SUMMER 2024 SPECIAL

THE 3 WEEKS

PRESENTED BY

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With Rabbi Shimon Nahum

10:00 AM - 12:15 PM
1- GEMARA HULLIN
2- SHIUR WITH RABBI ALOUF
10:00-11:00 (Mon, Tues, Thurs)

AFTERNOON
12:15 PM - 1:00 PM
1 - HEBRUTAH TIME
2- SHA'AR HABITACHON
With Rabbi Edward Benjamin
3- ABUDARHAM HILCHOT BERACHOT
With Rabbi David Tawil

2:30 PM - 4:30 PM
TUR / BET YOSEF YOREH DEAH
1- PREP 2:30 PM - 3:30 PM
2- SHIUR 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM
With Rabbi Harold Sutton (M, T, Th) and Rabbi Ikey Tawil (W)



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MESSAGE FROM Our President



Since its founding in 1998, the Sephardic Rabbinical College has worked tirelessly to develop the next generation's rabbinic leadership. In 2024, we remain steadfast in our mission to produce scholars and educators of the highest caliber—rabbis dedicated to serving the diverse needs of our vibrant and growing community.

We believe the future has never been brighter for both our community and our institution. Our newly invigorated SRC 2.0 committee, led by our esteemed Hachamim, Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Avi Harari, with guidance from our co-founders and rabbinic advisors Rabbi Shimon Alouf and Rabbi Harold Sutton, has rejuvenated our program.

Currently, our program supports over eight full-time and part-time students, boasts over 50 graduates, and includes more than 30 participants in our Summer Learning Program.

It is with great pleasure that we introduce our first summer magazine, which features messages from our current students and alumni on the period known as "Ben Hamesarim." During this time, we reflect on the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash, which was attributed to Lashon Hara. Hashem has given us the opportunity to rectify these mistakes by spreading Torah—Lashon Tov—and thereby drawing closer to Him and to one another.

May we continue to grow stronger together. Amen.

Jack D. Oved

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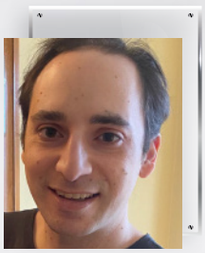
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OUR FOCUS IS TO CULTIVATE THE NEXT GENERATION OF TALMIDEI HACHAMIM WITH EXPERTISE IN PRACTICAL HALACHA, TEACHING, AND LEADERSHIP.

ESTABLISHED BY OUR FOUNDERS, RABBI SHIMON ALOUF AND EZRA S. ASHKENAZI, THE RABBINICAL COLLEGE'S GOAL IS TO EDUCATE ASPIRING RABBIS FROM WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY, EQUIPPING THEM WITH THE SKILLS NECESSARY TO EFFECTIVELY LEAD OUR COMMUNITY'S SCHOOLS, SYNAGOGUES AND ORGANIZATIONS FOR YEARS TO COME.

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SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM

OUR ADVANCED LEARNING PROGRAM CATERS TO CURRENT STUDENTS, VARIOUS COMMUNITY RABBIS—MANY OF WHOM ARE SRC ALUMNI—AND YOUNG ADULTS EAGER TO ENHANCE THEIR LEARNING CAPABILITIES. THIS INITIATIVE FOSTERS RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CURRENT AND ASPIRING RABBIS WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY, WHILE EMPOWERING YOUNG ADULTS WHO MAY BE INTERESTED IN ATTAINING SEMICHA OVER TIME. ESTEEMED RABBINIC FIGURES, SUCH AS HACHAM DAVID YOSEF, RABBI SHEMUEL PINCHASI, RABBI YISRAEL BITAN, AND OTHERS, REGULARLY DELIVER GUEST LECTURES.



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THE 3 Weeks
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE



Rabbi Avi Harari

Rabbi Avi Harari is the head Rabbi at Congregation Mikdash Eliyahu in Brooklyn and Ohel Yitzchak of Allenhurst, as well as Rosh Beit Midrash at Yeshiva of Flatbush. He is Rosh Yeshiva at Sephardic Rabbinical College.

כל המתאבל על ירושלים
זוכה ורואה בשמחתה.

"All who mourn for Jerusalem merit and see its happiness."

(Masekhet Taanit 30b)

It is hard to miss the seemingly inaccurate verb tenses in this statement from the Rabbis. Instead of a promise in the future tense – that all who mourn the destruction of Jerusalem will merit to see it rebuilt, it is stated in the present tense – "merit and see its happiness." This implies that the sight of Jerusalem's happiness takes place in tandem with the mourning. How can one possibly attain a glimpse at the vibrant "happiness of Jerusalem" while mourning its destruction?

Think back to a positive experience that you shared with a deceased relative or friend. Reflect upon the specific time spent together in all of its colors and details. Why is it that you are now smiling? The loss of a person to whom we were emotionally bonded generally evokes feelings of grief and despair, so how is it that the memory of good times spent together inevitably brings forth a happy mood?

The answer to these questions lies at the core of the proper understanding of time. When Albert Einstein's great Italian friend Michele Besso died, he wrote a moving letter to Michele's sister, stating:

Michele has left this strange world a little before me. This means nothing. People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction made between past, present, and future is nothing more than a persistent, stubborn illusion.

The common misconception of time entails grieving the yesterdays that are "no more," longing for the tomorrows that are "not yet," and situating ourselves in a fragmented today. Our connection to the past and future is defined simply by the laws of causality – what I did yesterday caused today's state, and my actions today will cause tomorrow's. A proper understanding of time, instead, imbues both past and future with the life of today. Past, present and future blend together, leading rise to a three-fold structure of time.

Remembering the good times spent with a deceased loved one is an experience that merges past and present points in time. In those few fleeting moments, the dead person has "come back to life." We are talking, laughing, and enjoying each other's company. Although those times have long passed, they are still ever-present when we wish to tap into and enjoy them.

The Rabbi's statement that "All who mourn for Jerusalem merit and see its happiness" doesn't describe a promise for the future, but rather an instruction for today.

Properly mourning the destruction of Jerusalem entails more than just remembering a long-lost reality. It means forcing ourselves to live the past in the present – to gaze at the grand structure of the Mikdash, watch the regally dressed Kohanim in their service, and to participate in aliyah la-regel on the holidays. Failure to do so rids the mourning experience of all meaning. It levels this time to a pointless period which is dedicated to "crying over spilled milk." To properly mourn the destruction of Jerusalem, then, we must view it in the present – reexperiencing its majesty in order to appreciate its loss.

PICKING UP THE PIECES OF THE SHATTERED LUHOT

Rabbi Isaac Tawil



Rabbi Isaac Tawil is a graduate of SRC and the head Rabbi of Kol Israel Congregation. He is also head of Student Activities at The Yeshiva of Flatbush Middle School.

Each summer, we are faced with the challenge of properly understanding the fast day of *Shib'ah Assar Be'Tammuz*—the 17th day of *Tammuz*. We hear community members often referring to this day as the "sketch fast" of the summer. Even if we cut ourselves some slack and rationalize the situation by claiming that we are only comparing the 17th of Tammuz to the more stringent fast that will come in another three weeks in the form of *Tish'a Be'Av,* this remains a very distressing sentiment for people to have! The Rambam[1] brings the reasons for fasting on the 17th day of *Tammuz* by citing five major tragedies[2] that occurred to our people on that day. These tragedies include many calamities that involved Jerusalem and the Beit Hamikdash (like Tish'a Be'Av), such as the walls of Jerusalem being breached, the desecration of the היכל and the stopping of the קרבן התמיד. There is certainly nothing fake, second-rate, or "sketch" about these events. And yet, since this fast day stands in the shadow of *Tish'a Be'Av*, it can lead to it being neglected or ignored altogether. How can we make this 17th of Tammuz powerful, effective, and meaningful on its own merit and not look at the fast through the lenses of its more revered counterpart, *Tish'a Be'Av*?

I believe the answer lies in us focusing on the lessons we can learn from one of the other events that transpired on that infamous day—the breaking of the לוחות. I'd like to focus on two aspects of this event that will help shed light on what the focus of *Shib'a Assar Be'Tammuz* should be and how we can make it more relevant and meaningful to our lives.

Were the Tablets Thrown or Dropped?

There is a debate as to whether or not Moshe *Rabbeinu* intentionally threw the לוחות at the golden calf or if the tablets became too heavy for him to hold as a result of seeing *Benei Yisrael's* sin and as a result were dropped onto the calf. On the simple level, the verse is ambiguous and uses a difficult word to describe how the tablets left Moshe's hands[3]:

ויהי כאשר קרב אל המחנה וירא את העגל ומחלות,
ויחר אף משה וישלך מידיו את הלוחות
וישבר אתם תחת ההר

"As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain."

While we can certainly make the case that Moshe threw the tablets, why didn't the Torah use the more common word for throw-- "זרק"?

The Talmud[4] seems to be of the opinion that Moshe did, in fact, throw the לוחות in a calculated action that Hashem agreed with:

תניא: שלשה דברים עשה משה מדעתו, והסכימה דעתו לדעת המקום: פירש מן האשה, **ושיבר הלוחות**, והוסיף יום אחד.

"It was taught in a *Berayta*: in three matters, Moshe acted on using his own reasoning, and Hashem agreed with his decision—1) He separated from his wife, 2) he broke the tablets, 3) he added one day (to the preparation period of the nation at *Har Sinai* before receiving the Torah)." This indicates that Moshe was purposeful in his destruction of the tablets. He was doing so to send a message of disgust to the nation to make them understand that the religion could not be passed down as Hashem wanted with this mentality permeating the camp. A mentality that caused the nation to fashion a molten deity that would function in Moshe's (and some say even Hashem Himself's) stead could not coexist with the holy לוחות Moshe had just received.

The Midrash[5] paints a different picture of what happened to the tablets and how they were destroyed. ילקות שמעוני writes:

נסתכל משה בלוחות וראה הכתב שבהן
שפורח וכבדו על ידי משה ונפלו מידיו ונשתברו

"Moshe looked at the tablets and saw the (hollowed out) writing fly away, and instead be replaced by stone. They got heavier, they dropped from Moshe's hands and broke." According to this explanation, Moshe had no intention of throwing the לוחות. They just got heavier, and he could not carry the load.

The רשב"ם[6] agrees with the concept of Moshe dropping the tablets but for a different reason:

וישלך מידו -כשראה את העגל--תשש כחו ולא היה בו כח והשליכם רחוק ממנו קצת שלא יזיק את רגליו בנפלם, בדרך כל משליכי משאוי כשאין בהם כח לשאת. וכן ראיתי בפרקים של רבי אליעזר, ועיקר פשוטו כך:

According to רשב"ם, the dropping of the tablets has nothing to do with a physical burden that was newly imposed onto Moshe by the tablets getting heavier; rather, it was because of his own distress and the difficulty that he was having with the situation that caused him to weaken.

We learn a profound lesson from this aspect of how the tablets were broken. Sometimes, a man's spirit is broken by external factors that he cannot control; other times, he himself is the reason for letting go.

Why Did We Save the Broken Luhot?

The Torah talks about what was placed inside the ארון (Holy Ark) saying that the "עדות"[7] was placed inside:

ונתת אל הארן את העדת אשר אתן אליך

"And deposit in the Ark [the tablets of] the Pact which I will give you."

Rashi Explains:

העדת. התורה, שהיא לעדות ביני ובניכים שצויתי אתכם מצות הכתובות בה

העדת = the Torah (the Tablets) which is a testimony between Me and you that I have ordained the commandments written in it.

This entire concept begs the question— "if the sin of the golden calf was so bad and the breaking of the tablets so tragic, why would it be saved in the ארון at all?" This should be one of the dark secrets that was destroyed immediately after the event, never to be brought up or discussed again. The שפת אמת[8] says something amazing:

והיינו כי בודאי המתנה שברי לוחות מונחים בארון: שנתן לנו הקב"ה לא הי' לשאו! ואם כי אז לא היינו ראוים לקבל ונגנז בארון ונשברו הלוחות בי"ז בתמוז וצריכין לתקן כל אלה השברים וזה היא באמת כמו פיזור וגלות בנ"י בכל הארצות כדי ללקוט אותן השברים וכשיתוקן הכל נוכל לקבל הלוחות הראשונים.

"It is a certainty that the gift that Hashem gave us in the first לוחות (that were destroyed) was not for naught! Despite not being worthy of receiving the tablets (when we sinned with the golden calf), the broken pieces were placed in the Ark on the 17th day of Tammuz. The broken Tablets symbolize the Diaspora (and they were placed in safekeeping) to remind us that we must fix and unite these spread-out people. When we fix ourselves and all those who are spread around the world, we will all finally be worthy to accept the first set of Tablets."

The scattered pieces are to remind us that there are Jews all over the world, and we are not yet united physically in one spot, in Jerusalem. We are not yet emotionally or spiritually connected to the needs and plights of Jews all over the world, with whom we need to connect in order to bring the redemption.

Before we can commemorate the temple, Jerusalem, or their demise, we need to acknowledge the journey represented by the לוחות and how they were destroyed. We may never know if Moshe threw them because of his internal struggle or lost control of them because of the external factor. Yet the message the rabbis are trying to teach is clear. Sometimes, we have internal struggles, and sometimes,



external factors add to our struggles. Either way, if we don't manage these factors and try to combat them by engaging in Torah and Mitzvoth, there is an equal danger of being destroyed.

The לוחות were placed in the ארון not for safekeeping and not as a keepsake to remember the tragic day when they were destroyed. They were kept in order to remind us to constantly be bettering ourselves and our brethren. Saving broken tablets is to remind us that we are all a little broken. We all need to rectify our sins and do *Teshuba*. We need to take that journey through the "desert" as our ancestors did, but this time, not fail at the last possible moment on the footsteps of *Har Sinai* just hours before Moshe is ready to appear to us with the greatest gift of all time. should be used as an opportunity to right the wrongs of our ancestors.

May we use the fast day of Shib'a Assar Be'Tammuz and the days leading up to Tish'a Be'ab, which we call "Three Weeks" בין המצרים to reflect on our internal and external struggles, connect to all of our fellow Jews, and commit to reaching the level where we can all accept the first לוחות once again.

---

1. יד החזקה: ספר זמנים: תעניות: ה': ב'.
2. *1) The* לוחות הברית *were destroyed 2) the* תמיד *offerings stopped being brought during the first Beit Hamikdash 3) Jerusalem was breached during the second Beit Hamikdash 4) Apostamos the* רשע *burned the Sefer Torah 5) he also placed an idol or image (*צלם*) in the* היכל.
3. שמות: לב': יט'.
4. יבמות: סב': עמוד א'.
5. ילקוט שמעוני: פרשת בהעלותך: רמז תשמ'.
6. שמות: לב': יט'.
7. שמות: כה': טז'.
8. פרשת בלק: כג': כט'

בצאתי ממצרים... בצאתי מירושלים

Rabbi David Tawil



Rabbi David Tawil is a graduate of SRC and the head Rabbi at Beit Rachel Synagogue at Larchwood. He is also a teacher at Hillel Yeshiva High School and the director of the SRC summer learning program.

One of the more famous קינות, lamentations, which we read on the day of תשעה באב, contrasts the glory and miraculous nature of the Exodus from Egypt with the devastation and gloom of the destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile to Babylonia. The author bases his lamentation on the ילקוט שמעוני, a Midrashic book that discusses many of the open miracles God performed to release the Jewish people from bondage and uses these to make moving comparisons with the exile of the first Temple.

"ומראה כבוד ה' כאש אוכלת לפני-- בצאתי ממצרים. וחרב לטושה לטבח נטושה-- בצאתי מירושלים"
"The appearance of the glory of God as a consuming fire before me when I went forth from Egypt; but a sharpened sword drawn for slaughter-- when I went forth from Jerusalem."

"רנה וישועה וחצוצרות תרועה-- בצאתי ממצרים. וזעקת עולל עם נאקת חלל-- בצאתי מירושלים"
"Rejoicing and salvation, and blast of trumpets-- when I went forth from Egypt; but the cries of infants together with the groans of the slain-- went I went forth from Jerusalem."

This lamentation hits the very core of what the day of תשעה באב is about, yet it is still puzzling why we wish to mention such miracles and glory days at a time of such sadness and misery. Are we trying to make ourselves feel bad about what we lost, or is there more that the poet is trying to convey through these comparisons?

The גמרא מסכת כתובות דף סו: recounts a story that may shed light on this quandary. The story is told about רבן יוחנן בן זכאי (Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai), who was the leader of the Jewish people during

the time of the destruction of the Temple and the rebuilder of Torah in the years following the exile from Jerusalem. One day ריב"ז was traveling with his students when he witnessed a woman digging through animal excrement looking for undigested pieces of barley that she could eat. When the woman saw ריב"ז approaching, she covered herself and approached him: "Rabbi, can you please give me something to support myself?" The Rabbi answered her: "The daughter of whom are you?" She answered: "I am the daughter of נקדימון בן גוריון (Nakdimon the son of Gurion)." The Rabbi looked at his students and said: "I remember signing this woman's כתובה in which it was determined that she would be given thousands of gold coins from the house of her father in addition to what was given to her by her husband." The Rabbi then cried and exclaimed:

"אשריכם ישראל, בזמן שעושין רצונו של מקום - אין כל אומה ולשון שולטת בהם, ובזמן שאין עושין רצונו של מקום - מוסרן ביד אומה שפלה, ולא ביד אומה שפלה אלא ביד בהמתן של אומה שפלה"

"Praiseworthy is the nation of Israel--when they are performing the will of God, there is no nation in the world that can touch them; and when they are not performing the will of God, He gives them over to the hands of the lowliest nations, and not just to them but to the animals of such low people as well."

The מהר"ל (Maharal) asks a similar question to that which we asked above: why, at such a sad time, does ריב"ז praise the Jewish people? He answers that it was at this moment that ריב"ז realized something astonishing about the relationship of the Jewish people towards God, and that was that the Jewish people do not live on middle ground with God. The Jewish people are either at the top of the mountain or at the bottom of the valley, but we can't be anywhere in between. As the chosen people, it is our job to rise to the top of the world, the beacon of light that shines onto the other nations; at the same time, when we do not rise above others, we fall to the depths, to sink to behavior lower than that of animals. This has been consistent throughout the history of the Jewish people, from slavery in Egypt until the most recent horrors of the Holocaust; God does not settle for mediocrity. It is for this reason that the Jewish people are compared to the stars in the sky and the dust of the Earth-- we either reach the heights of the stars or the depth of the sand.

This revelation in the eyes of ריב"ז was worth praising and could only be recognized at a time of despair and devastation. This is the message behind the lamenter's contrast between the exodus from Egypt and the exile from Jerusalem. It strengthens this message to us that we can only be in one of two levels and nothing in between. If we internalize this message when reading this poem, we can hopefully shoot ourselves to the stars and climb out of the depths in which we currently reside. "תזכו בנחמת ציון"-

"May we merit in the comforting of Zion."

NO LUCK FOR THE JEWS



Rabbi Jack Savdie

Rabbi Savdie is a graduate of SRC and a rabbi at Congregation Ahaba ve Ahva in Brooklyn. He is also a Magid Shiur at Sephardic Rabbinical College and currently learning at the Sephardic Dayanut Kollel.

Growing up in this community, we heard about or were taught that certain days of the year were unlucky. We were warned that the Nine Days were not just a time to refrain from meat and wine but dangerous days for the Jews. We were discouraged from swimming in the ocean, traveling on a plane, or engaging in any potentially dangerous activity.

In this essay, we will explain the true nature of these days and explore the concept of 'luck' and how it pertains to Jews. But to gain a fundamental understanding of the subject, we must begin with the root cause of it all—the fateful day of Tishaa Be'Ab.

Introduction:

There is no day on the Jewish calendar marred with tragedy like Tishaa Be'Ab. Time and time again, the Jewish people have suffered grave misfortune on this day. Although one could view this phenomenon as a simple coincidence, the Hachamim view it quite differently. They look at our history closely and notice its trends and patterns; they see no coincidence here. Our great Master and Teacher, the Rambam, labels Tishaa Be'Ab as "the day designated for tragedy" (Mishneh Torah Hilchot Taaniyot Chapter 5). This implies that the day itself is inherently prone to tragedy. In fact, Hazal have designated the month of Ab as tragedy-prone as well.

Let's look at the origins of this tragic day and the role Am Yisrael played in it. This will enable us to address a burning question in people's minds: Why has Am Yisrael suffered so greatly (more than any other nation) through the years? It will give us an insight into the recent events in Eres Yisrael. May the merit of this learning be for the *haslaha* of our dear soldiers and for the salvation of all our brethren in *Eres Yisrael.*

Bad Luck:

Mishna: When the month of Ab begins, we minimize happiness *(Ta'anit* 26B).

Gemara: A Jew who has a lawsuit with a gentile should not go to court during this period, as his luck is bad; rather, he should try to go in Adar when his luck is good *(Masechet Ta'anit* 29B).

Although we generally associate tragedy and misfortune with **the day** of *Tishaa Be'Ab,* Hazal felt that the beginning of *Ab* should be viewed as an unfortunate time as well. The Gemara quoted above is a ruling made by *Rab Papa* based on the notion that the *mazal* of the month of *Ab* is bad.

The term *mazal*, loosely translated as luck, refers to the astrological influences, specifically the constellations. Each month of the Jewish Calendar corresponds to a different constellation (aka the signs of the Zodiac[1]). The constellation for the month of *Ab* is *Aryeh*[2]- Leo (a lion). This Gemara is based on the premise that there is a relationship between astronomical phenomena and events in the human world. Since tragedy struck so many times during this month, the mazal of the month is considered to be bad. Hence, we are more prone to bad occurrences during this time. After *Tishaa Be'Ab*, however, the mazal of the month is no longer considered bad.

1 The significance of the zodiac stems from the fact that the ecliptic (the narrow path on the sky that the Sun, Moon, and planets appear to follow) runs directly through these star groupings.

*2 The Ben Ish Hai (Introduction to Parashat Debarim-Shana Rishonah) writes that the gematria of aryeh is 216 which is the numerical equivalent of the total hours from the beginning of Ab until after Tishaa Be'Ab (9*24=216). Only these days are considered to have bad mazal. It is also the numerical equivalent of gebura which represents the strength of Bene Yisrael who have endured through numerous hardships during this time.*

The law of *Rab Papa* still applies in our times. Hacham Obadia Yosef ZS"L writes that one who needs to schedule a court date with a non-Jew should try to push it off until after *Tishaa Be'Ab {Hazon Obadia* P. 164}

No Luck:

Many *Rishonim* contrast the ruling of *Rab Papa* with a statement in *Masechet Shabbat* (156A).

The Gemara states: *En Mazal LeYisrael*- The astrological influences (constellations) don't hold sway over Yisrael.

Am Yisrael has a unique and direct connection to God. The nations of the world have administering angels over them, while *Am Yisrael* is under the direct guidance of Hashem. Hence, the nations of the world are vulnerable to the influences of the mazalot, whereas *Am Yisrael* is not.

This concept is learned from *Abraham Abinu.* Abraham believed that he was vulnerable to the effects of the *mazalot* and that he wasn't going to have children. He tells Hashem "*Vehine ben beiti yoresh oti* - Since You have given me no seed, one of my household will inherit me" (Bereshit 15). Hazal explain that Abraham told Hashem, 'I see in my *istagninut* (in the stars) that I am not fitting to father a son.' Abraham was right in his assessment; based on the *mazalot* alone, he should not have had a son. However, he was wrong in his assumption that he was vulnerable to the influences of the *mazalot*.

Above and Beyond:

Hashem tells Abraham to step outside and look at the stars.
"He took him outside, and He said, 'Please look toward heaven and count the stars if

you are able to count them.' And He added, 'So shall your offspring be'" (Bereshit 15).

The Gemara explains that Hashem corrected the mistaken perception of Abraham. He tells him: Leave your *istagninut* - *Mazal* does not apply to *Yisrael! (Taanit* 29A).

Rashi quotes a similar idea from the midrash: He took him out of the terrestrial sphere and lifted him above the stars. This explains the expression of *'habet na'* looking down from above (Gen. Rabbah 44:12).

The 'lifting above the stars' represents the concept that Abraham was above and beyond the influences of the *mazalot*. He had a direct connection to God; whatever God willed for him would happen- regardless of the *mazalot*. This idea is encapsulated in the phrase, '***Yisrael is above the Mazal.***'

Question: If the Jews are not affected by *mazal*, how can the Gemara in *Masechet Taanit* say that our *mazal* is bad during *Ab*? How can there be a *halacha* to avoid court cases with gentiles during *Ab* because our luck is bad?

Decree from Above:

The Ritba (Ta'anit 29B) writes that **this month is an exception**, and it was decreed so from heaven. During these days, *we are affected by mazal* just like the gentiles. We are open to the natural and astrological influences of this world. Since we have experienced such suffering during Ab, and the mazal of the month is bad, *Hazal* urge us to take precautions to avoid further tragedy.

What decree is the Ritba referring to? When did it take place?

A Night of Crying:

To answer this question, we need to take a step back in history and look at the episode of the *meraglim*. As the spies return from their mission to Eres Yisrael, they submit a report that terrifies Bene Yisrael. The nation spends the night crying: "The whole community broke into loud cries, and the nation wept that night" (Bamidbar 14).
They pleaded to be allowed to return to Egypt rather than be slain by the inhabitants of Eres Yisrael. The crying of Bene Yisrael **was an utter and outright rejection of Hashem** and his plans for their future.

On this fateful night, Hashem decreed that our ancestors would not enter Eres Yisrael. Hazal tell us that this night was none other than *Tishaa Be'Ab*. This was the first of the five tragedies that occurred on *Tishaa Be'Ab* (Ta'anit 26B). Bene Yisrael's crying led to their ultimate demise: forty years of wandering and death in the desert. But it didn't affect them alone; it was of such great magnitude that it affected the future generations of *Am Yisrael* as well.

Hazal depict *Hashem's* response to their crying: Hashem said, 'You wept in vain (without cause); I will establish this night as a time of weeping for generations' (Ta'anit 29A).

How did Hazal know this? What is the source of their statement?

The *Yaabetz* writes that their statement is based on the following verses from *Tehillim:*

"They rejected the desirable land and did not believe His word; They grumbled in their tents and did not listen to the voice of the Lord. Therefore, He raised his hand in



oath to make them fall in the wilderness; to disperse their offspring among the nations and scatter them through the lands" (Chapter 106).

If one reads these verses carefully, he will notice that there is more than one punishment listed here. Besides the immediate punishment of that generation "to make them fall in the wilderness," Hashem decreed ***another punishment*** on that night: "to disperse their offspring among the nations and scatter them through the lands."

What is the significance of this punishment?

A Land God Cares For:

To fully understand the above verse, we must focus on one of *Eres Yisrael*'s special qualities. Every land outside of *Eres Yisrael* has a Sar- an administering angel- which serves as an intermediary between the people of that land and God. On the other hand, Eres Yisrael is under Hashem's direct guidance and control. As the Torach teaches:

"A land which the Lord your God cares for; ***the eyes of the Lord you God are always on it,*** from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year (Debarim 11)."

This is what makes the land so special and holy. The general forces of nature don't necessarily apply in Eres Yisrael. The conquest of the land in the times of Yehoshua is the greatest testament to this. A nation of redeemed slaves untrained in military warfare conquered seven mighty nations and thirty-one kings.[3]

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3 This phenomenon has repeated itself in modern times with the miraculous establishment of the State of Israel and its great growth and development since. From its inception the enemies of Israel have continuously attempted to wipe Israel and its' people off the map but with God's help our nation and country have endured. In recent years terrorist organizations from the north and south of Israel have bombarded Israel with rockets time and time again. Yet God constantly protects our brethren, and the death toll is always miraculously low. Most recently we've witnessed this in April as Iran launched a large salvo of missiles and drones at Israel and there was not one casualty! We can see a literal fulfillment of the verse "the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps" (Tehilim 121). Hashem watches over both the people and land of Israel constantly.

They Rejected the Desired Land:

The spies, and subsequently *Bene Yisrael*, did not view *Eres Yisrae*l this way. They refused to believe that God controls Eres Yisrael in a supernatural manner. Although Hashem promised the *Abot* that their descendants would inherit the land, and in spite of the fact that Hashem promised them directly that they'd successfully conquer the land, they refused to believe in God's words and spent the night crying!

The *Netibot Shalom* (Bamidbar, pp. 63-76) writes that they were *kofer bikedushat ha'aretz*- they denied the holiness of the land. **They viewed it like any other land,** which led them to fear the powerful inhabitants of the land. This is the meaning of the verse, "They rejected the desirable land and did not believe His word."

As a result, Hashem decreed that a time would come when they would be expelled from this special and holy land. They would be forced into exile and live in lands that function under the forces of nature, lands that are under the care of administering angels, and lands that are vulnerable to the effects of the stars and the constellations. "That He would disperse their offspring among the nations and scatter them through the lands."

Out of Luck:

The same cause-and-effect relationship applies to *Am Yisrael*. When they acknowledge that God has placed them "above the mazal," when they conduct themselves as *Am Yisrael* should, and when they celebrate their direct connection with God, they maintain that special status. The moment the nation conducts itself like the gentiles, the moment they ignore or breach their direct connection with God, they lose that special status. The decree from heaven was only a result of Bene Yisrael's behavior.

Since *Tishaa Be'Ab* was **the day** that *Am Yisrael* **denied the holiness of the land,** Hashem decreed that it would be the day that they would be exiled from that land in future generations.

Since *Tishaa Be'Ab* was **the day** that *Am Yisrael* **rejected the direct connection they have with God,** Hashem decreed it would be the day that Am Yisrael would be vulnerable to the influences of the *mazalot* and prone to terrible tragedies.

Against All Odds:

When *Am Yisrael* becomes vulnerable to the natural and astrological forces of this world, it is quite dangerous for them. The Vilna Gaon writes that the *mazalot* are actually against Yisrael. The *Yaarot Debash* writes that the '***Mazal hates Yisrael.***' As mentioned above, Abraham was not meant to have children according to the influences of the *mazalot*. The very inception of the Jewish nation is solely because God raised Abraham above the influences of the *mazalot*. If Abraham had been under the influence of the *mazalot*, he would not have had a child, and there would be no Am Yisrael. The very existence of Am Yisrael is hinged on our being above the *mazalot*.

Hence, throughout our history, each time our nation has become vulnerable to the mazalot, it has suffered greatly - specifically during the month of Ab[4].

From Bottom to Top:

The Vilna Gaon supports this concept with a beautiful interpretation of a Gemara in Masechet Megila. The Gemara comments on the conversation between Haman and his household upon his return from leading *Mordechai* through the streets of *Shushan*.

"If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish stock, you will not overcome him, but you will undoubtedly fall before him" (Esther 6).

R. Yehuda bar Ilai expounded: Why did they state a double expression of falling *(nafol tipol)*? They told him: This nation is compared to dust and is compared to the stars. **When they descend, they descend to the dust, but when they rise, they rise to the stars** (Megila 16A)

Yisrael can only succeed when they are above the *mazal*. Therefore, **if they begin to rise** - if they are succeeding- they will rise all the way to the stars- meaning they will rise above the stars. At this point, no nation can "reach them"- no nation can control or defeat them (Maharsha). However, **if they begin to descend** - if they are failing- **they will become below the *mazalot*** and become prone to their dangerous influences. They will fall all the way down to the dust since the *mazalot* are against Yisrael. The nations will not only "reach them" but also step on them like dust.

There is no greater testament to this statement than the events of the twentieth century. Our nation experienced the most terrible - the Holocaust. But from the ashes of the Holocaust, the state of Israel arose.

The Ben Ish Hai writes that since *Hodesh Ab* has been filled with many tragedies, there must come a time when it will be filled with many good occurrences—more than any other month. He bases this on the pasuk: ***"Give us joy for as long as you have afflicted us"*** (Tehillim 90).

The month is called *Ab*, which means father because it is destined to become "The Father" of all months. There is **great potential** to change *Ab* into a month of great events, **a month of joy and happiness.** It is in our hands to rise above the mazal and reclaim our direct connection with God.

Just as the downfall of *Am Yisrael* during this month was swift and severe, so too the rise of *Am Yisrael* will be swift and sudden, as it says in the pasuk in *Yeshayahu* (58):

"Then your light shall burst through like the dawn, and your healing spring up quickly."

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4 Rabbi Norman Lamm ZS"L writes a similar idea in his book on the Holocaust "The Face of God: Thoughts on the Holocaust". He posits that the Holocaust happened because of Hester Panim (when God "hides his face" and takes a step back to let the world run its natural course). "During an extended period of historical national Hester Panim, we are given over to the uncertainties of nature and history, where we can be raised by the tides of time and circumstance to the crest of the world's waves- or hurled pitilessly into the fierce troughs of life." Our notion further explains why the Jews in particular suffer so badly throughout history- more than any other nation. It is not only because God hides his face, it's coupled with the fact that the mazalot are against us. Considering this concept it is clear that on October 7th this past year we became vulnerable to the natural forces for one day, Hashem hid his face from us for one day, enabling the enemies commit unspeakable acts of abuse and destruction in Eres Yisrael and to carry out their brutal plan to viciously murder hundrends of Jewish soldiers, men, women and children (Hashem Yikom Damam).

אתחלתא דגאולה

Rabbi Albert Setton



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Since 1948, we have been fortunate to witness a return of עם ישראל לארצו. Many Rabbis have viewed this time as the beginning of the redemption process (אתחלתא דגאולה) - that the Jewish people have been anticipating for nearly 2,000 years. It is only natural that these developments impact Tisha Be'Av and our feelings towards the Hurban (destruction of the Temple) and Galut (exile) in some way. We will examine the impact of the creation of the State of Israel and the Jewish conquest of Yerushalayim in light of two halachic responsa written by two Sephardic Rabbis, Hacham Hayim David HaLevi (late Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv) and Hacham Ovadia Yosef זצ''ל.

There is a paragraph called נחם added to the blessing of בונה ירושלים on Tisha Be'Av (in Minha in the Syrian community). The paragraph highlights the destruction and desolation of the city:
"העיר החרבה והבזויה, מבלי בניה היא יושבת"

The Rabbis question whether this statement can still be said after 1967, in which Jerusalem is under Jewish control, with hundreds of thousands of Jewish residents, perhaps more than at any other time in Jewish history. The Temple Mount is patrolled by IDF soldiers, and the city is being rebuilt constantly. It is most definitely not destroyed and desolate- Jerusalem's children have returned. Additionally, the city is filled with Yeshivot and the restoration of Torah study and is firmly the Torah

capital of the Jewish world today. Neither of the Rabbis disagrees with the reality mentioned above- their argument takes place along different lines.

Hacham Hayim David Halevi[1] suggests a minor emendation to the prayer that completely changes its meaning- he suggests adding the word שהיתה, the city that was destroyed, implying that it is no longer the case. He is adamant that he can no longer say the text as is because he will then be considered lying to Hashem, denying the good that Hashem has bestowed upon his nation. He feels compelled to acknowledge the reality of the courtyard of the Kotel being filled with tens of thousands of Jewish people, and the Jewish sovereignty over the city. His argument is essentially acknowledging the reality in front of his eyes, and understanding that the prayer of נחם no longer reflects the new reality.

Hacham Ovadia Yosef[2] addresses the same question. Keep in mind that he already acknowledged the different reality post-1948, calling for the recitation of Hallel on Yom Ha'asmaut, and calling the developments [3] אתחלתא דגאולה. However, he disagrees with Hacham Halevi and believes that the statement of the נחם prayer is still accurate. He explains that the statement of destruction and desolation is not limited to the city of Jerusalem but rather the Temple Mount. He describes with agony the restrictions of the Jewish people to ascend Har Habayit (both halachic and political restrictions) and our lack of ability to rebuild the Bet Hamikdash. He speaks about the spiritual loss of the presence of God and the daily miracles that would happen in the Temple. With his emphasis on the lack of spiritual redemption, he feels the time has not yet come to change the text of the Tefillah.

This debate over the prayer of נחם is valuable because it highlights the complexity of the Jewish people returning to their country. No one truly anticipated that God would unfold the redemption in the ways that it has. It forces us to see both sides of the coin, the unprecedented Hesed bestowed upon us and the path that still remains to be traveled.

When you choose your prayer book for Tisha Be'av, make sure that the book you choose reflects your emotions and feelings about the current state of the Jewish people. Are you focused on the physical destruction of the Jewish people over years of exile, or feel bereft of spirituality and the presence of God in our midst? Make sure your prayers reflect the deep emotions that this day and the history of Am Yisrael invokes.

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1 שו"ת עשה לך רב חלק א סימן יד

2 שו״ת יחוה דעת חלק סימן מג

3 שו״ת יביע אומר חלק ו׳, אורח חיים סימן מא

Hazal's Perspective



Rabbi Edward Benjamin

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A very puzzling statement in the Midrash Eikha Rabba begs to be analyzed and expounded upon:

ר' הונא ור' ירמיה בשם ר' שמואל ברבי יצחק אמר: מצינו שויתר הקדוש ברוך הוא על עבודת כוכבים, ועל גילוי עריות, ועל שפיכות דמים, ולא ויתר על מאסה של תורה. שנאמר: 'על מה אבדה הארץ?' על עבודת כוכבים ועל גילוי עריות ועל שפיכות דמים אין כתיב כאן, אלא 'על עזבם את תורתי'.

Rav Huna and Rav Yermiya said in the name of Rav Shmuel B. Rebbe Yishak, "We find that God forgave for the sins of idolatry, incest, and murder, but didn't forgive for the rejection [out of disgust] of Torah, as it says, (Yirmiya 9:11) 'for what was the land destroyed' it does not say because of idolatry, incest, or murder, but rather for the 'abandoning of Torah'."

Questions:

1. How could it actually be that not learning Torah is worse than the three cardinal sins?
2. The Talmud itself (Yoma 9b) clearly states that the 1st Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because of the 3 cardinal sins. So, how does this midrash say otherwise?

To these questions I'd like to add two more. The Talmud (Nedarim 81a) uses the exact Passuk quoted to say something slightly different.

דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב: מאי דכתיב: "מי האיש החכם ויבן את זאת" דבר זה נשאל לחכמים ולנביאים ולא פירשוהו, עד שפירשוהו הקבה בעצמו, דכתיב "ויאמר ה' על עזבם את תורתי וגו'". היינו "לא שמעו בקולי" היינו "לא הלכו בה" אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: שאין מברכין בתורה תחילה

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: What is the meaning of the Passuk, "Who is the wise man who will understand this…" (Yirmiya 9:11) This question was asked to the wise men and the prophets and was left unexplained until God himself explained it, as it says, "And God said, for the abandoning of My Torah…"(Ibid) Is it not that abandoning Torah is equivalent to "not listening to my voice" or "not walking in it" (both of which are also mentioned in the Passuk)? Therefore, Rav Yehuda says in the name of Rav, "They didn't recite Birkot HaTorah before learning."

3. Is there a way to reconcile these two different statements, or are they two different opinions that are arguing with one another?

4. The Torah, in multiple places, tells us that if we abandon Hashem, abrogate the covenant, intermarry, and worship idols, God will cause us to be exiled, so why do the Rabbis of the Midrash and the Gemara feel the need to offer a new answer?

I'd like to start by answering question 4 and then use that as a springboard for the others.

When we examine the many various reasons offered by Hazal (whether in Midrashim or in different Masechtot) for the destruction of the Batei Mikdash and the Galut, three important patterns emerge.

1. The severity of the sins does not necessarily correlate with the severity of the ultimate result. Ex: "Yerushalayim was only destroyed because the Rabbis judged according to Torah law, and not above and beyond the Torah law." (Baba Metsia 30a)

2. Hazal are most of the time, speaking about the spiritual and/or internal societal causes for the destruction, not the historical/technical causes. Ex: "The Bet HaMikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred" (Yoma 9b) and not "The Bet HaMikdash was destroyed because the Romans had more advanced weaponry."

3. Hazal seem to have no qualms about disagreeing about the reasons for the destruction without feeling the need to reach a decisive conclusion about which explanation is, in fact, correct, as is evident from our two sources above.

These three patterns indicate to us that when Hazal are looking to pinpoint the reason(s) for calamities, they are not simply looking to find the most proximate cause, nor are they looking to find the most serious sin that was being performed at the time, but rather, they are seeking to find the sin(s) (or stories that portray sins i.e. Kamsa and Bar Kamsa) that are the bedrock or root cause for the societal rot that is. These sins are usually marked by being especially pernicious and malignant while many times being "under the radar."

To make a mundane comparison: many times during a sports game, there will be a "minor" play that ends up significantly shifting the balance of the game. While this play might not make the highlight reel and to all those watching at the time, it might not seem significant- to the person looking back and studying the game closely, it becomes clear that this was a monumental turning point because it was a play that signaled something greater beneath the surface which would only be revealed throughout the continuation of the game. Hazal, to complete the analogy, would be the ones to point to that play as being the downfall of the losing team because it is the essential problem that lay beneath the surface that eventually caused the bad results.

This understanding allows us to answer question 4. Of course, the Torah tells us the reasons for destruction and Galut, but those are the immediate proximate reasons. Hazal, with their additional explanations, are trying to tell us how we ever even got to that point where we were abrogating God's covenant because that doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen without people taking notice. Hence, Hazal point us to the "minor" sins that went undetected until it was so ingrained into the society that it was past the point of return.

Now, we can attempt to answer 1 and 2 as well. While, of course, it is true that Torah learning isn't as grave of a sin as the three cardinal sins, Hazal are telling us that when there is a complete abandonment of Torah, there is no longer any hope for the problems in society to be fixed. In other words, a broken society– one in which even sins like murder, incest, and idolatry are prevalent– can eventually be healed if there is some basic commitment to learning the Truth. The minute there is a total abandonment of Torah, the hope for a future other than the rotten society present is absent, and the only solution is a restart in the form of Galut. So indeed, it is true that the destruction was, in fact, a result of both (hence the 2 different opinions in the Gemara), the three cardinal sins, and the abandonment of Torah; the only question is from what perspective you are looking at it.

Finally, in answering question 3, I'd like to suggest that the argument lies in what constitutes abandonment of Torah, which would remove the possibility that the Torah can correct the rotten society. In other words, according to the Midrash, the abandonment of actual learning of the Torah was what revealed to the Almighty

that this was a society not going to change its rotten ways; while according to the Gemara in Nedarim (81a), once the Torah learners stopped treating their Torah with absolute value (Ran's explanation of the idea of not saying Berakha) evidenced by them no longer reciting the Berakha over it that was the sign that the Torah would have no ability to effect any change in the society.

In conclusion, when looking back at any historical event, especially ones as monumental as the destruction of the Batei Mikdash and the Galut, there will be an almost infinite amount of causes that can be pointed to as the "reasons" for the ultimate result. Hence, historians and anthropologists disagree on the reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire and the reasons for the Allies' victory in WWII, and hence the disagreements within Hazal. However, the fundamental difference between the historical/anthropological analysis and the one that Hazal take is looking at deeper causes, often rooted in moral or spiritual defects that are underrated in their malignancy to destroy society. What we can take away from the total breadth of Hazal's perspective is never to underestimate any wrongdoing, even if, in our mind, it may not seem so major. With the help of God, we will, during these three weeks, shine a lot of light on all the sins and misdeeds that may not be getting so much attention but are, in fact, the root causes of our continued Galut.



אהבת חינם



Alex Dweck

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The mitzvot in the Torah that govern interactions between man and his friend are typically straightforward and readily understood. Such is not the case regarding the prohibition against charging interest, ribbit, or neshech, which is often challenging to comprehend, especially in the market-based society that we live in today. Usually, we deem a transaction to be fair as long as both sides are well-informed of the terms and give their consent. Should the same principle not apply to a loan with interest? If a lender agrees to lend someone money with interest, and the borrower thinks it's worthwhile for him to make this deal, then shouldn't the transaction be legal?

This problematic question forces us to change how we view the prohibition of charging interest. Instead of viewing it from a strictly financial perspective, we can better understand it through a moral and ethical lens. In his book What Money Can't Buy, Michael Sandel discusses the ethical limits of markets. In simple terms, markets work by allowing people to buy and sell goods and services. When there's demand for a product, the price increases, encouraging more people to sell it. This way, goods are allocated to those who value them and are willing to pay the most. Sandel theorizes that although market policies govern many areas of life, and thus, most things are for sale, our moral society is often caught in the crossfire when markets overextend their reach.

The following example illustrates Sandel's point. Imagine a market for buying and selling kidneys. While instinctively, this feels wrong, it is hard to pinpoint precisely why! If one person agrees to sell one of his kidneys for a specific price, seemingly because he needs the money, and another agrees to purchase it, we have mutual informed consent, and the transaction is fair. So then, what is the problem? Sandel proposes two potential moral objections to the buying and selling of human organs; one is about fairness, and the other about corruption.

One argument is that a market for buying and selling kidneys would prey upon the poor, desperate for money. The transaction wouldn't indeed be a fair one, as their choice is not truly voluntary — they are effectively forced by external factors to make a sale that they might not ordinarily want to make. On the other hand, Sandel argues, one could claim that "such markets promote a degrading, objectifying view of the human person, as a collection of spare parts." In other words, by treating human body parts as a commodity, the transaction undermines the moral value of the human being. When markets overextend their reach, such as into the realm of organ donorship, our fundamental perception of human sanctity is corrupted.

With Sandel's moral and ethical arguments in mind, a closer look at the pesukim that describe the interest prohibition show the same two arguments reappearing (Vayikra 25:35-36):

"וכי ימוך אחיך ומטה ידו עמך והחזקת בו גר ותושב וחי עמך"

If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand (assets) become shaky among you, you must support him, [so too] the proselyte and the sojourner, [so] that he shall live with you.

"אל תקח מאותו נשך ותרבית ויראת מאלוקיך וחי אחיך עמך"

You shall not take from him interest or usury, and you shall fear your God and your brother shall live with you.

The Torah introduces us to a Jew who is impoverished and in desperate need of money. Although he is technically making a free decision to take a loan with interest, the Torah teaches that his decision isn't truly voluntary due to his desperate situation. Rashi (Shemot 22:24), commenting on the prohibition, writes, "It is called neshech, biting, because it resembles the bite of a snake: it bites, inflicting a small wound in a person's foot which he does not feel at first, but all at once it swells and distends the whole



body up to the top of his head. So it is with interest: at first, one does not feel the drain it makes on him, and it remains unnoticed until the interest mounts up and suddenly makes the person lose a big fortune." If he were genuinely thinking freely, he would know that taking this loan wouldn't financially serve him well in the long run. He would understand that it will compound and compound until it comes back to bite him. Like the case of the kidney transaction, this so-called "fair" agreement is anything but that.

Another explanation for the rationale behind the prohibition focuses on the word "brother" used by the Torah. In choosing this description, the Torah is hinting to us that it is prohibiting *ribbit*, (interest) not because financially it needs to, but instead because it wants to mandate a higher standard of relationship between Jews. If your brother were in need, you would never consider charging him interest — lending him money is a basic brotherly kindness! The moment one Jew charges a fellow Jew interest on a loan, the relationship becomes purely economic and centered on individual profit as opposed to one centered on brotherhood. This is likely what the Ramban (Shemot 22:24) was suggesting when he said, "Rather, the loan to him should be an act of goodness; you should not take from

him any mark of honor because of it, nor are you to derive any monetary benefit from it." Charging interest on the loan converts the transaction from an act of kindness to an ordinary business deal; the relationship between brothers has been corrupted.

The Gemara in Masekhet Yoma (9b) explains that the first Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins, whereas the second was destroyed because of sin'at hinam, baseless hatred. Rav Kook famously explains that if the destruction was because of sin'at hinam, then we can only finally reach full redemption through the practice of ahavat hinam. The idea that a person could genuinely love a fellow Jew without any particular reason is beautiful, but it is far easier said than done. How do we raise ourselves to that standard of relationship? The Torah's prohibition against *ribbit*, I believe, teaches us the very first step in the process of getting there. Instead of relating to your fellow Jew as just your fellow Jew, treat him like you would treat your brother — because that is precisely what he is.



Are We Guilty?



Rabbi Jacob Matalon

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As we spend these three weeks yet again, mourning the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, we need to ask ourselves why are we still here? Why hasn't the redemption come? What is G-d waiting for?

In order to tackle this question, we need to understand why we are in this position to begin with. In Gemarah Masechet Yoma daf 9: our Chachamim are puzzled with the destruction of the second Temple. Seemingly, the people of this generation were upright people; they learned Torah, they kept the Misvot and were involved in acts of Chessed. Why were they deserving of such a punishment? The Gemarah concludes, "מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיְתָה בּוֹ שִׂנְאַת חִנָּם"- Because they were guilty of "unjustified hatred".

The question is, are we still guilty? Well, let's understand what the Gemarah actually means by "unjustified hatred". In ויקרא פרק כט פסוק יז the Torah commands us *לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך* "do not hate your brother in your heart". The אבן עזרא, attempting to define this hatred, explains that the commandment "not to hate" is actually the other half of *ואהבת לרעך* to "love your fellow Jew". He asserts that both of these commandments are obligations of the heart, and when we fulfill them, we will bring the final redemption. It seems that this "hate" we are referring to isn't necessarily bound to any malicious actions, rather it is merely a feeling inside of us.

But how much "hate" is too much hate?

The אור החיים states, that some people may think that they are only guilty of שִׂנְאַת חִנָּם if they harbor real hatred. For instance, if they would hope for someone's demise or pray for their downfall, but simply "distancing" themselves from another Jew wouldn't fall under this category. However, the אור החיים stresses that these people are gravely mistaken. The Torah strategically places the words "do not hate" next to the words "your brother", to teach us that anytime someone has ill feelings towards another Jew, even if it is only to the point where that Jew no longer feels like a brother to them, they are guilty of *לא תשנא את אחיך*, and are holding back the redemption.

Putting up fences, slapping on labels, and classifying people as "other" certainly falls under this category. Undoubtably, most of us (and by "us", I am not just referring to the community, but to the Jewish world at large) are, or have been, guilty of this "hatred" at some point in time. The question is how do we prevent ourselves from feeling like this even when we disagree with someone's views, values, or beliefs?

In משלי פרק י פסוק יב Shelomo Hamelech states שִׂנְאָה תְּעוֹרֵר מְדָנִים וְעַל כָּל-פְּשָׁעִים תְּכַסֶּה אַהֲבָה: - "Hatred starts fights, but love covers up all wrong doings". The mepharshim explain this seemingly ambiguous verse as follows. The real reason for why people start fights, stems from underlying feelings of hatred. Because when we don't like a person, it's easy to get upset even at the littlest of things. However, when we love someone, even if that person wrongs you, or even if they have different outlook on life, it's easy to turn the other cheek. Because, love has the ability to cover up flaws.

If we want to solve the issue that is plaguing the Jewish world and preventing the redemption from coming, then we have to fix the way we view each other. We need to start with love and move forward from there. Because at the end of the day, when you view someone as your brother, any reason you have for hatred is unjustified.



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