

FROM ROCK BOTTOM TO BOTTOMS UP

by Jon Erlbaum

- This Week's **RRR** (Relevant Religious Reference): "**(In Messianic Times to come, Tisha B'Av, the saddest day of the Jewish year) shall become a time of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts...**" - *Zechariah, 8:19*
- This Week's **SSC** (Suitable Secular Citation): "**I've had an interesting morning. In the last two hours... I've lost my job, my apartment ... my car and my girlfriend**" -*JOHN WINGER (BILL MURRAY) to his buddy RUSSELL ZISKEY (HAROLD RAMIS) in the movie "STRIPEs"*

ROCK BOTTOM

Rock bottom! It can't get any worse because there is simply no lower depth that one can sink to. In the Jewish calendar & consciousness, there is a "rock bottom" equivalent in the dimension of time: the 9th of Av (in Hebrew, "Tisha B'Av"). Spanning Jewish history, it has been a day that reverberates with the energy of disaster, repeatedly set aside for the harshest brand of national Jewish wake-up calls[1]. If so, then why do our Sages tell us that in times to come, the 9th of Av will be celebrated as a Holiday of great rejoicing?

UNFATHOMABLE ANGUISH: A MAN KICKED OUT OF HIS FAMILY HOME

Imagine the following tragic scenario: a man becomes caught up in a gambling addiction, which gradually erodes the fabric of his Family life. He's rarely home, he loses much of the Family's nest egg, he begins to beat his children.... His Wife does all she can to help him shape up, but she finds that his occasional overtures to correct his behavior are half-hearted at best. Exasperated, she is eventually left with no choice: "I want you out tonight," she says as she throws his duffel bag at him. "Pack and get out of here." "But I'll really change this time!" "Not here you won't! I refuse to stand here and be insulted by those empty words again. You're out!" Dejected and completely broken, he takes his bags and walks through the doorway that he is no longer deemed worthy to reenter. Without a plan, he heads for the streets to begin his bitter personal exile. He has no more excuses to make, and no one to listen to them even if he did.

Eventually - after wallowing in self-pity proves fruitless - he decides to commit to a sincere regiment of rehabilitation, and he gradually works his way back to respectability. At long last, he feels that he is ready to try to regain his Family's favor. They spot him approaching, and before he even reaches the pine door that he had so often pined for, he is greeted with open arms by those who can see that he has truly and heroically done it! As he rebuilds his relationships, **he finds himself wanting to celebrate the remarkable rehabilitation that led to his jubilant reunion. Which date does he choose? The anniversary of the very day he had hit rock bottom!** Had it not been for that fateful day, he probably would have never made himself right again. Therefore, the dark day that spurred on his eventual rebirth & family reunion becomes tantamount to his new Birthday, Wedding Anniversary, and Father's Day as well.

[Adapted from a story told by Rabbi Mordechai Becher]

WHEN "THE "HOUSE" THAT SUPPLIED LIGHT TO THE WORLD

All of us - the Jewish People - were kicked out of the HOME we shared with our Creator. Our Temple was called a "HOUSE of Holiness", where G-d chose to "dwell" in the sense of allowing us to experience a heightened manifestation of His Presence. In effect, it served as the spiritual supply station of G-d's global pipeline, through which Divine energy would be pumped out to the rest of the world. Therefore, each time the Temple was destroyed (it stood twice and was **destroyed twice, both times on the 9th of Av**), the world lost some of the guiding light that emanates from the "Soul of the World".

The Talmud declares the metaphysical principle that "any generation in which the Temple is not built, it is as if it was destroyed in that generation[2]." In other words, if we see that the Temple isn't rebuilt, we know that we haven't fully corrected the human flaws that caused it to be destroyed in the first place (e.g. baseless hatred, immorality, & evil speech) - because if we HAD corrected them, the Temple would have been reconstructed by now! Therefore, Tisha B'Av is the time to recognize that in one sense, we have hit a spiritual rock bottom. And it is the time to realize just what it means to be living in a world that lacks its illuminating "House of Holiness".

BOTTOMS UP (JOIN THE ARMY WITH BILL MURRAY?)

But as with the protagonist in our story, this sobering, soul-searching realization is meant to serve as "a going down for the sake of going up", spurring us on to get our lives together and thereby our "House" back in order. Borrowing from a much lighter example, we are in some ways enjoined to follow the lead of John Winger (Bill Murray) after things got unbearably tough for him in the movie "Stripes". After hitting rock bottom by losing his job, his apartment, his car, his girlfriend, and his pizza (all within two hours), he knew that he had to commit to a radical regiment of change in order to pull

himself back up. He decided to "be all that he could be" by joining the Army! We too are called upon to use this time in order to "be all that we can be". Through this process, we will one day be able to celebrate Tisha B'Av as a uniquely joyous Holiday, the anniversary of the very day that snapped us into reality and allowed us to reunite with our Creator in a rebuilt House of Holiness. May we soon celebrate Tisha B'Av as the day that transformed devastation to celebration - as the day that helped us journey from Rock Bottom to Bottoms Up!

Have a Wonderful Shabbos and a Meaningful Tisha B'Av!
Love, Jon & The Chevra

1. Many tragic events have happened on TISHA B'AV (the following is, sadly, only a partial list):
 - a. The 1st Temple was destroyed - approximately 100,00 Jews were slaughtered and millions more exiled (TISHA B'AV, 586 BCE)
 - b. The 2nd Temple was destroyed - approximately 2,000,000 Jews died and another 1,000,000 were exiled (TISHA B'AV, 70 CE)
 - c. The fortress city of Beitar - the Jews' last stand against the Romans - was captured & destroyed. Over 100,000 Jews were slaughtered (TISHA B'AV, 135 CE)
 - d. King Edward I signed an edict that the Jews must be expelled from England (TISHA B'AV, 1290)
 - e. The Spanish Inquisition culminated with the expulsion of approximately 200,000 Jews from Spain (TISHA B'AV, 1492)
 - f. WWI broke out (TISHA B'AV, 1914)
 - g. The mass deportation began of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to the death camp Treblinka (TISHA B'AV, 1942)
 - h. The eventual day when the 9th of Av will be celebrated as a holiday of rejoicing (TISHA B'AV, ????)

2. From the Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Yoma 1A

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