitzvot*; however, by being the cause for the fulfillment of *nichum aveilim*, the deceased is credited with causing the realization of *chesed* in the world.

9 It is noteworthy that the above scenario calls for ten men sitting at the house, while in a situation where there



serve as substitute mourners, remaining in that place and accepting visitors.<sup>10</sup> The *Ra'avad*, in his glosses, objects and states there is no source for this concept. There is some discussion as to what exactly the *Ra'avad* found objectionable within Maimonides' formulation; according to the commentary *Lechem Mishneh*, the *Ra'avad* believed the role of these men is to gather in the home of the deceased, but not to actually take on the status of mourners. This notion, as expressed by Maimonides, is evidence of the aspect of honor to the departed contained within this *chesed*. This is explicit in the Talmudic commentary of the Meiri, who writes, "others come and surround [the volunteers] as if they are the ones who need comfort, and this is for the honor of the deceased."

This concept of voluntary mourning for a non-relative is found elsewhere in the Talmud, as noted in the commentary of the *Rashba*, who explains accordingly the actions of Rabban Gamliel, who sat *shivah* for his noble servant.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the *Rama* rules that one who is not related may volunteer to join the family as part of the group of mourners.<sup>12</sup> R. Joseph B. Soloveichik was of the opinion that this was the appropriate model for adopted children, who are not obligated by the strict letter of the law to mourn, while the propriety of doing so is self-evident.<sup>13</sup>

## Defining the *Mitzvah*

Central to the above discussion is the very definition of *nichum aveilim* itself. As with many categories of *chesed*, the name of the act appears simple and yet at the same time suggests a more complex mission. The literal translation of *nichum aveilim* is "the comforting of mourners." While it cannot be assumed that simply appearing in the home of the bereaved causes them to be "comforted," the mere presence of the visitors is certainly significant.<sup>14</sup> As noted by the *Perishah*, the honor to the dead resulting from the visit contributes to the comfort of the mourners.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, more is clearly called for.<sup>16</sup>

Traditionally, certain words are generally spoken during *nichum aveilim*, including the formula,

---

actually are relatives, there is no practice to add volunteers to complete a quorum of ten mourners. R. Betzael Stern (*Responsa Be-Tzeil Ha-Chokhmah* III, 107) explains that this is due to the unique needs of one who dies without relatives to mourn; the obligation then exists to compensate with a more substantial display of honor.

<sup>10</sup> *Hilkhos Eivel* 13:4.

<sup>11</sup> *Berakhot* 16b.

<sup>12</sup> *Yoreh De'ah* 374:6, citing *Teshuvot Ha-Rosh*.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in the journal *Mesorah* V, 47. See also R. Eliyahu Shlesinger, *Responsa Sho'alin U-Dorshin* II, 36.

<sup>14</sup> See also *Sefer Charedim* 43:12, with *Cherdat Kodesh*, 11, where the implication is also that the *mitzvah* is simply "going" to the house of mourning.

<sup>15</sup> *Perishah*, *Yoreh De'ah* 393:3.

<sup>16</sup> It should be pointed out that Sephardic and Yemenite practice does place more of an emphasis on silent presence than on conversation; see *Beit Mo'ed*, pp. 586-588, and *Responsa Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot* I, 691. In one sense, this tradition appears to be more consistent with the statement of the Talmud (*Berakhot* 6b): "The reward for [attending] a house of mourning [is earned by] silence." However, the application of this statement is unclear; see R. Raphael Silber, *Marpei Le-Nefesh to Berakhot*, 22, and the survey of views cited in R. Yechiel Meir Veingort, *Nachlei Orah*, *Berakhot*, 33-35.

“May the Almighty comfort you<sup>17</sup> among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”<sup>18</sup> While this exact formulation does not appear in the Talmud,<sup>19</sup> versions of it do appear in traditional commentaries to the codes of Jewish law.<sup>20</sup> This recitation is of great importance; it is simultaneously an expression of solace, support, perspective, and optimism. As R. Moshe Shternbuch interprets, the intent is to convey to the mourner that just as the destruction of Jerusalem is a tragedy of national significance, the whole Jewish people similarly shares in the loss of the departed individual. No less significant, however, is the other half of the association: just as the mourning over Jerusalem will ultimately be transformed into solace, the bereaved family will ultimately be comforted.<sup>21</sup>

The above translation of the formula is actually somewhat imprecise; the Divine appellation, rendered above as “Almighty,” is actually “*Ha-Makom*,” which is literally translated as “the Place.” While this usage is found in other blessings,<sup>22</sup> there is some discussion as to why it is especially appropriate in this context. One possibility is that a more indirect reference is used so as not to overtly associate the Divine Name with tragedy.<sup>23</sup>

R. Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg suggests that the reference is to a description in the Talmud of God’s behavior following the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people.<sup>24</sup> There we learn that as the glory was taken from the children of Israel, God set aside a hidden “place” for mourning over this situation, until such time as the crown will be restored and consolation will ensue. Thus, in comforting a bereaved family, we invoke “the Place” to convey that just as comfort will come to the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem, this family will also be comforted.<sup>25</sup>

R. Eliyahu E. Dessler suggests that the term “place” is used to assert that, contrary to the popular

---

17 It is perhaps noteworthy that the practice is to use the plural Hebrew term for “you,” *etchem*, in this formula rather than the singular (*otkha* for a male or *otakh* for a female). R. Nachum Yavrov, *Divrei Soferim*, *Aveilut*, 376, in *Emek Davar*, 9, writes that this is also reflective of the dual aspect of *nichum aveilim* discussed above, and thus is understood, “May both of you, the deceased and the living, be comforted.” See *Beit Mo’ed*, 470-471, fn 4, for a similar explanation of the format used in Sephardic communities. This explanation is also found in R. Avraham Mordechai of Ger, *Imrei Emet*, *Likkutim*, 206. If so, this may explain the view attributed to R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (see Nachum Stefansky, *Ve-Alehu Lo Yibol* II, 52) that one should not alter the format even when comforting an esteemed Torah scholar usually addressed in the third person; in doing so, one would remove the plural language. (R. Yavrov notes elsewhere [*Emek Davar*, 317] that R. Yaakov Emden [*Siddur Ya’avetz*, *dinei kria*h, 10] does advocate adapting the language when talking to a single individual. See also R. Moshe Mendel Shklarsh, *Chayei Mosheh: Kelalei Ha-Mitzvot*, 243, n. 6.)

18 This formula is prevalent in Ashkenazi communities; in Sephardic communities, the phrase more commonly used is “*tenuchamu min ha-Shamayim*” (“You should be comforted from Heaven”), sometimes with the addition “*ve-lo tosifu le-da’avah od*” (“and you should not continue to have sorrow”). For a lengthy analysis of this phrase, see R. Shefatiah Ha-Levi Segal, *Chiddushei Rabbi Shefatyah*, 103, and also *Ma’avar Yabok*, *Siftei Ranenut*, ch. 19.

19 See *Arukh Ha-Shulchan*, *Orach Chaim* 287:2.

20 See *Peri Megadim*, *Orach Chaim* 287 in *Eishel Avraham*, and *Shulchan Arukh Ha-Rav*, *Orach Chaim* 287.

21 *Responsa Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot* III, 378.

22 See, for example, *Shabbat* 12b, in the context of offering a blessing to one who is ill.

23 A version of this formula that appears in the *pesakim* of the Maharash Lublin (#40) does include the Divine Name directly.

24 *Chagigah* 5b, with Maharsha.

25 *Responsa Tzitz Eliezer* XVII, 7.

adage, it is not “time” that heals all wounds, but that comfort and the ability to be consoled is a gift from God. Thus, the word utilized is one that connotes Divine guidance and diminishes the role of the natural progression of time.<sup>26</sup>

Another possibility is that the term “place” is used to evoke the place in the next world that the deceased now occupies. It is thus a reference to the spiritual attainments of the deceased, and accordingly a source of comfort as it conveys that the deceased is enjoying the rewards of a meaningful and noble life.<sup>27</sup>

In any event, it is central that God, directly or indirectly, is invoked in this formula. As R. Yitzchak Shmuel Schechter notes, this reiterates the fact that it was God Himself who first modeled *nichum aveilim* when he visited Jacob upon the passing of his father Isaac.<sup>28</sup> Once again, the entire corpus of *chesed* is highlighted as an expression of the Divine example.<sup>29</sup>

The significance of the *nichum aveilim* formula notwithstanding, it is still far from obvious that the mere recitation of that statement constitutes comfort. It appears, rather, that this statement is a blessing traditionally extended to mourners, and as such only a small aspect of what is required of the visitor.<sup>30</sup> The *Chafetz Chaim* identifies this recitation as a possible minimal level of fulfillment, while indicating that to go further than this is clearly preferable.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, R. Moshe Feinstein asserts that the formula is primarily a way to close the visit, rather than the substance of the visit itself.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the nature of the act of “*nichum aveilim*” demands further elucidation.

The Talmud contains many descriptions of great rabbinic figures performing *nichum aveilim*, and their models are instructive. In some cases, the visitors describe the deceased as one who is enjoying great reward.<sup>33</sup> In others, we find philosophical ruminations about the transient nature of life and how it remains a blessing despite its finite aspect.<sup>34</sup> Still other instances involve speculation that the tragedy involved accomplished atonement for the wider community, and thus can be interpreted as a type of heroic sacrifice.<sup>35</sup>

The common element in all of these instances is that the visitor is engaged in an active effort to bring some measure of consolation to the grief-stricken.<sup>36</sup> This clearly goes beyond mere presence and formulaic recitations, and is not satisfied by the offering of blessings for a happier

---

26 *Mikhtav Mei-Eliyahu* IV, 342.

27 Attributed to an anonymous *shivah* visitor in *Yalkut Yosef*, 431, fn 3. See also *Keli Yakar*, Gen. 37:35, who considers the conveying of such a message to be the essence of comfort. See R. Moshe Michel Adler, *Mishnat Ha-Middot*, 315-317.

28 Gen. 35:9 with *Rashi*, citing *Gen. Rabbah*.

29 *Responsa Yashiv Yitzchak* VII, 30, citing an anonymous scholar.

30 See, at length, *Nechamat Sarah*, 7.

31 *Ahavat Chesed* III, ch. 5.

32 *Responsa Iggerot Mosheh*, *Orach Chaim* V, 20:21.

33 See, for example, *Mo'ed Katan* 28b.

34 See *Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, ch. 14, and *Ketubot* 8b.

35 See *Bava Kama* 38a, based on *Shabbat* 33b.

36 See the extensive discussion of this point in R. Yisrael David Harfenes, *Responsa Va-Yevarekh David* (*Kuntres Nechamat Sarah*, 7).

future. While a blessing is found in one of the above Talmudic texts,<sup>37</sup> it appears only after words of active consolation are spoken. This does not discount the value of focusing on the future; in fact, R. Joseph B. Soloveichik is quoted as asserting that convincing the mourners that their grief will be mitigated by the joys of the future is a key task of *nichum aveilim*.<sup>38</sup> But this point is made in the context of a conversation, rather than a recitation; it requires effort and insight.

This effort and insight is alluded to in several Rabbinic references in this context. The Talmud calls a house of mourning “*bei tamia*.” *Rashi* attributes this to the fact that consolation takes place there with words; he uses the phrase “*matimim oto be-devarim*,” which suggests words of “*ta’am*.” “*Ta’am*” means both “reason” and “taste,” and in this context, both meanings are appropriate; the words must contain substance, and the mourner must find them acceptable.<sup>39</sup> Early halakhic sources testify to the efforts made by rabbinic giants to tailor their comments to the specific needs of the mourner and to craft statements that would be effective on an individual level. R. Shmuel Wosner, referencing the *Zohar*, asserts that part of the obligation of this *mitzvah* is that before coming to visit, the visitor should consider and plan what to say in order to effectively bring comfort.<sup>40</sup>

Often, effort is measured by accomplishment, and this is true in *nichum aveilim*, as well. Not only does the visitor have a task to fulfill, but the mourner is also bidden to “accept” the consolation.<sup>41</sup> The Talmud refers to the mourner “nodding,”<sup>42</sup> and the *Zohar* demands that the visitor convey words that evoke agreement from the mourner, who will come to adopt a philosophical perspective.<sup>43</sup> R. Aharon Berachiah of Modena, in his work *Ma’avar Yabok*, a treatise on the passage from this world to the next, asserts that *nichum aveilim* is most appropriately accomplished when the mourner is capable of appreciating the justice in God’s decision and will “bless the bad in the fashion of the good.” He notes further that there is an obligation for the mourner to express gratitude to those who come to comfort and eulogize.<sup>44</sup>

The obligation of comfort applies not only in the emotional realm, but in a broader sense as well. Thus, it is incumbent upon those concerned to address the lack felt by the family in any way

---

37 *Ketubot* 8b

38 As quoted in *Mesorah* V, 48.

39 *Sanhedrin* 113a and *Rashi* s.v. *bei tamia*. As R. Harfenes notes, similar implications are found in the writings of Nachmanides, *Torat Ha-Adam*, *sefer tanchumei aveilim*, cited in Tur, *Yoreh De’ah* 376; Rabbenu Yerucham 28:2; and the *Orechot Chaim*, 582.

40 *Responsa Shevet Ha-Levi* II, 213.

41 See *Mesorah* V and R. Shternbuch, *Responsa Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot* I, 691, III, 377- 378 (referencing *Tzufunot, Nisan* 5749), both citing R. Chaim Soloveitchik, who understood this to be a commandment upon the mourner. *Imrei Emet* (*Likkutim*, 206) cites the *Sefat Emet* in the same vein. R. Shternbuch offers possible Talmudic support for this idea, and suggests that it may be fulfilled by the mourner answering “amen” to the formula of “May the Almighty...” See also R. Gavriel Zinner, *Nit’ei Gavriel*, ch. 85, fn. 6, where it is related that when R. Yochanan ben Zakkai lost his son, he was told “Adam had a son, and he died, you, too, accept consolation.” See also R. Nachum Yavrov, *Divrei Soferim to Hilkhos Aveilut* 376:1:50, and in *Emek Davar*, who suggests a comparison to the priestly blessing, which, according to some authorities, is not only a commandment upon the *kohen* (to bless) but upon the community as well (to receive the blessing); see also *Chayyei Mosheh: Kelalei Ha-Mitzvot*, 244, fn 10 and 11.

42 *Mo’ed Katan* 27b.

43 *Zohar*, *Parshat Korakh*.

44 *Ma’avar Yabok*, *Sefat Emet*, ch. 34, based on *Mo’ed Katan* 28b. See also *Sifte Ran’nut*, ch. 19.

possible. For example, if the departed was the main financial support for the family, then taking up a collection toward this need would be an aspect of *nichum aveilim*.<sup>45</sup> Further, R. Avraham Yisrael notes based on a passage in the Talmud<sup>46</sup> that the mourner is comforted by actions that show him honor. Accordingly, that need should be factored in when considering the method and manner of performing *nichum aveilim*.<sup>47</sup>

The *Shulchan Arukh* rules that one should not comfort “two mourners as one.”<sup>48</sup> R. Moshe Shternbuch notes a technical objection that some have raised against an attempt to comfort several mourners at once.<sup>49</sup> There is a halakhic rule known as “*ein ossin mitzvot chavilot chavilot*,”<sup>50</sup> which is a general exhortation against attempting to fulfill multiple *mitzvot* at once, giving the appearance that these obligations are a burden to be dispensed with as efficiently as possible.<sup>51</sup> R. Shternbuch dismisses this concern on technical grounds, but observes that there are other reasons to discourage an attempt to comfort several mourners at once. Each family member experiences the bereavement in his own way, and each manifests a unique grief. By necessity, each mourner must be addressed individually, in an attempt to provide a personalized solace that will be effective.

Consistent with this approach, R. Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg rules that the concern is only relevant when one is addressing the mourners in detail in an attempt to actually perform *nichum aveilim*. However, the formula of “*Ha-Makom*” may be expressed to many mourners at once, and this is indeed the practice at many synagogues on Friday nights when mourners come into the service.<sup>52</sup>

The challenge of the task of adequate consolation is reflected in a halakhic ruling of the great medieval authority *Rashba*, who considers the question of why a benediction, often recited before the performance of a *mitzvah*, is not invoked before performing *mitzvot* such as the giving of charity, and presumably *nichum aveilim*.<sup>53</sup> The *Rashba* apparently roots his explanation in the concern not to recite an unwarranted benediction, which would result if another party fails to allow the *mitzvah* to be completed. The instance of *nichum aveilim* is particularly affected by this concern; while the intent may be to accomplish a *mitzvah*, there is no guarantee that the visitor will, even given his best efforts, actually succeed in bringing comfort.<sup>54</sup>

---

45 See R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, as cited in *Mesorah* II, 55; *Nit'ei Gavriel*, ch. 85 fn 5.

46 *Mo'ed Katan* 21b, with commentary of *Rashi*.

47 *Ve-Ein Lamo Mikhshol* VI, 305.

48 *Yoreh De'ah* 354:2.

49 *Responsa Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot* I, 691.

50 *Berakhot* 49a; *Pesachim* 102b; *Sotah* 8a.

51 See *Rashi* to *Sotah* 8a, s.v. *chavilot*.

52 *Responsa Tzitz Eliezer* V, *Kuntres Even Ya'akov*, 13.

53 *Responsa of Rashba* I, 18.

54 See the extensive discussion of the *Rashba's* premise in R. Yaakov Farbshtein, *Mitzvat Bikkur Cholim*, 3. He notes that some Rabbinic sources do indicate a blessing on the act of comforting mourners, but asserts this is not a standard *mitzvah* blessing, but rather a blessing of praise in honor of the *chesed*. In this vein, he suggests that *nichum aveilim* is singled out for such a blessing due to the “dual *chesed*” component of the *mitzvah*; it is guaranteed that at least one of the aspects of the *chesed*, the kindness to the deceased, will be successful. This partial fulfillment, however, is insufficient to warrant a *mitzvah* blessing, and thus the *Rashba's* explanation still stands.

## Finding the Proper Time

The necessity to perform *nichum aveilim* in the manner that will be most effective and most likely to be well received has an impact, at least theoretically, on the timing of the visit. Some halakhic works cite a practice not to visit a mourner during the first three days of *shivah*. The evident rationale for this approach is that when the grief is still fresh, it is unlikely that the mourner will be receptive to any attempt at comfort.<sup>55</sup> Alternatively, there are those who maintain that the issue is that the first three days are a time when unmitigated weeping is appropriate; they are days of “*bekhi*,” (wailing), and the offering of comfort at this time is premature. Within this view, R. Aharon Yehudah Grossman notes there would be no distinction between a visit in person and a phone call; both would be inappropriate.<sup>56</sup>

Nonetheless, many rabbinic leaders did not accept this practice of waiting until after three days have passed,<sup>57</sup> and the widespread custom appears to be to visit on all the days of *shivah*; this seems to be explicit in the words of Maimonides.<sup>58</sup> R. Shaul Katzenellenbogen argues forcefully against waiting until the third day, which he asserts is a completely baseless practice (at least as far as non-Kabbalistic sources are concerned).<sup>59</sup> Some prominent rabbinic personalities make a point of performing *nichum aveilim* during the first three days out of concern that others will refrain from doing so and the mourners will be left alone.<sup>60</sup>

Even if it is accepted that one does visit during the first three days, R. Moshe Shternbuch suggests that the timing of the visit affects the nature of the experience. As noted, the first three days are traditionally assigned for “wailing.” One who visits during that period should see his role as being present for support and companionship while the mourner is in a state of weeping, without necessarily striving to minimize that weeping. After three days, the tone shifts, and it becomes appropriate to extend efforts to alleviate the wailing of the mourners.<sup>61</sup>

---

55 See *Midrash Tanchuma*, Parshat Miketz, and Nachmanides, *Torat Ha-Adam, sha'ar ha-evel, inyan ha-aveilut*, 84; and see *Gesher Ha-Chaim* 20:5:5. R. Chanoch Dov Padwa, *Responsa Cheshev Ha-Ephod* III, 98, asserts that this waiting period is not sourced in *halakhah*, but does note a source in Biblical exegesis from the commentary of the Alshich to Gen. 37:34. See also R. Ze'ev Wolf Leiter, *Responsa Beit David*, 7; R. Shlomo Abraham, *Devar Torah*, Genesis, 261; and *Beit Mo'ed*, 589-590. R. Shlomo Kluger, *Responsa Tuv Ta'am Ve-Da'at* III, part 2, #239, invokes in this context the principle of *miktzat ha-yom ke-kulo*, “part of the day is considered as the complete day.” This principle is the reason that the seventh day of *shivah* ends shortly after it commences in the morning. Similarly, the third day would end at a comparable point. Concerning the application of this principle to the nighttime period, see R. Asher Chananyah, *Responsa Sha'arei Yosher* III, 23:1-2.

56 *Responsa Ve-Darashta Ve-Chakarta* I, Yoreh De'ah 56.

57 See *Nit'ei Gavriel*, ch. 86 fn 5, citing the Chazon Ish and the Steipler Gaon, and R. Shalom Mordechai Schwadron, *Da'at Torah*, Yoreh De'ah 376:1, who brings a number of proofs from earlier sources that there is no need to abstain from comforting mourners during the first three days.

58 *Hilkhos Eivel* 13:2.

59 *Responsa Magen Sha'ul*, 69. Concerning his analysis, see R. David Yoel Weiss, *Megadim Chadashim*, *Mo'ed Katan* 23a, s.v. *Shabbat rishonah*. See also *Responsa Shevet Ha-Kehati* IV, 293, and V, 211.

60 See *Penei Barukh*, *Aveilut*, ch. 11, fn. 11; *Aleinu Le-Shabeach*, Leviticus, p. 337; and R. Yosef Kohen, *Responsa Va-Yashev Yosef*, Yoreh De'ah 43.

61 *Responsa Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot* III, 377.

The notion that the *mitzvah* should be performed at a time most conducive to acceptance of comfort is reflected as well in a custom referred to by R. David Shperber.<sup>62</sup> He discusses a practice, apparently not widely accepted,<sup>63</sup> not to visit a mourner at night. As the goal is to convey the ultimate justice at hand, nighttime, with its heightened emotional atmosphere, is less conducive to this endeavor.<sup>64</sup> R. Nachum Yavrov notes further that at night, the mourners are tired and desirous of sleep. Therefore, the practice might simply be a reflection of sensitivity to the mourners, and thus adaptable to local custom.<sup>65</sup>

A more significant timing concern is the accepted practice that one does not engage in comforting the family members prior to the burial. This is expressed by the *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avot*, which states, “R. Shimon ben Elazar says, ‘Do not comfort him at the time that his deceased [relative] lies in front of him [unburied].’”<sup>66</sup> The context of this dictum leaves some room open for discussion as to whether this is good advice or absolute *halakhah*.<sup>67</sup> The underlying principle appears to be that *nichum aveilim* is premature because at that time, when the grief is so fresh, it is inconceivable that the bereaved will accept consolation.<sup>68</sup> The commentary *Tiferet Yisrael* takes this further, suggesting that the family members will actually be anguished by the attempt, in that it implies that those around them are not sharing in their grief, but have already moved on.<sup>69</sup>

R. Shimshon Chaim Nachmeni adds another point, suggesting that it is reflective of the dual nature of *nichum aveilim*, serving both the living and the deceased. To express comfort too quickly, before the body is even buried, is an act of disrespect to the departed, creating the impression that no loss whatsoever has taken place; such neglect for the honor of the deceased is counterproductive to the goal of *nichum aveilim* itself.<sup>70</sup>

Nonetheless, the grief of the mourner is enough reason for this rule, as indicated by a ruling of R. Yaakov Ettlinger.<sup>71</sup> He addresses the situation of an individual who has lost two relatives, one who has already been buried and one still awaiting burial. While it might be assumed that the mourner can accept consolation on the first loss during this period, R. Ettlinger rules otherwise,

---

62 *Responsa Afarkasta De-Anya* IV, *shonim*, 372:3.

63 See *Responsa Yabbia Omer* X, *Yoreh De'ah* 48, and *Nit'ei Gavriel*, ch. 86, fn 10. See also *Responsa Sho'alin U-Dorshin* V, 79:2, concerning this point as well as the issue of the first three days.

64 This explanation is found in the journal *Va-Yilaket Yosef*, 5670 (volume XII in current editions), #180, based on a comment of *Ma'avar Yabok*.

65 *Divrei Soferim to Hilkhos Aveilut*, 376, in *Birur Halakhah*, 311. R. Yavrov also suggests a possible halakhic distinction; the laws of mourning may be less stringently applied at night. He notes a statement of the *Rama* (*Darkei Moshe*, *Yoreh De'ah* 380) that the mourner may leave his house at night if there is great need to do so. Accordingly, the custom may then reflect a desire to perform this *mitzvah* at a time when mourning is in full halakhic effect. If so, the intent would not be to discourage going at night, but rather to encourage going during the daytime, or, ideally, both times.

66 *Avot* 4:18

67 See R. Yitzchak Gottlieb, in *Ha-Darom* XLIX, 65-66.

68 See also *Keli Yakar*, Gen. 37:35, and R. Moshe Mishel Adler, *Mishnat Ha-Middot* on *Avot*.

69 *Tiferet Yisra'el*, *Avot* 4:18.

70 *Toldot Shimshon*, *Avot* 4:22. See also R. Shmuel Pinchasi, *Imrei Shefer* on *Pirkei Avot* II, 240-241.

71 *Responsa Binyan Tziyon* I, 112.

asserting that the language of consolation is broad, and would be understood to prematurely include the fresh loss as well.

However, the period of consolation does begin immediately after the burial, as the family members walk through a double line formed by all of those in attendance, who then recite the formula of comfort. As R. Shammai Kehat Gross notes, this would seem only to initiate the process of comfort, and does not exempt those in attendance from paying a visit to the house later on.<sup>72</sup> This appears to be explicit in the words of Maimonides, who begins his formulation of the *mitzvah* of *nichum aveilim* by describing the formation of the line at the cemetery and closes with: “Then the mourners go home, on each of the seven days of mourning, condolence is tendered them, whether by the same visitors or new ones.”<sup>73</sup>

In fact, one gets the impression from Maimonides’ formulation that one’s visit to the house of mourning should take place every day of *shivah*, rather than only once. To this end, R. Gross cites the Gerrer Rebbe, the *Imrei Emet*, as wondering why it is that most visitors do not make a point of coming every day.<sup>74</sup> He suggests that this is simply a consequence of lack of space, and the fact that in a sizable community, it is not feasible for everyone to come every day. However, in a smaller community, such frequency would indeed be recommended, at least for local residents.

## The Format of the Visit

The *halakhah* dictates protocol within the *nichum aveilim* visit, mandating that the visitors not speak until the mourner has opened the conversation.<sup>75</sup> The Talmud derives this practice from the Biblical recounting of the grieving Job, who is described as “opening his mouth” (Job 3:1) prior to his guests speaking to him (4:1).<sup>76</sup> A number of distinct theories emerge in the commentaries as to the reason for this practice.

One perspective is that this protocol stems from the requirement for the mourner to affirm Divine justice, *tziduk ha-din*. In this view, the *tziduk ha-din* must take place before the comforting can begin. Accordingly, a number of early authorities record a practice that before the visitors would approach, a representative of the community would prompt the mourners, who would respond with the phrase, “Blessed is the true Judge” (*barukh Dayyan ha-emet*).<sup>77</sup> This understanding is favored by the *Arukh Ha-Shulchan*, who connects the notion to Job’s statement of “the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away” (1:21).<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> *Responsa Shevet Ha-Kehati* V, 211. Concerning the status of this practice and its role in fulfilling *nichum aveilim*, see *Responsa Iggerot Mosheh*, *Orach Chaim* V, 20:21, and R. Moshe Tzvi Goldberg, in *Ha-Pardes* LIII, 9:49 (also published in LX, 5:27).

<sup>73</sup> *Hilkhos Eivel* 13:1-2. (Translation from Abraham Hershtman, Yale University Press.)

<sup>74</sup> See also *Nit’ei Gavriel*, ch. 85 fn. 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Yoreh De’ah*, 376:1.

<sup>76</sup> *Mo’ed Katan* 28b.

<sup>77</sup> Nachmanides, *Torat Ha-Adam* (*Kitvei Ha-Ramban* II [Mossad Ha-Rav Kook], 152), cites R. Hai Gaon, and is cited in *Beit Yosef*, *Yoreh De’ah* 376. See *Perishah*, 376:6, who appears to link this practice to the Talmud’s derivation from Job.

<sup>78</sup> *Yoreh De’ah* 376:1. This idea is also sourced in the Zohar (*Parshat Korakh* III, 176b).



The second view is that the mourner must initiate the process by first expressing his anguish publicly. Once he has set the tone accordingly, it is appropriate for the visitors to begin the act of comforting. This appears to be the understanding of *Rashi*,<sup>79</sup> who writes “that the mourner open with his anguish,” and is adopted as well by the *Levush*.<sup>80</sup>

A variation on this theme builds upon the point mentioned above, that *nichum aveilim* requires thoughtful, individualized words of comfort. Commenting on the source from the behavior of Job, the Biblical commentary *Metzudat David* implies that the necessity for the mourner to initiate is so that the visitors will be able to gauge his condition and emotional state and evaluate how to perform their task.<sup>81</sup>

If this last view is accepted, it may be possible to understand an intriguing notion found in some commentaries. The Talmud states that “the reward for [attending] a house of mourning [is earned by] silence.”<sup>82</sup> This passage is difficult to understand, especially in light of the assumption noted above that consoling a mourner requires speech and that a silent visit is lacking. Among the various interpretations of this passage is that it is a reference to this notion of waiting to allow the mourner to speak first.<sup>83</sup> However, this interpretation is difficult as well. In that same passage, the Talmud lists a succession of different activities that are “rewarded” based on a specific variable factor. Choosing “silence” as that factor in the context of *nichum aveilim* is surprising. If it indeed refers to allowing the mourner to initiate the conversation, this is seemingly a secondary element, which is objectively either observed or neglected; it would not appear to be subject to quantification as a measurement of earned reward.

However, this interpretation may be better understood if the reason for allowing the mourner to speak first is so that this period of listening will give the visitor the opportunity to gauge the mindset of the mourner, and thus console him more effectively. The Talmud’s intent would then be that the reward for *nichum aveilim* is measured by the degree that the visitor listens first, in order to properly calibrate his efforts toward maximal effectiveness.

Another perspective on allowing the mourner to speak first is suggested by R. Raphael Silber, who understands this practice as a way of showing honor to the mourner. Protocol generally dictates that the most honored individual in a group speaks first, and the mourner is accorded that status as part of his comfort.<sup>84</sup>

R. Yisrael Meir Lau observes that the first two understandings described above, that one waits for the mourner to speak in order to give him time for *tziduk ha-din* or to allow him to express his anguish, dictate two different practical frameworks, particularly in the modern era when the

---

79 *Rashi*’s commentary printed with the Rif, *Mo’ed Katan* 18a in pages of the Rif. The text of *Rashi* printed with the Rif’s commentary, particularly to the tractate *Mo’ed Katan*, is open to some question as to the authenticity of its authorship; see *Yad Melakhi*, klal 10.

80 *Yoreh De’ah* 376:1.

81 Note that R. Harfenes, *Nechamat Sarah*, 7, considers this explanation to be wholly separate from the perspective of *Rashi* and the *Levush*.

82 *Berakhot* 6b.

83 See commentary of *Maharsha* to *Berakhot*.

84 *Marpei Le-Nefesh*, *Berakhot* 6b (22).

practice of the early authorities to prompt *tziduk ha-din* is not observed. If the intent is, as the *Arukh HaShulchan* ruled, *tziduk ha-din*, then perhaps this is accomplished by the very act of talking. The fact that the mourner is able to open the conversation, to initiate an interaction with his visitors and not retreat into an isolated silence, is itself an expression of the recognition of Divine justice. It would follow, then, that at the very least, this protocol demands waiting for some sort of verbal expression on the part of the mourner.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, it might be assumed that it would suffice for this to take place once for an entire group of visitors.<sup>86</sup> More broadly, R. Nachum Yavrov considers it likely that the mourner may only have to indicate to his acceptance of Divine justice once during the course of the *shivah*, thus enabling subsequent visitors to initiate conversation.<sup>87</sup>

According to the second view, however, the focus is very different. If the need is for the mourner to first establish his disconsolation so that he may be comforted, then displaying his state of mind, even non-verbally, may be sufficient to allow others to begin to speak. However, it may be necessary for this to be established with each individual visitor. R. Lau notes that this *halakhah* is often not evident in contemporary practice, and, citing the behavior of great rabbinic figures,<sup>88</sup> he suggests that, following the second view, even a silent expression of grief is sufficient. As a rule, he recommends accommodating both theories, and thus advocates that the mourner verbally initiate the process at least when a group of visitors arrives, while sufficing with non-verbal expression for subsequent individual visitors.

However the conversation is started, it is important to be sensitive to the nature of the conversation that takes place. This is relevant to both purposes of the *mitzvah*. As far as the honor to the deceased is concerned, it is imperative that the conversation not become frivolous, or even simply irrelevant, as this detracts from the appropriate dignity and solemnity. This is similarly true as concerns the needs of the mourner; his grieving may be exacerbated if the conversation around him is unfitting to the context. R. Harfenes records an exchange on this issue that he had with R. Baruch Pinchas Goldberg, the author of the work *Penei Barukh*. According to the *Penei Barukh*, some amount of distracting conversation may be valuable in bringing a degree of comfort to the mourner. R. Harfenes, however, is inclined to disagree, arguing that the mourner is not permitted to divert attention from the deceased; the goal of *nichum aveilim* is to address the situation and evoke comfort and acceptance.<sup>89</sup>

Just as the mourner opens the interaction, he ends it as well. This rule is more a matter of

---

<sup>85</sup> *Responsa Yacheil Yisrael* III, 19.

<sup>86</sup> This was the position of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; see *Yagdil Torah* 5741, # 198, and the journal *Noam* 24, 227. See also *Responsa Sho'alin U-Dorshin* V, 79:5.

<sup>87</sup> *Divrei Soferim*, 317.

<sup>88</sup> Including the Chazon Ish (who would open the conversation if he saw that the mourner seemed unable to speak for some reason; see *Pe'er Ha-Dor* IV, ch. 250); R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (see *Torat Rabbeinu Shmuel Mi-Salant* I, 16) and R. Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg (see *Responsa Tzitz Eliezer* XVII, 45:4) would also do so. This is also the practice of R. Ovadiah Yosef, as cited in *Yalkut Yosef* VII, p. 119, and the volume on *Aveilut*, p. 432. See also *Responsa Shoalin U-Dorshin* V, 79:4.

<sup>89</sup> See R. Moshe Shternbuch, *Responsa Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot* III, 376-377, who uses stronger language in condemning extraneous conversation at a *shivah* house.

sensitivity than of protocol. The *Shulchan Arukh* rules that the visitors must leave once the mourner shakes his head and indicates that he no longer wishes for their presence.<sup>90</sup> The *Arukh HaShulchan* notes that this particular signal is no longer common, and visitors must thus be aware and discern any indication that the time has come to leave.<sup>91</sup>

As noted above, the recitation of the standard formula, “May the Almighty...,” is likely not a fulfillment of the obligation of comfort. R. Harfenes avers that it is actually an independent practice of offering a blessing, separate from the comfort. Accordingly, he feels that this recitation is not included within the protocol of waiting for the mourner to initiate.<sup>92</sup>

In theory, the *halakhah* requires the visitor to sit on the floor together with the mourner;<sup>93</sup> in practice, this has not been insisted upon.<sup>94</sup> However, the ideal format of the visitor sitting is indicative of some of the goals of the act. R. Chaim Kanievsky asserts that it is important to sit down while comforting mourners, as well as while visiting the sick, in order to display intent and focus on the task.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, the author of the *Penei Barukh* observes that one of the necessary aspects of *nichum aveilim* is to convey to the mourners a sense of joining in their bereavement. Sitting down with them, in contrast to standing ready to leave, is thus a far more effective position.<sup>96</sup>

A complex question in the laws of *nichum aveilim* is the relevance of this obligation to the mourners themselves. According to some authorities, it is inappropriate for mourners to engage in acts of consolation; by doing so, they appear to abandon their own grief. This is mitigated, however, if they adapt the formula to “May the Almighty comfort you and us.”<sup>97</sup> Others feel that there is a role for mourners to play in this *mitzvah*. R. Gavriel Zinner suggests that by showing the mourner that he is not alone in his anguish, even if he can do no more than that, the fellow mourner is actually displaying a fundamental theme of *nichum aveilim*.<sup>98</sup> R. Nachum Yavrov suggests a distinction between a mourner leaving the house to comfort another mourner, which may constitute a distraction from his own process of consolation, and mourners sitting together comforting each other, which should be permitted and thus considered a *mitzvah*.<sup>99</sup>

## Parallel Issues in *Bikkur Cholim* and *Nichum Aveilim*

Just as with visiting the sick, the question is raised as to whether *nichum aveilim* can be effectively performed with a phone call or with a letter. To a certain extent, the discussions in

---

<sup>90</sup> *Yoreh De'ah* 376:1

<sup>91</sup> *Arukh Ha-Shulchan*, *ibid.*, #3

<sup>92</sup> *Nechamat Sarah*, 7

<sup>93</sup> This concept is found both in regard to comforting mourners and in regard to visiting the sick; see *Shabbat* 12b and *Nedarim* 40a, and *Shulchan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 335:3 and 387:1 with *Shakh*, #1.

<sup>94</sup> See *Responsa Divrei Chakhamim*, *Yoreh De'ah* 133, citing R. Moshe Feinstein, and *Nit'ei Gavriel*, ch. 88 fn 1.

<sup>95</sup> *Derekh Sichah*, p. 125.

<sup>96</sup> In a letter to R. Harfenes, cited in *Nechamat Sarah*, 8.

<sup>97</sup> *Piskei Maharash Mi-Lublin*, 40, and *Nishmat Yisra'el* 24:17.

<sup>98</sup> *Nit'ei Gavriel* 85:6 and fn 8.

<sup>99</sup> *Divrei Soferim*, 318-319, in *Emek Davar* 68. See also *Devar Torah*, Genesis, pp. 261-262, who suggests a proof that mourners may comfort each other, but goes on to refute it.

regard to both *mitzvot* parallel one another. However, there are differences as well: here again, the perception of *nichum aveilim* as a “double *mitzvah*” bears relevance. As some authorities assert, a telephone call is somewhat of a fulfillment of *nichum aveilim*, although not a complete one, in that it at least comforts the living.<sup>100</sup> A comparable position is taken by R. Moshe Shternbuch with respect to a letter. He cites a position of R. Yitzchak Ze’ev Soloveitchik (the Brisker Rav) that a letter is certainly effective, as nothing in the obligation specifically requires the spoken word.<sup>101</sup> However, it is clearly only useful for the mourner, and not for the deceased, and is thus only a partial fulfillment.<sup>102</sup> Consistent with this analysis, some have suggested that if one is only able to phone or write a letter, one should also learn some *mishnayot* in memory of the deceased, so that their need for comfort will also be addressed.<sup>103</sup>

However, even the partial fulfillment of this *mitzvah* would appear to be incomplete. The honor shown to the mourners is certainly enhanced by the physical presence of the visitors, as is the ability of the visitors to properly respond to the cues of the mourners and address their needs. In a stronger formulation, R. Yitzchak Hutner was of the opinion that *nichum aveilim* is not accomplished via the telephone. Adducing Talmudic proof, he explains that the rabbinic enactment of mourning during *shivah* involves a specific physical structure, in which the mourner heads the room and is surrounded by those who would comfort him. Without the visitor being actually present, this format cannot be achieved. Thus, in his view, while certain aspects of the *mitzvah* are certainly addressed through a phone call, the obligation as rabbinically mandated cannot be considered “fulfilled.”<sup>104</sup>

R. Harfenes notes that there is another issue with telephone visits, one relevant only to *nichum aveilim* and not to *bikkur cholim*. As was discussed above, the protocol requires that the mourner is to initiate the conversation, something he can not do when answering a phone call.<sup>105</sup> This may create a distinction between phone calls and letters, as the mourner may decide when to open up a letter.<sup>106</sup> Further, as R. David Rosenberg notes, a caller is unable to gauge if the mourner is not in an emotional state to converse, nor can he abbreviate his comments as he might in person if necessary. Again, these concerns are a reason to prefer a personal visit and not

---

100 See *Iggerot Mosheh*, *Orach Chaim* IV, 40:11; *Responsa Yashiv Yitzchak* VIII, 50; and *Nechamat Sarah*, 8. A similar observation made by R. Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, and agreed to by his son-in-law R. Chaim Kanievsky, is cited in *Derekh Sichah*, pp.124-125. The issue is also analyzed along these lines at length by R. Nisan Ekstein, in *Ha-Be'er* XIII, 2-3:56.

101 *Responsa Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot* II, 587.

102 R. Ya’akov Farbstein, *Mitzvat Bikkur Cholim*, ch. 21, notes that accordingly, Maimonides’ prioritization of *nichum aveilim* over *bikkur cholim* would not apply in a situation where both acts are taking place via the telephone. See also *Responsa Sho’alin U-Dorshin* V, 79:1, who addresses the additional aspect of the letter arriving only after *shivah* is already completed. As he notes, while the primary obligation of *nichum aveilim* is during the period of *shivah*, the *mitzvah* continues into the time of *shloshim* (or twelve months, for a parent). See also R. Meir Bransdorfer, in *Or Yisra’el* I:3, 51-58.

103 See R. Chanan Aflalo, *Responsa Asher Chanan* I, 76, cited in *Ve-Ein Lamo Mikhsol* VI, 306-307.

104 *Pachad Yitzchak*, *Iggerot U’Khtavim*, 33:2. This is in distinct contrast to R. Hutner’s opinion concerning *bikkur cholim*, which he felt could be completely fulfilled through the telephone (*ibid*, 33:1).

105 See also *Responsa Sho’alin U-Dorshin* V, 79:4.

106 *Nishmat Yisra’el*, 24:6.

to exclude comforting by phone when no alternative exists.<sup>107</sup>

Assuming that one is unable to come in person and is seeking an alternate method of *nichum aveilim*, R. Yitzchak Shmuel Schechter suggests a distinction between a phone call and a letter.<sup>108</sup> A conversation on the phone may be more effective when the one consoling is an actual friend or acquaintance of the mourner, and the give-and-take of the conversation will allow the caller to gauge the mourner's mindset and adjust his efforts appropriately. If the one consoling is a prominent personality who is interested primarily in showing honor to the deceased, this may be done more effectively with a letter, which can be crafted with the inclusion of words of Torah, and which the bereaved can keep as a testimonial.<sup>109</sup>

Another question that is shared by the *mitzvot* of *bikkur cholim* and *nichum aveilim* is that of the appropriateness of one coming to comfort his enemy.<sup>110</sup> Here, too, the concept of a "double *mitzvah*" may dictate a difference between the two obligations. As R. Zvi Ryzman notes, it is the aspect of comforting the living that is affected by animosity between the visitor and the mourner.<sup>111</sup> The honor to the deceased, however, would seem to be independent of this concern. However, one should note that if the interaction would lead to an actual hostile encounter, this itself would presumably seriously undermine the nature of the honor to the deceased.<sup>112</sup>

Conversely, if the deceased harbored enmity for the visitor, the aspect of *nichum aveilim* meant for the deceased's benefit would presumably not be accomplished by this visit.<sup>113</sup> However, there are those who assume that an enemy is actually a particularly appropriate visitor; the Talmud advises that such acts of graciousness help to mitigate enmity.<sup>114</sup> Accordingly, as the obligation to seek forgiveness applies even after the death of the victim, paying such a visit affords an opportunity for posthumous "reconciliation."<sup>115</sup>

As noted earlier, a *mitzvah* generally overrides the obligation of Torah study when this *mitzvah* cannot be performed by someone else. It appears that the nature of the obligation of *nichum aveilim* is such that it generally cannot be performed by others. Several factors contribute to this.

---

107 See also *Responsa Yabbia Omer* X, *Yoreh De'ah* 48, and the journal *Noam* 24, 227. R. Asher Chanayah, *Responsa Sha'arei Yoshier* III, *Yoreh De'ah* 33, writes that the protocol applies to a phone call as well, and if the mourner does not speak first, the caller should first wait and then recite the "Ha-Makom" formula and end the call.

108 *Responsa Yashiv Yitzchak* III, *Yoreh De'ah* 31.

109 See also *Responsa Va-Yashev Yosef*, *Yoreh De'ah*. 43, who cites in the name of *Ma'aseh Nissim* a preference for letters over phone calls for this reason.

110 See the journal *Va-Yilaket Yosef* XIV, 195, where a distinction is suggested between *bikkur cholim* and *nichum aveilim* in this regard.

111 *Ratz Ka-Tzvi: Yerach Ha-Eitanim* 11:3.

112 Compare R. Ovadiah Yosef, *Responsa Yabbia Omer*, VII, *Orach Chaim* 23:4, who advises a family, fractured by dissension on the issue of a proper memorial for a beloved relative, that the soul of the deceased will profit much more from harmony among his family than from any specific gesture marred by dispute.

113 R. Ryzman acknowledges that the *Shakh* (*Yoreh De'ah* 335:2) assumes that there is no restriction on attending the funeral of one's enemy. However, he suggests that a distinction exists between a funeral, which is an expression of respect, and visiting the *shivah* house, which, even in terms of the deceased, is meant to bring "comfort."

114 *Bava Metzia* 32a. See *Responsa Tzitz Eliezer* V, *Kuntres Ramat Rachel*, 9.

115 See *Shulchan Arukh*, O.C. 606:1-2. See also R. Yisrael Eisentein, *Responsa Amudei Eish*, *Kuntres Dinei Aveilut* 19:1 who suggests various distinctions between *bikkur cholim* and *nichum aveilim* in regard to this issue.

One factor is the complex chemistry needed in order to succeed in evoking comfort. As every individual is unique, no substitute can exist for the contribution a given individual can make to the solace of the mourner. This is even more of a factor if the potential visitor is particularly skilled at speaking with people in a way that confers comfort. Moreover, if the potential visitor has a personal relationship with the bereaved, there is the genuine risk that the mourner will feel anguish at the absence of the visitor. Additionally, every guest adds quantitatively to the honor provided both to the deceased and to the mourners.<sup>116</sup>

As such, *nichum aveilim* is a prime example of the unique contribution each individual makes in the realm of *chesed*. Personality, perspective, and personal chemistry are merged with sensitivity, empathy, and kindness in the service of a magnificent expression of a Godly ideal.

---

<sup>116</sup> See *Nechamat Sarah*, 8, and *Nishmat Yisrael* 24:2.

# Tisha B'Av: A Day of Multiple Perspectives

Rabbi Joshua Flug

Community Fellow, Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future South Florida Initiative

Tisha B'Av is a day where we are asked to mourn the destruction of the Temple in a profound manner. While on a superficial level, Tisha B'Av seems to have a single theme, in reality, there are multiple themes apparent in Tisha B'Av. Let us begin by presenting a few questions:

- 1) We find the terms *Tziyon* and *Yerushalayim* used almost interchangeably throughout *Tanach*. Is there a difference between *Tziyon* and *Yerushalayim*?
- 2) In discussing the feelings of the Jewish people on the rivers of Babylon immediately after their exile from Jerusalem, the Psalmist states:

*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember thee not; if I set not Jerusalem above my greatest joy.*

**Tehillim 137:5-6**

אם אשכחך ירושלם תשכח ימיני: תדבק  
לשוני לחכי אם לא אזכרכי אם לא אעלה את  
ירושלם על ראש שמחתי:  
תהלים קלז:ה-ו

How is it possible that immediately after such a calamitous event, there could be a reference to *simcha* (happiness)?

- 3) There is a prayer that is inserted into the *Amidah* for Tisha B'Av entitled "*Nachem*." In many versions of *Nachem*, the *beracha* that concludes "*Boneh Yerushalayim*" (He builds Jerusalem) is amended to "*Menachem Tziyon U'Voneh Yerushalayim*" (He comforts Zion and builds Jerusalem). This seems to contradict a rule stated in the Gemara, *Berachot* 49a, that one may not conclude a *beracha* with two different themes. How do we conclude the *beracha* of *Nachem* with two different themes?
- 4) The Gemara, *Ta'anit* 29a, records that the Temple was set ablaze on the afternoon of the ninth of Av. One would then assume that the mourning practices intensify as the day progresses. Yet, according to Ashkenazi tradition, the theme of the morning *kinot* is one of crying and weeping over the destruction. It is only in the afternoon when the *Nachem* prayer is recited. What is the logic of this progression?
- 5) When a person is mourning, those who visit the mourner comfort him with the term: המקום  
המקום - ינחם אותך בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים - *May the Almighty comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem*. Ostensibly, it would be more appropriate to say that the Almighty should comfort you among other mourners who have experienced a similar loss. Why do we specifically reference those who mourn the destruction of *Tziyon* and *Yerushalayim*?

## Assessing the Loss

Let's begin answering these questions by assessing what was lost and what wasn't lost at the time of the destruction of the Temple. R. Meir Leibush Weiser (Malbim 1809-1879) suggests that there is a difference between *Tziyon* and *Yerushalayim*:

*Zion connotes the place where the Temple and the Shechinah were situated ... and Jerusalem connotes the city itself, the place where the masses lived.*<sup>117</sup>

**Malbim, Tehillim 51:17**

ציון מציין מקום המקדש והשכינה ...  
וירושלם מציין העיר עצמה, מקום מושב  
ההמון  
מלבי"ם תהלים נא:יז

Tisha B'Av commemorates the destruction of the Temple as well as the exile from Jerusalem.<sup>118</sup> Yet, the destruction of the Temple did not amount to a total loss. In this section we will note two important components that remained after the destruction of the Temple.

What was the effect of the destruction of the Temple on the place that housed the Temple and on Jerusalem as a city?

*Why do I say regarding the Temple and Jerusalem that the original sanctity lasts eternally and the sanctity of the rest of Israel- with respect to the laws of Shemitah and Tithes, etc.- did not remain? This is because the sanctity of the Temple and Jerusalem are a function of the Shechinah and the Shechinah is never nullified*

**Rambam, Hilchot Beit HaBechirah 6:16**

ולמה אני אומר במקדש וירושלים  
קדושה ראשונה קדושה לעתיד לבוא,  
ובקדושת שאר א"י לענין שביעית  
ומעשרות וכיוצא בהן לא קדושה לעתיד  
לבוא, לפי שקדושת המקדש וירושלים  
מפני השכינה ושכינה אינה בטלה  
רמב"ם הלכות בית הבחירה ו:טז

According to Rambam, both the place that housed the Temple and the entire Jerusalem retained their original sanctity, even after their destruction. The sanctity of Jerusalem still exists today.<sup>119</sup> For this reason, we still pray towards Jerusalem (and towards the Temple Mount when in Jerusalem).<sup>120</sup> There is also a mitzvah to live in Jerusalem, even after the destruction of the Temple.<sup>121</sup>

Most importantly, the destruction of the Temple did not entail destruction of the Jewish people. The Midrash comments on the peculiar opening of Psalm 79:

<sup>117</sup> See R. Yechiel M. Tukatzinski, *Ir HaKodesh V'HaMikdash* Vol. II, Chapter 2, for a lengthy discussion regarding whether *Tziyon* and *Yerushalayim* are two separate geographical locations or one. He does suggest that even if they are two distinct locations, certain verses reference *Tziyon* as the place where the Temple stood. Nevertheless, he does note that there are verses that also refer to *Yerushalayim* as the place where the Temple stood.

<sup>118</sup> R. Hershel Schachter, *B'Ikvei HaTzon* no. 33, notes that Jerusalem has a dual significance. First, it is the city that houses the Temple. Second it is the capital city of the Land of Israel.

<sup>119</sup> Ra'avad *Hilchot Beit HaBechirah* 6:14, disagrees and maintains that the status of the Temple and Jerusalem changed upon destruction of the Temple. This dispute is very relevant to the discussion of ascending the Temple Mount.

<sup>120</sup> See Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 94:1, and R. Tukatzinski, loc. cit., Vol III, chapter 16.

<sup>121</sup> See *Teshuvot Chatam Sofer*, Y.D. no. 234.



*A Psalm of Asaph. O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance; they have defiled Thy holy temple; they have made Jerusalem into heaps.*

**Tehillim 79:1**

מזמור לאסף אלהים באו גוים  
בנחלתך טמאו את היכל קדשך שמו  
את ירושלם לעיים:  
**תהילים עט:א**

Why would a Psalm that discusses the destruction of the Temple begin with a song?

*A psalm of Asaph. O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance (Ps. LXxIx, r). The text should have used a phrase like, 'Weeping of Asaph,' 'Lament of Asaph,' 'Dirge of Asaph'; why does it say, 'A psalm of Asaph'? It may be likened to a king who erected a bridal-chamber for his son which he plastered, cemented, and decorated; but his son entered upon an evil course of living. The king forthwith ascended to the chamber, tore the curtains and broke the rods; but [the son's] tutor took a piece of rod which he used as a flute and played upon it. People said to him, 'The king has overthrown his son's chamber and you sit playing a tune!' He replied to them, 'I play a tune because the king overturned his son's chamber but did not pour out his anger upon his son.' Similarly people said to Asaph, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, has caused Temple and Sanctuary to be destroyed, and you sit singing a Psalm!' He replied to them, 'I sing a Psalm because the Holy One, blessed be He, poured out His wrath upon wood and stone and not upon Israel ...*

**Eicha Rabbah 4:14 (Soncino Translation)**

מזמור לאסף אלקים באו גוים  
בנחלתך לא הוה קרא צריך למימר  
אלא בכי לאסף נהי לאסף קינה  
לאסף ומה אומר מזמור לאסף אלא  
משל למלך שעשה בית חופה לבנו  
וסיידה וכיידה וציירה ויצא בנו  
לתרבות רעה מיד עלה המלך לחופה  
וקרע את הוילאות ושיבר את הקנים  
ונטל פדגוג שלו איבוב של קנים  
והיה מזמר אמרו לו המלך הפך  
חופתו של בנו ואת יושב ומזמר  
אמר להם מזמר אני שהפך חופתו  
של בנו ולא שפך חמתו על בנו כך  
אמרו לאסף הקב"ה החריב היכל  
ומקדש ואתה יושב ומזמר אמר להם  
מזמר אני ששפך הקב"ה חמתו על  
העצים ועל האבנים ולא שפך חמתו  
על ישראל הדא הוא דכתיב ויצת  
אש בציון ותאכל יסודותיה.

**איכה רבה ד:יז**

The Midrash notes that destruction could have been much worse. The Almighty could have decided to destroy the Jewish people for their iniquities. Instead, he decided to destroy the Temple and exile the Jewish people. This punishment pales in comparison to what could have been.

## Appreciating What Remained as a Source of Comfort

The remnants of the destruction actually provide a source of comfort. The destruction of the Temple was very tragic and is a cause for mourning. We mourn the Temple and Jerusalem by appreciating what was lost and we comfort ourselves in appreciating what remains.

On Tisha B'Av, we attempt to appreciate the losses and take comfort in what remains. The theme of the morning *Kinnot* is crying over the loss of the Temple.<sup>122</sup> R. Yosef D. Soloveitchik (cited in *Harerei Kedem* Vol. II page 311) notes that in order to properly cry over the destruction

<sup>122</sup> See R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways* (R. Jacob J. Schacter ed.) pages 17-31.

of the Temple, one must mention the glory and grandeur of the Temple and Jerusalem when it was erect and contrast that with the impact of its destruction.

By contrast, the theme of Tisha B'Av afternoon is *nechama*, comfort. How is it possible that the afternoon is the time designated for comfort? Shouldn't the moment that the Temple was set ablaze be the moment of intense crying? R. Soloveitchik explains that it was precisely at the moment when the Temple was set ablaze that the Jewish people realized that they would not be destroyed. They took comfort in the fact that G-d only took his wrath out on wood and stones.<sup>123</sup>

Based on this idea, one can explain the concluding *beracha* of *Nachem*. R. Chaim Benveniste (1603-1673) writes that concluding a *beracha* with "*Menachem Tziyon U'Voneh Yerushalayim*" does not violate the rule that one may not conclude a *beracha* with two different themes:

*It is not two different ideas because comforting Zion means that it will be rebuilt because its comfort is achieved through its rebuilding.*

**Shayarei Kneset HaGedolah, O.C. 188:5**

לאו היינו שני דברים דמנחם ציון היינו שיבנה  
דבנין ציון היא נחמתה.  
שיירי כנסת הגדולה או"ח קפח:ה

The mourners of Zion are comforted by the fact that Jerusalem will one day be rebuilt. Therefore, when one recites "*Menachem Tziyon U'Voneh Yerushalayim*" it is considered one theme.

It is possible to add another dimension to the text of "*Menachem Tziyon U'Voneh Yerushalayim*." The remnants of the destruction are the bridge between the first two Temples and the third. The sanctity of the Temple always remained and the Jewish people who will occupy the third Temple are (or will be) descendants of the original inhabitants of the Temples. As such, the third Temple is currently in the process of being rebuilt (and was in the process since the original destruction). In fact, the term "*Boneh Yerushalayim*" means He Who is building Jerusalem, in the present tense.

R. Chaim Freidlander comments:

*"Blessed is He Who Builds Jerusalem." We recite 'builds Jerusalem' in the present tense and not 'He will build Jerusalem' in the future tense because the idea is not that nowadays in the exile there exists destruction and void and in the future the Temple we be built. Rather, even during the destruction, the Almighty arranges all events in stages, in anticipation of the ultimate redemption. We don't yet see or understand how these events unfold and how they bring about the redemption, but after Jerusalem will be rebuilt in actuality, we will understand retrospectively how all of the*

בא"י בונה ירושלים" אנו אומרים 'בונה ירושלים' בהווה ולא יבנה ירושלים בלשון עתיד כי אין הענין שעתה בזמן הגלות קיים חורבן והעדר ולעתיד יבנה בית המקדש אלא גם בזמן החורבן הקב"ה מוביל בכל המאורעות בשלבים לקראת הגאולה והבנין אלא שעדיין אנו איננו רואים ומבינים איך הדברים מתגלגלים ומקרבים את הגאולה רק לאחר שירושלים תבנה בפועל נבין

123 Ibid, pages 32-39. This idea was also expressed by R. Chaim Vital (1543-1620), *Sha'ar HaKavanot*, *Drushei Chag Shavuot* no. 1.

various stages of the exile brought about the redemption.  
Therefore, the Almighty is "building Jerusalem" in the present tense.

**Rinat Chaim page 192**

למפרע איך כל השתלשלות שלבי  
הגלות קירבו ובנו את הגאולה לכן גם  
בהווה הקב"ה "בונה ירושלים"  
**רינת חיים עמ' קצב**

We can now explain why the mourners sitting on the rivers of Babylon were able to focus on happiness. While they just experienced a major tragedy, one which they swore never to forget, they were also able to take comfort in the fact that they were already in the rebuilding process. The sanctity of the Temple remained and the continuity of the Jewish people was ensured. While they were still mourning, they were able to see a time when they would be able to experience happiness, albeit tempered through certain mourning processes.<sup>124</sup>

Based on this idea, perhaps we can explain why we comfort someone who lost a loved one "among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." For many reasons we can't compare the loss of a relative to the loss of the Temple. Yet, the comfort process is similar. The mourner should reflect on the achievements, values and character traits of the deceased as a guide to his own rebuilding process. The mourner is encouraged to build on the legacy of the deceased in order to find comfort.

## Conclusion

The idea of finding comfort in the rebuilding process is illustrated in the following story:

*Once again they were coming up to Jerusalem together, and just as they came to Mount Scopus they saw a fox emerging from the Holy of Holies. They fell a-weeping and R. Akiba seemed merry. Wherefore, said they to him, are you merry? Said he: Wherefore are you weeping? Said they to him: A place of which it was once said, And the common man that draweth nigh shall be put to death, is now become the haunt of foxes, and should we not weep? Said he to them: Therefore am I merry; for it is written, And I will take to Me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the Son of Jeberechiah. Now what connection has this Uriah the priest with Zechariah? Uriah lived during the times of the first Temple, while [the other,] Zechariah lived [and prophesied] during the second Temple; but Holy-Writ linked the [later] prophecy of Zechariah with the [earlier] prophecy of Uriah, In the [earlier] prophecy [in the days] of Uriah it is written, Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field etc. In Zechariah it is written, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem, so long as Uriah's [threatening] prophecy had not had its fulfilment, I had misgivings lest*

פעם אחת היו עולין לירושלים כיון שהגיעו להר הצופים קרעו בגדיהם כיון שהגיעו להר הבית ראו שועל שיצא מבית קדשי הקדשים התחילו הן בוכין ורבי עקיבא מצחק אמרו לו מפני מה אתה מצחק אמר להם מפני מה אתם בוכים אמרו לו מקום שכתוב בו והזר הקרב יומת ועכשיו שועלים הלכו בו ולא נבכה אמר להן לכך אני מצחק דכתיב ואעידה לי עדים נאמנים את אוריה הכהן ואת זכריה בן יברכיהו וכי מה ענין אוריה אצל זכריה אוריה במקדש ראשון וזכריה במקדש שני אלא תלה הכתוב נבואתו של זכריה בנבואתו של אוריה באוריה כתיב לכן בגללכם ציון שדה תחרש בזכריה כתיב עוד ישבו זקנים וזקנות ברחובות ירושלם עד שלא נתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה הייתי מתיירא שלא תתקיים נבואתו של זכריה עכשיו

<sup>124</sup> The Talmud, Baba Batra 60b, cites this verse as the source that we must continue to mourn the Temple throughout the year (see Rashbam, ad loc.). These laws are found in Shulchan Aruch, O.C. no 560.

*Zechariah's prophecy might not be fulfilled; now that Uriah's prophecy has been [literally] fulfilled, it is quite certain that Zechariah's prophecy also is to find its literal fulfilment. Said they to him: Akiba, you have comforted us! Akiba, you have comforted us!*

**Makkot 24b (Soncino Translation)**

שנתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה בידוע  
שנבואתו של זכריה מתקיימת בלשון  
הזה אמרו לו עקיבא ניחמתנו עקיבא  
ניחמתנו  
**מכות כד:**

R. Akiva was able to comfort his colleagues by shifting their focus from the tragedy to the rebuilding process. When we mourn the destruction of the Temple on Tisha B'Av, we first try to experience the depth of the tragedy through the *Kinnot*. In the afternoon, we try to find comfort by shifting our focus to the rebuilding process. It is our prayer that in the merit of properly mourning the Temple, we should be able to experience the grandeur and glory of the third Temple.

# The Thin Line Between Love and Hatred

Estee Goldschmidt

Fellow, GPATS

*... She [Jerusalem] cries in the night, her tears cascade down her cheeks. There is no one to console her, for all her lovers, all her friends have turned against her, have become her enemies...*

**Eicha 1:2**

בכו תבכה בלילה ודמעתי על  
לחיה אין לה מנחם מכל אהביה  
כל רעיה בגדו בה היו לה לאיבים:  
**איכה א:ב**

As the three weeks of destruction descend upon the world, the Jewish nation mourns the destruction of its holiest place, the Beit Hamikdash. It mourns the fact that all of its friends, all of its beloved nations have turned their back upon it and have become its enemies. How can the nations transform from loving Jerusalem to hating it so suddenly? How are the two feelings connected?

The TaNaCh is filled with stories of love and hatred: between the Avot, their wives, and their children. Often, love seems to be the driving motive for passing on the hierarchy. For example, Yaakov loved Yosef more than the rest of his sons, therefore, he crafted a special tunic for Yosef.

*And Yisrael loved Yosef from all his sons, for he was a son of his old age, and he made for him a coat of many colors.*

**Breishit 37:3**

וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו כי בן  
זקנים הוא לו ועשה לו כתנת פסים:  
**בראשית לז:ג**

*R. Nechemia said, that all the laws that Shem and Ever passed on to Yaakov were passed to [Yosef].*

**Breishit Rabba 84:8**

ר' נחמיה אמר שכל הלכות שמסרו שם  
ועבר ליעקב מסרן לו  
**בראשית רבה פד:ח**

There are two stories in TaNaCh that do not fit into the category of hierarchy, and the continuation of the Jewish people. The first is the encounter of Shchem and Dinah (Breishit 34:1-31) and the second is the less famous encounter of Amnon and Tamar (Samuel II, 13:1-39). Both stories illustrate how Amnon and Shchem defiled Tamar and Dinah respectively. There are many similarities between the two stories: both Dinah and Tamar have defensive brothers, who murder the offender to retain the honor and dignity of their sister. Both have fathers who are angered by the murders.

However, there is a striking difference. Shchem defiled Dinah, after which he loved her and asked to marry her. While the opposite happened with Amnon and Tamar. Amnon loved

Tamar; after defiling her, his love turned into hatred and he sent Tamar away.<sup>i</sup> What causes love to disappear or to turn into hatred? Although love and hatred seem to be opposites, in fact, they are two sides of the same coin. Malbim says: "Great is the hatred that emanates from love"<sup>ii</sup> explaining that love and hatred are interconnected.

The Mishna in Avoth introduces two types of love.

*Any love which is dependant on something will become null when that thing becomes null, and love which is not dependant on something will never become null. What is [an example of] love which is dependant on something? The love of Amnon and Tamar. [What is an example of] love which is not dependant on something? The love of David and Yehonatan.*

**Avot 5:15**

כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר בטל  
דבר בטלה אהבה ושאינה תלויה  
בדבר אינה בטלה לעולם איזו היא  
אהבה התלויה בדבר זו אהבת  
ושאינה תלויה בדבר אמנון ותמר  
זו אהבת דוד ויהונתן:  
**אבות ה:טו**

The Mishna uses the love of Amnon towards Tamar as the quintessential example of a love that is dependent on something physical<sup>iii</sup>, and therefore, it can never last. As soon as the physical cause disappears, so does the love. However, a love that is independent of anything physical, will last forever, just as the love of David and Yehonatan. However, the love of Amnon and Tamar was based on physical lust. As soon as Amnon satisfied his physical desires, the lust was gone, and he was left with nothing but hatred.

Shlomo describes the love between G-d and His nation in the Song of Songs, Shir Hashirim.

*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be contemned.*

**Shir Hashirim 8:7**

מים רבים לא יוכלו לכבות את האהבה  
ונהרות לא ישטפוה אם יתן איש את כל הון  
ביתו באהבה בוז יבוזו לו:  
**שיר השירים ח:ז**

*[This] refers to the love [of God] for Israel, for if all the nations of the world were to gather to take that love from between Him and Israel, they would not be able to, as it says, "Many waters cannot quench love".*

**Bamidbar Rabba 2:16**

מדבר באהבתו של ישראל שאם יתכנסו כל  
אומות העולם ליטול את האהבה שבינו  
לבין ישראל אינן יכולין שנאמר מים רבים  
לא יוכלו לכבות את האהבה  
**במדבר רבה ב:טז**

The love is compared to a fire which cannot be extinguished by numerous waters, a love which is eternal, a love which can stand the test of time. Therefore, the love between G-d and Israel is independent of anything physical.

However, the love of Israel towards G-d does have a dimension of love which is *Thuya Bedavar*, dependent on a physical factor. G-d expects the Jewish nation to serve Him, while the Jewish nation expects redemption and the Temple in return.

The Sefer Hamitzvoth explains that the reason for the destruction of the Second Temple was *Sinat Chinam*, baseless hatred.

*Why was the second Temple destroyed? We know that [the people of the time] were giants in Torah and acts of kindness. If so, why was it destroyed? Because there was baseless hatred among them... And is what is clearly visible, the awesome punishment for baseless hatred, because those exiled because of the three cardinal sins [from the first Temple] were redeemed after 70 years. And the end [of the exile] of those that were guilty of baseless hatred has not been revealed.*

**Sefer Hamitzvoth Katan #8**

בית שני למה נחרב. מכירים אנו שגדולים בתורה ובגמילות חסדים היו. אם כן מפני מה נחרב מפני שהיה בהם שנאת חנם. ונרמז בראשי תיב"ו: "איכה" "ישבה" "בדד" "העיר" "רבת" "עם" "היתה" - איב"ה רע"ה. וזה הוא דבר הנראה לעינים כי גדול עונש שנאת חנם מאד כי אותם שהיה בהם ג' עבירות נגאלו אחר ע' שנה. ואותם שהיה בהם רק שנאת חנם לא נתגלה קצם.

**ספר מצוות קטן מצוה ח**

On the ninth of Av the Jewish nation mourns over an event of destruction that has occurred long ago. The nation mourns, for the fact that the Beit Hamikdash is not built today is a sign that the cause for its destruction is still present among the Jewish people. There is still baseless hatred, there is still the love that is dependent on the physical. At the end of Megillat Eichah, the Jewish nation requests G-d for permission to return to Him as in previous days, where the independent love was so great and eternal, that nothing in the world could extinguish it. The Jewish nation asks G-d for a love that will never again transform into hatred, for the anger and the punishment the Jewish nation has experienced is too much to bear.

*Return us to You, O Lord, and we shall be returned; renew our days as of old. You cannot have utterly rejected us, and be exceeding wrathful against us.*

**Eicha 5:21-22**

השיבנו ה' אליך ונשובה חדש ימינו כקדם: כי אם מאס מאסתנו קצפת עלינו עד מאד: **איכה פרק ה:כא-כב**

# What Mourning Means: Reflections of the Rav on Tisha B'Av

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

The customs we observe on the day of Tisha B'Av are strikingly similar to those of an *avel*, one whose close relative has recently passed away. We abstain from washing ourselves and putting on perfume, from wearing leather shoes and talking frivolously. We even refrain from studying parts of the Torah which are unrelated to the events and the mood of the day. Instead we sit on the floor or a low chair and solemnly contemplate the loss of the Beis HaMikdash.

On Tisha B'Av the sense of mourning and sadness is palpable. But, in truth, the observances of mourning begin long before Tisha B'Av itself. Already from the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz, at the start of the “three weeks” period, Ashkenazic communities minimize their involvement in pleasurable activities like getting married, taking haircuts and buying new clothing. From the beginning of the month of Av through Tisha B'Av, what is commonly referred to as the “nine days”, we refrain as well from doing laundry and from wearing freshly laundered clothing. Tisha B'Av is certainly the most restrictive of the entire “three weeks” period, but the observances of *aveilus* (mourning) are not limited to that day alone.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt”l used to say that these three periods of time mirror the three periods of mourning that a child observes when losing a parent. Tisha B'Av is like the seven-day period of *shiva* when the sense of mourning is most intense. The “nine days” beginning with Rosh Chodesh Av is similar to the period of *shloshim*, and from the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz until the month of Av we observe laws of mourning similar to the twelve-month period of *aveilus* that a child observes after losing a parent.

What's interesting, though, is that the order of observances is reversed. The child who loses a parent observes *shiva* first, then *shloshim* and then the twelve-month period of *aveilus*, while during the “three weeks” we first observe the *aveilus* of the twelve-month period, then *shloshim*, and only on Tisha B'Av do we keep to the restrictions of *shiva*. Why is the order changed when we mourn the loss of the Beis HaMikdash?



The Rav explained that there is a fundamental difference between *aveilus chadasha* (a new private mourning), as the Rabbis refer to it (Yevamos 43b), and *aveilus yeshana* (the old, annual mourning for the Beis HaMikdash). When a close relative passes away, the grief, the pain, the sense of loss come naturally and easily. It is therefore most appropriate to begin the observances of *aveilus* with *shiva*, the most intense expression of mourning. But after seven days, the *avel* is ready to take a step back. Although his loss is still very much on his mind, nevertheless his emotions have tempered; his feelings of sorrow have lessened. For him, the observances of *shloshim* are more fitting. By the end of thirty days, the *avel* has gained perspective on his loss. For most relatives, he is now able to conclude the observances of *aveilus*. Even for a parent, while he continues to mourn, he still reduces his *aveilus* once again.

In the case of *aveilus yeshana*, on the other hand, this progression is out of place. We have become so used to living in a world without the Beis HaMikdash, that it would be unfair to expect anyone to begin the “three weeks” with the observances of *shiva*. It simply would be unnatural for anyone to suddenly break down and cry over the loss of the Beis HaMikdash. The sense of mourning for the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash can be internalized only through gradual increments. Only by slowly increasing our observances of *aveilus* from the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz through the “nine days”, while at the same time reflecting on the significance of this three-week period, can we hope to approach the day of Tisha B’Av with the right frame of mind. By engaging in this three-week learning experience, we prepare ourselves mentally so that when the day of Tisha B’Av finally arrives we are ready to grieve appropriately.

## The Unique Character of *Aveilus Yeshana*

The Rav added that in certain ways *aveilus yeshana* for the Beis HaMikdash is even more stringent than *aveilus chadasha*. Although the Talmud (Moed Katan 27b) mentions that the first three days of *shiva* are days of crying, there is no obligation for an *avel* to cry. The Talmud simply says that during the first three days of *shiva* it is natural for an *avel* to want to cry. But on Tisha B’Av, crying is one of the motifs of the day. As the navi Yirmiyahu (9:16-17) says, in the haftarah we read the morning of Tisha B’Av, “Summon the dirge singers ... send for the wise women ... Let them hurry and raise up a lament for us; let our eyes run with tears and our eyelids flow with water.”

Mourning for the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash requires an expression of raw emotion. It obligates us to show how overcome we are with our longing for the Beis HaMikdash. That is why we spend much of the morning of Tisha B’Av reciting *kinos* (lamentations) which bemoan the loss of the Beis HaMikdash and describe the pain and suffering the Jewish people has endured as a result. The *kinos* are designed to awaken our emotions until we cry out uncontrollably because only by crying can we properly mourn the loss of the Beis HaMikdash.

The navi Zechariah (7:1-3) describes how once the rebuilding of the second Beis HaMikdash had already begun, some of the exiles still living in Bavel sent a delegation to ask the leaders of the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael whether they should continue to observe Tisha B’Av. What’s noteworthy about this inquiry is the formulation that was used in posing the question. The Jews of the Diaspora didn’t ask whether they should continue to mourn on Tisha B’Av. The

language they used was, “Shall I cry in the fifth month (of Av) – *haev’ke b’chodesh ha’chamishi?*” This clearly demonstrates how central a role crying plays on Tisha B’Av. It is not simply a commendable expression of grief. Rather, it is an essential component of our obligation to mourn for the Beis HaMikdash. It is the activity, more than any other, which defines our *aveilus* experience on the day of Tisha B’Av.

There is another important difference between the observances of *aveilus yeshana* and those of *aveilus chadasha*. The Rabbis never placed any limitation on how much a person is allowed to mourn for the Beis HaMikdash. To the contrary, one who mourns the loss of the Beis HaMikdash incessantly is praised. In fact, the very last *kina* we recite on Tisha B’Av is *Eli Tzion V’areha*, in which we ask Yerushalayim and her surrounding cities to continue to cry for the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. “Weep and wail,” we call out to Tzion, “like a woman in the travails of labor, like a young lady who has just lost her husband.” Don’t stop crying until Hashem rebuilds the Beis HaMikdash and returns Yerushalayim to its former beauty and prominence.

The Talmud (Ta’anis 29a) relates that Rabbi Yochanan felt that the fast for the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash should have been established on the tenth day of Av, not the ninth, because although the Beis Hamikdash was set on fire late in the afternoon on the ninth of Av, it continued to burn throughout the next day. Since most of the *heichal*, the main Temple structure, was destroyed on the tenth of Av, Rabbi Yochanan maintained that it would have been more appropriate to establish the fast on that day. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Ta’anis 4:6) records that some Amoraim fasted on both the ninth and the tenth days of Av – the ninth because the destruction began on that day, and the tenth because most of the *heichal* was consumed on that day.

How was it permissible for these Rabbis to add an extra fast day? If one may not sleep in the sukkah on Shemini Atzeres (Rosh Hashanah 28b) because that would violate the Biblical prohibition of *bal tosif*, adding to the mitzvos, then how could a few individual Rabbis add an extra fast day once it had already been established on the ninth of Av? Just as it is forbidden to add to any Biblical commandments, so too, we are not allowed to add to any mitzvos instituted by the Rabbis!

The Ramban (Toras Ha’adam, Chavel ed., p. 242) answers that mourning for the Beis HaMikdash is different. Not only is one allowed to add to the mourning, but such behavior is praiseworthy. An *avel* who cries or mourns too much for his relative is criticized. As the Talmud says (Moed Katan 27b), “Anyone who grieves excessively over his dead will ultimately weep over another deceased.” But one who weeps bitterly for the Beis HaMikdash is rewarded. In fact, Rav Yosef Karo writes in the very first chapter of the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 1:3): “It is proper for every G-d fearing person to feel pain and anguish over the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash.” The need to feel a sense of loss for the Beis HaMikdash is not restricted to the day of Tisha B’Av alone. It is supposed to be a daily activity, an ongoing experience in the life of every Jew.

Why didn’t Chazal place any limitations on our expression of *aveilus yeshana* for the Beis HaMikdash just like they did for the private mourning of *aveilus chadasha*? The Rav explained that an *avel* is enjoined from crying too much for his relative because, as the Rambam writes

(Hilchos Avel 13:11), death is *minhago shel olam*; it is part of the natural course of events in this world. But the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash was an unnatural event. The Beis HaMikdash was much more than a physical edifice. It symbolized the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. It was the focal point of spirituality in the world. When we mourn the loss of the Beis HaMikdash, we are not crying for the wood and the stones. We mourn the fact that we no longer see Hashem's presence as clearly in the world and that our relationship with Him is strained. We long for the day when the Jewish people will reunite with Hashem and feel his closeness once again. In other words, we hope for the day when the world will return to its natural state. That is why we are obligated to cry on Tisha B'Av and there is no limit to our mourning because the loss of the Beis HaMikdash is a reality we can never come to terms with.

## The Tefilla of Tisha B'Av

There is something else remarkable about Tisha B'Av which highlights the unique sense of mourning we feel on this day. Aside from being a day of mourning, Tisha B'Av is also a *ta'anis tzibbur*, a communal fast day. It is similar to the fasts that were decreed in Eretz Yisrael in the event of a prolonged drought (Ta'anis 12a). The fast begins at sunset, as opposed to the more minor fasts, like those of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz and the 10<sup>th</sup> of Teves, which begin at sunrise. On Tisha B'Av, in addition to the prohibitions of eating and drinking, we refrain as well from washing and anointing ourselves, wearing leather shoes and engaging in marital relations.

On the surface, the laws of Tisha B'Av seem to follow those of Yom Kippur and other communal fasts. And yet, while Tisha B'Av does share the restrictions of these other fasts, the focus of the day is significantly different. On a typical *ta'anis tzibbur*, we place much of our attention on tefilla. We beseech the Ribbono Shel Olam to have mercy and compassion on the community. But on Tisha B'Av, many critical components of the tefilla of a *ta'anis tzibbur* are missing. We do not recite *Selichos* or *Avinu Malkenu*. There is no tefilla of *Neila*, like we have at the end of Yom Kippur. We even omit the *Tachanun* prayer and the section of *Tiskabeil Tzlos'hon U'vaus'hon* (accept our prayers and supplications) during the Kaddish at the end of Ma'ariv and Shacharis.

If Tisha B'Av is a *ta'anis tzibbur*, then why do we not engage in prayer on Tisha B'Av like we do on other fasts? The Mordechai (Ta'anis, sec. 635) offers two answers. First, he suggests that perhaps we do not recite *Selichos*, *Avinu Malkenu* or *Tachanun* on Tisha B'Av because it is called a *moed* (a special time), as the posuk (Eicha 1:15) says, *kara alay moed* ("He proclaimed about me a set time"). Presumably the meaning behind this interpretation is that Tisha B'Av is treated like a *yom tov*, a *moed*, because we hope that when the Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt, all days which were previously designated as days of mourning for the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash will become days of festive celebration. For this reason we omit *Selichos*, *Tachanun* and any other prayer which would be inappropriate for a *yom tov*.

But this seems difficult. Why should Tisha B'Av be treated like a *yom tov* when the Temple Mount still lies in ruin? If anything, Tisha B'Av nowadays should be considered a *yom kina* or a *yom aveilus*, not a *yom tov*. What's more, the simple understanding of the posuk in Eicha seems to be making this very point, that Tisha B'Av was a day that was divinely ordained as a time for inflicting pain and torture on the Jewish people, not a time for festive celebration! And besides,

even if Tisha B'Av can be called a yom tov, how does this explain why we omit the section of *Tiskabeil* in Kaddish?

The Mordechai offers a second approach which the Rav frequently quoted (see Nefesh HaRav, p. 200). He writes that perhaps we leave out *Selichos*, *Tachanun* and *Tiskabeil* in order to show, as the Talmud (Brachos 32b) states, "From the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the gates of prayer have been sealed, like the posuk says (Eicha 3:8) 'Even as I cry out and plead, He shut out my prayer (*sasam tefillasi*)'."

With the loss of the Beis HaMikdash, all tefilla is less effective. It's as if Hakadosh Boruch Hu no longer wants to listen to our prayers. On a regular ta'anis tzibbur we add extra prayers to our tefilla. We try to break through the barriers separating between the Ribbono Shel Olam and ourselves. But on Tisha B'Av, when we commemorate the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, the event which weakened the power of our tefilla, we leave out any extra supplications we would have liked to add to our tefilla, in order to demonstrate that we realize that without the Beis HaMikdash the strength of our prayers have been undermined, *sasam tefillasi*.

We omit *Tiskabeil* from Kaddish after Ma'ariv and Shacharis as an expression of sadness, as if to say that we understand we have become estranged from Hakadosh Boruch Hu, and it's as if He doesn't want to accept our tefillos. This custom of leaving out *Tiskabeil* applies only to the *aveilus yeshana* of Tisha B'Av, not to a regular *aveilus chadasha* (see Nefesh HaRav there), because it is only on Tisha B'Av that we mourn the loss of our close relationship with the Ribbono Shel Olam.

## Comfort on a Day of Grief

After *chatzos* (midday) on Tisha B'Av, we get up from the floor, put on our tefillin and recite the bracha of *nachem*, asking Hashem to console Yerushalayim and us. Where is there room for consolation on such a dark day? The Rav explained with a Midrash (see Tosafos, Kiddushin 31b). The posuk in Tehillim (79:1) says, "A song of Assaf: Hashem! The nations have entered into Your estate; they defiled the Sanctuary of Your holiness." The Midrash asks, "A song of Assaf? It should have been titled *kina l'Assaf*, a dirge of Assaf!" The Midrash answers that Assaf sang with happiness and joy that Hashem vented his anger, so to speak, on the wood and the stones of the Beis HaMikdash, and not on the Jewish people.

This is our source of comfort on the sad day of Tisha B'Av. While Hashem lashed out in fury against the Beis HaMikdash and Yerushalayim, He spared the Jewish people. Paradoxically, it is precisely at the time of the mincha prayer, when the Beis HaMikdash started to burn (Ta'anis 29a), that we feel consoled because that act of destruction was really a demonstration of love. It showed that Hashem wants the Jewish people to survive; he wants them to flourish and ultimately to reunite with Him. If Hashem punishes us only out of love, like a father disciplines his child, then there is hope for the future. We can look forward to the day of reconciliation when Hashem will return to us and reveal His glory to the entire world.

# The Legacy of Yirmiyahu

Ms. Miriam Krupka

Faculty, Ramaz Upper School

The legacy of Yirmiyahu is considered by many to be that of the Navi who alerted the Jews to the possibility of upcoming destruction, and the need to change their actions in order to avoid it. Each year, the month of Av arrives, and with it, the dual emotions that it represents; the grief and the mourning as well as the solace linked with the hope of return. For the time period of the shiva d'nechemta, the seven weeks of solace following *Tisha B'av*, we read Yeshayahu's expressive and powerful words of reassurance. For the tears and grief leading up to and including *Tisha B'av* itself, we turn to the painful words of Yirmiyahu, the prophet of the *churban*, both in the mournful tunes of *Megillat Eicha* as well as in the cautionary admonitions of *Sefer Yirmiyahu* itself, read during the haftarot leading up to *Tisha B'av*. In fact, Chazal themselves (Baba Batra 14b) have divided these two prophets into two clear categories; calling Yeshayahu "כולו נחמה", complete consolation, and Yirmiyahu "כולו תוכחה", complete reproach.

And so, the lines are drawn. In the minds of many, Yeshayahu, as his name denotes, is the prophet of *yeshuah*, salvation, while Yirmiyahu is the prophet of defeat and destruction. He is the "Jeremiah" of Rembrandt's "*Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem*", a painting depicting a worn, defeated prophet watching as his city is burned, his king blinded, his people led into captivity. Moreover, from the entirety of *Sefer Yirmiyahu* and its descriptions of his efforts throughout the forty years before the destruction, it would seem that through his entire career, Yirmiyahu faced a perpetually stubborn nation, politically determined to continue down a futile path of revolt and bloodshed. Spiritually, they were content with their smugly self-assured religious practices that rid them of any spiritual accountability. In terms of the leadership, Yirmiyahu faced a string of monarchs who vacillated between ignoring him and allowing the angry mobs to repeatedly assault him.

The words of his *sefer* are replete with examples. In 7:3 and 7:10-14, he exhorts the people to change their ways, lest the Beit Hamikdash be destroyed. The result? Yirmiyahu is put on trial by the masses and sentenced to death for his words. In 11:2-5, in a speech to the people of his own hometown of Anatot, Yirmiyahu encourages them to return to God if they wish to continue living in the land. The result? His own people attempt to poison him. Even in the final year before the *churban*, Yirmiyahu struggles to relay the futility of the revolt against Bavel. He

continues to encourage a return to God as the only way to any sort of victory. The result? He is ignored by his king and thrown by the military leadership into a pit to starve to death.<sup>125</sup>

In fact, as we read *Megillat Eicha* on *Tisha B'av*, it seems that as a prophet sent to open the people's eyes to the possibility, and then the eventuality, of one of the greatest tragedies in history, Yirmiyahu simply failed. While the definition of success and failure when it comes to the words of the prophets (and the attention paid them by the people) is one that is too broad to be discussed here, it would behoove us, most especially at this time of year, to briefly touch upon the topic as it regards Yirmiyahu. To do so, opens for us an incredible vision of the *churban*, and the *nechama* that accompanies it.

Perhaps one of the most pivotal *perakim* to learn as we begin this discussion is perek 29, the text of a letter that Yirmiyahu sends to the people who have been exiled to Bavel with King Yechaniah, also known as “גלות החרש והמסגר” (“exile of the craftsmen and smiths”), as many of the craftsmen and artisans were exiled along with them.

**1** Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the residue of the elders of the captivity, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon, **2** after that Jeconiah the king, and the queen-mother, and the officers, and the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the craftsmen, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem; **3** by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying:

(א) ואלה דברי הספר אשר שלח ירמיה הנביא מירושלם אל יתר זקני הגולה ואל הכהנים ואל הנביאים ואל כל העם אשר הגלה נבוכדנאצר מירושלם בבלה: (ב) אחרי צאת יכניה המלך והגבירה והסריסים שרי יהודה וירושלם והחרש והמסגר מירושלם: (ג) ביד אלעשה בן שפן וגמריה בן חלקיה אשר שלח צדקיה מלך יהודה אל נבוכדנאצר מלך בבל בבלה לאמר:

The first 3 pesukim serve as the introduction. The timing is directly after the second wave of exiles to Bavel, which occurred under the reign of King Yehonya. With him, we are told, went much of the aristocracy, leadership and skilled craftsmen of the nation. In addition, we are informed that Yirmiyahu entrusts this letter into the hands of two familiar, upright and reliable, people.<sup>126</sup>

The remainder of the letter can then be divided into 2 parts, pesukim 4-11 and 12-14.

**4** Thus said the L-RD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all the captive people, whom I have caused to be carried away captive from Jerusalem unto Babylon: **5** Build houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; **6** take wives, and have sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and

(ד) כה אמר ה' צבאות אלהי ישראל לכל הגולה אשר הגליתי מירושלם בבלה: (ה) בנו בתים וישבו ונטעו גנות ואכלו את פריה: (ו) קחו נשים והולידו בנים ובנות וקחו לבניכם נשים ואת בנותיכם תנו לאנשים ותלדנה בנים ובנות ורבו שם ואל

<sup>125</sup> See פרק ל"ח for fascinating similarities in the text to the Yoseph story.

<sup>126</sup> אלעשה בן שפן is from the noteworthy שפן family, who proved their loyalty during Yirmiyahu's trial (26:24) and גמריה בן חלקיה hails from the family of the גדול כהן who, with the help of the שפן family, initiated the purge against idolatry demanded by Yirmiyahu towards the beginning of his time as a נביא.

daughters; and multiply there, and be not diminished. 7 And seek the peace of the city to which I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the L-RD for it; for in the peace thereof shall you have peace.

תמעטו: (ז) ודרשו את שלום העיר אשר הגליתי אתכם שמה והתפללו בעדה אל ה' כי בשלומה יהיה לכם שלום:

First, Yirmiyahu makes three demands of Bnei Yisrael; 1) build homes and plant gardens, 2) marry, have children and multiply, and 3) pray for the welfare of the foreign government in which you live, so that you may have peace<sup>127</sup>. In its most simplistic interpretation, these three commands are directions. The purpose of these directions is then explained:

8 For thus said the L-RD of hosts, the God of Israel: Let not your prophets that are in the midst of you, and your diviners, beguile you, neither hearken to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9 For they prophesy falsely unto you in My name; I have not sent them, said the L-RD. 10 For thus said the L-RD: After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will remember you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the L-RD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

(ח) כי כה אמר ה' צבאות אלהי ישראל אל ישיאו לכם נביאיכם אשר בקרבכם וקסמיכם ואל תשמעו אל חלמתיכם אשר אתם מחלמים: (ט) כי בשקר הם נבאים לכם בשמי לא שלחתיים נאם ה': (י) כי כה אמר ה' כי לפי מלאת לבבל שבעים שנה אפקד אתכם והקמתי עליכם את דברי הטוב להשיב אתכם אל המקום הזה: (יא) כי אנכי ידעתי את המחשבת אשר אנכי חשב עליכם נאם ה' מחשבות שלום ולא לרעה לתת לכם אחרית ותקוה:

Yirmiyahu is giving the exiled Jews of Bavel the reasoning behind the three commands of building, marrying and praying for the host government. His explanation is quite logical. He is instructing them to fulfill these three commands because the exile will last longer than they think. In fact, it will last for a life time.<sup>128</sup> Thus, if they hope to survive, they must do what Jews have done for centuries; rebuild homes, rebuild families and hope to live in peace until they are eventually able to return to the land which they lost (10-11)<sup>129</sup>. Then, in pesukim 12-14, Yirmiyahu turns to the second part of his letter. The next order of business is the religious aspect; the encouragement to pray to God while in exile.

12 And you shall call upon Me, and go, and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. 13 And you shall seek Me, and find Me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart. 14

(יב) וקראתם אתי והלכתם והתפללתם אלי ושמעתי אליכם: (יג) ובקשתם אתי ומצאתם כי תדרשני בכל לבבכם: (יד)

127 It is debatable whether the goal of "peace" is attached merely to the command to pray for the foreign government or to all three commands. For our purposes, we can assume it doubles back to all three requests. The fulfillment of all three will ultimately lead to peace in exile.

128 תהלים פרק צ פסוק י: יְמֵי שְׁנוֹתֵינוּ בָּהֶם שְׁבָעִים שָׁנָה וְנָאֵם בְּגִבּוֹרֵת שְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה

129 A look at the pattern of building, planting and marrying as it appears throughout Tanach is worthy of more detailed analysis than I could do justice here. One interesting note, however, is its echo of the exemptions from a מלחמת מצוה as they appear in דברים כ:ה-ח (anyone who recently built a house, planted a vineyard or was married). At a time, when Yirmiyahu begins to call for military submission in the struggles with Babylonia, the terms are contextually appropriate ones.

*And I will be found of you, says the L-RD, and I will turn your captivity, and gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, says the L-RD; and I will bring you back unto the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.*

ונמצאתי לכם נאם ה' ושבתי את שבותכם  
וקבצתי אתכם מכל הגוים ומכל המקומות  
אשר הדחתי אתכם שם נאם ה' והשבתי  
אתכם אל המקום אשר הגליתי אתכם  
משם:

Yirmiyahu commands them to pray to God while in exile. This command too, if fulfilled, will result in a return to the land, as promised at the end of pasuk 14.

In other words, the letter reads as follows; you are currently headed into a prolonged destruction and exile. To survive, and eventually return to your land, you will need to do two things. On the one hand, you must work to build a *physical* community in exile (4-6). However, more importantly, to be able to return, you must recognize that God alone has the power to bring you back. Therefore, you must pray to Him to reverse the decree and return you to your land (12-14). Two simple instructions.

But the letter is far more meaningful than its initial reading seems to suggest. To appreciate this, we must understand that the galut of Yechania (about 11 years prior to the final destruction and exile) marked a complex turning point, or rather, a no-turning-back point, for the *nevuot* of Yirmiyahu and ultimately, all of Judaism. Yirmiyahu's *nevuot* now began to encourage the monarchs and the people to submit to the Babylonians, to accept the destruction of much of Israel, perhaps even its religious center, as inevitable, and to do their best to live as a vassal state under the Babylonian Empire. Understandably, this was not a message that the politically and religiously self-assured people were willing to hear. But Yirmiyahu, their *navi*, knew that once the destruction hit, they would find themselves in a situation that despite all the tragedies in Jewish history, will always be remembered as one of the worst – because the nation landed in the absolutely unknown. The contrast would be unbearable; the religious center with its priests and sacrifices – the only way in which they really knew how to connect to God - would be gone. Their central monarchy, the idea of having a political entity of their own, destroyed, and its constituency enslaved to another nation. And for the first time since they entered it close to 1,000 years before, the majority of Jewish life would move out of its land and into exile. With religion, land and leadership gone, they would find themselves in communal and religious territory that was completely unfamiliar. Such a drastic change in their political, social and religious reality could only result, as it did for so many other refugee peoples, in assimilation and death.

**In this letter, Yirmiyahu provides the Jewish people with the blueprint to encounter a life in the Diaspora, a life that, as we so well know, would last for thousands of years<sup>130</sup>.**

It is not merely instructions to enable a return. Yirmiyahu, in this pivotal letter to his exiled people, intends his instruction to be not only about what to do so that you can come back one day, but about how to survive not coming back for an extended period of time.

<sup>130</sup> Even the return during the times of Ezra and Nechemia and the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash*, would serve as an interim relationship period, and not an absolute reversal to the times of בית ראשון



And here's how he does it. He provides them with a plan for survival by forcing them to acknowledge their reality and then rebuild from it. Do not waste time, neither communally, nor religiously, yearning for a return to a way of life and a form of religious connection that was corrupted and damaged. Part 1 (4-6), the rebuilding of the physical community is not just an instruction book for survival; it is the notification of their new reality<sup>131</sup>. Yirmiyahu is telling them: "Here is what your new reality is. You will be building homes and having children in this new place. You will exist under this foreign government. In general, whether you like it or not, you **will** become a concrete part of the foreign land in which you live. Hopefully, that will happen peacefully". (Of course, there will always exist the tension between the need to build life in exile and the hope of return. Pasuk 9 acknowledges this tension by warning them against believing in the false prophets and dreamers who are telling them that return is imminent. That would be living in a dreamland at the expense of what the new reality demands of them.) Then, pesukim 12-14 (part 2) is about how to begin to rebuild what is most important – the community's damaged relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. A relationship that will now be based, not upon the land and the Beit Hamikdash, but around the command to pray to God as it appears in 12-14.

To understand the foresight and brilliance of Yirmiyahu's command, these pesukim require a closer look. Perhaps the most important thing he does in this perek is introduce the idea of prayer as the essential mode of connection to God (in no less than 4 separate terms, each of which speaks to a different element of prayer). The **key**, however, to Yirmiyahu's message is the way the word "והלכתם" is stuck strangely into the middle of the 2 descriptions of prayer ( וַיִּקְרָאֲתָם ( "א' תִּי וְהִלַּכְתֶּם וְהִתְפַּלֵּלְתֶּם אֵלַי ). In a simple reading, it can be read as "Go and pray to me". Alternatively, it can be read as "והלכתם מגלות". This reading would imply an if-then clause. If you pray to me, I will listen to your prayers and you will "go" to your land, i.e. return from exile. But in line with our reading of Yirmiyahu's message in this perek, the word "והלכתם" should actually be attached to the "והתפללתם" and read as "ongoing prayer" or "continuous prayer"<sup>132</sup>. Yirmiyahu is handing them a new form of religious service, one that will be "continuous" and lasting. Prayer, rather than sacrifice, will be the new, and continuous, form of relationship with God. This, then, is the new long-term plan for a relationship with God in an extended life in the Diaspora. It is the creation of the concept that historian Henry Feingold calls "the non-anthropomorphic relationship with Gd"; a group religious identity that is more about the abstract, intangible sacrifice of the heart than of the physical sacrifice of the altar.

It is an upheaval in religious life as they knew it! Yirmiyahu's message to the people is as follows: Forget the sacrifices, the land, the king – all the symbolic aspects of the relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, that ultimately were just that – symbols, and symbols that due to

131 The idea of customizing themselves to a new reality or existence, is further found in the words "רבו ואל תמעטו" at the end of pasuk 6, since these words seem reminiscent of the original מצוה given to mankind in בראשית א:כב. Here, they are "starting again", so to speak. Another interesting comparison lies in the dual promise to Avraham of a great and numerous nation alongside the promise of the land. Here, they are enjoined to continue the process of the building of the nation, albeit, for the interim, without the land.

132 פירושי שד"ל – "והלכתם מביע את ההמשחיות: תקראו אלי כל הזמן"

Similar to the phrase "הולך ו..." which, when attached to a verb, means to be "continuously" doing something.

excessive reliance upon them, can be cited as, if not the source, then at least the vehicle, of the failure. You don't need those things. In fact, they were hurting you. Your relationship with your God, a new and stronger relationship, can be based and built upon the decision to seek Him out and open an ongoing dialogue with Him.

**Rather than Yirmiyahu being the pessimistic, failed prophet, by handing them a method of religious survival, he is actually the greatest optimist of all.**

And with a glance through history, one can argue for the success of Yirmiyahu's message as well. Feingold coins a term called "Jewish exceptionalism" which describes the unique duality that exists amongst the American Jews he writes about. These Jews, he says, have an incredible ability to survive in and acculturate to new environments, while maintaining "an enduring link" to "a separate religious civilization with its own history" and identity<sup>133</sup>. A living demonstration of the duality to which Yirmiyahu speaks in our perek! Just as Yirmiyahu had explained to the Jews of the *churban*; understand and work with the fact that the physical life of the Jews is being moved to the Diaspora (Part 1) and therefore, that your relationship with God must be refocused to be attuned to that reality (Part 2).

As Feingold points out,

*"... the Jewish relationship to the American host culture is unique because there exists a separate continuous historical experience to which Jews relate as part of their identity. It has its claims. The formation of Jewish group identity is itself exceptional because for millennia it was not territorially, but spiritually rooted. Like the Jewish God, Jewish group identity was non-anthropomorphic- not anchored in material reality, but in an idea. The result was that not only was there a slower rate of acculturation for American Jewry, but one which occurred on different terms. They could not be classified as a religious denomination, nor as a hyphenate group. They were clearly not a race nor were they an ethnic group. The classification could not be found. To be sure, Jews became Americans, even "exaggerated Americans," but they also retained a strong loyalty to their Jewishness which, as we have seen, actually transcends the phenomenon of intermarriage... The tension between the two (American and Judaic culture) is sometimes difficult to negotiate, but it also contains what makes American Jewry and its history, exceptional."*<sup>134</sup>

In light of this message of Yirmiyahu's, Hashem's final promise of "ושבתי את שבותכם" in pasuk 14 can also be understood more deeply. The shorash "שוב" is unique in that "... while basically a verb of motion ... [it] embrace[s] both physical motion and religious relation, what might be called the 'covenantal' usage of the verb"<sup>135</sup>. It is the only verb of motion that is so frequently understood in both physical and covenantal ways. The covenantal usage is not about physical movement, but expresses a "movement" or "change" in the type or degree of loyalty on the part of *Bnei Yisrael* or

---

133 A midrash on American Jewish history, Henry L. Feingold, Albany : State University of New York Press, c1982, preface pxii.

134 Zion in America : the Jewish experience from colonial times to the present, Henry L. Feingold. New York : Hippocrene Books, 1974. p 331

135 The Root Šubh in the Old Testament : with particular reference to its usages in covenantal context, William L. Holladay, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1958, p1

their God, each for the other”<sup>136</sup>. This understanding of the verb occurs with unusually high frequency in Yirmiyahu’s writings and has become familiar to us through its later abstraction, “teshuva”. While one can assuredly read the pesukim as a simple promise of physical return to the land by God, should we merit it, what Yirmiyahu *covenantally* promises is that if we listen to his blueprint for a life in exile, we will end up with a new and stronger relationship *with* God.

Thus, the “return” of which Yirmiyahu speaks when he promises “וְשַׁבְתִּי אֶת שְׁבוּתְכֶם”, is not necessarily the promise of physical return, but the promise that the Jews will be able to find a path to God, even while in exile. If they foster a community of focused prayer and connection, then the Brit of Sinai, the relationship of the bride and the groom, will be rebuilt and fortified, even without the underlying land.<sup>137</sup> It is the challenge of a more esoteric or intangible monotheism; a move from a direct sacrifice-focused relationship to one that is more inherent, and perhaps, as we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century might argue, more difficult, requiring more spiritual discipline. Yet, as promised here in this perek, this new relationship has the potential to be not only critical and durable, but a thriving and powerful one in its own right.

Sir Rabbi Jonathan Sacks expands on this, pointing out that

*“... the irony is that it took the loss of Israel’s national independence to bring about the flowering of its religious vision. Now that the Temple lay in ruins, every Jew became a holy person, offering prayer instead of sacrifice, and achieving atonement through repentance... The synagogue replaced the Temple. Repentance substituted for the rites of the High Priest. Judaism, no longer a religion of land and state, became a faith built around homes, schools, and communities... and [this] would sustain them as a nation.”*<sup>138</sup>

The *churban*, as Yirmiyahu well knew, would force the Jewish community out of their self-assured religious state, and obligate them to begin again, and strive for something better.

Of course, we suffer in exile. Both for reasons of physical persecution and because we acknowledge our imperfect religious existence, we bitterly mourn the destruction and fervently pray for the ultimate return to our land. As the Chafetz Chaim remarks, the land is the body to our soul<sup>139</sup>. The Jews of the *churban* lost sight of the soul, due to misplaced confidence in the body. While we suffer without our body, we have learned, and continue to learn, in no small part as credit to Yirmiyahu, how to protect and nourish the soul of our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu while it is removed from its bodily state.

Ultimately, this pivotal letter to the exiles is a microcosm and a key to understanding all of Sefer Yirmiyahu. His constant grievances against the way the Jews served God in the *Beit Hamikdash*, while to his contemporaries would have been perceived as unheeded warnings, from our retrospective vantage point, were actually guidelines for a life with God, in Exile from His Temple. Imagine how the destroyed, confused and helpless religious community could reread

---

136 Ibid pp2, 152, 157

137 Of course, it can be read as more than two separate meanings. For ultimately, one is reliant on the other; succeed in rebuilding the loyalty and relationship, and you will then merit the physical return.

138 A Letter in the Scroll, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, New York, 2000. p150 and 152.

139 פספס חיים על התורה

the warnings and criticisms of his *sefer* and find religious instruction in those very criticisms, by understanding that it wasn't sacrifices that God wanted and therefore, it wasn't sacrifices they would need in order to reconnect to Him. And for us then, the life and book of Yirmiyahu is a charge, a rallying call that is not only intensely relevant to us as Diaspora Jews, but is also a strange, yet comforting form of consolation. For consolation can be found not only in the promise of an eventual return *from* exile, but in the idea that we were left with the guide to return to God while *in* it.

And being as the legacy of an individual or leader is really determined more by history's hindsight than by the situation he leaves behind when he expires, perhaps Rembrandt's "*Jeremiah*" as a lone representation of his prophetic tenure is a misguided one, and Yirmiyahu, his mission, and his words, are a triumph, and a solace, after all.

# *Megillat Eicha:* Catastrophe, Creativity, and Catharsis

Sarah Medved and Esty Rollhaus

GPATS Fellows

After forty years of calling to Israel to repent, prophesying the dire consequences of ignoring God's command, and remaining unheeded by a people unwilling to face the unfortunate truth, Yirmiyahu *Hanavi* finally saw his awful predictions fulfilled with the destruction of Yerushalayim and the *Beit Hamikdash*. But for him there was no spark of satisfaction in vindication. Bearing witness to the tragedies that befell the Jews and their land, Yirmiyahu's agony was heightened by the knowledge of how relatively easily the horrors could have been avoided. Crushed by pain and sorrow he cried out: "Eicha!" While commentaries offer differing interpretations of the term—explaining it variously as an expression of lament, shock, anger, or rebuke<sup>140</sup>—Yirmiyahu's call echoes still today.

What is the role of the book that bears this title, the book we read each year, sitting cross-legged on the floor in our Crocs? What might it have been to its author, observer of these grisly events; and what might it be to us, millennia removed from the disasters it describes?

## Yirmiyahu's *Eicha*: Creative Catharsis

While the words of *Megillat Eicha* certainly have important global implications and contain homiletic instructions, the *megillah* can and should be read, in part, as the personal diary, the written disclosure, of a man trying to come to terms with the destruction of the temple and the city he spent his life trying to preserve.

Psychological research has long pointed to the therapeutic effects of confronting trauma through emotional disclosure. Communicating past personal traumas has been correlated with higher emotional and physiological functioning.<sup>141</sup> The communication need not be verbal; even writing about traumatic events has been shown to engender increased positive emotions,

---

<sup>140</sup> See, for example, *Midrash Eicha Rabbah* 1:1

<sup>141</sup> Pennebaker, Barger & Tiebout (1989)

cognitions, and behaviors.<sup>142</sup> Since emotional inhibition is harmful and often manifests itself in severe physiological and psychological stress, disclosure facilitates improvement by allowing for the release of built-up tension.<sup>143</sup> Thus, writing that is most expressive and psychologically raw—that is least influenced by logical and emotional constraints—is the most powerful form of creative catharsis.

In *Megillat Eicha*, Yirmiyahu uses written disclosure to grapple with the tragedy he has witnessed. The text displays a progressive intensification of emotion, culminating in a release of accumulated anguish. *Perakim aleph* and *bet* of the *megillah* are emotionally saturated expressions of Yirmiyahu's grief and rage. He confronts the destruction without distancing himself from either the emotional pain or the physical reality. Yirmiyahu begins by portraying the state of the city from a third-person perspective: "Alas, she sits in solitude! The city that was great with people has become like a widow. (1:1)" He personifies the city as an independent character, whose state he must describe, as she cannot speak for herself. The use of the third-person in the first ten verses seems a logical choice for an author describing a reality not confined to his own experiences. However, in *pasuk yud alef*, the narrative voice switches to first-person, as Yirmiyahu becomes a mouthpiece for Yerushalayim, speaking as the city. One of the more famous first-person verses laments, "Over these do I weep; my eye continuously runs with water because a comforter to restore my soul is far from me. (1:16)" Yerushalayim is transformed from a "she" to an "I." Her figurative experiences intermingle with Yirmiyahu's own recollections and descriptions, until the line between them blurs, as Yirmiyahu experiences the destruction as if he were the city herself. His emotional reality cannot be contained in the slightly more dispassionate third-person narration, so he is compelled to adopt a first-person perspective to adequately communicate the intensity of his feelings.

While the first *perek* with its shifting perspective conveys the extent of Yirmiyahu's grief, the second expresses unbridled anger. The first half of the *perek* dramatically describes the effects of Hashem's ire, depicting Hashem as "without pity, (2:2)" "like an enemy, (2:4,5)" and "pour[ing] out His wrath like fire. (2:4)" Yirmiyahu's fixation on Hashem's fury contains an implicit accusation, a palpable undercurrent of resentment for the excessive nature of His retribution. Yirmiyahu then momentarily sublimates his rage, directing his attention toward the desolate city in a futile effort to find words of comfort with which to allay her sorrow, asking "To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you? (2:13)" Instead of consolation, he is able only to continue bemoaning the decimation, but this time addressing the city directly. After having drawn close to the city in his failed attempt to comfort, Yirmiyahu turns back to Hashem with renewed indignation: "See, O Hashem, and behold whom You have treated so! (2:20)"

Over the course of the *perek*, Yirmiyahu transitions from addressing the presumed audience—that is, readers of the text—to directing his words toward the city, the "maiden daughter of Zion, (2:13)" to confronting Hashem accusatorily. These shifts in address reflect emotions unchecked by rational intentionality: Yirmiyahu is overwhelmed. He faces a spectrum of varied emotions; he doesn't know whether to lament, comfort, or accuse. This *perek* reflects an intensification of the grieving process commenced in *perek alef*, as Yirmiyahu becomes increasingly enmeshed in his

---

<sup>142</sup> Donnelly & Murray (1991)

<sup>143</sup> Rachman (1980)

feelings and invested in the therapeutic writing process, grieving without inhibition, without distance between himself and his words.

Creative catharsis in its truest sense—the relief, comfort, and acceptance of traumatic past experiences through an intense and emotionally raw creative process—does not happen for Yirmiyahu until the third *perek*. *Perek gimel* contains Yirmiyahu’s personal identification with the tragedy, which ultimately leads him toward a measure of acceptance. The opening words of the chapter personalize the tragedy: “I am the man who has seen affliction. (3:1)” Yirmiyahu no longer expresses his grief by adopting the voice of the city, and he no longer accuses Hashem. In this *perek*, Yirmiyahu confronts his own feelings; he explains how the tragedy affects him as an individual. This heightened awareness of the magnitude of his suffering ultimately causes the emotional catharsis and the shift to acceptance that occurs later in the *perek*.

The crescendo of personal identification with the tragedy leads to a deafening buildup of Yirmiyahu’s internal psychic tension until he is finally able to achieve catharsis. The turning point comes halfway through the *perek*, with a set of verses dealing with the concept of memory: “Remember my afflictions and my sorrow; the wormwood and bitterness. My soul remembers well, and makes me despondent. Yet, this I bear in mind; therefore I still hope: Hashem’s kindness surely has not ended, nor are his mercies exhausted. (3:19-22)” Yirmiyahu confronts his anguish, recognizing the intensity of his own painful memories. Having recorded his harrowing experiences, he does not try to deny their reality, and this acceptance leads him to the hopeful affirmations that follow. The iterations of faith that comprise much of the remainder of the *perek* can be seen as the outcome of the therapeutic process, rather than as the therapy itself. It is only after Yirmiyahu has expressed his sorrow, once he acknowledges that his “soul remembers well,” that he can move forward to the verses of consolation. There is a causal link between the juxtaposed expressions: the painful memories and the emerging hope. Only by admitting the true extent of his suffering is Yirmiyahu able to work through that pain to acceptance and faith.

The end of *Eicha* marks an impressive attempt to make sense of the tragedy; Hashem is ultimately merciful, yet He deals with a recalcitrant, sinning nation. This sort of theological justification can often lead to the callous conclusion that all those afflicted by God have sinned against Him, emptying the observer of sympathetic instincts. However, Yirmiyahu does not espouse a shallow theology that disregards the people’s anguish. He identifies with the sinners and with their suffering, as he includes himself in their confession: “We have transgressed and rebelled; you have not forgiven. (3:42)” In the fifth *perek*, this tendency is even more pronounced. Having described the destruction as a third-person narrator, as the city herself, and as an individual affected by the tragedy, Yirmiyahu finally settles on a narrative voice: “Remember, Hashem, what has befallen **us**: look and see **our** disgrace. (5:1)” Yirmiyahu is, ultimately, one of a nation, a member of *Am Yisrael*. After years of being scoffed at by his people, he eventually shares in their fate, suffering alongside them.

Yirmiyahu, the messenger of God, now cries out to God as emissary of the people. The lips that prophesied destruction now elegize the city and its inhabitants. Years of suffering and persecution at the hands of his brethren culminate not in disassociation from them, but rather in an empathic

identification with them. Yirmiyahu is transformed through the words of *Eicha* into a spokesperson for the nation's distress. His emotional catharsis, as recorded in *Eicha*, serves as a model and an inspiration for his fellow sufferers.

## *Eicha* Today: Heightening Grief and Initiating Hope

While *Megillat Eicha* may have served as a powerful cathartic avenue for Yirmiyahu and his contemporaries, does this cathartic experience still resonate with us today? How ought we to relate to this text, as Jews generations removed from the overwhelming emotional experiences of firsthand observers? The mere fact that we still read *Eicha*, that we recall and mourn a destruction that occurred so long ago, indicates an aspect of our unique national character. In *Out of The Whirlwind*, Rav Soloveitchik describes the distinction between *avelut hadashah*, mourning for a recent, personal loss, and *avelut yeshanah*, national mourning “due to a historic disaster that took place 1,900 years ago. This category is the handiwork of man... The *avelut* is a result of recollection of events. Judaism here introduced a strange kind of memory, a very unique and singular memory.”<sup>144</sup> This type of memory, he argues, is based on Judaism's belief in a unitive time consciousness. We do not acknowledge the gap that seemingly exists between ourselves and the events of our history, but rather view our past as a current, living reality.

However, there is no escaping recognition of our unavoidable emotional distance from the *churban*. The Jerusalem Talmud, compiled in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, already acknowledges and notes this distance. *Masechet Ta'anit* recounts that Rebbe (Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, redactor of the Mishna) was able to derive by exegesis twenty-four disasters from a verse in *Eicha*, while Rabbi Yochanan was able to derive sixty.<sup>145</sup> The *gemara* notes that Rabbi Yochanan's ability to expound more than his Rabbi and predecessor, Rebbe, reflects a problematic reversal of the Talmudic assumption that the generations progressively decline in exegetical capabilities. It deals with this issue by explaining that the emotional potency of the temple's destruction interfered with cogent interpretation. Since Rabbi Yochanan's generation had more time to distance themselves from the tragedy, they were able to view the text objectively, as an object of study, and thereby to derive more interpretations. However, their emotional reaction to the recounting of the tragedies could not compare to that of earlier generations.

In light of this truth, Rav Soloveitchik points out that while *avelut hadashah* is a spontaneous response, *avelut yeshanah* must be cultivated. For this reason, he explains, our practices of mourning increase in intensity as we near the day of Tisha B'Av, culminating in the fast itself, about which the *beraita* states, “All the restrictions which are observed during *shiva* are observed on Tisha b'Av.”<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> Soloveitchik, Rabbi Yosef Dov. *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition*, 2003.

<sup>145</sup> *T.Y. Ta'anit* 4:5.

<sup>146</sup> *T.B. Ta'anit* 30a. However, the *braita* ought not to be taken literally, as there are several halakhic distinctions between the two states.



After three weeks of preparation, we usher in the fast day by reading *Megillat Eicha*. We have fostered grief both internally and externally, and have finally reached the climax, the point at which we, observers of *avelut yeshanah*, come as close as possible to experiencing the poignant and painful emotions of one who has experienced tragic loss firsthand. *Eicha*, the instinctive cry of sorrow, brings us to the peak of our suffering, as we see the destruction through Yirmiyahu's eyes and call out along with him. The distress expressed in the text becomes ours in that moment; our anguish is heightened and intensified.

However, these emotions do not encompass the totality of the modern *Eicha* experience. The Rav notes a further difference between *avelut hadashah* (which he equates with *avelut d'yachid*, individual mourning) and *avelut yeshanah* (which he also terms *avelut d'rabim*, communal mourning). While the individual, in the wake of personal loss, becomes completely subsumed by his grief, the community never reaches the same state of total despair. As the Rav eloquently explains, "the covenantal community... must never lose hope or faith. No matter how difficult times are, no matter how great the loss is, however dreary and bleak the present seems, the future shines with a brilliant glow full of promise. The messianic hope has never vanished; the people have never been enveloped by the dark night of despair."

Accordingly, as modern readers of *Eicha* we catch the droplets of hope that glisten softly alongside Yirmiyahu's tears. Over the course of the sefer, Yirmiyahu's emotions move from unbridled sorrow and anger and toward acceptance and catharsis. For him, the shift had to come with time and expression, but we are given the text in its entirety, a whole that encompasses both aspects at once. Therefore, as observers of *avelut d'rabim*, when we read the text we are never swallowed by the all-consuming grief that Yirmiyahu first experienced. We are given, within the text, the catharsis that he ultimately discovers, the spark of hope for us as a nation.

*Masechet Sofrim* presents two differing customs regarding the proper time to read *Megillat Eicha*: some read it on the night of Tisha B'Av, while others read it in the daytime.<sup>147</sup> Taking this into account, the *Mishna Berurah* comments that although the prevalent tradition nowadays is to read *Eicha* at night, it is recommended to read it individually during the day as well.<sup>148</sup> This daytime reading, perhaps, highlights *Eicha*'s dual role. As Tisha B'Av begins, we sit in darkness and hear Yirmiyahu's elegy for the first time. Our grief reaches a fever pitch, the hope of the later chapters is latent. But hours later, by the light of the summer sun, we read *Eicha* again. This time the move toward catharsis takes precedence over the distress, progressing toward the *nechama* of *chatzot*, when our mourning practices are reduced.<sup>149</sup> *Megillat Eicha*, the book of lamentations, though intrinsically connected to the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, nonetheless contains an important connection to recovery, both for its author at the time of its composition and for modern Jews in exile today. By allowing for the experience and expression of sorrow, it ultimately pushes us toward the moment in which we will rise up from the scene of destruction to greet a brighter future.

---

<sup>147</sup> *Masechet Sofrim* 18:5

<sup>148</sup> *Mishna Berurah* 559:2

<sup>149</sup> See *Shulchan Aruch/Rama, Orach Chaim* 554:22; 559:1, 3, 10

# Coping with Loss and Terror: Jewish and Psychological Perspectives<sup>150</sup>

Dr. David Pelcovitz

Faculty, Yeshiva University

The Chinese word characters for the word “crisis” consists of two symbols: danger and opportunity. Those looking for guidance on how to cope during times of loss or instability are understandably concerned about the emotional fallout that may follow a terror attack here or in Israel. At the same time, periods of crisis present numerous opportunities for becoming more tuned in to what matters most in life, including reordering our priorities in a manner that puts our role as family and community members front and center. This paper will utilize lessons learned from psychological and Torah perspectives, drawn from counseling survivors of trauma, especially relating to children and adolescents, as a result of terror in Israel, the events of 9/11 in America, and treatment for life-threatening diseases such as cancer. Nonetheless, while much of the discussion focuses on younger people, its findings can be applied as well to adults of all ages. The chapter seeks to draw on Torah insights from Tanach, Talmud, Musar literature, and rabbinic commentaries, that all reinforce these lessons in a particularly meaningful way. Finally, it will attempt to articulate conclusions and practical recommendations.

Research and clinical practice in recent decades have found considerable variability in the coping strategies that children and adults effectively employ in coping with traumatic events in their lives. On the evening of September 11<sup>th</sup> I received an email from a colleague in Israel who specializes in providing mental health intervention to survivors of terror attacks. He cautioned that in planning mental health services in New York after the World Trade Center attacks therapists should keep in mind that the type of coping mechanism used is far less predictive of how well an individual will adjust than whether the coping strategy works for that individual.

---

<sup>150</sup> This article was originally published by the Orthodox Caucus, Project Liberty, 2003)" and is reprinted with permission from the author.

The following vignette regarding how a group of educators in Israel dealt with a terror attack serves as an invaluable model of how a sensitive understanding of the diverse styles of coping with tragedy can facilitate healing.

*I was in Jerusalem shortly after a suicide bombing in Jerusalem and was asked to join an Israeli psychologist in meeting with a group of adolescents who just lost a beloved teacher in the bombing. The school set up five rooms for the adolescents. One room was set aside for writing condolence letters to the family of their teacher, other rooms were designated for a discussion group (led by the psychologists), music, art and saying Tehilim. The teens chose the room that best matched their style and seemed to find solace in finding an opportunity to deal with their grief in a manner that uniquely suited their styles.*

As with adults, when it comes to coping with stress in children one size doesn't fit all. There is no one correct way to deal with upsetting situations. Children often deal with stress and anxiety in ways that are qualitatively different from adults. Some children may show little reaction to upsetting events. Parents should not assume that this means that their child's coping mechanisms are not working. On the contrary, a child who is showing no symptoms and is not willing to discuss the situation may be doing just as well as a child who is openly discussing his or her feelings.

Psychologists who specialize in helping individuals deal with upsetting events have found the following coping mechanisms to be effective. Most people use more than one coping mechanism. Many adults and children find that over the course of time strategies that worked best shortly after the traumatic event gradually give way to a different set of approaches.

## Distraction versus Confronting

Research on how patients cope with painful medical procedures or other stressful situations finds that coping styles are on a continuum from "attenders" to "distracters", active information seekers to information avoiders. "Attenders" deal with stressful situations in an active manner. For example, if they are about to get an injection from their doctor they want to understand why, and they prefer to assist in preparing for the injection. In contrast, "distracter" patients prefer to distract themselves when getting the injection. They aren't interested in why the shot is necessary – they prefer to distract themselves by looking the other way while thinking about something else. Interestingly, research shows that the ability to cope is compromised if you try to turn a distracter into an attender or vice versa. For example, if one tries to force the distracter to talk about his/her understanding of why the injection is necessary or if one tries to force the attender to think about something else while getting the injection, the patient's anxiety level will increase and he/she will cope much less successfully with the stress of the medical procedure.

This approach is echoed in two views expressed in the Talmud on how to approach worries.

*Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs him down; but a good word makes him glad*

**Mishlei 12:25**

דאגה בלב איש ישחנה ודבר טוב ישמחנה:  
משלי יב:כה

*R. Ammi and R. Assi differ in the interpretation of this verse: one rendered it, 'let him banish the anxiety from his mind; the other, 'let him discuss it with others'*

**Yoma 75a**

דאגה בלב איש ישחנה רבי אמי ורבי אסי, חד אמר: ישחנה מדעתו, וחד אמר: ישיחנה לאחרים  
**יומא עה.**

The differing views of Rav Ammi and Rav Assi echo the “attender” versus “distracter” approach to dealing with anxiety. Distracters follow the interpretation of banishing the worry from one’s mind; attenders deal with worry by verbalizing their fears to others. In coping with the stress attending times of loss, violence and instability, it is important to tune in to whether you are more comfortable using distraction as the preferred approach, or are you more comforted by verbalizing your anxieties in discussion with others. For example, specific strategies used by child psychologists consulting with pediatricians regarding how to help children during a painful medical procedure might be to have a child who is a “distracter” blow bubbles or play their favorite computer game during the procedure. In contrast, a child who is an attender can be given age appropriate reading material explaining what will happen and can be asked to take an active role in helping the doctor prepare for the procedure.

## Perspective

Another powerful approach to dealing with adversity is to shift one’s perspective in a manner that focuses on positive changes that often come from coping with adversity. The Ramban, in a discussion of Hashem’s “testing” Avraham, teaches us a valuable lesson in the Jewish perspective on tribulations:

*“And Hashem tested Avraham”: Hashem tests a person to bring out his or her potential, so that the individual who is tested can earn the reward that comes from a good action rather than that of a good heart alone. .... All tests that we encounter in the Torah are for the benefit of the individual who is tested.*

**Ramban, Breishit 22:1**

והאלהים נסה את אברהם - ענין הנסיון הוא לדעת, בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו, אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא יעשה, יקרא "נסיון" מצד המנוסה, אבל המנסה יתברך יצוה בו להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל, להיות לו שכר מעשה טוב לא שכר לב טוב בלבד ... והנה כל הנסיונות שבתורה לטובת המנוסה:  
**רמב"ן בראשית כב:א**

This view of the growth potential that is actualized by engaging in the struggles presented by life’s ordeals is further elucidated in a midrash on this same verse that teaches us about the common etymology of the words *nisayon* (ordeal) and *nes* - miracle or banner, as follows:

*“And Hashem tested Avraham” it is written, “You gave those who fear you a banner (nes) to raise on high, in order to be adorned (Psalms 60), nisayon (test) after nisayon, i.e., growth after growth, in order to raise them up in the world.*

**Midrash Rabbah 55:1**

והאלהים נסה את אברהם, כתיב (תהלים ס) נתת לי ראיך נס להתנוסס מפני קושט סלה, נסיון אחר נסיון וגידולין אחר גידולין בשביל לנסותן בעולם, בשביל לגדלן בעולם  
**בראשית רבה נה:א**

In a particularly eloquent description of this process we find the following passage .

*Troubles are for the long-term benefit of the individual. As it says "Rejoice not against me, my enemy; for when I fall, I will get up; when I sit in darkness, Hashem will be a light to me" (Micha 7:8). Our rabbis, of blessed memory taught us, "If I had not fallen I would not have picked myself up. If I did not sit in darkness I would not have seen the light"*  
**Orchot Tzadikim, Shaar ha-Teshuvah, Gate 26**

כי הצרות הן לטובתו ולהיטיבו באחריתו,  
שנאמר (מיכה ז ח): "אל תשמחי איבתי לי  
כי נפלתי קמתי כי אשב בחשך ה' אור לי",  
ואמרו רבותינו, זכרונם לברכה (שוחר טוב  
כב ז): אלמלא שנפלתי לא קמתי, ואלמלא  
שישבתי בחשך לא היה אור לי.  
**ספר אורחות צדיקים שער התשובה**

In a similar vein, Rabbi Shimon Schwab<sup>151</sup> points out that the word *nichum aveilim*, which is typically translated as "the comforting of mourners," actually refers to a process by which they change their minds. For example, "Hashem reconsidered (*va-yinacheim*) having made man" (Breishit 6:6) indicates that in the face of prevalent evil in the generation before the flood, Hashem "regretted" the act of creation, or changed His mind, so to speak. Similarly after the episode of the Golden Calf, we find "Hashem relented regarding the evil that He had declared He would do to His people (Shemot 32:14)."

In other words, the central component of "*nechamah*" is a shifting of perspective, a gradually emerging insight that ultimately good can emerge from even the most tragic events. This is a perspective borne out by clinical experience.

In this regard, a study of 271 adolescent cancer survivors is typical. Of the 76% who viewed themselves as "different" because of the experience of coping with a life-threatening illness, 69% saw those differences as positive. These young men and women saw themselves as more mature, more likely to "know" the purpose of life, and more likely to treat others well.<sup>152</sup>

A number of years ago I was conducting a study of how parents react to the stress of having a child with cancer. Almost immediately after the study began my answering machine was inundated with messages from the research assistants conducting the interviews. They reported an almost universal complaint on the part of the parents of the ill children: "The questions being asked in the study only focus on the negative impact of our child's illness, why haven't you asked any questions about the positive changes that our family experienced as a result of the experience of dealing with a life-threatening illness in our child?" A series of questions were added investigating the positive aspects of their experience confronting one of the most harrowing experiences life can offer. Their answers resulted in the most valuable findings of the study.

The following example given by a mother of a child being treated for leukemia is a typical illustration of the study participants' view of positive family changes in response to coping with their child's illness.

*Before my child was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia the most important priority in my life was perfecting my tennis serve. About six months after my child was diagnosed, my*

<sup>151</sup> Levine, A. To Comfort the Bereaved, Aronson, 1994

<sup>152</sup> Stuber, ML: Is PTSD a viable model for understanding responses to childhood cancer? (1998) Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 7:169-182 ).

husband was spending the evening in the hospital with my son. As I was preparing to go to the hospital the next morning, my doorbell rang. My next-door neighbor was crying. There had been a storm during the evening, and her car had been completely destroyed when a tree that was between my house and hers was felled by the strong wind. I did my best to calm her down, calling her insurance adjuster and driving her to her job. Once she entered her office, I began laughing to myself. What would have happened had the wind blown in the opposite direction and destroyed my car instead? Had my car been destroyed I would have calmly said to myself “I better call a taxi;” and eventually I would have found time to fix the car. Although six months earlier I would have had the same reaction as my neighbor, my scale of priorities had totally shifted. I know what’s important in life. What’s important is to be with my son and let my husband get some rest after his long night in the hospital. Material concerns mean very little to me now.

This point is elucidated by the Metzudat David on the latter part of the verse in Mishlei discussed earlier: “Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs him down; but a good word makes him glad”.

*‘But a good word’ refers to knowing how to find the strength to divert this strong emotion in an effort to transpose the worry into a positive emotion by appreciating the fact that good can grow out of this experience, and thus to transform the worry into simcha.*

**Metzudat David Mishlei 12:25**

ודבר טוב הוא אם יוכל  
לעצור כח לשמוח עוד את  
הדאגה ולחשוב כי לטובה  
בא מה שבא:  
מצודת דוד משלי יב:כה

A similar message is given in a midrash in Breishit Rabbah on the verse “at that time Yehudah left his brothers.” (Breishit 38:1). To all appearances, the situation confronting the family of Yaakov was a grim one: Yosef’s brothers were consumed with their guilt at having sold their brother; Yosef himself was in his dungeon, preoccupied with mourning and fasting; Yaakov was also grieving at the loss of his son; while Yehudah was involved in the incident with Tamar. Yet, says the midrash, Hashem saw in these apparently tragic events, a larger, more positive, perspective in which these bitter events would become the spark from which would ultimately come forth the light of messianic redemption. From his unique perspective, Hashem had the omniscience and perspective to recognize that the spark of mashiach was being ignited from the relationship of Yehudah and Tamar, and from the sale of Yosef into slavery.

If the typical adult has a hard time having the perspective and faith that allows for a focus on the positive components of loss and trauma, one can only imagine how difficult it must be for a child. In the early stages of coping with a loss, children are typically in no position to find perspective or meaning in their experience. Over the course of time, however, as the adolescent cancer study cited above indicates, discovering meaning and focusing on the positive, become the norm – even for children.

## Active Problem Solving

Active problem solving is characterized by direct attempts at dealing with problems head on. These might include thinking of ways to solve the problem, or talking to others to get more facts and information about the problem. The difference between a passive approach to dealing with

difficulties and the far more effective approach of active problem solving, is described by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in his well known essay “Kol Dodi Dofek”<sup>153</sup>,

*Man’s task in the world, according to Judaism, is to transform fate into destiny; a passive existence into an active existence; an existence of compulsion, perplexity and muteness into an existence replete with a powerful will, with resourcefulness, daring and imagination. We ask neither about the cause of evil nor about its purpose but rather about how it might be mended and elevated. How shall a person act in a time of trouble? What ought a man to do so that he not perish in his afflictions? The halakhic answer to this question is very simple. Afflictions come to elevate a person, to purify and sanctify his spirit, to cleanse and purge it of the dross of superficiality and vulgarity, to refine his soul and to broaden his horizons. The halakhah teaches us that the sufferer commits a grave sin if he allows his troubles to go to waste and remain without meaning or purpose.*

This approach reflects talmudic teachings, as found in Berachot 5a, where the Sages teach the virtues of an active response in dealing with suffering. At the same time, however, it must be stressed that this is an *internal* process, by which an individual can find personal meaning in response to his or her tribulations. Others have no right to tell individuals who are struggling with making sense of their suffering what *they* believe is the reason for the traumatic event. People must arrive at their own personal theory about the meaning of the event, by actively engaging in a process of internal self-examination.

In his commentary to the Torah, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that as Jews we are taught to take an active role in responding to difficult situations from the verse in Devarim 32:11, “He was like an eagle arousing its nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings and taking them”:

*Just as the eagle does not bear its young aloft sleeping or in a passive condition but rather first stirs the nest up and then spreads its wings not under but above its nestlings, so that, with keen courageous eyes they fly up to rest on the mother’s outspread wings awaiting them above, so did God first awaken his people and get them used to having the courage to trust themselves with free-willed decision and full consciousness to his guidance.”*

Numerous research studies have documented the connection between stress levels in the workplace and the sense of control that workers have over their jobs. Repeatedly, this line of research has found that job-related stress lessens dramatically when workers are given the power to have active input into how they approach their jobs. Similarly, in one of the most widely cited studies regarding the powerful role of active problem solving in helping seriously ill individuals fight illness, Fawzy and his colleagues found that teaching cancer patients effective coping mechanisms actually improved their survival rates relative to a comparison group that did not receive such instruction. Cancer patients were taught stress management skills that included learning about their illness, and how to change their attitude towards sources of stress by viewing them through a “new light”, relaxation training skill and systematic problem solving skills.<sup>154</sup>

---

153 Kol Dodi Dofek”In Theological and Halakhic Reflections on the Holocaust, 1996

154 Fawzy, F, Cousins, N (1990) A structured psychiatric intervention for cancer patients, Archives of General Psychiatry, 47:720-725).

## Social Coping

A central essential coping mechanism is the ability to turn to others for support. The healing power of the seven days of *shivah* after the death of a family member is, in part, tied to the concrete evidence of social support that comes with every visit. Saying “*ha-Makom*” to the mourner at the end of a *shivah* visit gives further concrete evidence that the mourner is not alone, the burden of mourning is shared *betoch she’ar aveilei Tziyon vi-Yerushalayim*, “in the midst of the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem, i.e., “you are not alone, it is a shared experience.” As King Solomon says in Kohelet:

*Two are better than one, for they get a greater return for their labor. For should they fall, one can lift the other; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and there is no one to lift him!*

**Kohelet 4:9,10**

(ט) טובים השנים מן האחד אשר יש להם  
שכר טוב בעמלם: (י) כי אם יפלו האחד יקים  
את חברו ואילו האחד שיפול ואין שני  
להקומו:  
קהלת פרק ד

In recent years mental health researchers have gone beyond a focus on pathology to research regarding what differentiates individuals who fall apart in the face of adversity from those who seem to thrive psychologically no matter what difficulties they face. Invariably these studies find that a central ingredient in resilience is having at least one person who cares. Those facing even the worst kind of trauma and loss are buffered and protected by the knowledge that they have somebody in their corner. Such social support is a key predictor of which children will emerge relatively unscathed from even the harshest difficulties.<sup>155</sup>

Finding a balance between benefiting from often overwhelming levels of social support in the weeks and months following a loss or serious illness, on the one hand, and managing to find the necessary time to be alone, on the other, is among the most daunting task facing families struggling with the impact of trauma. Group therapists treating family members who lost a relative in the 9/11 attacks have found that among the most salient needs of the group members were requests for help negotiating the balance between accepting social support and finding time to grieve privately. Families coping with tragedy often find that after an overwhelming show of social support in the months following a loss, the level of support available from the community often recedes, in many cases, to lower levels of support than was available prior to the loss. A woman who lost a family member in a tragic accident recently told me that she, at times, notices people cross the street to avoid having to talk to her. The level of discomfort that others often have when faced with tragedy may give way to an avoidance, either because of not knowing the “right” thing to say, or because bereaved families can make others uncomfortable by reminding them of their own vulnerabilities.

Often, there is no “right thing” to say. Those going through a hard time may need the feeling of support that accompanies the physical presence, rather than the words of friends. The lesson is taught well by the experience of Iyyov, and the response of his friends.

---

155 Werner, E. (1993) Risk, resilience and recovery: Perspectives from the Kauaii Longitudinal Study. Development and Psychopathology, 54: 503-515)



*They sat with him on the ground for a period of seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great.*

**Iyyov 2:13**

וישבו אתו לארץ שבעת ימים ושבעת  
לילות ואין דבר אליו דבר כי ראו כי גדל  
הכאב מאד:  
**איוב ב:יג**

When Iyyov's friends heard about the terrible tragedies he had suffered, they traveled long distances to offer him consolation. Yet when they got there, they didn't say anything, because they realized that their physical presence was more important than words. Just being there was the type of support that Iyyov needed.

## Self-Soothing

The ability to cope with upsetting situations by soothing one's self, is central to being able to cope with situations of crisis or fear. This includes efforts to calm oneself by praying, taking a walk, listening to music, or trying to relax.

Turning to God to answer our prayers is perhaps the most powerful form of coping. In addition to the obvious spiritual benefits, the psychological benefits of prayer include the comforting knowledge that there is something that we can actively do in the face of events that are otherwise out of our control. A number of recent studies have found that prayer is associated with improved ability to cope with painful medical conditions<sup>156</sup> as well as making a positive emotional adjustment following major surgery<sup>157</sup>. Some studies even raise the possibility that participation in organized prayer lessens one's chance of being diagnosed with life-threatening illness.<sup>158</sup>

Similarly, the concept of *bitachon*, trust in God is an essential source of comfort that strikes a balance between, on the one hand, accepting God's decision to challenge us, while on the other hand asking us to actively respond to this challenge. *Bitachon* is not a passive experience.

*Provide me .. with an opening the size of an eye of a needle and I will respond by providing you with an opening the size of a chariot*

**Shir Hashirim Rabba 5:3**

אמר הקב"ה לישראל בני פתחו לי פתח אחד של  
תשובה כחודה של מחט ואני פותח לכם פתחים שיהיו  
עגלות וקרניות נכנסות בו  
**שיר השירים רבה ה:ג**

Faith in God can provide a sense of calm that comes with accepting that whatever God sends our way is ultimately for our benefit. We are also clearly charged, however, with the responsibility to manifest our faith in a manner that responds to God's challenges in an active manner as possible. *Bitachon*, is a source of comfort in that we are assured that once we do our part God will respond to our "eye of the needle" opening with a disproportionately comforting response.

156 Rapp, S., Rejeski, W., Miller, M. Physical function among older adults with knee pain. The role of pain coping skills, Arthritis Care & Research, 2000, 13:270-279

157 Ai, A, Bolling s., Peterson, C. The use of prayer by coronary artery bypass patients, International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 2000(10), 205-220

158 Fox, S.A., Pitkin, K, Paul, C, (1998) Breast cancer screening adherence: Does church attendance matter? Health Education and Behavior, 25:742-758

In a landmark study that tried to capture the essential ingredients of resilience in individuals raised in the midst of adversity, every child born on the Hawaiian island of Kauai in 1955 was followed into adulthood. Faced with high levels of poverty and abuse, one-third succumbed to the ravages of their highly stressful childhood environments, one-third were in the middle, and one-third thrived. One of the key predictors of those who were in the resilient group who overcame their impoverished and traumatic backgrounds was active religious observance. Those who prayed regularly were more likely to be in the resilient third that successfully beat the odds<sup>159</sup>. The mental health professionals conducting the study theorized that among the advantages of religious observances such as prayer were the psychological benefits of taking an active approach in the face of adversity. Active supplicants deal much better with traumatic situation than those who approach adversity as passive individuals who approach life's difficulties like a log floating on a river at the mercy of whatever comes their way.

Another powerful mechanism for self-soothing is writing about the upsetting event. Numerous well-designed research studies conducted over the last fifteen years have found that writing about one's thoughts and feelings in the aftermath of stressful events for up to 20 minutes on each of several days can reduce illness, enhance the functioning of one's immune system, improve grades and even increase the likelihood of unemployed individuals getting a new job<sup>160</sup>. For example, in one study, several hundred people with arthritis or colitis were divided into two groups. Half were asked to spend twenty minutes a day for three days writing about the worst thing that ever happened to them and the other half were asked to spend the same amount of time writing about their daily schedule. Four months later the group that wrote about their traumatic experiences showed significant improvement in their colitis and arthritis symptoms. These studies suggest that *yasichenu le'acheirim*, the approach of "talking out" one's worries can apply even to talking to one's self (i.e., committing one's thoughts to writing.)

Another form of self-soothing is crying. The following story illustrates this aspect of crying.

*A baby, who was being treated in the hospital for leukemia, had a particularly heart- piercing cry every time a medical procedure was performed on her. Although the pediatric oncology staff was used to hearing crying children, this particular child cried in a way that the parents and medical staff found very difficult to bear. The psychologist who was asked to help the parents and staff deal with this problem hooked the baby up to biofeedback equipment that measured the baby's physiologic levels of stress as she cried. The parents and staff found great comfort in seeing that the more the baby cried the calmer she became. This insight led to their actually welcoming the baby's cries, since they realized that this was a cry of relief and self-soothing rather than a cry of distress.*

---

159 Werner, E. (1993) Risk, resilience and recovery: Perspectives from the Kauai Longitudinal Study. *Development and Psychopathology*, 54: 503-515

160 Cameron, L. & Nicholls, G. (1998) Expression of stressful experience through writing, *Health Psychology*, 17:84- 92

## How Parents can Help

It might be helpful to ask your child directly how well he is coping; who, if anyone, can help him to cope; and what he may have found to be most effective and ineffective in coping with his anxieties. Don't try to force a style on your child that doesn't work for him. If your child is an attender, he will do best if allowed to discuss his concerns openly. Your role is to be honest and direct, while at the same time reassuring him that you are doing your best to keep him safe. A child who is a distracter will almost certainly prefer not to hear too many details about unpleasant topics. Your job is to respect his right to remain silent and try to find "teachable moments" when he might be more receptive to brief discussions aimed at reassurance and helpful information. Parents whose child's coping style differs from their own may find it hard to deal with his preferred mode of processing difficult information. One of the challenges of parenting is to recognize that we often have to let our children find their own way, even if their style of coping differs greatly from our beliefs about what works best.

Most children are resilient. If they show little in the way of obvious emotional or behavioral difficulties after traumatic events, parents should not assume that they are hiding their true feelings. In fact, researchers at Harvard, investigating the long-term psychological adjustment of children who had lost a parent, found that two out of three adjusted well without the benefit of any professional counseling<sup>161</sup>.

Creating an atmosphere that allows children to voice their hidden anxieties requires a relaxed, indirect approach. It is fine to occasionally pose such questions as: "I'm wondering how you feel today..."; "It seems you are quiet today, I'm not sure what your thoughts are..."; "It sounds like...". Keep in mind, however, that parents are far more likely to engage their children in meaningful conversation about the children's apprehensions if parents don't question too insistently.

Although it may be difficult for parents not to be able to directly discuss upsetting issues during troubling times, parents must separate what is in their control from what is not. What is in your control is to let your child know that you are available to discuss any concerns. For many children it may be enough to know that you are there; active discussion is not necessarily best for them or needed.

There are a few guidelines to keep in mind when children do discuss their concerns. Research on children's responses to upsetting situations consistently shows that they do better when their parents answer questions honestly and directly. Evasion in the name of protecting children tends to heighten anxiety. On the other hand, reassuring children that the adults in their life are there for them, and will do everything they can to support them physically and emotionally, constitutes honest discussion that validates children's concerns about the realities of facing loss while at the same time calming their fears.

Researchers on the psychological impact of traumatic events have long noted that even the most intelligent people may have difficulty understanding and processing information about anxiety-provoking situations. Consequently, it is important for parents to recognize that children's

---

161 Worden, W.J. *Children and Grief: When a Parent Dies*, Guilford Press, NY, 2002

cognitive and emotional regression in response to frightening events may necessitate parental repetition regarding what happened, as well as frequent reassurance.

A woman whose child was being treated for leukemia made herself expert on every aspect of her child's treatment. One day she received a call from her child's doctor saying that her son was in remission (meaning that the cancer was under control and was no longer active). Under normal circumstances she knew exactly what remission meant – but she was too paralyzed with anxiety to ask the doctor whether this meant that her child was going to live or die. Eventually she called the mother of another child being treated in the same center. Her friend reassured her that the doctor was giving her good news.

As noted earlier when young children try to make sense of traumatic events they are more likely than older children to personalize and think in concrete terms. Consequently, they are particularly prone to misinterpret the meaning of upsetting events, as illustrated by the following true story:

*Five year old twins were not responding to parental reassurance in the weeks following the attack on the Twin Towers. Three weeks after the attack, as her mother was putting her to sleep, one of the twins asked: "Mommy, why do people hate twins?"*

Finally, at times, parents won't know the answer to a child's question. When children ask difficult questions such as "Why do bad things happen to good people?" it may be more comforting for the child when the parent answers "I don't know". Sometimes children prefer parental honesty about not having all of the answers.

This is illustrated by a comment of the Ktav ve'Kabbalah on the episode in the Torah describing the death of the sons of Aharon. When Aharon was told of their deaths, the Torah tells us *vayidom*, i.e., Aharon was silent (Vayikra 10:3). The Ktav ve'Kabbala asks why the Torah uses the word *vayidom* instead of the more commonly used word for silence *vayishkot*. He answers that the Hebrew word *sheket* is used when people know something but choose not to share their knowledge. In contrast *demamah* is a term that describes a silence that comes from being truly speechless, a combination of total acceptance of Hashem's judgment and not knowing what to say.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- In discussing upsetting events with children, keep in mind that good listeners are generally more comforting than good talkers. It is often helpful for parents to wait before answering a child's question, in order to make sure the child's true, underlying question is clear. If parents aren't clear about the underlying meaning of a question it might be helpful to ask the child "What made you think of that"?
- In dealing with adolescents, remember that even though many will not verbalize their fears, they may need to be reassured about their safety and security. In the weeks after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack, many parents noted that teens who long felt comfortable being home alone asked that their parents stay home with them at night.
- It is particularly important to monitor childhood exposure to the media in the aftermath of terrorist attacks. Young children, in particular, may respond to each television replay of the

Twin Tower attacks as if it were happening for the first time. It is also important to supervise young children's exposure to upsetting pictures in newspapers or news magazines. Also, keep in mind that children may be affected by repeatedly hearing adult discussions about the impact of the attacks.

- It is often therapeutic to help children take an active role in responding to traumatic events. Some of those who lost family members in the crash of TWA Flight 800 reported that the only comfort they found in the days following the crash was in looking at the hundreds of drawings that children from around the country sent them to offer their condolence. Encouraging one's child to help raise money, or send letters of support to families that lost members in the attacks, is an opportunity to help children take an active role in a manner that teaches them important values that can act as an antidote to feelings of helplessness.
- Finally, studies of children who lost their father in the Yom Kippur War found that mothers' ability to talk of their sadness in front of their children played a crucial role in their children's recovery. Parents should, therefore, feel comfortable in occasionally discussing their sadness and concerns with their children. If this is done in a way that conveys a sense of loss mixed with reassurance and hope, children will learn a valuable lesson on how to deal with upsetting situations.

# Tisha B'Av: Some Introductory Thoughts

Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter

Senior Scholar, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

The Fast of the Ninth of Av (Tisha B'Av) is one of the most significant and important, as well as one of the most misunderstood, days in the Hebrew calendar. Jewish law requires that we fast for a full twenty-five hours and refrain from other physical pleasures on this day, like on Yom Kippur.<sup>162</sup> In addition, tradition has mandated some forms of mourning for the three previous weeks, like refraining from washing clothes and taking haircuts.<sup>163</sup> And we do all of this, we are told, as an expression of mourning for the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem, the first in the year 586 BCE, over 2500 years ago, and the second in the year 70 CE, almost 2000 years ago. Why? Why are the destructions of the Temples of such significance to contemporary Jews living at the beginning of the twenty-first century and what meaning do they have for a generation blessed to be living six decades after the founding of the Jewish sovereign State of Israel?

It is important to recognize three factors that combine to provide great meaning and significance to this day. First, the destruction of the Temple is not the only tragic event that occurred on Tisha B'Av. The Mishnah (*Ta'anit* 26a-b) teaches that five tragedies took place on this day, beginning with the decree requiring our ancestors to wander in the desert for forty years before being allowed to enter into the Land of Israel. Furthermore, based on a passage in Abravanel's commentary to Jeremiah 2:24, the late historian Cecil Roth claimed that the first expulsion of a major Jewry in the Middle Ages, that of the Jews from England in 1290, took place on Tisha B'Av.<sup>164</sup> According to Don Yizhak Abravanel, the last major medieval expulsion, that of the Jews from Spain in 1492 to which he was an eyewitness, also culminated on this day.<sup>165</sup> I have seen it

---

<sup>162</sup> See *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* #552-554.

It is interesting to note that on more than one occasion the Rambam explicitly parallels the laws of Tisha B'Av to those of Yom Kippur. See, for example, *Hil Ta'anivot* 5:7, "Tisha B'Av . . . *ke-Yom ha-Kippurim*;" 5:10, "*Ve-asur . . . ke-Yom ha-Kippurim*." On this parallel, see my *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways: Reflections on the Tisha B'Av Kinot* by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Jersey City, 2006), 2, and elsewhere.

<sup>163</sup> *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* #551.

<sup>164</sup> Cecil Roth, "England and the Ninth of Av," in idem., *Essays and Portraits in Anglo-Jewish History* (Philadelphia, 1962), 63-67.

<sup>165</sup> See his commentary to Jer. 2:24. Yitzhak Baer claims that this does not seem to be totally accurate. The edict of expulsion gave professing Jews in Spain until July 31, 1492 to leave the country and he pointed out that July 31 that year fell on 7 Av. See Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, 1971), 439 and n. 14. Cf. B. Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher* (Philadelphia, 1972), 282, n. 74, who argues for the accuracy of that date.

asserted that the First World War began on the Ninth of Av and someone also told me that the Arab massacre of the Jews in Hebron in 1929 did as well.<sup>166</sup> The Ninth of Av is a “*yom hayyav*” (*Ta’anit* 29a), a day that is inherently ominous, and, to quote Maimonides (*Hil. Ta’anivot* 5:3), it is a “*yom ha-mukhan le-pur’anut*,” day “set aside” for the occurrence of tragedies.<sup>167</sup> It is for all of them, including the destruction of the Temples, that we mourn on this day.

Secondly, and more significantly, the Fast of the Ninth of Av is meant to commemorate *all* tragedies that befell our people, whether or not they happened to occur on this day. In the traditional liturgy recited on Tisha B’Av, mention is made of the Ten Martyrs who were killed during the second century, the Crusade pogroms which devastated German Jewry at the end of the eleventh century, and the burning of holy Jewish books in thirteenth century France. None of these tragedies occurred on this day or even during this month. Yet, Tisha B’Av is the day designated to mourn for them all. Indeed, were we to set aside a day to remember each and every tragedy that occurred to us in the last two millennia, we would be forced to live in a constant state of mourning. And so we “set aside” one day to remember them all, limiting our commemoration in order to enable us to function creatively and effectively the rest of the year. There are those who feel that the commemoration of the Holocaust should also be subsumed under Tisha B’Av and not be the focus of a separate day. Even many of those who disagree, and I am among them, feel that it is certainly appropriate to remember and mourn for the Holocaust on Tisha B’Av as well.<sup>168</sup> Tisha B’av is, thus, the day designated to remember an entire series of tragic events that have unfortunately recurred with such constant regularity throughout our history.<sup>169</sup> And, as such, it continues to have real significance in our lives as well.

Finally, we should not for a moment underestimate the ongoing, constant impact of the Temple’s destruction, even today, in the case of the Second Temple, close to 2,000 years later. The *bet ha-mikdash* was not just some ancient building; its existence not simply some archeological curiosity. It served as the spiritual center and major unifying element of the people, their source of atonement, and a place for prayer for all the nations of the earth; it represented peace, security, wholesomeness and serenity. Surely our world today, even in America and even with the existence of Israel, is far from perfect, and perhaps it is this, most of all, that we should think about on Tisha B’Av. The rebuilding of the Temple will herald the return of all these wonderful ideals and usher in an eternity of peace for the Jewish people and the entire world. May it happen soon, *be-meherah be-yamenu*.

---

166 See *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways*, p. 208; R. Avrohom Chaim Feuer and R. Shimon Finkelman, *Tishah B’Av – Texts, Readings and Insights* (New York, 1992), 157-58.

167 For another example of the use of this phrase, see the *kinah* entitled, “*Be-lel zeh yivkayun*” recited on the night of Tisha B’Av. See R. Abraham Rosenfeld, *The Authorised Kinot for the Ninth of Av* (2nd ed., 1970), 36.

168 I deal with this issue and debate in my “Holocaust Commemoration and *Tish’a be-Av*: The Debate Over ‘*Yom ha-Sho’a*,’” *Tradition* 41:2 (2008):164-97.

169 For an elaborate treatment of this theme, see *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways*, pp. 208-301.

# Collected Insights into the Tisha B'av Kinnot

## The Lesson of the Forgotten Churban

קינה ו – שבת

Rabbi Yonah Gross

Young Israel of Phoenix, Phoenix, AZ

In lamenting the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, Rabbi Eliezer HaKalir invokes the memory of the destruction of the earlier Temple when it resided in Shiloh. The Kinnah laments that even though Yirmiyahu used Shiloh as an example of destruction coming as a punishment for sins (see Yirmiyahu 7:12) the warning was not heeded.

But *pachad chet Shilo* (the fear of the sin of Shilo) invokes something more. What about Shilo are we to fear? Rav Soloveichik explained that unlike the Beis Hamikdash which was endowed with *Kedusha L'Atid Lavo* (sanctity for all times), Shilo had only been granted temporary holiness. The fear described was about the time after Shilo's destruction where we don't know where the Temple in Shilo stood or what it looked like. The fear was whether in future the Beis Hamikdash would actually be remembered, or would it be like Shilo, a story with no remnants, monuments or memory.

The Kinnah may also be invoking fear as to our understanding of why the Temple in Shilo was destroyed. God announced to the Prophet Samuel that the destruction was punishment for the sins of the children of Eli, and for Eli's inability to censure his children (Samuel I 3:11-14). What had they done? Among other inappropriate acts, Samuel proclaims that they had "slept with the women who congregated at the door of the Tent of Meeting." That certainly sounds like a harsh sin deserving of an extremely harsh punishment.

The Talmud (Shabbos 56a) however claims that "whoever says that the sons of Eli sinned is simply mistaken." The Talmud then goes on to explain that their only sin was having delayed by a day bird offerings that women brought, thereby requiring them to abstain from their husbands an extra night. But if that was their sin why not say so? That same Gemara in Shabbos talks about difficult stories in the life of other biblical heroes (Reuven, David, Shlomo etc.) and explains away the simple meaning of the texts with various technical loopholes that exempt the perpetrator from all wrongdoing. Why does Tanach make accusations against prominent Biblical characters that really weren't true?



Tanach may be teaching an important lesson. While the things done may be defensible, it certainly looked bad in the eyes of the people. While the sons of Eli could give many reasons as to why the sacrifices couldn't be brought that day, it was still a miserable experience for the women that wanted to be with their husbands that night.

That is the fear invoked by the memory of Shilo in that first *Kinna*; that living a life of sanctity is not merely following the laws and commandments in such a way that we can defend our actions. That's not enough. Rather, a life of sanctity is a life that can be held up as an example through which every person, both learned and ignorant, can recognize as a life of holiness and piety, without a need for a defense.

## Speaking of the Loss

קינה ז' – איכה אצת באפך

Rabbi Chaim Poupko

Congregation Ahavath Torah - Englewood, NJ

A simple literary device helps this *kinna* overcome the challenge that plagues many of the *kinnos*. The irony is often noted that while our experience of *Tisha B'Av* can be largely determined by the recitation of the *kinnos*, their complex Hebrew poetry and style, their sophisticated Hebrew language, and their subtle referencing of passages from *Tanach* and Rabbinic literature leaves them difficult to understand. Indeed, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik saw the recitation of *kinnos* as something akin to a defining *mitzvas ha-yom*. The Rav notes that *mitzvos* in general aren't just ceremonies or rituals to be performed. Rather, they reflect critical themes and ideas that we internalize as we experience them. For holidays specifically, the *mitzvos ha-yom* particular to each one are designed to set the tone of our experience of these special days of the year. These holiday *mitzvos* teach us what the holiday is all about and help us to experience that theme. While on *Tisha B'Av* there are no actual positive commandments, the recitation of the *kinnos* are a positive activity which is meant to deepen our understanding of what we are mourning for like the *mitzvos* that characterize the other holidays. Therein lies the frustrating irony of the *kinnos*. While their recitation is critical to our experience of *Tisha B'Av*, that very experience is difficult to achieve with their recitation.

The second *kinna* for the daytime stands out as an exception to this rule. This *kinna* features a simple literary device we have all learned in elementary school which serves to highlight a collective emotion and theme of *Tisha B'Av*. The repeated alliteration found on each line of the *kinna* is a verbal punctuation. Rabbi Elazar ha-Kalir, the composer of the *kinna*, must have intended for it to be read with a strong verbal emphasis on the repeated sound – **EI**cha **ATZ**ta be-**AP**echa and so on. Read it out loud to yourself in this way and you will find that the recitation of the *kinna* takes on a staccato rhythm – one that reflects an aggressive sense of frustration and alienation that the Jewish people feel after the destruction of the Temples and the subsequent exile. The Jewish people are left feeling alienated from a G-d they had previously felt so close to. Feeling this emotion, we turn to G-d in this *kinna* and ask how He could have meted out such terrible punishments and not remember particular moments of closeness and shared experiences in our history. This type of questioning is unique to *Tisha B'Av*. Rav Soloveitchik observed that

this is the one day a year in which we feel a sense of anger towards G-d and express questions of G-d, often beginning with the refrain *Eicha*, “oh how,” as in this *kinnah*. And so the first stanza asks, how did You rush in Your fury to destroy those who had faith in You by the hands of the Edomites? Why did You not remember the covenant between the parts with which You chose those whom You tested? The second stanza asks how G-d could detest us so and not recall the *דלגת זלוג דרך*, the accelerated skipping of the flags of the various tribes of Israel during our miraculous march through the desert to the land of Canaan. The fourth stanza asks how could G-d have abandoned us in rage and not remember *חתון חוקי חורב* – our marriage at Mount Chorev by the laws that were given on it.

## Honoring the Questions

קינה י"ט – לך ה' הצדקה

Rabbi Moshe Rosenberg

Congregation Etz Chaim - Kew Gardens Hills, NY

*V'ata Amarta... V'lama? Lekha, Hashem Ha-tzedaka*

These two dirges of couplets are complementary: The first asks the unanswerable question of why G-d forsook all His promises of benevolence to unleash forces of destruction on His people, and the second, foreshadowed in the concluding lines of the first, gives a traditional response—G-d is righteous and our actions have been our undoing. Looking back over the parallel *kinot*, it seems roundabout--even wasteful--to have asked the question so many times when the answer was just around the corner. But this perception dissipates when we realize that the *kinot*, like *Tisha B'Av* itself, are about the deep psychological work of processing tragedy, and not merely the application of pat answers to unready souls.

It is said that a when a scholar would ask Rav Chaim Brisker a question and receive an answer, both questioner and responder would emerge dissatisfied. The nature of the *lomdus* employed by Rav Chaim made it clear that there had never been a question in the first place. Thus the questioner felt he'd never really had a real challenge to the text, and Rav Chaim felt that he had not come up with a real *terutz*, but merely cleared away the underbrush of confusion. To appreciate an answer, there has to be a recognition that there truly was a question.

When future Ambassador of Israel, Naftali Lavie, was a teenager newly liberated from Auschwitz, he could not, at first, bring himself to pray with the other freed inmates who made a minyan. Having successfully sheltered his little brother, who would be the future Chief Rabbi of Israel, Yisrael Meir Lau, but lost his parents and entire community, the young Lavie had too many unanswered questions to form the words of the prayers. One his first visits was to the Grand Rabbi of Ger, and his recollection of that visit was that the wise Rebbe, aware of his *emunah* issues, never once raised with him the topic of faith. He understood that there must be a time for questions, before there can be fertile ground for answers to take hold.

Perhaps the Gerrer Rebbe took his cue from G-d Himself. In the Midrashic debate between Moshe *Rabbenu* and G-d, during which Moshe pleads to live and to enter Israel, G-d informs

Moshe that he must die because "he has partaken of the cup of the first man." This reference to universal mortality is misconstrued by Moshe as a direct comparison to Adam himself, and therefore he responds: "Adam sinned, but what sin have I committed?" Rather than correct Moshe's misapprehension, G-d continues the discussion on Moshe's terms, comparing his sins with those of Adam and the forefathers, until finally, when Moshe will not yield, G-d, as it were, bangs a fist on the table with the phrase "Rav Lakh!." This is beyond you, at the moment, Moshe, and this is where the discussion must stop, until you have had more time to process.

I remember how, in the aftermath of a miscarriage exacerbated by an insensitive Ob/Gyn, my wife and I went to interview a prospective new doctor. This gynecologist had a ready answer to all of our questions. He'd seen every situation, solved every problem before it occurred. He absolutely radiated competence. We disqualified him, because our recent painful experience made us yearn for a doctor who didn't have all the answers, but honored the questions. We wanted a human doctor who knew that, no matter how trained and prepared he was, there would be situations and questions that would always arise that are unexpected and unanswerable. Before we could accept his answers, he had to legitimate our questions.

That's why the *Kina* of *V'ata amarta* is not repetitious. The *Kinot* give us a chance to repeat and process the questions, before suggesting the breath of an answer. *Tisha B'Av* itself is not a time of wallowing in tragedy, but of processing it. It is a necessary stage, the spiritual crouch that presages a rise towards redemption. May we experience it as such.

## Message of the Martyrs

קינה כ"א – ארזי הלבנון

Rabbi Yaacov Feit

New York City, NY

The horrific description of the execution of the ten martyrs, as described in Arzei Halevanon, makes one shudder. Yet underlying this kinnah is also a message of hope and a lesson in emunah. When describing the unspeakable death of Rebbe Akiva, the kinnah refers to Rebbe Akiva's dramatic recitation of *Shema Yisroel* as he suffered the unimaginable – "יצתה נשמתו באחד" – His soul departed as he recited [God is] One. However, the Talmud adds one strange nuance.

*When Rebbe Akiva was taken out to be killed it was the time of the recital of Keriyas Shema.*

**Berachos 61b**

בשעה שהוציאו את רבי עקיבא להריגה  
זמן קריאת שמע היה  
מסכת ברכות סא:

This addition is seemingly superfluous. Moreover, it doesn't make sense! In the very same passage Rebbe Akiva passionately describes how he was waiting his whole life for the opportunity to die while sanctifying Hashem's name. Why then does it matter that it was in the morning? Wouldn't Rebbe Akiva have been equally eager to sanctify Hashem's name in the afternoon? What message are these words teaching us?

Rav Moshe Shapiro explains that the declaration that Hashem is One means that everything and every event, no matter how difficult to comprehend, somehow fits into a larger picture.

Everything is part of the great puzzle that is being pieced together by the Creator since the beginning of time. Everything is One.

The Chassidic Masters teach that by covering our eyes during Keriya Shema we affirm that we may not understand everything that occurs in this world but we recognize that it is because we are blind. It is because we can't see. But everything fits together.

Times of great confusion demand this affirmation more than ever. Rebbe Akiva was not necessarily taken out during shacharis. But it was the most inexplicable moment of his life. It was the ultimate *zman kria shema*; a moment so incomprehensible that the only response was to recognize that this somehow fits into Hashem's master plan.

The version of this kinnah recited on Yom Kippur describes the angels' passionate protest to Hashem in response to the ten martyrs - Is this the reward for Torah? The response is a seeming threat that they remain silent lest the world be returned to nothingness.

Rav Shlomo Kluger, puzzled by an ostensibly unfair response to a good question, offers an explanation with a parable. A king hires the most talented tailor in his kingdom to customize a golden suit and supplied him with an exact number of threads. The other tailors in the kingdom, jealous that they were not chosen, inform the king that his tailor of choice stole some golden threads. Upon presentation of the final product, the king accuses the tailor of stealing his precious threads. The tailor responds that the only way to prove his innocence would be to rip up the garment and count it thread by thread.

This was Hashem's response to the angels. It was not a threat. Hashem was explaining that the only way to explain such unfathomable occurrences would be by returning the world to the beginning. Only then could Hashem demonstrate, step by step, that everything comes together to form the magnificent tapestry that is being woven and will only be revealed at the end of time.

Perhaps this can explain the kinnah's similar description of Rav Elazar ben Shamua's death while reciting the words *ברא אלקים* during Friday night Kiddush. The kinnah is reminding us that as tragic as these events may seem they somehow fit into a much larger picture that has been in motion since the creation of the world.

The kinnah, on the one hand is too tragic to bear. Yet its underlying message is that in the greatest moments of darkness it is our lack of vision which does not allow us to see the light.

## The Meaning of Martyrdom

קינה כ"א – ארזי הלבנון

Rabbi Asher Oser

Congregation Beth Sholom - Providence, RI

On the 26th of Nissan 5415 (May 3rd, 1655), Abraham Nunez Bernal was burned alive in Cordoba, Spain. At the age of forty-three, this father and son could still not reconcile himself to the Roman Catholic faith and so his sojourn in this world ended on a fiery pyre before a heated

and ecstatic crowd. When the Spanish-Portuguese community of Amsterdam learned the news of his martyrdom they must have been devastated. Another member of their community had died al kiddush Hashem. He was not the first, nor would he be the last, but each one dealt a blow to the morale of the dignified Spanish-Portuguese Jews. They had all paid a heavy price to live as Jews in cities, like Amsterdam, in which they had taken refuge but many of those whom they left behind paid for Judaism with their lives.

On Shabbat, some nine days later (Shabbat, 6th of Iyyar 5415), Rabbi Isaac Aboab De Fonesca alighted the bima to give words of consolation and comfort to his flock and to eulogize the kadosh, Bernal. (The hesped can be found in the Kitve Rabbeinu Yitzhaq Aboab (De Fonesca): Hakhmei Recife ve-Amsterdam published by Machon Yerushalayim). It is not surprising that in the midst of his eulogy he mentioned the kinnah “arzei halevanon” about the asarah harugei malkhiyot, the lamentation about the ten martyrs that we read on Tisha B’av.

He quotes Mehnahot 29b where Moshe Rabbeinu seeing the future Torah greatness of Rabbi Akiva, exclaims “Hashem, you’ve shown me his Torah – show me his reward” and Hashem responds by showing him the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva whose flesh was peeled off. Moshe then asks “This is Torah and its reward?” to which Hashem replies “Silence, for this is the thought that arose before Me.” Rabbi Aboab asks the following question. Moshe requested to see the reward of Rabbi Akiva and instead he was shown his death. What kind of a response is this? Do we not believe in an afterworld? Do we not have a concept of reward and punishment? Could it be that one gives up his life al Kiddush HaShem and that’s where it all ends?

These were questions that animated the theological background of Spanish-Portuguese Jewry. For centuries some of them had paid a very high price in this world for any small semblance of Jewishness and inflections of the question, is it all really worth it, must have crept into their minds. Rabbi Aboab movingly describes the scene of Bernal’s martyrdom in Cordoba: his mother begging him for her son, his wife begging him for her protector and his children begging him not to be left an orphan. Not only did he need to find the religious fortitude to be consumed by the flames he also had to find the emotional steadfastness to be deaf to the pleas of those whom he loved. How different this martyrdom was, remarks Rabbi Aboab, from the martyrdom of Hannah’s seven sons whose mother had encouraged their willingness to die al Kiddush Hashem. Thus, the Jews who heard of Bernal’s martyrdom may have wondered: what could the reward possibly be for such a Jew?

Rabbi Aboab explains that Hashem was imparting a teaching about martyrdom to Moshe. The reward of one who gives up their life al Kiddush Hashem can not be comprehended. By showing Moshe the death of Rabbi Akiva, he was letting him know that he, Moshe, would not fully understand the reward that awaited Rabbi Akiva because Rabbi Akiva was a martyr. On that Shabbat morning in Amsterdam, Rabbi Aboab had the same message for his flock. The reward that awaited their beloved Bernal was too great for any of them to comprehend for he too had been killed al Kiddush Hashem.

# Following Our Forefathers

קינה כ"ו – אז בהלוך ירמיהו

Rabbi Uri Pilichowski

Beth Jacob Congregation – Beverly Hills, CA

*Like parents who invest so much into their children's future, only to see it destroyed by chance, our forefathers complain to Hashem about His derailing their descendants' growth by exiling them.*

This kinnah, written like many others by R' Elazar HaKalir, poetically tells of Jeremiah admonishing our forefathers, "How can you lie still, your sons have been exiled and their homes destroyed?" The Avot, along with Moshe and Leah, protest God's exiling the Jewish people. Each protest claims a self sacrifice, wailing 'what was it all for?' After each protest God answers, first directly responding to the objection of the claimant, and then further articulating the sins of the Jewish people.

Kinnah 26 tells the story of a people, blessed with great ancestors who taught them valuable lessons and set the foundations of a providential relationship between God and the Jewish people, and how these same Jewish people rejected these lessons and were disallowed the benefits of the providential relationship. The poet quotes the people asking, "Where is [God's] assurance, 'And I shall remember for their sake the covenant of the ancients?'"

As in all parables, the author is teaching a lesson with his story. The parable centers on a philosophical challenge; how could God abandon a people that He promised would be protected by the merit of their ancestors?

Avraham reminds God of the ten tests he faced, asking "Was it for nothing I was tested for their sake?" God responds that Avraham's descendants fell to idol worship. Yitzchak screams, "Was it for nothing that I was willing to be slaughtered?" Hashem responds that the same mountain upon which Yitzchak was willing to be sacrificed was defiled by the Jewish people. Yaakov protests that the pain he went in rearing his children, Yosef's sale, Dina's rape, Shimon and Levi's war with Shechem, was it for naught? Moshe complains about "The lambs nursed at his bosom... cut off before their time." The kinnah ends with Leah and Rachel weeping for their children.

In the back and forth between our ancestors and God the kinnah teaches a fundamental tenant of our faith. We are told that our ancestors' actions were so great that God promised eternal protection to their descendants. It would seem, and this is the line of reasoning taken in our kinnah, that merely being the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and Moshe was sufficient merit for the Jewish people to be protected forever.

The thought of automatic eternal protection was shattered with the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash and exile to Babylonia. No longer was that guaranteed protection readily apparent. In having our ancestors protest, the kinnah is expressing the shock the people of this time must have felt at feeling the wrath of an attack so harsh it seemed almost impossible to bounce back from.

In Hashem's answers to the forefathers, R' Elazar HaKalir beautifully expresses the proper notion of zechus avos, or the merit of our forefathers. The promises to our forefathers were not

automatic guarantees of protection, but rather conditional assurances that if the Jewish people followed in the ways of their ancestors then they would merit divine protection. If the Jewish people abandoned the lessons taught by their forefathers, then they would lose their divine protection and their fate would be left to any and all enemies that attacked. At the time of the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash the Jewish people had left the ways of their forefathers, and the results were tragic.

This lesson extends past the times of the first exile to some 2,000 years later, today. We cannot rely on the merit of our forefathers to protect us if we do not follow in their path. There is no *protectsiah* in God's court; one receives what they've earned. This idea is articulated in the last line of the kinnah, seemingly God addresses the forefathers, "Return wholesome ones to your place of rest, I shall surely fulfill all of your requests, I shall return your children from exile." May we merit to see the fulfillment of this promise this year.

## In the Blink of an Eye

קינה ל"א – בצאתי ממצרים בצאתי מירושלים

Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz

Beis Haknesses of North Woodmere - North Woodmere, NY

This kina contrasts the jubilant and spiritually charged atmosphere of our departure from Egypt, with the depressing atmosphere of our departure from Yerushalayim. The duality of the kina is reflected in the tune that we sing it. The high notes of B'tzeiti MiMitzrayim, our voices brimming with excitement and pride, followed by the low notes of B'tzeiti MiYerushalayim - a weak and dejected tone. The kina underscores the ability of the Jewish people to reach the greatest heights and to sink to the lowest depths. Rarely are we mediocre.

One unusual aspect of this kina is the fact that the focus is not on where we are going, but where we are coming from. We speak of our departure from Egypt, not of our arrival in Eretz Yisroel. We speak of our departure from Yerushalayim rather than our arrival into exile.

The author of this kina, whose name is not known to us, is trying to teach us something very important about Jewish History and Jewish Destiny. We read Megilat Eicha shortly after reading Moshe Rabbeinu's plea in Parshat Devarim of "*Eicha Esa Levadi*". The usage of the word *eicha* on the Shabbat before Tisha b'Av is the subject of much discussion. Moshe was speaking within the context of the rapid growth of the Jewish people. A slave nation had grown to the point, physically and spiritually, that Moshe could not handle them alone. When feeling totally overwhelmed by how quickly the nation had become a powerhouse, Moshe wonders "*Eicha Esa Levadi*". It is upon being overwhelmed by the rapid growth and success of the nation that he says *eicha*.

Yirmiyahu, on the other hand, after seeing what he lived for go up in smoke cries out *eicha*. He too is overwhelmed - by how quickly things can fall apart. The word *eicha* represents to us that in the Jewish world our entire lives can turn on a dime. It does not have to follow a logical pattern, or even a natural steady progression. A nation bereft of spirituality can grow into an exalted nation almost overnight. The stories of rags to riches normally reserved for the movies can

happen to a nation. Conversely, a nation living in its own secure borders with a Beit HaMikdash at its center can see total ruin and destruction in just as short a period.

This is why the author of this kina focuses on where we came from and not where we were going to. Look how quickly we went from the slavery of Egypt to *Kriat Yam Suf*. Look how quickly we went from Yerushalayim to *Vayikonenu Yirmiyah* and *V'cherev letusha v'latevach netusha*. This outlook makes the aveilut so much more poignant. We are a people of enormous potential, and look at the spiritual ruins we currently live in.

But this kina also carries with it a profound message of hope and comfort. In difficult times, when we see an enormous amount of spiritual and physical destruction, we are reminded how quickly things may change. We don't know how, and unfortunately we don't know how soon, but in a blink of an eye the salvation may be at hand.

## Destruction and Rebirth

קינה מ"א – שאלִי שְׂרוּפָה בָּאֵשׁ

Rabbi Yaakov Bieler

Kemp Mill Synagogue - Silver Spring MD

The famous Ba'al Tosafot, R. Meir of Routenberg (1215 to 1293), was certainly well-aware of the notorious public burning of twenty-four carriage-loads of the Talmud that took place in Paris on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz 5002 (June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1242.) The destruction of the Talmud had been ordered by Louis IX after a disputation between Christian and Jewish clergy, and tragically marked the first of many such incidents. The anniversary of the Paris Talmud burning was not only marked by Ashkenazic Jews during the Middle Ages by a communal fast day on Erev Shabbat, Parashat Chukat, but also by the recitation of an elegy composed by the MaHaRaM and incorporated into the Tisha B'Av kinot, beginning with the words "*Sha'ali Serufa BaEish, LeShalom Aveilayich*" (Tora, that has been consumed by fire, seek the welfare of those who mourn for you.)

In his poem, R. Meir notes the ironic symmetry that the same Tora that was given to the Jewish people within a context of Heavenly Fire, an allusion to the description of the Revelation at Har Sinai, (Shemot 19:18) "And Mt. Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke because God had Descended upon it in fire, and its smoke rose up like the smoke of a furnace, and the entire mountain shook exceedingly," is now destroyed by man-made fire without apparent consequence to those responsible for the conflagration. The author recoils at the suggestion that the Tora's fiery beginning was a precursor to its ultimate destruction, and instead expects there to be Divine Retribution, not only against those who directly were involved with the burning of our holy books, but also those who persecute and destroy teachers, students and followers of HaShem's Will who have dedicated their lives to contemplating and understanding the contents of the volumes that have now been reduced to ashes.

The author, who has taken all this in, admits to his lack of comprehension of God's Ways. R. Meir fears that the Tora's destruction, as well as the massacre of those who embodied its teachings, is tantamount to Divine Abandonment of the Jewish people that remain behind, and that they will now be all that much more vulnerable to attack and persecution. "*Lakach Tzeror*