

# WHAT ARE WE MOURNING ON THE NINTH OF AV

*by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky*

## 1. What Are We Mourning on the Ninth of Av

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis states, "When the month of Av begins, one must decrease his level of simcha (not to engage in joyous activities)." Av is the most ominous month of the year for the Jewish people. It is during this month (on the ninth) that both the first and second Temples were destroyed. Av assumed this tragic status because of the sin of the spies. They had returned from their mission of scouting out the Land with slanderous reports, which caused the Jewish people to refuse to enter into the Land. They cried believing that G'd wanted to destroy them. The reaction of the people was due to a lack of faith in G'd who had promised the Land to the Jewish people. Since it was impossible to conquer it through human means, G'd would provide them with Divine Assistance to remove the nations of Canaan (7 pagan nations/giants) and allow them to settle in the Promised Land. They did not believe that G'd would intervene on their behalf. The Torah states, "The entire assembly rose up and issued its voice; the people wept that night...In response to this, G'd said to them, "Since you wept this night without reason, I will give you in the future reason to weep on this day...." This was the ninth of Av, a day and month that was designated for tragedy.

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that if a Jew has a court case with a non-Jew, he should not go to trial during the month of Av because "the mazel of the Jew is not healthy." In contrast, the mazel of the Jew is healthy during the month of Adar (Purim). All of the tragedies that befell the Jewish people in the past took place during the month of Av. The Gemara tells us that there were three good shepherds/providers that were given to the Jewish people - Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam. It is interesting to note that Aaron, who represents the service in the Bais HaMikdash (Temple), passed away during the month of Av. It was in his merit that the Jewish people merited the Clouds of Glory in the desert. As the Kohen, who was responsible for the service of G'd in the Mishkan/Temple, he was untainted by the sin of idolatry (Golden Calf). He thus was qualified to be the officiant of G'd. It was during the same month of his passing that both Temples were destroyed.

The Bais HaMikdash, which was the location of the Divine Presence, represented the Jew's relationship with G'd. The sin of the spies was a denial of that relationship. G'd's Presence was obviously in the midst of the Jewish people. There were revealed miracles on a continuous basis; however, the spies and the Jewish people did not trust that G'd would fulfill His promise of the Land. As a result of this lack of trust, G'd responded in kind by withdrawing His Presence from them - through the destruction of the Temples. On the ninth of Av we do not mourn the loss of the physical

structure of the Bais HaMikdash, where we brought offerings, rather we mourn the loss of the special relationship with G'd that we once had. Although the Jewish people still have a relationship with G'd it is no longer at the level that it was when the Temple stood. Since the people questioned the value of the relationship with G'd, He chose to minimize His relationship with them during the month that Aaron passed away through the destruction of the Temple.

Every morning we conclude the Amidah (Silent Prayer) with a request, "May it be Your Will, Hashem our G'd...that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days. Grant us our share in Your Torah..." What is the correlation between having the Temple and having our portion in Torah? Evidently, they are intertwined. The Zohar writes, "The Jewish people, the Torah, and G'd are all one." Meaning, the Jew's relevance and capacity to acquire Torah and his relationship with G'd are interconnected. As a result of not having the Temple/special relationship with G'd, the Torah that one can possess is at a deficient level. If the Temple stood and the Divine Presence dwelt in our midst, our share of Torah would be greater. The only way a Jew could truly bond with G'd is through the Torah. If Torah that we possess is limited, then our relationship with G'd is deficient. Therefore, we ask G'd to rebuild the Temple not only to have that special relationship renewed, but also to be able to have greater relevance to Torah.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos tells us that every day a Heavenly Voice emanates from Choreiv and announces, "Woe to mankind, because of the disgrace of Torah... Although it is available to be studied people are oblivious to it." How could something so precious be bypassed? We pray every day for the re-establishment of the Bais HaMikdash through which we will restore our relationship with G'd. If the Jew could study Torah but chooses not to do so, it is an indication that he truly does not have an interest in having a relationship with G'd. If so, why should G'd want to restore the Temple and return His Presence to our midst?

The Chofetz Chaim tells a story of the Bais HaLevi (Rav Yosef Dov Ber Soloveitchik), who had no interest in accepting the position as the Rav of Brisk (community in Belarus). The leaders of that community had to devise a plan to interest the Bais HaLevi into assuming the position. In order to convince him, they had 25,000 Jews of their community affix their signatures to a letter asking him to become the Rav of Brisk. When the Bais HaLevi received this letter he said, "How could I refuse the request of 25,000 Jews." Despite his initial refusal, he accepted the position. The Chofetz Chaim said just as the Bais HaLevi could not refuse the sincere request of 25,000 Jews, so too G'd could not refuse the sincere request of the Jewish people asking for the coming of Moshiach. It is only because we truly do not desire his coming that he has not yet come.

## **2. The All-Encompassing Principle of the Torah**

The Prophet Isaiah writes, "Do not continue bringing Me a worthless meal offering. The incense offering that is an abomination...." The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that the Second Temple was destroyed because of sinaas chinam (baseless hatred) between Jews. This lack of unity among

the Jewish people resulted in the tragedy of the destruction of the Second Temple. There were eleven ingredients in the incense offering - one of them being chelbina, which was a foul smelling ingredient. The chelbina represented a segment of the Jewish population that are rishaim (evil people). As foul smelling as the chelbina may be, if it is properly mixed and coalesced with the other spices that comprise the incense offering, it will actually bring out the most beautiful fragrances from them. However if the chelbina is not properly coalesced with the other spices then it remains foul smelling.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk explains that similarly regarding the Jewish people, if there is true unity among them (ahavas Yisroel - love among Jews), then even the evil one is integrated and influenced by other Jews. This unity is pleasing to G'd.

Regarding the four species, which are taken on Sukkos, the Midrash tells us that each of them represents/symbolizes a segment of the Jewish people. The esrog, which has food value and fragrance, represents those who possess Torah and perform mitzvos. Those who have Torah and do not perform mitzvos are represented by the lulav (palm branch), which has food value (dates) and no fragrance. Those who have mitzvos and no Torah are represented by the hadassim (myrtle), which has fragrance and no food value. Those who have no Torah and no mitzvos are represented by the aravah (willow), which has no food value and no fragrance. The Torah tells us that one must gather these four species and bind them together so that each may atone for the other. Meaning, if there is unity among the Jewish people, all of the segments are regarded by G'd as part of the whole - each atoning for the other. However if there is no unity among the Jewish people, then there is no atonement. Just as the incense offering, when it is not properly coalesced, is considered an abomination.

The law states that a mincha (meal) offering cannot be brought as a partnership. The mincha offering must be owned entirely by one individual. However, the Torah tells us that there is a communal mincha offering that was brought in the Temple on behalf of the Jewish people. If a mincha offering which is brought as a partnership is invalid, then why is the communal mincha offering acceptable? Although a community (tzibur) is comprised of many individuals, they are considered one entity because they share a common interest and value system. A partnership on the other hand is simply two or more individuals who have individual interests in the whole. The communal mincha is valid only because it is an entity that is not fractionalized. However if the community is not unified, then it is as the Prophet Isaiah states, "...a worthless meal offering..." Prior to the destruction of the Second Temple, because of sinas chinam and lack of unity among the Jewish people, they forfeited the profile of a tzibur (coherent community). They were seen by G'd as many elements coexisting in one location. Therefore, their meal offerings had no value.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that when a gentile came to Hillel the elder to convert, he had said that he would only convert to Judaism if he would be taught a single principle that encompassed the entire Torah. Hillel responded with the principle, "What you despise, to your

fellow you shall not do." Meaning, "Love your fellow as yourself." Hillel explained to him that this single principle encompasses the entire Torah and the rest is commentary. The Torah is comprised of mitzvos that are between man and man as well as between man and G'd. The mitzvah of loving one's fellow is between man and man. If this is so, then how can this principle encompass the entire Torah - including the mitzvos between man and G'd? The principle of loving one's fellow as oneself engenders the unity of the Jewish people, which manifests itself in every aspect of serving G'd. At the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the Torah tells us that the Jewish people were unified as one. This unity was a prerequisite to become the "Nation of G'd." There needs to be a commonality between the Jewish people and G'd. As He is One, the Jewish people must reflect that characteristic of oneness. It was the lack of unity/fragmentation of the Jewish people, which caused the destruction of the Second Temple.

### **3. What is Concealed from the Eye**

The Torah tells us that Moshe recounted to the Jewish people the events in which they had failed as well as those in which they had been beneficiaries of miracles. The Torah states, "Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel...after he had smitten Sichon, king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Cheshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, who dwelt in Ashtaroth..." Sichon and Og were both giants who were formidable enemies of the Jewish people who were destroyed by Moshe.

The Midrash Tanchuma states, "I (G'd) have destroyed before you Sichon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan... In what merit were you able to defeat these giants? It was in the merit of Torah. Our Rabbis of Blessed Memory explain that the strength of Sichon was so awesome that he was similar to a tower. He was the more powerful than any creature in existence and his height was greater than any tower. There was no human being that could defeat him. The Prophet Amos states, 'I (G'd) will destroy his fruits from above and his roots from below...' How did G'd go about destroying him? He subordinated/subdued the archangel of the nation and the land and toppled them before the Jewish people. Firstly, G'd destroyed the spiritual counterpart of the nation from above, then the Jewish people were able to destroy the nation in a physical sense (from below). Our Rabbis of Blessed Memory tell us that it was more difficult to destroy Sichon and Og than Pharaoh and his entire army. As the Jewish people had given song of praise/thanks after the closing of the Sea (defeating Pharaoh) so too should they have done after the defeat of Sichon and Og. Yet they did not. It was not until King David, who authored the songs of praise for the defeat of these giants. As King David writes, 'To him Who smote great kings, for His kindness endures forever...Sichon king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, for His kindness endures forever...'"

It is interesting to note that the Midrash tells us that despite the fact that Pharaoh was known to be the most powerful monarch of the most advanced civilization, it was more difficult to destroy Sichon and Og. They were the protectors of Canaan and it was only after they were destroyed was it possible for the Jewish people to conquer the Land. The Midrash explains that Sichon and Og needed to be defeated on a spiritual level before they could be destroyed by the Jewish people.

They possessed a level of spiritual contamination that was even greater than that of Egypt. Their contamination was the counter balance to the Jewish people and the Torah. Despite the enormity of the miracle of defeating Sichon and Og, the Jewish people did not recognize or appreciate the difficulty of their predicament. This is evidenced by the fact that they did not sing G'd's praises after their conquest as they had done after the closing of the Sea.

The meraglim (spies) that were sent by Moshe to scout out the Land were people of special caliber. They were princes, leaders of their tribes, and tzaddikim (righteous). They were able to perceive and evaluate events in a way that went beyond the average person. When they had entered into the Land, they had seen giants that they believed to be undefeatable. The spies understood that in order to destroy these giants of Canaan, their archangels (who were more powerful than those of Egypt) had to be toppled. This was something the spies believed was not possible because of the lack of worthiness of the Jewish people. The basis for their conclusion was their lack of faith in G'd. Because He had promised them the Land, it was obvious that He would intervene and destroy the archangels of these formidable giants on their behalf.

There are many levels to which one needs to be beholden to G'd and His Kindness. There are situations in which His Kindness is obvious - as in the destruction of Pharaoh and Egypt, while there are other circumstances in which His Kindness is concealed, i.e. concerning the destruction of Sichon and Og. It was only the few who were at a special spiritual level that could appreciate the difficulty and miracle that was required to destroy these giants. It was only in the merit of Torah, which is the most potent spiritual force in existence, that the Jewish people could have defeated Sichon and Og.

The Brisker Rav z'tl had lost his wife and a number of his children during the Holocaust. He had escaped to Israel with a number of his children during the war. When he was asked, "Are you not angered by what has befallen your family?" he responded, "Every day we thank G'd in the Modim (in the Amidah) - 'We gratefully thank You...for Your miracles that are with us every day...' We are continuously beneficiaries of miracles that G'd chooses to perform on our behalf. Do I have a claim if He chooses not to perform a miracle on my behalf?" Obviously the answer is "no."

King David understood and appreciated the great kindness of G'd when He miraculously destroyed Sichon and Og. He thus authored songs of praise/thanks that the Jewish people did not express. It is not enough just to say the "Modim" in the Amidah three times a day. Rather we must be continuously cognizant of G'd's Kindness in allowing the Jewish people to exist and survive through the most difficult situations as well as the ongoing miracle of daily survival, which is more concealed.

#### **4. One's Behavior Reflects One's Essence**

As the Jewish people approached the land of the Edomites (descendents of Esav) the Torah states, "...You shall purchase food from them for money so that you may eat; also water shall you purchase from them for money so that you may drink. For Hashem, your G'd, has blessed you..." It is obvious

that the Jewish people were not intending to steal the food and drink from the Edomites. Why then does the Torah need to emphasize that the Jewish people should "purchase" the food and drink? The Torah offers the reason- "For Hashem, your G'd has blessed you..." Since G'd blessed the Jewish people with wealth, they should buy their sustenance from the Edomites and not request it without charge. What is the correlation between the Jewish people being blessed and their need to purchase their provisions?

Rashi explains, "The Jewish people needed to purchase their food because G'd had blessed them. This is so that they should not ignore His kindness by behaving as needy people, when in fact they were wealthy. Acting as needy people when in fact they had the means, they would be considered ingrates." If they did not purchase their food, it would be considered ignoring/denying G'd's blessing. This is not because the world would see the Jews in a negative light and be considered a chilul Hashem (desecration of G'd's Name), rather not purchasing the food would be considered the behavior of an ingrate. Therefore, to acknowledge the source of their blessing, which is G'd Himself, the Jewish people needed to purchase their sustenance with the means that was provided by Him.

The Torah communicates many instances in which one must act in a certain manner not to be considered an ingrate. The Jew must continuously appreciate that everything that he has is from G'd. For example, there is a positive commandment to bring the new produce of the Land of Israel (bikkurim) to the Temple and make a declaration of gratitude to G'd for what He had bestowed.

If the Jewish people were to receive their needs from the Edomites without purchasing them, they would be seen as an impoverished people rather than a people of means. This behavior is considered denying the good that G'd had done for them. The only reason one would choose to receive something gratis and not purchase it, is because he is concerned that he would be depleted. It is an indication of his insecurity. Therefore, if he is able to receive something without paying for it, he is willing to accept it. This insecurity is rooted in believing that one's success emanates from his own effort and initiative, rather than recognizing that G'd is his provider. If one believes that his sustenance is only due to G'd's blessing, then as He had provided in the past He will provide in the future.

If the Jewish people would not purchase the food/water from the Edomites it would have been an indication that they believed that their wealth came through their own efforts and not G'd's blessing. This would be a denial of the good that G'd had done for them -making them ingrates (on a subconscious level).

The Torah is communicating that even the most seemingly insignificant behavior is revealing of one's psyche/mindset. The Torah tells us that it was not until Avraham, our Patriarch, had approached Egypt that he noticed that his wife Sarah was a beautiful woman. Rashi cites the Midrash that explains that it was at that time that Avraham had seen his wife's reflection in a pool of water - and only then noticed her beauty. Does this imply that Avraham had never looked at his wife

until that moment? That cannot be the case. Rather, when Avraham saw his wife, Sarah, he did not see her as a physical being. He saw her as an exceptionally spiritual person who was the future Matriarch of the Jewish people. It was only when he saw her reflection that he took notice of her physical beauty. This reveals to us Avraham's mindset and perception of existence as being within a spiritual context. The manner in which one perceives and processes his experiences in life reveals one's relevance to spirituality and Torah.

Therefore, we must continuously analyze and be sensitive even to our most minute actions to assess their true basis. By considering the serious ramifications of that basis, perhaps we will choose to make the necessary corrections.

## **5. The Path to the Restoration of Our Temple**

The Prophet Isaiah states, "If your sins are crimson (like a crimson thread) then they will be restored to the whiteness of snow. If they are like a (red) worm, then they will be restored to the whiteness of (washed) wool." The whiteness of snow is the ultimate white; however, the whiteness of washed wool is to a lesser degree. The Jerusalem Talmud in Tractate Shabbos explains the words of the Prophet. The sins that are compared to a crimson thread refer to the First Temple. While, the sins that are compared to the (red) worm refer to the Second Temple.

The Gemara in Tractate Yomah explains that the First Temple was destroyed because the Jewish people had violated the three cardinal sins - forbidden sexual relations, murder, and idolatry. After they had repented (teshuvah), the Jewish people returned from exile to Jerusalem to rebuild the Second Temple. This was the equivalent of the crimson thread being restored to the whiteness of snow. They were fully atoned after 70 years of exile in Babylon. The Gemara in Tractate Yomah continues that the Second Temple was destroyed because of *sinaas chinam* (baseless hatred among Jews). Even after they had repented, their sins, which were initially compared to the redness of a worm, were only restored to the whiteness of washed wool. Meaning, they were not fully atoned.

The Gemara tells us that Reb Yochanan was asked, "Which generation was greater - that of the First Temple period or that of the Second? It would seem that violating the three cardinal sins would be considered more severe than *sinaas chinam*, thus causing them to have greater culpability." Reb Yochanan responded, "Look at the Citadel (Temple). After the Jews of the First Temple period repented, the Bais HaMikdash was restored after 70 years. However, after the destruction of the Second Temple, although the Jewish people had repented, it has not yet been restored. Evidently *sinaas chinam* is more severe than violating the three cardinal sins." The Gemara explains, "The sin of the First Temple was revealed (three cardinal sins) therefore the end was revealed (Temple rebuilt). However, since the sin of the Second Temple was concealed (baseless hatred in between Jews) therefore the end (of the exile) is concealed (unknown)."

The gravity and seriousness of the three cardinal sins are obvious. No civilized human being,

especially a Jew, could deny the evil of these acts. If one had transgressed any of these three areas, he could fully appreciate the wrong of his ways and do a sincere teshuvah. Thus, the end was revealed and the Temple was restored after 70 years. However, the gravity of the sin of sinaas chinam is more insidious and not obvious. Although one may be in violation of sinaas chinam, he will not perceive himself as one who has violated anything serious. Many times negative feelings towards another can be rationalized and justified because of one's perception of another. Therefore he does not see himself as culpable for transgressing. This is what the Gemara actually means when it states that the "sin was concealed." Because one does not fully appreciate his failing, he does not do a proper teshuvah. Consequently, the end remains concealed- evidenced by the fact that the Temple has not yet been rebuilt.

Reb Meir Simcha of D'vinsk explains that a crimson thread is essentially white and it is only colored with crimson dye. It is only a superficial covering concealing the true character of the thread. If one were to wash the dye from the thread it would be restored to its pristine whiteness (that of snow). The sins of the First Temple, although serious/cardinal, were not indicative of the essence of the Jewish people. Rather, it was a result of predicament. On the other hand, a red worm is red because that is its essence. Therefore it cannot attain or be restored to a pristine white, but only can be dulled, which is the equivalent of washed wool. Sinaas chinam is not a result of one's predicament; rather it is a reflection the individual's essence.

The basis of sinaas chinam is rooted in the lack of faith in G'd. If one truly believes that G'd's Will predetermines his personal predicament in life, then he would not be envious or have reason to hate his fellow. It is only when one feels denied and deprived that one will envy and ultimately hate his fellow.

One of the Ten Commandments is "Lo Sachmode - Do not covet your fellow's house...your fellow's wife...nor anything that belongs to your fellow." How is it possible for one who envies/covets another to control those feelings? Ibn Ezra explains that a commoner is not envious of a prince when he chooses the princess as his wife because he understands that she has no relevance to him because he is not of royal status. She is not within his context of choice. Identically, if one understands that his personal predicament is predetermined by G'd, then he will realize that what is not his - is not meant to be his. Consequently, he will not have envy or any interest in that which belongs to his fellow. If one in fact has designs on his fellow's possessions, it is only because he lacks faith in G'd. This is the root of sinaas chinam.

The Gemara tells us that during the First Temple period the Divine Presence dwelled in the Holy of Holies. There were ten revealed miracles that were continuously present in the Temple. The Jewish people were able to see the Hand of G'd. Therefore, they had the clarity to understand that each person's situation was unique to himself as determined by G'd. Unfortunately, they failed due to succumbing to temptation. In contrast, the Divine Presence and the ten revealed miracles were not present during the Second Temple period. Thus, the Jewish people were lacking in clarity.



Consequently, due to this confusion, their faith in G'd was undermined, which resulted in envy and ultimately concluded with sinaas chinam. Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and **Torah.org**.

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