

# EICHAH – HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

by Mordechai Dixler

This Shabbos is *Tisha B'Av*, the Ninth of Av, the day of mourning for the destruction of both Holy Temples and tragedies throughout Jewish history. Because it is the Sabbath, the day of mourning begins Saturday night and is observed throughout Sunday.

A woman of royalty had three attendants who served her during different periods of her life. One lived with her in her noble state, another during her descent into indecency, and the last was with her in her disgrace. This is how the Midrash (*Eicha Rabba 1*) portrays the questions of the three prophets, Moshe (Moses), Isaiah, and Jeremiah who served the Jewish nation through three periods of history.

Jeremiah asked in the opening words of his scroll of Lamentations, "*Eichah* – How could the great nation of multitudes now sit alone..." Years prior, Isaiah (1:21) asked a similar question as Jerusalem began its descent, "*Eichah* – How could the Jewish people turn away and become unfaithful to G-d?"

Their questions trace back to yet a third, similar question, from Moshe in this week's Torah reading. Speaking to the Jewish people, assembled before him to hear his final words before his passing, Moshe recalls his question when they received the Torah, "*Eichah* – How can I alone bear your burden, your trouble, and your contentiousness?" (Deuteronomy 1:12) Moshe asked other communal leaders to help him confront the resistance of the Jewish people. The same somber, sad melody used to read *Eichah* on the night of *Tisha B'av* is customarily used by the reader (*Ba'al Koreh*) during the reading of Moshe's question — in order to highlight the common theme of these three prophetic questions.

"How?" is a question one asks when more was expected, but the reality has fallen short of those expectations. Moshe, Isaiah, and Jeremiah all saw the prior greatness of their nation, and lamented the fact that they would not maintain their prior nobility.

Our loss of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was the loss of the most intimate presence of G-d since His revelation on Mt. Sinai. Miracles occurred in the Temple daily, witnessed by all who visited, and known to all who heard of them. Offerings were brought for communal atonement, personal atonement, and as gifts to the Creator. These gifts were offered on behalf of Jews and non-Jews alike. The world has never felt G-d so close as when the Temple stood.

Moshe, the first to ask "How?", carried G-d's message to the Jewish people, and the difficulty they gave him in implementing G-d's instructions was the beginning and the source of their downfall. Our

full closeness to G-d was lost due to our unwillingness to completely accept His will and His message in the Torah. The nation that once stood at Mt. Sinai and proclaimed their uncompromising faith, had quickly fallen from grace.

During this time of mourning and on Tisha B'Av we cry for the loss of the Holy Temple, but we must also consider what led to its destruction. We too must ask ourselves, "How?" We all have the potential to do better, and it is likely there were times in our lives that we *did* do better. How can we make a change to be more devoted to G-d's will, to live faithfully to Him and His words in the Torah? This very personal question invites G-d back into our lives. May we see the rebuilding of the Temple and the return of G-d's intimate closeness very soon!