

WHAT ARE WE MOURNING?

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. What Are We Mourning?

The Gemara in Taanis states, "When the month of Av begins one should decrease his level of joy. When the month of Adar begins one should increase his level of joy." What is the basis to increase one's level of joy in the month of Adar? There was a decree that was initiated by Haman, the evil one, to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child. Miraculously at the last moment, there was a complete change of events that allowed the decree to be rescinded by the Persian Emperor Achashverosh. He allowed the Jewish people to annihilate their enemies which culminated with the celebration of Purim.

As a result of the miracle of Purim, the Gemara tells us the Jewish people reaffirmed their commitment to Torah out of love. At Sinai, the time of the giving of the Torah, G'd had held a mountain over the heads of the Jewish people with an ultimatum. They could either accept the Torah or be buried under the mountain. At Sinai, the Jewish people were compelled to accept the Torah. The verse in the Scroll of Esther, states, "Keemu v'kiblu (they fulfilled and accepted [the Torah])." The Gemara explains that after the miracle of Purim they reaffirmed what they had previously received. As a result of experiencing the miracle of Purim, the Jewish people understood that the only reason that G'd had saved them from physical extinction was because of His unlimited love for them. Thus, one increases his level of joy in the month of Adar because it was a time during which G'd revealed the special value of the Jewish people to Him. This was the culmination of the seventy years of exile of the Jewish people after the destruction of the First Temple. Thus, embarking on the era to build the Second Temple to be reinstated by G'd.

The Gemara in contrast states, "When the month of Av begins one should decrease his level of joy." While the month of Adar represents a time that G'd revealed His closeness and intimate relationship to the Jewish people, the month of Av, through its tragic events reveals the distancing of the Jewish people from Him. The Mishna in Tractate Taanis states, "Five tragedies occurred on the Ninth of Av (Tisha b'Av)- the sin of the spies, the destruction of the First and Second Temples, the massacre and destruction of Betar, and the city of Jerusalem was plowed under (by the Romans)." Every tragedy that had occurred to the Jewish people on the ninth of Av is the basis for every tragedy that will ever take place in the future.

Since the Jewish people accepted the slanderous reports of the spies regarding the Land that G'd had promised them, they had demonstrated an unprecedented lack of faith. Because they

bemoaned their fate without reason at that time, G'd decreed that this day would be a day of tragedy throughout Jewish history that will give them reason to cry. The initial tragic event of the spies set into motion a dynamic that would allow the intimate relationship with the Jewish people to be weakened. This was blatantly demonstrated through the destruction of the First and Second Temples, which were G'd's dwelling place in existence. Although the various destructions themselves are painful and tragic, what we actually mourn is the underlying cause of all of those tragedies, which is G'd's leaving our presence. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that there is "an iron curtain" between ourselves and Our Father in Heaven. Our supplications to G'd are obstructed and do not ascend to be received by Him because there is a spiritual barrier that has been created as a result of the sins of the Jewish people.

When we mourn the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the Jewish people in exile, we are not mourning our own physical predicament (such as exile and the lack of the Temple), but rather we are mourning the intimate relationship with G'd that we have lost. By lessening the level of Joy during the month of Av, one can focus on the true cause of the tragedies without distraction. When we supplicate G'd to rebuild the Temple and bring Moshiach it is not to free us from our personal travails and suffering, but rather so that we should merit to be reinstated with Him and restore G'd's Glory to the world.

2. Not Realizing the Degree of G'd's Kindness

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..." The Torah tells us that before Moshe passed away he admonished the Jewish people for their failings over the forty-year period in the desert. It was only after the giants Og and Sichon were destroyed and their countries conquered did he rebuke the Jewish people for their failings. After witnessing G'd's promise coming to fruition, with the conquest of these territories was Moshe able to rebuke them. They were now able to understand that Moshe was not there only to criticize and fault them, but rather to secure their existence and give them perspective and clarity.

The Midrash states, "G'd said, 'I have destroyed before you Sichon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan. Their height is that of the largest cedars. In what merit were you able to defeat these giants? It was in the merit of Torah.' Our Rabbis of Blessed Memory explain that Sichon was the equivalent of a tower. He was more powerful than any creature in existence. There was no human being that could defeat him. How then was Moshe able to defeat him? The Prophet Amos states, 'I (G'd) will destroy his fruits from above and his roots from below...' G'd had toppled the archangels who were the spiritual counterparts of Og, Sichon, and their people and gave them over to the Jewish people. It was only because G'd had removed the spiritual force that stood behind these giants was Moshe able to conquer and destroy its physical manifestation.

The Midrash continues, "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 after the destruction of Pharaoh and his army (Song of the Sea), so too should have they 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 destruction 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...' We see from the words of Chazal that the strength of any creature or nation is determined not by its own fortitude or physical prowess but rather by the dimension of its spiritual counterpart that stands behind it.

One would think that it would have been more difficult to destroy Pharaoh and his armies, which was perceived as the greatest power on earth, than Og and Sichon who were only two giants. However, Chazal reveal to us that Og and Sichon were the more difficult to destroy. From physical appearances alone, one would not be able to make this determination. One needs to be able to understand and appreciate the spiritual forces that are behind these entities in order to determine who is the more powerful.

The Torah tells us that when the spies returned after scouting out the Land they had said that it was not physically possible to conquer the nations of Canaan. Although the Jewish people had witnessed the destruction of Pharaoh, the spies believed that they did not have sufficient merit to destroy the nations of Canaan because Pharaoh was only one king and there were thirty-one kings of Canaan. They had believed that the thirty-one kings combined, because of their spiritual dimension, would not be able to be conquered. Rather than believing that nothing is beyond G'd's ability, despite their lack of merit, they chose to believe that they could not conquer the land.

Despite the fact that the destruction of Sichon and Og was a greater miracle than the destruction of Pharaoh and his army, the Jewish people did not sing the praises of G'd after their defeat as they had done at the time of the closing of the Sea. It was only because the Jewish people were able to fully appreciate what had taken place at the Sea that they sang G'd's praise. However, regarding the destruction of Sichon and Og, it was only Moshe who understood what dimension of miracle was needed to topple the giants. He understood the spiritual dimension of the archangels that stood behind them. King David, appreciating what Moshe understood sang the praises of G'd, thus expressing the kindness that had taken place.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that when the Roman general entered into the Sanctuary of the Temple, he prided himself that he was going to destroy the house of G'd. He was gloating over his sense of empowerment, when a heavenly voice said to him, "You fool! The only reason you are able to destroy Temple is because My Presence has departed from the Temple Mount. You are only destroying stones and wood. It is the equivalent of grinding flour that has already been ground." It is only when G'd's Presence is in the Temple that it is a location that is impregnable. The moment the Jewish people were no longer worthy of that relationship, the Temple became a physical edifice. This is something that most people do not understand. The power of every nation, regardless of its

physical might is determined by its spiritual counterpart. When G'd decides to incapacitate and subordinate its archangel, that nation will fall.

3. The Ramifications of the Innateness of the Jew

The Torah tells us that before Moshe passed away he recounted to the Jewish people of all the events that had transpired over the past forty years when they were in the desert. In so doing, he reprimanded them for their various failings at these particular times. Moshe had recounted to them the time when he had appointed judges and established a judicial system. He had said, "How can I carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels? Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise (chachamim), understanding, and well known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads." It is understood that judges should be wise and knowledgeable so that they should be qualified to adjudicate properly. Rashi explains that the word "chachamim (wise)" is referring to people who are "kesufim", which means people with conscience and shame. Why is it important for the wise man to have a sense of conscience and shame? If one does not have conscience he will behave as one without scruples. He could justify any decision that he chooses to render. His genius will be misdirected due to his warped perspective and thus bring about destruction. It is therefore imperative that a judge possess conscience and shame. He should have a sense of responsibility regarding the outcome of his decision.

The Gemara in Tractate Yevamos tells us there are three characteristics that are innate in every Jew. They have compassion (rachmanim), possess conscience/shame (byshanim), and have a propensity to do acts of kindness (gomlei chassadim). Since the Jewish people descend from the holy Patriarchs, who established and inculcated these characteristics into their own being, their progeny inherited them, as their spiritual heirs. The Gemara tells us that if one does not possess these characteristics, his pedigree as a Jew needs to be investigated.

The Midrash tells us that when G'd begins to punish the nations of the world for their transgressions, He continues to do so until they are destroyed. This is because when Divine Retribution comes upon the nations, rather than repenting and attributing the retribution to their failings, they become defiant and rebel against G'd to an even greater degree. Since the nations of the world do not possess the innate characteristic of conscience/shame, they are lacking the capacity to acknowledge that they have failed and thus deserving of punishment. Therefore, G'd continues to punish them until they are destroyed. In contrast, when He punishes the Jewish people for their spiritual failings, they address their predicament and begin to reflect to come upon the cause of their travails. Ultimately this will lead them to repent. This stems from their innate characteristic of conscience/shame.

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that the world is intended to exist for six thousand years. The first two thousand years of existence, the world was devoid of spirituality; nevertheless, G'd maintained it. During this period of time the world was destroyed through the Great Flood and there was the dispersion of the families of existence at the time of the Tower of Babel. Nevertheless,

because of His Attribute of Kindness, G'd allowed existence to continue. The second two thousand-year period is referred to as the years of Torah. This era began when Avraham, our Patriarch recognized G'd. The last two thousand-year period is the era of Moshiach.

One of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy of G'd is, "(G'd) wants Kindness." Ramak in his work Tomer Devorah explains the meaning of this Attribute. There is a location in the spiritual realm which is a sanctuary in which there are angels that were created to receive the kindness that is created by humanity. When prosecution comes upon the Jewish people because of the Attribute of Justice, these angels present before G'd the acts of kindness so that He should have Mercy upon the Jewish people. This is because "G'd desires kindness." When the Jew emulates the Attribute of Kindness of G'd, it activates and precipitates G'd's unlimited Kindness to come upon existence. Prior to Avraham, our Patriarch, there was no one in existence that was emulating His Attribute of Kindness so that the world should be worthy of His Kindness. Therefore, it was only G'd's Kindness that maintained existence. However, after Avraham, our Patriarch, came into existence, who personified the characteristic of Kindness, the world was deserving of G'd's Kindness because of Avraham. Subsequently and consequently, because of this attribute that is found in his descendants, the world is maintained. As long as the Jewish people exist, G'd's Kindness to the world will be perpetuated because it is an innate characteristic of the Jew.

Even when the Jewish people suffer in exile, under the nations of the world, that setting is only possible because of the innate characteristic of kindness of the Jew that allows the world to continue.

4. The Jew's Objective and Mission in Life

The Midrash on the Introduction to Eicha states, "Reb Yehoshua Ben Levy says, 'Every day there is Heavenly voice that calls out from Choreiv (Sinai) , 'Woe to mankind! Because the Torah is being disgraced.' ...When do the nations of the world issue evil decrees against the Jewish people and their decrees succeed? It is when Jewish people throw the Torah to the ground (disgrace it). It states in Daniel, 'The tzavah (army) will be placed upon the tamid (continuous) because of defiance.' What is the meaning of the word 'tzavah'? It is referring to the nations of the world. What is the meaning of the word 'tamid'? It is referring to the Jewish people. Why are they classified as 'tamid'? The prophet Yehoshua 'You should engage in Torah study continuously day and night.' Since the Jewish people must engage in Torah study continuously, they are classified as 'tamid (continuous).' Thus, the decree of the gentiles will come upon the Jewish people and succeed if they are defiant in not engaging in Torah study on an ongoing basis. It is considered as if they have thrown the Torah to the ground, which is the ultimate disgrace. As it states, 'It is when the Truth will be thrown to the ground.' The word 'Truth' is referring to Torah. As King Solomon writes in Proverbs regarding Torah, 'Acquire Truth and do not sell it.'" It is only when the Jewish people are defiant by disgracing the Torah, will they be persecuted by the nations of the world.

The current standing of the Jewish people is dire. The world no longer values our existence. They see the Jewish people in a negative light. The esteem and reverence for the Jew that may have one time existed in certain segments of society no longer exist. There are various plots behind the scenes of which we are not aware. This is only because the Torah is being disgraced. One may delude himself and believe that since there are Torah enclaves throughout the world and they are studying the Torah more than ever, there is nothing to be concerned about. While this may be true to some degree, the obligation of continuous Torah study is incumbent on every Jew, regardless of his station in life. Thus, those who are not engaged in uninterrupted study must set aside time to study Torah. As it states in the Gemara in Tractate Berachos, "If one is able to study Torah (for any set period of time) and chooses not to do so, a level of suffering will come upon him and disrupt his life to the extreme."

The Midrash tells us, based on the verse in Daniel, that the Jewish people are quantified as "tamid (continuous)." It is only because this is their essence. Any other pursuit is permitted only because it is a necessity to survive. However, if this classification is compromised by the lack of Torah study, then the decrees of the nations of the world will come upon the Jewish people as it states in Daniel, "The tzavah (gentiles) will be placed upon the tamid (continuous) because of defiance.' It is true that one needs to earn a livelihood, but one's occupation is not a reflection of his essence. The Jew is classified as "tamid" because it is his purpose in existence to engage in Torah study. The Jewish people are referred to as "Makdishei Shmecha (those who sanctify Your Name)." This is because when the Jewish people became His Holy Nation through the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. The sanctity of the Jewish people and the Torah are intertwined with one another. When one utilizes his time responsibly for the sake of Torah study, in essence, he is functioning within the capacity of "tamid" and "Makdishei Shmecha."

5. Torah, the Ultimate Setting For Blessing (from Mattos-Masei)

The Midrash asks, "Why did the 42 locations to which the Jewish people traveled in the desert merit to be mentioned in the Torah? It is because these locations accommodated the Jewish people during their forty-year journey in the desert. Ultimately, G'd will give these locations their just reward. As it states in the Prophet Yeshaya, 'This parched desert will rejoice. It will blossom and sprout...' If this inanimate and desolate location will merit reward for accommodating the Jewish people, how much more so will one merit great blessing/reward for hosting a Torah scholar in one's home. At the end of time the desert will become a settled location and the communities that are settled will become like a desert. Where do we find that the desert will become a settled and fertile location? The verse states, 'The desert will become a location of flowing brooks of water...' Where do we find that the settled locations will become like a desert? It states, 'I despised Esav and Edom (Har Seir) will be turned into a desert...' Today we find no trees in the desert. However at the end of time there will be trees...Today the caravans that travel the desert are only guided on their way by the zodiac; however, at the end of time there will be roads in the desert...."

It is known that in the 18th and 19th Century that Torah scholars were hosted by wealthy families who possessed large libraries containing volumes of Torah and manuscripts. These families, who revered these Torah scholars, provided for them the setting to engage in their Torah studies without interruption. The Shaagis Aryeh, who was a contemporary of the Vilna Gaon, and who was considered to be an equal to the Goan in the revealed Torah, was hosted by the parents of Reb Chaim of Volozhin.

The mother of Reb Chaim of Volozhin revered Torah on a unique level. She felt privileged to host the Shaagis Aryeh in her home. Whenever she needed to enter the room where the Shaagis Aryeh was studying in order to provide him with his needs or for any other reason, she would do it in the most inconspicuous manner so as not to disturb him. Since she was the wife of his host, if she were to enter the room and be noticed, the Shaagis Aryeh would interrupt his studies to acknowledge her presence. Being a woman of small size, she decided to don herself with the dress of her small daughter. She thought that if she were to crawl into the room dressed as a young child, she would go unnoticed and thus not interrupt the great rabbi.

When she crawled into the room the Shaagis Aryeh, immersed in Torah thought unknowingly put his foot on her dress. Since she did not want to disturb him, she did not make any movement to make him aware that she was caught under his foot. After a period of time had passed, he realized that this small child was caught under his foot. When he saw what he had done to the child he blessed her saying, "May you merit a child who will be a leading Torah sage and illuminate the entire generation." When he gave the blessing, he did not realize that this seemingly little girl was actually the wife of his host. As a result of the Shaagis Aryeh's blessing, within the year, she conceived and gave birth to Reb Chaim of Volozhin, who was the light of his generation. The blessing of the Torah sage, which was said in passing ultimately brought about a result that benefited the entire Jewish people until present day. If the desert, which is desolate and inanimate is deserving of reward for hosting and accommodating the Jewish people, although it had no choice in the matter, how much more so is the one who hosts the Torah scholar with proper reverence deserving of reward. Text Copyright © 2011 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and Torah.org.

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