



Parashat Devarim



English version

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THE ART OF ASKING AYEKAH

On Tisha B'Av, the darkest day of the calendar, the day both Temples burned, we omit Tachanun supplications, exactly as we do on holiday festivals (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 559:4). The reason is a verse from Eicha, the very scroll of our grief: kara alai mo'ed — "He has proclaimed a mo'ed against me" (Eicha 1:15). Tisha B'Av is a mo'ed.

How can the day of destruction be a holiday? The answer is, Mo'ed does not primarily mean "celebration"; it means "appointed meeting." It is the same root as the Ohel Mo'ed, the Tent of Meeting where G-d's voice met Moshe.

On every festival we arrive at the meeting carrying something. On Pesach we meet G-d with the Korban Pesach. On Shavuot we meet Him by receiving His Torah. On Sukkot we come holding the lulav and etrog. On Rosh Hashanah we meet Him by crowning Him King with the shofar and accepting His judgment; on Yom Kippur, by fasting until we resemble, for one day, the angels.

And on Tisha B'Av? We bring nothing. We carry nothing to meet Him with.

Tisha B'Av is the one mo'ed where the direction is reversed. On this day we do not go up to meet G-d — G-d comes down to meet us. We sit on the floor in the dark, holding a scroll of tears. He finds us where we are: on the ground, in pain. A parent who hears that a child is hurting does not wait for the child to make the trip. He comes. That is why there is no Tachanun. You do not say Tachanun when the King is sitting on the floor beside you.

What is the agenda of this meeting, between G-d and His People? One word: Eicha. Parshat Devarim is always read on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av because it contains that word.

The Midrash (Eichah Rabbah 1:1) teaches that three prophets prophesied with the language of Eicha. Moshe saw Jews in their glory and cried, "Eicha esa levadi" "How can I carry you alone — your burdens, your quarrels?" (Devarim 1:12), which Rashi explains included their constant suspicions of Moshe. Yeshayahu saw them in their decline: "Eicha hayta l'zonah" — "How has the faithful city become a harlot?" (Yeshayahu 1:21), read in the haftarah of Shabbat Chazon. And Yirmiyahu saw them in their devastation: "Eicha yashva badad... hayta k'almanah" How does she sit alone... she has become like a widow" (Eicha 1:1).

But the word Eicha is older than all three prophets. After Adam eats from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad, G-d calls out the first question ever asked of a human being: "Ayeka?" "Where are you?" (Bereishit 3:9). In the Torah scroll, Ayeka is spelled with the exact letters of Eicha: אֵיכָה / אֵיכָה. The Midrash makes the connection: G-d brought Adam into the garden, Adam violated the command, and G-d lamented over him with "Eicha", and later, G-d did the same lamentation with Adam's children when they violated the covenant and were exiled from His land, He said Eicha! (Bereishit Rabbah 19:9).

Rashi asks the obvious question about G-d's question to Adam "Where are you?" Did G-d not know where Adam was standing?



G-d asked "Where are you?" to open a conversation — gently, in the Name of YKVK of Mercy — so that Adam would not be terrified into silence, so that Adam would have an opening to answer, to own his mistake, and to return. וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַיֶּכָּה Ayeka was an invitation to teshuvah. And Adam missed it. He answered the surface question: I'm here in the garden; I heard You; I was afraid; I hid.

Our Rabbis explain that the word אַיֶּכָּה does not mean here just where are you... It was a question about direction: Adam — where are you headed? Where are you going with this? Until now, you were connected to Me. Now, you are connected to the Snake, the Evil Inclination!

The Rambam (Guide for the Perplexed 1:2) explains that before the sin, Adam's inner world knew only the categories of true and false. Whatever drew him toward G-d was true; whatever pulled him away was simply false — not tempting, not shiny,... just false. The Nefesh HaChaim (1:6, note) adds that before the sin, evil stood entirely outside of man, embodied in the serpent; only after eating did it enter within him. In Gan Eden, before eating the fruit, the grass on the other side of the fence wasn't greener — it was fake grass. After the fruit, envy became real, appetite became real, anger began speaking in first person, from inside. G-d was not just asking "where are you now?" He was asking, "where are you going with this?" Now that you have the Evil Inclination inside you, you are going to go further and further away from Me. (See Sanhedrin 38b) And because Adam never turned, the question was left open — and it has echoed through history as Eicha ever since. Until a person does teshuvah, until Mashiach comes, G-d's Ayekah, "Where are you going?" keeps collapsing into the prophets' Eicha, "How did you fall?"

These three Eicha questions, the Eicha: "How have you become so low", the Ayeka that Adam understood: "Where are you standing", and the Ayeka of G-d, "Which direction you are going", are three ascending levels of self-awareness and insight that are crucial for growth.

The first question is "How did you get here?" This is the question that traces the choices, and patterns that produced your current situation, good or bad. It has real value — you cannot repeat or stop what you never noticed. But this question can also become a trap. People who dig into themselves with "why"-style questions "Why did this happen to me? Why am I like this?" often end up spiraling into self-blame and negative mood.

The second question is "Where are you now?" the plain meaning of Ayeka. An honest, present-tense inventory: What is my actual status? — in my marriage, my health, my learning, my middot.

The third and deepest question is "Where are you going?" — the question beneath Ayeka, the one Adam never answered. What next, what now, what is the direction.

The art of life coaching is the art of asking questions. After much research and study, comparing problem-focused coaching questions (analyzing how the problem arose) with solution-focused, future-directed questions, here was the results: Both helped — but the future-directed questions significantly increased positive emotion, concrete action steps, and even participants' understanding of the problem itself, outperforming problem-analysis on nearly every measure. So "how we got here", "Where are you at", don't come close to the question, "Where are we going with everything we are dealing with". You understand your pit better by planning your climb than by studying your fall. A person who never asks "Where am I going?" will spend a lifetime asking "How did I get here?" That is the whole difference between the voice of Ayeka and the wail of Eicha.

Why does Judaism prescribe three weeks of mourning, nine days, a floor, and kinot? Because in Torah, mourning for Jerusalem is not dwelling on the past. Mourning is a direction, a goal in forward motion, and a declaration of a destination. The Talmud promises: "Whoever mourns for Jerusalem merits and sees her joy" (Taanit 30b). When we sit on the floor, we are answering G-d's Ayeka: We



are not at home in exile. We are going back! The kinot are the Jewish people's way of aiming back to Jerusalem.

This explains one of the strangest customs of the day. Halfway through Tisha B'Av the mourning begins to lift: at midday we rise from the floor onto chairs, and by Minchah we put on tefillin and add the prayer of Nachem, infusing consolation and hope. Historically this makes no sense. The Talmud (Ta'anit 29a) records that the fire was set toward evening of the ninth and the Heichal burned primarily through the tenth of Av. Rabbi Yochanan said that had he lived in that generation, he would have established the fast on the tenth. Just as the flames peaked, we stand up from mourning?!

The answer is the tradition that Mashiach is born on Tisha B'Av. A child named Menachem — "the Comforter" — is born on the very day the Temple was destroyed. The moment G-d meets us at our lowest is the moment redemption is conceived. Positive transformation begins, for many people, precisely at the point of rupture. The afternoon of the Hurban is the birthday of the Comforter, the Mashiach.

In every single prayer of the year, we pray "v'techezena eineinu" — "may our eyes behold Your return to Zion." Why the eyes? Why do we pray to see it, if the main goal is just that it should happen? Because seeing it means you merited to see it. Lot's wife looked back at Sedom and became a pillar of salt; Rashi explains she had sinned with salt — going to the neighbors to "borrow salt" in order to expose her husband's guests, that there was not enough salt for the family alone that night. She

was no better than the city, who did not allow guests, so she had no right to watch its downfall. Those who never mourned Jerusalem, never longed for her, will not merit to have their eyes see the rebuilding of it. The mourning over Jerusalem, is the only way to build Jerusalem.

Ever noticed how even the names of these months are arrows pointing forward? Av, stands for Elul Ba, "Elul is coming"; Tammuz for Zman Teshuvah Memashmesh U'ba, "the season of Teshuva is slowly approaching." In the Syrian community, on Tisha B'Av day, the moment the prayers of Tisha B'Av conclude, the melodies of the Selichot begin to be sung, as we go from the floor of Av straight toward the shofar of Tishrei, a shofar so certain that, the Talmud says, we arrange the blasts "to confuse the Satan", who trembles that this time it is the shofar of Mashiach. On Rosh Hashanah itself, before that shofar, Sephardic communities sing Eit Sha'arei Ratzon — the piyut of the Akeidah — whose final stanza is where all of this is going: **זָכְרָה לְעֵדָה טוֹעֵרָה וְנִגְוָעָה** For Your covenant, O Dweller on high **וְשָׁמַע תְּקִיעָה** remember the storm-tossed, stricken congregation, **וְהִרְוָעָה וְתִרְוָעָה** hear the tekiah sounded, and the **וְאָמַר לְצִיּוֹן בָּא זְמַן הַיְשׁוּעָה** and say to Zion: the time of salvation has come **יְנוּן וְאֵלֶיהָ אֲנִי שׁוֹלֵחַ** Yinon (Mashiach) and Elijah (who announces Mashiach's coming) I am sending.

G-d keeps His appointment, His Moed. He comes down to the floor, sits beside us in the dark, and asks the question He has been asking since the Garden of Eden — What direction are you going in? Jerusalem? Elul? Teshuva? Crowning G-d with Shofar? Mashiach?

THE ART OF CRYING

Three tears dripped from Esav's eyes, when he realized how his brother Yaakov had taken the blessings that his father Yitzchak wanted to give him. One tear dripped from his right eye, one from his left, and the third, Thank G-d, didn't leave his eye: it just formed. The two tears of Esav over the loss of the blessing destroyed our two Temples,

and if Esav would have cried a third tear, we would have no chance for a third Temple!

If a tear can do so much destruction, how much can it build? In the merit of these two tears, Esav merited the blessing that there would never be a lack of rain in his land, Har Seir. I looked on



Google maps, to see this place Har Seir on the Jordanian side of the Dead Sea. It looks as dry as dust. Where is Esav's land that is blessed with rain?

Any flag that has in it red (Edom), is a sign of Esav in that land, and any flag that has Green has Yishmael in it. Any script that is square and not round is Esav, not Yishmael. Esav prefers a more squared handwriting. Yishmael, Arab countries, on the other hand, prefer a more rounded handwriting. (Red and square, because Esav's father was Yitzhak, Middat HaGevurah. Green and round because Yishmael's father was Avraham, Middat Hachessed, Maharal) Europe, America, and Russia have plenty of rain, while the Arab lands, Africa, Asia, and Israel, lack rain. All that rain that Esav has had in all his lands, for thousands of years, is in the merit of two tears! (Tanhuma Kedoshim 15;Yalkut Shimoni 76; Midrash Sechel Tov Bereshit 27)

Rosh Hodesh Av is the Yahrzeit of Aharon, and for good reason. Aharon was, in certain ways, greater than his younger brother Moshe (Rashi, Vaera), and Moshe desired to die in the same way that Aharon did. What was the beginning of Aharon's biography? How did this great man's story begin?

When Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, saw the Teiva of Moshe, the box in which his mother Yocheved put him in the Nile so that she should not see him die... The story you were taught when you were 5 years old is that the boy Batya saw crying was Moshe. The Baal Haturim tells a different story. The child that was crying was Aharon, not Moshe! The words **נָעַר בִּכְהֵן** have the numerical value of Aharon Hakohen!!! When Yocheved put the three-month-old Moshe in the box, she put him next to the three-year-old Aharon, who would cry over him and worry over him!

This story makes so much more sense than the story we were taught in kindergarden! Every day, Pharaoh slaughtered 150 boys for breakfast and 150 boys for supper, to "jacuzzi" in Jewish blood to calm his leprosy! Bitya became apathetic to the murdering of Jewish boys. Why would she become

emotional about this one Jewish boy, Moshe? Another Jewish boy dying wasn't strange for Bitya! It was the norm! But a brother crying over the loss of his younger brother, that was strange for Bitya! A brother who cared, a brother who cried, who couldn't stay home knowing his three-month-old brother was going to die... this gave Bitya the chills!!!

The gentiles don't know of such things, that a brother feels his brother's pain! When Bitya saw Aharon cry, she knew, **מִלֵּגִי הָעֶבְרִים**, this is a Jewish child!!! She knew, at that point, that she wanted to be part of such a nation, a nation that cries for one another! Who needs all the wealth of Pharaoh's house, if no one really cares for you, all they want is your money! This Aharon, who cried for his brother Moshe when his brother was going to die and who rejoiced for his brother in his heart, when his brother was appointed to lead the nation instead of him, became the Kohen Gadol, the heart the deserved to have the Urim Vetumim with G-d's Name, so close to it!

The 21 days of the three weeks energize the 21 days of the High Holidays, from Rosh Hashana till Simhat Torah. How so? When a person goes to a wedding at which he does not know anyone, it is hard to know who is family, who is closest with the groom, because everyone is drinking, making merry, dancing, having a good time - even those who are not so close to the groom. But when one goes to a funeral or shiva house, it is much clearer who is close and who is not. The ones who cry, are closest. The ones who don't cry are not that close. If someone is happy, if someone rejoices during the three weeks of the High Holidays, it is not yet a sign that he is close to G-d, that he has a relationship with Him. But if someone cries during these days of Av, it shows, that G-d is his Av, his Father, and that he has a relationship with Him! These days are like black ink that we pour on paper, so that the High Holidays, the white ink, will have a stark contrast to shine on, and be prominent, in the boldest way!

G-d wants us to cry on Tisha B'av, during the three weeks, but we can't. We don't know how to cry for



G-d's pain. When the Temple was destroyed, G-d told Yirmiyahu, You don't know how to really cry for My pain! Go call Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, and Moshe from their graves! They know how to cry for Me! (Midrash Peticha Eicha) Rachel knows how to cry, like no one else, so that G-d has to beg her, **מִדְמַעָה, וְעֵינֶיהָ מִבְּכִי קוֹלָהּ מִבְּכִי** Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from shedding tears! (Yirmiyahu 31; 15) We don't know how to cry, because we are drugged with Esav's Western Culture, and we don't realize how much! When a person is taking Marijuana, he does not realize that he is drugged, he does not realize how he is not realizing his situation. He thinks he has it under control. Until I ask a Marijuana addict, Would you get onto a plane whose pilot is a Marijuana addict? The answer is, always, "Of course not". "But you are the pilot of your own life! Why would your drug your own pilot?!"

If we can't cry for our situation, of how far we are from G-d, it is because we are drugged by Western Culture, allowing Hollywood to define for us what is a successful life. Just know that G-d cries over you, when you don't learn His Torah! He cries over His Temple, and over His Children who are so, so far from home! (Hagigah 5b) Our Rabbis tells us that the reason we lost our Land is because we did not make a blessing on the Torah. **שְׁלֹא בִּרְכוּ** בתורה תחילה (Nedarim 81a) The Alshich asks, how this can be true? Don't we know that the reason why the first Temple was destroyed was because we transgressed the three cardinal sins?! If so, how could it be, because we weren't learning Torah?!

There was once a person who played the harp in the King's court, to bring the King to the desired state of mind. Every string he struck on his harp struck the King's heart. One day, the king heard that this musician had committed murder. The King ordered that his musician not be touched. A year later, the king heard that this musician had committed adultery. Again, the king said not to touch his harpist. Time passed, and the king heard

that the musician had gotten into a fight and had broken his hand. The king ordered that his harpist be hung, immediately, on the gallows. The whole city was in an uproar! Whenever this musician sinned, he got away with it; but now that he had broken his arm, the king going to give him the death penalty?!? The king answered, so long that this musician helped my state of mind so that I can be the best ruler I can be, I spared his life. But now that he can't play, he deserves punishment for his first sins!!

The Alshich explains that this is why, even though the Jews committed the three cardinal sins, G-d did not want them exiled, as long as they were learning Torah. Torah is the music that G-d wants to hear, **וְנִעְמָה כְּתִבְנוּ לָכֶם אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת**, (Devarim 31; 19) and when someone is learning Torah, no harm will befall him. But once the person stops learning, the protection is gone.

This is hard to digest. Does G-d want the Torah of those who are committing cardinal sins? The answer is, YES. The Torah is the only thing that fights the drugs of Western Culture. G-d says, I wish that, even though they have left Me, they still learn My Torah! (Midrash Eicha) Because the Torah is the cure for all bad drugs! All sins we commit are just because we are not learning Torah the way we are supposed to! If you would be connected to Torah, you would feel the way you are supposed to feel, and cry the way you are supposed to cry.

Yosef and his brothers reunited through tears, and the final redemption will be with tears. **בְּבִכִּי יָבֹאוּ** וְקִרְתְּמוּנֵימָּה אֲוִבֵּלִים (Yirmiyahu 31;8) Corona, Meron, Surfside, G-d please stop it all! We have cried for each other, from across oceans. We showed how we feel each other's pain. Please, G-d! Bring us closer to each other, closer to Your Torah, and closer to YOU!



HAVE A HEART

Secret Recipe for Ruach Hakodesh:

"Any wise Jewish man who has in him true words of the Torah, who mourns over the belittled Honor of G-d and the Honor of the Jewish People... and deeply desires, feels sorry and troubled over the honor of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the Salvation that should hopefully happen soon, and wishes that the Jewish Nation return from Exile- he will be worthy of having Ruach Hakodesh in his words... (Messilat Yesharim ch. 19, quoting a Tanna D'vei Eliyahu)

Why is a person granted *Ruach Hakodesh* in return for feeling deeply concerned about G-d's Honor, the Temple and the Honor of the Jews? What is so special about crying and feeling bad about G-d's Glory having been so greatly diminished?

One of the highest levels of *Ruach Hakodesh* was having the breastplate – חושן משפט – אורים ותומים – on the heart. Aharon Hakohen merited bearing the breastplate on his heart for something he did. When Moshe came from the desert and told his older brother, Aharon, the Gadol Hador of the Jews in Egypt, "I will be the leader of the Jewish People, to take them out of Egypt," Aharon was genuinely elated. וראך ושמה בלבו. He was not jealous or hurt. He had a much bigger heart than that. And such a heart was worthy of having on it the חושן משפט. (Shabbat 139a) The Maharsha points out that Aharon was not just happy; he was *happy in his heart*. Some brothers would, in such a situation, be happy on the outside, but burn from jealousy within. Not Aharon. His natural reaction, coming from deep within, was happiness. He was happy in his heart. Such a heart is deserving of the אורים ותומים, the Choshen Mishpat.

What difference does it make if one is happy for his brother in his heart or just on the outside, going through the mechanical expressions of joy? What difference does it make if one goes through Tisha b'Av with his heart or without it?

If we look closely at how the Torah introduces us to building a Sanctuary (שמות כה), we will notice

an unexpected order in the verses, that makes us wonder at the reasoning behind it. First, G-d says מאת כל איש אשר ידבנו לבו תקחו את תרומתי *"From each man whose heart is desirous of giving, shall you take my donations."* And only after that, a few *pesukim* later, it says ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם *"And they shall make me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell amongst them."* It would seem to us that the Torah should first tell us what the main idea is, i.e., building a Sanctuary, and only then say how to get the funding for it! Why is the *pasuk* of the "generous hearts" giving donations mentioned first?

The answer is that the main purpose of the Temple was not the sacrificing of *korbanot*. G-d did not and does not need our *korbanot*. What He does want is our hearts. That is the main goal. The Temple was a place where we could express what was in the heart. Hence, the Temple is referred to as none other than הר הלבנון, Mt. of Lebanon. The root of this word is the Hebrew word לבן, meaning white. Lebanon – the Temple – the place where the sins of the Jews were made white – where they were transformed from "stains" to purity. On a deeper level, we find within the same word an additional root: לב, heart. לבנון is a lot of hearts. And when someone would come to the Beit Hamikdash, he would get *Ruach Hakodesh* there. This is where Yonah received his prophecy for the people of Ninveh. With this same *Ruach Hakodesh* Yirmiyahu was able to answer all of Plato's philosophical questions. Clarity in life was one of the things that one got, by just entering the Beit Hamikdash. This is something that we lost along with the Temple. And this *Ruach Hakodesh* came to the hearts of the people, because our hearts were the way they were supposed to be.

What is the way the heart is supposed to be? We see from Aharon that he was praised for making room in his heart for his brother. Aharon was able to put his prestigious position aside for the purpose of his brother redeeming the Jewish People from Egypt. "Have a heart" means make place in your value system, your system of evaluating



importance, for other people and for what they are going through. And this is what G-d wants. When we make place in our hearts for others, then our hearts are worthy of being whitened from sin. When we do not have a place for others in our hearts, שנאת חנם, senseless hatred takes over, and by default, there is no place for a Beis Hamikdash.

How does one open the heart? With a question. The *Megillat Eicha* starts off each Perek with the word *Eicha* – How. How did such a thing happen? The *Megillah* does not answer the question. Someone might ask, what difference does it make how it happened? It happened, and it is very sad. No! The whole of *Eicha* is a powerful question that leaves us thinking throughout the darkest parts of Galut. When someone is left with a question, the mind is always trying to come up with an answer. Until there is an answer, the heart is not at rest. Yirmiyahu wants us to open our hearts and to

answer the question he asks, over and over, in *Eicha*.

We say in our Mussaf prayers on holidays מפני חטאינו גלינו מארצינו ונתרחקנו מעל אדמתנו *Because of our sins we were exiled from our country and we have been distanced from our land*. What is the repetition? In our prayers, we mention that not only are we in exile and physically distanced from our Land, we are also emotionally distanced from Eretz Yisrael. It is almost out of our hearts. The answer is perfect for our generation. We are in a cell phone generation. How do we know that someone took another person out of his mind, out of his heart and no longer cares about the guy? He deletes him from his cell phone. Jerusalem, the Beit Hamikdash, the צער השכינה is almost deleted from our memories. The only memory we have left is in a backup. Tisha B'av. Let's restore what is almost lost...

THE ART OF CONTEMPLATION

G-d told Moshe, הָבֵי לָךְ אֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים וְנִבְנִים *Appoint for yourselves judges that are wise and intelligent men*. It is not enough to be wise and knowledgeable in Torah. One needs to also have intelligence, the ability to contemplate, discern and deduce. Moshe was commanded to choose, as judge, not the biggest *Talmid Hacham*, but the person who had both Torah wisdom and contemplation, with a generous dose of common sense.

There are many stories of the leadership of our great leaders that demonstrate this combination of wisdom, wit, and common sense. Here are just two: A pained widow knocked at the door of R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l. "At the last part of my husband's life, he was very sick. I tried my best to help, but I feel remorse, a guilty consciousness. I feel that if I would have nursed him better, he would have been cured. I feel like I am at fault for his death. What can I do to repent and receive atonement?"

Rav Auerbach answered, "If you want to do the best thing and bring great merit to your deceased

husband, do the following three things. Go directly to the toy store, and buy each and every one of your children a nice, big toy or game. Once a week, take your children to a place with beautiful scenery, a place where they can recharge emotionally. Try your best to stay as positive as you can, so that you can bring happiness into your home. If you do these three things, your children will be able to serve G-d happily. There is nothing more that can help your husband now in Heaven."

A man came to R' Tzvi Pesach Frank, Rabbi of Jerusalem, to tell him about some embarrassing behaviors and sins that he committed. He wanted the Rabbi to guide him to repentance, and how to fix his soul, but the person was embarrassed to relay this information about himself. He told R' Frank, "My friend sent me to the Rabbi, and asked me to ask what a person should do if he sinned in such a way."

R' Frank understood that this person was actually asking about himself. He sat with him for a while and when he finished and was escorting this man out the door, he said to him, "Please tell your



friend that he can come himself, and tell me that his friend sent him!"

The whole *parasha* of Devarim is Moshe's rebuke to the nation, through delicate hints. What sort of rebuke was Moshe hinting to when he mentioned the importance of contemplation, intelligence and common sense?

When Yeshaya the prophet rebuked the Jews with prophecy about the destruction, his message was this. יָדַע שׁוֹר קִנְיָו וְחֲמֹר אֲכִיס בְּעֶלְיוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַע עָמִי. *An ox knows its owner, and a donkey knows the owner of its feeding trough. Yisrael doesn't know. My Nation does not contemplate.* (Yeshayahu 1;3) What does this mean? The Rambam teaches that contemplation is the foundation of your relationship with G-d. הַיָּאךְ הִיא הַדֶּרֶךְ לְאַהֲבָתוֹ וִירְאָתוֹ? כְּשִׁיתְבוֹנֵן הָאָדָם בְּמַעֲשָׂיו וּבִרְאוּיוֹ הַנִּפְלְאִים הַגְּדוּלִּים, יִרְאֶה מִהֵן חֲכָמְתוֹ שֶׁאֵין לֵה עֶרֶךְ – מִיָּד הוּא *What is the way to love Him and fear Him? When a person contemplates on His wondrous creations, he will see His unapparelled wisdom, and will immediately love Him* (Rambam Yesodei Hatorah 2). All G-d wants from us is to contemplate, to think, Who created us, supports us, and brought us to where we are now. This contemplation is what develops the passion to serve Him.

When you take a moment out of your busy life to meditate on your existence, you begin to realize that your very existence obligates you to serve your Creator. How do I fulfil my obligation? One of the 13 Principles of Faith is the belief that G-d gave us Torah, from Heaven, and within it is a clear path how to fulfill our obligations to Him. G-d expects us to keep His code of law.

When G-d allows punishment for those who are not keeping His Torah, He takes away a person's mindfulness and replaces it with mindlessness, measure for measure. Although the destruction of the Temples was because of idolatry, adultery, murder, senseless hate, and for not making the Torah blessings, the way that G-d brought about the destruction was via mindlessness of the people, intellectual blindness, of even the great sages and

people of the time. The Talmud introduces the detailed Aggadata which tells the stories that led up to the destruction of the Second Temple: אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם מִפְּתֹךְ תִּמְדִּי *Fortunate is the man who is always afraid.* (Mishlei 28/14). Rashi explains: דואג – לראות הנולד שלא תארע תקלה בכך אם אעשה זאת. *Afraid here means concerned about the outcome of the actions.* (Gittin 55b). Fortunate is the man who foresees the outcome of his actions. איזהו חכם הרואה את הנולד. (Tamid 32a).

The story of Kamza and Bar Kamza was one of mindlessness of everyone involved in the sequence of events. The master of the meal, the messenger, Bar Kamza, the Rabbis that were present, the Roman Emperor, the Rabbis that did not allow an exception due to the circumstances – everyone got hurt, because everyone was behaving mindlessly. In the end, everyone lost, and no one gained. Even the Emperor of Rome lost the Temple and all the blessing it brought to his empire.

Despite the fact that R' Yochanan Ben Zakai was one of the greatest, wittiest Rabbis and leaders our nation ever had, when he had the opportunity to be granted a request by the Caesar, instead of asking that Jerusalem and the Temple be spared, he settled for much less. Why? G-d took his wisdom from him at the moment. מִסִּיר שְׂפָה לְנִאֲמָנִים וְטַעַם זִקְנִים יָקָה. (Iyob 12,20; Gittin 56a)

R' Yochanan Ben Zaki was a man who knew everything. *He knew every pasuk, Mishna, Gemara, Halacha, Aggadata, every aspect of Dikduk in the words of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, every Kal Vachomer, Gezerah Shava, astrology, Gematraya, the conversations of the Ministering angels, the demons, the conversations of the palm trees, the parables of the laundry women, the parables of foxes, big things like Maaseh Merkava, and small things like the Talmudic disputes of Abaye and Rava...* G-d's punishment was that his mindfulness was overtaken by mindlessness. He knew everything, but at the most crucial point of his leadership, his wittiness was taken away from him due to the sins of the Nation. That is what happens when sin takes its toll: it zaps your mindfulness first.



The introduction to the fall of everything great always has an element of mindlessness, a lack of contemplation or common sense in it. Things that are great and powerful tend to implode more than explode. The destruction comes from within, not from without. As the historian R' Berel Wein wrote, history is witness to the downfall of the Roman Empire, Spain at its height, the Ottoman Empire and others – all due to senseless mindlessness. Internal failures, not external ones.

When we cry on Tisha B'av, we have a lot to cry for. Anyone who learns the history of how the Second Temple was destroyed knows that Jerusalem did not explode: it imploded. Our senseless hatred caused us to burn the storage houses of grain in Jerusalem, causing us to bring the Romans into Jerusalem, with our own hands. Because of this mindlessness, our nation is spread over every corner of the globe, causing us to speak different languages and have different customs and *Halachot*. Our nation's blood spilled, like water, during the destruction and years after, Beitar, Crusades, Inquisition, Holocaust, Intifada. We are ultimately unwanted wherever we go, no matter how comfortable we think we are. But most of all, we cry over the mindlessness that brought about the destruction.

Selfie Steps to achieve contemplation, mindfulness, and awareness.

1. To begin contemplation on beneficial ideas, stop contemplating on sad things that you can't change.
2. This world is a place where things happen so fast. Take out time be alone, in order to contemplate everything that is going on.
3. Writing out your thoughts helps to slow down your thinking and helps you contemplate.
4. Focus on one thing at a time.
5. Spend time in nature. Take breaks from the digital life.
6. Sleep well. Eat well. Exercise.
7. Take time thinking from other people's perspective.
8. Take time out to think how the "future you" would advise the you of today.

CHOOSING LAST WORDS

The Midrash elaborates on the name of the last book of the Torah. *Devarim*, from the root word *Devorah*, bee. *Just as a bee dies after it stings, so, too, he who delivers words of rebuke: To teach you that when someone rebukes the Jewish Nation, even rightfully so, he is immediately "removed."* Yaakov, our Forefather, knew this, and only on his last day did he rebuke his sons. All his life, Moshe Rabbeinu pondered how and when he should rebuke the Jews. Ultimately, he learned from his forefather, Yaakov, exactly how to accomplish this sensitive task. He knew that he would have to chastise them on his very last day. The sting was to bring about his death.

Just as Moshe learned the *when* from his forefather, so he learned the *how*. Therefore, Moshe rebuked mostly in hints. When Moshe rebuked the people for the sin of the Calf, he only hinted to it - *די זהב*. The surplus money the Jews had with them from Egypt is what caused them to make the Golden Calf. Why did Moshe not get straight to the point? This was, in a way, a modeling of Yaakov. One unique aspect of the rebuke Yaakov gave his children was to refrain from making mention of the act of sin. Rather, the sin was to be *referred to*, and the focus was on the loss that was suffered as result of the sin. Reuven was rebuked and told that he would lose his rights as a firstborn, to kingship and to priesthood. His *hastiness* was the focus of the



rebuke, and not his action. Shimon and Levi, as well, were not reproved for their attack on Shechem, but for their having “stolen” the sword and traits of Uncle Esav. Moshe learned from this that the correct way to call a person to order is to do so indirectly. The cause of the sin, the loss and the result of sin, were the focus in his words rather than the sin itself. For this reason, Moshe changed the sequence of rebuke from that of the sequence of events. First, he mentioned the sin of the Spies, and only then did he mention the sin of the Golden Calf. This is because the sin of the Spies had a much more onerous result and more far-reaching ramifications on the lives of the people than that of the Calf.

R' A. L. Heiman zt"l reveals another underlying point to which many are oblivious. The Torah stresses that Moshe spoke to all of Israel. Rashi brings the Sifri, that Moshe was careful to call everyone to this gathering of rebuke. *If he would rebuke only a part of the nation, the others, in the market place, would later say to those who were present, “You heard the Son of Amram chastising you, and you did not answer him?! Had we been there, we would have answered him back (Sifri: four or five times on each offense)!” So Moshe made sure that everyone was there, saying, “If anyone has anything to offer in his defense, let him speak up now.”*

This is hard to understand. How could anyone defend himself and challenge the truth of what Moshe was saying? Was someone going to refute the sin of the Spies or the sin of the Calf? Was someone going to deny the complaints about conditions in the desert?

There is one rebuttal that can be given to Moshe: The people who he rebuked could simply say, “If

you want to reprimand anyone for the sin of the Calf or the episode of the Spies, dig up our fathers’ graves and direct your comments to them. What do we have to do with it?” The truth of the matter is, no one was left! The Midrash even explains that for this reason, Moshe gave them a blessing in the middle of giving the rebuke, ה' אלקי אבותיכם יסף עליכם ככם אלה פעמים ויברך אתכם כאשר דבר לכם. He blessed them for listening to him and not saying that they were not guilty for the sins of their fathers. If so, if they were not the ones who sinned, then why did Moshe rebuke them? How could Moshe refute the defense of the “ones in the market place?” And, if they were also deserving of rebuke, why did he call them to order for what their parents did and not for what they did themselves?

If one were to study the history of the Jews from after the sin of the Spies until Moshe’s last day, he would find that the sons sinned the sins of the fathers. They, also served idols (Peor), fought with Moshe about the Manna and lack of water, and even tried going back to Egypt when faced by the war of C’na’ani, King of Arad. פקד עון אבות על בנים. Instead of Moshe mentioning their sins directly, he did so through a subtle hint. He made it *as if* the sins of the sons were because of the fathers who brought them up in such a fashion. *As if* they were not guilty.

We have a lot to learn from this. At times we look at our parents and notice their mistakes. Let us know, that these mistakes and mishaps may very well have some sort of déjà vu in our lives. And we can learn from our own weaknesses and work on

them. And when we do not, we say אבל אנחנו אבלי אבותינו חטאו. *But we and our fathers have sinned.*

Moshe was so careful to pick the right words.

A CHILD CALLED NACHUM

There was a couple who loved each other dearly, but, unfortunately, had not been blessed with children. They comforted each other by saying that the day would come when they would be “ready” to be parents, and able to hold their future in their

hands. They prayed together, went for blessings from great rabbis together, and went for treatments together.



The difficult waiting period dragged on year after year – for twenty years. The woman cried bitterly to her husband, and began to despair. But her loyal husband kept encouraging her – and himself. One night, he looked at her tear-stained face and suggested that they try still another series of treatments. To their utter joy – the woman became pregnant. They would often stay up late discussing what they would name their baby, if a boy or if a girl. They talked about what neighborhood would be ideal to live in and about details of good parenting that they had never before gone into. They laughed together for nine months – the best nine months of their married life.

As the woman was rolled into the delivery room, she began to feel severe pains which were unrelated to the regular birth pangs that she had been experiencing for the previous several hours. Complications were becoming more serious by the minute; the lives of both mother and baby were in jeopardy. The doctor put the hard facts on the table in the form of an ultimatum: either the mother or the baby! There was not enough time to ask a Rabbi about what Jewish Law dictates in this case, and the poor woman acted on emotion: She turned to her husband and said, “Call him Nachum, and tell him how I gave up my life for him. And make sure he says *Kaddish* for me with all his heart!”

The father held his son on his knees at the *bris*, and everyone cried bitterly when he called out the name. Every year, Nachum would celebrate his birthday on the *Yahrzeit* of his mother. He would say *Kaddish* in shul from the first time he was able.

MY D-O-G LOVES ME

While writing this article, I went out for a stroll to get some fresh air. There is nothing like the summer night air of Jerusalem. Approaching me was a man with his dog. He wore a tee shirt that said, “No one understands me better than my dog.” How sad. It would have been so much better if the letters were reversed: G-o-d instead of d-o-g.

The biggest mistake a Jew can make is to believe that G-d doesn’t understand him or doesn’t love him “like crazy”. When things go wrong, we

And on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, his father asked him to go visit the mother’s grave and say *Kaddish* fervently for the one who gave up her very life for him. To the father’s dismay, however, the boy said the *Kaddish* nonchalantly, without a tear in his eye. The father was devastated. “Nachum,” he asked, “don’t you have any feeling for your mother who gave up her life for you?”

Nachum gazed at the floor and tried to explain himself: “But I never met her. I really don’t have any feeling for the person everyone has been telling me to cry for.”

In a certain sense, we are all Nachum. We have difficulty mourning the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple), something that we never had the privilege of experiencing. But let’s stop and think for a minute. The prophet Yermiyahu tells us that G-d poured out his wrath on “sticks and stones” – the Holy Temple – instead of destroying the Jewish People for the sins they committed (*Eicha*, Ch. 4). We survived only because the Temple was destroyed. To fully understand what we lost, however, we must learn about the major differences between the era of the Temple and the present. The Temple was so much more than just a mere building of sticks and stones. It was the place where all Jewish hearts connected. And it was the only place in the entire galaxy where the glory of G-d’s Presence could be experienced. Only by destroying this marvelous place was G-d able to wake us up from our spiritual slumber and sinful lives.

shouldn’t say that G-d does not love us. All the love of mankind from the beginning of Creation till today does not add up to one iota of G-d’s love for every human being. And all the love that G-d has for a regular Human being does not add up to one iota of His infinite love for each and every Jew.

This is a very sensitive subject. Tisha B’av came about because of the negative report the Spies brought about Israel, and the feelings that we felt about our relationship with G-d as a result. *You*



slandered in your tents and said, Because of G-d's hatred for us did He take us out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Ammonite, to destroy us. (Devarim 1; 27) They cried all night, and G-d said, You cried for nothing, and I will establish this day for you to weep in every generation. (Taanit 29) And this is what Tisha B'av is about. This is what the galut, the exile, is about. When the enemy entered the Heichal, he saw that the Cherubim on the Parochet were hugging each other. We know that they faced one another when the Jewish Nation were serving G-d with love, and turned away from each other when the Nation was distant from G-d. Why then, at the time of the destruction, were the Cherubim facing each other and embracing? The answer is that G-d wanted His People go to exile with the message that He loves us "like crazy", even in the hardest of times. Contrary to what we think, He always loves us. And just as we have lost so much – the Temple, Jerusalem, – because we mistakenly believed that G-d does not love us, if we renew our belief that He loves us with infinite love, we will bring about the Final Redemption.

G-d's infinite love for us is not diminished even when we do something wrong. When things are not

going well, it does not mean that G-d has any less love for me, or that He does not understand me. Often, we do not understand *Him*, and that is because He is G-d and we are human. But no one loves us more than G-d, and no one understands us more than G-d. If you accept this belief, it will change your life. If you do not believe that G-d loves you, it can be hard for you to love yourself. It is a mitzvah to love yourself, based on a famous *pasuk*: *Veahavta Leraacha Kamocha, Love your friend as you love yourself*. If you do not love yourself, you can never keep this mitzvah. And why does G-d want me to love myself? Because G-d loves me. This is a link in a chain of beliefs. G-d loves me – I love myself – I love others. If one is not able to truly love another, either he does not love himself, or he does not believe that G-d loves him.

All we need to do is to really mean it, when we say in Shacharit and Arvit, 'Ahavat Olam Ahavtanu, Hashem Elokenu', *Endless love have You loved us, Hashem, Our G-d*. We need to feel it in our bones, and not only wear it on our tee shirts.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H

