

Framing the Destruction



THE THREE COMMON WORDS FOR TISHA B'AV

What are the words that the Megillah of Eicha asks us to pay attention to? What are the most important words that actually “scream out” to us from the Megillah of Eicha?

My thanks to Professor Koby Kramer, who helped me find, from a statistical perspective, the top three families of words in our canonical text of destruction:

Family: Destruction of the National Home and the Private Home

The word “bat” — daughter — appears in the megillah more than 20 times, most often as *bat Zion*, *bat Yerushalayim* or *bat ami* (the daughter of My nation).

The message is clear: Knesset Yisrael is the daughter of G-d, and the father-daughter relationship is a metaphor that describes the relationship between G-d and His nation. This word *bat* is the most powerful way to describe our relationship: the parent-child contract is permanent. It is impossible to break up, impossible to divorce, impossible to quit. There is no *get* or contract to end the relationship. It lasts forever.

Here are just a few examples of this term from Megillat Eicha:

וַיֵּצֵא מִבֶּת צִיּוֹן כָּל הַדְרָה

Gone from the daughter of Zion are all that were her glory (1:6)

אֵיכָה יָעִיב בָּאֵפוֹ ה' אֶת בֵּת צִיּוֹן

Alas! The Lord in His wrath Has shamed the daughter of Zion. (2:1)

מִבְּצָרֵי בֵּת יְהוּדָה הִגִּיעַ לְאָרֶץ
He has razed in His anger the daughter of Judah's strongholds. (2:2)

בְּאֵהֶל בֵּת צִיּוֹן שָׁפַךְ כָּאֵשׁ הַמָּתוֹ
He poured out His wrath like fire In the tent of the daughter of Zion. (2:4).

וַיִּרְבַּ בְּבֵת יְהוּדָה תְּאֵנָה וְרָאָהּ
He has increased within the daughter of Judah mourning and moaning. (2:5)

וַיִּגְדֵּל עֲוֹן בֵּת עַמִּי מִחַטָּאת סֹדֵם הַהַפּוּכָה
The guilt of the daughter of My people exceeded the iniquity of Sodom, which was overthrown. (4:6)

תָּם עֲוֹנָךְ בֵּת צִיּוֹן לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהִגְלוֹתְךָ
Your iniquity, daughter of Zion, is expiated. (4:22)

We don't need other proof-texts. The megillah reminds us that we, the

Jewish people, Kneset Yisrael, are the daughter of G-d. Specifically in the midst of horror, sadness, destruction, fear and grief — despite it all, we are the “daughter.”

There are other words that attest to the family connection: *bachur* (a young person), *yonek* (a baby), *olel* (little child), *na'ar* (youngster), *zaken* (elder), *almanah* (widow), *isha* (woman).

The destruction of the family is connected to the national destruction. The national destruction began in the family, with small daily events that eventually became a national tragedy. We can see from here how the breakdown of the small family unit leads to the breakdown of the nation. Throughout the summer, one of our goals should be to strengthen our families. This may not be easy, given the difficulties of the last few months. But it is critical.

There is another relevant source. When Devorah presents her “business card” in *Shirat Devorah*, how does she present herself? She could have said that she is a general, a prophet, that she judges under the date tree, that people wait in line to hear her military advice. But her business card says something else:

עד שקמתִי דְבוֹרָה שְׁקַמְתִּי אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.
Until I Devorah arose, I arose as a mother in Israel.

Shoftim 5:7

It is a mission, it is an assignment, it is sacred, it is precious, it is difficult, it is challenging, but it is the foundation. We all need to work on building and strengthening our private home. Everyone with their unique challenges (singles, marrieds, divorcees) should know that this is the key to building the Temple. These are the words that

the prophet Yirmiyahu repeats most often — both in the context of family that needs to be strengthened, and in the context of our relationship with G-d. Remember that you are children, despite the destruction and exile, remember that this relationship can never be destroyed.

Tears: Not Being Ashamed to Express Sadness

It's a cliché to say that people cry because they are sad, but it is actually not so. We live in an age when emotions sometimes get repressed. We don't properly allow their true expression. Look at how the megillah emphasizes suffering. It is indeed a time to feel suffering, or at least to try:

בְּכוֹ תִבְכֶּה בַּלַּיְלָה וְדַמְעָתָהּ עַל לְחִיָּה
Bitterly she weeps in the night, her cheek wet with tears. (1:2)

עַל אֲלֵה אֲנִי בּוֹכִיָּה עֵינַי עֵינַי יִרְדּוּ מַיִם
For these things do I weep, my eyes flow with tears. (1:16)

כָּלוּ בְדַמְעוֹת עֵינַי
My eyes are spent with tears. (2:11)

הוֹרִידִי כַנַּחַל דְּמָעָה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה אֵל תִּתְּנִי פִגְתִּי
לֵךְ אֵל תּוֹדִים בַּת עֵינֶיךָ
Shed tears like a torrent day and night!
Give yourself no respite, your eyes no rest. (2:18)

קוּמִי רִנֵּי בַּלַּיְלָה לְרֹאשׁ אֲשֶׁמְרוֹת שְׂפָכֵי כַמַּיִם
לִבְךָ נִבַּח פְּנֵי ה'

Arise, cry out in the night at the beginning of the watches, pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord! (2:19)

פְּלָגֵי מַיִם תִּרְדַּע עֵינַי עַל שֶׁבַר בַּת עַמִּי
My eyes shed streams of water over the ruin of my poor people. (3:48)

עֵינַי נִגְרָה וְלֹא תִדְמָה מְאִין הַפְּגוֹת
My eyes shall flow without cease, Without respite. (3:49)

Many commentators tell us around the time of Tisha B'Av to pay attention — don't be ashamed to express grief or sadness, and of course direct it toward the suffering of the Shechinah. We cry together with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This is the time to feel suffering.

Rabbi Erez Moshe Doron is a follower of Breslov. Precisely from Breslov, where it is “a great mitzvah to always be happy,” he explains how important it is to channel the suffering during this time of year. This is a fascinating insight:

All year we ask for a distraction, for comfort. But during this time, we are called to pay attention to sorrow, to the imperfect reality. Not to run away from it, not to repress it, not to do anything that will mitigate the pain, as is done in Western culture. Yes, there is evil in the world, there is bitterness. We are not just seeking comfort, temporary relief, but complete salvation, a perfect reality. This is the time of year when we are called to fight for the world, the condition of the people of Israel, which is supposed to act differently. Our rabbis tell us that when a person meets the Heavenly Court, they ask, “Did you long for salvation?” That is, did you really want a change? We usually ask for the maximum only when we discuss assets and finances. At this time of year, we are asking for the maximum: for love, joy, health, and spirituality.

Rabbi Erez Moshe Doron

Teshuva: Renew our Days as of Old

The root “shuv” (return) appears 14 times in Megillat Eicha, and it is interesting to see the change in its meaning throughout the megillah. For example, in chapter 1, we find it

in the context of a move backward, a withdrawal in response to the intensity of an attack:

היא נאָנחָה וַתִּשָּׁב אַחֲזֵר.

She can only sigh and shrink back. (1:8)

פָּרַשׁ רֶשֶׁת לַרְגְּלַי הַשִּׁיבֵנִי אַחֲזֵר.

He spread a net for my feet, He hurled me backward (1:13)

How sad! In the next chapter, we find the same root; this time, it refers to G-d Himself, to the retraction of G-d's hand. G-d pulls back His hand and allows the destroyers to destroy:

הָשִׁיב אַחֲזֵר יְמִינוֹ מִפְּנֵי אוֹיֵב וַיִּבְעַר בְּיַעֲקֹב

בָּאֵשׁ לְהַבֵּה אֶכְלָה סָבִיב.

He has withdrawn His right hand
In the presence of the foe; He has
ravaged Jacob like flaming fire,
Consuming on all sides. (2:3)

In chapter 3, we find this root with a

more optimistic tone, in the context of a return to G-d:

זֹאת אֲשִׁיב אֶל-לִבִּי, עַל-כֵּן אוֹחִיל.

But this do I call to mind, therefore I have hope. (3:21)

נִחְפְּשֵׁה דַרְכֵינוּ וְנִחְקְרֵה, וְנִשׁוּבָה עַד ה'

Let us search and examine our ways,
And turn back to the Lord. (3:40)

In the fifth chapter, we find it in the famous verse at the end of the megillah:

הַשִּׁיבֵנו ה' אֱלֹהֵי וְנִשׁוּבָה, חֲדָשׁ יְמִינוֹ כְּקֶדֶם.

Return us to You, O Lord, that we may be returned! Renew our days as of old. (5:21)

This verse is particularly significant. We want Him to return us, and we will return to Him. It's a shared, bilateral process. The world needs teshuva, especially this year.

We come to Tisha B'Av as different

people after one of our most difficult years, and we ask for help with teshuva in a deep and meaningful way. It seems to me that many of us can relate better to the words of the megillah after our coronavirus experience.

In conclusion, we should merit feeling like a “bat Zion” or a “bat Yehuda,” feeling like we are children of G-d and strengthening our private homes, which will lead to the building of our national home. We should merit to cry when needed and not be ashamed to express true sorrow, and we should direct our tears heavenward. And may we merit to perform teshuva and fulfill the verse at the end of megillah that also marks the end of our exile:

הַשִּׁיבֵנו ה' אֱלֹהֵי וְנִשׁוּבָה, חֲדָשׁ יְמִינוֹ כְּקֶדֶם.

Return us to You, O Lord, that we may be returned! Renew our days as of old. (5:21)

