
THE THREE WEEKS AND TISHAH B'AV II

Why the Temple was Destroyed & How to Rebuild It

In the first Morasha Class on the Three Weeks and Tishah B'Av we focused on the historical events that have laid the groundwork for our days of national mourning. In this class we will focus more specifically on what was lost when the Temples were each destroyed and what the causes of those tragedies were from the spiritual perspective of Judaism. This is no mere academic endeavor; understanding what we lost and why is the first step in being able to correct the mistakes of the past and to build for the future. This class will also help us gain an appreciation as to why we still mourn on Tishah B'Av and what there is to be gained by doing so.

This class will address the following questions:

- What does it mean to us that we no longer have the Holy Temple? What did we lose when it was destroyed?
- Why were the First and Second Temples destroyed?
- What can we do to rebuild the Temple?
- How can introspection, fasting, and mourning on Tishah B'Av help rebuild the Jewish nation?

Class Outline:

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Section II.	Causes for the Destruction of the First and Second Temples Part A. The Spiritual Roots of Destruction Part B. The First Temple: Three Cardinal Transgressions and Disrespect for Torah Part C. The Second Temple: Sinat Chinam, Lashon Hara, and Not Judging Properly
Section III.	How We Can Rebuild the Temple Part A. Respecting and Loving Our Fellow Jews Part B. Improving our Speech Part C. Respecting Torah Part D. Developing and Strengthening a Positive Outlook on Life Part E. Fasting
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INTRODUCTION. DO WE KNOW WHAT WE'VE LOST?

During the third day of the Six Day War in 1967, Israeli soldiers finally burst through into the Old City of Jerusalem and were able to fight their way to the area of the Western Wall. As soldiers both old and young fell upon the Wall they wept with emotion, all the while kissing and caressing with awe the last remaining segment of the Temple. This, in large part, was what they had been fighting for; this holy place to which Jews had not been allowed to come for close to two decades. Now they, at the high cost of many soldiers killed and wounded, had captured it from the enemy's hands. The picture of those anxious weeping soldiers at the Western Wall is etched forever in the minds of those who saw it first-hand.

Standing back from those huddled close to the Wall, were two soldiers who came from a non-observant kibbutz. They had no religious background whatsoever, and thus the holiness and significance of the place was lost on them. They looked around, overwhelmed by emptiness, and then suddenly one of them began to cry uncontrollably.

The second soldier, surprised by this sudden outburst, turned to the first and said,
 “למה אתה בוכה” – Why are you crying?”

The first soldier looked up as tears rolled down his cheeks and replied sadly,
 “אני בוכה על מה שאני לא בוכה” – I cry because I don't know what there is to cry about.”
 (From Rabbi Paysach Krohn, *Around the Maggid's Table*, ArtScroll Publications, p. 105)

SECTION I. WHAT WE ARE MISSING WITHOUT THE TEMPLE

As mentioned above, this class will discuss why the Temples were destroyed and why it is so important that we mourn their loss. In order to appreciate how our lives are different without the Holy Temple, in this section we will explore what it is that we lost when it was destroyed. As the shiur will show, the world without a Holy Temple is a world without clarity of God's direct involvement in our lives.

PART A. THE DIVINE PRESENCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. **Rabbi Shraga Simmons, Eye of Jerusalem, from www.aish.com – Without the Temple we lose the awareness that God is interested in this world.**

The Temple was where every Jew, no matter what his situation, could meet God. God did not want to be far away, He wanted to be next to His people and he wanted them to partake of His goodness.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller explains that the Temple was not merely a place of prayer and service, but was actually the dwelling place of God. "It was a stunning declaration of the principle that God's interest is not in the vast distances of space and in the millions of star-worlds, but in man alone."

This idea is alluded to in the following verse: *They shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell inside them (Shemot/Exodus 25:8)*. The commentaries point out that the verse does not say, "I will dwell inside it," but rather "inside them." What is the meaning of this unusual phrasing? The Temple was such a powerful reality that it inspired the Almighty's Presence to dwell inside each and every Jew.

PART B. PROPHECY

Prophecy – the clear channel by which God communicates with mankind – lasted for 1,000 years among the Jewish people, from the time of the Exodus (1313 BCE) until forty years after the rebuilding of the Second Temple (313 BCE). During the First Temple period, prophecy was very common and there were approximately one million men and women who experienced it.

Prophecy is very difficult to attain when the Ark of the Covenant (containing the Tablets of the Ten Commandments) is not in its place in the Holy Temple (Handbook of Jewish Thought, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, 6:79-86). As such, it has ceased to exist within the Jewish people since the time of the destruction of the First Temple. (For more on the end of prophecy, see the Morasha class on Prophets and Prophecy II, Section III.)

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

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

משמיתו נביאים האחרונים חגי זכריה ומלאכי נסתלקה
רוח הקדש מישראל...

2. **Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, Lev Eliyahu, Vol. I, p. 263 (in the name of the Rema in Torat HaOlah) – The prophets were aware of the channels through which they received their inspiration.**

When Yirmiyahu saw the Temple in ruins, he fell on the bricks and mortar and cried. Plato, the Greek philosopher, came up to him and exclaimed, "How can you, the wisest of the Jews, cry over bricks and mortar?! And why are you crying over the past? What happened, happened. A wise person does not cry over the past, but for the future." Yirmiyahu replied, "You are a great philosopher, surely you must have some philosophical quandaries?" Plato said to him, "I do have questions, but I don't think there is anyone who can answer them." Yirmiyahu said, "Ask me, and I will answer you." Plato asked,

בשעה שראה ירמיה את חרבן בית המקדש, נפל על העצים והאבנים ובכה. פגש אותו אפלטון – מפילוסופי יון ושאלו: "אתה החכם שביהודים, אתה בוכה על עצים ואבנים"? ועוד שאל אותו: "מה לך לבכות על העבר, מה שהיה היה. אדם חכם לא בוכה על העבר, אלא בונה את העתיד". אמר לו ירמיה: "אתה הרי פילוסוף גדול, ודאי יש לך שאלות בפילוסופיה"? אמר לו אפלטון: "יש לי שאלות, אבל אינני חושב שיש מי שיודע לענות עליהן". אמר לו ירמיה: "שאל אותן ואני אשיב לך עליהן". אפלטון שאל – וירמיה ענה לו על כל קושיותיו, עד שתמה הפילוסוף אם העומד לפניו הוא אדם, או שמא מלאך, המלא בחכמה נפלאה.

and Yirmiyahu answered all of his questions. Plato was so astonished at his profound wisdom that he was not sure whether Yirmiyahu was really a man or an angel.

Yirmiyahu then said to Plato, "All this wisdom has come from these bricks and mortar. As for why I am crying over the past, I will not answer you since you will not be able to comprehend it. Only a Jew can understand the depth of crying over the past."

אמר לו ירמיה: "דע לך שכל חוכמתי היא מאותם עצים ואבנים! – ומה ששאלת מדוע אני בוכה על העבר לא אענה לך, כי דבר זה עמוק מאוד ולא תצליח להבין – רק יהודי יכול להבין את עומק ענין הבכיה על העבר."

Those who had already achieved the level of prophecy while the Temple stood did not necessarily lose it, but from that point on there were no more new prophets. Lines of communication with the One Above were no longer open in the same way.

PART C. SIMCHAH

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

Whoever did not witness the *Simchat Beit HaShoevah* [the festival of the water drawing] never experienced true joy.

כל מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה, לא ראה שמחה ממשית:

Such pure joy no longer exists. To remind ourselves of this, Jews have adopted customs of minimizing their own joyous occasions. For instance, at the end of a wedding ceremony a glass is broken by the groom in commemoration of the fact that we no longer have the Temple.

PART D. OPEN CHANNEL FOR PRAYER

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

1. **Bereishit 28:17 with Commentary of Rashi – The place of Yaakov's dream was the gateway of prayers to God.**

[Yaakov] was frightened. "How awe-inspiring this place is!" he exclaimed. "It must be God's house. It is the gate to Heaven!"

"It is the gate to Heaven" – i.e., the place of prayer where their prayers rise to the Heavens.

ויירא ויאמר מה נורא המקום הזה אין זה כי אם בית אלהים וזה שער השמים.

זה שער השמים - מקום תפלה לעלות תפלתם השמימה.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Berachot 32b – After the destruction of the Temple the gates of prayer have been sealed.**

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

מיום שחרב בית המקדש ננעלו שערי תפלה שנאמר גם כי אזעק ואשוע שתם תפלתי.

Does this mean that there is no point in praying to God anymore? Obviously not. It's just harder now to get the prayers through to Him.

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

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

ואף על פי ששערי תפלה ננעלו שערי דמעות לא ננעלו.

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

PART E. MIRACLES AT THE TEMPLE AND DIVINE PROTECTION

1. **Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers) 5:5 – In the Holy Temple the laws of nature were transcended and open miracles could be witnessed by anyone present.**

Ten wonders were performed for our ancestors in the Temple: No woman miscarried from the aroma of the sacrificial meat; the sacrificial meat never became putrid; no fly was seen in the place where the meat was cut up; never did a seminal emission occur to the High Priest on the Day of Atonement; the rains did not extinguish the fire on the wood pile [of the Altar]; the wind did not disperse the vertical column of smoke [from the Altar]; no disqualification was found in the Omer, or in the Two Loaves, or in the Show Bread; the people stood crowded together, yet prostrated themselves [with] wide spaces [between them]; never did a snake or a scorpion injure someone in Jerusalem; and no man said to his friend: “There is no room for me to sleep overnight in Jerusalem.”

עשרה נסים נעשו לאבותינו בבית המקדש לא הפילה אשה מריח בשר הקדש ולא הסריח בשר הקדש מעולם ולא נראה זבוב בבית המטבחים ולא אירע קרי לכהן גדול ביום הכפורים ולא כיבו גשמים אש של עצי המערכה ולא נצחה הרוח את עמוד העשן ולא נמצא פסול בעומר ובשתי הלחם ובלחם הפנים עומדים צפופים ומשתחוים רוחים ולא הזיק נחש ועקרב בירושלים מעולם ולא אמר אדם לחברו צר לי המקום שאלין בירושלים:

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

During one of the pilgrimage festivals, one of the travelers to the Temple in Jerusalem left his

מעשה באחד שהניח את כריו (של תבואה בשדה) ובא, ומצא אריות סובבים אותו. מעשה באחד שהניח

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

Rabbi Pinchas recounted the following incident: Two brothers who resided in Ashkelon had non-Jewish neighbors. These neighbors plotted to take advantage of the brothers' ritual ascent to Jerusalem in order to plunder the belongings they had left behind. After the brothers departed on their journey, God sent angels to live in their home. When the brothers returned after the holiday, the gentiles asked them, "Where have you been?" They replied, "In Jerusalem." They asked, "Who did you leave behind in your home?" They answered, "No one." [Having grasped the miracle performed by God] the gentiles exclaimed, "Blessed is the God of the Jews, Who does not abandon them, and surely will never abandon them in the future."

בית של תרנגולים, ובא ומצא חתולים מקורעים לפניו. חד בר נש שביק בית' פתוח (עזב את ביתו ולא נעלה כראוי), ואתא ואשכח חכינה כריכה על קרקסוי (מצא נחש כרוך על המנעול של הפתח, לשמירה).

רבי פנחס משתעי הדין עובדא. תרין אחין הוון באשקלון. הוו להון מגורין נוכראין (היו להם שכנים נכרים). אמרין, כדין אילין יהודאין סלקין לירושלם, אנן נסבין כל מה דאית להון (אמרו, כשאלו היהודים יעלו לירושלם לרגל, אנו ניקח את כל אשר להם מביתם). מן דסלקין (לאחר שעלו לרגל), זימן להם הקב"ה מלאכים נכנסים ויצאים, בדמותן... אמרו לון, אן הויתם (אמרו להם הנכרים, היכן הייתם). אמרו לון, בירושלם. אמרו לון, ומאן שבקותון בגו ביתא (שאלום, למי הנחתם בתוך הבית). אמרו, ולא בר נש (והשיבו, שום אדם). אמרו, בריך אלקהון דיהודאי דלא שבקון ולא שביק להון (אמרו, ברוך אלקיהם של היהודים, שלא עזב אותם, ולא יעזבם לעולם). ע"כ.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ☞ When we lost the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, a certain connection to the Divine was lost.
- ☞ The ramifications of this lost connection to the Divine are felt in a decreased inspiration from Above, our loss of prophecy, as well as our difficulty in communicating through prayer.
- ☞ The Holy Temple was a place where God's Presence was felt on a daily basis, as well as His control over nature.
- ☞ Without the Temple, our capacities for wisdom, prayer, joy, and awareness of spiritual reality are significantly stifled.

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

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

PART A. THE SPIRITUAL ROOTS OF DESTRUCTION

A basic tenet of Jewish belief is that everything is in God's hands. Jewish history does not follow the standard patterns of political and economic forces; rather, it is a function of our relationship with God. If the Babylonians and the Romans were able to destroy the Temple, clearly God let them do it because the transgressions of the Jewish people had already destroyed the Temple at its spiritual roots.

1. Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 96b – Upon destroying the Temple, Titus was given a lesson in the way the world really works.

[Titus'] mind was now elated [with his triumph], when a voice came forth from Heaven saying to him, "You have slain a dead people, you have burned a Temple already burned, you have ground flour already ground."

קא זיחא דעתיה. נפקא בת קלא ואמרה ליה: עמא קטילא קטלת, היכלא קליא קלית, קימחא טחינא טחינת.

This is not a poetic expression of the sorry state of the Temple institution at the time – far from it. This is a statement about the reality of the way the world really works.

2. Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, Nefesh HaChaim, Shaar 1:4 – The Babylonians and Romans were performing the hollow act of destroying a Temple that already lay in spiritual ruin.

The actions of Nebuchadnezzar and Titus did not cause any damage in Heaven. Since the souls of these fiends were not rooted in the higher worlds, their actions did not affect those worlds at all. Rather, due to our sins, God's strength, as it were, was weakened and God's supernal Holy Temple above defiled. This is what gave Nebuchadnezzar and Titus the power to destroy the earthly Holy Temple, that which parallels the supernal Holy Temple above. This is as our Sages have said: "You [Titus] have ground flour already ground." That is because it had already been destroyed above by our sins, in the supernal worlds above, and they merely destroyed the abode below.

כי הלא נבוכדנצר וטיטוס לא עשו במעשיהם שום פגם וקלקול כלל למעלה, כי לא להם חלק ושורש בעולמות העליונים שיהו יכולים לנגוע שם כלל במעשיהם. רק שבחטאינו נתמעט ותש כביכול כח גבורה של מעלה, את מקדש ה' טמאו כביכול המקדש העליון, ועל ידי כך היה להם כח לנבוכדנצר וטיטוס להחריב המקדש של מטה המכוון נגד המקדש של מעלה, כמ"ש חז"ל קמחא טחינא טחינת. הרי כי עוונותינו החריבו נוח מעלה - עולמות עליונים הקדושים, והמה החריבו רק נוח מטה.

In the following story, the Talmud again illustrates this principle with regard to the Temple.

3. Talmud Bavli, Gittin 56a – At least one Roman general realized that he was merely a pawn.

He [the Emperor] sent against them [the people of Jerusalem] Nero the Caesar. As he was coming, he shot an arrow toward the east, and it fell in Jerusalem. He then shot one toward the west, and it again fell in Jerusalem. He shot toward all four points of the compass, and each time it fell in Jerusalem. He said to a certain boy, "Repeat to me [the last] verse of Scripture you have learned." He said, "And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel." He said,

שדר עלוייהו לגירון קיסר. כי קאתי, שדא גירא למזרח אתא נפל בירושלים, למערב - אתא נפל בירושלים, לארבע רוחות השמים - אתא נפל בירושלים. א"ל לינוקא: פסוק לי פסוק, אמר ליה: ונתתי את נקמתי באדום ביד עמי ישראל וגו', אמר: קודשא בריך הוא בעי לחרובי ביתיה, ובעי לכפורי ידיה בהווא גברא! ערק ואזל ואיגיר, ונפק מיניה רבי מאיר.

"The Holy One, Blessed be He, desires to destroy His House and to lay the blame on me." So he ran away and became a proselyte, and Rabbi Meir was descended from him.

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

What were the sins that had led to the spiritual destruction of the First Temple even before the Babylonians ever laid hands on it?

1. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b – The three cardinal transgressions led to the destruction of the First Temple.

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

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

Judaism considers these three sins the worst of all transgressions. So severe are they that the Talmud tells us that we should rather die than transgress them (see Sanhedrin 74a). These were not the only sins prevalent at the time.

2. Midrash Eichah 20 – The study of Torah was disregarded at that time.

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

לא חרבה ירושלים אלא על ביטול תורה

3. Bach, Tur, Orach Chaim, Siman 47 – People studied Torah for selfish reasons, in disregard of its immense spiritual purpose.

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

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

ונראה דכוונתו ית' מעולם היתה שנהיה עוסקים בתורה כדי שתתעצם נשמתנו בעצמות ורוחניות וקדושת מקור מוצא התורה... אבל עתה שעברו חוק זה שלא עסקו בתורה כי אם לצורך הדברים הגשמיים להנאתם, לידע הדינים לצורך משא ומתן, גם להתגאות להראות חכמתם,

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

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

What caused the spiritual destruction of the Second Temple?

1. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b – Baseless hatred among Jews led to the destruction of the Second Temple.

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

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

The following story from the Talmud illustrates how baseless hatred literally led to the destruction of the Second Temple:

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

The destruction of Jerusalem came through a man called Kamtza and a man called Bar Kamtza in the following way: A certain man had a friend called Kamtza and an enemy called Bar Kamtza. He once made a party and said to his servant, "Go and bring Kamtza." The servant went and brought Bar Kamtza. When the man who gave the party found Bar Kamtza there he said, "What are you doing here? Get up and leave." Bar Kamtza replied, "Since I am already here, let me stay, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink." Kamtza said, "No!" and threw him out.

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

אקמץא ובר קמץא חרוב ירושלים, דההוא גברא דרחמיה קמץא ובעל דבביה בר קמץא, עבד סעודתא, אמר ליה לשמעיה: זיל אייתי לי קמץא, אזל אייתי ליה בר קמץא. אתא אשכחיה דהוה יתיב, אמר ליה: מכדי ההוא גברא בעל דבבא דההוא גברא הוא, מאי בעית הכא? קום פוק! אמר ליה: הואיל ואתאי שבקן, ויהיבנא לך דמי מה דאכילנא ושתינא, אמר ליה: לא. אמר ליה: יהיבנא לך דמי פלגא דסעודתך! אמר ליה: לא. אמר ליה: יהיבנא לך דמי כולה סעודתך! א"ל: לא. נקמיה בידיה ואוקמיה ואפקיה.

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

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

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

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

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

4. **Maharal, Netzach Yisrael, Ch. 5 – Since divisiveness is the antithesis of the unity that the Temple is supposed to generate, it inevitably led to its destruction.**

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

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

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

At the end of the Second Temple period, baseless hatred and speaking derogatorily about others (*lashon hara*) abounded, and for these reasons the Temple was destroyed. The intention of the Talmud [Yoma 9b] in identifying "baseless hatred" as the reason for the Temple's destruction was also to include derogatory speech, which reflects the hatred between Jews. Were this factor not present, they would not have been punished.

לבסוף ימי בית שני גברה שנאת חנם ולשון-הרע בינינו
בעונותינו הרבים, ובעבור זה נחרב הבית וגלינו מארצינו
כדאיתא ביומא (ט:) ובירושלמי פרק א' דיומא הגם
שהגמרא נקטה "שנאת חנם", הכוונה היא על לשון
הרע גם-כן שיוצאת מצד השנאה, דאי לאו הכי לא היו
נענשים על-כך.

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

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

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

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

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

"Due to their vested interests in their judicial

רב שמחה אמר לי... גראית המילה "דיניהם" מיותרת...
אמנם כל אחד התכוון לטובת עצמו.

אך בגלל הנגיעה שלו השלה את עצמו שכל כוונתו

decisions, they deceived themselves by thinking that their intention was to uphold the law. Therefore, the Talmud writes 'their judgments' – that which they created for themselves and placed over the laws of the Torah, as if this was the law of the Torah. Such a situation brought about the destruction of the Temple."

היא לקיים את הדין, הווי אומר שהעמידו "דיניהם",
מה שהם חידשו לעצמם, הם העמידו על דין תורה,
כאלו זה היה דין התורה – ומצב כזה הוא שמביא את
החורבן.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ☞ Jewish history does not follow standard rules; it is rather a function of the relationship between God and the Jewish people. If the Temples were destroyed – with all the spiritual ramifications previously discussed – it must have been because the Jews had done something to deserve it.
- ☞ The First Temple was destroyed because Jews murdered, worshipped idols, engaged in sexual immorality, and disrespected Torah study.
- ☞ The Second Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred, speaking lashon hara, and not judging properly.

SECTION III. HOW WE CAN REBUILD THE TEMPLE

Just as the Temple was destroyed through our ancestors' misdeeds, each generation has the capacity to take concrete steps to rectify those transgressions and thereby enable the rebuilding of the Temple. As such, each generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt is viewed as if it itself caused the very destruction!

1. **Talmud Yerushalmi, Yoma 1:1 – Each generation has the capacity to rebuild the Temple and if it fails to do so is considered responsible for its destruction.**

Every generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt is to be regarded as responsible for its destruction.

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

In order to rebuild the Temple, then, we need to correct those flaws that led to its destruction.

PART A. RESPECTING AND LOVING OUR FELLOW JEWS

Since the last Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred, we need to work on our love and respect for our fellow Jews.

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

Since the Temple was destroyed by baseless hatred, it will – please God – be rebuilt by loving our fellow Jews.

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

2. Chasam Sofer on the Pesach Haggadah, Ha Lachma Anya – Our initiative to love others will expedite the redemption.

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

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

PART B. IMPROVING OUR SPEECH

Central to harmonious coexistence is the way we speak to each other.

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

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

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

PART C. RESPECTING TORAH

Disrespect for the Torah was at the heart of the destruction of the First Temple.

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

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

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

PART D. DEVELOPING AND STRENGTHENING A POSITIVE OUTLOOK ON LIFE

So many of our problems stem from having the wrong attitude. Going all the way back to the sin of the spies, this is a flaw that must be corrected.

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

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

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

2. **Based on Rebbetzin Tzipporah Heller, Feeling the Loss, from www.aish.com – We need to be held together by love for each other rather than by the hatred of our persecutors.**

Maimonides (Rambam) offers a formula that has often been referred to as “senseless love.” We must reach out to each other without self-centered agendas. The process is transformative in the way that it changes our focus:

We are obligated to speak well of other people, sharing our joy at having glimpsed his/her inner beauty. The act of speaking positively allies us to each other. It makes us aware that we are on one team.

We are obligated to care for each other's material needs. By being aware of how frail and needy our bodies make us, we become more forgiving and tolerant.

We are obligated to seek out situations that bring honor to others. By doing so, we give them the precious gift of self-esteem and simultaneously remove ourselves from the egotistical traps of center stage.

This three-step process is deceptively simple. Yet it can change us dramatically. It can change not only our relationship with others, but can lead us to rediscover ourselves. In doing so, the endless mourning for our lost selves, and for our national tragedies, will cease.

For two millennia, the Jewish people have been targeted again and again by hatred and persecution. It seems that we are held together by the world's hatred rather than by love for each other. Yet things can change. We only need to take the steps from hatred to love, from criticism to appreciation.

PART E. FASTING

Observing Tishah B'Av and all the fast days commemorating the destruction of the Temple is essential to rebuilding it. But, as we shall see, simply refraining from food is not enough to truly observe these fasts.

1. The Book of Jonah 3:5-10 – The city of Nineveh provides the archetypical model for the effectiveness of fasting.

And the people of Nineveh believed in God, and they proclaimed a fast and donned sackcloth, from their greatest to their smallest. And the word reached the king of Nineveh, whereupon he rose from his throne, took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh: By the counsel of the king and his nobles, saying: Neither man nor beast, neither cattle nor sheep shall taste anything; they shall not graze, neither shall they drink water. And they shall cover themselves with sackcloth, both man and beast, and they shall call mightily to God, and everyone shall repent of his evil way and of the dishonest gain which is in their hands. Whoever knows shall repent, and God will relent, and He will return from His burning wrath, and we will not perish.

And God saw their deeds, that they had repented of their evil ways, and the Lord relented concerning the evil that He had spoken to do to them, and He did not do it.

ויאמינו אנשי נינוה באלהים ויקראו צום וילבשו שקים
מגדולם ועד קטנם: ויגע הדבר אל מלך נינוה ויקם
מכסאו ויעבר אדרתו מעליו ויכס שק וישב על האפר:
ויזעק ויאמר בנינוה מטעם המלך וגדליו לאמר האדם
והבהמה הבקר והצאן אל יטעמו מאומה אל ירעו ומים
אל ישתו: ויתכסו שקים האדם והבהמה ויקראו אל
אלהים בחזקה וישבו איש מדרכו הרעה ומן החמס
אשר בכפיהם: מי יודע ונחם האלהים ושב מחרון
אפו ולא נאבד:

וירא האלהים את מעשיהם כי שבו מדרכם הרעה
וינחם האלהים על הרעה אשר דבר לעשות להם ולא
עשה

2. Mishnah, Ta'anit 2:1 – The people of Nineveh did not just fast – they repented!

What is the order [of service] for fast days? ... The elder among the people addresses them with words of admonition [to repentance]: "Our brethren, Scripture does not say of the people of Nineveh, 'And God saw their sackcloth and their fasting,' but rather, 'And God saw their deeds' (Jonah 3:10) for they had turned from their evil ways; and in the prophets it is said, 'And rend your heart and not your garments' (Joel 2:13)."

סדר תעניות כיצד ... הזקן שבהן אומר לפניהן דברי
כבושין אחינו לא נאמר באנשי נינוה (יונה ג') וירא
אלהים את שקם ואת תעניתם אלא וירא אלהים את
מעשיהם כי שבו מדרכם הרעה ובקבלה הוא אומר
(יואל ב') וקרעו לבבכם ואל בגדיכם:

3. Rambam, Hilchot Ta'anot (Laws of Fasting) 5:1 – The purpose of a fast day is to inspire us to improve our actions and our character.

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

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

4. **Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Sefer HaToda'ah (Book of Our Heritage), Ch. 32 – Fasting is an essential preparation for the main event: Doing teshuvah.**

Each person must use these (fast) days to engage in self-examination and to repent, for fasting is not the main thing but repentance ... Fasting simply prepares one to repent.

Therefore, those who spend the fast day idly emphasize what is of secondary importance and disregard that which is essential. Nonetheless, repentance alone (without fasting) is insufficient, for it is an ordinance established by the prophets, and all Israel has accepted these fast days upon themselves. Such has been the practice everywhere throughout the generations.

חִיב כָּל אִישׁ לְשִׁים אֶל לְבוּ בְּאוֹתָם הַיָּמִים וּלְפַשְׁפֹּשׁ
בְּמַעֲשָׂיו וּלְשׁוּב כִּי אֵין הָעֵיקָר בְּתַעֲנִית אֱלֹא הַתְּשׁוּבָה ...
וְאֵין הַתַּעֲנִית אֱלֹא הַכְּנָה לַתְּשׁוּבָה:

לִכֵּן אוֹתָם הָאֲנָשִׁים הַמוֹצִיָּאִים אֶת יוֹם הַצּוֹם בְּטִיּוֹל
וּבְדַבְרִים בְּטָלִים – תַּפְּשׁוּ הַטָּפֶל וְהַנִּיחוּ הָעֵיקָר. וּמִכָּל
מָקוֹם אֵין אָדָם יָכוֹל לִפְטוֹר אֶת עַצְמוֹ בַּתְּשׁוּבָה בְּלִבָּד,
כִּי בַיָּמִים אֱלֹה מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה מְדַבְרֵי נְבִיאִים לְהַתְּעַנּוֹת
בָּהֶם, וְכָבֵד קִבְּלוּ אוֹתָם כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל עַצְמָם וְנָהְגוּ כֵן
בְּכָל הַדּוֹרוֹת וּבְכָל הַמָּקוֹמוֹת:

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ✎ Any generation that does not see the rebuilding of the Temple is in a way responsible for its destruction. Since the Temple was destroyed due to our misdeeds, had we corrected those issues then we would have witnessed the rebuilding already.
- ✎ Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to rectify those mistakes that led to the destruction and work on respecting our fellow Jews, speaking positively, respecting Torah, seeing the world in a positive light, and judging others favorably.
- ✎ Another way of contributing to the rebuilding of the Temple is by properly observing the fast days that commemorate its destruction. These days are times for introspection and self-improvement.

SECTION IV. THE NEED TO MOURN

It is difficult to feel sad about losing something that one never had. Nevertheless, mourning for the Temple on Tishah B'Av is crucial to Jewish survival and rebuilding Jerusalem. In this final section, we will explore the great challenge offered us by Tishah B'Av and the profound meaning we can find in taking it seriously.

PART A. THE POWER OF MOURNING

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

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

כָּל הַמֵּתְאָבֵל עַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם זֹכֶה וְרוֹאֶה בְּשִׂמְחָתָהּ

2. **Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Sefer HaToda'ah, Ch. 33 – Mourning for past mistakes helps guarantee a future.**

They relate the following incident about Napoleon, the ruler of France: He once passed the entrance to a synagogue in Paris on Tishah B'Av, and he saw Jews sitting on the ground there, crying and lamenting the destruction of their Temple and land as if this tragedy had happened to them the day before. He stood in amazement, and then said, "I swear that in the end this nation will enjoy goodness in its own land! For where do we find another nation in the world that preserves its mourning and aspirations for thousands of years and is not diminished?!"

אומרים עליו על נפוליאון קיסר צרפת, שפעם אחת עבר על פתח בית הכנסת בפאריז ביום תשעה באב, וראה שם יהודים יושבים על הארץ ומבכים ומקוננים את חרבן מקדשם וארצם, כאשר היה אסון שפגע בהם אך אתמול - עמד משתומם, ואחר אמר: נשבע אני שיש אחרית טובה לעם זה בארץ שלהם! היכן מצינו עם אחר בעולם שישמור אבלו ותקותו אלפים בשנים ולא יפוגו ממנו לעולם!

3. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. III, p. 254 – No other nation commemorates its downfalls and losses. Doing so is a demonstration of spiritual survival.**

Just as the Jewish people derive strength from their miraculous [survival in] exile, similarly, there is intrinsic meaning in the yearly mourning for the destruction of the Temples. This is worthy testimony to the spiritual survival of the Jewish nation – for one does not find among the other nations a people who commemorate their downfalls. Just the opposite, all other nations only commemorate their victories. Yet, the Jewish people observe the day of the destruction of the two Temples every year.

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

PART B. THE CHALLENGE OF TISHAH B'AV

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

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

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

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

וַיִּעֲנוּ בְהִלָּל וּבְהוֹדוֹת לַה' בִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדּוֹ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל הָעָם הִרְעִיזוּ תְרוּעָה גְדוֹלָה בְּהִלָּל לַה' עַל הוֹסֵד בֵּית ה':

וְרַבִּים מֵהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם וְרָאשֵׁי הָאֲבוֹת הַזִּקְנִים אֲשֶׁר רָאוּ אֶת הַבַּיִת הָרִאשׁוֹן בִּיָּסְדוֹ זֶה הַבַּיִת בְּעֵינֵיהֶם בָּכִים בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל וְרַבִּים בְּתְרוּעָה בְּשִׁמְחָה לְהָרִים קוֹל:

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

וְאִין הָעָם מְבִינִים קוֹל תְּרוּעַת הַשְּׂמִיחָה לְקוֹל בְּכִי
הָעָם כִּי הָעָם מְרִיעִים תְּרוּעָה גְדוֹלָה וְהַקּוֹל נִשְׁמָע עַד
לְמִרְחֹק:

So too today, it is difficult for us who have never witnessed the grandeur of the Temple, and all that accompanied it, to really feel like our lives are incomplete without it.

2. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. III, p. 284 – It is difficult for us today to relate to the destruction of the Temples.**

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

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

אֲנַחְנוּ מֵתֵאבְלִים עַל חֻרְבֵּן שְׁנֵי מִקְדָּשִׁים: הָרִאשׁוֹן
וְהַשֵּׁנִי, אֲמֹנָם קָשָׁה מְאֹד לִבְכוּת וּלְהִבִּין אֶת מִשְׁמַעוֹת
הַחֻרְבָּן.

וְאִדְרָבָא לְצַעֲרֵנוּ אֲנִי ב"ה מְרַגִּישִׁים בְּטוֹב, לְמִירוֹת כָּל
הַצָּרוֹת הַסּוֹבְבוֹת אוֹתָנוּ, כִּאִלּוּ שֶׁלֹּא חָסֵר לָנוּ מֵאוֹמָה
הֵן בְּגִשְׁמִיּוֹת וְהֵן בְּרוּחָנִיּוֹת. הִרְגָּשָׁה זֶה הִיא הַמוֹנַעַת
מֵאֲתָנוּ אֶת הַיְכוּלָתָהּ לְהִתְאָבֵל עַל הַחֻרְבָּן כִּרְאוּי, כִּיּוֹן
שֶׁאִין אֲנִי יְכוּלִים לְהִרְגִּישׁ וּלְחוּשׁ הֵיטֵב מִה בַּעֲצָם חָסֵר
לָנוּ. לְזֹאת חֻבָּה עֲלֵינוּ לְלַמּוֹד וּלְהִבִּין אֶת פְּנִימִיּוֹת
הַחֻרְבָּן, וְלְהִרְגִּישׁ וּלְדַעַת אֶת הַתְּדַרְדְּרוֹת מִצַּבְנוּ
וּמִעֲמָדָנוּ מֵעַתָּה הַחֻרְבָּן וְעַד עַתָּה.

One of the messages of Tishah B'Av is that we should not be so complacent; we need to realize that not all is well for the Jewish people, that things have been much better and could be so again.

3. **Rabbi Emanuel Feldman, The Shul Without a Clock, Feldheim Publishers, p. 221 – We still have much to mourn.**

... A man once said to me: "Why bother with an event that took place 2,000 years ago? Why mourn, why sigh? We have modern Israel, we should rejoice."

Is there a county more concerned about daily security than Israel, or one that has more bitter experience of friendly countries growing cold and distant at the slightest provocation?

No other countries have to struggle daily over the sovereignty of their ancient capitals. No other countries are restricted in their right to visit and worship at their ancient holy sites in their own land.

PART C. GOOD MOURNING

It may seem to some that mourning our national tragedies is morose, that we should be focusing on the positive and building Jewish pride and self-esteem. These are certainly worthy endeavors, but there is depth to be gained from mourning that must not be overlooked.

Once a disciple of a certain Chassidic Rebbe noticed his Rebbe dancing happily on the Ninth of Av. He was astonished

by this behavior, for everyone knew that Tishah B'Av was not a time for happiness, but for mourning. As the disciple came closer he noticed that while the Rebbe was dancing so happily, tears of sadness poured from his eyes.

Unable to control his curiosity, he approached the Rebbe and asked him to explain his strange actions.

"It's very simple," replied the Rebbe, "it's a mitzvah to be sad on the Ninth of Av, and a mitzvah must be carried out with happiness!" (From Reachings, TorahLab by Rabbi Yaakov Haber.)

The Rebbe in this story is pointing out a profound truth: happiness and sadness are not opposites! When we appreciate the purpose of our sadness then it fills us with a deep contentment because by virtue of it, we become greater people.

1. Rabbi Akiva Tatz, *The Thinking Jew's Guide to Life*, simpletoremember.com – Happiness is doing what you should be doing.

Real happiness is what you experience when you are doing what you should be doing. When you are moving clearly along your own road, your unique path to your unique destination, you experience real happiness. The journey does not cause the happiness – the journey is the happiness itself.

And amazingly, the expression on your face may not be a smile. The face may reflect pain, the face may be tear-stained and taut with strain; but if the journey is proceeding, if you are aware that you are building what you must build, your heart will be singing within you, despite the pain of your body and the tears on your face.

Mourning on Tishah B'Av is a crucial step along our nation's journey toward the fulfillment of its ultimate destiny.

2. Rabbi Emanuel Feldman, *The Shul Without a Clock*, Feldheim Publishers pp. 220-221 – There is much to love about Tishah B'Av.

Tishah B'Av is not everyone's favorite day, but it is one of mine – not because it is enjoyable, but because of what it represents. I like Tishah B'Av because of what it says to me about Jews: that we are a people who remember and know its past leads to a future.

There are many more Italians in the world than Jews. Yet no one laments for Rome. There are many more Greeks than Jews. The Acropolis and the Parthenon are tourist attractions, but does anyone mourn because of their destruction?

Babylonia, Persia, Assyria, the glory of ancient Egypt – who remembers remembers, who sheds a tear, who cares?

I like Tishah B'Av because only a people that can weep will someday learn to laugh.

And I like Tishah B'Av because I need it.

In the midst of all the affluence and creature comforts, I need to remove my leather shoes, and dim the lights. I need to fast and not to indulge myself. I need to read Lamentations and weep for my people's martyrdom, for its bloody history. I need to focus outward.

I need Tishah B'Av because it reminds me of what it is to be a Jew; and that Esau hates Jacob, Pharaoh oppresses Israel, and Haman wishes to destroy us; and that the empires of the world abhor the Jew because he belongs to "a nation that dwells alone."

I like Tishah B'Av because it teaches something profound; that for Judaism, historical events are not just history, not just events. "History" and "events" take place at a point in time – but in Judaism, once an event occurs it goes on being part of us. It is a new awareness, cognition, an ongoing perception, a new consciousness.

I like Tishah B'Av because it contains a message of profound hope and faith. On this day, our Sages tell us, the Messiah was born. How profoundly insightful, how ironic, how just – on the day of destruction, redemption began. The end was also the beginning.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

- ☞ Mourning on Tishah B'Av serves a great purpose: it is the very catalyst to transform the day from one of sadness ultimately into a day of joy. The fact that we still mourn shows that we will one day have no more need to do so.
- ☞ But it is hard. We have lived so long without the Temple, without all that we had in the times that it stood, that we have gotten used to reality as we see it today. Tishah B'Av is a reminder that there is more.
- ☞ While Tishah B'Av is a sad day, we can become happy through it by learning and integrating its message.

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO US THAT WE NO LONGER HAVE THE HOLY TEMPLE? WHAT DID WE LOSE WHEN IT WAS DESTROYED?

While we cannot fully appreciate something that we never had, we can still understand how different life was when we had the Temple.

The Temple was a place of intense spiritual awareness where miracles happened on a constant basis. One could not experience the Temple and be left with too many doubts about the Presence of God.

The Temple and the spirituality present there was a great source of wisdom and joy for the Jewish people.

The Temple provided a gateway for our prayers that were more readily accepted when it was still standing. We still pray today, but it takes much more effort to get the prayers through than it used to.

WHY WERE THE FIRST AND SECOND TEMPLES DESTROYED?

While the Babylonians and Romans physically destroyed the Temples for their own political or religious reasons, Judaism understands that these were empty motions as the spiritual root of the Temple had been destroyed by the misdeeds of the Jewish people long before.

The specific transgressions of the Jewish people that led to the destruction of the First Temple were the cardinal sins of murder, idolatry, and sexual immorality, as well as a lack of respect for the Torah.

The Second Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred, speaking lashon hara, and not judging properly. These were both the spiritual causes as well as the catalysts to the destruction at the hands of the Romans.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE?

If the Temple has not yet been rebuilt then the reasons for its destruction must still be present amongst the Jewish people. We need to uproot the same flaws of social discord and lack of spiritual focus that were at the heart of the destruction in the first place.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to rectify those mistakes that led to the destruction and work on respecting our fellow Jews, speaking positively, respecting Torah, seeing the world in a positive light, and judging properly.

HOW CAN INTROSPECTION, FASTING, AND MOURNING ON TISHAH B'AV HELP REBUILD THE JEWISH NATION?

While mourning may seem dramatic or even morbid, there is much to be gained from doing so. Mourning puts us in touch with reality and imparts a depth of experience needed to wake us up from complacency.

The fact that we still mourn shows us that we still care, that we recognize that our world is not perfect, and that we still have much to do to improve and rebuild.