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JULY 2021 • TISHA B'AV 5781

## AHAVAT YISRAEL IN DIVISIVE TIMES



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן  
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Exploring the Tisha B'av liturgy

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Recently emerging from a period in which my wife and her family sat shiva for my father-in-law, I saw firsthand the kind of *chesed* felt by mourners. Family, friends, colleagues, and community members from all stages of our lives visited, brought food and provided comfort by being present during this difficult time.

This experience is reflective of the laws of *avelut* which simultaneously promotes isolation and comfort. Those in mourning sit on lower chairs, they rend their garments, and set

themselves apart from others, while at the same time the community is invited in to provide solace and care. The separateness of mourning is different from other forms of halakhic isolation such as a *metzora*, who is commanded to actually leave the camp entirely. Not so those in mourning. Their separateness occurs within the framework of community.

Over the last year and a half, the entire world has become familiar with the dual notion of isolation and comfort. While strictly upholding protocols like wearing masks and socially

distancing which kept us apart, we also experienced tremendous kindness and compassion. From essential workers and heroes on the front lines to the essential people in our own lives. We waited in lines to have our temperature checked, and at the same time, we checked in with our elderly family, reached out to one another and tended to each other's needs.

But what happens when the trauma and tragedy subsides? The kindness we extend to one another during times of crisis can lose much of its



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urgency. When returning to a new normal, the needs of others are not always noticed as starkly or obviously. That is why we need to focus on the protocols of our new normal. *Olam chessed yibaneh*, the world was built with kindness (Psalms 89:3). We need to rebuild our world with kindness as well.

Rav Kook famously remarked, that just as the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred between one another, it will be rebuilt through *ahavat chinam* baseless love between one another. But in order for our community to transform our protocols of distance into a renewed sense of togetherness, just abolishing social distancing protocols is not enough. We need protocols that bring us together. We need to operationalize the interactions that foster the sense of communal *chessed*, communal togetherness, and communal cohesion that we otherwise too often take for granted. We need to embody a *chessed* community.

A good place to start is to transform those very touchpoints where we would have otherwise been pausing for health protocols into moments of connection. If walking into a Yeshiva University building the past year required a long line for a temperature check, we can't go back to just walking through doors and into rooms

## Just abolishing social distancing protocols is not enough. We need protocols that bring us together.

without expressing gratitude for those stationed at the entranceways who keep us safe. We should enter every room asking ourselves who needs a kind word, a warm smile, or a helping hand? We need to commit to become proactively warm and kind to one

another. Our old protocols kept us apart, we need new protocols to rejoin together.

And that is our collective responsibility this coming year. To embody a *chessed* community, a community which systematically ensures that everyone is uplifted. And as we enter Tisha Ba'av, and think of this period of mourning, I ask each of you to consider what "halachot" could bring us together.

Watching a spouse sit shiva is a heart-wrenching experience. But it is also heartening. I personally saw the outpouring of communal support and experienced the urgency with which our community takes care of one another. And that's why I am so confident that we have the instinctive capacity to continue our *chessed* even as we turn the next page towards a new normal. We are a *chessed* community. It is in our fiber, it is who we are. So even as our safety protocol disappears, I know our *chessed* will endure.





# INSIGHTS INTO KINOT

## Kinah #6: We Can Longer be Oblivious About Tisha B'Av

**Rabbi Eli Belizon**

*Rebbe, Stone Beit Midrash Program  
Rabbi, Young Israel of Fair Lawn*

Connecting with Tisha B'Av has been a challenge in our modern era. Many speakers and educators often begin their *Kinos* explanations — particularly as they introduce this *kinah* — asking why we don't connect to the suffering and tragedy of this day. We don't connect because for most of our lives, the commemoration of this day related to the suffering that took place in various moments throughout our history. The destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and the suffering of the Jewish people was a subject that we related to from a textbook or history lesson, but not something

we could easily feel. For much of the last seventy-five years, we have been blessed to live a very comfortable life, and we struggle to comprehend what it means to lose the Mikdash. Our Jewish service has been consistent for so many years that, on occasion, we may forget that we are missing the central service in the Mikdash.

The opening *kinah* of the morning *Kinos* is titled “*Shavas*,” and was authored by Rav Elazar Hakalir. Like his other *kinos*, the first word is central to understanding the *kinah*. Why did Rav Elazar Hakalir focus on the word *shavas*? Rabbi Soloveitchik suggested that most things come to an end at a gradual pace. However, when it came to the creation of the world, Hashem was involved in creation until the very last moment of the sixth day. Shabbos began instantly on the seventh day. As such, the word *shabbos*, or *shavas*, not only connotes cessation, but also an instant change.

The Jewish people may have known that the *churban* was coming, but there was a moment when everything came to a halt. The mood changed in an instant.

I believe that this Tisha B'Av we can relate to the loss and distant feeling that Tisha B'Av exudes. This Tisha B'Av arrives after Jews experienced a year where the epicenter of our *yidishkeit* and service of G-d was removed from us on a moment's notice. That which we always took for granted — that we could daven, learn and connect with Hashem in our shuls — was no longer a reality. Although the magnitude of our suffering does not compare to that of our ancestors, the oblivious Tisha B'Av is no longer. The concept of exile is no longer a foreign concept; this year, we experienced a micro exile from the house of Hashem. This is a Tisha B'Av that relates on a smaller scale to the phenomenon of the Jew in the



exile. When we introduce *Kinos*, we no longer have to ask the audience to imagine what it felt like thousands of years ago. The rabbis do not have to paint an image in which the Ribono Shel Olam speaks to His nation through Jewish history. We approach this day of mourning and suffering with fresh wounds and tears.

In order to understand the depths of this new reality, we need to understand what the shul represents in a Jew's life. The significance of the shul in our Jewish lives is not merely a building with services and community events. A shul is integral for the survival of the Jew in the *galus*. We are often mistaken that throughout our years in exile there is no concept of Mikdash in our day. I think this approach is flawed. Chazal teach us that there was a physical Mikdash that stood in Yerushalayim known as the *Bais Hamikdash Shel Matta*, however there is also a *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* in the heavens. In Parshas Vayetzei (Bereishis 28:17), as Yaakov has a dream at the *makom Hamikdash*, Rashi, commenting on the verse *zeh sha'ar hashamayim* — this is the gate to heaven — states that the Bais Hamikdash in heaven parallels the Bais Hamikdash on earth. This statement of Rashi directly contradicts Rashi's comment in Parshas Beshalach (Shemos 15:17). Commenting on the verse *machon leshivtecha pa'alta Hashem* — the place You made to dwell in — Rashi reverses the order and states that the Mikdash below is directly parallel to the Mikdash in heaven. Which one is it? Why does Rashi contradict himself in stating in Vayetzei that the Bais Hamikdash below is primary, and in Beshalach that the Bais Hamikdash above is primary? Rav Yissachar Dov of Belz provides a fascinating insight. He

suggests that the Bais Hamikdash in Yerushalayim is physically aligned with the Bais Hamikdash above, and that is Rashi's point in Beshalach. In the construction of the classic Mikdash in Yerushalayim, the edifice below should physically parallel the Mikdash in heaven. However, in Vayetzei, Rashi is introducing an entirely new Mikdash. At this juncture in Yaakov's life, he was leaving Eretz Yisrael and preparing for the challenges ahead. This represents the Jew in exile, who faces the challenges of *galus*: How do we survive in the exile without a Mikdash? Yaakov was preparing Klal Yisrael for an existence without the classic edifice of the Bais Hamikdash, and introducing a metaphysical Mikdash for Jews in exile. This is what Rashi in Vayetzei was highlighting — that the *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* can descend and be transmitted everywhere. Although the *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* originates in Yerushalayim as referenced by Rashi in Beshalach, it is not restricted to this location. The *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* can also follow the Jew in the exile, where he builds a *Mikdash Shel Matta*. Through tefilla and Talmud Torah, a Jew in *galus* can extend the Mikdash to anywhere in the world. The *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* can be endowed and consecrated in the *galus* wherever the Jew creates his *avodas Hashem* below. Rashi therefore writes that the *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* and the kedusha of the Mikdash can be spread anywhere a Jew transmits that elevated existence. The *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* refers to the spiritual, non-physical Mikdash, which can be transported to any area that a Jew in the exile desires a spiritual connection with Hashem. Chazal (*Megillah* 29a) refer

to a shul in *galus* as a *mikdash me'at*, a miniature Bais Hamikdash. Our shuls, batei medrashos and areas dedicated for growth in our relationship with Hashem are an actual extension of the Bais Hamikdash. This may not be the primary Mikdash that has a designated location parallel to the *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah*. However, the *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* can be spread to other locations as well.

When our shuls were shuttered and inaccessible, our loneliness and despair came because we were cut off from that Mikdash experience. The *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* was not spreading to our communities as it normally would throughout the *galus*. The survival strategy that our grandfather Yaakov Avinu established in Parshas Vayetzei was disconnected from us. There was a sense of loneliness and kedusha missing in our lives. *Churban Hamikdash* was relatable, palpable and ever present. Our life source was stripped from us during the experiences of COVID. Tisha B'Av 5781 introduces a new approach to our lives and responsibility in this return to our Mikdash. As we sit here in shul and discuss the concept of being sent away from the Temple, this has new relevance and meaning in our lives. The concept of *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* spreading elsewhere is contingent on our sanctification of those areas. We recognize on this Tisha B'Av: the reality of *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* is contingent on us spreading that kedusha through our tefilos, Talmud Torah and ultimate respect for these sanctuaries. We never want to return to a life without the *Bais Hamikdash Shel Maalah* following our *Bais Hamikdash Shel Matah*.

# Kinah #10: “Eicha Yashva Chavatzelet Hasharon” — Commemorating Destruction and Hope

**Mrs. Emma Katz**

Director, NILI Women's Learning Program, YU Torah Mit Zion Kollel of Chicago

In *Kinah* 10 for Tisha B'Av day, Rabbi El'azar ha-Kalir poetically commemorates the destruction of the Priests and their Priestly cities. The Talmud (*Taanit* 27a) states that for the most part, the Priests did not live in Jerusalem. They were divided into 24 groups, each of which came to Jerusalem for two weeks each year to perform the *avodah* in the Mikdash. But during the rest of the year, these 24 groups lived in 24 cities. Some of these cities also housed non-Kohanim, while others were entirely inhabited by Kohanim (“*ir she-kulah Kohanim*”). The Romans destroyed each of these cities during the time of the churban.

This *kinah* details the names of the 24 cities and describes how each one suffered destruction and exile. Studying the *kinah* makes the churban tangible, allowing us to visualize our enemies emptying Priestly cities, dragging Kohanim from their homes, and sending them into exile. However, Tisha B'Av is really the story of the destruction, torture, and exile of all of Am Yisrael. Why does this *kinah* exclusively commemorate the narrative of the Kohanim?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (*The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways*, p. 243) explains that we specifically remember the Kohanim because they suffered

most at the hands of the Romans. Not only did the Kohanim perform the Priestly service in the Beit Hamikdash, they were the *talmidei chachamim* and part of the Sanhedrin as well. They were the spiritual core of the people. The Romans regarded the Kohanim as their central enemies, responsible for all wrongdoings toward the Empire. However, more significantly, they blamed the Kohanim for leading, maintaining, and sustaining the Jewish people after Jerusalem's destruction.

Rav Soloveitchik provides not only a basic explanation for the necessity of a *kinah* focused specifically on the Kohanim, he adds a much deeper understanding as well. During the time of the churban itself, the Kohanim suffered greatly, and fought fiercely to protect the Mikdash. The Midrash in *Eicha Rabbah* (*Petichta* 23) describes:

בַּיּוֹם שֶׁיָּצְעוּ שְׂמֵרֵי הַבַּיִת, אֵלּוּ מִשְׁמֵרוֹת כְּהֻנָּה וְלִוְיָהּ. וְהַתְּעוּתָּו אֲנָשֵׁי הָחֵל, אֵלּוּ הַכְּהֻנִּים  
“On the day that the guards of the house shake” this refers to the shifts of the Kohanim and Levi'im, “The men of valor bend,” this refers to the Kohanim.  
Additionally, the fact that it took three weeks — between Shiva Assar B'Tammuz, when the Romans breached the city walls, and Tisha B'Av, when they destroyed the Beit Hamikdash — is a testament to the efforts of the Kohanim. Indeed, various midrashim explain that the Kohanim led the resistance against the advancing armies. The Kohanim were weak, sick, and starving, but they fought so hard that it took the powerful Roman army three weeks to cover a distance that a seasoned seminary student can travel in a few minutes.

However, this *kinah* mourning the Kohanim commemorates much

more than physical resistance. The Kohanim need not be commemorated and mourned for the efforts they invested in protecting the Mikdash leading up to its destruction, though that alone is laudable. Rather, the Kohanim must be mourned as well for what they represented through their service prior to the churban. When the Kohanim served in the Mikdash during their designated time, they were serving on behalf of all of Am Yisrael, not only on behalf of themselves and their families. When the Kohanim brought the Korban Tamid, each morning and evening, it was considered to be on behalf of every Jew. The Kohanim represented a sense of responsibility for, and a connection to all of Klal Yisrael.

Today, we each have our own communities, shuls, schools, and organizations that we are involved in. We feel little connection to a Jew living in a different location, who may look different or practice differently that we do. One may say that this disunity is a product of *galut*, that a dispersed people have very few points of connection. However, on Tisha B'Av we connect this phenomenon not only to *galut* itself, but back to the Kohanim specifically, as those who exemplified the sense of responsibility that we have to one another as Jewish people. On Tisha B'Av we long for the unified service of HaKadosh Baruch Hu that was facilitated by the Kohanim, not just in physical unity, but in a sense of *achrayut* (responsibility) to one another.



# Kinah #10: Eichah Yashvah Havatzelet ha-Sharon

## Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter

University Professor of Jewish History and Jewish Thought, Yeshiva University, and Senior Scholar, YU's Center for the Jewish Future

This *kinah* focuses exclusively on *kohanim* and on cities of *kohanim*. The *kohanim* were divided into twenty-four families, each one called a *mishmar*, and each *mishmar* ministered for at least two weeks a year in the *bet ha-mikdash*. In turn, each *mishmar* was divided into seven *batei av*, each of which served for one day that week. Thus, every *kohen* served in the *bet ha-mikdash* for some two days a year. We know the names of some of these families; some are mentioned in Nach and some in the Gemara. In addition, here we have a list of the twenty-four cities in which the *kohanim* lived; there were entire cities that consisted of only *kohanim*.

This is not only an ancient reality. Rishonim deal with how *aliyot* on Shabbat morning are distributed in such cities where everyone is a *kohen*, who gets *shei'ni* or *shlishi*, etc.<sup>1</sup> The island of Djerba off the coast of Tunisia is known for its unusually high percentage of *kohanim*. There is a local tradition there, that as far back as *churban bayit rishon* large numbers of *kohanim* escaped from Jerusalem to Djerba.

Why do we single out *kohanim* when it comes to the *kinot* of Tisha B'Av? Simply speaking, perhaps the reason is that they were the one group most directly impacted by the *churban* because they could not do the *avodah* there any longer. It affected them more intensely than it affected any other Jews. Rabbi Soloveitchik

offered a different suggestion. He often explained that they are singled out for their bravery and heroism. How long did it take the Babylonians (first *bet ha-mikdash*) or Romans (second *bet ha-mikdash*) to get from the walls of the city to the *har ha-bayit*? In the case of the Babylonians there is a disagreement between the Bavli (*Taanit* 28b: 30 days) and the Yerushalmi (*Taanit* 4:5: 21 days); in the case of the Romans all agree that it took them 21 days — 21 or 30 days were necessary to progress the distance that today is a six-minute walk! And the reason for this was, said Rabbi Soloveitchik, because the *kohanim* were valiantly and desperately fighting to protect the *beit ha-mikdash*. Since they were the ones, more than any other group, who heroically extended themselves to save the *bet ha-mikdash*, we give them special consideration.

I would like to suggest another reason the *kohanim* are especially deserving of a separate *kinah* on Tisha B'Av. We know that a *kohen* cannot do the *avodah* if he drinks wine. We have a pale imitation of this ruling on Simchat Torah, during which we follow the unusual practice of *duchening* during Shacharit to avoid the *kohanim* *duchening* in their usual spot during Musaf, where they may do so under the influence of the wine (or other alcohol) they may have drunk after their *aliyot* on that day. The Gemara (*Taanit* 17a) states that when the *bet ha-mikdash* was standing, the *kohanim* whose time it was to serve had to be careful because, depending on the circumstances, they might be pressed into service at a moment's notice. The Gemara continues and states that even these days, when there is no *bet ha-mikdash*, *kohanim* need to be careful because, as Rashi explains,

the *bet ha-mikdash* may be rebuilt suddenly and their services will be necessary.<sup>2</sup> While the Talmud goes on to cite Rebbe's counter ruling, this notion that the *beit ha-mikdash* may be rebuilt at any moment is so powerful that it impacts normative halachah even in the 21st century. This ruling demonstrates that the *kohanim*, more than any other group, had to always live, in a practical way, with the expectation of a rebuilt Temple. In fact, one of the Geonim had a tradition, brought down from his family of *kohanim*, to let his nails grow long so that, at a moment's notice, he would be able to properly participate in a particular Temple ritual that required long nails.<sup>3</sup> He is one of the Geonim, living roughly nine hundred years or so after the *churban*, and yet the possible immanence of a rebuilt *bet ha-mikdash* affected his personal hygiene!

I would like to suggest that perhaps this is why the *kohanim*, more than any other group, are worthy of their own *kinah* mourning for the destruction of the *bet ha-mikdash*. Every day they were forced to confront, in a most practical way, the possibility of a rebuilt Temple, and so the passage of every day without that taking place was for them a source of extra sadness and disappointment. Their mourning on Tisha B'Av thus deserves being acknowledged separately.

## Endnotes

1. See *Teshuvot ha-Rashba Meyuhas le-ha-Ramban* #186. My thanks to my rabbi, Rabbi Yosef Adler, for this reference.
2. See Rashi ad. loc., s.v. *asur lishtot yayin kol oto ha-yom*, ש"מא יבנה בית המקדש ותכבד העבודה, "יהיה זה צריך לעבוד."
3. B. M. Levin, *Otzar ha-Geonim*, *Taanit*, p. 30.

## Kinah #19: Lecha Hashem Hatzedakah

**Rabbi Ari Zahtz**

*Maggid Shiur, RIETS*

*Rabbi, Congregation Bnai Yeshurun*

The *kinah* “*Lecha Hashem Hatzedakah*” focuses on the theme of *hakaras hacheit*, recognition of wrongdoing, and *tziduk hadin*, the recognition that as painful as punishment may be, we understand that Hashem is just, and it is our sins that have resulted in our punishment. The *kinah* highlights instances where nationally, we benefited from Hashem’s goodness, and yet we responded in a way in which we should be embarrassed — *v’lanu boshes hapanim*.

For example, R’ Elazar Hakalir contrasts how Hashem was so good to us in miraculously providing food and drink in the dessert with the *man* and the *be’er*, and yet our response was to complain about the *lechem hakelokel*, the light or destructive bread. What was the complaint? The bread was not digested in the normal way and there was no waste. However, instead of appreciating that their food was perfect and provided them all that they needed, the Jews complained.

With that backdrop, there is one stanza that seems difficult. R’ Elazar hakalir writes:

לך ה' הצדקה בסיחון ועוג וכל ממלכות כנען  
ולנו בשת הפנים בעכן אשר מעל בחרם בלי  
מצא מען.

*You Hashem were righteous in how you helped us wage war against the local kings and nations: Sichon, Og and the kings of K’naan. We are shamefaced regarding how Achan*

*took for himself from the forbidden spoils [of Yericho] without an excuse.*

What episode is this referring to? Before the battle against Yericho, Yehoshua proclaimed that all the possessions of the inhabitants of Yericho must be destroyed, and that no one may benefit from them. When the Jews lost their subsequent battle against Ai, Yehoshua realized that someone must have sinned by taking from the spoils of Yericho, thereby spiritually endangering the nation and causing Hashem to punish them by losing to Ai. Lots were drawn to discover the perpetrator and they fell on Achan.

This stanza is troubling: all other cases that resulted in national punishment and embarrassment came about through a national *chesed* from Hashem that went unappreciated by the Jews as a whole. Here, however, the *chesed* from Hashem in battling the nations of K’naan was national, but the sin of Achan was individual. Why would that individual sin cause us, as a nation, to proclaim *v’lanu boshes hapanim* — that we are embarrassed?

It seems that R’ Elazar Hakalir is teaching us about the role of the community in creating the environment in which individuals act. When a person can brazenly violate the decree of Yehoshua, it not only impugns him, but the nation. Had the community created the proper environment, Achan would have been unable to do what he did. So yes, it was the act of an individual, but a reason for the nation to feel *boshes hapanim*.

We have a responsibility to one another, not only for how we act, but for the atmosphere we create that permeates the community in which

we live. Every mitzvah we do brings us as a community closer to redemption and to change the mourning of Tisha B’Av to a Yom Tov celebration.

## Kinah #20: Hope Amidst Despair

**Rabbi Zvi Romm**

*Rebbe, IBC Program, Yeshiva*

*University*

*Rabbi, Bialystoker Synagogue, NYC*

*Dedicated in memory of my late mother-in-law Judith Pfeffer, Yehudis bas Shmaya HaKohen a"h. May her memory be for a blessing.*

The *Kinos* recited on Tisha B’Av morning can be divided into three sections:

1. *Kinos* 6–20, all composed by the famed liturgical poet Rabbi Elazar HaKalir.
2. *Kinos* 21–35, a mixture of *kinos* written by different authors; four of these *kinos* commemorate events which took place during the Crusades.
3. *Kinos* 36–45, focusing on the beauty of Eretz Yisrael and our yearning for it. We will focus here on the first section exclusively. Since the *kinos* of the first section are written by the same author, we can detect a logical progression in the themes those *kinos* touch upon.

The first two *kinos* describe the poet’s sense of shock and disbelief at the sudden calamity that has befallen the Jewish people. In *Kinah* 8, this shock gives way to weeping and a pained recollection of the blessings promised by Hashem, expressed in *Kinah* 9. The enormity of the tragedy is explored in the successive *kinos*: The loss of



spiritual leadership, as personified by the Kohanim (*Kinah* 10); the loss of inspired political leadership, as exemplified by King Yoshiyahu, the last truly righteous ruler of Yehuda (*Kinah* 11); the loss of the Beis HaMikdash, an integral part of Creation itself (*Kinos* 12 and 14); the seeming disappearance of the Divine promises made to the Jewish people (*Kinah* 13); and the human tragedy, captured by the many atrocities suffered by the Jewish people during the Churban (*Kinos* 15–17).

In *Kinah* 18, Rabbi Elazar HaKalir turns to the issue of theodicy: Why have these tragedies befallen the Jewish people? Each stanza of the *kinah* recounts promises of blessings or kindness bestowed by the Almighty on the Jewish people and then asks, “Lama?” — “Why” have we been subjected to so much torment?

The answer is provided in *Kinah* 19, which borrows its refrain from the ninth chapter of Sefer Daniel. In that chapter, Daniel fasts and beseeches the Almighty to rebuild the Beis HaMikdash, which is still in ruins. His prayers are answered when the angel Gavriel appears to him and reveals to him when the Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt. The answer itself is cryptic, but the context implies that Daniel understands what Gavriel is revealing to him.

In the course of Daniel's prayer, he repeatedly expresses that the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash is the fault of Jewish sin, and that the Almighty's anger was justified. “Righteousness is Yours, Hashem,” he says, “and we are shame-faced.” (Daniel 9:7). That phrase serves as the refrain of *Kinah* 19. Rabbi Elazar HaKalir wants us to realize that, if we wish to have the Beis HaMikdash

restored, we must, like Daniel, first appreciate that it was destroyed because of our sins.

Daniel's prayer also serves as the basis for *Kinah* 20, the last *kinah* in this series. Here, the *kinah* invokes the phrase used by Daniel, “My G-d, incline Your ear and hear [us]” (Daniel 9:18). Like Daniel's prayer, *Kinah* 20 is a heartfelt plea that Hashem restore the Beis HaMikdash. The *kinah* concludes with another citation from Daniel's prayer: “Shine Your face on Your destroyed sanctuary.” (Daniel 9:17)

By concluding his series of *Kinos* with references to Daniel's prayer, Rabbi Elazar HaKalir leaves us with a sense of hope, even in the midst of the mourning of Tisha B'Av. After all, Daniel was in a situation similar to our own: mourning the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash and unsure when it would be rebuilt. The implication of the *kinah's* reference to Daniel's prayer is that our prayers, just like Daniel's, will be answered, and we can look forward to an end to our mourning.

## Kinah #26: Zilpah and Bilhah Cry Out

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The *Kinah* (26) of Az Bahaloch *Yirmiyahu al Kivrei Ha-Avot* describes how the prophet Yirmiyahu approached the graves of the patriarchs as well as Moshe Rabbeinu to awaken them to the tragedy of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and the exile of the Jewish people.

In the midrashic version (*Eichah Rabbah*, Peticha 24), we are told how

Yirmiyahu was specifically sent by Hashem to beseech the patriarchs and Moshe Rabbeinu to cry out on behalf of the Jewish people to evoke Hashem's mercy on their behalf. Based on this order, Yirmiyahu systematically evokes their pleas in defense of their descendants and their nation.

In the *kinah* of Tisha B'av, however, there is no mention of any such divine order, but simply a description of Yirmiyahu as a distraught prophet who desperately cries out to the patriarchs, “how can you lie down while your children have been sent into exile?” and incredulously exclaims, “what happened to the *z'chut Avot* that always served as a source of protection in the past?” In the *kinah*, the crying of Yirmiyahu is in the form of a weeping lament, consistent with the theme of Tisha B'av as a day of tears rather than one of advocacy.

Both versions record the plaintive pleas of Avrohom, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and Moshe, recounting their own acts of dedication and sacrifice toward Hashem as a source for rescinding the verdict against the children of Israel. In both accounts, Hashem responds by pointing out the pervasive and pernicious sins of the people, thus negating any possibility for clemency.

At the conclusion of the midrashic version, Rochel emerges, reminding Hashem of her personal self-sacrifice as she watched her sister, Leah, being given to Yaakov as a wife in her stead, then assisted Leah from underneath the nuptial bed with instructions as to how to win over Yaakov's heart. If Rochel, a human being with fragile emotion, could so nobly bear the degradation of being subordinate to her own conjugal competition, why could Hashem not bear the

competition of the idolatry toward which His people had strayed? To this argument, Hashem's mercy was aroused, and He declared, "for your sake, Rochel, I will return this people to their land." This account, of course, corresponds closely with the scriptural verses (Yirmiyahu 31:15-17) describing "Rochel weeping for her children" and then being consoled by Hashem with the assurance that "your children shall return to their borders."

By contrast, in the *kinah's* version, Rochel does not intercede solely on her own, but together with the other wives of Yaakov. Rochel's cries are preceded by those of Leah, her co-matriarch, but their heartfelt cries do not carry the day by themselves. Rather, their cries are followed by those of the maidservants. "Zilpah pounds her face (in distress), Bilhah laments with both of her hands." Only after the appearance of the maidservants does the *kinah* shift gears, provoking the response of Hashem, "*temimim* (wholesome ones) — go back to your eternal resting

place, I will fulfill all your aspirations, I was sent to Bavel for their sake; behold, I will return your children from exile."

Zilpah and Bilhah, the maidservants of Leah and Rochel, were never given the top billing that was accorded to the four matriarchs of the Jewish people (see *Berachos* 16b). Although they gave birth to four of the tribes, and effectively also served as matriarchs for the Jewish nation (see *Bemidbar Rabbah* 12:17, noting that the six wagons brought by the princes of the tribes alluded to the matriarchal status of Bilhah and Zilpah together with the other four matriarchs), their status as such was subsumed to that of Leah and Rochel (see *Pri Tzadik*, Behar, n.9). After having endured so much in silence and obscurity, they cannot contain themselves anymore in this *kinah*. If their nation would be wiped out, there would be nothing left of their quiet and heroic legacy. Perhaps this is the import of these final lines of the *kinah*. "Zilpah pounds her face," because she would have no further face to save, and "Bilhah

laments with both of her hands," because her handiwork, G-d forbid, would be extinguished.

Together with the heartfelt pleas of Rochel and Leah, this stirring awakening on the part of the least heralded matriarchs in the birth of Israel dramatically changes the narrative. The final coupling of the "wholesome ones," highlighting their self-sacrifice and self-effacement in the formation of the holy nation of Israel, evokes the verdict from the Almighty that their descendants will surely be granted redemption. Zilpah and Bilhah, having complemented the cries of Leah and Rochel with the pathos of their pain, can comfortably return to their eternal resting place in peace.

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A Jerusalem Mansion, the “Burnt House,” destroyed 70 CE (Wikimedia Commons)

## **“THE STUDENTS OF BEIT SHAMMAI STOOD BELOW AND THEY KILLED THE STUDENTS OF BEIT HILLEL”**

### **A CALL FROM HAZAL FOR MUTUAL RESPECT IN TIMES OF BITTER DISPUTE**

**O**ne of the most astounding features of *Hazal*, the sages of the Mishnah and of both Talmudim, is their public willingness to discuss their most sensitive experiences, including their most public and bitter disputes.<sup>1</sup> We meet Hillel and Shammai, Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabban Gamaliel, Rabbi Yohanan and Resh Laqish, Rabba and Abaye, as real people. In the history of

religion such immediacy and honesty is quite unusual. No other religious literature tells of the foibles and doubts, mistakes and even pettiness of its culture heroes — with the goal of inviting us into their world for our own moral betterment. Stepping back, the level of access to which every *talmid* and *talmidat hakhamim*, every “student of the sages,” is privy, is astonishing. As we approach Tisha be-

Av, I share one lesser-known episode of internal conflict among the earliest Sages, the trauma it left behind, and ways that Sages in later centuries reflected on this event.

The Mishnah describes a meeting that took place in the upper chamber of a Jerusalem aristocrat, Hananiah ben Hizkiah ben Gurion, early in the century before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE:

ואלו מן ההלכות שאמרו בעליית חנניה בן חזקיה בן גוריון כשעלו לבקרו. נמנו ורבו בית שמאי על בית הלל, ושמונה עשר דברים גזרו בו ביום.

*These are some of the rules that they said in the upper story of Hananiah ben Hizkiya ben Gurion when they went up to visit him. Beit Shammai voted and were more numerous than Beit Hillel. Eighteen things were decreed on that very day. . .*

The Talmud Yerushalmi narrates what happened:

תנא רבי יהושע אוניא: תלמידי בית שמיי עמדו להן מלמטה והיו הורגין בתלמידי בית הלל. תני: ששה מהן עלו והשאר עמדו עליהן בחרבות וברמחים. תני: שמונה עשרה דבר גזרו ובשמונה עשרה רבו ובשמונה עשרה נחלקו.

*Rabbi Yehoshua of Ono taught: The students of Beit Shammai stood below and they killed the students of Beit Hillel. It is taught, Six of them [the Hillelites] went up and the rest [the Shammaites] stood against them [the Hillelites] with swords and spears. It is taught: They decreed eighteen things, won on eighteen things, and were in dispute over eighteen things.*

Let's imagine the scene. Shammaites forcefully kept Hillelites from going up to the second story of the Jerusalem home of Hanania ben Hizkiya ben Gurion. The students came to blows as Hillelites sought to ascend, and Shammaites were determined to block their path.

What happened next? The students of Shammai took over the court session, and with the Hillelites subdued,

voted on eighteen points of halakha. The Shammaites were clearly tired of always losing to the more numerous Hillelites. What may have begun as disagreement *le-shem Shamayim*, "for the sake of Heaven," devolved into *hilul ha-Shem* and murder.

The Yerushalmi story builds on a reflection that appears already in Tosefta Shabbat 1:17 (and parallels):

אותו היום היה קשה לישראל כיום שנעשה בו העגל.

*That day was as difficult for Israel as the day the golden calf was made.*

As with the Golden Calf, emotion overrode judgement, defaming God's name. One can just imagine the scorn that other groups of Jews — Sadducees, Baitusim, Essenes and simple people — might have poured on the Sages for this moment of desecration.

What was the fight all about? It all began with eighteen points of halakha over which Hillelites and Shammaites disputed, and which were extremely important to the Shammaites. We do not know exactly which eighteen "things" were disputed, but the general theme is purity and separation. The issues in dispute were hugely important — even if some of them can seem very distant 2,000 years later.

I wonder whether the source of the dispute was actually the stated halakhic causes, or whether perhaps something deeper was behind it. Shammaites could not have been happy with the rising power of the

Hillelites and their own decline during the Tannaitic period. Caustic disputes over halakha were the "language" in which Second Temple period Jews — from the Sadducees and Pharisees to the Dead Sea Scroll community — debated important ideological issues, from the Temple rituals to the calendar to the resurrection of the dead.

Later generations were clearly disturbed by this eruption. Assuming complexity, they wisely ascribed blame equally to the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai. A fragment of a Gaonic work, *Halakhot Gedolot*, found in the Cairo Genizah, has it that, "They all killed one another" — הרגו אלו מאלו — placing blame on both houses. Another text relates that, "a dispute arose between the students of Shammai and Hillel, and many of them were lost (ואבד מהם הרבה). One source inflates the number of dead to 3,000, the same number killed at the sin of the Golden Calf. Tosefta *Sotah* 14:9 (=Sanhedrin 88b) reflects on the cause of the bitter disputes between the schools Hillel and Shammai:

משרבו תלמידי שמיי והלל שלא שמשו כל צרכן, הרבו מחלוקת בישראל, ונעשו שתי תורות.

*When the students of Shammai and Hillel increased, who did not serve [their teacher] sufficiently, dispute increased in Israel, and two Torahs were made.*

The message of this text is clear. It claims that unbridled dispute is caused by faulty or incomplete training.



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Later generations of *hakhamim* in *Eretz Yisrael* and then in Italy and Ashkenaz read of this tragedy and wanted to do something to heal the lingering social and spiritual rift caused by that terrible event — and through it to safeguard against similar behavior in their own times. They declared a fast on the day when they believed that it happened, on 3 Adar. This was just one of many fasts that were integral to the religious calendars of early medieval Jews that we no longer keep today. These fasts included the imprisonment of Rabbi Aqiva (5 Tishri), the death of Miriam (10 Nissan), the death of Eli the Priest (10 Iyyar), the day a Torah scroll was burned in Rome (3 Kislev), and many others — including the fast of Hillel and Shammai. Lists of fast days were preserved in prose and in synagogue liturgical poetry (*piyyut*). A list of fast days was even found written on the walls of the sixth century synagogue at Rehov, near Beit Shean — which was also decorated with a list of the priestly courses and agricultural law. An eighth-century liturgical poet (*paytan*), Pinhas the Priest,

enumerated the fasting schedule in a poem recited on the advent of the month of Shevat. This is what he says about the month of Adar:

פורים עושים ומגלה קורים בו  
צום הלל ושמאי בשלושה בו  
אדר / קראתי צום לגזירת הר נבו  
רועה נאסף בשבעה בו

*Purim is celebrated and the Megillah is read in it,  
The fast of Hillel and Shammai is on the third of it,  
Adar, I declared a fast for the decree of Mt. Nebo,  
The Shepherd [Moses] died on the seventh of it.*<sup>2</sup>

Our Sages, of blessed memory, tell us much about their lives, both the positive and the unfortunate. They present their own failings fearlessly, and discuss them with unceasing candor and if necessary, contrition. Such was the case of the bloody fight between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai over the eighteen halakhic rulings. The Talmud Yerushalmi not only reported this grievous event but explained to us the magnitude of this sin. Later generations placed the blame for this

violence on both houses equally — taking it on themselves to heal the spiritual breach. They established a fast day each year, 3 Adar, so that this sore would never be forgotten, nor this sin repeated.

If Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai could fall to such depths, what about us? The possibility always exists that our communities — and even our nations — can falter under the weight of disputes poorly handled and left to fester. Is aggression, whether verbal or physical, the answer? Mourning the Temple this Tisha be-Av, may we consider for a moment the fast of Hillel and Shammai — and commit ourselves to avoiding our own “sin of the golden calf.” May we always disagree with mutual respect — always “for the sake of Heaven.”

## Endnotes

1. This discussion is based upon the work of Shulamit Elizur “Wherefore Have We Fasted?: “*Megilat Ta’anit Batra*” and Similar Lists of Fasts (Jerusalem, 2007), Hebrew, especially 199–120.
2. Elizur. pp. 32–33.

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## THE SILENT TISHA B'AV GREETING

A truncated “hello.” Replaced by an affirming “head-nod.”

Few moments in the Jewish calendar are as awkward as the social scene that follows the public reading of Megilas Eichah on Tisha B'Av night. Exiting the shul, we encounter our fellow community members and friends, and yet are restricted in acknowledging them with traditional social greetings (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 554:20*). It seems odd, that during a period in which we are so deeply focused on the cataclysmic impact of *sinas chinam*, that we would find ourselves engaging with each other from a disposition that seems to lack the basic embracing courtesies of social connections.

The very opening verse of Tisha B'Av — *Eichah yashvah badad*, Alas, she sits alone — conveys a deep sense of loneliness that underlies the

emotional dynamics of the day. The very void that is responsible for the calamities that initiated our exile is rooted in our inability to connect with others. How are we to balance the aspirational goal of re-unifying the Jewish people with the seemingly incongruent halachic expectation of avoiding greeting those around us?

### The Source of Our Contemporary Galus

The Gemarah writes in *Maseches Yoma 9b*, that the rebellious antecedents of the first churban were drastically different than those of the second. The first Mikdash was destroyed on account of a total decay in the moral, ideological, and halachic fabric of the Jewish people. The Gemarah describes a society that tolerated overt violations of idolatry, promiscuity, and even murder. In contrast, the

second Mikdash was destroyed as a result of the fractured nature of the Jewish community and the baseless hatred that defined the communal culture. The Maharal, *Netzach Yisrael* ch. 4, asserts that the differential in the causes for churban are related to the nature and function of the Mikdash at each particular time. The defining element of the first Mikdash was *Hashraas HaShechina*, the overt and manifesting presence of G-d. The deterioration of the Jewish people's faith and moral behavior resulted in a society that was entirely incompatible with a revealed presence of Hashem. Depicted by the Navi Yechezkel (ch. 9-10) the Shechina departed from the Beis HaMikdash, rendering the edifice devoid of any sacred and spiritual protection, thus susceptible to the deserving and inevitable conquest of our enemies.

In contrast, writes the Maharal, the initiating energy that led to the construction of the second Beis Hamikdash was the communal commitment and aspiration of the Jewish people themselves. As a result, the sanctity of the Second Mikdash emanated not from the overt presence of G-d, but from its role as a spiritual force in uniting the broader Jewish people. The intensifying sectarianism of the Bayis Sheini period, in addition to a more general breakdown of communal cohesion, emerged as an oppositional dimension to the underlying nature of the Mikdash at that time. As a result, the Jewish people were no longer worthy of the Beis Hamikdash within their midst.

It would follow that the core mandate for our own exile experience is to reconstruct the foundation of communal unity, whose void disrupted the nation-driven Mikdash from serving as our focal point of communal life and *avodas Hashem*. A renewed commitment to *ahavas Yisrael* is at the heart of our aspirational return to Zion, and therefore should emerge as a central motif in the commemoration of its destruction.

## The Centrality of Ahavas Yisrael in Jewish Life

The Torah's mandate to love our fellow Jew is expressed in a curious formulation: *veahavta lera'yacha kamocha Ani Hashem* — you shall love your neighbor like yourself, I am Hashem (Vayikra 19:18).

It is striking that our “love of self” seems to be the metric by which we are expected to measure the level at which we project love for others. Moreover, the culminating phrase “Ani Hashem” seems to

insert an affirmation of faith that distracts from our focus of nurturing compassion and love between people. Rav Mordechai Lobert, in his sefer *Milchamos Yehuda* (Vayikra pg. 78), suggests that embedded within this seemingly more generalized phrase is a very specific and tactical directive in how to bring the Jewish people together. He writes that we are each comprised of two dimensions — our body and our soul. If we live life entirely to accommodate our physical needs, then we risk developing the egocentrism that repels the opinions and concerns of others, in deference to securing the satisfaction of our own desires. However, if we recognize that our “*kamocha*” entails a much broader dimension of human existence, namely the soul, then we strive for loftier ambitions that transcend our immediate physical needs of the moment.

“Ani Hashem” is not a coda to the expectation of interpersonal harmony; it's the central force in ensuring its success. Connecting and relating to the Godliness within ourselves is what allows us to reach beyond our own agendas and live for something greater than our own personal needs and desires. It is what enables us to expand our world of compassion and embrace and include others even at the expense of ourselves. True *ahavas Yisrael* begins with the ability to approach the world without the personal agendas of our own opinions and ideas as filters for caring engagement with others, and to recognize that in the ultimate quest of manifesting our inner Godliness in this world, we must discover the very same Godliness and potential that exists within others as well. *Ahavas Yisrael* means to live an interpersonal and communal life that is larger and broader than ourselves.

## Love of Jews is Love of Hashem, Love of Hashem is Love of Other Jews

The Maharal, in his work *Nesivos Olam* (*Nesiv Ahavas Rei'a* no. 1) writes:

דבר זה שאוהב הבריות הוא אהבת השם יתב' גם כן, כי מי שאוהב את אחד אוהב כל מעשה ידיו אשר עשה ופעל, ולפיכך כאשר אוהב את השם ית' אי אפשר שלא יאהב את ברואיו ואם הוא שונא הבריות אי אפשר שיאהב השם ית' אשר בראם. וכן כבוד חבירו אשר נברא בצלם אלקים נחשב כבוד המקום.

*Loving other people is a form of loving G-d as well, because one who loves another loves all of the things that he makes. Therefore, when one loves G-d, it is impossible not to love His creations. And if he hates others, it is impossible to love G-d who created them. Similarly, honoring a friend who was created in the image of G-d is an honor to G-d.*

Extending love to others is itself an expression of our love of G-d, as the entity Who created them. Conversely, harboring hatred for G-d's creations is tantamount to rejecting Hashem himself, as His creations are an extension of His essence and His will. The notion of bifurcating our commitment to the rituals and expectations of mitzvos, which express our relationship with Hashem, from those which shape the ethical conduct of our interpersonal relationships, is a fallacy. We cannot truly stand as servants of the Almighty without respecting and embracing the people he created. It stands, therefore, that we acknowledge the prominence of *ahavas Yisrael* as a central value within our broader spiritual pursuits, even as we reach to connect with the Almighty Himself.



## Discovering Greatness in Others

The connection between “*veahavta lerayacha kamocha*” and “*Ani Hashem*” is expressed not only in the relationship between the Mikdash and the Jewish people, but in the internal functioning of the Mikdash itself. The Mishkan and the Beis HaMikdash were ministered by the Kohanim. This legacy of leadership originates with Aharon HaKohein. The Mishnah in *Avos* 1:12, states:

הלל אומר, הוי מתלמידיו של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הבריות ומקרבן לתורה.

*Hillel says, be of the students of Aharon: love peace and pursue peace, love other people and bring them closer to the Torah.*

The Maharal, *Derech Hachaim*, questions why Aharon's peacemaking nature was necessary to fulfill his primary role in overseeing the vast and complex world of the Beis Hamikdash. The Maharal explains that in order for Aharon to represent the Jewish people, he must somehow “embody” the Jewish people. Aharon's qualifications to succeed in such an ambitious reach of representation was the very notion that he managed to personally recognize religious capacity within the heart and soul of every Jew. As the Rambam there writes:

אמרו שאהרן עליו השלום כשהיה מרגיש באדם שתוכו רע או שהיו מספרים לו שתוכו רע ושבידו עבירה היה מתחיל לו לשלום והיה מתאהב אליו והיה מרבה לספר עמו והיה האיש ההוא מתבייש בנפשו ואומר אוי לי אילו היה יודע אהרן צפון לבי ורוע מפעלי לא היה מתיר לעצמו להסתכל בי כל שכן שידבר עמי ואמנם אני אצלו בחזקת אדם כשר לכן אני אאמת את דבריו ומחשבתו ואהיה חוזר למוטב ונעשה מתלמידיו הלומדים ממנו.

*Our rabbis said that when Aharon*

*sensed that someone was not doing well spiritually, or they told him about a person who was struggling spiritually or who had sinned, he would greet him first and would be friendly toward him and would speak much with him. And that man would become embarrassed about himself and say, "Woe is to me! If Aharon knew what is hidden in my heart and the evil of my actions, he would not permit himself to [even] look at me, all the more so to speak to me. And yet he treats me with the presumption that I am a proper man. [Hence] I will confirm his words and his thoughts and I will return to the good." And this individual would become one of [Aharon's] students who learn from him.*

Aharon would approach individuals who lacked commitment to the values and ideals of Torah and extend himself personally in greeting them. This type of unconditional engagement instilled a sense of self-worth within these individuals. It was that very confidence that ultimately propelled them to move forward in their spiritual growth, and to view themselves as having greater potential for religious success.

The very foundation of the Beis Hamikdash is the notion that everyone has access to the presence of G-d, because ultimately everyone has an inner potential to be worthy of such a connection. Core to the existence of the Mikdash within our midst is our own ability to appreciate the individual greatness of others. *Ahavas Yisrael* mandates that we relate to the inner greatness that can be discovered within every Jew.

## Ahavas Yisrael as a Tool for Hatred

The Gemarah in *Gittin* 55b, shares a famous story that began a chain of events that resulted in the destruction of the Second Mikdash:

אקמצא ובר קמצא חרוב ירושלים דההוא גברא דרחמיה קמצא ובעל דבביה בר קמצא עבד סעודתא אמר ליה לשמעיה זיל אייתי לי קמצא אזל אייתי ליה בר קמצא אתא אשכחיה דהוה יתיב אמר ליה מכדי ההוא גברא בעל דבבא דההוא גברא הוא מאי בעית הכא קום פוק אמר ליה הואיל ואתאי שבקן ויהיבנא לך דמי מה דאכילנא ושתינא אמר ליה לא אמר ליה יהיבנא לך דמי פלגא דסעודתיך אמר ליה לא אמר ליה יהיבנא לך דמי כולה סעודתיך א"ל לא נקטיה בידיה ואוקמיה ואפקיה אמר הואיל והווי יתיב רבנן ולא מחו ביה ש"מ קא ניהא להו איזיל איכול בהו קורצא בי מלכא אזל אמר ליה לקיסר מרדו בך יהודאי.

*Jerusalem was destroyed on account of Kamtza and bar Kamtza. This is as there was a certain man whose friend was named Kamtza and whose enemy was named Bar Kamtza. He once made a large feast and said to his servant: Go bring me my friend Kamtza. The servant went and mistakenly brought him his enemy, Bar Kamtza. The man who was hosting the feast came and found Bar Kamtza sitting at the feast. The host said to Bar Kamtza: That man is the enemy of that man, that is, you are my enemy. What then do you want here? Arise and leave. Bar Kamtza said to him: Since I have already come, let me stay and I will give you money for whatever I eat and drink. Just do not embarrass me by sending me out. The host said to him: No, you must leave. Bar Kamtza said to him: I will give you money for half of the feast; just do not send me away. The host said to him: No, you must leave. Bar Kamtza then said to him: I will give you money for the entire feast; just let me stay. The host said to him: No, you must*

leave. Finally, the host took Bar Kamtza by his hand, stood him up, and took him out. After having been cast out from the feast, Bar Kamtza said to himself: Since the Sages were sitting there and did not protest the actions of the host, although they saw how he humiliated me, learn from it that they were content with what he did. I will therefore go and inform against them to the king. He went and said to the emperor: The Jews have rebelled against you.

**Translation adapted from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud**

The Maharal, *Netzach Yisrael* ch. 5 asks, why did the Gemarah introduce this narrative with the claim that “*aKamtza ubar Kamtza charuv Yerushalayim*” — Jerusalem was destroyed on account of Kamtza and bar Kamtza? What transgression or crime did Kamtza commit that contributed to the destruction of Yerushalayim? Bar Kamtza is certainly guilty of reacting to his unjustified embarrassment by placing the entire Jewish people in peril. Kamtza is the individual who was supposed to be invited, and was omitted from the party. What role did he play in this catastrophe? He remained home throughout the entire episode, blissfully unaware that his absence was setting into motion a series of events that would result in the churban. He may have been the intended recipient of the invitation but truly had no meaningful part in the debacle.

The Maharal writes that there was

a toxic dimension to Kamtza’s relationship with the host. The invitation that was extended to Kamtza was in the context of an alliance of camaraderie that was entirely based upon its collective opposition to the group that included Bar Kamtza. The Maharal explains that when our friendships and relationships are formed as a coalition that stands in enmity of others, then not only is the antagonism toward others considered an expression of *sinas chinam*, but so is the love for the likeminded individuals as well. Disagreement and debate for the sake of heaven is noble. Unity as a strategy to advance one’s agenda in conflict with others undermines the fabric of the Jewish people. Indeed, it was the entire nature of the communal landscape that contributed to the collapse of the Second Commonwealth, and the impending exile of which we still suffer today.

*Ahavas Yisrael* is not simply a perfunctory gesture and expression of cordiality towards our fellow Jews. In fact, it extends beyond formal acts of chesed as well. It begins with a shift in mindset toward our engagement with others. This mindset views other Jews not through the prism of positions and issues, but rather more broadly as a reflection of an inner Godliness that projects a more complex and nuanced reality to the larger world. We may disagree vehemently on a particular issue while maintaining an appreciation for the larger greatness of an individual. *Ahavas Yisrael* means

we do not define people based on their opinions, ideas, and institutions. Rather, there remains an underlying connection that transcends even the most contentious issues. This connection coalesces the Jewish people into a unified nation, despite our differences.

As the sun sets on Tisha B’Av night, and we acknowledge the reality of our unredeemed world, we are prohibited from engaging with each other through the medium of “*sheilas shalom*” — greetings between people that are part of a habituated script for social engagement. “Hello” does not express a genuine appreciation for an individual’s self-worth. Rather, these expressions are simply a societal construct that frames our interactions with a surface level of politeness. Tisha B’Av is a day to look deeper. To drop the script and connect on a deeper level. To sit on the floor, reciting Eicha and Kinot, and experience the collective Jewish story. To remove the superficiality of “greetings,” and replace them with a larger appreciation for our shared destiny. The month of Av fundamentally depicts G-d as a loving father, and us as his children. *Banim atem LaHashem Elokeichem* — You are children of Hashem (Devarim 14:1). While siblings may fight, at the end of the day, an external threat will always accentuate the authentic and fundamental love that ultimately characterizes the family.



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## HOW DO WE GO FROM BEIN HAMETZARIM (BETWEEN THE BOUNDARIES) TO A HERITAGE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES?

**T**he Mishna, *Avot* 4:1 teaches us “*Eizehu ashir hasameach b’chelko*” — Who is wealthy? One who is happy with one’s portion. The simplest, most direct way to determine that we are happy with our portion is to see if we are also happy with our friend’s portion. This demonstrates that there is no jealousy or resentment, but rather a state described by Ben Azai (*Yoma* 38):

בשמך יקראוך ובמקומך יושבוך ומשלך יתנו  
לך אין אדם נוגע במוכן לחבירו ואין מלכות  
נוגעת בחברתה אפי' כמלא נימא.  
*By your name they shall call you, in  
your place they shall seat you and from  
your own they shall give you. No person  
touches what is designated for another  
and one reign does not overlap without  
another even by the width of a hair.*

This state is only possible when our lives are filled with a sense of *hakarath hatov* (gratitude) to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and to other people.

For this reason, the very last miracle in the chain of miracles that took place as we left Mitzrayim was that the dogs didn’t bark as we left:

וְלֹכֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִחְרֹץ כָּלֵב לְשׁוֹנוֹ לְמַאִישׁ  
וְעַד בְּהֵמָה לְמַעַן תִּדְעוּן אֲשֶׁר יִפְלֶה ה' בֵּין  
מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל.

*But not a dog shall snarl at any of the  
Israelites, at man or beast — in order  
that you may know that the Lord makes  
a distinction between Egypt and Israel.*  
**Shemot 11:7**

There is an obvious question that must be asked. During the Ten Makkot, there was a clear distinction

between the Jewish people and the Egyptians. The Jews were protected from the makkot and the Egyptians were not. If so, what exactly did this miracle demonstrate that was not demonstrated during the Ten Makkot?

The answer is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted us to leave Mitzrayim not only focusing on the miracles that took place but on what we learned from the experience — the trait of *hakarath hatov*. The dog symbolizes this trait. Maharsha, *Chidushei Agadot, Sanhedrin* 97a, teach us that the etymology of the word for dog, *kelev* is based on it being *kulo lev v’ne’eman la’adon* — it has complete loyalty toward its master.

Rav Yitzchak Aramah, *Akeidat Yitzchak* (Shemot 30:12) teaches:

אם הכרת החסד המקובל תעדר והשבת  
הגמול הראוי לו תבטל. על מה ועל מה העולם  
עומד.

*If gratitude for kindness would disappear  
and repayment for good deeds would  
fade away, what would the world stand  
on?*

During the Three Weeks, we read  
Parashat Matot, which includes the  
request of the tribes of Gad and  
Reuven:

וּמִקְנֵה רֵב רַב הָיָה לִבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן וְלִבְנֵי גָד עֲצוּם  
מְאֹד וַיֵּרָאוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ יַעֲזֹר וְאֶת אֶרֶץ גִּלְעָד  
וְהָיָה הַמָּקוֹם מִקּוֹם מִקְנֵה. וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי גָד וּבְנֵי  
רְאוּבֵן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אֱלֶעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְאֶל  
נְשִׂאֵי הָעֵדָה לֵאמֹר. עֲסָרוֹת וְדִיבּוֹן וַיַּעֲזֹר וְנִמְרָה  
וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן וְאֶלְעֵלָה וְשֶׁבֶם וְנָבו וְקֶעֶן. הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר  
הִכָּה ה' לִפְנֵי עַדְתִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶרֶץ מִקְנֵה הוּא  
וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ מִקְנֵה. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִם מִצָּאֵנוּ חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ  
יִתֵּן אֶת הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת לַעֲבָדֶיךָ לְאֶחָזָה אֵל  
תַּעֲבִירָנוּ אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן.

*The Reubenites and the Gadites owned  
cattle in very great numbers. Noting  
that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were  
a region suitable for cattle, the Gadites  
and the Reubenites came to Moses,  
Eleazar the priest, and the chieftains  
of the community, and said, "Ataroth,  
Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh,  
Sebam, Nebo, and Beon — the land  
that the Lord has conquered for the  
community of Israel is cattle country, and  
your servants have cattle. It would be a  
favor to us," they continued, "if this land  
were given to your servants as a holding;  
do not move us across the Jordan."*

The tribes of Gad and Reuven don't  
explicitly connect their desire to  
remain on the other side of the Jordan  
to their abundant cattle. If not for the  
cattle, why did they want to remain  
and why is the abundance of cattle  
mentioned? Perhaps they wanted to  
remain out of gratitude toward Moshe  
Rabbeinu. These two tribes were the

most loyal to Moshe Rabbeinu. While  
the other tribes consumed their cattle  
in the forty years in the desert, these  
tribes subsisted on the *manna* and  
*slav* (quail) that fell from the sky. This  
is what Moshe Rabbeinu told them  
to eat, and they couldn't betray their  
leader who selflessly dedicated himself  
to leading them through the desert.

What really motivated them to remain  
on the other side of the Jordan? They  
knew that Moshe Rabbeinu would  
not merit to enter Eretz Yisrael and  
would be buried on the other side of  
the Jordan:

וְאֶתְחַנֵּן אֵל ה' בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר ה' אֱלֹקִים  
אֲתָה הַחֲלוֹת לְהִרְאוֹת אֶת עַבְדְּךָ אֶת גְּדֻלָּתְךָ וְאֶת  
יָדְךָ הַחֲזָקָה אֲשֶׁר מִי אֶל-בְּשָׂמִים וּבְאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר  
יַעֲשֶׂה כַּמַּעֲשִׂיךָ וְכַגְּבוּרָתְךָ. אֶעֱבִירָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה  
אֶת הָאֶרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן הַהָר  
הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְכֵנוּ. וַיַּתְעִבֵר ה' בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם וְלֹא  
שָׁמַע אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי רֵב לָךְ אֵל תּוֹסֵף דָּבָר  
אֵלַי עוֹד בְּדָבָר הַזֶּה. עֲלֵה רֹאשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה וְשֹׂא  
עֵינֶיךָ יָמָה וְצִפְנָה וְתִימִנָה וּמִזְרַחָה וְרֵאָה בְּעֵינֶיךָ  
כִּי לֹא תַעֲבִיר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה.

*I pleaded with the Lord at that time,  
saying, "O Lord God, You who let  
Your servant see the first works of Your  
greatness and Your mighty hand, You  
whose powerful deeds no god in heaven  
or on earth can equal! Let me, I pray,  
cross over and see the good land on the  
other side of the Jordan, that good hill  
country, and Lebanon." But the Lord  
was wrathful with me on your account  
and would not listen to me. The Lord  
said to me, "Enough! Never speak to  
Me of this matter again! Go up to the  
summit of Pisgah and gaze about, to the  
west, the north, the south, and the east.  
Look at it well, for you shall not go across  
yonder Jordan."*

**Devarim 3:23-26**

Moshe Rabbeinu died on the other  
side of the Jordan and was buried  
there. The tribes of Gad and Reuven  
and Gad said: How can we leave

Moshe Rabbeinu alone, buried on  
the other side of the Jordan? Our  
health, sustenance and satisfaction  
in the desert was because we listened  
to Moshe Rabbeinu and ate *manna*  
and *slav* rather than our cattle. Our  
gratitude toward Moshe Rabbeinu is  
so great that it is worthwhile to remain  
on the other side of the Jordan, even  
if by doing so we will lose out on the  
opportunity to live in Eretz Yisrael.

At the end of Moshe Rabbeinu's life,  
he blesses the tribe of Gad by saying:

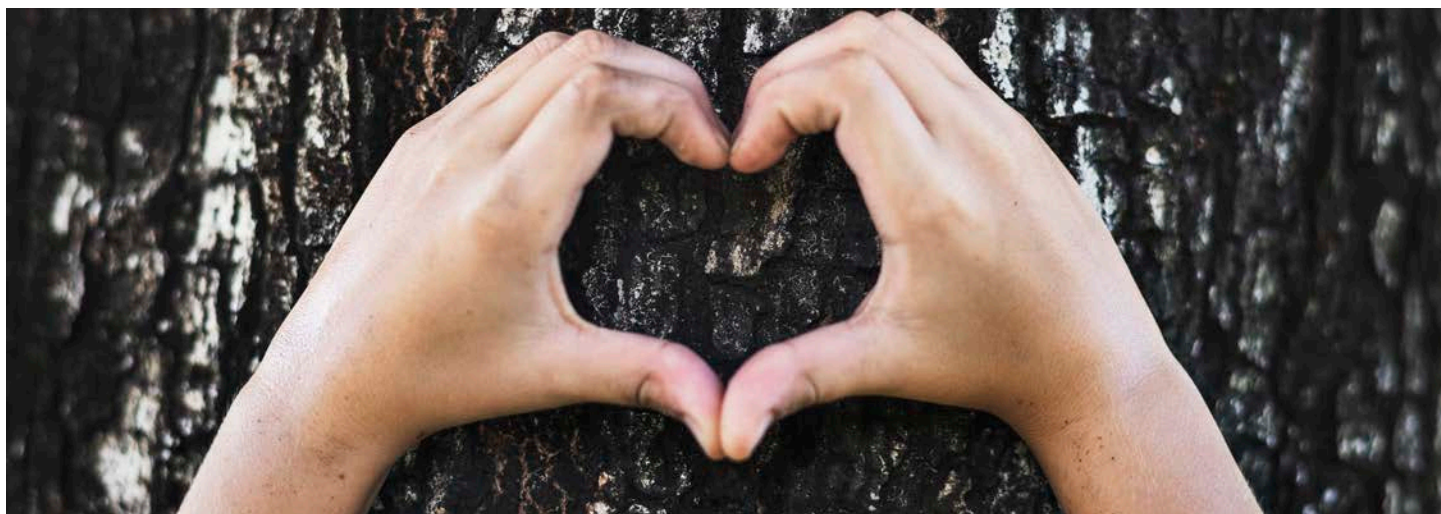
וּלְגַד אָמַר בְּרוּךְ מְרַחֵב גֵּד כְּלָבִיא שֶׁכֵּן וְטָרֵף  
זֹרֵעַ אֵף קָדָקָה. וַיֵּרָא רֹאשִׁית לֹא כִּי שָׁם חָלְקֵת  
מַחֲקֵק סָפוֹן וַיִּתֵּא רֹאשִׁי עִם צִדְקָתָהּ ה' עֲשֶׂה  
וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל.

*And of Gad he said: Blessed be He who  
enlarges Gad. Poised is he like a lion  
to tear off arm and scalp. He chose for  
himself the best, For there is the portion  
of the revered chieftain, Where the heads  
of the people come. He executed the  
Lord's judgments And His decisions for  
Israel.*

What does, "He chose for himself the  
best, For there is the portion of the  
revered chieftain" refer to? It refers to  
the fact that Gad (and Reuven) chose  
to remain with Moshe Rabbeinu.

The trait that the tribes of Gad and  
Reuven embodied — *hakarat hatov*  
— has the power to eliminate the  
jealousy and resentment that lead  
to *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred)  
and bring us from *Bein Hametzarim*  
(between the boundaries) to a  
*nachalah b'li mitzarim*, a heritage  
without boundaries — Blessed  
be He who enlarges Gad. *Hakarat  
hatov* is the root and foundation of  
*ahavat Yisrael*, love of a fellow Jew,  
of *ahavat Hashem*. It is the key to the  
path toward our redemption and the  
rebuilding of Yerushalayim and our  
Holy Land.





## GETTING THEM TO GET ALONG

There is the well-known incident of the proselyte challenging both Hillel and Shammai to teach him the Torah while standing on one leg. Shammai refused, perhaps sensing the insincerity of the request. Hillel responded: Do unto others as you would have done to you — that is the Torah entire, the rest is commentary, now go and learn it (*Shabbat*, 31a). Hillel's answer supports the centrality of *bein adam l'chavero* in Torah thought and Torah living. Children and teens in today's world are exposed to endless examples of bad interpersonal behavior, disdain for those who are different, and mean-spirited discourse between disagreeing parties. How do we raise and educate our children to have the will and skill to live by the Torah's golden rule? I believe it is both

necessary and possible to do so, if we consider what we value, live, and teach.

From early in their development and through their teen years, youngsters seek clues about what is important and valued by watching and listening to adults. When children are greeted after returning from school with questions about their test grades, they have every reason to believe their family values academic achievement. If they are encouraged to win every game and claim every trophy, they learn that individual success is valued above all. We communicate how much we value interpersonal relationships when we ask about them, when we celebrate children's acts of caring, and congratulate teens on their diplomatic navigation of friends' conflicting opinions. Through such communications and actions, we help

demonstrate that relationships and how we deal with others matters.

We cannot inculcate Hillel's golden rule in the next generation if we communicate that we value something — but live in such a way that directly contradicts those values. The school/family that voices how much they value caring social behavior, but then describes “those people” who are different or complains about having to spend time with a particular person or group, will quickly be seen as hypocritical. In contrast, we build upon our values and strengthen their transmission when we demonstrate lived examples of *bein adam l'chavero*.

This can be challenging for parents and educators since much of adult social life occurs outside the view of children and students. We may therefore need to unmask our actions

— to make youngsters aware of both what we do and why we do it. For example, we might routinely bring food to community members in need — doing so while children are at school. If we ensure children see the food preparation, and if we tell them, “we are cooking for the Levine family who just had a baby, because it is nice to help people,” we convert our private actions to a public lesson.

Equally important is being exemplars of acceptance of difference and respect for all. Sharing with children and teens that a social media post makes us angry, but that we are taking time to calm down before responding, sends an important message. We can directly explain to our children and teens the reality that there are points of view, lifestyles, and practices that are strange to us, and that we don’t agree with, but we can and should treat every person with maximal respect, as being *b’tzelem Elokim*. The final ingredient in raising and educating caring children who can get along with others is seemingly the most obvious, yet it is often omitted. We assume that social skills will be learned just as easily as children learn to walk and talk. Simple social skills — such as making eye contact and answering questions are learned by most children without any direct instruction. Parents and educators teach more complex social skills

in many ways. In early childhood, we tell children to use their words, share their toys, wait their turn, and more. We continue throughout their childhood and teen years, discussing and explaining social conventions and manners. We teach indirectly as well, pointing out the behavior of characters in books and videos, helping children learn to recognize their emotions and those of others, and to act with care and compassion.

One of the most important social skills and social tools we can offer is that of perspective taking — being able to put ourselves in the shoes of another. Neurological research has identified a 10-section empathy circuit in the brain. Evolutionary biologists and psychologists confirm that we are social animals, innately wired to care for our fellow creatures. As is true of any characteristic, some are born with greater empathic abilities than others. But all can grow their empathy muscles.

Curiosity is a powerful tool for empathy development — especially curiosity about the lives and experiences of others. Consider the Canadian-based program, Roots of Empathy, that brings infants into elementary and middle school classrooms. Simply observing and learning about an experience of the world quite different than their current one expanded the perspective

taking of participating students, who also demonstrated enhanced empathic abilities, decreased aggressive behavior, and improved emotional intelligence (see research summary at [www.rootsofempathy.org](http://www.rootsofempathy.org)). Exposure to other perspectives requires careful and intentional approaches in our somewhat insular schools and communities. We can promote respectful curiosity about those who are different while concurrently communicating the richness of Torah living.

Learning any new skill and developing mastery of it requires considerable repetition and practice. Teaching children and teens to get along is no different. We will need to value, live, and teach the lessons of caring and empathy many times over. It is a labor intensive but very worthwhile investment with dual benefits. Since psychologists have demonstrated that those with strong people skills, emotional intelligence, empathy, and strong friendships fare better in life, our efforts clearly enrich our children’s lives. These efforts help young people develop the will and skill to live by the Torah of Hillel — not only how to get along with each other, but how to respect, support, nurture, and grow those around them — which benefits both our Jewish communities and the world at large.



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## TES, TOV, AND TISHA B'AV: THE HIDDEN PROMISE OF FUTURE REDEMPTION

**T**isha B'Av is a day of mourning over a great number of communal tragedies that have occurred over the course of a long and painful exile. While the date is most closely associated with the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash, the Mishna (*Ta'anis* 26a) teaches that the Bar Kochba revolt against Roman rule in Judea came to a violent and bloody end on Tisha B'Av, when Jews were massacred at Beitar in 133 CE. One year later, on the same date, the Roman general Turnus Rufus plowed over the Temple Mount, reducing the site to rubble.

Other tragedies occurred on or near Tisha B'Av, including the beginning of the First Crusade in 1096, then expulsions from England in 1290, France in 1306, and Spain in 1492. Germany entered the First World War on Tisha B'Av, 1914, starting the international conflict that would

ultimately result in the Second World War and the Holocaust a few decades later. The Nazi's Final Solution received formal approval on Tisha B'Av, 1941, and the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto began a year later, on Tisha B'Av, 1942.

Many of these events have been incorporated into *Kinos*, reflecting the status of Tisha B'Av as more than just a day of mourning over the Batei Mikdash, but a day of mourning over the pains and travails of exile and *hester panim* in general.

And it all began when the spies returned from their forty-day tour of Eretz Yisrael, thousands of years ago. Carrying with them the bounty of the land, they extolled Eretz Yisrael as a "land flowing with milk and honey," as Hashem had promised them. But then they quickly turned to words of warning and caution: Its inhabitants are mighty, its cities huge

and fortified, and the offspring of the giants dwell there. "We cannot go up against these people," they said, "for they are stronger than we. It is a land that consumes its inhabitants" (Bamidbar 13:27-32).

The spies' report frightened the Jewish people, and as night fell, they wept. "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this desert," they complained to Moshe and Aharon. "Why does Hashem bring us to this land to fall by the sword, our wives and children will be as spoils. Is it not better for us to return to Egypt?" (ibid. 14:1-3).

That night was Tisha B'Av, and as punishment for their faithlessness, not only was that generation barred from entering Eretz Yisrael, but Hashem established Tisha B'Av as a day of mourning. The Gemara (*Ta'anis* 29a) records Rebi Yochanan saying, "Hashem said: You wept needlessly



that night, therefore I will establish for you a day of weeping for generations.”

We might think that the date — Tisha B’Av — was mere happenstance; because the Jewish people’s response to the spies’ report occurred on Tisha B’Av, the day was doomed to become a day of weeping for generations to come. The Gemara, however, implies otherwise.

While calculating how we know that the spies returned on the 8th of Av, and the Jewish people’s cries occurred on the 9th, the Gemara explains that the spies left on the 29th of Sivan and toured Eretz Yisrael for 40 days. That would mean, however, that the spies returned on the 9th of Av, and the Jewish people’s reaction, and the subsequent decree barring them from Eretz Yisrael, occurred on the 10th, and not on Tisha B’Av. Abaye resolves this difficulty by answering that the month of Tammuz of that year was a full month of 30 days, so when the spies returned, it was the 8th of Av. Abaye adds that this is alluded to in a pasuk in Eichah (1:15): “He has called an appointed time (*mo’ed*) against me to crush my young men.” *Mo’ed* in this context is interpreted to be a reference to Rosh Chodesh, and the verse means, Hashem created an additional Rosh Chodesh so that Tisha B’Av would become a day of destruction.

Abaye’s allusion indicates that the establishment of Tisha B’Av as a date of communal tragedy was not coincidental, but rather divinely orchestrated. Hashem purposefully made Tammuz of that year a full month of 30 days so that the decree barring that generation of Jews from Eretz Yisrael would specifically fall out on the 9th of Av, and the same day, by consequence, would become a day of weeping for generations. What

purpose was there in the selection of this date? Why would it matter if the events of Tisha B’Av occurred on the ninth or the tenth or any other date on the calendar?

To answer this question, we need to consider another event, one that occurred many hundreds of years later, just before the destruction of the First Beis HaMikdash. Chazal tell us that the prophet Yirmiyahu wrote Megillas Eichah (*Bava Basra* 15a), and the Midrash (*Eichah Rabbah* Pesichah 28, Parasha 3, 1) further tells us that the composition of the megillah is recounted in a dramatic story found in Sefer Yirmiyahu (ch. 36). During the reign of King Yehoyakim (the third-last king of Yehudah), Hashem told Yirmiyahu to take a scroll and write upon it all the words Hashem spoke to him concerning the fate of Yisrael and Yehudah. The contents of the scroll were an early version of Megillas Eichah, comprising the first two and fourth chapters of the final edition, “*Eichah yashvah*,” “*Eichah ya’iv*,” and “*Eichah yu’am*.” All three chapters were structured as an acrostic covering the 22 letters of the Aleph-beis.

Yirmiyahu instructed his scribe, Baruch ben Neriah, to read the scroll before the Jewish people in the Beis HaMikdash, in hopes of encouraging them to repent, and avoid the impending destruction of Yerushalayim foretold in Yirmiyahu’s prophecies. When the king, Yehoyakim, heard of the public reading of Eichah, he took the scroll, rent it, and cast it into a fire. Subsequently, Hashem instructed Yirmiyahu to rewrite the original book on a new scroll. And when Yirmiyahu dictated the original text to his scribe, Baruch ben Neri’ah, he added “*devarim rabim ka’heimah*,” many more similar words. Chazal understand this verse to be an allusion

to what would become the third chapter of Eichah, “*ani ha’gever*,” which is a triple acrostic — unlike the first two and fourth chapters, which are structured as single acrostics. Instead of one verse corresponding to each of the 22 letters of the Aleph-beis, there are three verses for each letter.

Two questions emerge from this story: First, why did Yirmiyahu think that it was necessary to add an additional chapter to the original composition? In the aftermath of Yehoyakim’s burning of the first scroll, Hashem commanded Yirmiyahu to rewrite “all the original words that were on the first scroll.” What was Yirmiyahu’s purpose in adding “many more similar words.”

Furthermore, in light of Chazal’s understanding that these “many more similar words” were the third chapter of Eichah, the order of the final composition becomes difficult to understand.

Given that the original composition comprised what would become the first, second and fourth chapters, we would expect that these passages would be grouped together as the first three chapters of Megillas Eichah, and what would become the third chapter would actually be added after the original composition. Why did Yirmiyahu add the new chapter, “*Ani ha’gever*,” in between the chapters of the first edition of Megillas Eichah?

Rabbi Chagai Preschel, in his book *Chagvei HaSelah al Megilas Eichah*, indicates a comment of the Maharasha (*Bava Kamma* 55a, *Chiddushei Aggados* s.v. *Ha’ro’eh*) that addresses these two issues.

The Gemara quotes Rebi Yehoshua as saying, “If one sees the letter ‘tes’ in his dreams, it is a good sign for him,” and explains that since the first appearance

of the letter “tes” in the Torah is in the word “tov” (“*Va’yar Elokim es ha’or ki tov*,” And Elokim saw that the light was good [Bereishis 1:4]), “tes” is therefore a positive sign.

Based on this Gemara, the Maharsha explains the ordering of the chapters in Megillas Eichah: While the letter “tes” generally connotes good, on *tes b’Av* (Tisha B’Av), the two Batei Mikdash were destroyed, and the “tes” was transformed to represent evil and suffering. The first two acrostic chapters of Eichah, “*Eichah yashvah*” and “*Eichah ya’iv*,” were composed by Yirmiyahu to represent the destruction of both Batei Mikdash. Therefore, the verses corresponding to “tes” in both chapters connote evil and tragedy:

טְמֵאָתָהּ בְּשׂוּלֶיהָ לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרֵיתָהּ וַתֵּרָד  
פְּלִאִים אֵין מִנָּחֵם לָהּ רָאָה ה' אֶת עֲגִי כִי  
הַגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב.

*Her impurity is on her hems, she was heedless of her end, She has sunk appallingly, With none to comfort her.— See, O Lord, my misery; How the enemy jeers!*

#### Eichah 1:9

טָבְעוּ בָּאָרֶץ שַׁעֲרֶיהָ אֶבֶד וְשַׁבַּר בְּרִיחֶיהָ מִלְכָּה  
וְשָׂרֶיהָ בְּגוֹזִים אֵין תּוֹרָה גַּם נְבִיאֶיהָ לֹא מָצְאוּ  
חֲזוֹן מֵה'.

*Her gates have sunken into the earth, He has destroyed and broken her bars Her king and her leaders are in exile, Instruction is no more; Her prophets, too, receive no vision from the Lord.*

#### Eichah 2:9

But lest we think that destruction of the two Batei Mikdash signified the removal of all good from the Jewish people, and the permanent shift of “tes” from “tov” to evil, Yirmiyahu composed what would ultimately be the fourth chapter of Eichah, which concludes with the words “*Tam avonech bas-Tzion, lo yosif l’hagloseich*,” “Your iniquity is expiated, O daughter

of Zion, He will not exile you again.” The destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash and the subsequent exile will be the last exile the Jewish people face. Once they return to Eretz Yisrael, and the Beis HaMikdash is rebuilt, the scourge of dispersion will never come upon us again. And as a hint to the re-emergence of this “tov,” Yirmiyahu began the verse corresponding to “tes” with the word “tov”:

טוֹבִים הָיוּ חֲלָלֵי חֶרֶב מִחֲלָלֵי רָעָב שֶׁהֵם יָזוּבוּ  
מִדְּקָרִים מִתְּנוּבוֹת שָׂדֵי.  
*Better were those slain by the sword than those slain by famine. Who pined away, [as though] wounded, For lack of the fruits of the field.*

#### Eicha 4:9

This subtle hint, that the “tes,” which once connoted tragedy and destruction, would once again come to represent “tov,” was later prophesized by Zechariah with his famous words:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צֶבֶ-אוֹת צוֹם הָרְבִיעִי וְצוֹם  
הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְצוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה  
לְבֵית יְהוּדָה לְשִׂשׂוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה וּלְמַעֲדִים טוֹבִים  
וְהָאֶמֶת וְהַשְּׁלוֹם אָהֲבוּ.

*So said the Lord of Hosts, the fast of the fourth and the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of tenth, shall be for the house of Yehudah for joy and happiness and for festivals, but you must love honesty and integrity.*

#### Zechariah 8:19

The “tes” of Tisha B’Av will no longer be a day of mourning and pain, but a day of “tov,” a day of goodness and joy and happiness.

However, when Yehoyakim burned the original scroll, Yirmiyahu was afraid that his actions would have dire spiritual consequences for the Jewish people, and the destruction of the scroll would result in the failure of his prophecy that the “tes” of Tisha B’Av will revert to being a day of goodness

and joy. Therefore, Yirmiyahu added another chapter in between the first two and the fourth. Unlike the original composition, this chapter comprised a triple acrostic, and for the verses corresponding to the letter “tes,” Yirmiyahu wrote the word “tov” three times:

טוֹב ה' לִקְנוֹ לִנְפֹשׁ תִּדְרָשְׁנוּ. טוֹב וְיִחַל וְדוֹמָם  
לְתַשׁוּעָתָהּ. טוֹב לְגִבּוֹר כִּי יִשָּׂא עַל בְּנֵעוּרָיו.

*Hashem is good to those who trust in Him, to the soul that seek Him. It is good to hope silently for Hashem's salvation. It is good for a man that he bear a yoke in his youth.*

#### Eichah 3:25-27

In this fashion, Yirmiyahu intended to reaffirm and ratify the promise written in the subsequent chapter: “*Lo yosif l’hagloseich*,” Hashem will not exile you again. The “tes” of Tisha B’Av will permanently become a “tes” of “tov.”

The Maharsha’s approach explains why Yirmiyahu thought it necessary to add an extra chapter to the original scroll of Megilas Eichah, and why he arranged the chapters of Eichah in the order we have it today. It also sheds light on our first question: Why did Hashem orchestrate that Tisha B’Av, of all the dates in the calendar, would become the “day of weeping for generations”?

The selection of Tisha B’Av was due to the significance of the 9th, symbolized by the letter “tes.” “Tes,” as the Gemara in *Bava Kamma* tells us, is generally a good sign, because the first appearance of the letter in the Torah is in the word “tov,” good. Hashem chose Tisha B’Av as the date of communal tragedy and destruction to intimate that even though the day would serve, for more than two thousand years, as a day of mourning, its essential nature is a day of “tov.” And even though that “tov” would be hidden and obscured by the churban and the travails of exile,

when the exile comes to an end, and Tisha B'Av becomes a day of gladness and joy, that “*tov*” will be permanently reinstituted. Behind the tragedy lies a promise of hope, symbolized by the very date chosen by Hashem to be the day of communal catastrophe.

This approach helps explain several halachos regarding the tefillos of Tisha B'Av. Even though Tisha B'Av is a day of profound mourning, and many practices and customs reflect that reality, there are several tefillos that are omitted because Tisha B'Av is simultaneously treated as a festival. While Abaye interprets the aforementioned verse, “He has called an appointed time (*mo'ed*) against me to crush my young men” (Eichah 1:15), to allude to the additional day of Rosh Chodesh established to ensure that Tisha B'Av would become the day of communal tragedy, the simple interpretation of the verse is that Tisha B'Av itself is called a “*mo'ed*.”

For this reason, the *Shulchan Aruch* writes that Tachanun is omitted on both erev Tisha Bav (*Orach Chaim* 552:12) and Tisha B'Av (559:4), just like Tachanun is omitted on the eve of a festival and on the festival itself. Likewise, if Tisha B'Av falls out on Sunday, “*tzidkascha tzedek*” is

omitted at Mincha on the proceeding Shabbos (ibid. 1), and “*Vihi noam*” is omitted on Motzoei Shabbos (ibid. 2). Furthermore, the Rema (ibid. 4) tells us that Slichos are not recited on Tisha B'Av, because Tisha B'Av is called a *mo'ed*.

These omissions are, perhaps, some of the most perplexing features of Tisha B'Av. How can the saddest day in the Jewish calendar be considered a *mo'ed* at the same time, and warrant the exclusion of tefillos in the manner of a Rosh Chodesh or Yom Tov?

The *Aruch HaShulchan* (552:14) explains that Tisha B'Av is treated as a *mo'ed* to demonstrate our confidence in Hashem's promise that the day will ultimately become one of joy and gladness, as foretold by Zechariah. But this answer seems insufficient, because if our treatment of Tisha B'Av as a *mo'ed* is in anticipation of the date eventually becoming a holiday, the same laws should apply to the other communal fasts as well, which are also included in Zechariah's prophecy, and yet the halacha is that Tachanun and Selichos are recited on those days.

If we understand, however, that the very date of Tisha B'Av reflects Hashem's promise that the day will ultimately become a joyous

festival, we can explain why Tisha B'Av is treated as a *mo'ed*, and what distinguishes it from other communal fasts. Tisha B'Av is not a *mo'ed* in anticipation of the fulfillment of Hashem's promise, as recorded by the prophet Zecharia. It is treated as a *mo'ed* because the very date, the ninth of Av, reflects and symbolizes the eternal promise of “*tov*,” Hashem's guarantee that our suffering in exile is transient, and the final, permanent redemption is forthcoming. This feature is unique to Tisha B'Av alone, and thus the three other communal fasts are not treated as a *mo'ed*, and, consequentially, both Tachanun and Selichos are recited on them.

“Hashem's kindness has not ended, nor are His mercies exhausted” (Eichah 3:22). The “*tes*” of Tisha B'Av is testament to that enduring assurance that Hashem has not removed His kindness from us. “*Tes*” signifies “*tov*,” and even on the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, when centuries of tragedies are remembered and mourned, a promise of redemption and hope is inexorably linked to the verse date of Tisha B'Av. The same promise articulated by the prophet Zechariah: “The fast of the fifth ... shall be for the house of Yehudah for joy and happiness and for festivals.”

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## FINDING COMFORT IN THE DEPTHS OF MOURNING: THE UNIQUE PRAYER OF NACHEIM

As the day of Tisha B'Av winds to a close, the poignant tefillah of *Nacheim* is recited at Minchah. Its piercing words beseech Hashem for comfort on behalf of Yerushalayim and her mourners. Interestingly, an analysis of the source for *Nacheim* reveals several striking variations between its initial and its contemporary forms. The original presentation of the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Berachot* 4:3) records in the name of R. Chiya that *Nacheim* is the “*mei'ein ha-me'ora*,” an additional prayer related to a day's events (e.g. *Ya'aleh Ve-yavo*, *Al Ha-nissim*), of Tisha B'Av:

א"ר אחא בר יצחק בשם רבי חייא דציפורין  
יחיד בט"ב צריך להזכיר מעין המאורע מהו  
אומר רחם ה' אלקינו ברחמך הרבים ובחסדיך  
הנאמנים עלינו ועל עמך ישראל ועל ירושלים

עירך ועל ציון משכן כבודך...

R. Acha Bar Yitzchak said in the name of R. Chiya of Tziporin, “An individual must mention “*mei'ein ha-me'ora*” on Tisha B'Av.” What does he recite? [He should say,] “Hashem, our G-d, with Your abundant mercy and trustworthy kindness, have mercy on us, on the Jewish nation, on Yerushalayim Your city, and on Tziyon the abode of Your glory...”

From the Talmud Yerushalmi, three distinctions between the original description of *Nacheim* and our recitation of it emerge. First, while our text of the Talmud Yerushalmi employs the language of “*racheim*,” “have mercy,”<sup>1</sup> we request instead “*nacheim*,” “comfort [us],” the version accepted by Rif (*Ta'anit* 10a *be-dapei ha-Rif*) and Rosh (*Ta'anit* 4:34). What are the implications of our usage of

“*nacheim*” for how we understand the essence of this prayer?

Second, whereas the Talmud Yerushalmi does not limit the recitation of *Nacheim* to Minchah, we follow the ruling of Rama (*Orach Chaim* 557:1) and recite *Nacheim* exclusively at Minchah.<sup>2</sup> Rama (*ibid.*) justifies his position by noting that Minchah is particularly apt for the prayer of *Nacheim* since the Beit Ha-mikdash was set aflame during the afternoon. Rama's explanation, however, prompts an obvious rejoinder: do we yearn for comfort only while the Beit Ha-mikdash was burned in the afternoon and not when it was captured and seized at night and in the morning?!

Finally, the continuation of the

Talmud Yerushalmi (ibid.) highlights another distinction between contemporary recitation of *Nacheim* and its origin. After questioning in what context of Shemoneh Esrei the tefillah of *Nacheim* should be added, R. Mana concludes that an addition that pertains to the future should be incorporated as part of “*Avodah*” (i.e. after *Retzei*) while one that concerns the past should be integrated with “*Hoda’ah*” (i.e. after *Modim*).<sup>3</sup> Various authorities debate about which category *Nacheim* belongs, but contemporary practice, surprisingly, is to do neither! Rather, *Nacheim* is added to the berachah of “*Bonei Yerushalayim*.”

What accounts for the seemingly puzzling contemporary recitation of *Nacheim*? Why does our version veer from the Talmud Yerushalmi’s presentation of *Nacheim*, and what does our practice reflect about the contribution of *Nacheim* to our experience of Tisha B’Av?

The paradigm of *nichum aveilim*, the mitzvah to console a mourner, sheds light on these anomalies. At first glance, the requirement to comfort *aveilim* is quite intuitive in nature. Basic to interpersonal relationships is the principle of “*ve-ahavtah le-reiachah ka-mochah*,” the obligation to do for another as one would desire for himself. This principle dictates that just as a mourner generally seeks out comfort for his pain, so too, one is obligated to provide consolation for others. Indeed, Rambam (*Aveil* 14:1) codifies “*le-nacheim aveilim*” as a rabbinic commandment that satisfies the biblical principle of “*ve-ahavtah le-reiachah ka-mochah*.”<sup>4</sup>

However, much evidence suggests that *nichum aveilim* also plays an intrinsic role in the very process of mourning.

The Gemara (*Shabbat* 152a-b) relates:

אמר רב יהודה: מת שאין לו מנחמין הולכין עשרה בני אדם ויושבין במקומו. והוא דשכיב בשבבותיה דרב יהודה לא היו לו מנחמין, כל יומא הוה דבר רב יהודה בי עשרה, ויתבי בדוכתיה. לאחר שבעה ימים איתחזי ליה בחילמיה דרב יהודה, ואמר ליה: תנוח דעתך שהנחת את דעתי.

*Rav Yehudah said, “If a deceased has no menachamin, ten people should go and sit in his place.” In the neighborhood of Rav Yehudah, there was once a person who died and had no menachamin. Every day, Rav Yehudah would send ten people who would sit in the place of the deceased. After seven days, [the deceased] appeared to Rav Yehudah in a dream and said to him, “You should be calmed since you have calmed me.”*

The word “*menachamin*” requires clarification. To whom does it refer? Maharsha (*Chidushei Aggadot* ibid.) argues that “*menachamin*” means “comforters,” and as such, Rav Yehudah’s requirement is that ten people comfort the soul of the deceased. Rashi (ibid.), however, claims that it means “mourners who need to be comforted,” in which case Rav Yehudah’s requirement is for ten people to *mourn* the deceased. Seemingly, though, Rashi’s interpretation confronts an obvious problem; if “*menachamin*” refers to mourners, why does Rav Yehudah use the term “*menachamin*” in place of the simpler “*aveilim*”?!

Rambam’s codification of Rav Yehudah’s requirement may resolve this difficulty. Rambam (*Aveil* 13:4) agrees with Rashi and defines “*menachamin*” as “*aveilim le-hitnacheim*,” “mourners to be comforted.” Moreover, Rambam adds that Rav Yehudah’s requirement is not only that ten people should substitute as mourners but also

that the community should console these replacement mourners. *Lechem Mishneh* (ibid.) wonders: what is Rambam’s source that these substitute mourners must be comforted? After all, Rav Yehudah says only that ten people should go and sit in the place of the deceased, but he does not mention that they must be consoled by others!

Apparently, Rambam extrapolates from the quizzical usage of “*menachamin*” that indispensable to the process of *aveilut* is the presence of *nechamah*. According to Rambam, *aveilim* are not just those who mourn but those who are consoled, “*aveilim le-hitnacheim*.” Rav Yehudah employs the term “*menachamin*” since, by definition, *aveilim* receive consolation. Rambam infers further that implicit in Rav Yehudah’s requirement for substitute mourners is the obligation for others to comfort those mourners; on Rambam’s view, integral to mourning is the *nichum* of a community.

From Rambam’s understanding of Rav Yehudah’s requirement emerges a dual status of *nichum aveilim*. On the one hand, *nichum aveilim* is a fulfillment of *gemilut chesed*, while on the other hand, it is a definitional aspect of the process of mourning. As R. Soloveitchik comments, “If there is a mourner and people do not come to give him words of comfort and solace, the process of mourning is not complete.”<sup>5</sup> Rambam (*Aveil* 13:1–4) even codifies the procedural requirements of *nichum aveilim* before mentioning (ibid. 14:1) that *nichum aveilim* fulfills the commandment of “*ve-ahavtah le-reiachah ka-mochah*!” This ordering suggests that according to Rambam, *nichum aveilim* constitutes an essential facet of the



process of mourning, separate and apart from its status as *gemilut chesed*.<sup>6</sup>

Rambam's position demonstrates the intimate relationship between *nechamah* and *aveilut*. The interweaving of *nechamah* within the fabric of *aveilut* suggests that halakhic mourning must be coupled with and tempered by feelings of faith, optimism, and hope. Without doubt, *nechamah* is not meant to dilute the experience of mourning; on the contrary, *nechamah* enhances *aveilut* by lending it a necessary context and framework. *Aveilut* unbounded by *nechamah* runs the risk of a mourner descending into an infinite sea of sorrow, unable to integrate his painful loss as part of his continued religious future.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, *aveilut* juxtaposed with *nechamah* ensures that a mourner, while engaged in profound and authentic mourning for his loss, maintains a foundation of optimism that will guide him through his *aveilut* and into his future.

Rambam's view of *nechamah* as an integral part of the experience of *aveilut de-yachid* has ramifications also for *aveilut de-rabbim*, the communal mourning of Tisha B'Av. *Aveilut de-rabbim*, just like *aveilut de-yachid*, must be imbued with the element of *nechamah*. With the recitation of *Nacheim*, we proclaim that we are no longer mired in the immediate shock and chaos that results from the loss of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. Instead, we are ready to embark upon a stage of reflective mourning that is complete only with the presence of *nechamah*. Our beseeching of Hashem for consolation reflects that we are now mourners in need of comfort, not just to ease our pain but to ensure that our mourning is inextricably linked to a sense of optimism and hope.

If so, the anomalies associated with *tefillat Nacheim* actually highlight the indispensability of *Nacheim* to our experience of *aveilut de-rabbim*. First, the usage of "*nacheim*," as opposed to "*racheim*," conveys that the prayer is not just a plea for our exile to come to a speedy close but one that conjures up the idea of *nechamah*. By petitioning "*nacheim*," we imply that our *aveilut* is not one that impedes our future. Rather, it is tinged with a feeling of optimism, with a recognition that despite our current mourning, our future still exists.

Second, the limitation of "*nacheim*" to Minchah, to the afternoon of Tisha B'Av, can be understood as well. As evinced by many of the legal changes that coincide with it, the afternoon of Tisha B'Av marks a new stage in the Tisha B'Av experience.<sup>8</sup> Ritva (Responsum 63) presents the remarkable view that Tisha B'Av is divided into discrete phases of mourning. The night and morning parallel an individual's *aninut*, the stage a relative of a deceased undergoes prior to the burial. In contrast, the afternoon of Tisha B'Av correlates to *aveilut*, the mourning of relatives that follows burial. Since Tisha B'Av afternoon initiates the stage of reflective mourning, it is the time that allows for and must be linked to the concept of *nechamah*.<sup>9</sup> R. Soloveitchik explains that ironically, the characterization of Tisha B'Av afternoon as the time of *nechamah* lies at the core of Rama's explanation of why we limit *Nacheim* to Minchah.<sup>10</sup> The destruction of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, which transpires at midday, counter-intuitively affords us the most comfort because it illustrates that Hashem has chosen to destroy the Temple but not the Jewish people.

Finally, the addition of *Nacheim* to "*Bonei Yerushalayim*," as opposed to *Avodah* or *Hoda'ah*, also follows the pattern of changes that underscores the true character of *tefillat Nacheim*. To add *Nacheim* to *Avodah* would be to reduce it to a plea to Hashem to end our current exile. To add it to *Hoda'ah* would be to circumscribe it to an expression of gratitude for preparing our future redemption and preserving our nationhood. By incorporating *Nacheim* in "*Bonei Yerushalayim*," we accentuate the unique role of *Nacheim* as a prayer that reflects the infusion of *nechamah* within our *aveilut* for Yerushalayim.<sup>11</sup> The berachah of "*Bonei Yerushalayim*," the berachah that implicitly recognizes the loss of Yerushalayim, is the perfect forum for the addition of *Nacheim*, the prayer that blends *nechamah* into the process of mourning that loss.

In truth, the theme of consolation is woven into every stage of our mourning on Tisha B'Av. The notion of consolation lurks in the background throughout the experience of *aveilut de-rabbim*. Beginning with our recitation of Eichah, we refuse to conclude the *megillah* on a harsh note of rejection and scorn. Instead, we repeat the verse "*Hashiveinu Hashem eilechah ve-nashuvah chadeish yameinu ke-kedem*," "Return us to You, Hashem, and we will return, renew our days like the days of old" (Eichah 5:21).<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, as R. Soloveitchik explains, our recitation of *Kinot* is also intertwined with the motif of *nechamah*,<sup>13</sup> as we express our steadfast belief in our return to Israel and say, "*Eini chiketah le-chazon ben Berechyah*," "My eye pines for the [fulfillment of the] vision of ben Berechyah (Zecharyah)."<sup>14</sup> We then reach the afternoon of Tisha B'Av and, together with the recitation



of *Nacheim*, begin the process of reflective mourning contextualized by the enduring optimism of *nechamah*. Eventually, we transition from the mourning of Tisha B'Av to the *shiva de-nechemta*, the seven *haftarot* that, according to Tosafot (*Megillah* 31b), increase successively in the potency of their consolation. These various instantiations of *nechamah* permeate our experience of *aveilut de-rabbim*.

On Tisha B'Av 5781, the recitation of *Nacheim* takes on outsized significance. This year, we mourn not only for *churban ha-bayit* but also for the inexplicable tragedies that befell our people during this difficult phase of our history. The integration of *nechamah*, a sense of genuine hope and optimism, within a most painful and heart-wrenching process of *aveilut* helps calibrate our mourning experience. It ensures that rather than becoming lost in an abyss of despair, we find consolation in knowing that we can turn to the Almighty and ask “*Nacheim Hashem Elokeinu*,” Hashem, our G-d, please comfort us.

## Endnotes

1. This text is codified by Rambam (*Tefillah* 2:14).
2. Rosh (ibid.) wonders why we limit the recitation of *Nacheim* to Minchah. *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 557:1), according to *Mishnah Berurah* (ibid.), rules that *Nacheim* is recited also at *Ma'ariv* and *Shacharit*.
3. *Abudraham* (*Tefillot Ha-chol*) cites the opinion of R. Gershom b. R. Shlomo, who posits that if one mistakenly omits *Nacheim* from “*Bonei Yerushalayim*,” then he should recite it as part of *Hoda'ah*, which is its original

placement. In contrast, *Taz* (*Orach Chaim* 557:1) assumes that because *Nacheim* is a future-oriented prayer, its original placement is within *Avodah*. See *Eliyah Rabbah* (ibid.), who cites *Rashi Al Ha-Rif* (*Ta'anit* 10 *be-dapei ha-Rif*) as characterizing *Nacheim* as a past-oriented prayer since it pertains to the past *churban ha-bayit*.

4. *Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah* (*Berachot* 11b *be-dapei ha-Rif*) concur with Rambam's view that comforting a mourner constitutes a fulfillment of a biblical principle, but based on the Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 30b), they characterize it as a fulfillment of “*ve-hoda'ta lahem et ha-derech — zo gemilut chasadim*,” “and you shall teach them the path — this refers to acts of kindness.”

5. *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways*, pg. 42.

6. See also Rambam (*Aveil* 13:2), where Rambam describes the procedure of *shurat ha-menachamin*, the lining up of onlookers who console a mourner after his deceased relative is buried. Rambam (ibid.) records that the consolers say to the mourner, “*tenuchamu min ha-shamayim*,” “you should be consoled from above.” According to *Perishah* (*Yoreh Deiah* 393:3), the mere wish of “*tenuchamu min ha-shamayim*” does not suffice to fulfill the *gemilut chesed* component of *nichum aveilim*, which requires that one empathize with a mourner by at least sitting together with him. If so, Rambam's procedure of *shurat ha-menachamin* also reflects the second component of *nichum aveilim*, namely, the integration of *nechamah* within the process of *aveilut*. Rambam (ibid.) then emphasizes that on every day of the seven days of *aveilut*, “*ve-chol yom va-yom mi-shiv'at yemei aveilut*,” people should come to the mourner to comfort him. The accentuation of “every day” suggests that *nichum aveilim* plays a definitional role in the observance of *aveilut*.

7. *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deiah* 394:1, 6) records two *halachot* that buttress this idea. On the one hand, he states, “*ein mitkashin al ha-meit yoteir midai*,” “we do not exaggeratively grieve a loss.” On the other hand, he chastises one who does not mourn

properly and dubs him an “*achzari*,” “a cruel person.” The combination of these two *halachot* demonstrates that *aveilut* must be both deeply felt but also non-paralyzing.

8. Rama (*Orach Chaim* 554:22) notes that the custom to refrain from work on Tisha B'Av applies only until midday. *Shulchan Aruch* (ibid. 555:1) records that *tallit* and *tefillin* are donned at Minchah. Rama (ibid. 559:3) rules that after the conclusion of *Shacharit*, we sit on benches, and *Magein Avraham* (ibid.) explains that according to Rama, one may sit on benches at midday. Rama (ibid. 559:4) also records that “*tikkabeil*” is reinserted into *kaddish* during Minchah.

9. Ritva (ibid.) advances the novel view that the prayer should be recited during all *tefillot*, but the usage of “*nacheim*” should be employed during the night and morning while “*nacheim*” should be reserved for the afternoon!

10. *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways*, pg. 35.

11. The characterization of *Nacheim* as a *tefillah* that is not just a plea but one that captures the nature of *aveilut de-rabbim* coheres well with *Nacheim*'s status as “*mei-ein ha-me'ora*.” See the debate between Rama (*Orach Chaim* 557:1) and Gra (ibid.) regarding whether *Nacheim* is added to *Birkat Ha-mazon* in circumstances in which one must eat on Tisha B'Av. Rama's ruling that *Nacheim* is recited in *Birkat Ha-mazon* further emphasizes its “*mei-ein ha-me'ora*” status, which can be understood in light of our perspective that *Nacheim* reflects a critical element of *aveilut de-Rabbim*. See also *Chochmat Shlomo* (ibid.) for other justifications for the addition of *Nacheim* to *Birkat Ha-mazon*.

12. See Rashi (*Eichah* 5:23), as interpreted by R. Michael Rosensweig, “Tisha B'Av: A Day of Tears, A Day of Hope, A Catalyst for *Teshuvah* *Me'ahavah*,” *torahweb.org*.

13. *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways*, pg. 45.

14. *Kinah* 7, “*Shavat suru meni*.”



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## RABBI MICHOEL BER WEISSMANDL'S "KINAS MIN HAMETZAR": A KINAH FROM THE DEPTHS

It has become commonplace in many communities to recite special *kinos* on Tisha B'Av to commemorate the Holocaust, such as those authored by R. Shimon Schwab and R. Shlomo Halberstam, the Bobover Rebbe.<sup>1</sup> However, the *kinah* of R. Michoel Ber Weissmandl is far less well-known. In fact, until fairly recently, R. Weissmandl and the story of his herculean rescue efforts during the war were either ignored, downplayed, or misunderstood by historians.<sup>2</sup> Due to the scholarship of

Dr. Abraham Fuchs that has started to change.<sup>3</sup> However, his *kinah* has not yet made its way into the Tisha B'av liturgy.

The popularization of Holocaust *kinos* can largely be attributed to the efforts of R. Pinchas Herzka.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to R. Herzka, R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach expressed his support of his goal to establish the recitation of *kinos* to commemorate the Shoah.<sup>5</sup> However, R. Auerbach thought that, perhaps because of the community's

lack of cohesion, it would be nearly impossible to establish one specific *kinah* to be recited. The only *kinah* R. Auerbach believed could become standard, because of the "special merit of its author," was the *kinah* of R. Michoel Ber Weissmandl.<sup>6</sup>

### The Story of R. Michoel Ber Weissmandl

R. Chaim Michoel Dov Weissmandl (1903-1957), known as Reb Michoel

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*My thanks to R. Aharon Lopiansky, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Gedolah of Greater Washington, who was the first to introduce me to R. Weissmandl and his story. Thank you to R. Elchanan Adler, Rosh Yeshiva at RIETS, who greatly improved this article. Thank you to R. Moshe Lieber for directing me to R. Weissmandl's kinah and for marshalling his wealth of knowledge and insight to assist me with this project.*



Ber, was born in northern Hungary, in an area known as Oberland. He studied in the Nitra Yeshiva under R. Shmuel Dovid Unger who later became his father-in-law. At a young age, his remarkable Talmudic genius was noted by the Chofetz Chaim and R. Chaim Ozer Grodzinski.<sup>7</sup> R. Weissmandl was a unique blend of staunch traditionalism and broad interest in the outside world. Like the scion of his community's *mesorah*, the Chasam Sofer, R. Weissmandl defied simplistic contemporary categories. He had a profound and vibrant religiosity, but was in no way an isolationist. On the contrary, he operated with a distinct sensitivity, broadness, and diplomacy. He was not *Chassidish*. He was not *Litvish*. He was an *Oberlander*.

He was a deeply spiritual and sensitive soul who touched anyone who came into contact with him — secular and religious alike. After the war, he met with the economist Alvin Johnson during his attempts to rebuild the Nitra Yeshiva in Mount Kisco. Johnson was completely taken by him and his mission. In Johnson's words:

*To have under your hand a group of seventy young persons who have experienced the most burning bitterness of life; to draw them together into a spiritual unity; to endow them with the divine privilege of working, each for all and all for each, to make life into religion and religion into life — what nobler work could a man do under the sun!...*

*You have been through fire. What was unessential in you was burned away, and alas, much more, but what is left is pure metal.*<sup>8</sup>

A scholar of multiple languages and disciplines, R. Weissmandl traveled to the Oxford library to work on various Hebrew manuscripts. However,

despite the comfort and security he enjoyed there, in 1939, he decided that he must return home. His people were in danger and he felt that he must do what he could to help. And that is exactly what he did.<sup>9</sup>

By necessity, a quiet and unassuming scholar quickly transformed into a man of indefatigable and feverish activism. Known to many as the “Genius of Hatzalah,” or the “Partisan Rebbe,” R. Weissmandl was arguably the single most important person in the effort to rescue European Jewry. Working mostly underground as part of what was known as the Working Group in Slovakia, R. Weissmandl had a hand in almost every major effort to rescue Jews from the hands of the Nazis.

## The Plea to Bomb Auschwitz

In his simplest and most feasible rescue plan, R. Weissmandl demonstrated that the Allied forces could severely limit the deportation of Hungarian Jewry by bombing the train tracks being used to transport them to Auschwitz. He sent out many letters to the Western World with detailed information pleading his case. Tragically, his numerous appeals fell on deaf ears.<sup>10</sup>

However, his efforts were not completely in vain. As part of his plan, R. Weissmandl drafted what later came to be known as the “Auschwitz Protocols.”<sup>11</sup> Based on the accounts of two inmates who escaped from Auschwitz, R. Weissmandl wrote a report of the atrocities of the death camp and publicized it to the world. Eventually, in 1944, this led the Swiss press, President Roosevelt, the BBC, and the world at large to finally condemn the crimes against humanity being carried out in the

Nazi concentration camps. Facing international pressure, Hungary's Fascist regent Admiral Horthy finally stopped the deportations of Hungarian Jewry to the death camps.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this small success, on the whole, R. Weissmandl's cries were unheeded. Not only did R. Weissmandl feel betrayed by the indifference of the Western world, the major Jewish organizations in power did not deliver either. R. Weissmandl felt that the Joint Distribution Committee, the American Jewish Committee, and the Jewish Agency, run by the Labor-Zionists, abandoned him and their Jewish brethren in their time of need.

R. Weissmandl's sole agenda was the saving of more lives. *Pikuach nefesh* dictated his every move. He would do anything to save more lives. Risking his life, he successfully bribed and negotiated with the S.S.,<sup>13</sup> he joined forces with anyone willing to help, Jew, non-Jew, religious, anti-religious alike, and he was willing to use illegal means to smuggle more Jews to safety. R. Weissmandl recounted that many of these organizations had other agendas. The Labor-Zionists wanted to focus on their plan for a Jewish State. The Jews of Europe were not their main priority. On the whole, the American Jewish establishment did not want to put their relationship with the American Government into jeopardy by asking for “Jewish favors.”<sup>14</sup>

Between the years of 1938 and 1944, R. Weissmandl spent every waking moment saving Jews and sending letters to the West pleading with them to do something. “As you delay, every single day there are 12,000 Jews being murdered!” The world remained indifferent to R. Weissmandl's call. He was forever haunted by this. Perhaps



more than anything else, it was his deep frustration with the apathy of the world that destroyed him.

R. Weissmandl lost everything. He lost his wife and five children to the Nazis, he lost his faith in the Jewish establishment, and ultimately, he lost his own life. He would never shake the deep sense of betrayal he felt by those who could have saved more Jews but didn't. He could never forget tens of thousands of children he could have saved had he been given the funds to bribe various Nazis.

After the war, he emerged a broken man. He came to America, remarried, and rebuilt the Nitra Yeshiva in Mount Kisco, New York. But again, he could not rest. He personally carried the burden of its crushing debts. Eventually, his heart, after suffering many failures which he ignored in order to continue his rescue efforts during the war, finally gave out on him and he died in 1957.

## Kinas Min HaMetzar

R. Weissmandl's Holocaust *kinah*, sometimes referred to as, "*S'lach Nah*," was composed in the decade following World War II.<sup>15</sup> It is a poetic and deeply personal work. Whereas other *kinos* address the Jewish people, or God on behalf of the Jewish people, in his *kinah*, we hear R. Weissmandl's voice praying, breaking, demanding, calling, and crying — directly to the *Ribono Shel Olam*. If you read the *kinah* slowly, you can hear a broken soul turning to the only one who will listen.

This extremely intricate *kinah* contains 26 stanzas (the numerical value of Hashem's name). Below are its first five stanzas along with some commentary:<sup>16</sup>

סלח נא אל, לגוף ישראל, אשר נפשו  
נשרפה  
ושורפה לא השאיר ממנה, אך את דעתה  
הנשרפת  
ובכן כפר, ושוב אל תפל, על עמך ישראל  
רעדה

ומנוח, גו שוכח, אל נא תקדיח, בחרדה.  
*God, please forgive the body of  
the Jewish people whose spirit was  
burnt,  
Those who burnt it left it with  
nothing but a disoriented mind,  
seized by madness,  
Therefore, grant [them] atonement,  
and do not impose upon Your nation  
Israel, any more terror  
Grant rest to the body which  
forgets, and do not char them with  
[trembling] trepidation.*

This passage is a window into a profoundly sensitive soul. R. Weissmandl, an extremely religious person, never willing to compromise his values, pleads with God to forgive those who lost their faith in Him during the Holocaust.

ומנוח, גו שוכח  
*Grant rest to the body which forgets*

Forgive these "soulless bodies."<sup>17</sup> Grant them rest, even when they forget You and their faith. As much as he asks God to relieve the Jewish people of their painful trembling, ultimately, R. Weissmandl met this very fate. After expending himself completely during the war, his heart trembled and then stopped.

זכר כל נקבר, בסוד נסתת, ואין קבר  
להשתתח  
ואין מצבה להכניע, בן בזרועו בוטח  
זכרם נא, אדון הנשמות, ומחל לנשמה  
שוממה  
מחל לנפש נשפחת, בחיק בשר ודם  
ואדמה.

*Remember all who were buried in  
secrecy, and have no grave [for us]  
to prostrate over [in prayer]  
[They] have no tombstone to humble  
the son who puts his faith in arms.  
Please remember them, the Master of  
Souls, and forgive the desolate soul,  
Forgive the forgotten soul, [caught] in  
the bosom of flesh, blood and earth.*

Here, R. Weissmandl asks God to remember those who have no grave and to forgive these tragic and forgotten souls.

בן בזרועו בוטח  
*the son who puts his faith in arms.*

Perhaps this is a reference to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising or to the failed partisan uprising in Slovakia which led to R. Weissmandl and his family's deportation to Auschwitz. R. Weissmandl managed to escape by jumping from the speeding train.<sup>18</sup> But he would never see his family again.<sup>19</sup>

Either way, it is clearly a critique of those who felt they could put a stop to antisemitism with their own brute strength, a philosophy often associated with the founders of the Secular Zionist Movement. It may be easier to forget the magnitude of the tragedy of the Holocaust and to think we have the power to stop our enemies. However, even R. Weissmandl, the great activist, calls on us to remember that ultimately, we are powerless. In times of crisis, we do what we can, but ultimately, our salvation is in the hands of Hashem.

זָכַר נָא הַבְּכִיּוֹת, בְּתֵהוּם הַגְּיוּיֹת, בְּיוֹם עֲלוֹתָם לְמָרוֹם הַנְּשָׁמוֹת  
אֲזַי נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ שְׁמָם לְהִזְכִּיר, וְלֹא לִשְׁכּוּחַ עַד סוֹף עוֹלָמוֹת  
וְהָשִׁיב בֶּן שְׂכָחָה, וּבֶן הַכְּחָשָׁה – בֶּן שֵׁם שָׁוְיָ – עַם דָּם וְאֶדְמָה

*Please remember the cries [called out] in the pit of corpses,  
on the day they ascended to the higher realm of the souls,  
At that time we swore, that their names would always be  
remembered, not to be forgotten to the ends of the worlds,  
Please return the son who has forgotten [his faith], and the  
son of [self-]denial -- the son of an empty name — a nation  
of blood and earth,  
For even after [witnessing] the sea of their [brother's]  
blood, he chose to forget his [Jewish] name — the true  
name — a nation of faith and soul.*

*Please* וְהָשִׁיב בֶּן שְׂכָחָה, וּבֶן הַכְּחָשָׁה – בֶּן שֵׁם שָׁוְיָ – עַם דָּם וְאֶדְמָה  
*return the son who has forgotten [his faith], and the son of*  
*[self-]denial — the son of an empty name — a nation of blood*  
*and earth,*

Again R. Weissmandl prays for the “sons of denial” — who, after all they went through in the war, wanted nothing more than to leave their faith. However, with his poetic pen he argues that those who call themselves “sons” of the Jewish people through only “blood-relation” and the land of Israel, refer to an empty name.

*the true name — a nation of faith and soul.*

According to R. Weissmandl, just having a familial relationship to the Jewish people and the land of Israel is, essentially, self-denial. To be a true “son of the people of Israel” you must be part of the faith of Israel. Here we can hear echoes of R. Weissmandl’s theological opposition to Zionism, which was compounded by his feelings of being abandoned by the secular Zionist establishment in his efforts to save European Jewry.

*a nation of blood and earth.*

This may also be a play on arguably the most famous phrase from R. Weissmandl’s memoir, *Min HaMetzar*. In a stirring and biting passage, he recalls from memory an infuriating message sent by Nathan Schwalb, the Ha-Chalutz representative in Geneva, in response to a request for funds to ransom Jews from the hands of the Nazis:

*About the cries coming from our country...the Allies are spilling much of their blood. If we do not sacrifice any blood, by what right shall we merit coming to the table when they divide nations and lands at the war's end? Therefore it is silly, even*

*impudent, on our part, to ask these nations who are spilling their blood to give their money to enemy countries in order to protect our blood — כי רק בדם תהיה לנו הארץ — for only with blood will the land of Israel be ours.*<sup>20</sup>

מִיָּמוֹת עוֹלָם, שְׁלִישִׁים עֶבֶר, בְּהֶרֶג וְאֶבְדּוֹן הַיְּהוּדִים  
בְּכוֹמְרֵי זָדוֹן, שׁוֹרְפֵי אֵשׁ, שׁוֹפְכֵי דָם, הַמְּשַׁמְדִּים  
נִגְעָם פָּשָׁה עַל דּוֹרוֹת תִּבְלָה, עַד שְׁצִיץ מִרְשָׁעָם – עַם רָצַח  
וּמִחְלֹי עֲמֻדָה, שְׂכַח שְׁמֹהּ, אֵל נָא רַפָּא, וְשׁוּב שֵׁם לֹו קְרָא – עַם נִצָּח  
*A third of world history<sup>21</sup> has been replete with the killing  
and destruction of the Jews  
With evil priests, firebrands, blood-spillers, and destroyers,  
Their plague [of antisemitism] spread across the generations  
of the universe;  
Until, out of their wickedness — a murderous nation  
emerged  
And in its state of illness, Your nation forgot Your name,  
God, please heal [Your nation], and restore to it, its  
[rightful] name -- the eternal nation.*

נְתִיבוֹת עוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר נִחְרְבוּ בְּפִצְעֵי זַעַם הַמִּלְחָמָה  
אֵיכָה נָחוּ לְמַסְעֵי רָצָחָם – מֵאִין לֹחֶם, מִפִּיץ שְׁמָמָה  
כִּי גַם אוֹיְבֵי עַם אֲרוּר שְׁמֻחוֹ, עַל שֶׁקָּם פּוֹטֵר עַל הַיְּהוּדִים  
שֵׁשׁ אֲב אֶמּוֹנָתוֹ – שְׁסוּף סוֹף הַצִּלְיָה, אֶחָד מִן הַתְּלִמִּידִים  
*The pathways of the world, which were destroyed by the  
wounds of the wrath of war,  
Oh how they paused their normal routes allowing for their  
murderous journeys,  
[Claiming] there were insufficient combatants to lay waste  
[to the death camps]  
Indeed, even the [Allied forces who were] enemies of the  
accursed nation [Germany] were [secretly] pleased that a  
man had risen up to rid [the world of] the Jews,  
The father of their faith rejoiced—for ultimately, it was  
one of his own disciples who had succeeded.*

*Oh how they paused their normal routes allowing for their murderous journeys.*

All transport and trains have come to a halt all across Europe. All except the cattle cars bringing the Jews to their deaths. The imagery is haunting. The pain is felt. With biting sarcasm, R. Weissmandl notes the lame excuses given in response to the many pleas he made to Allied officials to bomb the train tracks leading to the death camps. Evidently, the Allied forces did not care to attempt to stop the atrocities being carried out on the innocent Jewish civilian population because the leadership may have also harbored antisemitic sentiments.

שֶׁשׁ אָב אֲמוֹנָתוֹ – שְׁסוּף סוּף הַצֵּלִיחַ, אֶחָד  
 מִן הַתִּלְמִידִים *The father of their faith*  
*rejoiced — for ultimately, it was one of*  
*his own disciples who had succeeded.*

This is a reference to Pope Pius XII who rejoiced over his disciple's success — namely Hitler. In 1942, R. Weissmandl assisted with two letters which were sent to the Pope alerting him of the steady deportations of hundreds of thousands of Slovakian Jews.<sup>22</sup> The reply was essentially denial:

*The [Papal] Secretariat of State hopes that these reports do not correspond to the truth, for such measures ... could not be executed by a State which claims to be guided by the principles of the Catholic church.*<sup>23</sup>

## His Final Words

Two weeks before his death, perhaps sensing that the end was near, R. Weissmandl made what would be his final public address:

*Rabbosai (gentlemen), I would like to present myself, to tell you who I am. Although it is unbecoming, I have no choice. I am one of the countless millions of people that Hashem created in this world because He believed that this person can contribute to the task of bringing kavod shamayim into this world. ... After I tried to do very great things, Hashem said, "No." God commanded that I not succeed. ... I came to the realization that even when the big things do not succeed, one is, in no way, exempt from doing the little things.*<sup>24</sup>

What R. Weissmandl called "little things," were not really little things. He managed to save thousands of lives during the war. However, compared to his goal of saving all of European Jewry, this appeared small in his eyes. R. Weissmandl experienced the crushing defeat of attempting

to save European Jewry and being rejected by an indifferent world. But his last message to his students — and his last message to us — was a call to responsibility. Even when we experience failure — and we most certainly will — we are not exempt from trying. To live a life of faith does not mean we will always succeed. It means we must have the courage to try.

## Endnotes

1. R. Avrohom Chaim Feuer and R. Avie Gold (ed.), *Tefillah L'Moshe - The Complete Tisha B'av Service* (Mesorah, 1991), pp. 391–394. Available here courtesy of ArtsScroll Mesorah: <https://artscroll.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/kinnah-bobov-rschwab.pdf>

It should be noted that R. Soloveitchik was uncomfortable with the establishment of special *kinos* composed by contemporary authors. In his view, the mourning for those who perished during the Holocaust is expressed in the *kinos* recited for the victims of the Crusades. For further elaboration, see R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord Is Righteous in All His Ways*, Jacob J. Schacter (ed.), (Ktav, 2006), pp. 298–299.

2. Abraham Fuchs, *The Unheeded Cry* (Mesorah, 1984,) pp. 83–84, 88–90.

3. See his *Karasi V'Ein Oneh* (Jerusalem, 1983) and his *The Unheeded Cry* (the English translation).

4. See his *Kuntres Divrei Derisha Vi-Hisoreros L'Amiras Kinna L'Zeicher Kadoshei Europia BiYom Tisha B'Av L'Zeicher Kadoshei Yisrael Sh'nishmadu bi-Europia B'shenos 5699-5705* (New York, 1984).

5. R. Yaakov Fuchs, *Kinas Min HaMetzar* (Feldheim, 2007), pp. 22–23.

6. Ibid. In fact, R. Auerbach himself had the practice of reciting R. Weissmandl's *kinah*, but stopped because it was not agreed to by all of the *gedolei hador*. See *Halichos Shlomo, Hilchos Tefillah* (Yeshiva Halichos Shlomo, 2007), p. 229 n72. The *kinah* is printed in R. Michael Dov Weissmandl, *Toras Chemed*, (Yeshiva Press, 1958), pp. 303–306, and in his *Min HaMetzar* (Cong. Beth Hamedrash Chemed, 1980), pp. 255–259.

7. *Ish Chamudos*, Vol. 1 (New York, 2012), pp. 46–49.

8. Ibid., p. 445.

9. R. Eli Brackman, "Michael Dov Weissmandl: Remembering an Oxford Rabbi Who Saved Jews from the Holocaust," *Oxford Chabad Society*.

[https://www.oxfordchabad.org/templates/articlecco\\_cdo/aid/3659256/jewish/Michael-Dov-Weissmandl-Remembering-an-Oxford-Rabbi-Who-Saved-Jews-from-the-Holocaust.htm](https://www.oxfordchabad.org/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/3659256/jewish/Michael-Dov-Weissmandl-Remembering-an-Oxford-Rabbi-Who-Saved-Jews-from-the-Holocaust.htm)

10. David Kranzler, *Thy Brother's Blood: The Orthodox Jewish Response During the Holocaust* (Mesorah, 1987), pp. 104–114.

11. Ibid., pp. 206–215.

12. Ibid., p. 215.

13. Ibid., p. 271.

14. Ibid., pp. 61–69.

15. Fuchs, *Kinnas Min HaMetzar*, p. 33.

16. For much of the translation and commentary, I relied on the assistance of R. Moshe Lieber and R. Elchanan Adler as well as R. Yaakov Fuchs' *Kinas Min HaMetzar*. The rest of the kinnah is available here, courtesy of ברסלב מאיר:

<http://www.breslevmeir.com/%d7%a7%d7%99%d7%a0%d7%94-%d7%a2%d7%9c-%d7%94%d7%a9%d7%95%d7%90%d7%94-%d7%a7%d7%99%d7%a0%d7%aa-%d7%9e%d7%9f-%d7%94%d7%9e%d7%99%d7%a6%d7%a8/>

17. The word גו is a term for the body. See Yeshaya 50:6.

18. Fuchs, *The Unheeded Cry*, p. 208.

19. Ibid., p. 220.

20. *Min HaMetzar*, p. 92. Also see Fuchs, *The Unheeded Cry*, p. 78 and Michael Hilton, "Dealing with the Nazis: The Ambiguities of Survival," *European Judaism* (Berghahn Books, 1986), p. 36.

21. Based on *Sanhedrin* 97a, world history is to last a total of 6,000 years, 2,000 of which are *tohu*, chaos, which R. Weissmandl interprets as the years of exile.

22. Kranzler, p. 277.

23. Ibid., p. 278.

24. *Ish Chamudos*, Vol. 2, pp. 855–861, translation adapted from R. Aharon Lopiansky, *Orchos Chaim: Ben Torah For Life* (Eshel, 2018), pp. 24–25.





## THE READING OF EICHA ON TISHA B'AV

On the night of *Tisha B'Av*, there is a tradition to read the Book of *Eicha*. The source for this tradition is *Masechet Soferim* 18:5, and *Eicha Rabbah*, *Parsha* no. 3. This article will explore the various practices regarding the tradition of reading the Book of *Eicha*.

### Should One Recite a Beracha on the Reading of Eicha?

The Book of *Eicha* is one of the Five Megillot. *Masechet Soferim* 14:1, states that when we read one of the Five Megillot, we recite the beracha of *Al Mikra Megillah*. R. David Avudraham, *Tefillot HaPesach* codifies the statement of *Masechet Soferim*. Ramban, *Torat Ha'Adam* (Chavel ed. Pg. 258) applies the statement of *Masechet Soferim* specifically to the reading of *Eicha*. Nevertheless, R. Yosef Karo, *Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim* 559, notes that common

practice is to refrain from reciting the beracha of *Al Mikra Megillah* on all of the megillot with the exception of Megillat Esther.

Rama, *Teshuvot HaRama* no. 35, addresses the practice of refraining from the recitation of a beracha. He presents four reasons for this practice. First, perhaps the beracha of *Al Mikra Megillah* is only recited upon obligatory readings of a megillah. If the megillah is read because of a *minhag*, one does not recite a beracha. [Rama does note that the reading of *Eicha* can be considered an obligatory reading since it is based on Talmudic sources.] Second, there are different versions of *Masechet Soferim* as to what beracha should be recited. One version is to recite *Al Mikra Megillah*. Another version is to recite *Al Mikra Ketuvim*. Rama suggests that a tradition developed to omit the beracha in order to avoid this question. Third, Rama questions whether it is actually appropriate

to recite a beracha on reading a megillah (aside from Megillat Esther). Although *Masechet Soferim* does endorse reciting a beracha upon recitation of the megillot, Rama suggests that the statement in *Masechet Soferim* is based on opinions and traditions that are not considered common practice. Fourth, Rama suggests that one may only recite the beracha of *Al Mikra Megillah* if one is reading from a text that is written on parchment and was written according to the laws of writing a *sefer* Torah. Since most communities do not have megillot that are written on parchment (with the exception of Megillat Esther), they do not recite the beracha of *Al Mikra Megillah*.

Rama concludes that one should never recite a beracha on the megillot (with the exception of Megillat Esther) even if they are written on parchment. He notes that if the only reason to refrain from

reciting the beracha is that they are not written on parchment, synagogues would make it a priority to purchase a set of megillot. Since we do not find such a practice, it must be that one would not recite a beracha on the megillot even if they are written on parchment.

*Magen Avraham* 490:9, disagrees with Rama's conclusion and rules that one should recite a beracha on reading any of the *megillot* (except *Kohelet*). [*Magen Avraham* does not seem to require parchment in order to recite the *beracha*. Ostensibly, *Magen Avraham* is following his own opinion (284:1) that there is no requirement to use parchment for the *Haftorah* text. *Mishna Berurah* 490:19, sides with the opinion of Rama that one should not recite a *beracha* on the *megillot*. However, he notes that one can justify the practice of reciting a *beracha* if the *megillah* is read from parchment. The Vilna Gaon's personal practice was to read all of the *megillot* from parchment and to recite a *beracha* (see *Ma'aseh Rav* no. 175). Those communities that follow all of the *minhagim* of the Vilna Gaon recite a *beracha* on reading the *megillah* from parchment. [See R. Yechiel M. Tucatzinski, *Sefer Eretz Yisrael* 21:2. R. Tucatzinski implies that reading from a parchment is necessary regardless of whether one plans on reciting a *beracha*.]

## Reading Eicha during the Daytime

*Masechet Soferim* 18:5 presents two traditions as to when one should read the Book of Eicha. One tradition is to read Eicha on the night of *Tisha B'Av*. Another tradition is to read it during the daytime. *Mishna Berurah* 559:2, notes that although

the prevalent tradition is read to Eicha at night, it is preferable to read Eicha (privately) during the daytime as well.

On *Tisha B'Av* 5708 (1948), during the second truce of Israel's War of Independence, many communities in Yerushalayim were not able to hold the evening *Tisha B'Av* services due to mortar attacks. By the next morning the mortar attacks ceased and everyone was able to hold the morning services. For those communities who followed the *minhagim* of the Vilna Gaon, the question arose whether it was permitted to recite a beracha on the reading of Eicha (from parchment) during the daytime. R. Yechiel M. Tucatzinski ruled that they should read the megillah without reciting a beracha. His rationale was that the beracha is only recited when there is a communal obligation to read the megillah. The communal obligation only exists at night, even if the entire community was unable to congregare at night. [See *Sefer Eretz Yisrael*, ch. 21, note 1.]

## Are Women Obligated to Participate in the Reading of Eicha?

*Masechet Soferim* 18:5, states that women are obligated to participate in the reading of Eicha. Nevertheless, this discussion is part of a broader discussion regarding a woman's obligation to participate in *k'riat haTorah*. *Masechet Soferim* states that women are obligated to participate in *k'riat haTorah* just as they are obligated to participate in the reading of Eicha. The issue of whether women are obligated to participate in *k'riat haTorah* is addressed by *Magen Avraham* 282:6. He

concludes (partially based on the comments of *Masechet Soferim*) that women are obligated to participate in *k'riat haTorah*. However, he notes that common practice is in his time was that women were not particular about attending the *k'riat haTorah* service. *Aruch HaShulchan* 282:11, explains that the intent of the statement of *Masechet Soferim* was not to formally obligate women in *k'riat haTorah* and the reading of Eicha. Rather, it was meant to encourage women to attend.

One can suggest that the discussion of a woman's obligation in the reading of Eicha is slightly different than the discussion of a woman's obligation in *k'riat haTorah*. The reading of Eicha serves two purposes. First, it fulfills the communal obligation (or tradition) to read Eicha on the night of *Tisha B'Av*. This is the very obligation that allows for the recitation of a beracha (for those who recite a beracha). Second, the reading of Eicha is part of the Kinot services. The discussion of whether women are obligated to participate in the reading of Eicha is limited to the first function of the reading of Eicha. In that sense, the reading of Eicha is similar to *k'riat haTorah*. Nevertheless, women are required to mourn the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash and one of the mourning practices is the recitation of Kinot. Eicha serves as the prototypical kinah in describing the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. This is why there is a tradition of reading Eicha privately during the daytime. As such, it would be proper for women to read Eicha (at least privately) in order to fulfill this aspect of mourning the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash.



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY-RABBI ISAAC ELCHANAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# Tisha B'av 5781

SUNDAY, JULY 18 • 9 AV, 5781



**8:45 a.m. Israel Time**  
**Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb**  
*Rebbe, Yeshivat Har Etzion*



**9:30 a.m. ET**  
**Rabbi Yaakov Glasser**  
*David Mitzner Dean, YU CJF*



**9:30 a.m. ET**  
**Rabbi Mordechai Willig**  
*Rabbi Dr. Sol Roth Chair in Talmud and  
Contemporary Halakhah & Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS*

## Three Options for Online Kinnot



**2:30 p.m. ET**  
**Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter**  
*University Professor of  
Jewish Thought and Jewish  
History, Yeshiva University*



**3:15 p.m. ET**  
**Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz**  
*The Abraham Arbesfeld  
Chair of the Director of the  
Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik  
Semikha Program*



**3:45 p.m. ET**  
**Rabbi Menachem Penner**  
*Max and Marion  
Grill Dean, RIETS*



**4:15 p.m. ET**  
**Rabbi Meir Goldwicht**  
*Joel and Maria Finkle Visiting  
Israeli Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS*



**4:45 p.m. ET**  
**Professor Smadar Rosensweig**  
*Professor of Bible,  
Stern College for Women*

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