

Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Devarim

Insights into life, personal growth & Torah

The Fax of Life

ת"וב

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GOOD MORNING! As we have previously discussed, *Tisha B'Av* is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar. *Tisha B'Av* – the ninth day of the Hebrew month of *Av* – culminates the mournful period known as “The Three Weeks,” which began with the fast of the 17th of *Tammuz*. Many terrible misfortunes befell the Jewish people on the 17th of *Tammuz* including the breaching of the walls of ancient Jerusalem, which led to the destruction of the Holy Temple on *Tisha B'Av*.

Over the last 3,500 years many horrific things have happened on the ninth of *Av* – including some of the most tragic events in Jewish history. Here are some of the many tragedies:

1. The incident of the spies slandering the land of Israel and the Jewish people buying into their lies. This led to God's decree that the Israelites wander the desert for 40 years until that entire generation died out.
2. The destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon in 423 BCE.
3. The destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE.
4. The fall of Beitar and the end of the Bar Kochba revolt against the Romans 65 years later, 135 CE.
5. Pope Urban II declared the First Crusade. Tens of thousands of Jews were killed, and many Jewish communities obliterated.
6. The Jews of England were expelled in 1290.
7. The Jews of Spain were expelled in 1492.
8. World War I broke out on *Tisha B'Av* in 1914 when Russia declared war on Germany. German resentment of the Treaty of Versailles set the stage for World War II and the Holocaust. In fact, many believe it was merely the continuation of World War I. Thus, the Holocaust also has its roots in *Tisha B'Av*.
9. Deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto began in 1942.

This year, *Tisha B'Av* begins this upcoming Saturday night, August 3rd. On this day, one is forbidden to eat or drink, bathe, use moisturizing creams or oils, wear leather shoes, and have marital relations. The idea is to minimize pleasure and to let the body feel the distress the soul should feel over these tragedies. Similar to Yom Kippur, these restrictions span 25 hours; it begins at sunset on Saturday night and extends until the stars come out Sunday evening.

Like all fast days, the objective is introspection; disconnecting from our physical distractions and taking a spiritual accounting and correcting our ways. In Hebrew this is called “*teshuvah* – returning to the path of good and righteousness, to the ways of the Torah.”

Tisha B'Av is a very somber time; at night the synagogue lights are dimmed (many synagogues distribute candles to those in attendance) and everyone sits on low stools or on the floor, similar to those in mourning. *The Book of Lamentations*, which was authored by the prophet Jeremiah who witnessed the destruction of the First Temple and the subsequent exile of his people, is read in a hushed and mournful tone.

The service is followed by a communal reading of some of the elegies composed by poets over the last two millennia. Many of those in attendance read these sad passages with tears streaming down their faces. This is repeated the following day; the custom is to read these elegies until midday and then head home to rest before returning for the afternoon services.

A story is told of Napoleon walking through the streets of Paris one *Tisha B'Av*. As he passed a synagogue he heard the mournful sounds emanating from within. Napoleon turned to one of his attending officers and asked, “What’s this all about?”

It was explained that the Jews were in mourning over the loss of their Temple. “Why haven’t I heard about their Temple being destroyed?” The aide replied that it had happened nearly 1700 years prior. Napoleon is reputed to have observed: “A nation that has mourned its Temple for 1700 years will surely merit seeing it being rebuilt one day.”

In all likelihood this story, like many tales and legends about famous personalities, never happened. But as author Tim O'Brien once noted; “Just because something never happened doesn’t mean it isn’t true.” In other words, the Jewish people, who for two millennia have been mourning the loss of the Holy Temple and actively praying and pining for it to be rebuilt, will surely one day succeed in making that dream a reality.

Still, in order to merit having the Temple rebuilt we must first understand why it was lost in the first place and make every effort to correct whatever caused that to happen.

The Talmud (*Yoma* 9b) states that the Second Temple was destroyed because of the sin of “*sinas chinam* – baseless hatred,” which was an outgrowth of the rampant strife and discord that plagued the Jewish people. This disharmony led to both the destruction of the Temple and the continuing two millennia long exile of the Jewish people from the Land of Israel.

I would like to share an insight from my brilliant father, HaRav Yochanan Zweig. My father points out that the

greeting “*shalom*” – used as both hello and goodbye in conversational Hebrew – actually means neither; by definition, *shalom* means peace. Yet this seems to be a rather odd way to greet someone. What is the meaning behind this greeting and farewell?

Much of the ancient wisdom of the Torah has been distilled into principles of life and ethical behavior and compiled by our sages in the work known as “*Pirkei Avot* – Ethics of our Fathers.” This manual for living a meaningful and principled life was completed about two thousand years ago and the wisdom contained within is quite timeless. *Pirkei Avot* is part of the Torah known as *mishna* – which forms much of the basis of the “oral law.”

We find an interesting teaching in the fourth chapter of *Pirkei Avot*; “Rabbi Masya said; “[when meeting others] be the first to initiate a greeting and be the tail to lions rather than the head of a fox.” This statement seems very odd. These two concepts appear to be distinct and totally unrelated.

This is even more perplexing when considering that the primary method of teaching the “oral law” was, as the name implies, verbally. In fact, the Talmud often uses mnemonics to facilitate retention. By contrast, a non sequitur would be infinitely harder to remember and transmit properly. So the two statements of Rabbi Masya must be related. What is the relationship between these two concepts?

Strife is always painful; when something is torn apart there is bound to be some level of profound suffering. This is why the word for peace in Hebrew is *shalom*. The word *shalom* come from the Hebrew word “*shalem* – whole.” When we have unity, we have peace.

When we greet someone with “*shalom*” what we are really conveying is that we are unified with one another (as in “you complete me”). Thus, it is the ultimate way to greet or depart from someone because it implies a deep-rooted connection and commonality as well as a sustained interest in their wellbeing.

This also explains the relationship between Rabbi Masya’s two statements. When we internalize that being part of a unified whole is the goal (rather than focusing on personal achievement) then we begin to understand that it doesn’t really make a difference whether or not we are a head or a tail, we are all one. It’s not about the role you play, rather it’s about being part of a higher caliber entity. Therefore, it is much preferable to be the tail of a lion than the head of a fox because at the end of the day it’s not about you – it’s about the unity and strength of the entity.

As I mentioned some months ago, one of the names of the Almighty is Shalom, and it is telling that the Temple was built by King Solomon in Jerusalem; all these names came from the root word *shalem*. The Torah describes the Holy Temple as the place where the Almighty “rests His name,” where the Divine Presence is manifested in this world. When the Jewish people suffer from disunity and conflict, when they are unable to resolve their differences with each other, they make it impossible for God to rest His Presence in their midst.

Thus, in order for the Holy Temple to be rebuilt we must actively work on ourselves to internalize that there is no “us vs. them” – our fates are all intertwined, and we must make every effort to bridge any divide between us. We are all created in the image of God, and we are all His children. There is no greater joy for a parent than seeing one’s children getting along, helping one another and living harmoniously. The same holds true for the Almighty.

May the Almighty grant all of us the insight and wisdom to become unified so that we will merit seeing the Holy Temple rebuilt speedily in our days. Amen.

TORAH PORTION: Devarim, Deuteronomy 1:1 - 3:22

This week we begin the last of the Five Books of Moses, “*Devarim* – Words.” In English, it is called *Deuteronomy* (from the Greek meaning “Second Law” – from *deuteros* “second” + *nomos* “law”) perhaps because Moses repeats many of the laws of the Torah to prepare the Jewish people for entering and living in the Land of Israel. The book is the oration of Moses before he died. Moses reviews the history of the 40 years of wandering the desert, reviews the laws of the Torah, and gives rebuke so that the Jewish people will learn from their mistakes. Giving reproof right before one dies is often the most effective time to offer advice and correction; people are more inclined to pay attention and to take it to heart.

SHABBAT LIGHTING: *Jerusalem* 7:00 Miami 7:48 Cape Town 5:48 Guatemala 6:13 Hong Kong 6:46 Honolulu 6:52

Jo'Burg 5:23 LA 7:35 London 8:33 Melbourne 5:14 Mexico 6:54 Moscow 8:17 New York 7:53 Singapore 6:58 Toronto 8:22

“QUOTE OF THE WEEK”: Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.

— Albert Einstein

Dedicated in Loving Memory of Our Parents

Oscar & Rosita Boruchin

Rachel bas Avraham & Osher ben Dovid

By Their Children Diana & Oded Ben-Arie



Shabbat Shalom,

Yitzchak Zweig

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

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