
THE THREE WEEKS, SEVENTEENTH OF TAMMUZ AND TISHAH B'AV

The most cataclysmic events shaping the history of the Jewish people occurred on the Seventeenth of Tammuz and Tishah B'Av (the Ninth of Av). Profound mistakes in our relationship with God and our fellow Jews resulted in national tragedies that led to the establishment of these days of mourning, fasting, and introspection. This three-week period is known as "*Bein HaMeitzarim*" – (lit. "between the straits") – and is marked by a reduction in our joyous celebration of life.

The goal of this class is to understand the underlying causes of the major calamities that occurred on the Seventeenth of Tammuz and Tishah B'Av so that we can take action to improve our character, and thus restore the glory of the Jewish people and help rebuild the Third Temple.

This class will address the following questions:

- ~ Why should we be concerned with ancient historical events that seem to have no relevance to contemporary life?
- ~ What events transpired on the Seventeenth of Tammuz and on Tishah B'Av that have impacted the Jewish nation throughout history?
- ~ Why were the First and Second Temples destroyed?
- ~ How is our sense of reality profoundly different without the Temple?
- ~ What can we do to rebuild the Temple?
- ~ How can introspection, fasting, and mourning on Tishah B'Av help rebuild the Jewish nation?

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SECTION I. THE GOLDEN CALF AND THE SPIES – SEMINAL EVENTS IN JEWISH HISTORY

As we have discussed in the Morasha shiurim on the Jewish festivals, the cycle of the Jewish year contains a dynamic spiritual energy unique to each season. The same is true of the Three Weeks. The tragic actions of the newly founded Jewish nation worshipping the Golden Calf on the Seventeenth of Tammuz and the acceptance of the negative report of the Spies on the Ninth of Av, created a long-term negative impact on Jewish history. On the other hand, this time period provides each generation with the opportunity to rectify the source of these errors in order to elevate the Jewish people to the highest spiritual levels.

1. **Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Mishnas Rabbi Aharon, Vol. III, p. 49 – Although there were several events that occurred on the Seventeenth of Tammuz and Tishah B'Av, the Golden Calf and the report of the Spies are viewed as the bases for the calamities that subsequently occurred on these days.**

The destruction of the Temples and our exile are based on the days from the Seventeenth of Tammuz until the Ninth of Av. One who contemplates this will find amazing things. On the Seventeenth of Tammuz the Golden Calf was worshipped, and on the evening of the Ninth of Av the episode of the Spies took place. These two major events changed the entire course of the Jewish nation for generations.

Before the Golden Calf, [after having received the Torah on Mount Sinai] the Jewish people reached the stature of Adam HaRishon before his banishment from the Garden of Eden. They had achieved a totally different consciousness, close to the spiritual worlds...

The transgression of the Spies resulted in the inability of that entire generation, including Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses), from entering the Land of Israel. If they had entered the land at that time, they would have enjoyed a supernatural existence with open miracles like the ones they had experienced until now [the Manna, Clouds of Glory, and traveling Spring of Miriam]. Furthermore, the Temple would never have been destroyed nor would the Jews have been exiled. All these events were the outcome of the sin of the Golden Calf and the transgression of the Spies.

והנה החורבן והגלות יסודם באלה הימים, מ"ז תמוז עד ט' באב, והמתבונן בזה ימצא כאן דברים מפליאים, דב"ז בתמוז נעשה העגל, ובליל ט' באב מעשה המרגלים, והנה הם שני המאורעות גדולים ששינו את מהלך עם ישראל לדורי דורות,

דקודם מעשה העגל היו כאדם הראשון קודם החטא... היינו קודם עשיית העגל היו במציאות אחרת לגמרי, קרובים לעולמות הרוחניים...

וחטא המרגלים גרם לדור המדבר שלא יכנסו לארץ ושלא יכנס משה רבינו לארץ, ואילו הכנים היתה ההנהגה כמו במדבר הנהגה ניסית גלויה, וגם לא היה אפשרי חורבן ביהמ"ק והגלות מהארץ והכל נסתבב ממעשה העגל ומחטא המרגלים.

2. **Rabbi Shaul Goldman, Mirrer Yeshiva, Jerusalem – Analogy to the formative period of a marriage.**

We can provide an analogy: The relationship forged between God and the Jewish people at Mount Sinai is sometimes referred to as a marriage. If, during the formative period of a marriage serious issues arise and are not addressed, they can be expected to resurface later, until they are resolved. Such were the challenges presented by worshipping the Golden Calf and the acceptance of the malicious report of the Spies.

SECTION II. THE SEVENTEENTH OF TAMMUZ

What were the five tragedies that took place on the Seventeenth of Tammuz?

1. **Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Ta'aniot (Laws of Fasting) 5:2 based on Mishnah, Ta'anit 4:6 – The five historical tragedies that all occurred on the Seventeenth of Tammuz.**

Five tragedies occurred to our ancestors on the Seventeenth of Tammuz:

1. Moshe broke the tablets containing the Ten Commandments when he descended from Mt. Sinai and saw the Golden Calf.
2. The two daily sacrifices were suspended during the First Temple period.
3. The Romans breached the walls of Jerusalem prior to the destruction of the Second Temple.
4. The wicked Apostomos burned the Torah.
5. Apostomos placed an idol in the Temple. [Some authorities maintain Apostomos lived during the Syrian-Greek conquest during the Second Temple period; others state he was a Roman ruler during the late Second Temple period.]

ושבעה עשר בתמוז וחמשה דברים אירעו בו:
נשתברו הלוחות,

ובטל התמיד מבית ראשון

והובקעה ירושלם בחורבן שני,

ושרף אפוסטומוס הרשע את התורה,
והעמיד צלם בהיכל.

The first calamity to occur on the Seventeenth of Tammuz was the sin of the Golden Calf. Only forty days after the entire nation heard God speak at Mt. Sinai, the Jewish men (not the women) created and worshipped an idol. This weakened their connection to the revelation at Mt. Sinai and created the possibility that in the future, other Jews would also sever their connection to God and the Torah (Gateway to Judaism, Rabbi Becher, p. 238). The next sources discuss this idea:

2. **Shemot (Exodus) 32:23-25 – Aaron recounts to Moshe the events leading to the Golden Calf.**

The people said to me, "Make for us a god that will go before us, for we do not know what has become of this man Moshe who brought us up from Egypt." And I said to them, "Who has

ויאמרו לי עשה לנו אלהים אשר ילכו לפנינו כי זה משה
האיש אשר העלנו מארץ מצרים לא ידענו מה היה לו:
ואמר להם למי זהב התפרקו ויתנו לי ואשלכהו באש
ויצא העגל הזה:

gold?" They removed it and gave it to me. I threw it into the fire and this calf came out.

And Moshe saw the people, that they were exposed, for Aaron had exposed them to disgrace among those who rise up against them. [In other words, the enemies of Israel will disgrace them by referring to the sin of the golden calf – Rashi.]

וירא משה את העם כי פרע הוא כי פרעה אהרן
לשמצה בקמיהם:

3. **Ramban (Nachmanides), *ibid.* –Moshe foresaw that the sin of the Golden Calf would weaken the connection of future generations to the revelation at Mt. Sinai, and open the possibility for them to exchange God for idols.**

Onkelos explained the words "l'shimtza b'kimah" (a disgrace among those who rise up) as "to give them a bad name in their generations." Since Onkelos explained this verse as "in their generations," it seems that the Calf would become a cause of disgrace and evil throughout Jewish history.

For people will say, "It was not in vain that our ancestors made the Golden Calf and worshipped it, for it was this [Calf] that brought them out of Egypt. Since it was beneficial for them to worship the Calf, we shall do the same and it will also be good for us."

This was in fact what was said at the time of Yeravam [the evil king of the Northern Kingdom who made two golden calves], who said to the people, "It is too far to go to [the Temple in] Jerusalem. These are your gods that you brought up from the land of Egypt!" (Melachim/Kings I, 12:28)

Moshe Rabbeinu foresaw prophetically how the Golden Calf would be the cause of transgression for generations.

וזה כדעת אונקלוס שתרגם לשמצה בקמיהם לאפקא שום ביש בדריהון. ולפי שאמר "בדריהון" נראה שרצה לפרש כי העגל אשר עשו יהיה שמץ רעה בדורות ישראל,

כי יאמרו לא לחנם עשו אבותינו את העגל ועבדוהו, רק שידעו בו כי הוא אשר העלם מארץ מצרים ומצאו בעבודתו תועלת להם, ואף אנחנו נעשה כן, כי טוב לנו לעבדו,

כאשר היה הדבר בירבעם שאמר רב לכם מעלות ירושלים הנה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים (מ"א יב כח),

ראה משה כי לדורות יפשעו בו:

4. **Rabbi Chanoch Henoch Lebowitz, *Chidushei HaLev*, Vol. II, p. 151 –The tragedy of the Golden Calf is not limited to that particular generation, since its disastrous effects are felt in every generation.**

One can explain from the words of the Ramban [in the previous source], who cites the Targum, that the transgression of the Golden Calf [in 1313 B.C.E.] impacted the Jewish people to worship idols in the days of Yeravam ben Nevat [796 B.C.E.] and for generations after him.

מבואר בדברי הרמב"ן שדייק מהתרגום, שחטא העגל גרם והשפיע על בני"י שיעבדו ע"ז בימי ירבעם בן נבט ובדורות שלאחריו. ואף שבנ"י כאן לא עבדו לעגל אפילו יום אחד שלם, והעגל גם נשרף ונטחן מיד... ולא הוסיפו עוד לעבדו, בכל זאת גרם חטא חמור זה שדורות שלמים יכשלו בעבירות חמורות.

Even though the Jewish people did not worship this calf for one full day, and the calf itself was immediately burned and pulverized... and they no longer worshipped it, nevertheless, this serious transgression caused future generations to stumble and commit serious transgressions. This was not an unusual consequence; rather it is the nature of historical events to have future consequences.

ולא היה זה מקרה משונה, אלא כן הוא טבע הדברים.

SECTION III. CALAMITIES THAT OCCURRED ON TISHAH B'AV

What were the seven tragedies that occurred on the Ninth of Av?

PART A. THE NEGATIVE REPORT OF THE SPIES AND THE DECREE FORBIDDING ENTRANCE TO THE LAND (1312 B.C.E.)

1. **Bamidbar (Numbers) 13:32, 14:1, 14:34** The spies publicly reported that the Land promised to them by God was not worth entering, and any attempt to conquer it would fail.

They delivered an evil report about the land they had spied ... the entire assembly raised their voices and cried that night [for they did not want to enter the land] ... [And God said,] “According to the number of days that you spied out the land, forty days, one day for each year, you will be punished – for forty years” ...

ויצאו דבת הארץ אשר תרו אתה...
ותשא כל העדה ויתנו את קולם ויבכו העם בלילה
ההוא:
במספר הימים אשר תרתם את הארץ ארבעים יום יום
לשנה יום לשנה תשאו את עונתיכם ארבעים שנה...

2. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Ta'anit 29a** – The Jewish people's response to the Spies' report was completely unjustified since God had explicitly promised the Land to them.

You cried without cause; I will establish for you a reason to cry [on this day] for generations.

אתם בכיתם בכיה של חנם ואני קובע לכם בכיה
לדורות

The night of the spies' report was Tishah B'Av, and it was on this day that both Temples were destroyed and many other tragedies took place throughout Jewish history.

3. **Maharal, Netzach Yisrael, Ch. 8, p.53** – The basis for their mistake was a lack of gratitude for the gift of the Land of Israel.

The fact that the Jews cried for nothing and despised the Land of Israel established for them

וזה שאמר שהיו בוכים בכיה של חנם ומאסו בארץ
חמדה ודבר זה נקבע להם בכיה לדורות, שהיה גורם

a crying [on this day] for generations. This actually caused them to be exiled from their land. Their crying showed that they had not forged a complete connection to the land.

שגלו מן הארץ, כי הבכיה שהיו בוכים מורה שאין הארץ שייך להם לגמרי.

PART B. DESTRUCTION OF THE FIRST TEMPLE AND EXILE (586 B.C.E.)

1. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b – The First Temple was destroyed as a result of our depraved moral level and transgression of the three cardinal sins.**

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three [evil] things which prevailed at that time: idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed ...

מקדש ראשון מפני מה חרב מפני שלשה דברים שהיו בו עבודה זרה וגלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים...

PART C. DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE AND EXILE (70 C.E.)

1. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b – The Second Temple was destroyed as a result of unfounded, baseless hatred and lack of love and unity in the Jewish people.**

But why was the Second Temple destroyed? Surely the Jews were occupied with Torah, mitzvot, and the practice of kind deeds? Because there was baseless hatred between them. This teaches that baseless hatred is considered equal to the three sins of idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed combined.

אבל מקדש שני שהיו עוסקין בתורה ובמצוות וגמילות חסדים מפני מה חרב מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם ללמדך ששקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות עבודה זרה גלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים...

PART D. CAPTURE AND DESTRUCTION OF BEITAR (132 C.E.)

1. **Mishnah Brurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 649:2 – Tens of thousands of Jews lost their lives in the fall of the city of Beitar.**

On that day [Tishah B'Av] the large city of Beitar, containing tens of thousands of Jews, was captured [in the year 132 CE]. All the inhabitants were killed; and it was a tragedy as great as the destruction of the Temple.

ובזה היום נלכדה עיר גדולה וביתר שמה והיו בה אלפים ורבות מיישראל ונפלו כולם ביד העכו"מ ונהרגו כולם והיתה צרה גדולה כמו חורבן ביהמ"ק.

PART E. TEMPLE SITE PLOWED OVER (133 C.E.)

1. **Mishnah Brurah, Shulchan Aruch – Orach Chaim 649: 2 Ibid. – The Temple grounds were plowed over 63 years after the destruction of the Temple.**

On this same day of suffering [Tishah B'Av], the Temple area and its surroundings were plowed over by the Roman general Turnus Rufus, in fulfillment of the prophecy, "Zion will be plowed

ובו ביום המוכן לפורענות חרש טורנוסרופוס הרשע את ההיכל ואת סביביו לקיים מה שנאמר ציון שדה תחרש.

over like a field” [Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah 26:18].
[Jerusalem was then rebuilt as a pagan city –
renamed Aelia Capitolina – and access was
forbidden to Jews.]

PART F. EXPULSIONS (1290, 1306, 1492 C.E.).

1. **Abarbanel, Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) 2:24 – With astonishing regularity, Tishah B'Av has been the date upon which Jewish exiles have begun throughout history.**

On that day [Tishah B'Av, 1306], the expulsion from France took place, as well as other pogroms and expulsions that were forced upon the Jews in that month ... And the King of Spain decreed that all the Jews in his kingdom would be expelled or killed in three months; and the day the Jews left was the Ninth of Av, 1492. The Spanish King did not know the significance of that day; it was as if the date had been determined in Heaven.

ובו ביום נעשה גרוש צרפת... וכמה עוד כהשמדות
והגרושים היו בחדש ההוא לישראל... והנה כשגזר
מלך ספרד גרוש על כל היהודים אשר בכל מדינות
מלכותו שיצאו במשלה חדשים ושלם והיה יום
היציאה ט' באב והוא לא ידע מזה הזמן דבר כאלו מן
השמים הדריכוהו להגבלת הזמן ההוא.

Furthermore, the Jews were expelled from England on Tishah B'Av, 1290 (Gateway to Judaism, Rabbi Becher, p. 235).

PART G. WORLD WAR I AND THE SEEDS OF WORLD WAR II

1. **Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, Tishah B'Av, Mesorah Publications, p. 158 – Germany declared war on Russia on Tishah B'Av in 1914, precipitating the First World War, which had tragic repercussions for the Jews of Europe and also ultimately led to the Second World War and the Holocaust.**

World War I began on Tishah B'Av ... The German sweep into Eastern Europe beginning in 1914 uprooted Jewish communities and demolished a laboriously built tradition that took centuries to shape ... [T]he extreme poverty afflicting communities and yeshivot, the Bolshevik Revolution and the clamping of the Iron Curtain around the three million Jews of Russia, the decay of German political and economic life and the emergence of an evil genius named Hitler – all these and more were the legacy of World War I.

SECTION IV. WHAT WE ARE MISSING WITHOUT THE TEMPLE

As the next sources will show, the world without the Temple in Jerusalem is a world without clarity of God's direct involvement in our lives.

PART A. THE DIVINE PRESENCE

1. **Yalkut Shimoni, Eichah (Lamentations) 996 158– The destruction of the Temple means that there is no longer a dwelling place for the palpable Presence of God (*Shechinah*).**

When they burned [the Temple], the Holy One, Blessed Be He, said: "I no longer have a resting place in the land. It is no longer mine. Rather, I will remove my Presence from it."

כיון ששרפוהו אמר הקב"ה שוב אין לי מושב בארץ כל הארץ לא שלי הוא אלא אסלק שכינתי ממנה.

2. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. II, p. 407 – The withdrawal of the Divine Presence leaves the world and its inhabitants bereft of the Presence of their Creator.**

The destruction of the Temple constitutes the destruction of the world in the respect that there is not even one pure and holy corner for God's Presence to rest in.

חורבן בית המקדש הוא חורבן העולם. עולם נחרב הוא שאין בו אף פינה אחת מטהרה ומקודשת להשראת השכינה.

PART B. PROPHECY

Prophecy – the clear channel by which God communicates with mankind – lasted for 1,000 years among the Jewish people, from the time of the Exodus (1313 B.C.E.) until forty years after the rebuilding of the Second Temple (313 B.C.E.). During the First Temple period, prophecy was very common and there were approximately one million men and women who experienced it. However, prophecy is very difficult to attain when the Ark of the Covenant (containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments) is not in its place in the Holy Temple (Handbook of Jewish Thought, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, 6:79-86).

1. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b – After the First Temple was destroyed and the Ark was permanently concealed, prophecy became very difficult to achieve and ended when the last of the prophets all died in a single month.**

With the death of the last prophets – Chaggai, Zachariah, and Melachi, Divine Inspiration departed from the Jewish people ...

משמתו נביאים האחרונים חגי זכריה ומלאכי נסתלקה רוח הקודש מישראל...

PART C. SIMCHAH

1. **Mishnah Succah 5:1 – The ultimate experience of human joy was to be found in the Holy Temple during Sukkot, when the Sages would sing and dance with lighted torches, to the accompaniment of music played by the Levites.**

Whoever did not witness the Simchat Beit

כל מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה, לא ראה

HaShoevah [the festival of the water drawing]
never experienced true joy.

שמחה מימיו:

PART D. OPEN CHANNEL FOR PRAYER

The site of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is described by Yaakov (Jacob) as “the abode of God and the gate of the heavens” (Bereishit/Genesis 28:17). From this, the Sages understand that it is a place especially suited to prayer and the site from which man’s prayers go up to God (Rashi, Targum Yonasan, *ibid.*). Without the Temple however, that gate is closed.

1. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Berachot 32b – After the destruction of the Temple the gates of prayer have been sealed.

From the day that the Temple was destroyed, the gates of prayer have been sealed, as the verse says, “Even as I cry out and plead, He shut out my prayer” (Eichah 3:8).

מיום שחרב בית המקדש ננעלו שערי תפלה שנאמר
גם כי אזעק ואשוע שתרם תפלת.

2. Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 59a – More effort and sincerity is required for one’s prayers to be effective.

Even though the gates of prayer have been closed, the gates of tears have not been sealed.

ואף על פי ששערי תפלה ננעלו שערי דמעות לא ננעלו.

In response to the Talmudic statement “The gates of heaven are never closed to tears” (Berachot 32b), one Chassidic master said, “But prayers with joy can break all locks and penetrate closed gates” (Not Just Stories, Rabbi Abraham Twerski M.D., p. 181).

PART E. MIRACLES AT THE TEMPLE AND DIVINE PROTECTION

1. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers), Ch. 5, Mishnah 8 – In the Holy Temple, the abode of the Divine Presence, the laws of nature were transcended and open miracles could be witnessed by anyone present.

Ten wonders were performed for our fathers in the Temple: No woman miscarried from the aroma of the sacrificial meat; the sacrificial meat never became putrid; no fly was seen in the place where the meat was cut up; no seminal emission occurred to the High Priest on the Day of Atonement; the rains did not extinguish the fire on the wood pile [of the altar]; the wind did not disperse the vertical column of smoke [from the altar]; no disqualification was found in the Omer, or in the two loaves, or in the show bread; the people stood crowded together, yet prostrated themselves [with] wide spaces [between them];

עשרה נסים נעשו לאבותינו בבית המקדש. לא הפילה
אשה מריח בשר הקדש, ולא הסריח בשר הקדש
מעולם, ולא נראה זבוב בבית המטבחיים, ולא ארע קרי
לכהן גדול ביום הכפורים, ולא כבו גשמים אש של עצי
המערכה, ולא נצקה הרוח את עמוד העשן,

ולא נמצא פסול בעומר ובשתי הלחם ובבלחם הפנים,
עומדים צפופים ומשתחוים רוחים, ולא היוק נחש
ועקרב בירושלים מעולם, ולא אמר אדם לחברו צר לי
המקום שאלין בירושלים:

never did a snake or a scorpion injure someone in Jerusalem; and no man said to his friend: "There is no room for me to sleep overnight in Jerusalem."

2. **Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud), Peah 3:7 (with Hebrew cited in Yibanei Hamikdash, Rabbi Shlomo Brevda) – Those who ascended to the Temple during Pilgrimage Festivals were afforded Divine protection and security.**

During one of the pilgrimage festivals, one of the travelers to the Temple in Jerusalem left his wheat unguarded in his field. Upon his return he found lions surrounding [and guarding] it. Another traveler left his chicken pens [unguarded,] and upon his return found cats ripped apart near them. Another traveler left his home unlocked, and upon his return found a snake curled around the lock guarding it.

Rabbi Pinchas recounted the following incident: Two brothers who resided in Ashkelon had non-Jewish neighbors. These neighbors plotted to take advantage of the brothers' ritual ascent to Jerusalem in order to plunder the belongings they had left behind. After the brothers departed on their journey, God sent angels to live in their home. When the brothers returned after the holiday, the gentiles asked them, "Where have you been?" They replied, "In Jerusalem."

They asked, "Who did you leave behind in your home?" They answered, "No one." [Having grasped the miracle performed by God] the gentiles exclaimed, "Blessed is the God of the Jews, Who does not abandon them, and surely will never abandon them in the future."

מעשה באחד שהניח את כריו (של תבואה בשדה) ובא, ומצא אריות סובבים אותו. מעשה באחד שהניח בית של תרנגולים, ובא ומצא חתולים מקורעים לפניו. חד בר נש שביק ביתי' פתוח (עזב את ביתו ולא נעלה כראוי), ואתא ואשכח חכינה כריכה על קרקסוי (מצא נחש כרוך על המנעול של הפתח, לשמירה).

רבי פנחס משתעי הדין עובדא. תרין אחין הוון באשקלון. הוון להון מגורין נוכראין (היו להם שכנים נכרים). אמרו, כדין אילין יהודאין סלקין לירושלם, אנן נסבין כל מה דאית להון (אמרו, כשאלו היהודים יעלו לירושלם לרגל, אנו ניקח את כל אשר להם מביתם). מן דסלקין (לאחר שעלו לרגל), זימן להם הקב"ה מלאכים ננסים ויצאים, בדמותן... אמרו לון, אן הויתם (אמרו להם הנכרים, היכן הייתם). אמרו לון, בירושלם.

אמרו לון, ומאן שבקותון בגו ביתא (שאלום, למי הנחתם בתוך הבית). אמרו, ולא בר נש (והשיבו, שום אדם). אמרו, בריך אלקהון דיהודאי דלא שבקון ולא שביק להון (אמרו, ברוך אלקיהם של היהודים, שלא עזב אותם, ולא יעזבם לעולם). ע"כ.

SECTION V. CAUSES FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FIRST AND SECOND TEMPLES

As a prelude to understanding how we can rebuild the Holy Temple (as discussed in Section VI), in this section we will examine the moral and spiritual causes of its destruction. If these negative factors can be eliminated, then the Temple can be rebuilt.

PART A. FIRST TEMPLE: THREE CARDINAL TRANSGRESSIONS AND DISRESPECT FOR TORAH

What were the factors that caused the destruction of the First Temple?

1. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b – The three cardinal transgressions.

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three [evil] things which prevailed at that time: idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed ...

מקדש ראשון מפני מה חרב מפני שלשה דברים שהיו
בו עבודה זרה וגלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים...

2. Midrash Eichah 20 – Disregard for Torah study.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because of the disregard for Torah study.

לא חרבה ירושלים אלא על ביטול תורה

3. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 119b – Disrespect for Torah resulted in the neglect of both mitzvah observance and character development, and this led to the Temple's destruction.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because the Sabbath was desecrated in it ...
Jerusalem was destroyed only because they neglected the reading of the morning and evening Shema...
Jerusalem was destroyed only because they neglected [the education of] school children ...
Jerusalem was destroyed only because its inhabitants had no shame amongst themselves ...
Jerusalem was destroyed only because the small and the great were made equal ...
Jerusalem was destroyed only because they did not rebuke one other ...
Jerusalem was destroyed only because they did not show respect to Torah scholars ...

לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שחללו בה את
השבת...
לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שביטלו ק"ש שחרית
וערבית...
לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שביטלו בה תנוקות
של בית רבן...
לא חרבה ירושלים אלא מפני שלא היה להם בושת
פנים זה מזה...
לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שהושוו קטן וגדול...
לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שלא הוכיחו זה את
זה...
לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שבזו בה ת"ח

4. Bach, Tur, Orach Chaim, Siman 47 – People studied Torah for selfish reasons, disregarding its immense spiritual purpose.

And it seems that God intended that people

נראה דכוונתו ית' מעולם היתה שנהיה עוסקים בתורה

should study Torah in order to integrate spirituality and holiness into their beings. However, [at the time of the First Temple] people learned Torah only to derive material benefit and enjoyment, or to know the laws for business purposes, as well as to arrogantly boast of their wisdom.

But they did not intend to cleave to the holiness and spirituality of the Torah, nor bring the Divine Presence into the world, in order to elevate their souls to a high level after their death. They created a division that caused the Divine Presence to leave the land. The land remained in its physical state without holiness, and this caused its destruction and loss.

כדי שתתעצם נשמתינו בעצמות ורוחניות וקדושת מקור מוצא התורה... אבל עתה שעברו חוק זה שלא עסקו בתורה כי אם לצורך הדברים הגשמיים להנאתם, לידע הדינים לצורך משא ומתן, גם להתגאות להראות חכמתם,

ולא נתכוונו להתעצם ולהתדבק בקדושת ורוחניות התורה, ולהמשיך השכינה למטה בארץ, כדי שתעלה נשמתם למדרגה גדולה אחרי מיתתם, הנה בזה עשו פירוד שנסתלקה השכינה מן הארץ ועלתה לה למעלה, והארץ נשארה בגשמיותה בלי קדושה, וזה היה גורם חורבנה ואבידתה.

5. **Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Mishnas Rabbi Aharon, Vol. II, p. 51 – God wants us to recognize the overwhelming goodness that is in the Torah.**

Their main shortcoming was that they did not properly recognize the overwhelming goodness of the Torah.

בעיקר שלא הכירו כראוי עוצם הטובה של התורה.

PART B. SECOND TEMPLE: SINAT CHINAM, LASHON HARA, AND NOT JUDGING PROPERLY

What were the factors that caused the destruction of the Second Temple?

1. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b – Baseless hatred among Jews.**

But why was the Second Temple destroyed? Were the Jews not occupied with Torah, mitzvot, and the practice of kind deeds? [The Second Temple was destroyed] because there was unjustified hatred between Jews (*sinat chinam*). This teaches that unjustified hatred is equated with the three transgressions [that caused the destruction of the First Temple] – idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed combined.

אבל מקדש שני שהיו עוסקין בתורה ובמצות וגמילות חסדים מפני מה חרב מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם ללמדך ששקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות עבודה זרה גלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים...

2. **Talmud Bavli, Gittin 55b, 56a – The story of Kamza and Bar Kamza that led to the destruction of the Second Temple.**

The destruction of Jerusalem came through a man called Kamza and a man called Bar Kamza in the following way: A certain man had a friend called Kamza and an enemy called Bar Kamza. He once made a party and said to his servant, Go and bring Kamza." The servant went and brought Bar Kamza.

אקמזא ובר קמזא חרוב ירושלים, דההוא גברא דרחמיה קמזא ובעל דבביה בר קמזא, עבד סעודתא, אמר ליה לשמעיה: זיל אייתי לי קמזא, אזל אייתי ליה בר קמזא. אתא אשכחיה דהוה יתיב, אמר ליה: מכדי דההוא גברא בעל דבבא דההוא גברא הוא, מאי בעית

When the man who gave the party found Bar Kamza there he said, "What are you doing here? Get up and leave." Bar Kamza replied, "Since I am already here, let me stay, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink." Kamza said, "No!" and threw him out.

Bar Kamza said to himself, "Since the rabbis were sitting and watching and did nothing to prevent this, they must have agreed [with the host of the party]. I will go and slander them in the King's palace." [Bar Kamza] went and said to the Roman Caesar, "The Jews are rebelling against you!"

הכא? קום פוק! אמר ליה: הואיל ואתאי שבקן, ויהיבנא לך דמי מה דאכילנא ושתינא, אמר ליה: לא. אמר ליה: יהיבנא לך דמי פלגא דסעודתיך! אמר ליה: לא. אמר ליה: יהיבנא לך דמי כולה סעודתיך! א"ל: לא. נקטיה בידיה ואוקמיה ואפקיה.

אמר: הואיל והוון יתבי רבנן ולא מחו ביה, ש"מ קא ניחא להו, איזיל איכול בהו קורצא בי מלכא. אזל אמר ליה לקיסר: מרדו בך יהודאי!

From the above events, the Sages pinpoint the exact factors that caused the destruction of the Temple:

3. **Talmud Bavli, Gittin 57a – Transgression of the prohibition against embarrassing another person was a factor that caused the Temple's destruction.**

Rabbi Eliezer taught. "Note from this incident how serious a thing it is to put a man to shame, for God supported the cause of Bar Kamza and destroyed His House and burnt His Temple."

אמר רבי אלעזר בא וראה כמה גדולה כחה של בושה שהרי סייע הקב"ה את בר קמזא והחריב את ביתו ושרף את היכלו.

4. **Maharal, Netzach Yisrael, Ch. 5 – Divisiveness is the antithesis of the Jewish unity that the Temple is supposed to generate, and caused its destruction.**

The etymology of the name Kamza means "divisive." There is no question that their names relate to their nature of causing separation and disagreement. Therefore, it was through their actions that the Temple, which is intended to bind the Jewish people together in unity, was destroyed.

השם קמזא מורה על חלוק... כי אין ספק כי שמם של אלו אנשים היה נקרא על ענין שלהם שהיו בפירוד ובחילוק ולכך על ידם חרב הבית שהוא לאחדות ישראל, ולקשר אותם באחדות.

5. **Chofetz Chaim, Shmirat HaLashon, Introduction – Speaking negatively of others was a factor that caused the Temple's destruction.**

At the end of the Second Temple period, baseless hatred and speaking derogatorily about others abounded, and for these reasons the Temple was destroyed.

The intention of the Talmud [Yoma 9b] in identifying "baseless hatred" as the reason for the Temple's destruction was also to include derogatory speech, which reflects hatred between Jews. Without these reasons, they would not have been punished.

לבסוף ימי בית שני גברה שנאת חנם ולשון-הרע בינינו בעוונותינו הרבים, ובעבור זה נחרב הבית וגלינו מארצינו כדאיתא ביומא (ט:)

ובירושלמי פרק א' דיומא הגם שהגמרא נקטה "שנאת חנם", הכוונה היא על לשון הרע גם-כן שיוצאת מצד השנאה, דאי לאו הכי לא היו נענשים על-כך

6. **Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 30b – Judges did not go beyond the letter of the law and exercise compassion when it was appropriate.**

Rabbi Yochanan said, “Jerusalem was destroyed only because... they established their judgments according to the letter of the law and did not go beyond the letter of the law.”

אמר רבי יוחנן לא הרבה ירושלים אלא על... שהעמידו דיניהם על דין תורה ולא עבדו לפנים משורת הדין.

7. **Rav Shlomo Lurintz, B'Michitzasam, p. 107 – Judges were also biased by self-interest in court cases.**

Rav Simcha [Wasserman] told me, “It seems that the words ‘their judgments’ [in the previous source] are redundant [and must be teaching a deeper idea]. Rather, each judge adjudicated laws with his own interests in mind.

“Due to their vested interests in their judicial decisions, they deceived themselves by thinking that their intention was to uphold the law. Therefore, the Talmud writes ‘their judgments’ – that which they created for themselves and placed over the laws of the Torah, as if this was the law of the Torah. Such a situation brought about the destruction of the Temple.”

רב שמחה אמר לי... נראית המילה “דיניהם” מיותרת... אמנם כל אחד התכוון לטובת עצמו.

אך בגלל הנגיעה שלו השלה את עצמו שכל כוונתו היא לקיים את הדין, הווי אומר שהעמידו “דיניהם”, מה שהם חידשו לעצמם, הם העמידו על דין תורה, כאילו זה היה דין התורה – ומצב כזה הוא שמביא את החורבן.

SECTION VI. HOW WE CAN REBUILD THE TEMPLE

Just as the Temple was destroyed through our ancestors’ misdeeds, each generation has the capacity to take concrete steps to rectify those transgressions, which will enable the rebuilding of the Temple and restore the Jewish people to their former spiritual greatness. Moreover, each generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt is viewed as if that generation itself caused its very destruction! So what can we do?

PART A. TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND OURSELVES

1. **Talmud Yerushalmi, Yoma 1:1 – The Sages remind us that each generation has the capacity to rebuild the Temple, if only we take responsibility for our actions and the physical and spiritual welfare of others.**

Every generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt is to be regarded as though the Temple was destroyed by that generation.

כל דור ודור שלא נבנה בית המקדש בימיו מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו הוא החריבו.

PART B. RESPECTING AND LOVING OUR FELLOW JEWS

1. Sfas Emes, Rosh Hashanah, 5641 – Loving one's fellow Jew will help rebuild the Temple.

Since the Temple was destroyed by baseless hatred, therefore, it will surely be rebuilt by loving our fellow Jews.

כיון שע"י שנאת חנם נחרב. כ"ש שע"י אהבת ישראל
יהי' נבנה בעזה"י.

2. Chasam Sofer on the Pesach Haggadah, Ha Lachma Anya – Our initiative to love others as we love ourselves will precipitate the arrival of the redemption.

If you will ask, "What have we gained in being freed from Egypt, we are back in exile!" Rather, the difference is that when we were enslaved in Egypt we did not have the ability to expedite our redemption; however, in this exile we are capable of ending it through acts of kindness. That is why [at the beginning of the Passover Seder we invite guests into our homes saying], "Whoever is hungry come and join the Seder." In that merit [we can rebuild the Temple] and be "Next Year in Jerusalem!"

שמא תאמר, מה הרוחנו ביציאת מצרים ואנחנו
בגולה – אלא שבגלות מצרים לא יכולנו לדלג על הקץ,
ובגלות זה בידינו לקרב את הקץ על ידי צדקה ומעשים
טובים, לפיכך "כל דכפין ייתי וייכול", ונוכה לשנה
הבאה בירושלים, שהרי בידינו הדבר.

PART C. IMPROVING OUR SPEECH

1. Chofetz Chaim, Shmirat HaLashon, Chelek Sheini, Ch.7 – Whoever speaks positively of others and pursues peace has a share in the rebuilding of the future Temple.

It is written in the name of the Holy Zohar that even one congregation that maintains peace properly can merit bringing the *Mashiach* (Messiah). Therefore, the coming of the *Mashiach* is dependent upon us. And it is known that preserving peace can only be accomplished if we are careful in avoiding both baseless hatred and speaking derogatorily of one another. Each individual who endeavors to rectify these shortcomings will have a share in rebuilding the future Temple; without this, the Temple could remain destroyed forever, God forbid.

הנה כתבו הספרים בשם הזוה"ק דבי כנישתא חדא אם
היו שומרים מדת השלום כדבעי יכולים לזכות לביאת
המשיח, אם כן ביאת המשיח תלויה בידינו. וידוע
שבמדת השלום אין אנו יכולים לזכות בה רק אם נהיה
זהירים מתחלה מעון שנאת חנם ולשה"ר וכל אחד
שיתחזק לתקן החטא הזה יהיה לו חלק בבית הבנוי
לעתיד, דבלתם היה הבית חרב לעולם ח"ו.

PART D. RESPECTING TORAH

1. Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Mishnas Rabbi Aharon, Vol. II, p. 51 – The meaning of life and the word of God is available in the Torah – appreciate that there is nothing else like it.

Nowadays, especially during the Three Weeks, we need to rectify our [lack of appreciation for the importance of Torah] and to strengthen our understanding of its goodness – especially that there is nothing [that provides meaning] other than the Torah.

הרי הזמן הזה ימי בין המצרים, מחייב לתקן בחיזוק
התורה והכרת טובתה, ובעיקר שאין עוד זולתה.

PART E. DEVELOPING AND STRENGTHENING A POSITIVE OUTLOOK ON LIFE

1. **Rabbi Yissocher Frand in Print, ArtScroll Publications, p. 223-224 – Do not repeat the mistake of the spies by focusing on a person's external negative points. Rather, look below the surface to see the positive.**

Rabbi Shimon Schwab noted that two people can look at the same thing and see something totally different ... [T]he spies saw giants and funerals [Bamidbar 13:32, Rashi ibid.]. But they failed to see the holiness of the Land. They saw what was external and obvious, and failed to perceive what was deeper and eternal. Because they transmitted that superficial view to Klal Yisrael and caused them to cry in their tents, we have been crying now for nearly three thousand years.

And we repeat the sin of the spies when we look at another Jew and only focus on externals... *Sinat chinam*, *lashon hara* and *machloket* (hatred without cause, malicious gossip and dispute) all come from a failure to integrate the lesson of Tishah B'Av, from a failure to look at our fellow Jew and appreciate his good attributes, his potential for spiritual greatness.

SECTION VII. MOURNING, FASTING, AND INTROSPECTION HELP REBUILD THE JEWISH NATION

PART A. IDENTIFYING WITH THE LOSS

1. **Talmud Bavli, Ta'anit 30b – One who understands what the loss of the Temples means, will be motivated to embark on their rebuilding.**

Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit sharing in her joy [when the Temple will be rebuilt.]

כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחתה

At the rebuilding of the Second Temple, there were intense and contrasting emotions. Those people who had never seen the glory of the First Temple were joyous to witness the rebuilding of the Second Temple, despite its diminished state. At the same time, older people who had witnessed the grandeur of the First Temple wept with the same intensity as those who were joyous, since they were focusing on what had been lost.

2. **Ezra 3:11-13 – At the building of the Second Temple the young celebrated, while the elders mourned since the Presence of God (the *Shechinah*) was not present.**

And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the House of the Lord was laid.

But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, older men who had seen the First Temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this [Second] Temple was laid before their eyes, though many shouted aloud for joy.

וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ בְהִלָּל וּבְהוֹדוֹת לַיהוָה כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חִסְדּוֹ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל הָעָם הִרְעִיזוּ תְרוּעָה גְדוֹלָה בְהִלָּל לַיהוָה עַל הוֹסֵד בַּיִת הַזֶּה׃

וְרַבִּים מֵהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם וְרֵאשֵׁי הָאָבוֹת הַזְּקֵנִים אֲשֶׁר רָאוּ אֶת הַבַּיִת הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּיָסְדוֹ זֶה הַבַּיִת בְּעֵינֵיהֶם בָּכִים בְּקוֹל גְּדוֹל וְרַבִּים בְּתְרוּעָה בְשִׂמְחָה לְהַרְרִים קוֹל׃

And the people could not distinguish the sound of joyful shouting from the sound of people weeping, because they shouted loudly, and the sound was heard from far away.

ואין העם מכירים קול תרועת השמחה לקול בכי
העם כי העם מריעים תרועה גדולה והקול נשמע עד
למרחוק:

3. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. III, p. 284 – The challenge of relating to the destruction of the Temples.**

We ... mourn for the destruction of the two Temples, even though it is difficult for us to cry and to understand the implications of their loss.

Just the opposite, we feel satisfied, even with all the suffering surrounding us, as if we are not lacking anything physical or spiritual at all. This feeling prevents us from being able to properly mourn the destruction, as we cannot feel nor sense what, in essence, we are missing. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to learn and understand the deep consequences of the destruction and to feel and understand how our situation has declined from the time of the destruction until now.

אנחנו... מתאבלים על חורבן שני מקדשים: הראשון
והשני, אמנם קשה מאוד לבכות ולהבין את משמעות
החורבן.

ואדרבא לצערנו אנו ב"ה מרגישים בטוב, למרות כל
הצרות הסובבות אותנו, כאילו שלא חסר לנו מאומה
הן בגשמיות והן ברוחניות. הרגשה זו היא המונעת
מאתנו את היכולת להתאבל על החורבן כראוי, כיון
שאין אנו יכולים להרגיש ולחוש היטב מה בעצם חסר
לנו. לזאת חובה עלינו ללמוד ולהבין את פנימיות
החורבן, ולהרגיש ולדעת את התדרדרות מצבנו
ומעמדנו מעת החורבן ועד עתה.

4. **Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Sefer HaToda'ah (The Book of our Heritage), Ch. 33 – Mourning for past mistakes helps guarantee a future.**

They relate the following incident about Napoleon, the ruler of France: He once passed the entrance to a synagogue in Paris on Tishah B'Av, and he saw Jews sitting on the ground there, crying and lamenting the destruction of their Temple and land as if this tragedy had happened to them the day before.

He stood in amazement, and then said, "I swear that in the end this nation will enjoy goodness in its own land! For where do we find another nation in the world that preserves its mourning and aspirations for thousands of years and is not diminished?!"

אומרים עליו על נפוליאון קיסר צרפת, שפעם אחת
עבר על פתח בית הכנסת בפאריז ביום תשעה באב,
וראה שם יהודים יושבים על הארץ ומבכים ומקוננים
את חרבן מקדשם וארצם, כאשר היה אסון שפגע בהם
אך אתמול - עמד משתומם, ואחר אמר:

נשבע אני שיש אחרית טובה לעם זה בארץ שלהם!
היכן מצינו עם אחר בעולם שישמור אבלו ותקותו
אלפים בשנים ולא יפוגו ממנו לעולם!

5. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. III, p. 254 – No other nation commemorates its downfalls and losses. Judaism recognizes the importance of learning from our mistakes.**

Just as the Jewish people derive strength from their miraculous [survival in] exile, similarly, there is an intrinsic meaning in the yearly mourning for the destruction of the Temples. This is dependable testimony to the spiritual survival of the Jewish nation – for one does not

כשם שעם ישראל שואב עידוד מניסי הגלות, כך יש
בעצם עובדת הצער והאבילות על החורבן מדי שנה
בשנה, עדות נאמנה על הקיום הרוחני של עם ישראל,
שהרי לא מצאנו עם בין העמים שיציין יום זכרון לזכר
מפלותיו. אדרבה, כל העמים מציינים רק את ימי
נצחונותיהם, ועם ישראל מצייין את יום החורבן מדי שנה.

find among the other nations a people who commemorate its downfalls. Just the opposite, all other nations commemorate only their victories. Yet, the Jewish people observe the day of the destruction of the two Temples every year.

PART B. FASTING IS A CATALYST FOR INTROSPECTION AND PERSONAL GROWTH

1. **Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Ta'aniot (Laws of Fasting) 5:1 – The purpose of a fast day is to inspire us to improve our actions and our characters (*teshuvah*).**

There are days upon which all of the Jewish people fasts because of the troubles that occurred on them, in order to awaken their hearts to *teshuvah* – introspection and personal growth. The fast days help us focus on our improper behavior, and that of our ancestors, that led to the misfortunes that befell both them and us. By recalling these things, we will engage in introspection and improve ourselves.

יש שם ימים שכל ישראל מתענים בהם, מפני הצרות שאירעו בהן, כדי לעורר הלבבות לפתוח דרכי התשובה. ויהי זה זכרון למעשינו הרעים, ומעשה אבותינו שהי' כמעשינו עתה, עד שגרם להם ולנו אותן הצרות. שבזכרון דברים אלו נשוב להיטיב.

PART C. RESTRICTIONS ON TISHAH B'AV

1. **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 554:1, 25 – Mourning involves fasting, not washing, and not wearing leather shoes.**

On Tishah B'Av it is forbidden to wash, anoint oneself, wear leather shoes, and have marital relations.

Whoever eats or drinks on Tishah B'Av will not see the rejoicing of Jerusalem. Whoever mourns over Jerusalem will merit to share in its rejoicing ...

תשעה באב אסור ברחיצה וסיכה ונעילת הסנדל ותשמיש המטה

כל האוכל ושותה בתשעה באב אינו רואה בשמחת ירושלים, וכל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחתה.