

# HOW?

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

This Shabbos, upon which we read Parshas Devarim, falls on the eve of Tisha B'Av--the date that both Temples were destroyed. On Tisha B'Av itself, the Megillah of Eichah [Lamentations] is read. The word 'eichah' is a longer version of the word 'aich,' meaning, how. It is the rhetorical question of how was such a state reached.

The Medrash [Eichah Rabbah 1] teaches that three prophets used the term 'eichah' in their prophecy: In our parsha, Moshe asks: "Eichah [how] can I alone bear your (the Children of Israel's) troubles, your burden and your strife? [1:12]" In the Haftorah read this week, known as Shabbos Chazon (chazon means a prophetic vision), the Prophet Yishayahu asks: "Eichah [how] has the faithful city become like a prostitute? [Yishayahu 1:24]" Lastly, the Prophet Yirmiyahu began the Megillah of Eichah: "Eichah [how] is it that she (Yerushalayim) is sitting in solitude! The city that was filled with people has become like a widow... [Eichah 1:1]"

Rav Moshe Sternbuch explains that each of these prophets was explaining a reason that led to and caused the churban [destruction]: Moshe saw it as being a result of our leaders not having the proper support and helpers. He even saw himself as being inadequately equipped to lead the nation without any help. He asked: "Eichah [how] can I alone bear your troubles, your burden and your strife?" The Prophet Yishayahu saw the nation lusting after the ways and desires of the nations, deserting their true soul mate, the Torah of Hashem, and thus bringing about the destruction and the exile. He asked: "Eichah [how] has the faithful city become like a prostitute?" The Prophet Yirmiyahu saw it as a lack of trust and faith in Hashem. They felt that they were alone, removed from Hashem's providence. He asked: "Eichah [how] is it that she (Yerushalayim) is sitting in solitude! The city that was filled with people has become like a widow..."

This concept of Yishayahu, linking the churban and the exile to our desertion of the Torah is also found in the Talmud. Why was the land destroyed? Because they did not make a blessing prior to the study of Torah. [Nedarim 81A]

The issue here was not that they weren't learning Torah. They were learning and were immersed in Torah. On the outside, everything looked fine--all of the trappings were there. However, they didn't make a blessing before their study--there was something essential missing at the core.

Rav Yisroel Salanter explains that on something done as a preparation for a mitzvah [commandment] one doesn't make a blessing--only on the mitzvah itself. Building a Succah is the preparation for the

mitzvah of sitting/living in a Succah. Thus no blessing is made on the construction, the blessing is only made when one actually sits in the Succah on Succos.

By not making a blessing before learning, they showed that they viewed Torah study, not as a mitzvah in and of itself, but rather as the necessary preparation to know how to properly fulfill the mitzvos. This was a grievous error as Torah study is in fact k'negged kulam--equal to all of the other mitzvos put together.

However, why was this error of such magnitude that it led to the churban and the subsequent exile from which we still suffer today?

Rav Yaakov Naiman in Darchei Mussar offers a beautiful and illuminating explanation. In the blessings pronounced before Torah study, we state that Hashem has chosen us from amongst the nations and has given us His Torah. The generation of the churban didn't say this blessing. They learned Torah, understanding that the reward in the next world for Torah study is boundless. However, their omission of the blessing showed that they were lacking understanding of the special and unique entity that Klal Yisroel is and the unique role that it must serve in this world.

If they are no different than the nations then they can have the same wants, desires, priorities and lifestyles as the nations. This is what led Yishayahu to exclaim: "Eichah [how] has the faithful city become like a prostitute?"

That is what led to the loss of Eretz Yisroel [The Land of Israel]. The holiest land on this earth is designated for the nation that understands its holy potential, role and responsibilities. If that nation becomes like all other nations, its unique claim to the land gets lost along with its loss of identity. As such, the result of not making the blessing on Torah study--not recognizing whom we are and what we must do--leads directly to churban and exile.

A generation that didn't have the Temple rebuilt is as if it was destroyed in their days.

We are presently experiencing a nation arising, claiming Eretz Yisroel for themselves, as the rest of the nations hungrily shower condemnations on us and sympathy on our enemies. To learn the lesson of the churban is to heed the warning of Yishayahu.

To not only make that blessing but to live it.

Good Shabbos,  
Yisroel Ciner

---

Copyright © 2000 by [Rabbi Yisroel Ciner](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

---

The author teaches at [Neveh Tzion](#) in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).

