

BEIN HAM'TZARIM (THE "THREE WEEKS")

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THE MISHNAH IN TA'ANIT

In our calendar, there are four fast days which directly relate to the destruction of the Beit haMikdash and Yerushalayim under the Babylonians during the latter half of the sixth century BCE:

- * Asarah b'Tevet (Tevet 10 - in the winter), when the siege of the city by the Babylonians began;
- * Shiv'ah 'Asar b'Tammuz (Tammuz 17 - summer), when the walls of the city were breached, several years after the beginning of the siege;
- * Tish'ah b'Av (Av 9 - summer), when the Beit haMikdash was destroyed by the Babylonians.
- * Tzom G'daliah (Tishri 3 - fall) when the Judean governor was assassinated in an Ammonite-generated plot. This brought about the end of Jewish autonomy under the Babylonians.

Unlike the fasts in Tevet and Tishri, the two summertime fasts are associated with other tragedies in our past:

In the Mishnah in Ta'anit (4:6), we are taught:

"Five catastrophes befell our ancestors on the Shiv'ah 'Asar b'Tammuz and five on Tish'ah b'Av:

On the 17th of Tammuz:

- * The Tablets were broken
- * The Tamid offering was stopped
- * The city walls were breached
- * Apostomos burned the Torah
- * He constructed an idol (or "an idol was constructed") in the Sanctuary

On the 9th of Av:

- * The sentence was passed against our ancestors that they not be allowed to enter the Land
- * The 1st Mikdash was destroyed
- * The 2nd Mikdash was destroyed
- * Beitar was entrapped
- * The city was plowed under"

[Besides this list, there are many other tragedies which befell our people, as recently as the Holocaust, which reached their pinnacle or were begun on Tish'ah b'Av.]

II

ANALYZING THE MISHNAH

Although both of these fast days were first mandated and established as a result of the destruction of the Beit haMikdash and Yerushalayim, the Rabbis point to much earlier tragedies for each. This suggests that, in Rabbinic thinking, each of these days has a "theme" to its tragedy, one which has roots in the same experience which serves as the basis for all of Jewish history - the Egypt - Desert - Israel experience. (See our discussion of this topic at

<http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/5757/va/dt.57.3.04.html>, at

<http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/5757/va/dt.57.3.05.html>, here and, briefly, at the end of

<http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/5757/bm/dt.57.4.01.html>).

Whenever the Tannaim (Rabbis of the Mishnaic period) present an ordered list (i.e. when they introduce that list with the number of items to appear), especially in non-Halakhic literature, it indicates a significance to that number. This does not mean that there is a mystical import (although there may well be), but that if two parallel lists are presented, both with the same number of items and both "ordered", the symmetry indicates a parallel (or opposing) relationship between the two.

(For an example of an "opposing" relationship, see the Mishnah in Avot which was the focus of last week's shiur [5:19]: "Anyone who has these three [following] characteristics is considered a student of Avraham Avinu, and anyone who has three other [opposite] characteristics is considered a student of the evil Bil'am."

For an example of a parallel relationship, see the Mishnah ibid. 5:4 - "Ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in Egypt and ten [miracles] at the Sea." An opposing relationship is evidenced by the opposite nature of the lists - Avraham is a saint and Bil'am is evil. A parallel relationship is identified whenever the two groups are of a similar type - in a general sense.)

The placement of these two "themes" and their lists of tragedies in juxtaposition implies a continuum from one to the other. This sequenced relationship is more clearly evidenced by the tradition that we have to regard the time period between Shiv'ah 'Asar b'Tammuz and Tish'ah b'Av as a unit, marked by customs of mourning (e.g. no weddings, parties, haircutting etc. - see Shulhan Arukh Orach Hayyim #551 and the Aharonim ad loc.)

From this Mishnah (and our analysis & comments), we can infer four points:

a) Each of these days has a "theme".

b) This "theme" explains the inclusion of all five items on each list.

c) There is a parallel relationship between the two. (It is not an "opposing" relationship as the two sets are not presented as antitheses, rather they are all of one type - tragedy).

d) There is a continuum between the two "themes". The rest of this shiur will be focused on identifying the themes of each of these days, by finding the common thread between the five items on each list - then suggesting the relationship between the two sets of tragedies, explaining the continuum of Shiv'ah 'Asar b'Tammuz ---> Tish'ah b'Av. This will, hopefully, enlighten us as to the nature of the "Three Weeks".

III

SHIV'AH 'ASAR B'TAMMUZ: REJECTION OF SINAI

1) THE BREAKING OF THE TABLETS

As the Midrash points out numerous times (see our shiur at <http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/5757/bm/dt.57.4.01.html>), the Stand at Sinai was the wedding of the Jewish People and God. The Gemara (BT Shabbat 88b) compares the Stand at Sinai to an actual Huppah - wedding canopy. Why did Mosheh break the tablets (for which God congratulated him with the first "Yasher Koach" in history - see the Gemara ibid.)? Because, just like a bride who has an affair under her Huppah, the Jewish people, standing at the foot of Sinai just forty days after the Revelation of God's word, clamored for the construction and worship of a golden calf. The various reasons for Mosheh's breaking the tablets, suggested in different Midrashim, all point to one common idea. The Jewish people had broken their trust with God at the very location and time of their most intimate encounter with Him. The breaking of the Tablets was both symbolic - and the result - of the introduction of an abomination (idolatry) at a site and time which was the pinnacle of holiness. The covenant of Sinai - to be a "Kingdom of Kohanim and a Holy Nation" was turned on its head.

2) THE TAMID OFFERING WAS STOPPED

The Torah commands us to bring a daily offering, known as Korban haTamid (the "Regular" offering - see our discussion at <http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/5757/sh/dt.57.2.08.html>). This Korban was to be offered twice daily, once in the morning (the first Korban of the day) and once "between the evens" (in the afternoon - with the exception of the Korban Pesach, the last Korban of the day). We would normally associate this Korban with the Beit haMikdash, and would expect the suspension of its being offered to be in the same set with the destruction of the Beit haMikdash (Tish'ah b'Av). Why is it on this list? (One could argue that historically, that's just when it happened; however, following our thinking that the Rabbis deliberately composed two parallel lists, they intended each list to represent a common theme.)

A verse in Parashat Pinhas will clarify:

It is a regular burnt offering, ha'Asuyah b'Har Sinai (ordained/performed at Mount Sinai) for a

pleasing odor, an offering by fire to YHVH. (Bamidbar 28:6). As some of the Rishonim (see S'forno and Rashi's second explanation ad loc.) point out, this verse associates the regular twice-daily Korban with the offering brought in the aftermath of the Revelation as part of the covenant ceremony at Sinai (See Sh'mot 24:5-8). In other words, the daily Tamid was to be a reminder and recovenanting of the B'rit Sinai - the covenant of Sinai. We now understand the inclusion of the suspension of the Tamid with the breaking of the Tablets.

3) THE CITY WALLS WERE BREACHED

Although we would normally associate this with the destruction of the Beit haMikdash - indeed, it was the first step in the final defeat which culminated in that terrible conflagration - yet, there is also a Sinaitic association with the breaching of the city walls.

One of the most beautiful compilations of Rabbinic "tragedy-literature" is the Midrash Rabbah on Eikhah. Of note is the extensive "Petichta", which contains the many homiletic introductions given by the Rabbis to the reading of Eikhah (or other tragic portions in Tanakh read publicly). In the second chapter of the Petichta, we read:

Rebbi sent R. Asi and R. Ami to check out - and repair- the cities of Eretz Yisra'el; they would come to a city and ask for the N'turei Karta (guardians of the city) - and the townsfolk would bring them the constable and governor - whereupon they would say - "Are these the N'turei Karta? These are the Haruvei Karta (destroyers of the city)!" - So they asked "Who are the N'turei Karta?" - They responded: "These are the scribes and teachers who study and review and guard the Torah during the day and night." (Petichta of Eikhah Rabbah, Ch. 2)

(This Midrash is the source for the name of the community in Yerushalayim known as N'turei Karta. The reader may judge for himself how closely the name fits the group).

The Midrash is teaching a valuable lesson, one which deserves a shiur of its own. The protection of the city comes not from its military might, rather from its scribes, teachers and students of Torah.

If the walls of the city of Yerushalayim were successfully breached, that would imply a breach in the protection of Torah - and a lapse among her students and scribes. Although the association with Sinai is now clear - Sinai is not only the source and foundation of Torah, but, as many Rishonim point out, every time that we engage in Torah study, we are effectively reenacting the Sinai experience (See Rashi D'varim 11:13). There is also a clear association between the study of Torah and the Korban haTamid, alluded to in the Midrash mentioned above. The Korban haTamid was to be brought twice daily, in the morning and evening ("between the evens"). Torah study is defined in the Torah as "when you lie down and when you rise up" - or, as God commands Yehoshua: "You shall meditate upon it by day and by night" (Yehoshua 1:8). In other words, the study of Torah parallels the Korban haTamid - it is an ongoing Mitzvah which has two time-foci: Morning and evening (see our shiur on the Korban haTamid, cited above.) The lapse of study which allowed the breach of the city walls is of a type with the suspension of the Korban haTamid - the cessation of the "day-and-night"

worship of God, originated at Sinai.

4) APOSTOMOS BURNED THE TORAH

Wherever this event happened, it is a clear "regression" from Sinai. That great gift which we received in the desert, among protective flames, now went up in flames. This is a clear disruption of the Sinaitic experience.

5) HE CONSTRUCTED AN IDOL IN THE SANCTUARY

Whether Apostomos was the villain here - or someone else (see the various readings in Ta'anit - and Rashi Ta'anit 26b s.v. hu'amad), the similarity to the tragedy at the foot of Sinai is all too obvious. It was not just the establishment of an idol that was the tragedy - it was the placement of this idol in the Sanctuary - just like the abomination of the golden calf was its placement at the foot of Sinai in the wake of the Revelation.

SUMMARY OF LIST #1

All five of the tragedies which the Rabbis date to Shiv'ah 'Asar b'Tammuz are disruptions of the promise of Sinai - regressions from the intimacy we enjoyed when God first revealed Himself to us. The breaking of the tablets, the burning of the Torah and the construction of an idol in the Sanctuary were clear "rollbacks" from Sinai. The Korban haTamid and the regular study of Torah (protecting the walls of the city) represents something about Sinai (as the verse in Bamidbar tells us - although we don't yet understand what it represents) - and these were also suspended or lost on the fateful day of Shiv'ah 'Asar b'Tammuz.

IV

TISH'AH B'AV: REJECTION OF TZIYYON

1) THE SENTENCE AGAINST OUR ANCESTORS As we read in Parashat Sh'lach L'kha, after Kaleb's challenge to the other scouts and their exaggerated response ("The Land eats up its inhabitants"), the people "wailed on that night". As the Gemara states:

Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. Rabbah said in the name of R. Yohanan: That night was Tish'a b'Av; haKadosh Barukh Hu said: They cried for naught, I will establish for them [this night as] a weeping for generations. (BT Sotah 35a)

In other words, the wailing (and the subsequent decree that that entire generation would die in the desert and their children would enter the Land) was the event that shaped the nature of Tish'ah b'Av. Just as we found in regards to Shiv'ah 'Asar b'Tammuz, the tragedies of Tish'ah b'Av are rooted in our desert sojourn.

In describing this wailing, the Psalmist says:

Then they despised the pleasant land, having no faith in his promise. They grumbled in their tents, and did not obey the voice of YHVH. Therefore he raised his hand and swore to them that he would make them fall in the wilderness. (T'hilim 106:24-26) Indeed, their eager acceptance of the scouts' negative report was tantamount to a rejection of the "pleasant land", the Land which God had promised them, flowing with milk and honey and all manners of blessing.

We may then, following our earlier methodology, identify the Tish'ah b'Av group of tragedies as forms of rejection of Tziyyon/Israel.

2-3) THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BATEI MIKDASH

We would assume that these two tragedies - certainly the nadir of our national existence - belong to the first group. As we have discussed in several shiurim, the Mishkan/Mikdash were meant to be a continuation of the Sinai experience. How do we explain these two events being listed here? (Here, by the way, our theory gains strength. As the Gemara in Ta'anit [29a] points out, the major part of the burning of the second Mikdash took place on the tenth of Av; nevertheless, the Rabbis wanted to preserve the theme and included the destruction of both Batei Mikdash on this list).

There is, however, a critical difference between the role of the Mishkan/Mikdash (= "Heikhal" - Sanctuary) and the "Beit haMikdash", which includes the entire structure and institution. Whereas the Mishkan/Mikdash is the continuation of Sinai, with the smoke and fire reminiscent of the moment of Revelation, the Temple (writ large) plays a critically different role. The sanctity of the Temple plays a different role than that of the Mikdash. Whereas the Mikdash is a place reserved for the intimate relationship between the Jewish people and God, the Temple is - ideally and teleologically - a beacon for the entire world. We will address this fully in the concluding section of the shiur.

As we will see, the destruction of the Batei Mikdash and the rejection of the Land are of a type - they both belong to the de-evolution of a different mission from that established at Sinai. We will refer to it as the B'rit Tziyyon - the covenant of Zion.

4) BEITAR WAS ENTRAPPED

Roughly seventy years after the destruction of the second Temple, the great rebellion led by Bar-Kokhba ("son of the star" - also known as "Bar Koziba" - the "son of deceit" - by his detractors; recent archeological findings indicate that his name was probably Shim'on bar Kosiba, a name which could easily be "teased" into either "Bar-Kokhba" or "Bar-Koziba") held Messianic hopes for the people. Even the great R. Akiva considered Bar Kokhba to be a valid candidate for Mashiach and carried his weapons (see Rambam, MT Melakhim 11:3). Not only was the timing of the rebellion possibly inspired by the model of the Babylonian exile, in which there were only seventy years during which the Temple Mount lay fallow - but it was chiefly the attempt to regain Jewish sovereignty over our Land.

The crushing of this hope was certainly similar to the decree against our ancestors, denying them entrance into - and sovereignty over - the Land.

5) THE CITY WAS PLOWED UNDER

This "final" tragedy was certainly of a type with the sentence against our ancestors. Keeping in mind that Yerushalayim is not only a spiritual center, it is also (of necessity) our political capital, the plowing under of the city represented the final blow to our hopes for sovereignty in the Land.

SUMMARY OF LIST #2

All five of the tragedies listed which occurred on Tish'ah b'Av were rejections or disruptions of B'rit Tziyyon - the national hope and promise of sovereignty in the Land. In order to understand the inclusion of the destruction of the Batei Mikdash on this list and the association between the two lists, we have to investigate the difference between the B'rit Sinai and the B'rit Tziyyon.

V

BETWEEN SINAI AND TZIYYON

As mentioned above, Sinai was the wedding between the Jewish people and God. This metaphor is taken much further than earlier mentioned in Rabbinic literature:

"The Torah which Mosheh commanded us is a Morashah (inheritance) to the congregation of Ya'akov" - Do not read Morashah, rather read M'orasah (betrothed); the Torah is betrothed to the Jewish people and is considered a "married woman" to the nations of the world. See also BT Sanhedrin 59a where R. Yohanan utilizes this D'rashah to rule that if a non-Jew studies Torah, he is liable for death, either for "stealing" (the inheritance - reading Morashah) or for adultery (reading M'orasah).

Sinai was, indeed, the place where the Jewish people became separate from the nations of the world. The Gemara in Shabbat (89a-b), discussing the various names given to that mountain, identifies the name "Sinai" with Sin'ah (hatred) - the mountain where hatred came down to the nations (Rashi: because they did not accept the Torah. This is based on the Midrash that prior to the Revelation, God offered the Torah to all of the nations and they rejected it). Another identification there is Horev (the name used in Sefer D'varim) with *Hurban* (destruction) - that it is the mountain from where destruction came down to the nations of the world.

Sinai represents that point of intimate and exclusive contact between the Jewish people and God. This is typified by the constant and consistent worship of God - both the daily offerings and the constant study of Torah (which is, again, our exclusive possession).

Sinai was, of course, not the end of the road for us. Our destiny was not to remain encamped at the

foot of the mountain (see D'varim 1:6), rather to conquer the Land and to establish a Holy Community there. What was the purpose of that community, of that nation?

We find the answer in one of the most famous sections of Tanakh, which appears in the prophecies of Yeshayah and Michah (8th c. BCE):

The word that Yeshayah son of Amotz saw concerning Yehudah and Yerushalayim. In days to come the mountain of Hashem's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of Hashem, to the house of the God of Ya'akov; that He may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Tziyyon shall go forth instruction, and the word of Hashem from Yerushalayim." He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Yeshayah 2:1-4)

Our mission, the B'rit of Tziyyon, is to be a model nation which attracts the attention and spiritual thirst of the nations of the world. The beautiful words: "From out of Tziyyon..." which we say every time we take out the Sefer Torah - are words which the prophet puts into the mouths of the nations of the world. An ethical, learned nation will certainly attract the nations of the world who will want to learn "our secret"; when they come a bit closer and see that our close relationship with God is the source of our learning and of our ethics - they will desire to learn from His teachings as well. The place of that instruction, as they themselves will say, is "Tziyyon".

We can now understand why the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash belongs with the rejection of the Land. One common interpretation (more prevalent in Hassidic thought) of the behavior of the scouts and the reaction of the people, was that they did not want to enter the Land because they knew that that would spell the end of their intimate relationship with God. They would become a nation among nations - with the responsibility of ethical leadership among them. The destruction of the Batei Mikdash - ideally the world-wide center for God's instruction through the Jewish people (keep in mind that the Sanhedrin was seated right in the Beit haMikdash in the "office of hewn stone") - meant the (temporary) suspension of the opportunity to completely fulfill this responsibility. The fall of Beitar and the plowing of the city were, again, seemingly fatal blows to our national destiny and opportunity. (Thank God, we have merited living in a generation in which we have been allowed to return and try again.)

We not only understand the nature of each list - but also the sequence. First, we were to fulfill B'rit Sinai, maintaining and constantly strengthening our exclusive relationship with God - and we are also to fulfill B'rit Tziyyon, using that special relationship to teach and inspire the world.

This is the tragedy of these three weeks - our failure in both regards, one leading to the next. It is not for naught that the traditions of our people have created a sense of continuity between these two fast days - they are, indeed, a sequence which we must reverse, through the introspection and

Teshuvah motivated by a fast (see Rambam, MT Ta'aniot, 1:1-3).

VI

POSTSCRIPT

The role of the Beit haMikdash as an international focus is not only found in the prophecy regarding God's instruction; it will ultimately be a prayer- center for the entire world:

...For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. (Yeshayah 56:7) May we speedily merit the complete rebuilding of our nation and of our Beit haMikdash - and may this be the last year when these fasts remain days of sadness:

Thus says Hashem of hosts: The fast of the fourth month (Tammuz), and the fast of the fifth (Av), and the fast of the seventh (Tishri), and the fast of the tenth (Tevet), shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Yehudah: therefore love truth and peace.

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