

Although the month of Av possesses no "bad luck", God did select it to repeat punishments. This makes us realize that the Temple destructions were not by chance, but by His will. **And this in turn helps us repent.**

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## Weekly Parsha

# Devarim

RABBI BERNIE FOX

"And it was in the fortieth year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, Moshe spoke to Bnai Yisrael regarding all that Hashem had commanded him for them." (Devarim 1:3)

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## Tisha B'Av

# Self imposed wounds

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

These past few weeks, we read of the Prophets' rebuke of the Jews. Their words are divinely inspired, containing absolute truths, not worthy to turn from and imbibe once their recital commences on Shabbos, as many do. A drink on Shabbos is not wrong, in fact we are to partake of Oneg – physical pleasures. But we are not allowed to turn our ear from Torah. The Rabbis say that if one turns his ear from Torah – even to pray – his prayer is "torn up" before him. Torah study surpasses all. It is nothing less than tragic that one does not wish to hear the Prophets' words. So what did Jeremiah (chap. II) say two weeks ago?

*"So says God, 'What wrong have your forefathers found in Me that they distanced themselves from Me and pursued futility, and became futile? And they did not say, 'Where is God who took us out of Egypt, who led us through the dessert, in a dry land and pits, in a land of waste and a shadow of death, in a land through which no man passed and where no person settled?'"*

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(Devarim cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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Moshe delivered the address contained in Sefer Devarim at the end of his life. Moshe's address contained a rebuke. Rashi asks why Moshe waited to deliver this rebuke. Would it not have been more appropriate to have chastised the nation earlier? Why delay encouraging the Bnai Yisrael to examine their behavior?

Rashi responds that Moshe based his decision on the actions of Yaakov. Yaakov waited until the end of his life before reprimanding Reuven for serious shortcomings. Moshe decided that he too should patiently await the end of his life before chastising the nation.

Rashi discusses Yaakov's motivation for delaying his reprimand. He explained that Yaakov feared that Reuven might abandon him and follow Esav. In order not to estrange Reuven, he did not deliver his rebuke until his death approached. Moshe also feared that he might alienate the nation. Therefore, he followed Yaakov's precedent and delayed his discussion of the nation's shortcomings.[1]

A number of questions present themselves. Let us begin with Yaakov's decision. First, why did Yaakov believe that Reuven might not accept his rebuke? This is a very serious criticism of Reuven's character. What is its basis? Second, how did Yaakov resolve this concern? Why did he feel that he could be more effective at the end of his life? Third, the laws concerning rebuke are very specific. Maimonides discusses the basic requirements of the law. He explains that when we encounter a person acting improperly we are to challenge the individual. If the behavior continues, we are to persist in correcting the person. [2] It does not seem that the law encourages postponement of this obligation. On what basis did Yaakov and Moshe delay fulfillment of their obligation to correct wrong-doers?

It seems that we must distinguish between two types of rebuke. One type is addressed towards a specific behavior. We might tell a person that he or she has indulged in gossip. A person may correct a friend for talking during prayers. Dealing dishonestly in a business transaction may occasion a reprimand. In all of these instances, the rebuke is directed at a specific action.

A second form of rebuke extends beyond any specific action. In this type of rebuke the censure is directed at the person's personality or being. Specific acts might be identified. However, the objective is to identify a pattern of behavior. This pattern reflects a basic flaw in the very essence of the individual.

These two forms of criticism have different effects. This is a direct consequence of human nature. Every person has a self-image. We strive to see ourselves positively. Our reaction to criticism is influenced by this need to maintain a positive self-image.

The first form of rebuke is relatively benign. This is because it does not seriously threaten this self-image. It is directed against a specific action. We can accept this criticism without risking our overall view of ourselves. However, the second type of rebuke strikes directly against our self-image. We are being told that we have the flaw. We might become defensive and attempt to deny the flaw. If we are repeatedly challenged with the criticism, we may seek to flee. Flight sometimes seems preferable to admitting a basic fault.

Maimonides seems to discuss the first form of rebuke. It is relatively harmless. This is the form of reprimand that should be offered immediately and as often as necessary.

Yaakov was proffering the second form of rebuke. He carefully considered the best time to level his criticism. We can understand his fear. He intended to identify a basic flaw in Reuven. He knew that every individual is sensitive to such criticism.

Yaakov waited until the end of his life. How did this delay address his concerns? If Yaakov had offered his criticism earlier, he would force Reuven to choose between only two options. He could accept Yaakov's criticism. This would require a painful personal reassessment. Alternatively, he could choose to avoid this emotional anguish and flee. However, it would have been very difficult for Reuven to reject the truth of the rebuke and remain a member of the household. Every time he encountered his father, he would be reminded of Yaakov's assessment. Even if Yaakov never repeated his criticism, Reuven

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would know Yaakov's opinion. He would constantly be reminded of his father's disapproval. Flight would be the only way to avoid these reminders.

Yaakov waited. As the end of his life approached, he addressed his son. He hoped he would accept the criticism. But Yaakov also accepted the possibility that Reuven might reject his reprimand. By waiting until the approach of death, Yaakov provided Reuven an alternative to flight. He could simply deny the accuracy of the insight. Yaakov would soon die. Reuven could remain a member of the household. No one would remind Reuven of his shortcoming.

Moshe understood Yaakov's concerns and the wisdom of his solution. He applied Yaakov's insights to his own situation.

**"And I approved of the idea. And I selected from among you twelve men – one man from each tribe."** (Devarim 1:23)

Sefer Devarim begins with Moshe's final admonishment of Bnai Yisrael. He reminds the people of their sins in the wilderness and the consequences of these misdeeds. He reviews the incident of the spies.

This incident occurred in the beginning of Bnai Yisrael's sojourn in the wilderness. The nation was poised to enter the land of Israel. The people suggested sending spies to scout the land. Moshe asked Hashem. Hashem told Moshe to approve the suggestion. However, Hashem amended the original plan. He did not allow the people to choose the spies. He insisted that Moshe make the selection himself.

Why did Hashem insist that Moshe personally select the spies? Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra explains that Hashem knew that this task required uncommonly brave individuals. He wanted Moshe to choose spies who had the necessary courage.[3]

Seforno expands upon this explanation. Seforno explains that the report of these scouts would influence the attitude of the people. A positive report would generate enthusiasm. A negative report would discourage the people. The scouts must be individuals that will appreciate the fertility and wealth of the land. They must be capable of reporting accurately.

Moshe was commanded to choose individuals who had the ability to execute this duty.[4]

What was the impact of this selection criterion? The spies returned. They delivered a negative report. Bnai Yisrael was discouraged. They did not believe they could conquer the land. They refused to follow Moshe into the land of Israel.

It seems that Hashem's criterion did not affect the outcome of this affair. In fact, His insistence on choosing spies of courage and integrity may even have had a negative effect. These individuals were above reproach. Spies of lesser stature could have been more easily opposed. Moshe could have denounced lesser individuals and challenged their credibility. Why did Hashem insist upon a selection criterion that had no impact and seems to have contributed to a disaster?

Seforno explains Hashem's insistence on sending these suitable individuals did have a positive affect. In order to identify the impact, we must begin by identifying the components of the spies' report. There were three elements to the report. They described the land. They assessed the likelihood of its conquest. They evaluated the suitability of the land for occupation. Let us consider each element of their report.

The spies claimed that the land could not be conquered. It was occupied by mighty nations. The people lived in strongly fortified cities. They reported that the land was not fit for occupation. They said the land consumed its inhabitants. However, they acknowledged the overwhelming richness and fertility of the land. They even demonstrated this extraordinary fertility. They placed before the people beautiful fruit that they had brought back. In fact, they asserted that only very robust individuals could thrive in such a rich environment.[5] In other words, the spies reported the facts accurately. They praised the richness of the land. They misled the nation in their interpretation of their observations and their judgments.

Next, we must review the consequences of the nation's sin. The Almighty decreed that the generation that had refused to enter the land would wander in the wilderness. The conquest of the land would be postponed until this generation died. The next generation would enter and conquer the land of Israel.

Upon learning of their punishment, Bnai Yisrael confessed their sin. They attempted to repent. They marched into the land of Israel. However, this was not true repentance. Real repentance required accepting the Almighty's decree. Through advancing into the land, Bnai Yisrael was denying this decree. Hashem did not assist this attempt to defy His will. Bnai Yisrael were attacked by the inhabitants and beaten back.

Bnai Yisrael then repented again. This time the repentance was performed with a contrite attitude. The nation cried to Hashem and begged His forgiveness. This repentance was sincere.

We can now appreciate the positive affect of Hashem's criterion. What caused Bnai Yisrael to repent? Clearly, they were moved by Hashem's decree. They would not enter the land of Israel. However, this does not completely explain the people's new attitude. Why did they view this as a punishment? They had refused to enter the land!

Seforno explains that the report of the spies was crucial in reshaping Bnai Yisrael's attitude. The spies had truthfully reported that the land was rich and fertile. The lushness of the land of Israel was never debated. Now, this generation realized that the opportunity to possess this land had been within its grasp. They had squandered the opportunity. This realization made contrition possible. In other words, without the accurate report of the spies, repentance would have been more difficult.[6] Hashem insured that this report would be delivered through His selection criterion. In short, this criterion did not prevent the nation from sinning. However, it did facilitate Bnai Yisrael's repentance. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 1:3.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot De'ot 6:6-7.

[3] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:2.

[4] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 1:22.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:32.

[6] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 1:22.

A number of valuable lessons are revealed here. First, God teaches man what his reasoning ought to be. He must not ignore historical truth, and their lessons: God proved He could save man from slavery. He could sustain man where nothing could possibly live. Yet man chases after demons; useless fantasies that never prove real, and therefore cannot provide. They left God, without cause. God did no wrong.

When you think about this, these succinct and penetratingly undeniable truths...you wonder how man can reject a Torah life. Yet, many do. These words should be our response to those who do not live religiously. Put the question to them: "What is your reason for rejecting Torah? Do you deny God's Egyptian exodus? Do you also deny Caesar was Rome's emperor? Of course not, so accept ALL proven history...including those that even place a burden of mitzvah upon you. Do you deny God's miracles in the desert for forty years? Did God do anything but to help man? If so, why are you leaving a life where YOU can be helped? And what will you follow? All else is lies and futile.

Sometimes, to help someone, we must sacrifice our relationship with him or her, if it means a possibility to make them see the truth. We must not be selfish, and seek to retain a relationship by avoiding such a conversation. We see that God delivered these words to the Jews through the prophet. These words are the undeniable argument to bring an unaffiliated Jew back. Jeremiah continues:

***"The Kohanim did not say 'Where is God?'; those charged with teaching Torah did not know Me; the leaders rebelled against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and after that which does not help, they followed."***

The nation's leaders were the sinners. And those who followed them sinned two sins: 1) they sinned as did the leaders, and 2) they did not determine for themselves whether their leaders were acting properly. Today this phenomenon continues. A leader teaches, and the congregants or students follow blindly. The words of our great Rabbis who urge us to think for ourselves go unheeded. But God punished those leaders, and followers. He will do so again, as God's ways are just, and He does not change, "I am God I do not change". (Malachi, 3:6) If those called prophets and Kohanim can err back then, it can, and does happen today.

It is because people parrot others, and what they parrot is nonsensical, that many Jewish youths find no reason to remain observant. The lack of true philosophy taught in school, coupled with parents who do not exemplify a Torah lifestyle by studying at home, drives Jewish youths away from any interest in the great wisdom and fulfillment that only Torah study can offer. Many youths then pursue lifestyles of wealth and pleasure, to find that only its reputation was real, while the anticipated enjoyments were never found. Our prophets continue...

This week we read Isaiah I. God says He will reject sacrifice and prayer. He considers our Temple approach a "trampling of His courtyard", "vain offerings", "and abominable incense", our holidays are called "hateful and loathsome". What is our remedy? Isaiah answers: "Remove evil deeds, learn what is good, seek justice, vindicate the victim, render justice to the orphan, take up the grievance of the widow". Evidently, the Jews mitzvot were worthless. Why?

These Jews performed the commands as a panacea. They felt the acts of mitzvah alone are all God desires, while they distorted justice and the welfare of the lowly of our people for unjust gain. What did they think...God sees mitzvah but He can't see into human motivations?! Yes, this was their unchecked view. But God says He doesn't want the "trampling of His courtyard" as Jews rush to sacrifice and pray. That is all too selfish. God

desires that we enact His will of equality for all mankind. The widow. The orphan. The convert. The Noachide. The Jew. Mitzvot in themselves without understanding their perfection are not what God wants. The Shema says so: "And you shall love Hashem your God with ALL your heart, with ALL your soul, and with ALL your might". That doesn't sound like rote action, but a deep dedication, where one as a Rabbi Akiva gave his soul for Torah values.

As the prophets taught, Maimonides also teaches, that man's evils are of three types: 1) naturally generated, like floods; 2) aggressiveness towards each other; 3) self-inflicted. He says the last class comprises most of our troubles. Yet, man blames God. But Torah does not accept such falsely displaced blame:

***"Is destruction His? No. You [who call yourselves] wrongly His sons, you who are a perverse and crooked generation" (Deut. xxxii. 5). This is explained by Solomon, who says, "The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord" (Prov. xix. 3).***

What about Torah punishments? These too are our own doing.

The tragedies for Torah abandonment are gruesome. Mothers will eat their children due to enemies who starve us. Why so severe? Why will God place us in such a state? It is clear, as God says, "If despite these [punishments] you will consider My punishments simply nature, then I will walk with you with a fury of this natural [explanation] and I will chastise you sevenfold on your sins. And you will eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters you will eat." (Lev. 26:27-29 and Deut. 28:57)

The severity is to make it impossible for the Jews and others to accept that anything but God delivered this tragedy. This will insure the truth of Torah, as the tragedies meted out are of such proportions, never experienced by any other nation. All will know that God keeps His word: that Torah is truth. Our punishments will prove God's word, just as do our rewards. "Just as God delights upon you, to do you good and to increase you...so too God will delight to wipe you out and to destroy you and take you off the land that you came to inherit". (Deut. 28:63) Of course this requires interpretation. God does not truly desire to punish. Lamentations 3:33, "For He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Actually, God desires our benefit. But this idea that God show equal "delight" to wipe is out, means that it fulfills His will for mankind, equally as reward fulfills His will. Whether God rewards or punishes, His justice and truth is equally served.

We are entering Tisha B'Av. A time of reflection, and a time where we can make change. We can improve. But this requires an honest assessment of our shortcomings. We read the Prophets so as to awaken ourselves to those very flaws they addressed. The blame the Jew for "acting" religiously, while he was not kind, just and charitable. The Prophet blamed the Jewish leaders for their unjust acts. The message is clear: we must use our own reasoning to determine if what we follow is a correct justice. And our reasoning must be based on the absolute truths contained in the words of the Prophets. Therefore, study is the only path that will lead us to living properly.

The Prophet concludes this week's Haftoras Devarim by saying "Jerusalem will be redeemed through justice, and its inhabitants, through tzedaka." Therefore, to earn redemption, we must first "know" what justice and tzedaka are, and then act upon that knowledge. Following others led astray many generations of Jews...even leaders. That's why God gave us the Prophets, and safeguarded their written words for millennia.

Study them to know God's will. To know what's true. To gain the best for yourself in this one earthly existence. ■



## Tisha B'Av



# the Month of Av: Unlucky or Misunderstood?

BY MATT SCHNEEWEISS

Matt Schneeweiss authors the blog  
<http://kankanchadash.blogspot.com>

## Introduction

This past Shabbos was the first day of the month of Av. There appears to be a fairly prevalent belief that the month of Av is an "unlucky time." People rearrange their plans, pushing off certain "risky" endeavors until after the month of Av (or, at least, until after Tisha b'Av). They avoid things like traveling, surgery, and business ventures because they feel that undertaking these activities during the month of Av are dangerous and destined for failure. I have even heard and read the words of rabbis who refer to the month of Av as an "inauspicious (i.e. unlucky) time of the year for Jews."

But as we know, it is unwise to assume that a belief or practice is correct just because it is widespread. Let's see what the Torah has to say on this topic.

## The Source of the Misconception

As far as I can tell, the source of this notion is a statement in the Gemara: "a Jew who has a court appointment at a non-Jewish court should try to avoid it during the month of Av because it has a bad mazal" (29b-30a). This statement is not just aggadah, but an actual halacha (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 551:1). On the surface, this halacha would seem to support the popular belief. Why else would we be cautioned to avoid non-Jewish courts during the month of Av if not for the fact that Av is an inauspicious time for Jews? It even uses the word "mazal," which OBVIOUSLY means "luck"! (hint hint: that was intended to be facetious and thought-provoking)

The first step in investigating such a statement is to analyze it in its context. The full statement of the Gemara reads: "*At the onset of the month of Av, we diminish our rejoicing: Just as we diminish rejoicing at the onset of the month of Av, so too, we increase rejoicing at the onset of the month of Adar. Rav Pappa said: Therefore, a Jew who has a court appointment at a non-Jewish court should try to avoid it during the month of Av because it has a bad mazal, but he should be present in court during the month of Adar because it has a good mazal.*"

Even before we analyze this statement, we can see that the popular notion is not supported by the Gemara. According to the popular belief, we avoid court appointments with non-Jews because the month of Av has some unlucky quality. We see from the Gemara, however, that this is not the case. Rather, the month of Av generates a halachic

obligation to diminish rejoicing, and THEREFORE we avoid court appointments with non-Jews. In other words, avoiding non-Jewish courts is an expression of our diminished rejoicing during the month of Av - not a precaution that we take in response to some harmful property inherent to the month itself. Granted, we must still explain the meaning of "bad mazal," but it is clear from the Gemara that avoiding non-Jewish courts stems from the obligation to diminish rejoicing.

Moreover, the Gemara only says to avoid non-Jewish courts. It does not say to avoid all "risky" ventures. Not only that, an exhaustive search throughout the halachic literature reveals no support for the common practice to avoid all "risky" activities during the month of Av. If the month of Av were truly "unlucky," the halacha would certainly tell us to avoid all forms of perilous activity, not just appointments at non-Jewish courts. According to halacha, there is no more reason to avoid "risky" activities during the month of Av than any other time of year.

Thus, although we haven't explained idea behind the Gemara's statement, we clearly see the lack of support for the popular interpretation. But before we try to understand the meaning of the Gemara's statement, I would like to discuss a major problem with the popular belief. According to my understanding, the popular belief is not only false, but may actually violate a biblical prohibition.

## The Prohibition of Meonein

There is a biblical prohibition called "meonein." I haven't managed to find an adequate English translation of the term "meonein," so we'll stick with the Hebrew. The Sefer Ha'Chinuch (Mitzvah #250) provides the following definition of meonein, based on the words of the Sages: "*The explanation of this subject is as it was given in the Midrash Sifra: [the Hebrew verb, te'oneinu, denotes] the sense of onah, a designated time - i.e. that we should not determine set times, to say that this hour is 'good' for doing that activity in it, and whoever does it at that time will succeed, and whoever does it at this other time will not succeed - as the deluding masters of sorcery say.*"

In other words, meonein is the prohibition to designate a period of time as "good" or "bad" for certain activities; one who acts in accordance with this designation is liable for the penalty of

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whiplashes. The Rambam, in the Mishneh Torah (Laws of Idolatry and the Statutes of the Gentiles 11:9), elaborates on this prohibition of "designating times," and mentions additional examples: one who says that a specific day is a "good" or "bad" day for doing a particular activity, or a particular year, or a particular month.

The most common form of meonein is astrology. One who consults horoscopes or astrologers and acts on the basis of their counsel transgresses the Biblical prohibition of meonein. According to the Sefer Ha'Chinuch's definition, not only astrology but any designation of a time period as "good" or "bad" for a certain activity falls into the scope of this prohibition.

Thus, the problem with the popular belief is clear. If a Jew believes that the month of Av is an "unlucky time" (thinking that this is what the Gemara meant) and avoids certain activities based on this belief, then he would seem to be in violation of the Biblical prohibition of meonein. In order to appreciate the severity of this transgression, let us analyze the harm of meonein.

### What is Wrong with Me'onein?

There are several other Biblical prohibitions which belong to the same class as meonein. These include nichush (omen reading), koseim (fortune telling), chover chaver (reciting incantations), doreish el ha'meisim (consulting the dead), kishuf (sorcery), and others. The Rambam concludes his exposition of these prohibitions with the following explanation:

*"These practices are all false and deceptive and were means employed by the ancient idolaters to deceive the people of various countries and induce them to become their followers. It is not proper for Israelites, who are highly rational, to allow themselves to be deluded by such inanities or imagine that there is anything in them, as it is said, 'For there is no enchantment with Jacob, neither is there any divination within Israel' (Bamidbar 23:23), and further; 'For these nations that you are to dispossess hearken to soothsayers and diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God, has not suffered you so to do' (Devarim 18:14). Whoever believes in these and similar things and, in his heart, holds that they are true and scientific but forbidden by the Torah, is nothing but a fool with a deficient mind, who belongs to the same class with others whose intellects are immature. Intelligent people, however, whose rationality is intact, know by clear proofs that all*

*these practices which the Torah prohibited have no scientific basis but are senseless and empty; and that only those with deficient minds are attracted by these follies and, for their sake, leave the ways of truth. The Torah, therefore, in forbidding all these follies, exhorts us, 'You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God' (ibid. 18:13)."*

The Rambam's characterization of these prohibitions can be summed up in one phrase: all of these beliefs and practices are forms of **magical thinking**. There are three major problems with magical thinking: magical thinking constitutes a denial of the laws of nature, a denial of hashgacha pratit (particularly, reward and punishment), and a withdrawal from reality into the world of infantile fantasy. Let's examine each of these problems in detail.

### Denial of Natural Law

The Torah maintains that Hashem created the entire universe with wisdom, as it is stated, "How great are your works, Hashem, You make them all with wisdom" (Tehilim 104:24), "Hashem founded the earth with wisdom; He established it with understanding" (Mishlei 3:19). The Torah refers to this concept as "Malchus Shamayim" (Kingship of Heaven) - the universal lawfulness that governs all of nature, including man. The premise of every scientific inquiry is that there is a universal lawfulness underlying all natural phenomena.

Magical thinking constitutes a denial of Malchus Shamayim because it posits the existence of supernatural forces which undermine Hashem's natural law. Magical thinking leads a person away from objective scientific knowledge into the realm of subjective imagination. The Rambam, far ahead of his time, recognized that these magical beliefs and practices have no scientific basis, and modern science supports his conclusion. Today the mainstream scientific community regards magic as a primitive product of human imagination and does not grant it any legitimacy.

A person who, in spite of his practical precautions, is afraid of the influence of harmful forces lacks trust in God. After Tisha b'Av we will recite the blessing over the moon, "Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who with His utterance created the heavens, and with the breath of His mouth all their legion. A decree and schedule did He give them that they not alter their assigned task." Natural law was created by the



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## Tisha B'Av

Word of Hashem, and the Word of Hashem is trustworthy and reliable. To assume that supernatural forces can overpower or undermine His law is to deny His Malchus, and to lack true emunah in His Word.

## Denial of Reward and Punishment

The Sefer Ha'Chinuch agrees with the Rambam, but takes one step further. In his explanation of the prohibition of meonein (which can be found under the prohibition of menacheish, Mitzvah #249) the Sefer Ha'Chinuch writes:

"At the root of this mitzvah lies the reason that these things are matters of utter lunacy and folly, and for the truly holy people that God chose, it is not fitting that they should pay regard to false words. Moreover, they are a factor that thrusts a man away from conviction in the Eternal Lord and from His sacred Torah, to set him going from their midst to complete heresy: **For he will reckon that all his good and bad fortune, all that happens to him, is a matter of chance occurrence, not by the hashgachah of the Creator.** In consequence, he will thus abandon all the principles of the religion. Therefore, since the Eternal Lord desires our good, He commanded us to remove this thought from our heart, and to set firmly in our heart **that all evil and good issue by the word of the One on high, according to a man's deeds, be they good or bad. And omens [and all forms of magic] neither help nor hinder** - as it is written, "For there is no augury with Jacob, nor divination with Israel" (Bamidbar 23:23)."

"The Eleventh Fundamental Principle," according to the Rambam, is that Hashem "rewards with good those who fulfill the commandments of the Torah and punishes the one who transgresses its admonitions, and that the ultimate reward is the World to Come, and that the ultimate punishment is kareiss." Everything that happens to us is in accordance with Hashem's perfect justice, from which we can neither hide nor escape.

According to the Sefer Ha'Chinuch, one who subscribes to magical thinking ipso facto denies the principle of reward and punishment. What, exactly, does the meonein hope to accomplish by planning his activities around his so-called "unlucky" time? Does he believe there is some evil force out there that will harm him, contrary to Hashem's system of reward and punishment? Does he think that he can avoid Hashem's reward and punishment by simply rescheduling his activi-

ties for a different period of time? Either way, his maneuvering is premised upon a denial of reward and punishment. "Ein ohd milvado" – there is no other force out there which acts contrary to His Will and Wisdom.

## Retreat into Infantile Fantasy

The Rambam writes that "only those with deficient minds are attracted by these follies and, for their sake, leave the ways of truth." On the surface, this doesn't seem to follow: Does the Rambam mean that just because a person believes in a false, unscientific idea, he will end up forsaking the "ways of truth"? Would the Rambam say the same thing about one who believes that the earth is flat, or some other theory that has been falsified by science?

In my opinion, the Rambam is referring specifically to those beliefs which can be described as magical thinking. All magical thinking caters to the egotistical, infantile fantasy that "I am the center of the universe, and everything revolves around my desires." This belief is infantile because it hearkens back to the period in one's life in which this was, to some degree, true. In the infant's world, he IS all-important. If the infant desires anything, reality (i.e. his parents) will respond to that desire. All he has to do is wish and cry, and all of his needs will be addressed.

Just as the infant exists in a world where his own existence has a primary importance, so too, the meonein views his own existence as having primary, cosmic significance. His belief in lucky and unlucky times is premised on the notion that the whole universe revolves around him. He believes that TIME ITSELF takes interest in his personal aspirations and plans, and aims to thwart them or to bring them to success.

This delusion is far from the truth. In reality, we humans are very insignificant. The days where we were the center of the world and where our desires were of primary importance have long since passed. "Olam k'minhago noheig." The laws of nature continue to

operate in accordance with their set patterns, regardless of our personal strivings and ambitions. The period of time which the meonein believes is lucky or unlucky is nothing more than a position in the orbit of the earth around the sun. Our planetary position has no bearing on whether we will succeed or fail in our personal endeavors.

Thus, I do not believe that the Rambam would say that any scientifically disproved theory leads to a forsaking of the "ways of truth." The Rambam refers specifically to those unscientific beliefs which reinforce our deep desire to return to a state in which we are at the center of the universe. This is the root of avodah zarah.

For all these reasons (and more), Hashem – in His Wisdom and Kindness – sought to distance us from all forms of magical thinking, and to firmly establish in our hearts and minds the concept of Malchus Shamayim: there is no power other than Hashem, and everything happens in accordance with His Wisdom.

## The Explanation of the Gemara

Unfortunately, it looks like I won't have time to write an explanation of the Gemara's statement in this issue. Check out my blog (<http://kankanchadash.blogspot.com/>) later on in the week. God willing, I will merit to understand the halacha and will write about it there. May we merit to do teshuvah from this and all other forms of avodah zarah, and bring about the restoration of Malchus Shamayim in the minds of all human beings. ■

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## Tisha B'Av

# Tisha B'Av & the Temple Site

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

To understand the loss of the Temple – Tisha B'Av's commemoration – we must first understand the importance and significance of the Temple. Maimonides "Laws of the Select House" (2:1,2,4)

[1] "The altar's location is very exact, and that place is never changed, as it states, 'This is the altar of Olah sacrifices for Israel.' And in the Temple was Isaac our forefather bound [by Abraham] as it states, 'Go for yourself to the land of Moriah', and in Chronicles it states, 'And King Solomon commenced to build the house of God in Jerusalem, on Mount Moriah where God appeared to David his father, that he prepared in the place of David, in threshing floor of Amon the Jebusite'."

[2] "And a tradition is in the hands of everyone that the place where David and Solomon built the altar on the threshing floor of Amon, this is the place where Abraham built the altar and bound upon it Isaac. And this is the place where Noah built there [the altar] when he exited the Ark. And that was the altar on which Cain and Abel sacrificed. And on it, Adam the first sacrificed when he was created, and from there, was he created."

[4] "Three prophets went up with the Jews into exile. One testified to them on the location of the altar. And one testified to them on its measurement. And one testified to them that there must be sacrificed on this altar all the sacrifices, even though the Temple did not [longer] exist."

Why did Adam, Cain, Able, Noach, Abraham, King David and King Solomon sacrifice on this specific spot? Why did God deem it vital to humanity

that Noah's Ark land on this very same Mount Moriah, and that Noah sacrifice on the same location? Why did God demand Abraham bind Isaac on this mountain? Why must the Temple be built here?

To understand all subsequent cases of sacrifice on this specific site, we must learn its inceptional significance. And what is so essential about sacrifice, and this place in specific, that even when the Temple no longer stood, sacrifice was essential as the prophets taught?

The first event to occur upon this precise location was Adam's creation...who then sacrificed to God immediately upon his creation. He must have suddenly recognized that he was "just created" a few moments ago, and that prior; he was nothing...he didn't exist until God desired it. Adam was a perfected creature, made in an adult form, and not an infant newborn. His vocabulary and thoughts were mature at his creation. He knew God. Being perfect in thought, he acted perfectly: he suddenly felt compelled to express thanks and praise God for his creation with a sacrificed animal. But why is this the correct response?

Sacrifice is the appropriate response, as it is man's means of identifying with his true state of nonexistence. Man would not exist without God. Adam therefore killed an animal, the embodiment of the non-existent state man would be in, had God not created him.

We too must identify with Adam's perfection. He represents the highest level of man: a creature that understands he is "created", and thus, that a Creator exists, Who alone is responsible for his creation, and worthy of our thanks and praises.

All of Adam's perfected descendants mimicked

Adam's act of sacrifice, and, upon the precise site of Adam's creation. They too desired to express this one, same perfection, demonstrating their recognition that they are created. They desired to embellish upon the truth that man exists, only because God created Adam. Therefore, God assisted perfected men, commanding or causing their arrival and sacrifice upon this very parcel of Earth, where God formed the very first human, Mount Moriah.

The Temple's site on Mount Moriah serves to underscore these concepts: that we are created beings like Adam, who owe our lives to the Creator; and that we must demonstrate this realization through sacrifice: the idea of sacrifice alone is insufficient; active sacrifice is vital. Sacrifice embodies the idea of our non-existence...since we would not be alive without God. Sacrifice, then, become synonymous with Temple, since Temple serves to flag the event and location of man's creation: a creature who in truth, should not exist.

There are many concepts learned through the study of the Temple's laws. But primary to this discussion, is the fundamental that we must relate to God as our life-giver, with this essential and dependent feeling. And when we are convinced of this reality, we will live in daily appreciation of all God has granted us.

Conversely, our loss of the Temple is in truth, a loss of identification with Adam, the true relationship with our Creator, and how fortunate we are to exist.

When the Temple will finally be rebuilt, we will then, once again, recall that ancient event of human creation (and re-creation with Noah) with clarity, and look at ourselves equally as "created". Our attachment to God and His laws will then be a natural lifestyle for all mankind. ■

