



The Talmud states that due to the Jews' unwarranted cries fearing they would die by the enemy, G-d established cries throughout the generations. Thus, on the same date - the 9th of Av - both Temples were destroyed and we were exiled. **What is this justice?**

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TISHAH B'AV A PARADOX

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will be will [merit to] see its rejoicing, and all who do not mourn for Jerusalem will not [merit to] see its rejoicing." [1]

The simplest understanding of this statement of the Sages is that Hashem operates middah k'neged middah (measure for measure). If a person acts according to God's wishes and is appropriately distressed over the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, he will be rewarded with the opportunity to rejoice when it is rebuilt. If not, he won't deserve such a reward. In short: "If you show me you really want it, I'll give it to you, but if not, then I won't." This simple understanding might be true, but it is probably not what our Sages were getting at. There is a deeper meaning here.

In order to attain a deeper understanding of this statement of our Sages we must first examine the obligation of aveilut (mourning) on Tishah b'Av. Many people ask the question, "Why do we mourn for Jerusalem on Tishah b'Av?" This may be an important question, but it certainly is not a strong question. One could simply answer: "Because we are sad about the destruction of

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TISHAH B'AV THE SPIES & THE TEMPLE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Talmud Sanhedrin 104b states G-d's sentiment, "You cried an unwarranted cry, (therefore) I will establish for you a cry throughout the generations." The Rabbis suggested this was G-d's sentiment addressed to the Jews on the ninth of the month of Av - Tisha B'Av - when the Jews cried at the spies' divisive report. The spies spoke against G-d's promise that He would conquer the land of Canaan - Israel. The spies incited a riot, declaring the Jews could not succeed over Canaan's mighty inhabitants, despite G-d's age-old promise to Abraham. The Talmud says that as a response, G-d established Tisha B'Av as a day of crying for many years to come.

Many questions emerge. Why would future generations pay the price for a former generation's sins? Didn't G-d punish that former generation with 40 years in the desert? If so, why is additional crying necessary? How is a crying for many generations justified - why not just one generation? What was the sin of the spies, and of the Jews? What is meant by, "you cried an 'unwarranted cry'..."? And finally, we are taught that the latter generation's sins of immorality, idolatry and baseless hatred are what brought upon us the destruction of both Temples respectively - not the sin of the spies. So which is the cause for the mourning of Tisha B'Av: the spies, or the latter generation's sins?

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Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:
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Weekly Parsha

Devarim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"On the east side of the Jordan, in the land of Moav, Moshe began to explain this law saying." (Devarim 1:5)

This passage is an introduction to Sefer Devarim. Much of the sefer is a review of the mitzvot. In this review

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the Jerusalem and the Beit haMikdash," and that would be the end of it. There is a stronger, more specific question we can ask: "Is our mourning on Tishah b'Av consistent with the structure of normative, halachic aveilut?" To understand this question and find an answer we must take a brief look at the halachic structure of aveilut.

Normative halachic aveilut takes place in three stages: the seven days of lamenting, the thirty days of weeping, and final twelve months, after which no more memorials may be held for the dead.[2] In each progressive stage, the severity of the strictures imposed upon the mourner is reduced. In each stage, the mourner is expected to grieve less intensely. After the end of the period of mourning, the mourner is expected to move on with his life. The main point: normative aveilut is time-bound.

Ostensibly, it seems as though the aveilut of Tishah b'Av is not normative. Normative aveilut shouldn't last past twelve months, and here we are, still crying over the destruction of Jerusalem after nearly two thousand years – a blatant breach of the clearly defined time boundaries of halachic aveilut! Not only that, but normative mourning lessens in intensity as time goes by, but with each Tishah b'Av that passes, our mourning increases! Furthermore, the Rambam says, "One should not indulge in excessive grief over one's dead, as it is said: "Do not weep for the dead, nor bemoan him,"[3] meaning, (do not weep for him) too much, for [death] is the 'way of the world,' and he who frets over the 'way of the world' is a fool."[4] It comes according to the Rambam that our aveilut on Tishah b'Av not only oversteps the bounds of normative aveilut but is also considered to be foolish! What is going on here?[5]

It turns out that we are not the only ones who mourn (or have mourned) excessively. We know that Ya'akov Avinu mourned for twenty-two years for (what he believed was) the loss of his son, Yosef[6]: "Then Ya'akov rent his garments and placed sackcloth on his loins; he mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted."[7] This is an outright contradiction to the halachic principles mentioned by the Rambam! How can it be that Ya'akov, one of the most righteous men to walk the earth, refused to be consoled, in stark opposition to the demands of halacha?

The answer lies in a distinction between normative aveilut and the aveilut of Ya'akov Avinu. This distinction is alluded to in the Midrash: "A person does not accept consolation over a living person whom he believes to be dead (savur sh'meit), for a [Divine] decree has been issued over one who has died that he be forgotten from the hearts [of the living], but this decree is not [issued] over one who is still alive."[8] The simple meaning[9] of this statement is as follows: one



cannot be consoled over the death of a loved one until he has undergone yei'ush – until he has given up hope. The mourner must know and feel with absolute certainty that the person is dead and won't be coming back. When a person loses a loved one, he intellectually knows that that person is dead, but emotionally, his love still reaches out for that person. When he (emotionally) realizes that the person is no longer there, he becomes incredibly frustrated and distressed. The gap left behind by the deceased creates a gap between the mourner's mind and his heart, generating intense feelings of anxiety, confusion, and depression. Mourners tend to go through this intellectual/emotional battle for a period of time after the death, but eventually, their emotions catch up with their intellectual realization that the person is dead. Only then do they truly give up hope in both their minds and their hearts. Only then can they fully be consoled, and continue on with their lives.

Now we can see the distinction. Ya'akov's case was different. He could not be consoled. Why not? Because he had not given up hope. He was only believed that Yosef was dead, but he didn't know with complete certainty. He lacked that absolute conviction necessary for the intellectual confirmation. If a mourner knows in his mind that his loved one is dead he may struggle emotionally, but his heart will eventually catch up with his mind. Emotional acceptance will eventually follow intellectual acceptance. But if a person lacks that intellectual conviction, consolation is impossible. As long as there remains room for doubt – even a remote possibility that the person is still alive – the mourner will invest his entire mind and heart into that possibility and refuse to let it go. The emotional acceptance will never come because the intellectual acceptance never took

place. That is why Ya'akov's aveilut exceeded the normative boundaries of halacha. He was unable to be consoled because his mind had never fully accepted Yosef's death. To summarize, there are two objectives accomplished by mourning: 1) honor for the deceased, 2) closure for the living. The process of aveilut helps the living recognize and acknowledge the tragedy that has occurred, and helps them get over it. So long as that second step remains unfulfilled, the process of aveilut can never end.

Back to Tishah b'Av. The Shulchan Aruch writes, "We do not say tachanun (Rema: or selichot) on Tishah b'Av and we do not fall on our face in supplication because Tishah b'Av is described as a moed (festival)."[10] This is a very strange phenomenon indeed. On Tishah b'Av we cry, mourn, afflict ourselves with fasting and the other four forms of affliction, refrain from studying Torah, refrain from donning festive clothing, and deprive ourselves of nearly every single pleasure – yet, we modify our observance of Tishah b'Av because we recognize it as a partial moed. Why should this be? It would be understandable if we made it a point to omit all moed-aspects until the arrival of Moshiach, when all fast-days will be nullified and celebrated as festivals[11]; that way, we would be drawing a full contrast between now (exile) and the future (redemption) . . . but that is not our practice. Instead, we take two completely antithetical themes – joyous moed and mournful fast – and bend over backwards to make sure both aspects are demonstrated and acknowledged. Why do we do this? Why try to uphold this paradox of including aspects of moed on a day of nation-wide mourning?

The Aruch haShulchan provides an insight into this conundrum. He explains that we refrain from reciting tachanun as a demonstration of our faith in

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Holidays

the redemption.[12] Based on our understanding of Ya'akov's aveilut, we can understand the paradox. Our aveilut, like that of Ya'akov Avinu, oversteps the time-boundaries of normative halachic aveilut. Ya'akov continued to mourn because he could not be consoled. Why not? Because he had not yet given up hope over his situation. The same is true for us. The reason why we continue to mourn is because we have not given up hope over our situation. We fully trust in Hashem's promise that He will redeem us from our exile. We know that the exile is only temporary, and that the redemption can come at any moment. In fact, we are better off than Ya'akov. He was only savur sh'meit – he just thought that there might be hope. We know that there is hope, because Hashem has given us His promise!

Now our previous problem can be resolved. The clash of moed and aveilut on Tishah b'Av is no paradox. In fact, quite the opposite is true. By observing the moed characteristics of Tishah b'Av, we are demonstrating the reason why we continue to mourn and why we can't accept consolation: we can't be consoled precisely because we haven't given up hope! We have refused to be consoled for nearly two thousand years because we have not given up hope. We know that Hashem will redeem us.

Now we can fully appreciate the statement: "Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit to see its rejoicing, and all who do not mourn for Jerusalem will not see its rejoicing." Why does a person who mourns deserve to be redeemed? Because the fact that he continues to mourn is a demonstration of his conviction in the redemption! Conversely, one who does not mourn demonstrates the fact that he has "gotten over it," by not mourning he is demonstrating that he has given up hope of redemption. Since he has demonstrated a lack of faith in the redemption and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, he does not merit to see its rejoicing. ■

[1] Masechet Ta'anit 30b

[2] Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides), Mishah Torah: Hilchot Aveilut 13:10

[3] Sefer Yirmiyahu 22:10

[4] Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides), Mishah Torah: Hilchot Aveilut 13:11

[5] At this point, Rabbi Fox made it clear that he was not in any way denigrating the aveilut on Tishah b'Av. He said that all of the mourning practices on Tishah b'Av make perfect sense, and that he is merely questioning the fact that the aveilut of Tishah b'Av deviates from normative halachic guidelines.

[6] Rabbeinu Shlomo ben Yitzchak, Commentary on

Sefer Bereisheet 37:34

[7] Sefer Bereisheet 37:34-35

[8] Cited by Rabbeinu Shlomo ben Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer Bereisheet 37:34 from Bereisheet Rabbah 84:21; see also Masechet Pesachim 54b

[9] Rabbi Fox explained that although the term "decree" sometimes refers to miracles, that simply cannot be the case here. If this were a miraculous phenomenon, then Ya'akov should have known that Yosef wasn't dead from the fact that he was still sad after a year had passed. Furthermore, if this phenomenon were miraculous, we wouldn't have to worry about agunot (an agunah is a woman whose husband is believed to have died, but his death is not confirmed. She cannot remarry until it is established for a fact that her husband is dead). All you would have to do is ask the agunah, "Are you still sad?" and if she answered negatively, you could just say, "Yup! He's dead!" Obviously, if this phenomenon were miraculous, we wouldn't need the entire halachic process of establishing the death of the husband and we would never have to worry about agunah problems. Thus, the Midrash must be referring to a psychological phenomenon.

[10] Rav Yosef Kairo, Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim 559:14

[11] Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides), Mishah Torah: Hilchot Ta'anit 5:19

[12] Rav Yechezkel Michel Epstein, Aruch haShulchan: Orach Chaim 559

Save a Life

If you or anyone you know would consider being tested as a potential donor, call Columbia Presbyterian Hospital at 212-305-6469 and ask for Joan Kelly. You can also reach her at kellyja@nyp.org. The test is simple and free. If you do not hear back soon, call me. Often they are very busy, and don't get back to people as quickly as we would like. You can also email me: zimmer6@aol.com.

Compatible donors should be between 18 and 65, in good health and have Type B or O blood. If you have high blood pressure, a blood disease or diabetes, you cannot donate. The donor's surgery is now very simple and laparoscopic. The donor is hospitalized for 2-3 days, with only a small "bikini line" incision. Most donors are back to work within a week with no dietary or lifestyle restrictions. There is no cost to the donor. You can live a long, healthy life with just one kidney! In fact, many people are born with just one.

My husband, Stuart Zimmer, is dying from kidney failure. We have three children: ages 4, 2 and 5 months. Stuart is suffering on dialysis and his doctors are unable to control his blood pressure, which is high enough to cause a stroke or worse. He is only 35 and otherwise fit & healthy. He desperately needs a kidney transplant to stay alive. So far, 30 friends, family and total strangers have been tested, but none were compatible. Since he had a previous surgery and blood transfusions, he is highly sensitized and difficult to match.

Now, I am taking my appeal across the U.S. in hopes of getting a match for Stuart. I pray someone will read this and understand. Every day, 12 people die waiting for a donor. I don't want my precious husband to become a statistic.

Please share this with friends, family and colleagues. With the right transplant, Stuart will have many more years to enjoy our babies and lead a full, productive life. In the meantime, please pray for everyone awaiting vital organs to live.



**Thank you with all my heart for reading.
Please contact me with any questions.**

God bless you, Jennifer Zimmer

H (201) 825-9388

C (201) 388-6289

zimmer6@aol.com

While reciting the daily prayer of "Heal Us" (Rifa-aynu) please insert a request for Stuart Zimmer to locate a donor and have a speedy recovery.

-Mesora

(Devarim continued from page 1)

Moshe clarifies the commandments and reveals additional details.

Rashi comments that Moshe explained the Torah to Bnai Yisrael in seventy languages.[1] According to Rashi, this was part of the process of clarifying the Torah. This raises an interesting question. How does translation into various languages clarify the Torah?

This problem has an important parallel in halacha. In order to understand this parallel, we need an introduction. The Torah is divided into parshiyot – sections. Generally, one portion is read in synagogue each Shabbat. On some weeks two parshiyot are read. In the course of a single year the entire Torah is read. The Talmud explains, in Tractate Berachot, that reading the weekly portion is not featured merely in the Shabbat synagogue service. We are also individually obligated to study the portion read on Shabbat. The Talmud further explains that this personal study of the parasha has a specific structure. We are required to read the entire parasha twice. We are also required to read the targum once.[2] What is targum? Targum means translation. The term is understood as a reference to the Aramaic translation composed by the Sage Unkelous.[3] This translation is included in many editions of the Torah.

The Tosefot record a dispute regarding this requirement of studying targum. They explain that there are two opinions regarding the requirement of targum. According to the first opinion, targum can be replaced by any translation understood by the student. An English-speaking person can substitute an English translation for targum. The second opinion disagrees. This opinion insists on the student's study of Unkelous' targum. The second opinion explains that targum is more than a mere translation. Although written in the form of a translation, Unkelous' work offers invaluable insights into the meaning of various passages. This scholarly work cannot be replaced by a translation.

This does seem to be a valid criticism of the first opinion. The Talmud requires targum. Targum is more than a translation. How can targum be replaced with a translation? The Tosefot do not provide much information regarding this issue. They make one brief comment. They explain that every translation elucidates.[4] The question is obvious. How does a translation elucidate? This problem parallels our question

Let us begin by understanding the requirement of reviewing the weekly parasha. Why is targum needed? Why is it not sufficient to read the parasha without targum. It is clear that the law requires that the parasha be read and interpreted. This requirement creates a problem. The activity of interpretation is open-ended. The entire Oral Law can be viewed as an interpretation of the Torah! What level of interpretation is required to fulfill the

obligation of reviewing the weekly portion? The Talmud is establishing this minimum level. Targum represents the minimum. Reading the parasha and studying the targum fulfill the obligation of studying the parasha.

We can now understand the dispute in Tosefot. How does targum fulfill the requirement of interpreting the parasha? There are two possibilities. This is because targum has two aspects. Targum is a brief commentary – based upon the Oral Torah – written in the form of a translation. It is a translation and a commentary. The second opinion in Tosefot is that the essential characteristic of targum is that it provides insight from the Oral Torah. It is written in the form of a translation. However, study of a mere translation does not fulfill the requirement of reviewing the parasha. A commentary providing insight from the Oral Torah is essential. Targum satisfies this requirement. Another translation might not.

The first opinion in Tosefot maintains that the essential feature of targum is translation. The very process of translation provides insight into the parasha. Why is this? There are two reasons. First, some phrases in the Torah are unclear or ambiguous. The process of translation clarifies these phrases. It is impossible to translate the Torah without dealing with and elucidating these difficult passages. Second, no two languages are completely parallel. Every language has a unique vocabulary. In translating a phrase, the scholar must choose the word or phrase that best reflects the meaning and sense of the original. In making this choice the translator inevitably provides insight into the meaning and implications of the original text. According to the first opinion in the Tosefot, the interpretation, implicit in a translation, is sufficient to fulfill the obligation of studying the weekly portion.

We can now answer our original question. Moshe translated the Torah into seventy languages. This was part of his explanation of the Torah. How did these seventy translations elucidate the meaning of the Torah?

As we have explained, translation inevitably interprets. In each translation, Moshe used the unique vocabulary of the language to describe the meaning and intention of the pesukim. Each language added color to the entire picture of the passage's meaning. Through this process, Moshe was able to accurately define the simple meaning of the phrases.



“And they took in their hands samples of the fruits of the land and they brought them down to us. And they brought us back a report. And they said, “The land that Hashem our G-d gives to us is good.” (Devarim 1:25)

Moshe recounts the incident of the spies. This incident is described in greater detail in Sefer BeMidbar. In the account in Sefer BeMidbar, Moshe sends spies to scout the land of Israel. They return and report that the land is rich and fertile. However, they add that the land is heavily fortified and occupied by mighty nations. One of the spies – Kalev – argues that they can conquer the land. Hashem's Providence will assure success. The other spies respond. Now, they claim that the land is not wholesome. It is a land that consumes its inhabitants. After hearing these reports, the nation does not want to proceed. There is a movement to appoint a new leader and return to Egypt. Another of the spies – Yehoshua, joins Kalev. Together, they reiterate that the land is fertile and rich. They argue that if Hashem is with Bnai Yisrael, they will conquer the land. The people should not rebel. In the end, the appeals of Kalev and Yehoshua do not have any effect.

Moshe's account in his rebuke of these events is abridged. This is appropriate and understandable. He is speaking to people that are familiar with the incident. There is no need to review all the details. However, oddly, Moshe's account seems to differ significantly from the description in Sefer BeMidbar. These differences do require an explanation.

Let us consider one of these differences. In his recounting the events, Moshe describes the report of the spies. In Moshe's account, they merely say the land is good. This does not correspond with the description of their report in Sefer BeMidbar. There, they begin by acknowledging the fertility and richness of the land. However, they add that it cannot be conquered. Furthermore, they later change their assessment of the land. They claim that the land consumes its occupants. Why does Moshe not mention these elements of the spies' report?

Rashi explains that Moshe is not describing the

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majority report of the spies. He is describing the report of Kalev and Yehoshua. What is Moshe's message? Moshe's apparent point is that the spies came back and said that the land was good – rich and fertile. Nonetheless, the nation disregarded this report and decided not to go in![5]

Nachmanides objects to this explanation. If this is Moshe's criticism of the nation, it is very weak! Of course, Bnai Yisrael was unmoved by the minority report! Ten spies condemned the land. Only two praised it! The sensible response was for the nation to discount the minority perspective.

Nachmanides responds on Rashi's behalf to his own objection. He explains that there was a reason for the people to embrace the report of Kalev and Yehoshua and reject the report of the other spies. Hashem already described the land of Israel to the nation. He assured Bnai Yisrael that the land flowed with milk and honey. The spies provide conflicting reports. Who should Bnai Yisrael have found to be credible? Nachmanides explains that they should have listened to Kalev and Yehoshua. Their report was consistent with Hashem's assurances. The other spies provided a very different description of the land. But their account should have been attributed to their admitted fear and awe of the nation occupying the land. In short, the goodness of the land was confirmed. Yet, Bnai Yisrael refused to enter out of fear.

What is Moshe's point? He is admonishing the nation to not scapegoat spies for the tragedy of the nation. The spies were wrong and committed a grave sin. However, their sin does not explain or excuse the transgression of Bnai Yisrael. Why are the spies not responsible for the nation's sin? The spies did not say anything that should have misled the nation. The people should have believed the report of Kalev and Yehoshua. They should have attributed the report of the other spies to their fear.

Nachmanides takes this approach one further step. Moshe says that the spies reported that the land was wholesome. Nachmanides proposes that Moshe is referring to the report of all the spies. All of the spies originally endorsed the perfection of the land. True, later the majority changed their appraisal. But this new appraisal was a transparent fabrication. Moshe's message is that the nation had every indication that the land was wholesome. They did not refuse to enter the land because this issue was actually in doubt. Instead, they lacked the courage to conquer the land. Nothing the spies said excuses the actions of the nation. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 1:5.

[2] Mesechet Berachot 8a.

[3] Tosefot, Mesechet Berachot 8a.

[4] Tosefot, Mesechet Berachot 8a.

[5] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 1:25.



Our first step is to note that the Talmudic statement does in fact tie the sin of the spies and the Jews' cry, to both Temples' destructions, "You cried an unwarranted cry, (therefore) I will establish for you a cry throughout the generations." The Rabbis teach there is a direct relationship. We must analyze the sin of the Jews' cry.

Why did they cry at the spies' report? They did so out of a fear of destruction. This fear was caused by their overestimation of their enemy's strength. But the Jews failed to include one more essential element into their military equation: G-d's promise. The Jews' cry was baseless, as they were already guaranteed victory, despite the strength of their opponent! G-d's word should have outweighed any other consideration, and should have been all they heeded. As we read at Mincha (afternoon prayers) of fast days, "As the heavens are higher from the land, so also is My way higher than yours, and My thoughts from your thoughts."(Isaiah, 55:9)

Digging deeper, we discover that "tragedy" is directly proportional to one's sense of the good. If 'A' is greater in importance than 'B', the loss of 'A' is a greater tragedy, than the loss of 'B'. In other words, G-d was saying that with your cry, you display you value system - and your system does not include Me. This must be corrected. A life where G-d is not part of our daily considerations is not the life G-d planned for man. He did not give us intelligence to gather riches, create fame, or overindulge in pleasures. The gift of intelligence has but one aim: knowledge of the

Creator. What is G-d's remedial action? The destruction of both Temples, on the same date. How does this address the problem?

What is "Temple"? Without understanding its purpose, we cannot mourn its loss. According to Sforno, the Temple was given as a response to the Golden Calf, with which the Jews displayed a distorted approach to G-d. With the Golden Calf, man displayed his inability to approach G-d bereft of religious practice. They did not feel the Calf was G-d, rather, a means to reach Him. Their corruption required a fix. "Temple" was the answer: it came to realign man's approach to G-d, to conform with real and true ideas, not man's imagined, idolatrous emotions - displayed via the Calf. However, when man is left to his own devices, he creates Golden Calves and idolatry. Man's religious expressions require guidance, and Temple's strict and meticulous system of laws, satisfies this need. Additionally, the Temple's presence indicates G-d's continual acceptance of our worship, and thus, His providence over the nation. Conversely, its destruction indicates G-d's absence.

The Jews cried over their imagined defeat, had they attempted combat against Canaan's inhabitants. They discounted G-d's guarantee of success. In response, G-d destroyed the Temples to correct a few errors: their destructions indicated that His absence is what the Jews should view as a true loss. G-d is the most essential factor for one's happiness. During the epoch of the spies, the Jews did not view G-d's promise as a reality, as much as their own prowess. Therefore, G-d used Temple

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- His 'presence' - as an indicator that herein lays the greatest factor in our lives.

But how would the Jews accept that this destruction is G-d's will? Primarily by the element of duplicate dates. Both Temples fell on the ninth of Av. This cannot be coincidence. G-d must have executed this judgment. Not only that, but this devastation recalled the spies' crime committed on this date - the Jews reliance on "self", and omission of G-d from their view of reality. All three tragedies falling on the same date teaches G-d's hand is evident - it is Divine Punishment.

It is true, that latter crimes of immorality, idolatry, and baseless hatred demanded their own, exclusive punishment, without the sin of the spies. But perhaps the exact punishment of the Temples' destruction, and on duplicate dates, would not have been the selected measure, had the spies never sinned. The Talmud's exact words "I will 'establish' crying throughout the generations", might be understood as G-d duplicating a date alone to link the spies' sin with latter evils, not the 'nature' of the punishments. The spies determined the date, while the punishment was determined by latter generations. However, the Marshah disagrees with this theory, stating that based on the spies' and the Jews' cry alone, was the date fixed, and the Temples were marked for destruction.

Even subsequent to the 40-year term in the desert, this corruption in the Jews was not yet removed. Certainly the original offenders have passed on. The Temples' destructions can only address latter generations. We are forced to conclude that remnants of the original sin are still cleaved to by their descendants - by us today. Even during the times of the Talmud, the Talmud says that latter generations lacked faith in G-d's ability to provide, so they worked most of the day, and learned little, instead of the Torah's prescription for the exact opposite. Man still limits his equations to natural law, disbelieving that which does not compute based on cause and effect. But Chanina ben Dosa displayed the correct philosophy. His daily activities included the possibility of G-d's assistance. He did not rely on miracles, which we must not do. But he also did not rely on his own knowledge as the sole determinant of how a successful life is achieved. He knew of G-d's unlimited abilities, and His wish for man to learn, above all else. Chanina ben Dosa's learning taught Him his belief in G-d, and this was not an abstract belief, but one by which he lived each day.

G-d wills the best life for man. If man has shortcomings, it is addressed by G-d's mercy. Our shortcomings today begin with a lack of Torah study, which can teach us the proper way the world operates, what to value, and how to achieve true happiness. It is outright foolishness for man to continue in the sin of the spies, to abandon the one

invaluable tool - Torah knowledge - that can open doors which as of yet, remain closed to many, and prevent man from working within G-d's reality instead of fighting it, all for temporal wealth, fame, or lust.

To mourn for the Temples' losses properly, we must first realize the loss we all suffer from an incomplete Torah system, one if sustained today, would offer us the most rewarding and enlightening existence with G-d's providence, unparalleled by anything else you can imagine. "All desirous things do not compare to her (Torah)". (Proverbs, 8:11)

"Return to Me, and I will return to you." We must take the first step. ▣

*Taken from "Getting It Straight"
Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity*

Belief

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"So what do you believe about God?" I asked.

The momentary din of the ferry horn drowned out our discussion for a few seconds. The King of Rational Thought and I were taking a late afternoon round-trip ferry from Mukilteo just for the fun of it. With the warm July sun comfortably set at slow roast, we were walking and talking on the upper deck.

"Why is that important to you?" he replied.

I wasn't sure quite how to answer. "Well, uh, because I'm interested," I said hesitantly.

"The truth is, I have no belief about God," he said.

"What?" I couldn't believe my ears.

He smiled. "I suspect you're jumping to conclusions too fast," he said. "Tell me. What is a belief?"

"A belief? Well, it's, uh, something that you believe," I said, struggling to come up with a good definition. "It's having faith. It's believing something when there's no evidence."

"I see," he said. "So you think there's no evidence for God?"

"I didn't say that," I replied, backpedaling quickly. "There's lots of evidence. I mean, all you have to do is look around."

"At what?" he said.

"Well, at the trees, the stars, the sea, everything around us. It couldn't possibly have happened by accident."

"So you've done a scientific analysis to prove that?" he asked.

"No, but I know it's true. I believe it."

He smiled again. "Let me offer another definition of belief," he said. "Belief is a conviction you have concerning something about which you are ignorant."

He paused to let that sink in. Then he went on.

"Think about it," he said. "People only have 'belief' about something that they don't know about. Otherwise, they wouldn't need belief about it. Have you ever heard someone ask, 'Do you believe in gravity?' Of course not. A question like that is absurd. Why? Because you know gravity as a fact. Just like you don't have a 'belief' about electricity."

"Belief, in and of itself," he continued, "proves nothing. No offense, but your saying that you believe in God, as if your belief makes it true, is no more valid than a small child saying he believes in the tooth fairy. Lots of people 'believe' things. That doesn't make them true."

"So you don't believe there is a God?" I just couldn't let that point go.

"You misunderstood me," he said. "I said I have no belief in God. What I mean is that I don't have a belief that is based on ignorance. I have studied that issue thoroughly, answered all the questions, and have proven to myself that God does exist. It is possible to prove that. Once the idea is clear to your mind and all the questions have been answered, 'belief,' as I defined it, ceases. The truth is, I know God exists. Not because of some emotional experience, but because I proved it rationally to myself in the same way that you prove a mathematical formula to be true."

The boat docked and we headed up the ramp. My mind spun like a fishing reel out of control. I believed lots of things that I didn't know how to prove. So where did that leave me?

"Don't let this bother you," he said, reading my mind. "You won't change your whole approach to life overnight. Just think about the ideas. And the next time someone tells you that something in the religious realm is too complicated to understand, or that you need to just 'have faith,' remember something. God didn't give you a brilliant mind capable of abstract thinking just so you could trash it when it came to religious matters and believe things you would otherwise consider nonsense. Ask questions, ask questions, and keep asking questions. Don't accept an idea unless you've answered every question and the idea is completely clear to your mind."

I heard what he said, although my mind was already somewhere else. I was thinking about all the things I had been told all my life that I should believe and not question. I was thinking about all of the party lines I'd been told to swallow, even when I knew they didn't make sense.

I was thinking that I was going to be making some changes in my life. ▣

OUT OF THIN AIR?

Reader: As I was reading the Chumash yesterday I came across a section on building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) that generated some interesting thoughts: Where did all the fancy fabrics come from? They included tremendous yardage, and if they wove the fabric, where did they get the raw materials, from the sheep? They required fancy woods - this they had to bring with them for sure. What about the contributions? These are certainly not found the middle of the desert. Therefore logic dictates that they brought it out of Egypt with them. If that is a correct assumption, then the following question is: The Jews did not have time to let the bread rise (which only takes a couple of hours) but they did have time to gather all the enormous amount of materials and tools to build a Mishkan?!...which they did not even know they were going to build? And why would they even think of bringing what on the surface seems to be a huge unnecessary extra load...instead of essential food? I can't make any logical sense of that.

Similarly; Regarding the Golden calf, it seems that in a few hours, and without any prior planning, they completely built a mold (out of stone or sand I suppose), collected the gold, melted it and completely finished the statue. That is really quick...quicker than in modern times.

I am lost here...it seems the Jews were pretty talented and knowledgeable in many, many areas (metal forging, yarn spinning, woodworking) even though in Egypt, they were but simple slaves. Where did all the technical and specialized knowledge come from? Thanks, G.M.

Mesora: Ever think of starting a website for Torah questions? I enjoyed these!

Regarding the wool, yes, it came from their sheep, and they had many. The Jews were known as shepherds. They had sheep in Egypt. We know this too from the Torah's depiction of the fifth Egyptian Plague of Animals: none of the Jews' animals died. (Exod. 9:4) Thus, they had flocks and herds.

The wood is a good question, but Rashi addressed this (Exod. 25:5, citing Rabbi Tanchumah). Rashi states that Jacob had prophetic knowledge of the Jews' need for the Tabernacle's building materials. He therefore brought cedars to Egypt and planted them there, commanding the Jews to take them upon their Exodus. And although the Jews may not have known about the Tabernacle and their need for wood while slaves, they heeded the commands originated by Jacob years earlier.

The contributions could be of their own objects, or of that which Moses commanded the Jews to request from the Egyptians before their leave, "And you will request, a woman from her (Egyptian) neighbor, vessels of silver and vessels of gold, and

clothing..."(Exod. 3:22) The Jews despoiled Egypt upon their leave, as it is recorded when they actually left (Exod. 12:35). I once heard this despoiling was to assist in rebuilding the Jew's self-esteem. Having been slaves for so long, Moses addressed their need to reaffirm their dignity and wealth, and the precious metal objects and clothing of their oppressors addressed this need. We also learn from Rashi on Exodus 12:35 that the Jews valued the clothing more than the gold and silver. This attests to their state of needing to bolster their dignity: Moses was correct, their wish to emulate those who oppressed them, those who were superior, was a needed step up from slavery. Donning themselves in beautiful Egyptian clothing allowed the Jews to express dignity..

Now, the timing issue: The command of collection of all these Egyptian garments and precious objects of gold and silver was given to the Jews with plenty of time before their Exodus. So too, they had plenty of time to gather the necessary wood. However, these events were not during the hurried aftermath of their Egyptian, Passover Seder which concluded that night with their unannounced oust. Not knowing when they were to leave, they did not make ready any provisions. Therefore, they could only grab their dough with such limited time.

So there were two events: 1) the collection of Egyptian goods and the cedar wood, and 2) the Passover Exodus. The prior was not a rushed scene - the latter was...so all they grabbed was their food.

You finally asked about the Golden Calf, how it was made so fast. Well, we do not know how large this calf was, or if it was an entire form of the animal, just a head, or if it was a flat image like a painting. But if it was relatively small, making it from pure gold is not so difficult, as it is very pliable. No casts or molds need to be made. A few hours of banging the gold softened further by the fire is ample time to make some likeness of a calf, if not even a good likeness. So hi-technology wasn't present, nor was it needed.

The arts, which we do see were required, are those indispensable in creating the Tabernacle's vessels, the woven draped coverings, the Ark, the Menora, and other objects. For this, we are taught distinctly (Exod. 21:3), "And I (G-d) filled him (Betzalel) with a spirit of G-d, in wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and in all work." Betzalel's ingenuity addressed what you properly asked, "where did slaves get so knowledgeable about these fine arts?" The answer is Betzalel.

From all of your good questions we (myself included) learn how essential it is to continue our Torah learning, to consult the Rabbis and commentaries like Rashi, and to never end our questioning! I look forward to your next installment. ■

ATTACKING VS QUESTIONING

Dear Jewish Times,

In your article, "Plural Positions," you defended your adherence to the concept of one, absolute truth. You explained that we must fit into the Torah, not fit the Torah into our predefined philosophy. You explained that you would only teach opinions that you agree with.

You did not respond to two points that I would like to address.

The writer said:

"[You] presume yourself as the sole source on what is considered "correct" and "truth," whether it be in areas of Philosophy or Halacha. To presume either is quite laughable even for the greatest talmid chacham, which I'm sorry to say from reading through your website, you do not seem to be."

The language "I'm sorry to say that you do not seem to be a talmid chacham" came across as a personal attack. I would have liked to see an example cited of an area of philosophy or halacha, with proof that it is clearly false. This would have backed up the accusation more specifically.

The writer said:

"You should also get an education... many of your claims are clearly stated from a lack of one."

Once again, this is a personal attack unaccompanied by specific data. I have seen many examples of questions sent in by readers with the following format: "You claim X. This gemara/midrash/practice, etc. contradicts that.

How do you explain that?" This gives Mesora the opportunity to defend its position. The writer of this letter must address all of the points he disagrees with by bringing clear sources that contradict what Mesora says, and then receive unsatisfactory explanations, in order to justify this complaint. His current contentions are vague. He criticized Mesora personally instead of attacking the halacha or philosophy with sources.

-Jessie Fischbein



EDWARD I. KOCH

WHY BUSH MUST WIN

I support the reelection of President George W. Bush. Why? Because I believe one issue overwhelms all others: the President's strong commitment to fight the forces of international terrorism regardless of the cost or how long it takes to achieve victory.

I do not agree with President Bush on a single major domestic issue, but in my view, those issues pale in comparison with the threat of international terrorism. Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the evil poster boys of mass murder, are revered and supported by millions of Muslims throughout the world. The stated goal of al-Qaeda and its supporters is to kill or convert every infidel, and that means Jews, Christians, Buddhists, and everyone else who will not accept Islam's supremacy.

These terrorists are convinced that non-Islamic nations do not have the will and courage to persevere in this ongoing struggle, which could last decades. They believe the democracies are weak-willed and will ultimately yield to whatever demands are made upon them. By withdrawing their troops from Iraq in response to terrorist attacks, Spain and the Philippines have already shown that, tragically, terror tactics, including suicide attacks, car bombings and the beheading of innocent civilians, do work. They also intend to destroy moderate Muslim governments that want to live in peace with countries that are not Islamic. Shortly after 9/11, President Bush announced his commitment to the struggle against Islamic fanatics who believe they can destroy the values of western civilization and democratic governments everywhere. On entering this war against terrorism after 9/11, President Bush said, "We shall go after the terrorists and the countries that harbor them." This Bush Doctrine rivals in importance the Monroe Doctrine, which limited the colonization efforts of foreign powers in the western hemisphere, and the Truman Doctrine, which contained the spread of Communism. President Bush has proven that he is prepared to keep to his commitment to fight terrorism.

If John Kerry were to win this presidential election, would he stand up to terrorism to the same extent as George Bush? I don't think so. Regrettably, my party, the Democratic party, now has a strong radical left wing whose members often dominate the party primaries. Those same left-wing radicals have an anti-Israel philosophy, reviling that democratic state which shares the values held by a majority of Americans.

Kerry is a patriotic American who performed heroically in the Vietnam War. Regrettably, he surrendered his philosophical independence to the left wing in the recent primaries in order to prevail over the original darling of the radicals, Howard Dean. Kerry owes his nomination in large part to the supporters of Dean and the support of Senator Ted Kennedy. Kennedy sadly demonstrated his loss of any sense of decency with his crude attacks on President Bush using unacceptable, abusive language. The hatred deliberately stirred by Kennedy directed at President Bush is contemptible and dangerous. It encourages our terrorist enemies with whom we are at war, and it incites the crazies in our own country.

On July 9th, a Kerry/Edwards fundraising concert was held at Radio City Music Hall. During that concert Hollywood comedienne Whoopi Goldberg engaged in unprintable, despicable, sexual references to the President and the Vice President. She combined the President's family name with allusions to the female anatomy, and she made a sexual reference to Vice President Dick Cheney's first name by referring to the male anatomy. Even worse was Kerry's thank you from the stage to all of the performers saying that they conveyed "the heart and soul of our country." Shameful.

Now a comment about the war in Iraq. Most Americans understand that few, if any, wars go smoothly. Just cast your mind back to the American Revolutionary War, during which New York City was occupied by enemy forces for seven years, or the American Civil War, in which Confederate armies won victory after victory on the battlefield, or even World War II, in which the Nazi menace was defeated at an enormous cost in human lives. Should we have gone to war with Iraq? I believe the answer is yes.

During a daily briefing after 9/11, then CIA Director George Tenet told the President that Iraq had the ability to wage chemical and biological war on the U.S. He referred to Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction as a "slam dunk." Had the President not engaged in the preemptive war against Saddam, and if this madman had subsequently released biological agents in the U.S. or poison gas, which he had already used against the Kurds and Iran, does anyone doubt that the President would have been impeached? The security agencies of nearly every democratic nation provided to their President or Prime Minister the same description of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability. The U.S. Congress had the same information and concurred with the President's decision. The U.N. Security Council unanimously concurred, passing Resolution 1441. But it was President Bush who had the courage to take up arms in defense of the U.S. and our allies. That is what leadership is all about.

A poll released by the Washington Post on July 14, 2004, showed that "55 percent of Americans approve of the way Bush is handling the campaign against terrorism," and "51 percent also said they trust Bush more than Kerry to deal with terrorism, while 42 percent prefer the Democrat."

We also should not forget that President Bush, in my opinion, has been the greatest friend Israel has ever had in the White House. At the U.N. Security Council and in the U.N. General Assembly, allies of the U.S. and others who are indifferent or hostile to our country have conveyed the view that if we end our alliance with Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, they would welcome back the U.S. into their circle. President Bush has refused to abandon our ally Israel. In my opinion, the U.S. presidents who have been Israel's greatest friends are, in order, the current President Bush, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. This November, we Americans in the Jewish community should remember our friends. We should thank President Bush for his courage in the war against terrorism and for his strong and consistent support for Israel and democracy. ■

To Fast and Mourn on the Ninth of Av

RIVKA OLENICK

We are now in the period of the nine days, which throughout generations remains as a significant mourning period. The purpose of the observance of this time has not changed. With this in mind our motivation to mourn the tragedies of our own people should be greater. Hopefully, the desire and willingness to reflect on our own misdeeds will be stronger.

Our First Temple was burnt down by Nebuzaradon and his legions, and again our Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans headed by Titus. These periods marked our history as the fall of Jerusalem and the fall of Zion. What caused this? We learn that the sins of Israel that caused the First Temple's destruction were brought about by idolatry, murder and immorality. These three sins, against God, against one's self and one's neighbor were predominant at that time. The second Temple's demise was due to baseless hatred of others, which also causes a person to sin against, God, the self and others. I believe there is no difference. If God is not predominant in one's mind and life then every sin is possible as one sin leads to another sin. We were greatly influenced by other nations and idolatry permeated our lives. Our evil, corrupt ways made us turn against our brethren and our hatred toward each other stemmed from a preoccupation and worship of the self. Murder and immorality are a natural result of this self worship, our punishment was justified and we were forced into exile.

Today we still suffer in our dispersion, even though we deny it. We're despised and still hated by other nations. Although we've survived, we still haven't learned our lesson and still allow the false ideas of society to rule our lives. To cling to God and to the Torah as our real source of strength is what we haven't learned to do. We haven't learned to treat Torah as our most precious possession. As the world around us continues in endless self-pursuit and deification, power and riches, we have to pull ourselves out of this trap and cling to God. Our corrupt culture fosters endless possessions and pleasure as an end in itself, which is not the barometer for peace of mind and happiness in life. Morality and righteousness can't exist without God. The philosophy and worship of an "anything goes" mentality has seeped into Judaism. We've become lazy, we don't question this philosophy and we give in rather than think about how it has

tainted our lives.

When will we realize that only the will of God rules every aspect of life and we must turn to our Torah for insight and truth?

This is the greatest investment we can make in life, to search for truth and uphold kindness. We can once again become a great and holy people who govern the world. This is what being in exile should make us think about. Through the punishment of our Temples destruction and our being forced into exile we should realize what we are supposed to be. Our mission is to sanctify God's name throughout the world, while we show and declare our true purpose in life. Our love for one another should grow because we are one family and share a covenant and a purpose as the teachers of truth.

So we mourn not only the actual loss of the Temple, but more importantly that we strayed so far away from our true purpose. Today while we do have the land of Israel we are still so far removed from God's truth and Israel's actual intended purpose. There is no Temple, which is the center of divine service where the life of the Jewish people is firmly established. This is the one place designated to us in order to destroy idolatry but we disobeyed. "We denied the Lord and said He is not, you served idols", "burnt incense unto Baal, and walked after other gods whom ye know not." Jeremiah, Verse 12. The Rambam says: "only one Temple has been appointed" by God to stand in Israel, "in the place that the Lord shall choose" Deuteronomy 12:26. We have no King, no Sanhedrin or established government of Jewish law in the land. All of this is what is truly sad. Other nations still rule us and other disgraceful and corrupt ideologies still plague the land of Israel today. The spirit of Zion is based on our unity, communal life and love for one another as a Klal and is how we are to live in our own land. We think that life is good outside and inside the land but we fool ourselves by



thinking this, our status as a nation remains exiled. As a nation in exile or not, our lives should revolve around the sanctification of God's name in the world. When God redeemed us, He took us to Him as a nation and we declared ourselves as a people filled with the love of God and the wisdom of Torah. That is what God created us to be and is "what" our true purpose is.

When we fast next Thursday on the Ninth of Av, it should be taken very seriously. It is not a day to just abstain from food and self-gratification. It is a day of fasting together with mourning that should bring us to a realization of what the source of sin really is, the continuous search for pleasure. With this understanding, hopefully each of us will become more aware of our endless self-indulgent nature. As much as want to deny it we should force ourselves to recognize how big our ego really is and to further recognize our preoccupation to always want to satisfy it. As we realize the pathetic state we are in we can use this day as another opportunity to draw closer to God individually and as a Klal through repentance. This day is a means to return to and embrace what God has defined for us as our real purpose in life. Every day is a day for repentance according to the Rambam. To repent as a Klal is an additional gift.

We should truly mourn on the Ninth of Av, and weep pitifully for ourselves. We are lost and so far away from God's truth even though we were chosen and we were told: "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people" Leviticus 26:12. ■

“Consoling” G-d?

"Dear JewishPress,

Rabbi Abraham Stone opened his article in last week's issue (JewishPress, July 16, 2004, "Expounding the Torah") with an unqualified position that "Menachem Av" ("consoling Av") may be defined as man's "consoling of G-d". He interprets the word "Av" to mean our "Father" in Heaven. Nothing could be further from the truth. As Maimonides and all of our Rabbis and Sages held, G-d has no needs - and not from man either. This basic, Judaic principle that G-d is self-sufficient, is one that Rabbi Stone has obscured from his readers, instead of enlightening them to our Yesodos - our Jewish fundamentals. G-d is the Creator - we are merely the "created". The Creator has no "needs", and not from those lumps of clay - mankind - which He created. Even more damaging to the reader is the insinuation that G-d requires consoling, as if He were a man, possessing the human frailty of emotion. The Torah portion of Balak read just a few weeks ago states, (Numbers 23:19) "G-d is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man the He should be consoled..."

If the Torah says a phrase such as "G-d was angered", this does not mean human emotion is within His abilities, far be it. It means to teach us of what G-d does not desire "for us". Conversely, when Noah's sacrifices found favor

in G-d's eyes, it means that Noah acted in accord with G-d's plan for man. But we never understand such phrases literally. Unkelos went out of his way to translate all such phrases in their proper light, and not literally. Maimonides discusses this.

Certainly, we do not suggest new phrases - unauthored by the Torah - as Rabbi Stone has done. We are destructive and misleading if we create such a phrase, which the Torah did not mention. The Rabbis coined a term, "If the Torah had not written it, it would be impossible to enunciate". Through this phrase, the Rabbis taught that we must hold our tongue from any deviation from the Torah's writings. Only that which G-d Himself instructed Moses to write, may we utter. This is the proper degree of humility and care that mortals must take when talking about G-d, about He, of Whom we have no positive knowledge. G-d told Moses, "for man cannot know Me while alive."

The most primary of all ideas, essential to the remainder of our knowledge absorbed during this short and precious life, is to recognize what G-d is, and what He is not. And G-d does not need consoling, He does not need anything, nor can this unfathomable Creator be spoken about as if we understand anything about Him. Certainly, to project human emotion upon Him is against the Torah's foundations."