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# JewishTimes

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of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

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## Three Weeks

**Tisha B'Av**

## The Day of Tragedies

**RABBI DR. DARREL GINSBERG**

*"Tonight, five appalling tragedies occurred.*

*A decree against our ancestors,  
denying them the Land;*

*Afflicting them with oppressing pain  
and worse,*

*A day destined for harm and hurt.*

*The enemy stood and shrieked  
horribly,*

*'Attack! For this is the day that God  
foretold!'*

*Tonight my children weep and wail."*  
(Kina 3)

The day approaches. The day marking the destruction of both Temples, the cause of our current state of disarray and disrepair. The theme of the horrific events of the churban – destruction – dominates the tefilas and kinos, and are seemingly the focus of the day. And yet, we know Tisha B'Av to be a day where other tragedies befell the Jewish people. The Mishna indicates that there are five of these tragedies that occurred on Tisha B'Av, three of which seem to be isolated and separate from the churban. Furthermore, the Mishna does not indicate a "superiority" of one event over the

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## Fundamentals

**MAIMONIDES**

*an amazing*

# IDEA

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

These Three Weeks, commencing with the 17th of Tammuz, focused us on the tragedies contributing to this day's sorrowful nature. Talmud Taanis 28b records Moses' smashing of the Tablets as one of these tragedies. As he descended from Sinai with those two sapphire Tablets bearing God's laws, he encountered the Jews sinning with the Gold Calf. He responded by breaking the Tablets. A wise Rabbi explained he did so, lest the Jews continue their sin, projecting their idolatrous expression onto these divinely inspired objects, just as they were doing regarding the Calf. Moses broke the Tablets to eliminate this possibility, to which, God agreed. We might think the service of the Gold Calf as more worthy of making the list of tragedies. But as my friend Howard suggested, sin is not a "loss", but a waste. A true "loss" is the removal of something of value or a failure to realize a gain. That loss was the Tablets. The removal of the positive is loss, not the engagement in the negative, the latter being "harm". Similarly, we mourn the loss of the Temple, and not the idolatry or enmity between the Jews that precipitated those two losses, although the latter are evils for which we must repent.

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Boston	8:00	Moscow	8:48
Chicago	8:06	New York	8:08
Cleveland	8:41	Paris	9:31
Detroit	8:49	Philadelphia	8:10
Houston	8:05	Phoenix	7:21
Jerusalem	7:27	Pittsburgh	8:31
Johannesburg	5:15	Seattle	8:45
Los Angeles	7:46	Sydney	4:49
London	8:52	Tokyo	6:39
Miami	7:56	Toronto	8:38
Montreal	8:21	Washington DC	8:14

## Weekly Parsha

# Devarim

**RABBI BERNIE FOX**

## Moshe's Motives for Rebuking Bnai Yisrael

*"These are the words that  
Moshe spoke to all of Israel on  
the east bank of the Jordan, in the  
wilderness, in the Aravah, near*

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(Devarim cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

## JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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*Suf, in the vicinity of Paran, Tofel, Lavan, Chatzerot, and Di Zahav.” (Devarim 1:1)*

Sefer Devarim is basically composed to three elements. First, Moshe reviews some of the commandments. In this review, he adds additional detail or emphasizes the importance of specific mitzvot. Second, Moshe reveals mitzvot that he had not previously discussed with the nation. Third, the sefer includes a rebuke. Moshe chastises Bnai Yisrael for past behaviors. He encourages the nation to guard itself against repeating these sins.

Moshe's motives for discussing the first two elements are self-evident. He knew he would soon die before the nation entered the Land of Israel. Moshe was Bnai Yisrael's teacher. He was responsible to transmit the Torah he had received from Hashem. This was his last opportunity to complete that task. As teacher, he also had the duty of clarifying any areas of confusion and answering all questions regarding the law. But a teacher is not only responsible for the transmission of knowledge. A teacher must also inspire. Therefore, it was imperative to urge the nation to observe the mitzvot.

Moshe's motives for rebuking the nation are less obvious. The commentaries generally agree that Moshe wished to force the nation to review its past mistakes. Understanding these errors would help Bnai Yisrael. The nation would be better prepared to avoid repeating prior sins or reverting to the patterns of behavior that led to these sins. However, Nachmanides explains that Moshe had an additional motive.

Moshe wished to demonstrate to Bnai Yisrael the mercy of Hashem. The nation was poised to enter the Land. This would occur despite past sins and failings. This verified Hashem's mercy. Furthermore, Moshe felt this was a timely message. The conquest of the Land would require a deep commitment

from the people. This commitment could be expected only from a nation confident in the outcome of its efforts. The nation must know that its efforts and sacrifice would be rewarded with success. This must have evoked within the people an important question. Would they be able to seize and retain the Land? Could the nation meet Hashem's standards for behavior? Perhaps, Bnai Yisrael would fail to achieve the righteousness demanded by Hashem! If the nation failed, would it be ejected from the Land of Israel?

Moshe responded through demonstrating Hashem's mercy. Bnai Yisrael had committed

grave sins in the wilderness. Yet, Hashem did not abandon His nation. He brought Bnai Yisrael to the border of Land of Israel. They were now poised to occupy this legacy. Certainly, the nation must strive to serve Hashem. However, Hashem will judge His nation with mercy and kindness. They will not be immediately exiled should they sin. Hashem will provide ample opportunity to repent. They can succeed in conquering and settling the Land of Israel.[1]



*“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. As mentioned above, much of the sefer is a review of mitzvot that had previously been presented to the nation. In this review, Moshe does not merely repeat the material he had already taught Bnai Yisrael. He clarifies the commandments and reveals additional details. Rashi explains that in the process of review, Moshe explained the Torah to Bnai Yisrael in seventy languages.[2] According to Rashi, this was part of the process of clarifying the Torah. How does translation into various languages clarify the Torah?

This problem has an important parallel in

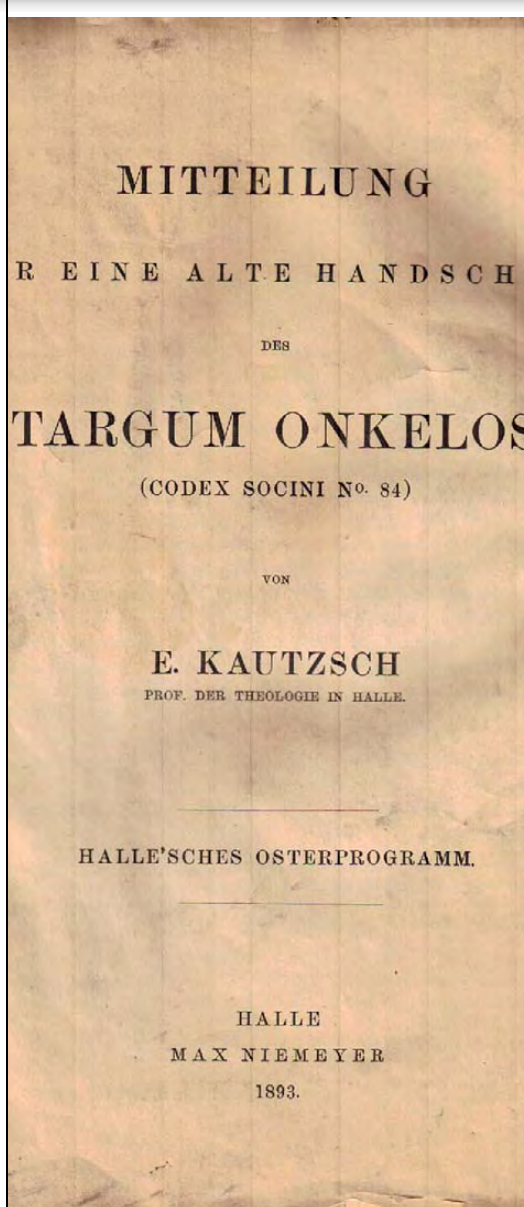
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halachah. In order to understand this parallel, an introduction is required. The Torah is divided into parshiyot – sections. Generally, one portion is read in synagogue each Shabbat. On some weeks two parshiyot are read. In the course of a single year, the entire Torah is read. The Talmud explains, in Tractate Berachot, that reading the weekly portion is not merely a feature of the Shabbat synagogue service. We are also obligated to individually 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.[3] What is targum? Targum means translation. The term can also be understood as a reference to Targum Unkelus the Aramaic translation composed by the Sage Unkelus.[4] 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, the requirement of a targum can be fulfilled by reading any translation understood by the student. An English-speaking person can substitute an English translation. The second opinion disagrees. This opinion insists on the use of Unkelus' targum. The second opinion explains that stipulation of study with a targum requires more than a mere translation. Although written in the form of a translation, Unkelus' work offers invaluable insights into the meaning of various passages. The inclusion of these insights and interpretations is essential to fulfilling the targum requirement. Therefore, Targum Unkelus cannot be replaced by a translation.

This does seem to be a valid criticism of the first opinion. The Talmud requires a targum. This requirement is only meaningful if it assumed that a targum is more than a translation and that it includes commentary. How can the first opinion presume that the requirement of a targum can be fulfilled by review with mere translation? The Tosefot do not provide much information regarding this issue. They make one brief comment. They explain that every translation elucidates.[5] The question is obvious. How does a translation elucidate? This problem parallels our initial question: how did Moshe's multiple translations of the Torah lend clarity to its meaning?

In order to answer these questions, we must begin by considering the requirement of



reviewing the weekly parasha with a targum. Why is a targum needed? Why is it not sufficient to read the parasha without a targum. It is clear that the law requires that the parasha be read and also 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. The targum represents this minimum. Reading the parasha and studying the targum fulfill the obligation of studying the parasha. But how does reading with a targum provide interpretation?

There are two possibilities. One possibility – expressed in Tosefot's second opinion – is that

the passages must be restated in a form that includes insight and interpretation from the Oral Torah. Targum Unkelus fulfills this function. In translating the passages, it reworks and restates them based upon the Oral Torah. Another translation cannot be assumed to fulfill this role. It may not include elements of the Oral Torah.

The first opinion in Tosefot maintains that the essential feature of a targum is translation. How does mere translation provide interpretation? This opinion argues that the very process of translation inevitably 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 element of interpretation included in 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. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban/Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Devarim, Introduction.

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

[3] Mesechet Berachot 8a.

[4] Tosefot, Mesechet Berachot 8a.

[5] Tosefot, Mesechet Berachot 8a.



But to truly comprehend the loss of the Tablets, we must understand:

1) what they were and 2) why God gave them to us. The indispensable need for the Tablets is derived from God's granting to Moses a second set of Tablets after he smashed the first set.

What I will eventually suggest herein astonished me, but I feel Maimonides' words point to this discovery...

### The Guide (Book I, chap. lxxvi)

*"And the tables were the work of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16), that is to say, they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called "the work of the Lord", e.g., "These see the works of the Lord" (Ps. cvii. 24): and the description of the several things in nature, as plants, animals, winds, rain, etc., is followed by the exclamation, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works!" (Psalms, civ.24). Still more striking is the relation between God and His creatures, as expressed in the phrase, "The cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted" (ib. 16): the cedars being the product of nature, and not of art, are described as having been planted by the Lord. Similarly we explain.*

*"And the writing was the writing of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16): the relation in which the writing stood to God has already been defined in the words "written with the finger of God" (ibid xxxi. 18), and the meaning of this phrase is the same as that of "the work of thy fingers" (Psalms viii. 4) this being said of the heavens: of the latter it has been stated distinctly that they were made by a word, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (ibid xxxiii. 6). Hence you learn that in the Bible, the creation of a thing is figuratively expressed by terms denoting "word" and "speech". The same thing, which according to one passage has been made by the "word", is represented in another passage as made by the "finger of God." The phrase "written by the finger of God" is therefore identical with "written by the word of God", and if the latter phrase had been used, it would have been equal to "written by the will and desire of God".*

*Onkelos adopted in this place a strange explanation, and rendered the words literally, "written by the finger of the Lord". He thought that "the finger" was a certain thing ascribed to God; so that "the finger of the Lord" is to be interpreted in the same way as "the mountain of God" (Exod. iii. 1), "the rod of God" (ib. iv. 20), that is, as being an instrument created by Him, which by His will engraved the writing on the tables. I cannot see why Onkelos preferred this explanation. It would have been more reasonable to say, "written by the word of the Lord", in imitation of the verse "By the*

*word of the Lord the heavens were made." Or was the creation of the writing on the tables more difficult than the creation of the stars in the spheres? As the latter were made by the direct will of God, not by means of an instrument, the writing may also have been produced by His direct will, not by means of an instrument. You know what the Mishnah says, "Ten things were created on Friday in the twilight of the evening", and "the writing" is one of the ten things. This shows how generally it was assumed by our forefathers that the writing of the tables was produced in the same manner as the rest of the creation, as we have shown in our Commentary on the Mishnah (Avos, v.6)."*

### Understanding Maimonides

We must pay attention to Maimonides' words. He opens with "And the tables were the work of God". His intent is to first discuss the Tablets – not their writing. He first explains how the Tablets are made via "nature", meaning by God. They are not "works" or "art". By definition, if natural objects are used in a new construction or form, either seen in woodworking or paintings, we call this "carpentry" and "art" respectively. But if something is formed undisturbed by external influence, as leaves are formed with veins and trees with bark... this we call "nature" and not art. Therefore, when addressing the Tablets, Maimonides writes, "they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called "the work of the Lord"." This means that the Tablets formed naturally independent from the rest of the sapphire that formed in that area of Sinai. That is quite amazing. We will get back to what this means. But they were not works of carpentry or art. Remain mindful of this distinction.

Maimonides then addresses the Tablets' "writing": "And the writing was the writing of God". He argues that although the Torah says the writing was "written by the finger of the Lord", this writing was no less natural than the Tablets themselves, or God's natural creation of the heavens. He disputes Onkelos' suggestion that a tool was used to form these letters, and insists that those letters were created without a tool, just as God created the heavens, by His will alone.

But focus your attention on Maimonides' insistence that the writing was "natural", and not an act of carpentry or art. What does he mean by this? You must know that Maimonides bases himself on the verse that references both, the Tablets and the writings: "And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16). Maimonides teaches that this verse is not redundant, but with it, God intentionally directs us to realize that not only were the Tablets a natural phenomenon, but so too was

the writing. This is essential to our discussion.

So we must delve into understanding the distinction between writing that is natural, and writing that is art. How are they different?

We must ask a number of questions. God communicated 10 Commandments, shortly afterwards they would be committed to the Sefer Torah Moses would write. Therefore, for what purpose did God create the Tablets with the same record of this communication? Is this not a redundancy?

Let's briefly recount the history. God created Revelation at Sinai. The nation heard great sounds. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai, he remains in commune with God for 40 days and nights and then he receives the Tablets from God. While still on Sinai, God informs Moses that the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf and that He will destroy the nation. Moses prays and God refrains from destroying the Jews. Before Moses descends the mountain we read these words, "And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two Tablets of Testimony were in his hands; Tablets written from both sides[1], from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they, explained on the Tablets." (Exod. 32:15,16) Why is Moses' descent interrupted with this detailed description of the Tablets? Why was this description of the Tablets not included earlier (31:18) where we read, "And God gave to Moses – when He concluded to speak with him on Mount Sinai – two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." This division of the Tablets' details into two Torah portions requires explanation, as does the term "Tablets of testimony"... testimony to what exactly? And we wonder why "two" tablets are needed. Could not a larger tablet contain all the words; could not smaller letters accomplish the same message on a single tablet?

Maimonides also cited the Mishna in Avos, "Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening", and "the writing" is one of the ten things." Maimonides wishes to draw our attention to the necessity for God to have created the Tablets and their writing, at the end of the six days of Creation, just before God ceased His Creation. What is his message?

In Exodus 34:1, God instructs Moses to hew a second set of Tablets, and He says He will write on them the matters that "were" on the first tablets. Why doesn't God say He will write on them the matters that "He wrote" on the first Tablets? He uses a less descriptive term.

I also wonder if there was more to Moses' breaking of the Tablets than already explained.

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## Revelation

Revelation on Sinai was intended to remove all doubt that a Supreme Intelligence created all, sustains all and communicates with man. However, God desired this message not end at Sinai's closure. My friend Avraham suggested that the Tablets were intended to be an everlasting "testament" (Tablets of Testimony). This explains why upon God's completion of His communication with Moses atop Sinai, we read, "And God gave to Moses – when He concluded to speak with him on Mount Sinai – two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." That is, once God concluded His Revelation to the people and to Moses, He desired an everlasting testimony of this Revelation, to serve as enduring and conclusive evidence that He alone created and sustains the universe. Thus, "testimony" appears in this verse, and not later in the second description of the Tablets. In order that this testimony is everlasting, the words are embedded in a permanent object – stone. So "stone" is also in this verse.

But can't anyone write words in stone? Of what proof are these Tablets?

The testimony God intended is to the truth that He alone is the source of the universe. We read that these Tablets were "written with the finger of God." Maimonides said this was a "natural" phenomenon. Here now is the amazing idea and how these Tablets "testified"....

## Astonishing Tablets

These miraculous Tablets contained something not found elsewhere in nature: naturally formed letters, sentences and commandments! Imagine a tree, where its branches grew in the

form of words, or if lightning patterns did so too. That is how astonishing these Tablets were.

As God formed these Tablets over time at the end of Creation, so too, He formed the "writing" simultaneously, and naturally. The commands were not subsequently carved into the Tablets, but they literally grew with the stones as the stones formed through nature: "And the writing was the writing of God", as Maimonides said above, this means a natural phenomenon. This explains why God tells Moses that He will write on the second Tablets the matters that "were" on the first set, and not matters that He "wrote" the first set. For God did not do an act of "writing" on the first Tablets. Yes, the words appeared "written" as the verse states[2], but not through an act of one thing acting on another resulting in writing. Again, the verse does not say, "I wrote" on the first Tablets, but rather, "were" on the first Tablets. The letters in the first Tablets formed simultaneously with the Tablets themselves. This is an amazing idea, and a phenomenon not seen elsewhere in nature. Perhaps for this reason, Maimonides includes in this chapter his critique of Onkelos' suggestion that the stone Tablets were carved through an instrument.

## The Need

What consideration demanded that God create such a phenomenon? Although the exact words appearing on the Tablets were duplicated in the Torah scroll, it was not the words per se that demanded the Tablets' existence, but the "manner" of existence of these words. This natural formation of letters is God's clear message that He is behind the natural world, and Torah. Both form one unit. This is needed,

"אֱלֹהִים" commences the first of the 10 Commands; created in the spaces between the branches below. How nature might reveal words



for many people view nature as devoid of God's creation and rule. Man becomes accustomed to matters by his very nature. The sun rises and sets, plants and animals grow, and species beget their own kind. We take all for granted, thinking all occurs due the nature itself...and not God. But with the existence of naturally formed words and commandments in natural objects, we can no longer maintain a view of an unguided world. Nature is finally understood to be the expression of an intelligent being: God. How can one ignore a natural object that has words naturally imprinted and not the work of art? This was the lesson of Sinai, and the sustained lesson of the Tablets.

Therefore, the Torah scroll's account of God's communicated commands sufficed for the 'content' of His words, but not for an everlasting "testament" which was revealed through natural stones containing intelligent words! And perhaps to remove all doubt that this occurred without God's intent, there were two stones, not one. A freakish natural incident can possibly be dismissed if it occurs once...but not twice.

We can no longer separate nature, from God. His very words are embedded in these stones in truly natural manner.

Why didn't God give the Tablets to Adam the First? Perhaps Adam had no need for them. God's original plan was that man use intellect to discover God. The beauty and precision of natural law is sufficient for a person following a life of wisdom.

However, at this era in mankind's development, these Tablets were intended to offer



How did the commands appear naturally in the sapphire tablets, and from two sides?

(continued on next page)



mankind a new leap in our wisdom of God. The ability for nature to produce such a phenomenon would offer us tremendous appreciation for the Creator of this nature. They were to be viewed and not placed in an Ark.

But as these Tablets were being delivered, the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf. The extraordinary lesson of the Tablets would not be realized with those Jews. These first Tablets required destruction. However, a lesson was required: the nation must now have a reminder of what they lost. God instructed Moses to hew a new set...their tablet form would not come about naturally, but by human craft. God also "wrote" the matters on this second set; again, no longer a natural phenomenon of words that were part of their natural design. A gap now existed between the Jews, and God. The intended, intimate relationship that could have been, was now lost. To emphasize this break from God, these Tablets must be stored out of sight; in the Ark. Perhaps this explains why King Solomon hid the Ark and no other vessel. He reiterated this message of "distance" between God and the nation through digging caverns to eventually hide the Tablets and the Ark.

### **"Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening"**

As natural law needed to tolerate these unique Tablets, they had to be planned with the creation of the substance of sapphire. This could not be created later, for the very blueprint of how sapphire forms must contain natural laws that would generate stones with embedded communication. As this would be a "property" of sapphire's substance, it must be set at the time that God endowed sapphire with its formative properties - during Creation.

### **"And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two Tablets of Testimony were in his hands; Tablets written from both sides, from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they, explained on the Tablets."**

Why is Moses' descent interrupted with this detailed description of the Tablets? Why was this description of the Tablets not included earlier (31:18) where we read, "And God gave to Moses"...two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." It appears to me that the first account expresses



**Natural sapphire crystal:**  
Perhaps the Tablets' distinction was in its grain or deposits that formed the Hebrew characters

the "purpose" of the Tablets – testimony. Thus, we learn that the testament is in durable stone, and that the testament is a unique phenomenon. But when Moses is about to descend to the sinful Jews, we are told of the Tablet's nature that conflicts with their idolatry: the Tablets were "God's work", intended precisely to fend off idolatry. This aspect is relevant in connection with the idolatrous Jews, and therefore not mentioned until its relevance surfaces.

Now we understand the loss of the Tablets: our knowledge of God has been impaired. This is the ultimate tragedy. What an amazing sight they must have been. Perhaps in the future, this will be the means by which God will make His name fill the Earth. For we do not know if the Tablets were the only natural elements in which God embedded natural communication. And as this was God's will at Sinai, perhaps in the messianic era He will unveil this again to a more fitting generation. ■

[1] Ibn Ezra rejects the notion that the letters Mem Sofit and Samech (shapes like "O") had miraculous center pieces floating. The letters were not hollowed from one side completely through to the other. They were simply written on the two faces of the stones, as the stones were thick. Alternatively, I suggest the letters were internal facets in the translucent sapphire, that could be seen on "both sides", like a crack can be seen from any side of a diamond. Furthermore, God does not perform impossibilities, so to have legible writing passing through a stone, with the exact wording seen on the opposite side, is not possible. God can do miracles, but not impossibilities. Similarly, God cannot create a circle that is a square.

[2] Exod. 32:15

# Letters

**Reader:** What is the origin of Hebrew, is it one of the oldest compared to Aramaic? In which language did our forefathers communicate with each other? Abraham's father, Terach was an idol worshipper, so which language did they speak?

In the Torah we have two versions on the creation of man, why?

All the animals were created in pairs, why was man created alone?

When we wash our hands for al netilat, does it require a utensil only, running water will not suffice? Why?

Hoping to hear your response.

**Rabbi:** As we have no evidence that the Hebrew language(1) came to man at any point in history; we know that God spoke with Adam and his son, and that God selected Hebrew for His Torah...my assessment is that Hebrew was the original language of God's communication. I do not know if Abraham spoke Hebrew or another language, as God created many languages at the Dispersion at Babel.

Anything can only be created only once. Man's 2 creation accounts are meant to teach different aspects of his single creation. You must investigate to determine the differences. Similarly, the Torah talks about the first set of 2 Tablets – luchos habris – in a number of places, and describes different aspects, although there were only one set of the "first" luchos.

Man was created first, and then woman from him, as man requires a mate with whom he must identify. As a wise Rabbi said, God's building Eve "from" Adam's flesh and bones allowed Adam to identify psychologically with Eve. And we see Adam said "bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh" when first encountering his wife.

Washing may be performed without a vessel, but the blessing, if dunking into a lake for example, is "al tevilas yadayim". ■

(1) The Hebrew characters did go through a change



Two Mondays ago, we marked the shloshim of our beloved son and brother, Avi Pincus ?"?, who just a few weeks ago – at the tragic young age of twenty-six – died of a drug overdose. Death by overdose is not uncommon in the Orthodox community, but when it does occur families often cover up the cause of death due to denial, shame, and perceived social pressure. This denial, shame and its subsequent white-washing is not limited to the death of the loved one, but often extends also to that person's life. And it is not only something of which the families of the addict are guilty. Our Jewish community as a whole looks down with derision and disgrace at the addicts among us.

We believe that this outlook and attitude are the wrong ones to take. We believe that such ostracization is a mistaken, destructive and often fatal force. We are not ashamed of Avi. We take deep pride in his life; we sympathize greatly with his pain; and we stand in awe of his heroic struggle to overcome his addiction.

### **We Take Deep Pride In His Life**

It is a terrible shame that you will never meet Avi. For Avi was one of the most outstanding individuals – in terms of kindness, character, love of Jews and love of humanity – that we have ever known.

Avi was a perfect paradigm of generosity. If he had something, he gave it, no questions asked. He would empty his pockets without hesitation, and without any regrets. On numerous occasions, Avi would meet someone who did not have enough money for a Shabbat meal. Avi, without blinking, would set out to buy an entire Shabbat so those who wanted could partake. If he ran out of money, he would offer whatever he had – food, his bed, and, most significantly, his time. When a friend of his couldn't afford an engagement ring, Avi sold his upright bass violin to fund it. Avi was willing to give his life to others, so it came as no surprise when he made aliyah and joined the Israeli Defense Forces.

Avi's mission in life was to bring joy to those closest to him. And Avi had so many people who were close to him. It was impossible to walk one block with Avi without getting stopped by someone excited to see him who want to stop and chat. Avi was committed to his friends as if they were siblings. He would drop anything he

was doing to spend time in person or on the phone with a friend who needed him. Recently, Avi went out to a restaurant with friends. His phone rang – it was a fellow recovering addict who needed help. Avi spent two hours on the phone with him, and ended up missing dinner.

At the shiva, we were told countless such stories from lifelong friends and people who had just met him a few times but who were touched by his love and care. One of the most striking stories: Avi saved up to travel to Tanzania to hike Mount Kilimanjaro. As he and his travel-mates began the trek up the highest mountain in Africa, one of his friends got ill. Avi insisted that he accompany this friend back to make sure he received the proper care. For Avi, friends were more important than even the greatest of mountains.

Most admirably, Avi was a counselor and advisor to literally hundreds who sought a voice of reason and sensibility. He had a rare ability to listen so that others would speak and to speak so that others would listen. Numerous friends told us that he was their conscience, that he would help them do the right thing when they were tempted to do wrong.

### **We Sympathize Greatly With His Pain**

Avi experienced a horrible amount of pain in his life, including the loss of his mother during his teenage years. But this pain never expressed itself in anger or self-pity; it translated itself into caring and empathy. His hurt enabled him to understand the pain of others and to help them overcome it. Avi cared for everyone. He made friends with homeless people in Manhattan. He kept his fellow IDF soldiers entertained for hours. He played music for autistic children. We received a message from a man who was lost at an airport. Avi noticed he looked lost, and immediately offered him a ride and some food. That was Avi in a nutshell, always looking for ways to help others, whether it was someone who he knew and loved, or a person he did not know at all. For Avi, a person in need was a person to be helped. So many people told us how Avi helped them in times of pain and desperation – he was able to pull them out because he had pulled himself out.

*(continued on next page)*

# Dying to Recover

*The Life and Loss of Our  
Son and Brother*

**Avi Pincus**

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*Rabbi Dr. Gershon and Kirbie Pincus  
Rabbi Dr. Elie and Aliza Feder  
Noah and Nava Pincus Greenfield  
and Chaviva Pincus*

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(Avi continued from page 7)

## Role Models



### We Stand in Awe of His Heroic Struggle to Overcome Addiction

We stand in awe of his heroic struggle to overcome addiction. And the more we learn about the trials and tribulations of recovery, the more respect and appreciation we have for him and those like him. Most people in our community think that drug and alcohol addiction is a choice. They think that when an addict realizes how destructive their addiction is, they should go to rehab and just stop. People who do not stop, they believe, lack personal responsibility. Such beliefs are simply in error.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), "Addiction is a chronic disease similar to other chronic diseases such as type II diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. No one chooses to be a drug addict or to develop heart disease. Addiction, like other chronic diseases, is a heritable disorder and genes play a role in vulnerability to addiction. As with all complex diseases, environmental risk and protective factors interact with genetics to determine the course and outcome of disease." Recent evidence has confirmed that the use of drugs literally rewires the brain, making the already challenging task of self-control and will power infinitely more difficult, if not impossible.

If, God forbid, someone in your synagogue drops dead at age fifty from heart disease, would the family cover up the cause of death? Do you look disparagingly at people who suffer from diabetes, or who die after months of fighting cancer? Do you ostracize members of your community who constantly diet but never lose weight?

Given the realities of the science behind addiction, it is simply astounding to realize the difficulties and struggles of the lived experience of addiction. Recovering addicts are truly ba'alei teshuva in the literal sense of the term: they are masters of repentance. Though Avi ultimately succumbed to his disease, he had remained clean for almost an entire year. For that last year, he volunteered to work with

addicts in the community, spoke at Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, inspired others to do what feels impossible to do. He saved lives along the way. For that last year, Avi daily reflected on how to change, daily sought to make amends with people he may have hurt, and daily prayed for help to overcome his weaknesses. How often have you engaged in such dedicated, intense and continuous self-reflection to change your weaknesses?

As Jewish and especially Orthodox recovering addicts renew themselves and begin rebuilding their lives, they often experience loneliness and isolation from a community that fails to understand them – precisely at a time when they need support and community the most. Our shiva home turned into a place where recovering addicts – those who have known Avi for a long time, those who knew him only briefly; men and women, Jews and non-Jews, from all walks of life – could talk freely and be listened to about the trials and triumphs of being in recovery, as well as the experience of watching so many friends and loved ones, like Avi, be destroyed by their disease.

There are good chances that you, too, have someone wrestling with substance abuse in your family or community. We urge you to reconsider the way you relate to them. Encourage them to seek help. But professional help is never enough – you must support them throughout the process. Take an hour and visit an Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous meeting. Doing so, you will quickly realize why recovering addicts are our family's heroes – and that they should be treated accordingly by the Jewish community, with the respect and dignity they deserve.

If only the Jewish community would learn a little from the life and loss of our dear son and brother, Avi – to be more caring of others, more sensitive to the pain around us, and more appreciative of the difficult circumstances in which so many find themselves – perhaps we would lose fewer of our sons and brothers. ■



other. How are we to balance the dominance of the churban with the importance of reflecting on these other tragedies? Looking at the fifth event introduced in the Mishna may offer guidance to our necessary state of mind on this important day.

The Mishna (Taanis 4:6) writes about these five events:

*"...On Tisha B'Av the decree was given to our forefathers to not enter into Eretz Yisrael, the first and second Temples were destroyed, Beitar was captured, and the city (Jerusalem) was plowed up."*

The Rambam (Hilchos Taanis 5:3) elaborates on the last event, offering the following:

*"...and on that day set aside for terrible events, the evil Turnus Rufus of the kings of Edom ploughed the heichal and its surroundings, fulfilling (the prophecy of Jeremiah 26:18) that of 'Zion shall be ploughed like a field'."*

In this elaboration of the fifth tragedy, the question of its importance relative to the churban becomes even more apparent. Sure, Turnus Rufus seems like a really bad guy and what he did is certainly indicative of someone who had aggression against the Jewish people. But is this really on par with the destruction of the Temples, the institutions which served to unite Bnai Yisrael and reflected God's unique relationship to the Jewish people? Furthermore, the event of Beitar involved the capture of that important city, along with the slaughter of tens of thousands, great talmidei chachamim included. Nobody was injured in plowing up the area of the Temple. When the decree came that none of those who had left Egypt would enter Eretz Yisrael, a seismic shift occurred that ultimately changed the destiny of Bnai Yisrael. The magnitude of that event does not seem parallel in importance to what Turnus Rufus accomplished. What are we to make of this fifth event?

The first step is to understand the intrinsic relationship of the three events to the destruction of the Temples. It would seem that each of these events is related to the churban, whether they be causally related, or an effect of the destruction. At the same time, each event requires its own analysis, devoid of the impact of the churban. For example, there was the decree given to Bnai Yisrael as a result of their terrible sin by the incident of the spies. The event itself needs to be understood, why they sinned, and why their punishment was fitting. Yet this sin and punishment played a pivotal role in the destructive events in the future. Had the generation that left Egypt, who bore witness to countless miracles, and received the Torah via the revelation at Sinai, entered into the Land of Israel and conquered it, the churban may never have occurred. The void that emerged as a result of their sin



played a unique causal role in bringing about the churban.

This same approach can be used to help explain the importance of Turnus Rufus's plowing feat. This event took place some time after the Temple had been destroyed. The ruins were still left, clear physical evidence of the catastrophe. As long as the ruins were still present, the area of the Temple would retain its designation. The Jewish people would see this area, the remnants of the Temple, and plan for its rebuilding. To rebuild means to take that which already exists in some capacity and redo it. Plowing up this area, making it into a field, meant a new designation for this area. It would no longer be used for the Temple. There was to be no re-building. In a sense, this was a necessary component of galus. It could be the fulfillment of this prophecy was actually the true beginning of the galus. As long as the ruins were still present, the Jewish people would be resistant to accepting the result of the churban and would try and rebuild the second Temple. Now, with the ruins gone, there could no longer be a "re-building." The galus was in place and could only end with final redemption and the building of the Third Temple.

This demonstrates the connection between the churban and the event of plowing over the ruins. However, there is another necessary analysis, an understanding of who Turnus Rufus was and what makes him so dangerous.

The Rambam inserts a few additional elements in his description of the event. First, he adds in "and on this day set aside for terrible events." Yet the Rambam omits this introduction by the other tragedies. He (along with all other commentaries) includes as well that this action was the fulfillment of a prophecy. The Rambam is alluding to an important concept. Turnus Rufus shows up throughout the Talmud and Midrash in one recurring context. He challenges Rabbi Akiva, the great Talmudic scholar,

to different intellectual debates, questioning the validity of the halachic system. He disputes the rationale for Shabbos (Sanhedrin 65b) and scoffs at the logic of an obligation for tzedaka (Bava Basra 10a). In the end, Rabbi Akiva offers rebuttals that expose the fallacy in Turnus Rufus's arguments. The key here is the danger Turnus Rufus presents. His objective is the ideological destruction of Judaism. He understood the effect his actions would have on Bnai Yisrael. Acting as he did on Tisha B'Av, the day of the churban, would only serve the purpose of stirring doubt in the minds of the Jewish people. His goal was to destroy Bnai Yisrael's link to God – without any means of serving their God, the Jews were lost. However, his understanding of the Temple was purely superficial. Rather than a vehicle to affect God (an idolatrous concept), Temple serves to perfect Bnai Yisrael. There would be other ways for Bnai Yisrael to achieve this perfection.

The threat presented by Turnus Rufus serves as an important idea for us in our current state of galus. We live under a constant threat of annihilation, surrounded by those who despise our ideology, who try to uproot our belief system through convincing arguments. We must always be prepared to counter the many "Turnus Rufuses", to understand the clear, rational arguments for Judaism's basis. Without it, we will be truly lost.

As we can now see, there is a natural duality within all the tragedies that exists on Tisha B'Av. Tisha B'Av is the day for us to reflect on all calamities that have befallen the Jewish people. Each event requires its own analysis, understanding our downfall and inspiring us to be involved in teshuva. At the same time, the churban takes center stage. All tragedies that occur to the Jewish people are the direct result of the destruction of the Temples. The reality of this must be at the forefront of our minds during this most solemn of days. ■

## Three Weeks

**Recognizing the sins of our ancestors and our own iniquities on Tisha B'Av**

*"There are others days on which all Israel fasts because of the tragedies that occurred on these dates. This is in order to move the hearts of the people and to open the road to repentance. And this is a memorial to our evil actions and the actions of our ancestors that were like our current behaviors to the point that these behaviors have brought these sorrows upon us and our ancestors. Through the recollection of these matters we will repent as it says: And they will confess their iniquities and the iniquities of their ancestors." (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Fasts 5:1)*

Each year we observe four fast days that commemorate the destruction of the first and second Temples and the suffering associated with these events. The fast of Tisha B'Av is the culmination of these fasts and commemorates the actual destruction of both Temples. The above quotation introduces Maimonides' discussion of the laws governing these fast days.

In his concise manner Maimonides makes a number of important points:

- These fast days were created to commemorate the destruction of the two Temples and the associated suffering and to place us upon the path to repentance.
- The fast days should cause us to recall our own iniquities and failings and those of our ancestors.
- The destruction of the Temples and the related suffering are a direct result of our failings and the sins of our ancestors.
- Recognition of the relationship between sin and suffering should motivate our repentance.
- Repentance requires that we confess our own sins and those of our ancestors.

Maimonides' comments raise a number of questions. First, it is generally assumed that the observance of Tisha B'Av and the other three fasts commemorating the Temples' destruction and the related suffering are designed to recall these events and to recognize these events as national and spiritual tragedies. However, Maimonides does not support this position. Instead, he proposes that these fasts are observed in order to acknowledge our responsibility and that of our ancestors for these calamities. Maimonides' contention that we are responsible for these disasters is difficult to understand. The first Temple was destroyed in 586 BCE and the second was destroyed in 70

CE. However, Maimonides attributes these tragedies to the sins of our ancestors and to our own behaviors. How can we be held accountable for these disasters?

Second, Maimonides explains that these fasts are intended to lead us to the path of repentance through recalling these events. How does this occur? How does the recollection of these long-past calamities bring us to the path of repentance?

Maimonides' contention that subsequent generations bear responsibility for the destruction of the Temples is reflected in the statement of the Sages that any generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt is regarded as if the Temple was destroyed in its time.[1] On its simplest level, this statement means that the absence of the rebuilt third Temple is as great a tragedy as the destruction of the second Temple. However, on a deeper level the message of our Sages is that our behaviors and conduct determine when the Temple will be rebuilt. In other words, the Temples were destroyed as a result of the sins of previous generations. The Temple will be rebuilt through the repentance of their descendants. Every generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt endures its absence because of its failure to properly return to Hashem. Therefore, Maimonides' contention that the absence of the Temple is a consequence of the sins of our ancestors and our own iniquities accords with the position of the Sages. Our ancestors' behaviors led to the destruction of the Temples and our own failings are responsible for the delay in its rebuilding.

This explains Maimonides' assignment of responsibility for these events to generations living centuries after their occurrence. This interpretation of the Sages' comments also explains how recalling past calamities leads to repentance. In recalling these disasters, we are not merely remembering a misfortune in our ancient past. We are recognizing that the destruction of the Temples was the beginning of a calamity that continues into the present – our own time. We share responsibility with our ancestors for this disaster. Once we recognize that our behaviors are responsible for the continued delay in the Temple's rebuilding, we will be motivated to address and improve our behaviors.

We now better understand Maimonides' comments regarding these four fasts. However, in order to more fully understand Maimonides' position, it is helpful to consider his general perspective on the purpose of fasting.

(continued on next page)

RABBI BERNIE FOX



**Fast Days and their objective**

*"It is a positive commandment to cry out and to sound the trumpets in response to any affliction that comes upon the congregation .... This is characteristic of repentance. At the occasion of a tragedy, when the congregation cries out and sounds the trumpets, they all realize that the evil that has befallen them is a consequence of their actions.... And this will cause the removal of the affliction from upon them.... But if they do not cry out and do not sound the trumpets but say that these events are merely natural events and happenstance, this is the path of cold-heartedness and it will cause them to cling to their evil actions. And upon the affliction will be added more affliction ..."* (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Fasts 1:1-3)

In these opening sentences of his Laws of Fasts, Maimonides explains the purpose and objective of fasts. All fasts are a response to an affliction or suffering. The Sages may declare a fast in response to drought or famine. A fast may be declared in reaction to an impending attack by our enemies. The fundamental aspect of the observance is not cessation from eating and drinking or other self-imposed hardships endured during the fast. Instead, the most essential element is petition and supplication. More specifically – the essential element of the observance of a fast is recognition and acknowledgement that our suffering is not merely a consequence of simple misfortune or chance events but instead, it is a consequence of our actions. All blessings and suffering experienced by the Jewish nation are expressions of Hashem's will and His providence. In turn, He blesses or punishes us in response to our behaviors.

In the context of this perspective on the function and purpose of fast days it is possible to more fully appreciate Maimonides' understanding of Tisha B'Av and the other three associated fasts. According to Maimonides, all fasts days have three shared elements:

- They are a response to a present affliction.
- The ultimate objective of the observance is to relieve the affliction.
- This objective is achieved through accepting responsibility for the tragedy – through recognizing that our actions are the cause of the calamity.

Therefore, although Tisha B'Av and the other three related fasts are observed annually, they are fundamentally indistinguishable from a fast declared in response to an emerging, onrushing disaster. Both are responses to current afflictions. The delay in the rebuilding of the Temple is a current, present-day affliction and it is a consequence of our actions. ■

[1] Talmud Yerushalmi, Mesechet Yoma 1:1.

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## Responding to Teens in Need

# A Decade of Progress



Rabbi Avraham Twerski, MD  
founder and director of Gateway Rehab



By now everyone knows about the major epidemic affecting our youth whom we have termed "at risk". We have spent ten years bringing awareness to the community, working on prevention, intervention and setting up programs to treat girls and boys. We have come a long way in a decade, priding ourselves on our resources such as drop in centers, trained therapists specializing in sexual and other abuse affecting our adolescents, yeshivas that specialize in boys at risk, as well as various girls programs. Indeed we have grown and have what to be proud of as we address the needs of an ever growing population of teens acting out in self damaging ways unprecedented. But as we take a closer look at the past ten years of progress, we must also see the discouraging reality; treating girls who are self destructing is something that we have attempted and failed at. We have started countless programs that have closed and our young women in need often turn outside to non Jewish programs for comprehensive treatment. The fact is that girls that are going "off the derech" are not merely in spiritual crisis or in need of empowerment and acceptance to turn themselves around, they are deeply hurting and in need of professional care in order to heal. What we have learned in ten years is that treating young women is costlier than treating young men, and that often the issues lie deeper and therefore need more comprehensive treatment to be effective. The programs that were offering residential professional treatment have closed.

Yet, against all odds, there is one program that stands alone, having withstood the test of time, addressing all of the issues plaguing our young women in need. Tzofiah is taking girls with deviant behaviors such as promiscuity, petty theft, drugs, alcohol and self mutilation and affectively rehabilitating them, offering them a chance at a future that once seemed impossible. In a loving, warm environment run as a home model, while offering quality treatment, a high school education, vocational training and career planning, it is the only therapeutic residential program for young women from orthodox backgrounds still standing today after ten years of experience. With a trained and experi-

enced staff of professionals and educators Tzofiah's successes speak for itself.

"The key to Tzofiah's unprecedented success is the unique love and devotion offered by the uniquely professional staff. As far as I am aware, there is nothing in the Jewish world offering this quality of care anywhere." –Rabbi Avraham Twerski, MD, founder and director of Gateway Rehab.

"Tzofiah saved my life in every way. I'm scared to think of where I would be without it." –LR orphaned at 8, present counselor at Tzofiah, past student.

"With lots of love and patience Tzofiah gave me the tools to become who I really wanted and needed to be; to be able to look past what the world had shaped me into and to discover who G-d has created." –BD, present mom and wife living in Jerusalem alumni of Tzofiah.

"Someone robbed me of my ability to shine because of their animalistic nature. Tzofiah worked overtime to undo the damage. I would not be who I am today if it weren't for Tzofiah." –Tzofiah alumni presently working while studying for her career.

Unfortunately the tragic circumstances leading girls to Tzofiah are endless. Fortunately there is a wonderful solution.

In a society with plenty of awareness and not enough resources we need to pay attention to where the solutions lie and what we can each do to help.

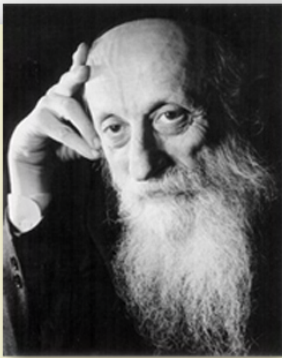
Rabbi Twerski added, "Tzofiah, standing alone as a therapeutic program for teens at risk from religious backgrounds, must be given support to continue doing their invaluable and unprecedented work."

*For more information email [info@tzofiah.org](mailto:info@tzofiah.org) or call 972-2-9998096 or to donate send to American Friends of Tzofiah, C/O Miriam Gold, 874 E. 9th street, Bklyn, NY 11230. 718 951 7482.*



# Jewish at risk teenage girls need you...

Tzofiah: a vital program in danger of collapse under the weight of the economic crisis. Tzofiah is a residential therapeutic program for at risk girls from religious backgrounds which has been serving our communities for over 10 years.



*Tzofiah is literally saving lives, yet Tzofiah is in danger of closing it's doors, which would be a tragedy for the girls presently registered and for the future needy girls*

The only program of it's kind, Tzofiah offers comprehensive treatment for high school girls from backgrounds of pain and despair. Tzofiah nurtures recovery from abuse, trauma, neglect, learning disabilities, family loss, family discord or domestic violence. Unfortunately, hurting young women often act out self destructive behaviors, isolating themselves from productive society and joining the counterculture of self damaging teens.

We all know kids like this but we rarely know how to help them. Tzofiah sees these behaviors as a cry for help and heeds this cry by attending to these childrens' every need; therapeutic, educational, vocational, physical and spiritual.

Behaviors being treated at Tzofiah range from promiscuity, petty theft, self mutilation, drugs, alcohol and eating disorders. Their success rate is astounding and with ten years of experience behind them, Tzofiah brags graduates that have joined the work force, universities, are happily married with children, honor roll graduates, and most importantly fulfilled, accomplished and happy. Tzofiah is literally saving lives, yet Tzofiah is in danger of closing it's doors, which would be a tragedy for the girls presently registered and for the future needy girls that will not find help anywhere else within the Jewish world.

Please get involved in helping them keep their doors open through this difficult financial climate, so that they may still be here when the crisis is over as well, to address the needs of our pained and deserving young women in need.

**Please donate through the Mesora website.  
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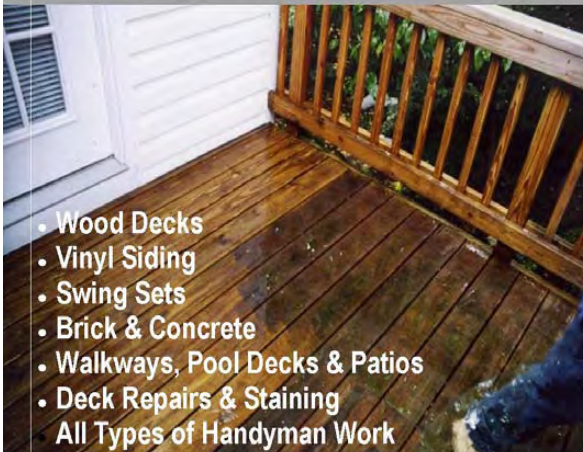
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