

A LESSON ABOUT OUR PSYCHE

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Guest contributor: Rabbi Yoel Pomerantz.

The fast of the 17th of Tamuz begins a three week period of mourning. This time of mourning ends with the fast of the 9th of Av. The reason we mourn during this time is because the 17th of Tamuz marks the date on which the walls of Jerusalem were breached during the campaign that ended with the destruction of the Temple on the 9th of Av. (For more information about these events and the other events that the fasts commemorate, see vol.I 27-31.)

The central focus of this time period is the mourning of the destruction of our Holy Temples, which occurred at this time some two millennia ago. The Talmud (Yoma 9b) tells us the reason why the Jewish people deserved such a destruction and exile was different for each of the Temples. The first was due to rampant violation of the three cardinal sins of the Torah: murder, idolatry, and immorality. The reason for the second destruction, however, was that even though the people of that generation observed all of the Mitzvos properly, they were guilty of harboring baseless hatred towards one another. The famous commentator Maharsha points out that an example of this hatred can be found in another Talmudic passage (Gittin 57a). The Talmud tells us of the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. Essentially, what happened in that incident was that a mix-up occurred and the wrong person (an enemy of the host) was invited to a party. In spite of the guest's pleas to be allowed to remain and be spared the embarrassment of being sent away, the relentless host insisted that he leave. Our Sages say that this act is a typical example of the baseless hatred prevalent at the time.

On the surface, this is somewhat puzzling. The Talmud tells us that the people of the generation were involved in the performance of Mitzvos (commandments) including the Mitzvah of Chessed, acts of kindness to others. We can assume that when our Sages tell us that the people were in fact vigilant in their Mitzvah observance, it means they were sincere in their efforts, including doing kindness towards others. How can it be that on the one hand these people fulfilled the Mitzvah of Chessed on a high level and did indeed do acts of kindness toward **some** people, yet simultaneously they harbored such deep-rooted venomous hatred toward other people?

The lesson that we see here is that the nature of human beings is extremely complex. We are in fact capable of experiencing a vast array of emotions, even at two extremes, simultaneously.

The Chofetz Chaim tells us that we today are in fact still afflicted with this destructive problem of harboring baseless hatred towards our fellow Jew.

This serves to prolong the exile we are presently experiencing. We must work to end this exile by rectifying its cause. may G-d help us to better ourselves and cultivate feelings of love for all Jews so that we may merit soon to see this day of sorrow and mourning transformed into a day of rejoicing.