

REVIEW

by Shlomo Katz

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Yosef Laib Halevi a"h**

Today's Learning:

Kelim 17:16-17

O.C. 61:2-4

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Zevachim 54

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shekalim 8

R' Yitzchak Eliyahu Landau (Vilna; 19th century) writes in the introduction to his commentary on Sefer Devarim: This book is called "Mishneh Torah" / "The Review of the Torah" because many things that were taught in the prior books of the Torah are repeated here. As long as Moshe was alive, anyone who had difficulty understanding a law of the Torah could ask Moshe. However, when Moshe was about to die, he felt it was necessary to elaborate on some of the laws he had taught previously. At the same time, he transmitted new laws that Hashem had taught him and also delivered words of rebuke and mussar, and he foretold what would befall the Jewish people in the future.

All of this, Hashem commanded Moshe to write in the Torah, for Hashem also wants His people to

understand the laws clearly. That is why some parts of Sefer Devarim are written as if Hashem is speaking and others are written as if Moshe is speaking. On the one hand, the book includes laws that Moshe chose to explain on his own. On the other hand, Hashem later told Moshe to record those very explanations in the Torah.

Near the end of this book, in Parashat Ki Tavo, we read the Tochachah -- a warning of dire punishments that await our nation if we do not observe the Torah's laws. Our Sages say that Moshe said this Tochachah on his own. However, this does not mean that Moshe made up these punishments. Rather, it means that unlike the other books of the Torah -- which "Hashem spoke through Moshe's throat" -- in Devarim, Hashem told Moshe to speak in Moshe's own words. Then, after the fact, Hashem told Moshe to write those words in the Torah. (Patsheggen Ha'dat)

"Hashem, your G-d, has multiplied you and behold! You are like the stars of the heaven in abundance . . . Eichah / How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?" (1:10-12)

The Midrash notes that three prophets used the word "Eichah": The first was Moshe, in our verse. The second was Yishayah, who said (in today's haftarah, verse 21): "How has she become a harlot! - faithful city that was full of justice . . ." The third was Yirmiyah, who said (in the first verse of the Book of Eichah, which we read on Tishah B'Av), "Alas, how she sits in solitude! The city that was great . . ."

The Midrash likens these three prophets to three servants who saw their mistress at different times. One saw her in tranquil times, one saw her when she behaved irresponsibly, and the third saw her downfall. So, too, Moshe saw Bnei Yisrael in their glory ("Hashem, your G-d, has multiplied you and behold! You are like the stars of the heaven in abundance."), Yishayah saw them in their sinfulness, and Yirmiyah saw them at their downfall, the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash and the exile to Bavel.

R' Shlomo Harkavi z"l (mashgiach of the Grodno Yeshiva; killed in the Holocaust) writes: The midrash is showing us that whatever state Bnei Yisrael find themselves in, they always take it to extremes. The word "eichah" means more than "how." "Eichah" expresses wonder and amazement. Moshe saw Bnei Yisrael at the height of Hashem's kindness to them, when they rebelled against Him but He continued to shower them with daily bread and with other miracles. Moshe therefore exclaimed, "Eichah / How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?" I cannot, but Hashem can and does.

Yishayahu saw Bnei Yisrael in their sinful state. Maharal (16th century) writes that it is the nature of Jews that when they fall, they fall very low. Yishayahu exclaimed in amazement, "Eichah / How are such sins possible from the people who live in Yerushalayim, the city of justice and charity?"

Finally, Yirmiyah saw Bnei Yisrael's punishment, and he cried, "Eichah / How is such suffering possible?"

In this light, says R' Harkavi, we can understand on a deeper level why the first chapter of Yishayahu was chosen as the haftarah for the Shabbat preceding Tishah B'Av. It is not because this passage coincidentally contains the word "Eichah." Rather, before we mourn on Tishah B'Av -- whether we mourn only for the losses of long ago or also for more recent tragedies - we remind ourselves how we reached this stage. Once we were unparalleled in our greatness, but then we sinned with unparalleled depravity. As a result, we have been punished with suffering unparalleled in history. (Me'imrei Shlomo No. 55)

"But Hashem did not listen to your voice and He did not harken to you." (1:45)

A literal translation of this verse would be: "But He did not hear - Hashem - your voice, and He did not listen to you." R' Shimon Sofer z"l (1821-1883; rabbi of Krakow) observes that this alludes to the Sages' teaching: "Why are people's prayers not heard? Because they do not know the Name of Hashem." Because He did not hear His Name said with proper concentration when you raised your voice in prayer, He did not listen to you. (Michtav Sofer)

"I commanded Yehoshua at that time, saying, 'Your eyes have seen everything that Hashem, your G-d, has done to these two kings; so will Hashem do to all the kingdoms to which you cross over [the Jordan River]. You shall not fear them, for Hashem, your God -- 'Hu ha'nilcham lachem' / He shall wage war for you.'" (3:21-22)

R' Gavriel Ze'ev Margolis z"l (1847-1935; rabbi in Lithuania, Boston and New York) asks: Once Moshe had promised Yehoshua that Hashem will do to the kings of Canaan as He did to the kings on the east bank of the Jordan, why was it necessary to tell Yehoshua not to be afraid? For the same reason, what did he add by saying, "He shall wage war for you."

R' Margolis answers: Hashem may fight our battles for one of two reasons - either because we are meritorious or because our enemies are so wicked that a Chillul Hashem / Desecration of G- d's Name would result if He were to let them be. Each of the two verses quoted above refers to one type of war. In the first verse, Hashem takes the offensive, so-to-speak, because it refers to a situation in which we merit His intervention. In the second verse, the word used for waging war is "nilcham" -- a nif'al conjugation. This conjugation means that someone or something else is causing Him to make war. That something else is the wickedness of our enemies. This explains why the promise that He will fight our enemies is repeated. Each refers to a different scenario. It explains as well why Yehoshua had to be told not to fear. He knew that Hashem fights for us when we are deserving, but what if we are not? He was told, Hashem will fight our battles nevertheless to prevent a Chillul Hashem. (Torat Gavriel)

Tishah B'Av

R' Zalman Rotberg shlita (rosh yeshiva of Yeshiva Bet Meir in Bnei Brak) writes: The Book of Eichah, in which the prophet Yirmiyah poured out his heart over the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash and the exile, teaches us not only about the past, but about the future. Our Sages teach that prophecy can be attained only when one is in a state of joy. This means that Yirmiyah wrote Eichah, which is prophetic, in a state of joy! How is this possible? Because the mere fact that, in the midst of the destruction, Hashem spoke to Yirmiyah was a hopeful sign, a sign that He had not abandoned His people, that there is a future to Hashem's relationship with us.

There is also another reason that Hashem wanted Yirmiyah to view the destruction through the prism of prophecy. The truth is that man cannot fully grasp the significance of either the Bet Hamikdash or its destruction. [More on this below.] The Bet Hamikdash was the "residence" of the Shechinah, but just as we cannot fathom the essence of the Shechinah, so we cannot fully comprehend what it means for the Shechinah to have a "residence." It follows from this, too, that we cannot grasp the great loss when the Shechinah's "home" was destroyed. Through prophecy, however, Yirmiyah could put some of the loss in perspective for us.

We can learn from this, too, adds R' Rotberg, that it takes a great person to appreciate the depth of the losses that the Jewish people have suffered. Indeed, the authors of the kinot / lamentations which we recite were all great scholars and righteous men.

R' Rotberg relates: All of us sigh or groan when we hear of a person who is ill or who died tragically. However, we do not feel another's pain the way great people do. The Chazon Ish's sister (R' Rotberg's aunt) used to beg visitors not to enter the Chazon Ish's study before he had eaten breakfast, because, as soon a visitor asked the Chazon Ish to pray for a seriously-ill relative, the Chazon Ish immediately lost his appetite and became very pained. This is an emulation of Hashem's own behavior; Chazal say that He appeared to Moshe from a thorn-bush as if to say, "I am suffering with Bnei Yisrael." (Tuv Da'at Vol. III, p. 329)

R' Elazar / Eliezer Hakalir z"l

R' Elazar or Eliezer Hakalir was one of our most prolific liturgical poets and was the author of many of the kinot / lamentations for Tishah B'Av. Oddly enough, nothing is known about him, not even his true name or when he lived.

It is certain that R' E' lived before the time of Rashi (died 1105) as Rashi quotes R' E's poems many times in both his Tanach and Talmud commentaries. Some say that the paytan / liturgist was R' Elazar the son of R' Shimon bar Yochai, one of the sages of the Mishnah in the second century. Others contend that he lived in the fifth century and is the R' Eliezer ben R' Shimon who is mentioned in Midrash Rabbah to Vayikra 23:40. Still others identify him as R' Elazar ben Arach, a member of the

generation which saw the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash in the first century C.E.

Those who reject all of the above opinions point to a line in the Tishah B'Av Kinot which states that more than 900 years have passed since the destruction. (Others say that this was a later addition.) In addition, those who place R' E' later find it incredible that, if he lived as early as has been suggested, he is not mentioned (at least by the name "Hakalir") in any place in the Talmud or the major Midrashim. (He is mentioned in one Midrash, although that may reflect a later addition.) This silence is particularly incredible considering that some of R' E's poems actually state halachic opinions that one would expect to find quoted by later sages. Similarly, if R' E' preceded the authoring of the major Midrashim, why is he not quoted in them, even when his poems' words and the Midrash are identical? Also, why do Sephardim not recite any of his poems?

Some attribute to R' E' a kabbalistic work called Kevudah in which the sage R' Hai Gaon is referred to as being "of blessed memory." R' Hai Gaon died in 1038.

It also is not known what the name "Hakalir" means. Some say that Kalir was the grandfather of R' E' and that his name was adopted as a surname. Others say that "kalir" means "cake," and that R' E' had eaten a certain kind of cake which was a segulah / charm for wisdom.

The evidence that this paytan lived in Eretz Yisrael includes the fact that we know of no prayers that he wrote for the second day of any yom tov. It appears that he lived in the town of Kiryat Sefer. (Sources: Introduction to Seder Hakinot Ha'meforash Im Beur Kol Be'ramah; Introduction to Machzor Korban Aharon)

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