

Introduction

Rabbi Yaacov Haber

“Let Zion and Her cities lament like a widow girded with sackcloth, mourning for the husband of her youth” (Kinos)

Let us imagine a young woman who lived in perfect harmony with her husband. Their life was comfortable and they were blessed with children. Suddenly the husband passed away. This was of course a tragedy. A profound adjustment was needed in everyone's life. The young woman was left with her children and a broken heart. But she looked at her children and realized that she must be in control. She must not hurt her children with her weeping and agony. She was determined to show strength to her loved ones. As she did so she grew more pained. She longed to cry, she yearned to release the pressure of her suffering, but she dared not. Her children came first.

A year of sleepless nights passed, and the anniversary of her husband's death approached. She decided that on this day only, she would allow herself to cry. She gathered her children together and commended them for their strength. She explained to them that this was the anniversary of the great tragedy that befell them and they could allow themselves to cry. They sat and wept bitterly all day long and bemoaned their sorrow. They felt better, she felt relieved.

Tisha B'Av is an anniversary of tragedy for the Jewish people. Despite all the pain we feel and sorrow we endure we don't cry. We must not cry, for we must survive. If we were to cry, we would cry all the time. We could mourn day and night all the holocausts and pogroms, persecutions and attacks which have befallen us throughout history. We would be traumatized over the problems that happen today in Israel, around the world and in our own communities. Markets and busses are blowing up in Jerusalem. Jews are making the wrong international headlines. An unprecedented amount of our own children are straying from the path of Torah. A growing amount of unmarried men and woman are crying themselves to sleep at night. Missionaries with billion dollar budgets have targeted our communities and our children. Marriages are in crisis and what might be even worse is that it's so hard to find anyone to talk to about it. We must restrain our tears. One day a year, however, we may cry. On the ninth of Av we are permitted to release our emotions and bemoan our sorrows.

So why aren't we crying? Why are our minds begging our hearts to cry but no tears flow? Because in order to survive we've taught ourselves how not to cry.

But here is the problem. The Gemara says “tipach atzmosav shel mechashvei kaitz.” Those that calculate the time of the coming of Moshiach will not rise to greet him. I'd like to offer a simple explanation as to why that is. One can wait for Moshiach, one can yearn for Moshiach and one can cry for Moshiach. These are reactions of the heart. But to calculate is to intellectualize. It's an issue out there but not an issue in here. When a yid is in trouble, when the world is in trouble, if it is a stranger I calculate, if it is my brother I cry.

Yesterday someone told me a story about someone, somewhere, who came to visit a famous tzadik. They were childless and in pain. They sought the blessing of the tzadik to shake up the heavenly chambers, perhaps G-d would grant them a child. The tzadik thought and he prayed. He turned to the couple and said to them, I'm sorry I can't help you. There is a decree in Heaven that just can't be reversed. The couple left in despair. The next day the couple looked out the window of their home and saw the Tzadik approaching their door. They greeted him but asked, “why are you here? You said that there was nothing that can be done for us!” The tzadik looked at them and said, “I know there is nothing I could do to help you but I figured at least I could come and cry with you.” If it is my brother I cry.

The first Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed because people violated the three cardinal sins. They worshipped foreign gods, there was murder in the streets and forbidden incestuous relationships were commonplace. During the Second Temple era none of this took place. Jerusalem was destroyed because of Sinas Chinom, cause-less hate. In the words of the Talmud “This teaches us that cause-less hate is equal to the three most serious transgressions of the Torah.”

The Jerusalem Talmud questions this deduction. In fact the Babylonian exile lasted only 70 years while the Roman exile is still with us today. The amount of bloodshed caused by the Romans and their followers far outreached the horrors of the Babylonians. The Jerusalem Talmud concludes therefore, that in fact causeless hate is much worse than the worst transgressions of the Torah. In the words of the Jerusalem Talmud, during the first Temple era the wrongdoing was open, whereas during the second they were hidden.

The Vilna Gaon in his usual succinct fashion presents an omega insight into Sinas Chinom. As terrible as the violation of the cardinal sins of the Torah are, they do not, says the GRA, necessarily indicate that the people are intrinsically evil. It is possible to be swept into a culture of idolatry, to lose one's head and kill, or to fall into forbidden relationship. These are terrible unjustifiable sins and one must give one's life to avoid them. But they can be external to the person and do not necessarily define the person. Hate, says the GRA, is an

internal sin. It reflects the essence of one's human condition and defines him. A person who hates has a bad heart. With a bad heart one can not worship G-d. The Temple was destroyed and will remain that way until we remedy the cause.

I remember 20 years ago when I was newly married and living in Jerusalem. My wife and I hosted a sheva brachos for one of our friends. In his honor amongst the many guests was one of the great poskim of Jerusalem, Rabbi Chaim Pinchus Scheinberg. A discussion broke out at the table about why there seems to be so much mudslinging going on in a certain community. Some claimed that jealousy was the cause, another said it was ignorance and yet another claimed it was financial. We looked toward the Rav as he said, "Ich mein as es felt in lev tov." I think there is a lack of good heartedness. A good hearted person doesn't hate. This, says the GRA, was the sin that we still mourn.

"Hazorim B'dimah", if we sow with tears, "brina yiktzoru", we will merit to reap with happiness. Amen.

Leil Tish B'av – The Eve of Tisha B'av

By Rabbi Sender Haber

Kina #1 – Zechor Hashem

On Tisha B'av we sit on the floor and say Kinos. The first one of those Kinos is the book of Eicha, written by Yirmiyahu. In it he laments the destruction. Much of it was written as a warning and then rewritten after the events actually transpired. In the first one of our Kinos, Eicha becomes interactive. We read a line and interpose it with a krechzt, a sigh, something personal.

In the first Chapter (1:17) we say that the Jewish people were exiled together with their enemies. We didn't just lose our land, we gained enemies. And those enemies are destined to surround us wherever we may go.

Kina #3– Tonight We Cry

Tonight we cry. When I was studying in Israel, I finished Kinos on the evening of Tisha B'av and felt a desire to go to the Kosel. I naively thought that I would be the only one with this idea, but as I boarded the bus I realized that many people had the same thought. The 2# bus was full, as always, with many different people from many neighborhoods of Yerushalayim. Women were saying Kinos and crying. Everyone was dressed in their non-leather shoes.

Going to the Kosel was usually very exciting, even cheerful. On Pesach I used to walk there every single day to say Hallel and daven Mussaf. Tonight the Kosel is a sad place to be. We remind ourselves that we aren't really there. That we are stuck outside on the wrong side of the wall. Thousands of people sit on the floor, each saying Kinos in their own way. It is a beautiful sign that the Jewish people have not forgotten what once was. But it is a night to cry.

On the first Tisha B'av when we cried for no reason. We said that we did not want to enter the land of Israel, that Moshe was leading us into a death trap.

Hashem said that we cried for no reason; He would give us reason to cry. And he has. In the Kinah itself we mention Five Events: the Meraglim (spies), the destruction of the Two Batei Mikdash, the Temples (586 BCE, 70 CE), the end of Bar Kochba revolt (132 CE), and the plowing of the city of Jerusalem by Turnus Rufus (133 CE).

Additionally, Tisha B'av has been the date of several terrible events including the beginning of the First Crusade 1096, the Expulsion from England in 1290, the Expulsion from Spain 1492, WW I in 1914, and the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto deportation in 1942.

We can only pray that G-d will see our tears and stop giving us reason to cry.

Kina #4 - Shomron

The fourth Kinah was written in Eleventh century Spain by R' Shlomo ibn Gabirol. Ibn Gabirol himself had a very difficult life. He lost his parents at a young age and many people who were close to him, seem to have passed away. He himself was banned from his hometown for some of his writings that hit too close to home.

With that in mind, it is touching that his poem recognizes not his suffering, but the suffering of the two states of Israel.

Before the destruction, the Jewish nation was split into two states. They were known as Yisroel and Yehuda with Shomron and Yerushayim as their capitals. Shomron and the kingdom of Yisroel were exiled much earlier. They are known to us as the ten lost tribes. The Kingdom of Yehuda lasted longer, but they were subject to the actual destruction. In this Kina they argue, each insisting that her troubles were worse.

Kina #5 – Ad Anah

The fifth Kina deals with the Mazalos – the zodiac signs. The underlying theme is that the entire universe was affected by the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Gemara in Gittin tells us that Jerusalem was destroyed because of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. Somebody invited Kamtza to his party but Bar Kamtza showed up instead. He offered to pay and begged not to be thrown out but nobody said a word. He went and convinced the Caesar that we were rebelling. The Caesar eventually attacked. We are sitting on the floor today because Bar Kamtza was insulted.

Who was Bar Kamtza? We don't know a lot about him, but we do know that he was bad enough to be thrown out of the party and evil enough to encourage the Caesar to attack the Jews. He was not a very good guy, but he was apparently good enough that we were punished because people like him were mistreated.

As we read the next Kina and go back to our homes, we need to think about how the entire universe changed because one person was insulted. We need to look around us and learn to appreciate every single person. We need to find something to admire in every person

When it comes to actions that are between us and Hashem, we can always claim that we had good intentions. If we thought the food was Kosher or we forgot that it was Shabbos our sins make less of an impact. When it comes to actions between people, intentions don't always matter. If someone is insulted, he is insulted. He may be reacting unreasonably, but we see from

Bar Kamtza that that unreasonable reaction has the potential to cause us just as much pain as a reasonable reaction. If not more.

Morning Kinot

By Rabbi Sender Haber with Rabbi Tzvi H.Haber

Kina #6 – Shovas!

Rav Shalom Schwadron was a fabulous speaker. Many of us know him through Rabbi Pesach Krohn and his Maggid series. Besides for being a speaker, he was a tremendous scholar and a tzaddik.

Every Motzei Shabbos, Reb Shalom would speak to hundreds of people at Zichron Moshe. One year, on Parshas Bereishis he got up to speak and his mind drew a blank. He began speaking and stopped, began speaking and stopped. He beckoned to his son (from whom I heard the story) who reminded him of what he would say and started again – only to draw a blank. He started to cry and sat down. Never to speak publicly again.

Rab Shalom Schwadron's last words spoken in public were filled with tears. "You see", he said, "what happens to an old Jew. Go and daven Maariv. Begin with the words 'Ve'hu Rachum'. He who is merciful will forgive our sins and not destroy us completely".

We all know that nobody lasts forever, but we don't really know. A friend of mine passed away recently. Every single night I expect him to walk home with me. Every night he's not there. Nobody lasts forever.

The Bais Hamikdash was so majestic, Yerushalayim so awesome, that we thought we would never lose it. How it could it go away? How could it become a mere memory?

And when we did lose the Beis Hamikdash there was silence. The world came to a stop. The music was not the same; the flowers did not smell as good, the air tasted stale. Nothing will ever be the same.

The Zohar tells us that when the Kohein Gadol would enter the Holy of Holies during the time of the first temple, the angels would sing.

The word Shabbos usually has nice connotations, but Shavas in this Kinah does not refer to the absence of work. It refers to the absence of everything. The world stood still.

The angels in the Holy of Holies stopped singing. The incense stopped burning. The Kohanim stopped walking in the streets. Shavas. Everything stopped.

The Vilna Gaon writes that nobody was ever sad in Yerushalayim. Nobody was ever under pressure or stress. Twice a day, the smell of the Ketores would drive everyone to do Teshuva and if someone did sin, or if he or she had something on their mind, they could go straight to the source and ask for blessing. Even advice. Shavas. It's not here anymore.

As we say the Kinos today, we are not allowed to be happy with our lot. We need to concentrate on what we have lost. Read the English, look through the commentaries. Join the Simple Jews and scholars who, for two thousand years, have spent this day remembering what is no more.

Kina #9 – Eicha Tifarti

By Rabbi Tzvi H. Haber

This Kina takes a look at Parshas Bechukosai, where Hashem tells us the wonderful idyllic rewards for keeping His mitzvos and walking in His ways, and chas veshalom the punishments that will befall the Jewish people if we 'are disgusted with His commandments and stray.

There may be a tendency to not take these seriously. If I don't wear shatnez there will be peace in the Middle East? Really? And if I ignore some of the commandments, if I don't cherish my relationship with Hashem then we will (temporarily) lose our rights to being the chosen people, Hashem will turn a blind eye to us?

Here the mekonen, step by step, takes us through the blessings, and shows how they were reversed, and how all the tochachah and curses of Bechukosai came to be. The words of the Chumash came alive, in a very horrible and tragic way.

The kinah is 'spoken' alternatively by God, the Jews, and the enemies of the Jews. Hashem speaks and reminds us of the covenant we have with Him, and how we have brought the tzuros unto ourselves. Israel laments, and the enemies says that yes – true Hashem used to be your protector, but now he has turned against you and abandoned you because of your sins.

We have to realize that Jews enjoy a very close and special relationship with Hashem, and along with the perks of being G-ds chosen people, we are held to a higher standard as well. We bear responsibility for our actions, and suffer the consequences of our missteps.

Last night, in the very first kinah of Tisha B'Av, as well as in Kinah 10, the kinah gives us a clear tit for tat for our actions. Each tragedy happened for a specific cause. Although it's not for us to be specific, the general principle of responsibility is one that must be held dear.

There is a tremendous upside to this as well. Shmuel Hanavi, after crowning Shaul as king, said to the Jewish People: "I don't understand you! Until now you had a very wonderful close relationship to Hashem. When you were close to Him and prayed to Him He took care of you. When you strayed and forgot about Him you were attacked by your enemies and you remembered Him. Why would you want to put a king between you and Hashem?" It's a beautiful

special thing to have closeness with Hashem and something we should cherish, but comes along with a responsibility as well.

I think there is also a deeper point here. Rashi explains that the parsha of Bechukosai is referring to the obligation to toil in Torah. When we are involved in Torah study everything goes right for us, we are close to Hashem and He takes care of us. If we say that c"v its archaic, who needs it and mai ahani li rabanan that brings the kelalos upon us. Indeed the Gemara in Yoma tells us that that the chachamim were in a quandary as to the reason for the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash until it was revealed to them that it was for not making Birkas HaTorah. Rav Michel Birnbaum explains that this is more than a bracha, its our showing appreciation to Torah, recognizing the very dominant role Torah study must play in our life, and feeling and expressing our appreciation to HKBH for giving us this wonderful gift (as is evidenced by the din that Birkas Hatorah can be replaced by ahavah rabbah).

We lost the blessings and received the tochachah due to our lack of respect for Torah. The medrash in Eicha says Halevai they would have forsaken me and protected the Torah, the light within it would have returned them to good. We need, and must recognize within our own lives the need, for the light of Torah to be our guide and our inspiration, and then as the Kinah concludes in the prayer Hashem will dispose of Edom and rejuvenate our relationship and the blessings that come along with it.

Kinah #10 - Mourning the Kohanim

If the Bais Hamikdash was the place that we could always depend upon to be G-dly and holy, then the Kohanim were the people whom we could always depend upon to be our steadfast role models in the service of Hashem.

The Kinah of Aicha Yashva departs from the theme of the destruction of the physical Bais Hamikdash and focuses on the Kohanim. The Kinah mirrors the first chapter of Aicha, preserving the first word of each verse in Eicha as the beginning of its respective stanza in the Kinah. The author, Reb Elazar Hakalir demonstrates a familiarity with the Kohanim that we no longer have. Many of the names of the priestly cities that he mentions are not available to us from any other source.

Someone asked me if the Curtain in the Bais Hamikdash was removed on Tisha B'av just as it is removed in our shuls. It most certainly was not! Tisha B'av at the time of the Bais Hamikdash was (and will be) a joyous Yom Tov. The Magen Avraham writes that those who eat large meals before Tisha B'av are mistakenly observing a minhag that has been preserved from the times of the Bais Hamikdash. We used to eat large meals on tisha B'av and celebrate.

There were no sad days in the Bais Hamikdash.

The Kohein Gadol, who was considered a fixture of the Bais Hamikdash, was not allowed to be sad or sit Shiva. We are taught, "G-d's soul weeps [only] in secret" and the atmosphere in the Bais Hamikdash and around the Kohein Gadol was always joyous.

The Torah writes that the Me'il (tunic) of the Kohein Gadol could not be torn. It was constructed like a suit of armor with a reinforced neck. It is specifically forbidden to tear Kriah on the Me'il. The sanctity of the Me'il transcended the laws of Shiva. It was indestructible and dependable, because the Kohein Gadol's role was to be indestructible and dependable. No matter how tough things were and how many people were tearing their clothes, we always knew that we could depend on the Kohein Gadol to stay strong. This ended on Tisha B'av when – as our Kinah records - "V'hame'il K'nikra Pesilo" – the fabric of the Me'il was torn.

And in a later stanza: 'Sila kol Abirai' – He shattered all of my heroes' – we had nobody to depend on and look up to.

Another loss was the love the Kohanim had for the Jewish people. When the Kohanim bless us they thank Hashem who commanded them "to bless the Jewish people with love". We did not appreciate that love. The Kina tells us "Anos Amein Lo Avu" – we did not bother to answer Amen when they gave us their blessing.

Our focus was not in the right direction at all: We like to echo the words of Dovid "Esah Einai El Heharim" – 'I will lift my eyes to the mountains'. But the Kinah records that at the time of the destruction: 'Lo Lamarom Ayin Tzafas' we were not looking upward/ 'Kesef Al Cheres Chipas' – we were too busy putting a silver plate on earthenware jugs and pretending that everything was fine.

"R'eh Ki Husa'arti K'aniya" - The Kinah echoes the plight of Yonah as his ship tossed and turned in the ocean. We criticize Yona for trying to run away from his problems. He tried to escape Hashem's command but it was impossible. We need to focus on Hashem when we seek to solve our problems.

'Mishulchancha Ta'ariach' - The Kina ends in the hope that we will once again be guests at G-d's table. In the laws of Brachos, the intentions of the host always trump the intentions of his guest. G-d decided that we were no longer welcome at His table and we were forced to leave. We beg Hashem to invite us back.

Kina #11 – Yirmiyahu's Lament

Yoshiyahu was one of the greatest kings that the Jewish people ever had.

He was sure that he had succeeded in encouraging the Jewish people to repent and, in doing so, avoided the destruction of Jerusalem. Yirmiyahu knew better. He warned Yoshiyahu that the Jewish people hadn't really repented. They were still worshiping idols secretly and would still be destroyed.

If this were a novel or a movie, Yoshiyahu would have won. He would have shown that good triumphs over evil and that people can change. Unfortunately, Yoshiyahu did not win. He was killed in battle.

Yirmiyahu was right about the destruction, but this was not an "I told you so" moment. He cried over the death of Yoshiyahu and the last hope of the Jewish people. He encouraged all of the people to cry with him.

Kina #12 - Ohali

The world was created as a dwelling place for G-d. The purpose of our lives is to represent G-d in this world. The Bais Hamikdash is called an ohel – a tent. Hashem dwells inside of that tent, but it is our job to give shape to that tent and to keep it standing.

Sometimes we look around and we wonder: what happened? Is this what I'm looking for? Is this why I was created? Are these the friends I want, the lifestyle I want the schedule I want? Is the world on the right track? Can Moshiach really come?

These are the questions that are explored in the Kinah of Ohali – my tent.

Kina #21

Arzei Halevanon – The Cedars of Lebanon.

After we lost our Beis Haikdash we still had our scholars. The next Kinah laments the loss of our holy men.

How often do we find ourselves pining for the perfect Jew, for the perfect role model, for somebody who reminds us what it is that we are striving toward.

The sages were not the Beis hamikdash, but they were like the Klei Shares. Anything they contained became holy. Everything they represented exuded holiness. The Gemara tells us that in some ways the death of Tzadikim is worse than the burning of Hashem's home.

Too often, we suffer disappointment. We think we found someone who has it all, but he really doesn't. We don't judge the person or even criticize them, but we are disappointed.

On the one hand we need to know that the holiest people are flesh and blood just like us. Still, sometimes we need people who are like angels to look up to, holy people who can show us what The Torah can do.

Thank G-d we are fortunate in every generation to have great and Holy

people. Hashem does not forsake us. Still, once a year we allow ourselves to kvetch about those 'Cedars of Lebanon' who are no longer with us.

Kina #25 – Speyer, Mainz and Worms

Rabbi Tzvi H. Haber

All evil that happens to the Jews is because of Tisha B'Av, and therefore we mourn on Tisha B'Av even if that's not the day it actually happened – Brisker Rav.

This is explicit in this kinnah that writes “their murders were as tragic as the burning of the Bais Hamikdash, but we do not add an additional day of mourning”.

This Kinah discusses the destruction of Speyer, Mainz and Worms, which were from the larger cities that were destroyed at the very beginning of the Crusade. In addition there were numerous small towns and villages that were wiped out as well.

There are three distinct items that are lamented. The thousands of people killed, including great Torah scholars. Secondly, the destruction of Shuls and Torah centers, referred to as **מקדשי מעט**. And thirdly, we lament the burning of Sifrei Torah and volumes of the Talmud (see Kinah 41).

Let us look at some of the history, in order to better appreciate the magnitude of the loss.

A so called 'crusader' named Count Emicho was one of the early crusaders. Setting off in the early summer of 1096, an army of around 10,000 men, women and children proceeded through the Rhine valley, towards the Main River and then to the Danube.

Emperor Henry IV ordered the Jews to be protected when he learned of Emicho's intent. After some Jews were killed at Metz in May, John, Bishop of Speyer gave shelter to the Jewish inhabitants. Still 10 men and one woman who were found outside the fortress were slain by crusaders on May 3. Later on they came back and killed the rest of the community as well.

On May 18th, a Sunday, they reached Worms. They immediately went about spreading rumors that the Jews had killed a Christian child, and that they had poisoned the towns wells. The local population joined in and every Jew that they captured was killed. The Bishop of Worms attempted to shelter Jews, but 8 days later the crusaders broke in to his episcopal palace and killed the Jews inside. This was on Sunday May 25th, Rosh Chodesh Sivan, and the mekonen writes **בקריאת הלל לשוררה** – while they were saying Hallel they were killed. At least 800 (and some versions say 1100) Jews were massacred in Worms when they refused Christian baptism.

The Seder Hadoros quotes the Sm”a who explains, in a lesson to us all,

why Worms suffered more than other communities throughout history. He writes that the community of Worms was established by exiles of the first Bais Hamikdash. When the Jews returned to Jerusalem after 70 years, the Jews of Worms did not return. A message was sent to them by the leaders in Jerusalem, inviting them to come join. Their response was tragic – 'you stay where you are in your big Jerusalem, and we will stay where we are in our little Jerusalem'. The lack of recognition by the Jew that he is in Galus is ultimately the most dangerous attitude he can have.

News of Emicho's crusade spread quickly, and he was prevented from entering Mainz on May 25 by Bishop Ruthard, who had been paid 400 pieces of silver to protect the Jews. Emicho also took an offering of gold raised by the Jews of Mainz in hope to gain his favor and their safety. Bishop Ruthard tried to protect the Jews by hiding them in his lightly fortified palace. Nevertheless Emicho did not prevent his followers from entering the city on May 27 and a massacre followed, with the help of the locals. Eventually the Bishop himself fled and left the Jews to their fate.

There is an account written by a Shlomo Bar Shimshon who describes how the Jews of Mainz and their Rov, Rav Kloynomus ben Meshulam, killed themselves to avoid forced baptism. He describes men killing their families and then themselves, and women killing their own children to avoid the evil hands of the Crusaders.

He describes a woman, Rachel and in graphic details how she killed her four children with her own hands so that they would not be cruelly killed or converted by the crusaders. When they found her crying over the four bodies of her children they immediately struck her and killed her, and her husband, seeing all this, fell on the sword as well. This is but one of the many incidents that happened.

All this happened on Shavous – as the mekonen writes **ביום נתינתה כמו כן** **אז חזרה**. On the day of the giving of the Torah it was 'returned ' to Hashem, in the form of the death of great Torah Scholars and the burning of the Seformim and Sifrei Torah.

In all over 1000 Jews were killed in Mainz, and over 5000 during the First Crusade. This was the first organized mass roundup and murder of Jews in history.

And we are left with desolation and destruction. In the words of the mekonen – **אי תורה ותלמוד והלומדה** Rav Soloveitchik explains that we mourn not only the loss of the Scholar, but also the loss of the lomda – the common Jew who was attached to Torah, and would spend time every day studying Torah.

He compares it to Jews who returned after the war to their hometowns, which had been bustling centers of Torah activity prewar, and they were

desolate and abandoned. They couldn't get a minyan together; there were no Sifrei Torah and seforim. The feeling one has is a cry of desperation – 'where is everybody?'

Kinah #41 – Sha'ali

Rabbi Tzvi H. Haber

This Kinah was written by the Maharam Miruttenberg, one of the last of the Baalei Tosfos. It describes a tragic event in Jewish history, made even more tragic due to the fact that the entire event was instigated by one of our own, an apostate Jew. In 1240 in Paris an apostate Jew named Nicholas Donin recommended to King Louis IX that if he wanted to get rid of the Jews for once and for all, the only way to do that was by destroying their Torah. The King and the Church had all copies of the Talmud confiscated on March 1240 3 and placed in the Place De Greve, a public square in Paris, which is the current location of city hall and the mayor's office. In all there were 24 cartloads of Talmud, thousands of volumes.

The King invited 4 rabbis to a debate with Donin, the fate of the 24 cartloads hanging in the balance. Transcripts of the debate exist, and even according to the Latin transcript was it by no means a win by Donin. The Queen herself at one point told the accusers that they were trying too hard. Even so the fates of the volumes of Torah were a foregone conclusion, and in 1242 the Gemara's were burnt.

The ramifications of this were tremendous. Each one of those volumes were handwritten, this was 200 years before the printing press was invented. There wasn't a Gemara to be found in all of France, and many of the volumes had the actual handwritten glosses of the Baalei Tofos written in their margins, to be lost forever.

There is a parallel that cannot be ignored here. Nine years earlier (to the day?) in the very same square, volumes of the Rambam's guide for the perplexed had been burned. Although it seems that they had also been burned by the church, the impetus came from some of the greatest Rabbis of the day, who felt that the works of the Rambam should not be studied. It cannot be merely a coincidence that the Talmud was burnt in the very same spot 9 years later.

The Maharam Miruttenberg was a 27 year old student at the time. It is evident in this Kinah that he saw this potentially as the end of Torah as we knew it. He compares the glory of the giving of the Torah to its current state. As Rav Soleveitchik explains it, he compares us to a wife whose husband ran away and deserted us, and didn't even leave over any money – the holy Sefarim – to sustain ourselves.

He laments “no longer will I hear the voice of your singers” the voice of Torah has been stilled, and there will no longer be any Torah scholars.

The Torah is the glue that keeps us going throughout golus, that binds us together and to our Father in Heaven.

But netzach yisrael lo yishaker - the tenacity and resilience of the Jewish people cannot be over estimated. As the maharam himself predicts at the end of the kinah, Torah will prevail.

Rabeinu Yechiel of Paris the father of the Rosh and one of the debaters, gathered 300 students and taught them Shas from memory, which they recorded.[remarkably, when compared to the Munich manuscript, one of the only Shasim we have from before the burning, they are almost exactly the same]. He taught them the teachings of the Baalei Tosfos. Rav Moshe of Coucy, another one of the debaters wrote the Sefer Mitzvos Hagadol, which codified and explained all the mitzvos and is still a primary text today.

We saw this more recently during the holocaust. In the Kovno Ghetto there was a Rav named Rav Ephraim Oshry. He recorded and hid many of the questions that were asked to him, questions like whether the kohanim had to remove the rags from their feet before duchening, how to put on tefilin when working 18 hour days, whether boards stolen from the Nazis can be used for a sukkah, and were ghetto homes obligated in a mezuzah. These questions eventually filled five volumes that were printed after the war. Five volumes!! From one ghetto, to one Rabbi. That is the tenacity of klal yisrael, the inborn resilience Hashem has given us to survive.

An American officer told my father the following story. In 1945, he was involved in liberating the horrendous concentration camps of Nazi Europe. He went into a camp to find himself surrounded by death. A man looked up to him with gratitude. “*Zei Moichel*,” [please forgive me for troubling you] he said “and find me a Gemara *Moed Katan*.” Next week I have *yahrzeit* for my father and I promised him that each year on his *yahrzeit* I would make a *siyum* on *Moed Katan*.”

The Maharam Mirutenberg, who right before he died wrote “the sun shines for everyone but G-d and me,” is telling us that Torah is our essence, and when 24 cartloads of Torah were burnt it potentially could spell the end of the Jewish people, total despair and abandonment. The Torah is our lifeforce!

Is There Another Torah?!

By Rabbi Sender Haber

Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg was famous for being in jail. He was the last of the Tosafists and a respected leader of his generation. He was incarcerated for trying to make Aliyah and avoid Servi Camerae under Rudolph I in 1286.

If it wasn't for the Maharam Rothenburg we might not have a Shulchan Aruch today. He was the teacher of Rabeinu Asher who is the father and teacher of Rabeinu Yaakov baal Haturim upon whose work the Shulchan Aruch is based.

Reb Meir of Rothenburg began his teaching career on Friday, June 1242 ,17 at the Place de Grève in Paris.

Today, the Place de Grève in Paris is the address of the City Hall and Mayor's office. In 1242 it was the site of executions and, beginning June 17th, the site of the burning of the Talmud.

Reb Meir wrote a Kina describing his feelings as a twenty-seven year old student in Paris: "My tears formed a river that reached to the Sinai desert and to the graves of Moshe and Aharon" He wrote, "Is there another Torah to replace the Torah which you have taken from us?"

The printing Press hadn't been invented yet and the Church had methodically collected and destroyed almost every manuscript in existence. Today, we only have one surviving manuscript from that era and as Reb Meir watched wagonloads of scrolls go up in smoke, he realized just how Oral the Oral Law was. We could not rely on what has already been written and it was up to him to return to Germany and teach the Torah there.

It is the practice of the Norfolk community to bury worn out sefarim (books) with the deceased. Last week, at the funeral of a very special elderly woman, I was shocked to find that some of my Sefarim had gotten mixed up with the Sefarim being buried. These were volumes from a family collection that had belonged to my grandfather and, in some cases, to his father. They aren't worth very much at an auction, but they are tangible proof that my forbears studied the same subjects I did, grappled with the same questions I do, and had a love for Torah that I can strive to emulate. As everyone else focused on the deceased, I am ashamed to say that I was focusing on the cardboard boxes. I knew that any Sefer that went down into that grave would never come out again. (I also knew that I might be headed in a similar direction if my family ever found out). My sefarim were rescued, but the experience brought the Maharam's Kina to life.

The Maharam compared the burning of books to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. Both the Torah and the Beis Hamikdash (temple) unite us and ensure our existence: The Torah guides us and connects us to the generation

that received it from Sinai; the Beis Hamikdash allowed us to articulate our shared connection in a physical space.

Beyond the knowledge contained in sefarim, the written word is an assurance that our tradition will be passed to future generations. The 613th Mitzvah is the writing of the Torah. It is as if the writing of the words is the capstone that will ensure the Torah's survival.

Before Moshe's death he wrote thirteen Sifrei Torah. Twelve of the Sifrei Torah were distributed amongst the tribes and the thirteenth was placed in the Aron Hakodesh (Ark) in the Mishkan. According to the Pesikta (32) that Thirteenth Torah is now kept in heaven and it is read from three times a week.

When the Maharam was imprisoned in 1286 he was given access to parchment and quills but not to any Sefarim. Although he knew almost everything by heart, his inability to read from the Torah on Monday, Thursday, and Shabbos frustrated him intensely.

According to legend, the angel Gavriel visited the Maharam and presented him with the Thirteenth Torah, on loan from heaven. Generations of Tzadikim would descend from heaven and join him in his cell every Monday, Thursday and Shabbos to hear him read from their Sefer Torah.

Eventually, the Maharam copied the Heavenly Torah onto his own scroll and sealed the copy in a waterproof case which he threw out of his window and into the river Rhine. The Torah floated to the city of Worms where some Jewish fishermen discovered it and placed it prominently in their shul. The Jewish community of Worms suffered terribly during the Chmielniki massacres but the Sefer Torah survived. They read from it every Simchas Torah and Shavuos. Today the Maharam's Torah is in the Aron Kodesh of the famous Alt-neu shul in Prague.

The facts of the above legend are anybody's guess, but the appropriateness of the legend to the Maharam is beyond dispute. The Maharam was deeply dedicated to the written word and to the transmission of the Torah. He successfully formed the foundation for Halacha as we know it and he inspired his students to record and codify the words of his teachers. Their works form the canon of Jewish Law as we know it today. If anyone desired and deserved a Heavenly Sefer Torah, it was he. And if anyone was going to write a Torah in the most unlikely place and deliver it via a raging river to a desperate community, it was the Maharam of Rothenburg. He watched the last copies of the Talmud being burned and emerged from the flames by founding a Yeshiva and teaching the Talmud to a new generation.

The Maharam of Rothenburg died in captivity writing that "the sun shines for everyone but not for G-d and myself". His Kina foretells a happier ending for us:

“... perhaps Hashem will remember how you followed Him into the barren desert,

... For as long as you have suffered - He will console you.

He will bring gather all captives to Jerusalem and lift them up high,

We will wear dance joyously to a beat and join together as one.

My heart will be uplifted when Hashem shines his light for you,

He will light up your night and dispel all of your darkness”

Even in his generation’s darkest moments the Maharam knew that we would survive and that the Torah would survive. He was limited in his movements but he knew that we would go far. New copies of the Talmud are printed every day, and each and every volume contains the indelible words of the Maharam’s teachers and students.

On a slightly different topic, The Zohar writes that when the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed its’ bricks were scattered throughout the Diaspora. Wherever a stone landed, a future shul was built. When Moshiach comes each community will return their stone to Jerusalem and build the third Beis Hamikdash.

The Altneu shul in Prague was built with actual stones from the Beis Hamikdash. Some say that that is the “alt” (old) in Alt-neu. Others say that the shul got its name because it was built on the condition - “al Tnai” - that when Moshiach came the stones would return to their original place in Jerusalem.

All of our shuls are only a stone’s throw from Yerushalayim. There is only one Torah and only one Beis Hamikdash. Our Torah and our tears are our shared legacy that has kept us together for thousands of years. One day we will all return to Yerushalayim and link the stones of our shuls together to form an everlasting testament to our love of Hashem and our nation of One.

Kina #45– Eili Tzion

We began by discussing the grieving widow who allows her family to mourn once a year. This Kina is about that widow, but it is also about hope. All is not lost and we can and will make it through to another Tisha B’av and one day to a time when there is no Tisha B’av at all.

We read on shabbos that the when the jewish people left egypt they did not want to enter the land of Israel - Lo Avisem La'alos (1:26) .The Seforno explains that the main thing holding us back was a feeling of inadequacy. We didn’t think we could do it.

We can do it, because this is all part of Hashem’s plan. We have lessons to learn in Exile and missions to accomplish, but one day we will see the light at the end of the tunnel.

We need to emerge from Tisha B’av ready to go further. We need to solve the world’s problems and bring about the ultimate redemption. We can do this by

thinking about others and brightening their lives.

Halachos of Tisha B'Av

By Rabbi Tzvi H. Haber

Tisha B'Av is best known as the culmination of the National Mourning Period over the destruction of the First and Second Bais Hamikdash.

In truth the events of Tisha B'Av began much earlier when the Jews had left Egypt and were in the desert. They sent scouts ahead to the Land of Israel, who came back with a negative and discouraging report. The reaction was one of despair and lack of faith, and Hashem decreed that that generation would not be allowed to enter the Land of Israel. This happened on the night of Tisha B'Av, and at that point it was established to be a day of calamity for the Jewish People.

As mentioned, on that day both the First and Second Temples were destroyed. Additionally on the 9th of Av Beitar was destroyed, which effectively ended the Bar Kochba rebellion, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of men, women and children.

After the Bar Kochba revolt the Romans returned to Jerusalem and on Tisha B'Av they plowed the Temple Mount.

Throughout Jewish History Tisha B'Av has been designated as a day that is ripe for calamities. Events linked to various expulsions and crusades occurred on Tisha B'av.

Prohibitions

Although Yom Kippur is a joyous time and Tisha B'Av a mournful one, the five items that are prohibited on Yom Kippur are prohibited on the 9th of Av as well.

These are:

Washing

The Shulchan Aruch states that one may not wash on Tisha B'Av, even to immerse one's finger in water is forbidden (OC 554:7).

However this is limited to washing which would be considered 'enjoyable' as opposed to utilitarian. Therefore in cases of necessity the Halacha is lenient. Therefore, if one has to pass through water to visit their Rebbe or to rescue their assets they may, but they may not return through the water. Someone who is preparing food may rinse the food if necessary even though their hands will be washed as well.

Likewise, one should wash their hands upon arising and after using the restroom, but should be careful to only wash up to the major knuckles.

If one has actual dirt on their skin they may wash that area as well.

Anointing

One may not put on creams or lotions on Tisha B'Av, as this is considered anointing. This prohibition extends to makeup and cosmetics as well, according to many poskim.

Deodorant is considered to be removal of dirt and is therefore permitted, however some halachic authorities write that one should not apply deodorant either, because it would be included in the prohibition of washing.

Wearing shoes

According to Halacha only a leather shoe is considered a shoe. Therefore, one may wear footwear made out of other materials, because they are not considered shoes.

There are those who are stringent, and say that nothing comfortable should be worn. There was some controversy several years ago when it was announced the leading Halachic authorities said one should not wear Crocs on Tisha B'Av. The truth is, they were not on a vendetta against weird looking rubber footwear, rather they were concerned about the opinions quoted by the Mishna Berura that discourage wearing anything comfortable on one's feet. This would obviously include tennis shoes, canvas shoes, or fuzzy bedroom slippers as well. Although this is not Halacha or common practice, it's good to be aware of the valid halachic opinion that one should refrain from wearing anything comfortable on their feet.

A shoe which has some leather in it is permitted if the leather is not supportive and is merely decorative. (Rav Moshe Feinstein quoted in Moadei Yeshurun).

Marital Intimacy

According to some all practices of Harchakos should be observed, just as when a woman is a Nidda. Others are of the opinion that only the Torah mandated Harchakos are in effect. Some differentiate between the day and the night.

Eating and Drinking

Even those who wouldn't fast on the minor fasts, such as a pregnant or nursing woman, should fast on Tisha B'Av. It goes without saying that if there is a medical need then one should consult with their doctor and Rabbi.

Additionally, since Tisha B'Av is a mournful time there are additional items

which were enacted from a mournful perspective (See Chidushei Maran Riz Halevi on Hilchos Taanios for a full treatment of the dual aspect of Tisha B'Av).

These include:

Abstaining from Studying Torah

Torah Study brings joy and is therefore forbidden. There are specific sections one may study, particularly those that speak of the destruction of the Temple, Eichah and the sections of the Talmud that discuss mourning. When studying those sections he should not delve deeply in a way that will bring him joy.

One may say all the parts of prayer that he says on a daily basis, even if they are technically Torah study.

There are differing opinions on reciting Tehillim after midday. Before midday according to all opinion one should not say Psalms.

One may learn Mussar works only to the extent that they are used as an inspirational tool to introspect. (Rav Elyashiv Zt"l).

Greeting Others

We refrain from greeting others be it verbally or by nodding ones head or bowing. If one is greeted they should reply to the extent that the other person won't be slighted.

Sit On the Floor

One should sit on the floor until midday, or on a low stool that is lower than 3 tefachim (12-9 inches).

Additionally make an effort not to distract oneself from the mourning, thus not to engage in idle chatter.

Therefore one is to abstain from work and business related matters until at least midday and preferably the entire day.

Other Laws and Customs

Some don't sleep on a bed, others replace their pillow with a stone, and one should make an effort to make their bed at least a little less comfortable.

One shouldn't dress particularly nicely

One should refrain from smelling pleasant smelling spices, and smoking is not allowed in most circumstances.

Men do not wear Tallis and Tefillin at Shachris. This is because Tefillin is called פאָר , our glory, and on Tisha B'Av our glory was taken from us

Other Tisha B'Av customs:

Cleaning the House

Many have the custom to clean the house and wash the floor after midday, so as to prepare for the coming of Moshiach, and to signify that even in the depths of our despair we do not give up hope. According to tradition Moshiach is born on Tisha B'Av.

One should not clean the house, or even make the beds, until midday.

Visiting Graves

There is a widespread custom to visit the cemetery on Tisha B'Av. There is an old Jerusalem custom to gaze at the walls of Jerusalem to remind themselves of their unfinished state.

The Eicha Revolution

By Rabbi Yaacov Haber

The Kotzker Rebbe observed: “There is no place lonelier than a room full of people.”

Walk into a wedding or a Bar Mitzvah. Everyone is eating, dancing and singing. Who would think that loneliness is even possible in this room? But if you are a stranger in that room, if you feel unseen or unknown, it can be a desert island – the loneliest place in the world.

Today we are privileged to see big crowds. Thousands gather at the Kotel, thousands come together to pray for Israel, thousands demonstrate, thousands attend a Siyum HaShas, thousands celebrate and communicate on the Internet. Can anyone feel isolated any more? Sadly, yes – as the Kotzker said, “There is no place lonelier than a room full of people.”

Loneliness is possibly one of the most painful human experiences. Loneliness is not the same as being alone. Many people have times when they are alone through circumstances or choice. Being alone can be experienced as positive, pleasurable, and even emotionally refreshing if it is under the individual’s control. When Moshe received his prophecies, he was alone in solitude. Loneliness is unwilling solitude that is forced upon a person.

We always read Parshat Devarim on the Shabbos preceding Tisha B’Av, in part because of the connection between our Parsha and Tisha B’ Av signaled by the word “Eicha”. Moshe asked, “How [Eicha] can I carry your burdens alone?” (1:12) and in the Book of Lamentations that we read on Tisha B’Av, Yirmiyahu asks in astonishment, “How [Eicha] could Jerusalem sit alone?”

But it’s not just the word “Eicha”! The Vilna Gaon explains that Moshe said, “How can I carry your burdens alone?” and Yirmiyahu asked, “How can the city (of Jerusalem) sit alone?” Feeling alone, explains the GR”A, is the essence of our national tragedy.

Moshe and Jerusalem were reflections of the condition of the Jewish people. Moshe was a lonely person and Jerusalem was a lonely city. Our people became isolated – not just from the world, but from each other. There was polarization, elitism, and arrogance. Moshe felt isolated and so did Jerusalem, and they both exclaimed: “Eicha?!”

Moshe Rabeinu was the most important and well-known figure in his generation! Who would have thought that he could possibly feel isolated? Jerusalem was a gathering place for all Jews – how could Jerusalem possibly feel alone?

The answer is: “There is no place lonelier than a room full of people!”

We need an “Eicha” revolution.

There are too many lonely places amongst our people, and too many lonely people. There are too many distinctions, too many partitions, and too many Jews that aren't allowed in. Jerusalem is lonely. There is destruction, insecurity and danger in Jerusalem when Jews stand aloof, apart and alone.

Let us find ways to come together, and may the streets of Jerusalem resound with joy and security, as they overflow with holiness.

Tisha B'av

Rabbi Yaacov Haber

Some years ago while serving as a Rabbi in Buffalo, New York I remember standing at my place in Shul, Sunday morning, seeing the large oak door to the Shul open a crack. There at the door was an elderly woman, a member of the congregation, who was motioning for me to come out to speak with her. I came out and the woman who I knew quite well looked very anxious. "Rebbe", she said, "I need to be matir neder." She felt she had made a vow, which requires the nullification of a beit din and asked me if I could convene this beit din in Shul immediately following services. Obviously I complied and after davening that morning three of us sat alone in the back of the very old Shul with Mrs. Segal standing before us. She took out her siddur and opened it to the place that was already marked with her forefinger and began to recite the standard formula for the nullification of vows. She looked out of the siddur and with great emotion told the following story. "Forty years ago, you should never know from such things, I lived in a Nazi Labor camp. Living day by day would have been a luxury, we lived minute by minute. I didn't think I would live to see freedom again and I said to G-d, "I don't think I will make it out of here alive, but if I do I will come out with a whole new perspective, a brand new appreciation for life. If I come out of this alive I promise you G-d I will never throw away a piece of bread, ever." That was my promise, she continued, and I've always kept my promise to G-d but today my two grandchildren came to visit. Kids are kids and some bread was disgraced. I realized that perhaps I'm not in a position to keep my promise that I made to G-d so many years ago. But raboisai I know that a neder needs a pesach. (an out) What do I know now that I didn't consider before? In my wildest dreams I couldn't see Jewish grandchildren in my life. My appreciation for bread, for life and for children is greater now than it ever was, nevertheless I feel I must annul the vow." We all said together, "Mutar loch, Mutar loch, Mutar loch!" and Mrs. Segal went home.

Forty years ago in this country there were very few Jewish schools and Yeshivos, as we know them today. Nobody knew for sure that there ever would be a renaissance of Torah and Yiddishkeit in America. What there was, and some of this even I can remember, were teams of yeshiva bochurim that traveled around the country during their summer and winter break. They went to places like Sioux City, Iowa and Fort Worth, Texas armed with suitcases full of tuna fish and a strong sense of camaraderie. Their mission was to try to salvage the Jewish soul. They tried to start little day schools or Sunday schools that would somehow cater to the American Jewish boy or girl that otherwise

didn't stand a chance as far as Yiddishkeit was concerned. They visited parents, Rabbis, philanthropists and anyone who would listen to them. They would spend a week in a city and sometimes reach two children or one family. They sowed the seeds of Torah that has blossomed into the majestic forest of Torah and Torah communities that stands before us today. At that time the Jewish Neshama had a value beyond rubies. The individual importance of each boy or girl was beyond description. I'm sure they silently promised Hashem that they would never take a Jewish child for granted.

Thank G-d, at least in places like New York, it seems that we have arrived. Torah is thriving, classrooms are full, and beautiful edifices are being built. There is a danger in success. We can forget the neder that we have made to never treat a Jewish boy or girl as a number. We can forget that no matter how many we have and how many we have produced the Jewish Neshama is still priceless and beautiful. There was a time that if we would meet another Shomer Shabbos or someone wearing a Yarmulke we would feel like hugging them. They were important, we were brothers. We would open up our hearts and our homes to them. We would get involved in helping with their shiduchin, their parnossa and what ever else is important in another Jews life. I dare say that at times, in some places it seems that the neder has been somehow forgotten.

The most important thing to think about on Tisha B'av is the importance of every Jewish Neshama. If we value every Neshama we will love every Jew. Then we will be ready for Jerusalem!

Jewish Internationalism

Rabbi Sender Haber

A deranged Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* that “the Jewish race, owing to its universality, is of necessity pacifist and internationalist. Pacifism is the deadliest sin, for it means the surrender of the race in the fight for existence. The first duty of every country is to nationalize the masses.”

Hitler’s complaint was not a new one. He was quoting Haman almost word for word: “There is a united nation that is spread and scattered throughout many countries and provinces... and their ways are different than those of any nation”.

Hitler understood that we couldn’t possibly be sold on the concept of a German Master Race because that would by necessity cause us to abandon our brothers and sisters in other countries throughout the world. He understood the affinity and unity that the Jews possess and sensed that it could not be broken.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner said famously that the last stop in exile would be the United States of America. His words are usually cited as a call to optimism and a hope toward the future.

Perhaps there is more here.

Although America was considered for many years to be the *Treife Medina* and a place where Judaism was lax, America is also the melting pot for all of us. For the first time, we need to walk into a shul and a community and even families that are multinational.

When I was a kid, the older men in shul would fight. The Hungarians couldn’t get along with the Polishers and the Russians couldn’t get along with the Galicians. Once in a while a Sefardi would walk in and he would be an oddity. Yemenites were people that we just heard about.

Today we have been forced to come together, and we have. Hitler didn’t understand how it was possible for a Multinational group of people to come together, but we do.

Yitzhak ben Tzvi was a President of the State of Israel. He compared the Jewish people to the *Paroches* in the *Mishkan*. He wrote that we are a tapestry made up of many different threads. We all come together to make something beautiful, but when we are apart our similarities disappear. His words were beautiful and they are printed on every twenty sheqel note in Israel.

I think he was wrong.

We are not the *Paroches* but rather the *Menorah*. The *Menorah* was made of one solid piece of gold, yet it forms seven diverse branches. We are all united at the core and made of the same stuff.

Hitler said, “The greatest upheavals in history would have been unthinkable had it not been for the driving force of fanatical and hysterical passions. Nothing could have been affected by the bourgeois virtues of peace and order...” Hitler wanted a world where everything was perfect and orderly, a world where nobody was passionate. Passion, he understood, causes people to be pulled in different directions and against each other.

We have proven him wrong. We can come together as very different people and form a community. We can come together with our passions and fanaticisms intact, and still succeed and be strong. We can take the energy of our love for one another and channel it into beautiful davening, meaningful learning and outstanding chessed.

When I was in Stamford two boys came to yeshiva with their father. They wanted to learn Torah. The Rabbeim assigned one of the older students to earn with them. I don't remember what he taught them but he came back in horror. “They didn't know”, he said, “whether they were Sefardim or Ashkenazim”.

Maybe there is something to that.

Seventy years later we know how wickedly wrong Hitler was in everything that he predicted. People have been wrong about us for millennia. We still remember and mourn Yerushalyim because it never really died. When someone passes away we eventually stop mourning, but when Yaacov lost Yosef he never stopped mourning. That is because he was still alive.

We as Jews haven't lost hope in our ability to erase baseless hatred.

We are closer than ever before to the time when all of us can live united in the Land of Israel. We need to keep moving by remaining united in our passion and in the way that we speak about and judge one another.

At Chashiva

Rabbi Mostofsky was cleaning up the bookcases today. One shelf had all the sefarim lying haphazardly. Rabb Mostofsky cleared the shelf and returned it, taking care that the brackets were even. To his surprise, the shelf still looked crooked. He took it out again and checked it again. It was perfect but it still looked crooked. Finally, he noticed that the shelf below was crooked. It had been crooked for years, but nobody noticed because the shelf above was so cluttered.

Sometimes you need to straighten something out in order to realize that you were crooked to begin with.

Rabbi Eisenman tells a story about a couple who came to him for counseling. The wife complained that the husband never says anything without yelling. He didn't deny, acknowledging that was how he communicated. Perhaps they were right. That was what they married into. But, imagine if their marriage had not always been that way. Imagine if they were able to watch video of the first five years of their marriage and to see how nicely they spoke to each other. Imagine the sadness that they would feel in their current state.

The Gemara tells the story of Elazar Ze'ira who was walking through the streets with black straps on his sandals. He was arrested by the Jewish police and thrown into jail as a fraud. "Chashiv At L'isabulai al Yerushalyim?" – "Do you think that you are distinguished enough to be mourning for Jerusalem?" Reb Eliezer reluctantly revealed his Torah wisdom and was allowed to go free.

We have trouble mourning for Jerusalem because we don't really have a concept of what we are missing. It has been a very long time and our collective memory is short. Our lack of appreciation for Jerusalem prevents us from yearning for it's rebuilding and it is the attitude that led us to lose Jerusalem to begin with.

There were two Daily sacrifices in the Beis Hamikdosh. The Afternoon Tamid would atone for all sins done during the day and the Morning Tamid would atone for all sins that occurred overnight. One would think that we were immune to punishment. How then could the Jewish people ever aggregate enough sins to deserve the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh and exile? The Leshem explains that we were exiled for only one sin: our reliance on the Tamid. Rather than use the Beis Hamikdosh as a tool for coming closer to G-d, we relied on our Korban Credits and continued to follow a path that led away from G-d.

We need to learn more about Yerushalayim and more about the Beis Hamikdosh so that, like Reb Eliezer, we can be Chashuv enough to mourn.

Three centuries ago, a man went to the great Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim ibn

Atar because he had no money. He needed one golden napoleon each month to support his family. The Ohr Hachayim gave the man a sealed envelope and told him to place it in the Kosel. From that day on the man found, earned, or otherwise procured a golden napoleon every single month. Finally, unable to contain his curiosity, he went back to the Kosel and ripped open the envelope. The envelope contained but a simple message: "Hashem, Please give this man one golden Napoleon every month".

Rabbi Aharon Yosef Brizel explained to me that there is a special connection to Hashem that even the holiest Jew cannot achieve unless he is standing at the Kosel. This connection is so simple that many people fail to appreciate it.

Several years ago I was asked to officiate at a funeral for Sol Soroko. I did not know him, he had never been married and had no immediate family at all. When I did some research, I found that he had held the key and acted as caretaker and custodian at Chevrah Tehillem Synagogue in Portsmouth for over fifty years (it is rumored that Rav Mordechai Gifter grew up in that shul). The shul has not been used in decades and I was surprised to find that very few people gave Sol credit for his devotion. They didn't understand why he was bothering with an old shul and an ancient cemetery. People tried to sell it, merge it, give it away or knock it down. Sol wouldn't hear of it. He fought for the shul meticulously and kept it standing and Orthodox until the day he died.

At the funeral, I told the story of Reb Yosi who was traveling through Jerusalem almost two thousand years ago. It was time to pray and he searched for a peaceful place where he could pray without interruption. Passing an abandoned synagogue he entered and, amidst the dust and rubble, began to pray earnestly. As he prayed in this holy place the saintly Elijah the prophet appeared and waited patiently. (This was an abandoned building and Elijah wanted to protect Reb Yosi from harm).

As Rabbi Yosi finished his prayers he noticed Eliyahu for the first time. The prophet asked him: What did you hear as you were praying in the abandoned Synagogue? Rabbi Yosi's answer was surprising: "I heard a heavenly voice crying out".

Elijah explained to Reb Yosi that a heavenly voice can be heard three times a day in all unused synagogues. Only some have ears to hear it.

"Even in their desolation they remain holy". A synagogue is more than just a convenient meeting place. The very walls of the synagogue hold history and holiness that only some of us can fathom. Three times daily G-d returns to these synagogues and remembers the Jewish people.

I related the story to Sol and Chevra Thilim, but Rav Kook explains that Reb Yosi's Churva was none other than the Kosel, the site of the destroyed Beis Hamikdosh.

The Kosel, Jerusalem and the land of Israel call out to us each day. Only some of us have ears to hear and to appreciate.

Rabbi Mordechai Dolinsky, of Jerusalem, went to the Kosel (Western Wall) for the first time on Shavuot 1967. He was so taken by the experience that he went back to the Kosel the next day, and the next, and the next, and the next. To the best of my knowledge he still walks or rides the bus to the Kosel each and every day. He doesn't daven shacharis there or give a shiur; he goes to spend a few minutes close to Hashem at the holiest place on earth.

Many ask this morning why Tish B'av does not supersede shabbos. It is clear that we don't completely ignore it on Shabbos, yet we always push it off. The Shela asks this question. He writes that although the sages did, at times, override a Torah obligation passively with a shev v'al Taaseh, they would not actively override a Torah commandment. Since building is forbidden on Shabbos, Tisha B'av cannot be marked on Shabbos. It seems that we cannot have even one minute of Tish B'av without the possibility of rebuilding.

The Land of Love

Moshe Rabbeinu led an accomplished life. He took us out of Egypt, got us the Torah and pleaded our case before Hashem on ten different occasions. He brought Hashem and the Torah to the eyes of the world. Still, Moshe was unsatisfied because he could not enter the land of Israel. In Parshas Va'eschanan, Moshe begged in 515 different ways to enter the land. If he could not enter as a leader, he would enter as a simple person, a bird, a stone, or even a gust of wind. Moshe understood the beauty of Eretz Yisroel.

The verse tells us that servants of Hashem love even the dust and the stones of the land of Israel.

At the same time, there were another group of people – the Bnei Gad and the Bnei Reuvain. They came to Moshe with a request: "Please do not send us across the Jordan. We do not want to enter Israel. We want to stay here."

One could imagine Moshe's response to these tribes. They needed to open up their eyes to the beauty of Israel and the holiness of its stones. He could have told them about the site of the Bais Hamikdash and about the Mearas Hamachpeila. He didn't.

Instead Moshe lectured the tribes Gad and Reuvain on empathy. "Will you stay here while your brothers go to war? Will you throw cold water on their excitement and shatter their resolve to enter the holy land?"

Moshe Rabbeinu realized that the tribes of Gad and Reuvain were not ready to hear about the dust and stones of the land of Israel. They would have time for those regrets later. The first step, the important step now, was for them to hear about the beauty of their fellow Jews. They needed to be thinking about each other and about what their decision not to cross the Yardein would do to

their cousins in the Shevatim of Dan and Naftali.

It is not enough to mourn the tragedies that we have experienced as a nation. It is time to yearn for the air and the dust and the water of Eretz Yisroel.

Moshe Rabbeinu has taught us that we do not prepare for our journey by reading travel books and studying satellite images on Google Earth. We prepare for the final Geulah by learning how to treat the people around us and training ourselves to value every person and the effect that we can have on him or her.

(Sources: Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, Rav Peretz Tarshish)

Stretching our Land

Neta Revai is the name given to the fruits of a tree's fourth year. Neta Revai is ours to eat or share but it must be enjoyed in the city of Yerushalayim. The fruits of Neta Revai can be redeemed but only if the replacement fruits will be eaten in Yerushalayim.

Let's say that someone transferred his Neta Revai to fruits that could not possibly make the journey to Yerushalayim. If he knows for a fact that the fruits will be rotten and inedible by the time he gets to Yerushalayim, can he still use them as Neta Revai?

The Rambam's surprising ruling is - yes! A person may designate almost expired food as Neta Revai even though it is physically impossible to bring it to (and eat it in) Yerushalayim! Many have wondered at the Rambam's reasoning and Reb Chaim Kanievsky explains it in a very creative way. In his *Derech Emunah*, Reb Chaim cites a Sifre and proves that although it is impossible for the fruits to make it to Yerushalayim, it is entirely possible that Yerushalayim will expand to include the fruits.

Zachariah (9:1) tells us that at the end of days there will be no unrest in Yerushalayim. She will expand to the East and to the West and her rest-filled borders will spread out as far as Damascus. According to the Medrash, a person could go to sleep in Syria and wake up to find that his home has been divinely annexed and that he is living within the restful borders of Yerushalayim.

Reb Chaim uses the Medrash to legalize overripe Neta Revai in Syria, but there is another message here as well:

Hashem calls Yerushalayim His city of Rest and we live to rest. Our week's build up to a day of rest and our ultimate reward will come with our eternal rest, be it in heaven or here on earth with the coming of Moshiach.

In our non-stop pursuit of rest we often find ourselves engaged in non-stop motion. If rest requires the absence of motion, then our lives are an exercise in counterproductivity. How can we possibly achieve our goal of rest if we are constantly involved in propelling ourselves forward?

It seems that, contrary to Newton, an object in motion will become an object at rest. Yaakov said of his son Yissochar: "And he saw that rest was good ... so he bent his shoulder to bear" [Breishis 49:15]. The Torah's definition of rest includes some pretty hard work. Like a soldier preparing for battle, the only way to stay cool and calm when it counts is to prepare thoroughly, train well and work hard beforehand. True rest comes only after working through years of unrest.

On all three of our National missions to rebuild Yerushalayim we contended with some serious unrest. Hashem challenges us, tests us, and sometimes

pushed us to our limits. He just won't let us stop moving in our perpetual quest for rest. But when push comes to shove and we reach the end of the road, the rest can come as the result an entity outside of ourselves. It will come at us when we least expect it. Like the expanding borders of Yerushalayim, Hashem's bracha of Menucha will radiate powerfully and envelope us even as we continue to journey toward Him.

Neta Revai begins with the fourth fruit bearing year of a tree's existence and the first harvest it's fruits; Education in Mitzvos begins with the fourth year of a child's life and (in some circles) his first haircut. In both instances we are entrusted with something holy and given a monumental task. The laws of Neta Revai teach us not to give up. Our goals seem impossibly hard to reach, but while we are engrossed in the 'game' Hashem is quietly moving the goal closer and closer to our side of the field.

Before we know it we may wake up to find that our goals have been reached, that Moshiach has finally come and that we are all proud residents of a restful, resplendent and redefined Yerushalayim.

The Jews of Suffolk

The Gemara tells us that Reb Yosi was once davening in a destroyed Churva. When he finished his Tefilos he noticed Eliyahu Hanavi standing by the entrance. The Navi asked him: What did you hear as you were praying in the Churva? Rabbi Yosi answered: "I heard a heavenly voice crying out".

Eiyahu Hanavi explained to Reb Yosi that a heavenly voice can be heard three times a day in all unused shuls. "Even in their desolation they remain holy". The very walls of the shul hold history and holiness. That Kedusha never goes away and Hashem returns to these shuls three times daily G-d and remembers the Jewish people.

The other day, I was driving through Suffolk, VA and made a wrong turn. I passed by an old shul that I had never seen before. It was a simple building with a Magen Dovid as a window. Across the street was a Bais Hakevaros with Jewish graves. Overcome with curiosity, I parked outside the shul and went in. I was hoping to see old relics or traces of the shul but I found nothing but an eighty year-old man ripping up the floor. I introduced myself to the man and he returned my greeting in Yiddish, assuring me that he had been able to sing "Oifem Pripitchik" when he was much younger. His name was Benjamin and he had grown up on a farm in the area. The shul was built before he was born and the wood that he was removing from the floor was the original wood that had been cleared from that very land to build the shul.

I stood with my son and took in the rotted wood and the stripped shul. I wondered what had happened. What happened to the resolve of those immigrant farmers who had built this building almost one hundred years ago? Where were their children? What happened to that beautiful shul and Aron Kodesh that the old man was telling me about? What happened to the Sifrei Torah that they would read from and kiss three times a week?

It was just a few days before Tisha B'av and the parallels to the Chorban Bais Hamikdash were obvious. I immediately decided that I would devote one of my shiurim on Tisha B'av to this story.

I sat down and began to research the history and roots of the Jewish community in Suffolk.

As I learned more I came to realize that I would have no shiur to give on Tisha B'av. My sorrow gave way to disbelief and I became aware of one of the lesser known incidents in American history.

It turns out that back in the 1800's there was a slave in Maryland by the name of William Crowdy. As was common among the slaves, he and his family were treated unfairly. Eventually, William ended up killing a white man and needed to escape. After some time in captivity, he was able to travel secretly

to the North where he joined the Union army and fought in one of the “Negro regiments”. After the war, William moved to Oklahoma where he had a farm and used to preach to the masses. In 1892, William was walking in the fields when his story took an unusual turn. He had his first prophecy. In his vision, he was told that Judaism is the true religion and he understood that he was to be its new Moses. He came up with a set of rules based partly on the Torah and partly on his own thoughts. He developed a large following of Black Jews. In 1903 he bought land in Suffolk and settled there with his congregation.

For one hundred years, this group has been following a religion they call Judaism. They use Hebrew, keep some form of Shabbos and celebrate Jewish Holidays. Before the Civil Rights Movement, they were the only group to send a “Jewish” team to the Negro Baseball League. They have converts and Prophets and Chiefs and even a Kohein Gadol.

The building that I chanced upon in Suffolk was their first Temple.

Slowly, I realized that my poor shul had never been a shul at all. The Shechina had never rested there and the Shechina does not come back and cry three times a day.

When we build and use our shuls, we affect their very essence. No matter what happens to that building, it will always remain a shul. The building in Suffolk had an impressive story but it was just another building.

The Churva of Reb Yosi and all of Churvos of Yerushalyim have Kedusha are saturated with holiness. The people who frequent them may have ups and downs or they may stop coming altogether, but the Shechina will never leave them.

May we all merit to build the Churvos of Yerushalyim. May our homes and shuls be places in which the Shechina comes and never leaves and where the voice of Hashem can always be heard.

The Letter

Before my last trip to Israel, I invited my third grade students to write notes to Hashem. There is an ancient custom to put messages in the Kosel and I thought that it would be a meaningful exercise for my students. I promised not to read the notes and encouraged the students to put serious thought into the words that they would write.

I watched with apprehension and awe as one girl wrote her letter with tears pouring down her cheeks. I knew that she was not crying because of the letter, but about some of the challenges that she was describing. It was awful to see her crying but touching to know to whom she was crying. I carefully placed all of the letters into one sealed envelope and packed it away for my trip. I assured the students that I would be a faithful messenger.

Later that night I received an emergency phone call. One girl had been home with the flu. Was there time to bring her letter over to my house?

The girl had used a tiny florist's envelope to hold her letter. I don't know what was on the note inside the envelope, but on the front of the envelope was a simple message in the careful handwriting of a ten-year-old:

"To: Hashem; From Chana".

I don't know what came over me, but I was overcome with emotion and struck by the beauty and plaintiveness of the letter. I stuck the envelope into my pocket and kept it with me as I boarded the plane a few hours later.

A trip to Eretz Yisroel is always an emotional experience, but this time I felt like so many of my emotions were articulated in that simple envelope. All of the logistics, politics, planning, excitement, and trepidation were encapsulated in those four words on the outside of the envelope. I was going to the land of Hashem and Hashem was waiting for and listening to my prayers.

I couldn't control myself. I showed the envelope to my sister when she met me in New York and to the Rosh Yeshiva who sat down next to me on the plane. I showed it to the woman behind me on the escalator and to the couple in line with me at the border. I showed to a Christian Pilgrim at the baggage claim and to my family when I arrived at the wedding.

Finally, faithfully, even lovingly, I placed the tiny letters from the little girls into an ancient crack between the age worn stones of the Kosel.

I hope that all of my prayers are as pure and uncomplex as the prayers of those small children. I hope that we all merit to see our prayers find their way to Hashem's throne as He blesses us and our entire nation with purity, sincerity, sensitivity, and connection to Hashem.