

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

What is the real significance of our Tisha B'Av mourning? What really caused the Temple's destruction?

The Haftorah selection for this week's portion Devarim, is the last of three Haftorahs preceding the fast day. Two of the Haftorahs are from Jeremiah, the prophet who actually lived through the cataclysmic loss. This week, the third, is from Isaiah, chosen by the sages to be read immediately before the ninth of Av, a reading which provides deep insight into why the Temple was destroyed. Indeed, this Sabbath is called Shabbat Hazon (the Sabbath of the Vision) after the first word of the Haftorah.

We read how Isaiah mercilessly berates the Jewish people: "Hear the word of the Lord, rulers of Sodom, give ear to the Torah of our G-d, you people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifice to me? I'm sated with the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of sated beasts; ... Bring no more vain offerings, incense of abomination they are to me. As for the New Moons, the Sabbaths and the Festivals, I cannot bear iniquity along with your solemn convocations. Your hands are full of blood ... Wash you, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil. Learn to do well; seek justice; relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" [Isaiah 1:10-17]

I have quoted at length because these seven verses, although but a fragment of Isaiah's words, capture the essence of prophetic sensibility as well as alluding to the age-long tension between prophet and priest. Long before the checks and balances of a democratic government, Judaism had its own built-in system for maintaining a balance between the awesomely exact ritual requirements in the Holy Temple which was the domain of the priests and an ethical spirit of universalism, compassion and justice which was promoted - and insisted upon - by the prophet. The prophets stood alone as they raged against the sins of people, especially when the sins took on a veneer of religious respectability which only served to hide the rot within. The hypocrisy of the Israelite callousness towards the oppressed coupled with concern about punctilious religious performance made a mockery out of ritual and an abomination out of

the Temple. If indeed the word Korban (sacrifice) is derived from Karov (to come near to G-d), then the sacrificial offerings ought bring us closer to the G-d of "compassion and freely-given love, patience, loving-kindness and truth." If the aftermath of the sacrifice is not a more sensitive human being, then the offering becomes a bribe and the offerer a hypocritical scoundrel attempting to manipulate G-d to serve his selfish and nefarious purposes. No wonder the Oriental (Sefardi) Prayer/books ordain the following introduction to synagogue prayer: "Behold I am now prepared and ready to perform the ritual of prayer, as it is written in the Bible, 'you shall love your neighbor like yourself.'" The purpose of ritual is not merely to bring us closer to G-d; its purpose is rather to help us understand that our G-d is a G-d of love and compassion who wants us to act lovingly and compassionately towards every human being!

Of course, we need ritual in every aspect of our lives. The nuances of ritual are the grammatical rules of the language with which man communicates with G-d. Rituals give a people its identity in the world, its colors and sounds and haunting melodies. Rituals give people an ethnic identity apart, emphasizing unique eating habits as well as unique celebrations and holy days. Indeed, without ritual, the Jews would blend into the overall landscape of humanity and disappear as an identifiable people. But the purpose of Jewish separate ethnic identity is not merely to be separate; it is rather to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priest-teachers who will communicate the will of a G-d of ethics and morality, love and peace, to the entire world.

And even ritual, in the eyes of classic Judaism, does not exist in a vacuum. The Sabbath itself, rich with ritualistic tapestries, opens itself to an original ethical view of all creations made by G-d, Who endows each of His creatures with right-to-life; indeed the Bible declares the very purpose of the Sabbath to be "in order that your male and female Gentile slaves may rest like you" (Deut. 5), and it is a holy day in which even beasts of burden must rest, even a mosquito may not be killed, even a blade of grass dare not be plucked from the ground. No wonder Martin Buber declared that anyone incapable of saying Shabbat Shalom to a dog or a tree does not understand the true purpose and meaning of the Sabbath!

When the question was raised whether to continue keeping fast days that were instituted after the

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destruction of the first Temple or abandoning them once the Second Temple had been rebuilt, we hear G-d's answer in the words of the prophet: "...When you fasted and mourned, in the fifth month and the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for Me you fasted?' After all, when you ate and when you drank, it was you who did the eating and you who did the drinking... This is what the Lord G-d of Hosts declares: True judgements shall you judge, loving-kindness and compassion shall you do to your sibling humans. Do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the stranger and the indigent..." (Zehariah 7: 5-10)

G-d doesn't need our fast days, nor does He need our sacrifices. Ritual is a means to the end of developing a more sensitive and compassionate human being. When the ritual - or Temple - didn't do its job - or, even worse, became an impediment to the goal, served as a cover-up for iniquity - then the Temple had to be destroyed.

Hence, what must be done to bring back the Holy Temple? Demonstrations, petitions, tanks? Isaiah makes no bones about it. The Haftorah ends with the verse: "Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and those that return to her with righteousness" (1:27). Yes, "The fast days ... will be turned into days of gladness and rejoicing, [but only] when you [learn] to love truth and peace." (Zechariah 7).

A story Post Script: Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev tells of two townsmen, one the scholarly son-in-law of the wealthiest man in Berditchev and the other a poor ignoramus porter. Both were of the same age - but the one had nothing to do with the other. They were literally worlds apart. There was however one daily interchange between the two. The porter had to rush his prayers at the earliest prayer service each morning in order to be one of the first at his post near the train station; the scholar, who studied late into the night, went to the second, later service. As the porter was hurrying out of shul, and the scholar was entering shul, their eyes would meet as they brushed past each other. The porter's eyes were filled with humble yearning, and even apologetic embarrassment; how much he would have liked some time for leisurely prayer and even elementary Torah study. 'The scholar's eyes were filled with a condescending, supercilious

sneer; how grateful and even superior he felt to have the privilege to spend his days in Divine Service.'

Both men died on the same day. When the porter was judged before the heavenly throne, his sins were placed on one side of the scale (after all, he had often missed the afternoon prayers and he sometimes slept through the Sabbath morning prayers due to physical exhaustion) and his daily humble and yearning glance was placed on the other side of the scale; the glance outweighed the sins, and he was escorted to heaven. At the same time, the scholar's good deeds were placed on one side of the scale (and they were quite numerous), with his daily sneer placed on the second side. The sneer out-weighed the good deeds, and he was taken straight down to hell.... © 2007 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Moshe's long and beautiful valedictory address begins in this week's parsha. It is perhaps the most personal part of our holy Torah, for it lays bare the humanity and emotions of Moshe himself. His frustrations with a people who are destined and charged with holiness and seemingly always shy away from that destiny are clearly evident in his words. His cry of "eichah" - how can it be? - is the forerunner, in the words of the Midrash of the ultimate "eichah" which causes us to weep and mourn on Tisha B'Av.

It is not only the stress of leadership that pains Moshe, though that is certainly part of his burden. It is the relentless carping and unappreciative attitude of Israel towards its blessings and its relation of uniqueness with G-d that gives him a sense of brooding sadness and impending troubles. Moshe will state in the Book of Dvarim: "I know that after my death, in the future, you will stray from the path of Torah and worship strange G-ds. Terrible things will then befall you until the day of final redemption arrives."

It is the anguish of a parent who fully knows what an error the child is making in pursuing a matter and is absolutely incapable of stopping the personal disaster from happening. The valedictory address of Moshe is therefore not a purely past event but rather a reminder of our weaknesses throughout our history and in current times as well. "Eichah" - how can this be? - is a word that aptly fits the Jewish world of today.

Moshe zeroes in on the two main faults of personality that lie at the root of Jewish weakness and disaffection. These are ingratitude and lack of self-worth. The matter of ingratitude is addressed many times in the Torah. The complaints about the manna, the water, the Land of Israel, even the Exodus from Egyptian bondage are quite numerous in the Torah. The entire forty year miraculous sojourn in the desert of Sinai is one long litany of complaint and ingratitude.

The rabbis defined wealth as being satisfied. There are therefore relatively few truly wealthy people in our world. Ingratitude affects family relations, business ventures, and the general psychological well-being of individuals and a society. Lack of self-worth is also very prevalent in Jewish society. In a world where other faiths have hundreds of millions of adherents, Judaism is the smallest of all faiths, number wise.

Moshe told us in the Book of Dvarim that this would be the case - "for you are the smallest in numbers of all nations." But the inner strength of the Jew always lay in the deeply held conviction of being holy and special, of being chosen by G-d for an eternal mission in this world. In recent times this belief in ourselves and our mission has been eroded by secularization, ignorance of Judaism by Jews and the pernicious influences of a hedonistic and loose environment.

Moshe's words therefore stand as a rallying cry to combat these twin evils that weaken us and endanger our survival and progress. This season of the year presses us to heed Moshe's words and message ever more diligently. It is the pathway to ultimate consolation and redemption. © 2007 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**T**hese are the things that Moshe spoke to all of Israel on the other side of the Jordan [River], in the desert, in the plain, by Suf, between Paran and between Tofel and Lavan and Chatzeiros, and Di Zahav" (Devarim 1:1). Although at least some of these "names" are actual places, most explain that Moshe was subtly rebuking the nation by hinting at the sins they had committed from the time they left Egypt (see Rashi). The hints were so subtle, however, that which sin each refers to is the subject of much discussion. What follows is a partial list of the various approaches.

(1) "B'eiver haYarden" (on the other side of the Jordan). The overwhelming majority of sources do not include this as one of the "hints" about a sin. The Sifray, however, says that "Moshe rebuked them for what they did on the other side of the Jordan." Although this could refer to the place he gave the rebuke, the similar wording used here and describing the sin(s) done "in the desert" indicates that the intention is sins done after they left the desert and entered the Plains of Moav. (The Midrash Hagadol bears this out as well, as before quoting the Sifray as "another interpretation" it explains "eiver haYarden" as the place where the rebuke occurred.) It would therefore seem to refer to worshipping Peor, but the Netziv understands the Sifray

to connect that sin with "ba'aravah." He therefore suggests it refers to the Tribes of Gad and Reuvein asking that their portions be on that side of the Jordan. Rabbi Akiva Eiger says that it refers to both Peor and to being tempted by the Moavite women.

(2) "Bamidbar" (in the desert). The Vilna Gaon's version of Avos d'Rav Noson (34:1) is among the Midrashic sources that do not have "bamidbar" referring to a specific sin, but rather to everything that occurred in the desert. Targum Unkoles also seems to include this as part of the introduction, i.e. Moshe rebuked the nation for the sins they did in the desert, which would explain why Peor is left off their list (since it occurred after they left the desert). However, they don't explain why Moshe chose to only rebuke them for sins committed in the desert. The Targum Yerushalmi says that Moshe rebuked them for still being on the other side of the Jordan, which was caused by the 10 sins before the decree after the meraglim (spies), which obviously took place in the desert (see Arachin 15a). Rashi seems to understand "bamidbar" to refer to the complaints about the desert conditions, such as when they said they would have preferred to die in Egypt than starving to death in the desert (Shemos 16:3). Midrash Yelamdainu presents an interesting twist to this, implying that Moshe's rebuke lay in the fact that by complaining about G-d regarding the conditions in the desert they were risking His taking away the very miracles they needed to survive there, which is not a very bright idea. One of the approaches of the Midrash Hagadol applies "bamidbar" to the idol they wanted to worship and have lead them back to Egypt (see Bamidbar 14:4). The standard edition of Avos d'Rav Noson is one of the Midrashic sources that say it refers to the golden calf. One of the Sifray's approaches to "bamidbar" is that the adults thrust their young upon Moshe and insisted that he raise them and support them in the (barren) desert. Rabbi Akiva Eiger says that another of the Sifray's approaches is that it refers to the desert of Paran, from where the meraglim were sent. Yonasan ben Uziel explains the rebuke to be pointing out the various things G-d did for them, such as receiving the Torah in the desert, at Mt. Sinai.

(3) "Ba'aravah" (in the plain). Unkoles combines this with the next words, "mol suf," so that it refers to the nation "angering [G-d] at the plain that is facing the Reed Sea," although it is unclear which sin he means. Most, however, explain "aravah" and "mol suf" to be two separate rebukes. Rashi (based on Midrash Lekach Tov) says "aravah" refers to Peor, which they worshipped in the Plains of Moav, indicating that he does not limit the list only to sins that occurred in the desert. We have already seen that the Sifray includes sins that occurred in the 40th year as well, and it attributes "aravah" to what happened when "Israel dwelled in Shittim" (Bamidbar 25:1). Although the Netziv and Rabbi Akiva Eiger understand this to refer to

Peor, since that verse continues by telling us that "the nation began to be tempted by the daughters of Moav," I would have thought this is what the Sifray meant (with "the other side of the Jordan" referring to Peor). The standard edition of Avos d'Rav Noson understands "aravah" to be their complaints about having no water in Refidim (Shemos 17:1-3), but this seems inconsistent with the end of that Mishnah, which adds "Masah" as another of the 10 tests that the nation failed, even though Masah was one of the names given to Refidim (17:7). Perhaps it was for this reason that the Vilna Gaon changed it to refer to the complaints about the bitter waters at Marah instead (15:23-24). It is unclear how "aravah" refers to water (see Binyan Yehoshua). Yonasan ben Uziel understands it as referring to having the Torah explained to them at Avos Moav, although this verse seems to be a prelude to that very explanation.

(4) "Mol Suf" (by Suf). The overwhelming majority of sources explain this to refer to the complaints by the Reed Sea, whether it was because the Egyptians were after them and they thought they would die there (before it split) or after they came out onto dry land when they suspected that the Egyptians came out safely on the other side (or both). Other issues at the Reed Sea are mentioned as well (see the Margolios edition of Devarim Rabbah 1:8). Some editions of the Sifray include going back three legs of the journey to the Reed Sea. Rabbi Akiva Eiger understands one of the Sifray's approaches as referring to bringing an idol with them through the (split) sea, as is one of the approaches of the Midrash Hagadol (which is based on the Sifray which Rabbi Eiger is explaining). Yonasan ben Uziel understands Moshe's reference to be a reminder of all the miracles that occurred when they crossed the sea.

(5) "Paran." The overwhelming majority of sources understand this to be the meraglim, which were sent from Paran (Bamidbar 13:3). Unkoles, however, combines "Paran" with "tofel" and "lavan," and explains it as their dissatisfaction with the white mun (Bamidbar 11:6), which occurred in the expansive Paran desert (see 10:12). The Sifray uses "between Paran" to prove that the rebuke applies between encampments as well, i.e. when they complained while traveling.

(6) "Tofel" (unseasoned, secondary or belittle). Rashi (again based on Midrash Lekach Tov) combines it with "lavan" (white), and explains it as their belittling the white mun, specifically their fear that it would eventually harm them, since it didn't create any waste (see Rashi on Bamidbar 21:5). The standard edition of Avos d'Rav Noson understands "tofel" alone to refer to the mun, while the Vilna Gaon's edition has it referring to the first time G-d sent them slav (quail) to eat (Shemos 16:13) after their complaints of hunger (16:3). (It is unclear how "tofel" is connected with the first slav.)

Yonasan ben Uziel connects it with the untruthful way they dealt with G-d.

(7) "Lavan" (white). The standard edition of Avos d'Rav Noson connects this with Korach's rebellion, with several commentators mentioning the Midrash that says that Korach first approached Moshe with garments that were completely blue, asking whether they needed a blue fringe before wearing them. This contrast of needing blue and white was Moshe's subtle way of hinting to this incident. The Vilna Gaon's version has this referring to the white mun.

(8) "Chatzeiros." Rashi brings two approaches. His first, based on Midrash Lekach Tov (a.k.a. Pesikta Zutrasa) and other Midrashim, is that it refers to Korach's rebellion, which, according to this approach, occurred at Chatzeiros. Although some commentators try to explain how this can be so even if Korach happened after the meraglim (which was after they left Chatzeiros) it seems that these Midrashim are of the opinion that Korach rebelled before the meraglim (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/korach.pdf). Rashi's second approach, based on the Sifray, is that it refers to the lesson not learned from Miriam's speaking about Moshe (which happened at Chatzeiros, see Bamidbar 12:16). The interesting part of this approach is that the lesson they should have learned was not to speak poorly about the Promised Land, i.e. the report of the meraglim. Yet, Rashi had already told us that "Paran" referred to the meraglim! Evidently, there were two aspects to the sin of the meraglim; sending them in the first place because they didn't trust G-d that the land was good, and then the bad report afterwards (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/shlach.pdf). The Netziv says that they also should have learned not to speak about Moshe, referring to Korach's rebellion. Unkoles says that Chatzeiros was where they angered G-d by requesting meat. Even though this took place at Kivros Hataavah (Bamidbar 11:33-34), it has been suggested that Chatzeiros was a large area that included the locale that later became known as Kivros Hataavah. Other suggestions have been made as well (including that being near Chatzeiros is enough to hint to it, especially since it would be pretty explicit if Moshe used the actual name of the town), and some try to use whatever answer works for Unkoles to explain how Rashi can say that Korach rebelled at Chatzeiros if it really happened elsewhere (in the same general vicinity). The standard edition of Avos d'Rav Noson has Chatzeiros being the (second) slav, which is consistent with Unkoles, while the Vilna Gaon's edition says it refers to Shabbos. It is unclear which issue the Gaon is referring to, or how it is hinted to by "Chatzeiros." If he is referring to the "mekoshaish" (Bamidbar 32:36), even if it was written in the right chronological order (after the meraglim and before Korach), we have the same issue as above (since they had already left Chatzeiros) unless Korach really happened at Chatzeiros (which

makes it a pretty hectic week in Chatzeiros, between Miriam speaking about Moshe, Korach rebelling, and the mekoshah. The Talmud's list includes leaving the camp to try gathering mun on Shabbos despite being told there would be none; perhaps the Gaon means this violation of Shabbos, with "chatzeiros" referring to leaving their "courtyards" to look for mun. Midrash Yelamdeinu says it refers to the nation experimenting with every form of idol worship, but again, it is unclear how "chatzeiros" implies this.

(9) "Di Zahav" (enough gold). The overwhelming majority of sources associate this with the calf made of "zahav" (gold), although Yonasan ben Uziel explains it to mean that they were saved from destruction and forgiven for the golden calf due in large part to the golden vessels of the Mishkan. Rashi says that the word "di" refers to having more than "enough" gold, one of the defenses Moshe used for the nation when G-d wanted to wipe them out because of the sin. The standard edition of Avos d'Rav Noson, which had used "Bamidbar" for the golden calf, doesn't apply these words to an additional sin, but makes an editorial comment, that of all the sins hinted at, the sin of the golden calf would have been "enough" to incriminate the nation (even without the others), or that the punishment for it is "enough" to last from then until G-d revives the dead (i.e. and there will be no more punishment). © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Many events in the book of Bereishit (Genesis) repeat themselves in Devarim (Deuteronomy) with one major difference. Whereas Genesis is a narrative which focuses on individuals, Devarim focuses on the nations who have emerged from these individuals.

Consider for example the story in this week's portion of the children of Yaakov (Jacob), Am Yisrael, asking the children of Esav (Esau) for permission to go through their land on their way to Israel. It is a reversal of the story of the confrontation between Esav and Yaakov as found in the Genesis narrative.

In Bereishit Esau comes from the field tired and buys food from Yaakov. (Genesis 25:34) Here in Devarim, it is the Jews weary from years of wandering in the desert, who try to buy food and water from the children of Esav. (Devarim 2:6)

In Bereishit, Yaakov rejects traveling with Esav, but promises to rendezvous with him one day in Seir. That promise is never fulfilled in their lifetime. (Genesis 33:14) Yet, here in Devarim, the Israelites finally connect with the children of Esav in Seir, and are rejected. (Numbers 20:21; Devarim 2:8)

Note also the similarity in language. In preparation for his meeting with Esav, Jacob wrestles with a mysterious stranger and is struck in the hollow

(kaf) of his thigh (Genesis 32:26). In Devarim, G-d tells the Jews not to antagonize the children of Esav, "For I shall not give you of their land, even the right to set foot (kaf) there." (Deuteronomy 2:5) Rabbi Yitzhak Twersky notes that the use of the uncommon term kaf in both places points to a similarity between these episodes.

Indeed, both stories also intersect in that they deal with fear. In Genesis it is Yaakov who is afraid before meeting Esav. In the words of the Torah, "Yaakov became very frightened." (Bereishit 32:8) Here, in Devarim it's the children of Esav who are frightened as the Israelites draw near. As the Torah states: "The Lord said to me (Moshe)...command the people saying 'you are passing through the boundary of your brothers, the children of Esav, who dwell in Seir; they will fear you.'" (Devarim 2:4,5)

One can't help but note that the parallel stories in Devarim are often the reverse of the Bereishit narrative. Thus, events in Devarim could be viewed as a corrective to what unfolded in Bereishit. A real appreciation of feeling the pain of another only comes when one feels that very pain. Perhaps Am Yisrael, the children of Yaakov, had to learn this lesson before entering the land of Israel. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI YEHUDAH PRERO

YomTov

The Talmud (Chulin 92a) cites a verse in Hoshea (3:2): "So I bought her for me for fifteen pieces of silver, and a chomer-measure of barley, and a leseh-measure of barley." The Talmud elaborates: "Pieces of silver:" these are the righteous... "And a chomer-measure of barley and leseh-measure of barley:" these are the forty-five righteous men on account of whom the world continues to exist."

The Maharsha notes that the righteous are allegorized using two different terms within the same verse: they, without any quantity assigned, are called "silver," and then, with a quantity of 45, are called "barley." The reason for this, the Maharsha writes, is rooted in the context in which the righteous are viewed.

Generally speaking, the nation of Israel, when they listen to Hashem and obediently fulfill His dictates, are referred to by the term "silver." Conversely, when they do not listen, they are categorized as "slag." The genesis of this comparison can be found with a description of the experience of the exile in Egypt: "For they are your people, and your inheritance, which you brought forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron (Melachim 1 8:51)." The furnace is where the impurities are removed from the metal. After going through the process, two substances remain: the pure

metal, the pure silver, and the spoils, the refuse, the slag. When the people are "pure," they are silver; otherwise, they are slag.

We see from Egypt that the experience in exile is a purification process. The verse terms Egypt "the furnace of iron," the place where metal is purified. Exile is an experience designed to remove impurities from the nation of Israel. It is one during which the bad from within us should be removed. Once exile concludes, we are a better nation, a nation rid of impurities, free of contamination. When the verse in Hoshea refers to silver, the Talmud is telling us that it refers to the righteous of the nation of Israel at a time when the nation itself is like silver-when the nation is not in exile, after having undergone the purification process exile provides.

However, when the nation does find itself in exile, a different term is used to describe the righteous, and the people of Israel, in general. We find that Rabi Elazar said (Pesachim 87b) that "Hashem only exiled Israel among the nations in order that proselytes might join them, for it is said: 'And I will sow her to Me in the land:' surely a man sows a se'ah (a small measure) in order to harvest many kor (a large measure)!"

The Maharsha explains that when the nation is in exile, they are experiencing a form of punishment. G-d could have exacted His punishment on the nation of Israel in many different ways. Yet, he chose exile, the dispersion of the people all over the world, living in foreign lands amongst foreign people. Why was this method of punishment chosen? Rabi Elazar says so that the other nations of the world will see how the nation of Israel serves G-d. They will see the nation's dedication and steadfast devotion to Him. They will see how the nation dutifully performs His commandments and studies His Torah. They will learn, from the example set before them, about true service of the One and Only G-d. And from this example, the nations will follow suit: people will convert.

When the nation is in exile, they are compared to barley, to produce. Just as a few seeds can produce a bountiful harvest, so too can a few people, scattered to and fro, bring forth a large scale sanctification of the name of G-d. In exile, there are indeed a set number of righteous people who sustain the world. Because these individuals are in exile, and in exile they are supposed to be the catalyst of growth in the service of G-d, they are termed "barley."

We are in the midst of the Three Weeks-the time of sadness that commemorates the entrance of the nation into exile. Today, we still find ourselves in that exile. We are indeed a nation scattered throughout the world. From the passage in Chulin, we learn what we are to draw from our experience in exile. For one, we are supposed to undergo a purification process while in exile. We are supposed to take this difficult experience and make it one from which we will,

hopefully-very soon, emerge better people, both individually and collectively. Exile is also a time during which we are supposed to stand out from our neighbors. We are supposed to act in a way that draws attention to us, because of our refined character, our evident devotion to proper service of G-d and His Torah. We are supposed to be a people whom others desire to emulate, to the extent that they want to join our ranks. These tasks to be accomplished in exile are related: if we spend the time working on ourselves, becoming better people, removing those serious character flaws, we, just by living our daily lives, will become a people worthy of emulating. However, if we ignore the goal of our exile, and become entrenched in mundane everyday life, we will have done nothing to differentiate ourselves in the realm of spirituality and service of G-d, and we will have failed to live up to the challenge exile presents. © 2007 Rabbi Y. Prero & torah.org

RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

In this week's Torah portion, Moses tells the Jewish people of additional details of events that occurred since they left Egypt. He goes into the disastrous episode of agreeing to let spies go into the Land of Israel, and says that initially: "The idea was good in my eyes..." (Deuteronomy 1:23)

The mission of the spies was clearly one of the most devastating events in Jewish history. It was the very act that caused the Jews to wander in the desert for 40 years and resulted in many of them never being able to enter the Land of Israel.

Even though the spies' mission was so catastrophic, Moses still had the courage to say "the idea was good in my eyes."

How many times have you seen people backtrack on something they said if events prove their position wrong? It seems that when people say something and then it doesn't work out as well as they or others had hoped, they'll quickly re-write history by changing the words they said, the ideas they vividly expressed, or views they had just passionately given. But Moses, being the great person and leader that he was, said to everyone that "the idea was good in my eyes."

This is rarely how leaders or people act today. All too often, heads of corporations, governments, or households back away from their previous words if the results turn out differently than they had believed. This isn't leadership. Leadership is about being honest and having the trust of those who believe in and follow you. Do these leaders really believe that people have that short a memory? The answer is: they really don't care.

They don't care because the real reason why people choose to re-write history is because of their own lack of self-esteem. Like most people, they don't

want to look foolish-and they believe that admitting they made a mistake makes them look foolish. It doesn't. Ironically, it shows you to be a man or woman of conviction who isn't afraid to stand up when you make a mistake. Doing this isn't a knock to your self-esteem; in fact it's actually a huge boost to it. This is because taking responsibility will always make you feel great. Not doing so makes you a fraud.

The higher our self-esteem, they more readily we will be to admit our mistakes made because we don't see poor decisions as a reflection of our own self-worth. We hold ourselves in high self-esteem and know that any mistake we make can never damage that. Since people always learn and grow from their mistakes, we can actually GAIN self-esteem if we err because we know it will only make us BETTER people in the end.

People with low esteem, however, fear how people view them if they admit to making a mistake. So instead of owning up to it, like politicians, they chose to re-create the events of the past to be viewed in the best possible light. But again, ironically, your self-image actually gets stronger when you admit you made a mistake.

So, the next time you do or say something that turns out to be the wrong position to have taken, make a statement about who you are. Boldly announce that while initially "the idea was good in my eyes," based upon new information you now see things differently. You will not only gain the credibility, trust, and admiration of others, but you will also gain enormous self-esteem in the process. © 2007 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.org

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

We have begun 'The Nine Days'-a period of national mourning. These somber days start with Rosh Chodesh Av-the day that Aharon Hakohen was niftar. The days of mourning culminate with Tish'a be'Av-the day on which both the first and the second Beis Hamikdash were destroyed.

Note: it is important to distinguish between Atzvus-depression-and Aveilus-feeling bereft. Atzvus-depression-is certainly a severe problem. In fact, the Seforim single out Atzvus as one of the key weapons of the Sitra Achra-the dark force of self-destruction that lurks deep within each of us. But Aveilus is distinct from Atzvus. Aveilus is the sadness that a person feels because he/she has lost something dear.

What have we lost? The Beis HaMikdash, and the easier access to HaShem that the Mikdash afforded. More generally, we are mourning the fact that "the Shechina is in Golus". That phrase is shorthand for the many sources of grief that assail us because of the wide gap that has opened between HaShem and ourselves. These include: the terrible Hester Panim in

which we live, as well as the ensuing Chilul HaShem; people who treat other people in ways incompatible with both being created Betzelem Elokim; 'leaders' who do not lead; 'followers' who do not follow; Sin'as Chinam (likewise, well-merited Sin'a). The list is long...

Clearly, we have much for which to mourn. But the Seforim tell us- even during these Nine Days, our Torah and our Tefila should be Besimcha. © 2007 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

Moshe describes the long journey towards Eretz Yisrael, including many years of waiting in the desert. He emphasizes that it was possible to continue the journey only after the last of the men who had left Egypt had died in the desert. "And from the time when we left Kadesh Barneya until we crossed the Zered River was thirty-eight years, until the entire generation had died? the men of war from among the community, to whom G-d had sworn... And then, when all of the men of war had died from among the people..." [Devarim 2:14-16]. The repeated reference to "men of war" is certainly not clear. What does Moshe mean when he uses this phrase, and why does it appear in the first place?

The Rashbam writes that the phrase refers to the entire generation of the scouts, who were punished in the desert. And he explains the phrase "men of war" as a reference to the fact that only men "twenty years and older" [Bamidbar 14:29] were punished, and this is the age of the men who were expected to fight in the army. The problem with this explanation is that it would have been better to call these men "members of the army" and not "men of war." Note that this second phrase does not appear anyplace in the Torah in direct relation to the age of twenty. An anonymous author has added a note to the commentary of the Rashbam, suggesting that the Torah refers specifically to the "ma'apilim," who insisted on entering Canaan in violation of G-d's explicit command: "And every man put on his weapons and you insisted on climbing the hill" [Devarim 1:41]. But this is hard to accept in view of the fact that these men were not connected to G-d's oath that the people would die in the desert? rather, they died immediately in battle.

It is thus likely that the original interpretation by the Rashbam is right, and that the phrase refers to the scouts and the men of Yisrael at the time. But this still leaves us with the need to explain the phrase, "men of war." Evidently the Torah wants to emphasize the fact that the second generation was at a higher level than the first one. While the earlier people were afraid to fight the nations of Canaan, the second generation had greater faith in G-d. These men responded to the command, "Begin to take possession, and challenge

him to war" [Devarim 2:24], and they did not hesitate to fight Sichon (2:32) or Og (3:1). And this gives the generation the right to enter the land under the leadership of Yehoshua, who Moshe addressed when he spoke the following words at the end of the Torah portion: "Your eyes can see everything that G-d has done to these two kings. G-d will do the same to all the kingdoms where you will pass through. Do not fear them, for your G-d will fight for you." [3:21-22]. Only those who have shown that they have faith in G-d's help in war will have the privilege of fighting against the Seven Nations of Canaan and conquering them. As opposed to this, the first generation did not believe in G-d, and they therefore did not achieve their goal by fighting within the land of Canaan. These people did not heed Kaleb's warning, worded in a similar way: "Do not revolt against G-d, do not be afraid of the local people, because they will be like bread for us. Their protection has turned away from them, but G-d is with us and we will prevail." [Bamidbar 14:9]. And the sinners were indeed "men of war"? against the will of G-d.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“Moshiach is born on Tisha B'Av." (Talmud)
 "Any generation in which the Temple was not built in (with) its days is considered as if it was destroyed in (with) its days." (Talmud)

"There is no light like the light that emanates from darkness." (Zohar)

The 9th of Av is one of those days in which we allow ourselves to wallow in the misery of a brutal history and indulge in thoughts of the extended exile and our many sufferings. Admittedly, it seems ultra heavy and it is an ominous reality to meet face to face. What benefit do we have from this exercise? Why follow the black and hurtful lines of history when there are so many brighter and rosier points to visit?

I hope the situation never comes your way. It happened to me once and although I was woefully unprepared things happily turned out alright. What do you say to someone who is seriously contemplating ending it all?

Here's a scenario I heard about from a very clever individual: Imagine that you are sitting in a reception area in a fancy office on the 77th floor of the Empire State Building. Suddenly the elevator opens and a gentleman with a disheveled appearance walks over to the window which he throws wide open. He backs up like he's readying himself to take a running leap and before he does so you are able to halt him temporarily.

You ask him, "Why are you about to do such a crazy and foolish thing?" He shows you a piece of paper with a list of 49 items that he begins to recite aloud; 1) Lost my job 2) Wife left me 3) Broke 4) Hungry 5) Dog died 6) Chronic incurable diseases 7)

Homeless etc. That's just the beginning of the list and any single item would be enough to drive the average man over the top. He's got the worst situation you ever heard of or imagined. You're ready to agree with his morbid conclusion. What can you say to him?

Of course, you acknowledge his pain but you might challenge him with the following question: What if on top of all the 49 things there was also a 50th and that is that you were also completely blind? Today you tapped your way over, pressed the 77th floor button, before tapping your way to the window and as you are about to leap, lo and behold the lights go on and you are granted vision. You can see! Would you choose to jump at that moment? For sure the fellow will say, "NO!" "Why not?", you would have to challenge him. He would probably answer, "I'd go around and check it all out!" So then you tell him, "You aren't blind! You can see! Use those eyes to find goodness!"

The ravages of long exile tend to rob us of our sense of purpose and direction. We become easily distracted by the small and silly. Eventually we are living so small, we are at constant risk of losing our very identities. We don't see. The suicide is not dramatic but incremental and accumulative, as moment after moment is deadened, by the activity of killing of time. How true what Warren Buffet had said, "Habits are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to break."

Being in exile is like living at the airport. I was once stuck at JFK for 24 hours due to a snow storm. There was seemingly no way out. Every "courtesy desk" employee was as frustrated, lost and discourteous as we were. One disoriented oriental gent on his cell phone was heard venting, "I don't know where I am! I don't know who I am! I don't know why I am!" I realized I should just make good use of the many Holy Books in my bag. The Chofetz Chaim teaches that we are currently rebuilding the Temple if not "in our days" but at least "with our days." By indulging our imaginations for one day in things o y way we can build it all back by learning to love what is! © 2007 Rabbi L. Lam and Project Genesis, Inc.

