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MEANINGFUL THREE WEEKS/NINE DAYS

A Personal and Spiritual Guide to the Three Weeks

EXCLUSIVE
FOR SHLUCHIM

By Simon Jacobson

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WHAT ARE THE THREE WEEKS?

“The Three Weeks” refers to the 21 days between the Fast Days of Tammuz 17 and Av 9 – the saddest period in the Jewish year.

This period is officially called “*Bein Ha’mitzarim*”—“between the straits (or distresses),” days that are between the abovementioned two days of misfortune and distress. This name is based on the verse in Eicha (Lamentations): *All her pursuers overtook her between the dire straits* (Eicha 1:3).

Throughout our history this period has been marked with tragedies and suffering. These three weeks commemorate the destruction of both Holy Temples in Jerusalem, the first Temple 2432 years ago, the second one 1942 years ago.

Within the Three Weeks themselves, the sadness intensifies during the last nine days of this period, as we enter the Month of Av and concluding on the Ninth of Av (Tisha B’Av) - the saddest day in the Jewish calendar, when both temples were actually destroyed.

YEAR

TRAGIC EVENTS IN JEWISH HISTORY WHICH TOOK PLACE DURING THE THREE WEEKS BETWEEN 17TH OF TAMMUZ AND 9TH OF AV (partial list only)

1312 BCE	Israelites send 12 spies to scout out the Land of Israel and decide that entry is too dangerous. As a result of this decision, which showed a lack of trust in G-d, they are doomed to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.
422 BCE	Walls of Jerusalem breached by Babylonians and First Temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.
68 CE	Jerusalem conquered by the Romans and the Second Temple destroyed by Titus. 2.5 million Jews are killed and another 1 million are exiled from the Land of Israel.
133 CE	Jewish revolt against the Romans led by Bar Kochba mercilessly crushed at Beitar.
1096	Crusades launched in which half the Jews of Europe (and all the Jews of Jerusalem) are brutally murdered.
1290	Jews expelled from England.
1492	Jews of Spain given an ultimatum by the Inquisition—leave, convert, or die.
1914	World War I, the prelude to the Holocaust, begins.
1942	Deportations to Treblinka death camp ordered from the Warsaw Ghetto.
1994	Jewish community center bombed in Buenos Aires with 86 killed and 300 wounded.

TAMMUZ 17

Mishne Taanit 26a-b:

Five things happened to our ancestors on the 17th of Tammuz:

- 1** The tablets were broken by Moses upon seeing the Golden Calf
- 2** The continuous daily offering in the Temple ceased, because there weren't any cattle left in Jerusalem
- 3** The city walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans after a lengthy siege
- 4** Apustumus burned the Torah
- 5** A graven idol was placed in the Sanctuary by Menashe

(see page 13 for psychologically relevant applications of these events)

AV 9, TISHA B'AV

Five things happened to our ancestors on the 9th of Av:

- 1** It was decreed that our parents would not enter the Land of Israel
- 2** The first Temple was destroyed
- 3** The second Temple was destroyed
- 4** Beitar was conquered by the Romans
- 5** The city of Jerusalem was plowed by the Romans

(see page 16 for psychologically relevant applications of these events)

IS THIS PERIOD A "BAD TIME?"


With all these negative events occurring in the three weeks, the obvious question arises: is this a "doomed" time? Why did so many bad things happen during this period? Can we do anything about it? Do we have control over our destinies during the three weeks?

The answer to these questions and the overall significance and relevance of the "Three Weeks" can be appreciated by taking a deeper look at the Jewish view on the nature of time.

THE ENERGY OF TIME

Time is a spiral flow of energy that annually repeats its orbit. It progresses not like a river from past to future in linear fashion, but like a spiral that winds around, cycling the events of history, drawing their energy ever upwards - and returning every year on that day to the same energy point (on a different axis) of the original event. Events in history are actually forms of energy - experiences that we relive when we reach the same point in time each year.

A holiday or any other period marked in the Hebrew calendar is thus not simply a day when we commemorate events happened in the past on this day. Rather, we are actually reliving on this day the exact energy that manifests on this day, year after year, going back to the beginning of time. For example: Your birthday is not simply remembering the day that you were born years ago; the energy that flowed on this day repeats itself every year on the



same day. And through your focus and actions on this day you can tap into the special energy of this day, as it replays itself (in a deeper fashion) year after year.

The annual cycle/spiral of time - encompasses the entire spectrum of energy and life experience (year, *shono* in Hebrew, means cycle and change, suggesting that the year includes all possible changes, which repeat in an annual cycle) - including all the ups and downs, highs and lows and twists and turns of life.

The year therefore contains both “high” and “low” levels of energy: The month of Adar, for instance, is a time of joy and celebration. By contrast, the month of Av, is a sad period. As the Talmud declares: “Just as when Av arrives decrease joy, so too when Adar arrives increase joy.” Strange statement: Why equate the two periods in time? Even if the Talmud wanted to make both statements, it could have simply said: “When Av arrives decrease in joy; when Adar arrives increase in joy”?!

The Talmud is telling us that time is a cycle. Av and Adar are not just two unrelated, diametrically opposed, periods in time: One filled with sorrow, the other with joy. They are like the trough and crest of one wave: Just as Av brings on a decrease in joy, so too Adar brings on an increase in joy.

The Three Weeks is therefore not a time of “doom.” Rather it is part of the complete cycle of life, which includes the “low points” as well as the “high points.” The key thing to remember is that during this time of the year we learn to navigate the more challenging and difficult moments of our lives, and learn to see them as part of a greater picture.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE THREE WEEKS’ NEGATIVE ENERGY?

But what exactly is the nature of this negative energy? How does it impact us and what can we do about it?

The answer to all these questions brings us back to the destruction of the two Holy Temples, which we commemorate during this three week period. Why would we still be grieving over a structure destroyed thousands of years ago?

The Temple was not a mere piece of real estate. It was a window between heaven and earth. The Temple bridged spirit and matter. Thus its destruction was not just an isolated historical event, but one whose effects are still reverberating today. As long as tension remains between the physical and the spiritual, we are experiencing the loss of the Temple. Which is why our sages tell us that “a generation that does not rebuild the

The key thing to remember is that during this time of the year we learn to navigate the more challenging and difficult moments of our lives, and learn to see them as part of a greater picture.

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temple is considered as if it destroyed it.” We now can understand the “negative” energy reflected in the Three Weeks and why so many negative events took place during this period: Time is not linear but spiral. Events that happen in a particular time of year are related to the energy flow of that respective time. And that energy flow repeats itself each year as the cycle returns to that point in time. The negative energy that manifested when the Temple was first destroyed repeats itself each year during this period in time. In other words: Historical events are merely outer manifestations of invisible forces that are always at work behind the scenes.

Our grief for the destruction of the Temple includes all areas in life that cause us anguish.

The Three Weeks: A Time of Concealment

The mystics explain these three weeks as a time of intense “concealment” of the Divine presence, with the objective of us uncovering a deeper light within this darkness. In personal terms this concealment manifests in different forms of dissonance in our lives. Who among us does not have a conflict between our home and work, between our personal and professional lives, between our own ideals and moral standards and the need to conform to the

demands of the marketplace? We all have to face the tension between our hearts and our minds, between our desires and our disciplines, between our bodies and our souls?

All these dichotomies are an expression of the schism that takes place during the “three weeks,” when the Temple was destroyed, closing the window between

heaven and earth, between the Divine and the mundane. Yet, in a mysterious way, this dissonance can lead us to discover deeper truths amidst the ashes.

When challenged by intense darkness, we

are compelled to dig deeper. These “three weeks” are therefore an appropriate time for embarking on a profound search of the hidden Divine which lies embedded in our lives, even as it may appear dormant.

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Swimming the Wave-Cycles of Time

Therein lays a profound lesson in life, and a universal lesson at that. The Hebrew calendar reflects the true rhythm of life. Life is not comprised of particles but of waves. Like the waves of the sea, life consists of cycles, with troughs and crests, some of which may be extreme.

A good swimmer recognizes the dynamic nature of water, and adjusts accordingly.

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In contrast to a static plateau, which one can navigate without fluctuation, the waves of water require constant vigilance to negotiate the cycles. When a strong wave hits, a proficient swimmer will not resist or fight the wave, but “go with the flow” and allow the cresting wave to carry him. Any attempt to ignore or fight the wave will quickly deplete the swimmer’s energy, with the risk of drowning the swimmer. In the case of a severe stormy sea, the need to surrender to the flow of the waves is only amplified.

On the other hand, when the waves are relatively calm, the swimmer uses his energy as a catalyst for forward thrust.

Interestingly, when negotiated properly, both stages, whether it be stormy waves or calm ones, are forms of energy that are all part of the swimming cycle. Indeed, a powerful wave that cannot be fought can be tapped in a powerful way, as long as you ride it and don’t try to resist.

The wave-cycle of time too consists of crests and troughs. The Hebrew calendar is a sort of travel guide through time that helps us align ourselves

to the inner rhythms of life’s cycles.

During the Three Weeks we have the opportunity to discover a new perspective on all the painful experiences of our lives - the energy of destruction, loss and mourning - and learn how to channel and transform them into joy and happiness. As the prophet says: *“these days will be transformed into joy and gladness and holidays”* (Zechariah 8:19).

In this 21-day period of “*bein ha’mitzarim*” we come to terms with the ruins of broken homes, broken marriages, broken dreams, and learn to draw comfort and consolation from others and from G-d. These “three weeks” give birth to the “seven weeks of consolation” that follow. The month of Av is therefore called Menachem Av - the consoler of (the sadness of) Av.



The Birth of Moshiach

On the day that the Holy Temple was destroyed, a Jew was plowing his field when his cow suddenly called out. An Arab was passing by and heard the lowing of the cow. Said the Arab to the Jew: "Son of Judah! Unyoke your cow, free the stake of your plow, for your Holy Temple has now been destroyed."

The cow then lowed a second time. Said the Arab to the Jew: "Son of Judah! Yoke your cow, reset the stake of your plow, for the Redeemer has now been born...."

Said Rabbi Bon: "Do we need to learn this from an Arab? The Torah itself says so. The verse predicts, "And the Lebanon shall be felled by the mighty one." And what is written in the very next verse? "There shall come forth a shoot from the stem of Yishai."

As the Temple ruins lay smoldering, the process of rebuilding was already underway. Moshiach, the divine emissary empowered to bring redemption to the world and the eternal Sanctuary to Jerusalem, was born on the Ninth of Av. - Yerushalmi Berochos 2:4. Midrash Eicha Rabba 1:51.

Because Moshiach (whose name is Menachem) was born on Tisha B'Av we:

1) bless the new moon Tisha B'av at night (Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar Chag HaShavupot ch.1).

2) Say *nachem* in Tisha B'Av's Mincha service (Shaar Hakavanot), Inyan Tisha B'Av).

A PANORAMA UNFOLDING

Transforming Darkness into Light

Indeed, the entire purpose of the Three Weeks and the destruction of the Temple is to reach greater heights. As the Midrash states: In the month of the “lion” (the mazal of the month of Av) the “lion” (the Holy Temple in Jerusalem) was destroyed by the “lion” (Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon), on condition that in the “lion” (Av) the “lion” (the Temple) will be rebuilt by the “lion” (G-d).

“Aryeh” (lion in Hebrew) - the mazal of Av - is the acronym of Elul, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Hoshana Rabba. The New Year is conceived in the month of Av. Av gives birth to the success of Moses’ prayers beginning in Elul (when Moses ascends Sinai for the third and final time), through Rosh Hashana, finally prevailing on Yom Kippur, and consummated and celebrated on Hoshana Rabbah.

In the throes of the Temple’s destruction, the salvation is

born. Moshiach is born on Tisha B’Av afternoon, as the raging fires were consuming the Temple, and this gives birth to our New Year. The greatest joy originates in the heart of darkness. Redemption is conceived from the ashes of destruction.

In the deepest darkness lies the strongest light. However, from our limited perspective we can only see one dimension at a time: either we see dark or we see light. Someone with deep eyesight and strong focus can see the light within the dark.

During the “three weeks” we need to look at this period in time not in a vacuum, but in context - as part of a bigger picture, which began with preceding events as well as those that followed - the story of Exodus, the giving of the Torah, the Golden Calf, Moses’ breaking the tablets, his return to Sinai to plead for forgiveness, his evoking Divine compassion during Elul, his success on Yom Kippur.

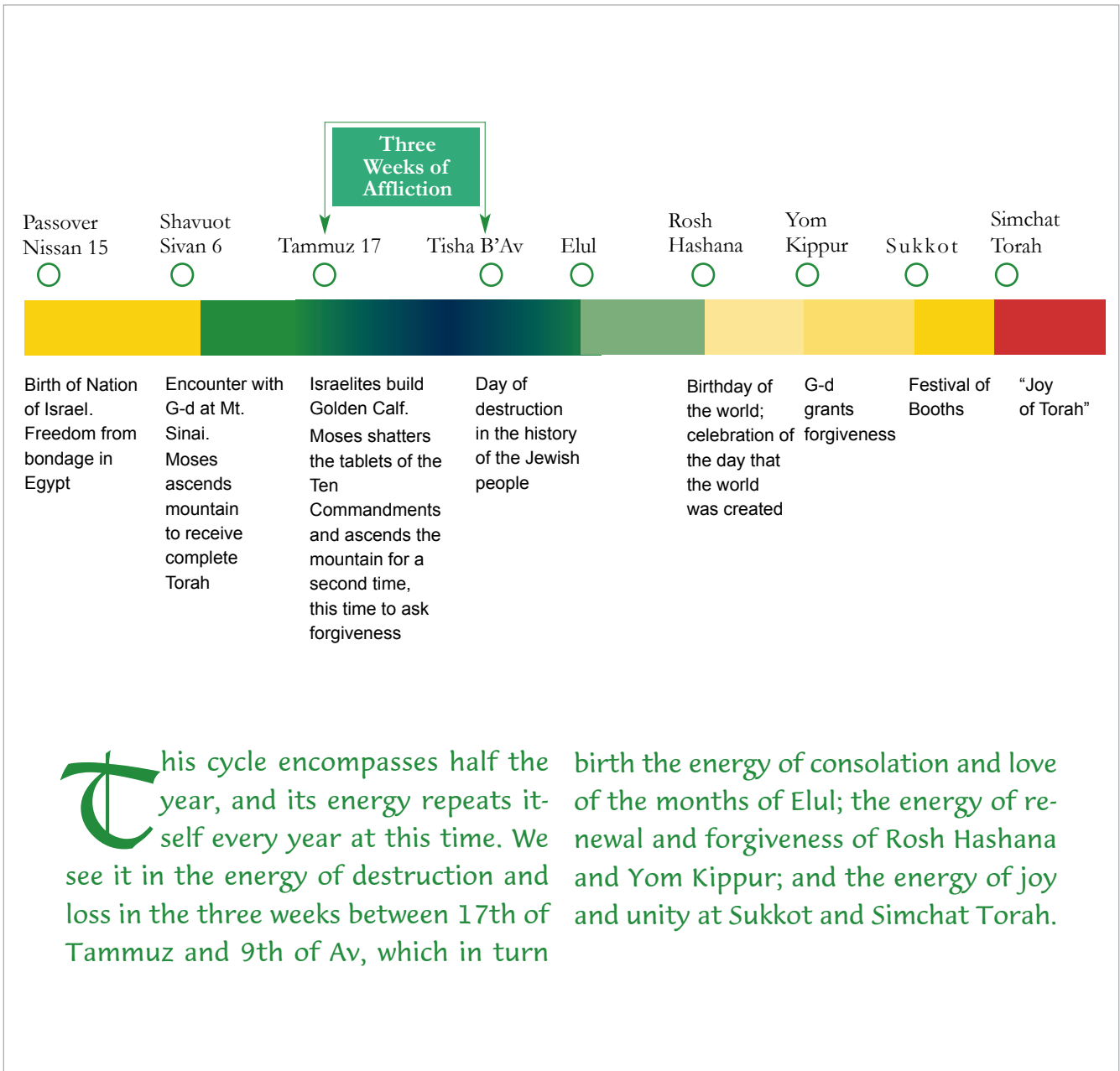
The Deepest Love

“When the pagans entered the Holy Temple, they saw the cherubs cleaving to each other” (Yuma 54b).

Very bizarre: The embracing cherubs reflected a time of profound love between G-d and the Jewish people, while at a time of estrangement between G-d and the Jews the cherubs would be back to back (Yuma 54a. See Bava Basra 99a). How then do we explain that the cherubs were cleaving to each other when the pagans entered to destroy the Temple - a time when G-d was clearly alienated from His people?! Explains the Maggid of Mezrich (cited in Bnei Yisachar, Av): The sages rule that a man ought to consort with his wife prior to leaving home on a journey (Yevomos 62b). Before His long journey away from home, G-d expressed His intimacy with His spouse (the Jewish people). Prior to the onset of the long exile, right at the moment of destruction, the cherubs embraced one final time, demonstrating that a new relationship and new level of intimacy was beginning to develop.

- Maamar Ba’laylah Ha’hu, Purim 5744 chapter 5





This cycle encompasses half the year, and its energy repeats itself every year at this time. We see it in the energy of destruction and loss in the three weeks between 17th of Tammuz and 9th of Av, which in turn birth the energy of consolation and love of the months of Elul; the energy of renewal and forgiveness of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur; and the energy of joy and unity at Sukkot and Simchat Torah.

❧ LAWS AND CUSTOMS ❧

THREE WEEKS

During the three weeks between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av, we are in a mourning period. To honor the “sad” and “low” energy level of this period, we refrain from the following:

- Make weddings.
- Play musical instruments or listen to music.
- Do anything that would require the Shehecheyanu blessing. For example: don a new garment or have a first taste of a seasonal fruit.
- Take a haircut or shave.
- On the 17th Of Tammuz we fast from pre-dawn till nightfall.

NINE DAYS

Once the month of Av begins we enter a more intense state of mourning known as the Nine Days. These first nine days of the month of Av (and half of the tenth) are days of mourning for the two Jewish Temples in Jerusalem that were destroyed during this time.

During this time, we do not do the following:

- Launder clothing.

- Eat meat or poultry or drink wine (excluding Shabbat and celebrations of a Mitzvah, such as a Bris, Bar Mitzvah, completion of a tractate of Talmud etc.).

- Bathe for pleasure or swim.
- Remodel or expand homes.
- Plant trees to be used for shade or fragrance (as opposed to fruit trees).
- Buy, sew, weave, or knit new clothing.
- Cut nails during the actual week of the fast of Tishah b'Av (starting from the Saturday night beforehand).

- There is no law forbidding traveling during the Nine Days; however it is customary to refrain from traveling (or engaging in any potentially perilous activity) during these days unless it is absolutely necessary.

- "When the month of Av begins, we reduce our joy".

- The entire month of Av is considered a time of “bad luck” for Jews so if you are having a court case or something of that sort it is best not to have it during Av (or at least not until after the ninth of Av).

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TISHA B'AV

Tisha B'Av is a major fast day. Since we are mourning the destruction of the Holy Temples we adopt many of the laws and customs of Shivah. We don't:

- Eat or drink beginning at sunset on the eve of Tishah b'Av until nightfall the next day (adults over Bar/Bat Mitzvah age).
- Wear leather footwear.
- Sit on a normal-height chair. After midday of Tishah b'Av it is permitted to sit on a regular chair.
- Bathe or wash oneself, even with cold water. A person who has become soiled may rinse the affected area with cold water.
- Apply ointment, lotions or creams (aside for medicinal creams).
- Engage in any physical acts of intimacy.
- Greet another with the customary "hello" or "how are you doing?"
- Engage in any pleasurable activities, such as outings or trips.
- Study Torah, because "the commandments of the Lord are upright, causing the heart to rejoice". It is however permitted - and encouraged - to study sections of the Torah which discuss the tragedies which befell the Jewish people throughout our history. This prohibition begins at midday of the day before Tisha B'Av.

- Immediately before the fast begins we eat the "separation meal." At the conclusion of this meal, we eat a piece of bread dipped in ashes and an egg - symbols of mourning. (If Tisha b'Av falls on a Sunday, then this meal does not contain any symbols of mourning.)
- The curtain is removed from the Ark, and the lights in the synagogue are dimmed. After the evening prayers, Eichah (the Book of Lamentations) is read. The leader reads aloud and the congregation reads along.
- When ritually washing the hands in the morning, the water should be poured over the entire fingers only up until the knuckles.
- Tallit and Tefillin are not worn during the morning services. Instead, we wear them for Minchah.
- Tachanun is not recited. The Torah is read during Shacharit, followed by a Haftarah.
- After Shacharit, it is customary to read the Kinnot (Tisha B'Av elegies).
- The Torah and a Haftarah is read again (different sections) during Mincha. The sections of "Nachem" and "Aneinu" are added to the Amidah of the Mincha prayer. Aneinu is only recited by one who is actually fasting.
- The Kiddush Levanah is recited after Tisha b'Av.

THE REBBE'S DIRECTIVES:

Transforming These Days into Joyous Ones

All these demonstrations of mourning and grieving elements during these sad days are not meant to depress and cause us anguish. We honor the destruction of the Temples and the other losses that occurred in this period in order to demonstrate our sensitivity and not ignore the magnitude and the consequences of the destruction. Indeed, by recognizing these tragic events as the root of our “broken” world, we can begin to heal from our wounds. Awareness is half the cure of an illness.

But above all, as discussed earlier, the purpose of the “three weeks” and the “nine days” is to use these days as catalysts that will give birth to an even greater celebration and redemption, preparing us for the time that *“these days will be transformed into joy and gladness and holidays.”* *I will turn their mourning into joy and will comfort them and make them rejoice from their sorrow*” (Jeremiah 31:12). We thus have to use every possible opportunity - allowed to us by Jewish law during this

period - to diminish the sadness with permitted celebrations, and add in joy and gladness.

In this spirit, here are the Rebbe's directives and suggestions for the Three Weeks and the Nine Days:

- **Study the laws of building the Temple**, in the book Ezekiel, the tractate Midos and the Rambam. By studying these laws we will merit to actually build the Third Temple (Tanchuma Leviticus 14).
- **Complete a tractate of Talmud** each day of the nine days so as to bring whatever joy is allowed into these days.
- **Add in Torah study and charity**, fulfilling the prophecy: “Zion shall be redeemed by law (Torah) and her captives by charity” (Isaiah 1:27).
- **Increase in all acts of unconditional love** - Ahavas Yisroel - which counteracts the baseless hatred (sinas chinam) that causes the Temple's destruction.

When G-d told the prophet Ezekiel to instruct the then exiled Jewish people about the measurements and design of the Third Holy Temple, Ezekiel replied: “Master of the world, why are You telling me to go and tell Israel the form of the house; they are now in exile in the land of our enemies—is there anything they can do about it? Let them be until they return from the exile. Then, I will go and inform them.”

G-d answered: “Should the construction of My House be ignored because My children are in exile? The study of the design of the Holy Temple as detailed in the Torah can be equated to its actual construction. Go tell them to study the form of the Holy Temple. As a reward for their study and their occupation with it, I will consider it as if they actually built the Holy Temple.”

-- Tanchuma Leviticus 14

The Torah Chapters Read During the Three Weeks

"Consider and reflect upon an astonishing thing: Everything happens in its time for the good. The [Torah] portions which we always read during the Three Weeks, Matos, Mas-sei and Devorim, discuss the victory of Israel over the nations and the division of the [Promised]

Land - the diametric opposite of the terrible events that happened during this time [the destruction of the Temple]. Sometimes we also read Pinchas during this period, which discusses all the holidays... related to the fact that in the future "these days will be transformed into joy and gladness and holidays"
- Shaloh Mesechta Taanit



"When Av arrives decrease - the negative energy of Av through - joy"

- The Munkatcher Rav (Minchas Elozor).

How can he turn around the literal meaning of the statement, which specifically directs us to decrease joy? In Jewish thought, based on faith in G-d, even a decrease in joy is not an end in itself, but part of a larger picture. In that context, even the decrease in joy in the month of Av is only a decrease on an ostensible level; within the sadness lays a deep joy - the joy of the light at the end of the tunnel, that our mourning today is a yearning that will lead us to the rebuilding of the Temple. How do we reveal that joy? By acting joyously (in ways that are halachakly/legally permitted) during the month of Av.



THE KABBALAH AND PSYCHOLOGY OF THE THREE WEEKS

The Roots of Trauma

Thousands of years have passed. Why are we still mourning the destruction of a... building?! What did the holy temple carry that would cause millions of people to continue grieving over its loss, and praying for its restoration?

The answer is that the Temple wasn't a mere structure of bricks and mortar. It was a window - a literal gate - between heaven and earth. "Build Me a Sanctuary," G-d says, "and I will rest among you."

There are those that see the symptoms of pain; and there are those that look for its roots. By remembering and mourning the destruction of the Temples, we get to the root of all our troubles.

That root being: The dichotomy between our inner spirits and our outer lives. The Temple was a gate that bridged the two. Its destruction reflected - and exposed - the duality of our lives.

Should we ignore the destruction of the Temple and continue to live our lives oblivious of the destruction, we then would be forced to always suffer its symptoms, never getting to the cause. By acknowledging the root of all our problems - personal, psychological, interpersonal, national and historical - in this time period of "The Three Weeks", we make our first step toward complete healing.

The Mishne therefore tells us that five tragic events happened both on the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av. These five events are actually a breakdown of the roots of all trauma and pain:

17TH OF TAMMUZ


1. The tablets were broken

This offers us insights into the dual nature of all things that "break" in our lives. A broken thing is not a positive experience. Yet, when something breaks it is a warning that there is an underlying problem that needs repair.

The breaking of the tablets was not the cause of the problems, it was the effect. These tablets represented G-d giving His Essence to the people. Just as the sacred words of the Ten Commandments were engraved on these tablets, so too G-d engraved Himself into our very beings. By building the Golden Calf and worshipping a false G-d, the people "broke" this essential connection. Moses was simply demonstrating this spiritual break by physically breaking the tablets.

And in doing so, Moses brilliantly and subtly revealed the "cure": The first step to healing and growth is humbly recognizing that you are broken, then you will look for ways to repair yourself. "Nothing is as com-

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plete as a broken heart,” says the Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak.

This is why the broken tablets lay side by side with the complete ones in the holy Ark in the Temple. They carry a positive message: A reminder that there is a break in our lives, and for something to be truly complete we must also feel how we are broken. Not a demoralizing feeling of being broken, but an uplifting one that motivates us to heal, grow and become greater than before.

The first root of trauma is when we break away from our inherent innocence, when we betray our inner selves and wander away from our inherent connection to our Divine Image.

Being aware of this fact helps us find our way back.

The first event of 17th of Tammuz wakes us up to the fact that there is something broken, and that we have the power to fix it.

2. The continuous [daily offering in the Temple] ceased

The constants in our lives are those eternal experiences that are there for us even when all else is lost. Once a constant has ceased, the end is near.

There were many activities and services in the Temple. But the most enduring one was the “*tomid*,” the daily offering that was brought each day of the year, including Shabbat, holidays, even Yom Kippur, without fail. Once the enemy caused this

constant to cease, the Temple’s fate was sealed.

We all go through many fluctuations in our lives. Ups and downs. But never allow a bad mood to stop your good habits, the things that you do without fail.

Consistency is a very powerful force that creates true and enduring change in the world. Witness all the greatest innovators: Persistence was the ultimate key to their success. Absolute belief in your cause and

the determined commitment to make it happen.

From time to time we need a jolting new experience to ignite our spirits; but the key to success is always what happens the day after the inspiration: Can you maintain it?


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3. The city [walls] were breached

The wall around a city is only a wall, but it protects the precious city. Our skin consists of outer layers that are not nearly as life sustaining as our vital organs, yet they are the key to protecting our insides from infection, G-d forbid.

We build many walls in our lives to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Walls include small things we do for our beloved that may not be the essence of our relationship, but they express by far the deepest dimension of our relationship. True love is expressed not in the things that you are required or asked to do; not even in the things that your beloved alludes that you

Cont’d



do; but in the things that you do out of your sheer desire to please your beloved, the “optional walls” you build that surround and protect the vital aspects of the relationship.

Walls also include special care we take to ensure that our weak and blind spots not get the better of us. When you are particularly prone, say, to bouts of anger, you have to build extra “walls” - be extra careful, employ additional measures to prevent this part of you to burst out of control. Each of us has areas of weakness where we need protective “walls” and boundaries. Never allow those walls to be breached.

This is another root of trauma: Breached walls. And the cure: To fortify the walls in your life.

4. Apustumus burned the Torah

Burning someone’s books is a desecration often equal to burning the person himself. By burning his valuable books, you are in effect burning his passions, his beliefs, his very identity.

If this is true with many books, how much more so with the Torah - the Divine blueprint of life. Torah was often the target of those that could not stand the absolute devotion Jews showed to their Torah. Indeed, many a Jew risked his own life to save a Torah scroll from being burned in a torched synagogue. Why? Because Torah was not seen merely as a book; it is “our life and our sustenance,” one with life it-

self. If you burn my Torah, you are in effect burning my past and my future. The Torah is my enduring link to generations past, who passed it on to me, and to generations to come.

Understanding the root problem helps us uncover its cure: Hold on strong to the Book. Ensure that you dedicate time to study Torah, recognize its relevance to your life and apply it. Strengthen your connection to its eternal power. This is why we intensify Torah study during the Three Weeks, as the prophet says: “Zion will be redeemed with law [Torah] and its captives with charity.”

Hold on strong to the Book. Ensure that you dedicate time to study Torah, recognize its relevance to your life and apply it. Strengthen your connection to its eternal power.

5. A graven image [idol] was placed in the Sanctuary

A true enemy always likes to strike at the heart of his adversary in order to humiliate and demoralize him. Placing a “tzelem” - a foreign image - in the Sanctuary was the ultimate insult and humiliation.

Each of us has a very pure place in our heart and soul. It is the most beautiful spot in your life. Cherish and protect it. Never allow anything to desecrate it. Because after everything is said and done, this place is the key to your redemption.

The last and final of the five roots of trauma is desecration of your most intimate and precious side. Ensure that your inner sanctuary always remains clean and pure of “foreign gods.”

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9TH OF AV

Had we learned our lessons from these events and healed them in a timely fashion, we would not have needed a Tisha B'Av and its five tragedies. Had, for instance, the Jews not built the Golden Calf, Moses would then not have broken the Tablets, and all of history would have changed. There no doubt would not have been the sin of the scouts that led to the decree that the people not enter Israel, and there would not have been the destruction of the Temple (see Talmud, Eruvin 54a).

Since we did not entirely root out the five traumas of the 17th of Tammuz, we now have to dig deeper and uncover even more fundamental roots, which are ingrained in the events of Tisha B'Av. Hence, following the five events of the 17th of Tammuz, the Mishne continues and lists the five for the 9th of Av:

1. It was decreed that our parents would not enter the Land [of Israel].

On the 29th of Tammuz Moses sent out scouts to survey Israel in preparation of its conquest. 40 days later, on Tisha B'Av, they return with their terrible report, declaring that we are too weak to conquer the land; Israel is a "land that consumes its inhabitants. The scouts incite and demoralize the entire nation, and that night of Tisha B'Av becomes a night of tears and grief ("The entire community rose in uproar and begin to cry; the people wept that night" - Num-

bers 14:1). G-d then said to them: "You wept (that night) for no reason; I will designate (that night as) a weeping for generations..." (Talmud, Taanit 29a). Tisha B'Av becomes the night and day when both Temples are destroyed, Beitar is vanquished and Jerusalem is plowed. [Other tragedies as well occurred on this day: The final date for the Spanish expulsion of the Jews in 1492. The beginning of World War I. And other events].

Clearly, the decree of not entering the Land was a major event that led to all the other escalating tragedies of Tisha B'Av.


What is the essence of this event? The scouts basically contended that we cannot possibly integrate spirituality into a materialistic land. The sheer nature of materialism, they argued, is too

corrupt, too selfish, to be receptive to anything sublime. Not only can we not conquer it, but this land is one "that consumes its inhabitants."

Now, their argument was not only sensible but realistic. Is there someone that would deny the fact that the market place, and in general the materialistic universe, conquers us all? Who has not been humbled by the forces of life, who has not been compromised by the pressures of survival, who has not conformed to the demands of the marketplace - who is not "for sale"?

But, there's one problem. It is G-d that sent us here and charged us with the mission not only not to succumb, but to *transform* the physical universe. As "practical" as the scouts were, they basically defied the very

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essence of G-d's mission to us human beings on Earth: "I have sent your soul to the material on a mission," G-d in effect is telling us. "That mission is for you to take your physical corner of the universe - your time, space and experiences - and transform it into a vehicle, a channel for the Divine." Our mission, in brief, is: To integrate spirit and matter.

No man, no person has the right to question the possibility *whether* we can accomplish the mission; our role is to figure out *how* to do it, but not to challenge the very premise.

Because once we do, we essentially are giving up on life. Yes, life undoubtedly is difficult; we live in a cruel universe. Much pain and misery. Many reasons to give up. But we were simultaneously given all the necessary tools to change the world, and not be overcome by it.

The scouts then proceeded to arouse all the fears and insecurities of the entire nation, and they ended up weeping all night. G-d does not punish; G-d responds. The universe is one of cause and effect. "You - the people - don't want to enter the Promised Land. You don't believe all my promises to you and your ancestors. You are overcome by fear - that demonstrates that you are unable, and don't deserve, to enter the Promised Land."

"It is you own weakness and fears that projects and does not allow you to enter and conquer the land. As a result, this fear

- this weeping for no reason - will cause you to weep for generations on this night of Tisha B'Av."

Once someone decides (G-d forbid) that he or she cannot fulfill their life mission, that s/he cannot integrate matter and spirit, that person in effect creates an inevitable dichotomy within themselves and the world around them - a dichotomy of soul

and body, matter and spirit, a split between the sacred and the secular.

And this brings on the decree that this person cannot enter the Promised Land, i.e. cannot realize his/her dreams and aspirations.

And this results in all the other effects of Tisha B'Av, the next four events, which all reflect a progressive break down of


the structures around us that cannot survive once matter and spirit have been torn asunder. Can anything survive if its body and soul are not aligned? Can you have true inner happiness if you are afraid of your mission, if you do not have seamless between your spiritual and material sides?

This awareness allows us the ability to begin to heal and mend our internal and external dichotomies and schisms.

2. The first Temple was destroyed

Now that the first root has exposed the breach between matter and spirit, this rift begins to expand.

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Its first casualty is the destruction of the first Temple. As some of our holy books write that had Moses entered the Promised Land, the Temple he would have built would never have been destroyed (see Megaleh Amukot 185. Alsheich, Ohr HaChaim at the beginning of this Vaetchanan's Torah portion).

The Temple was a bridge between heaven and earth, between the spiritual and the material. The first Temple, which corresponded to Abraham (chesed), was a bridge that primarily brought heaven down to earth. While the second Temple (corresponding to Isaac, gevurah) primarily lifted earth to heaven. The first Temple is compared to the first Tablets - the work of tzaddikim, who draw the light downward. The second Temple is like the second Tablets - the work of baalei teshuvah, who initiate and raise that which is below upward.

The first Temple was destroyed primarily because of sins between man and G-d.

In the split between heaven and earth, the first step is when we get disconnected from G-d. When we stop recognizing that we have a Higher Reality to answer to, a power greater than ourselves, we inevitably become consumed with our own selfish needs. Once the people lost sight of their Divine mission, the inevitable result was the compromise and ultimate destruction of the first Temple - the bridge between the people on Earth with heaven.

3. The second Temple was destroyed

As the effects of the schism between matter and spirit continue to deteriorate, the next effect it has is on our relationship with each other.

If you are not at peace with yourself, if your body and soul are not in harmony, you will not be at peace with other people.

The destruction of the second Temple was because of baseless hatred between people. And this destruction is deeper and more powerful than that of the first Temple. G-d can forgive people's crimes against G-d,

hence the destruction of the first Temple lasted only 70 years. But once it reaches a point of divisiveness, that we begin to hate each other, that causes a destruction that we don't see an end to (see Talmud Yoma ibid), one that has already lasted 1942 years...

And make no mistake about it. A person

cannot have a relationship with G-d if they don't love other people. Because if you love G-d then you love that which G-d loves - and G-d loves His creatures.

This is the lesson from the third tragedy of Tisha B'Av, the destruction of the second Temple: The destructive force of baseless hatred - which is a direct result from a split within ourselves (a form of "self-hate"); and its antidote is only baseless love.

A person cannot have a relationship with G-d if they don't love other people. Because if you love G-d then you love that which G-d loves - and G-d loves His creatures.

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4. Beitar was conquered

Beitar was the last fortress to hold out against the Romans during the Bar Kochba revolt in the year 135. Beitar was a great city that had tens of thousands of Jews, and it had a great leader that was considered Moshiach by all the leaders of the time. When Beitar fell to the Romans and all its residents were killed, it was considered as tragic as the destruction of the Temple itself (Rambam, Hilchot Taanit 5:3).

As long as Beitar stood, there was still a remnant of hope that the Temple's destruction could be reversed. Once it fell, 67 years after the destruction of the second Temple, it sealed the fate of the people and the destruction became an irreversible finality.

In the psycho-spiritual realm the fall of Beitar represents the next decline in the progressive break down resulting from the matter/spirit dichotomy. Beitar symbolizes the "last stronghold" within us that still allows us hope.

Even after you may have lost your innocence and allowed your life to become compartmentalized, split between your body and your soul, between your physical life and your spiritual one, there always remains at least one "bastion," which allows you to make your "final stand." The fall of Beitar is the shattering of last hopes and our last reserve of strength.

[In Kabbalistic terminology: The first Temple is Binah, the second Temple is Malchut and Beitar is the level of division that takes place in the worlds of Biy"at

(Beriyah, Yetzirah, Asiyah). The two Temples are both levels within the unity of Atzilut, with the first Temple being a revelation from above and the second one a revelation below. But Beitar is already a stage after the destruction of the unity between heaven and earth, a stage where divisiveness exists; yet it is a remaining bastion that still carries the energy of the earlier unity (see Ohr HaTorah Lech Lecho (vol. 1) 83b. Shir HaShirim p. 357)].

Whatever it takes we
must hold on to hope,
and not allow our past
disappointments, no
matter how profound,
to dictate our future.


What this means for us is that we must never, ever allow our last "stronghold" to fall. Whatever it takes we must hold on to hope, and not allow our past disappointments, no matter how profound, to dictate our future.

5. The city [Jerusalem] was plowed

The final breakdown is when the Romans (three years after the fall of Beitar) plowed the city of Jerusalem, completely leveling everything in the city. This was the ultimate humiliation: Total annihilation of any memory, and remnant of the greatness that once stood there.

The most sacred place on Earth, the spot from where Adam was created, Noah brought his offering, Abraham brought Isaac, Jacob had his famous dream, the place that King David designated and King Solomon built the Temple - the Holy of Holies and the center of the universe - the area that till today remains the center for billions of people. What did the Romans do? They plowed it down to oblivion, as if to say that nothing ever existed here. As

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long as the ruins can be seen, there is still a memory of the past; but plowing is finality, a total and absolute obliteration.

In earlier stages, even if there is a dichotomy between body and soul, you still can identify yourself, albeit a split identity, but some form of recognition. Then there comes a stage when your “identity” and ‘self’ gets plowed to the point of absolute erasure of who you thought you were. This is the lowest point a person can reach, when you feel that your entire identity has been annihilated. All sense of self has been lost.

That’s the bad news; the good news is that therein lays the cure as well. Sometimes one needs to hit “rock bottom” in order to recognize that his/her life is not working and requires change.

What is fascinating about this level of destruction is that the Mishne uses the word “plow,” evidently based on the verse in Micha “Zion will be plowed under like a field” (3:12).

On one hand the plowing of the city was a tragedy of enormous proportions, especially considering the intentions of the Romans. On the other hand, plowing is a vital step in the regeneration and the new growth that would emerge from this very ground.

Plowing implies removing from our lives the “weeds” and “rocks,” the negative elements of our personalities that impede our own growth. Plowing includes completely leveling a negative past so that you can begin anew, and build something

better and greater. Plowing means swallowing false pride, eliminating obstacles - clearing the ground, so that a new structure can be built upon it.

The Laugh

Rabbi Akiva laughed when the others sages cried upon seeing a fox running out of the place which was once the Holy of Holies (Talmud, end of Makot). The other sages


only saw the plowed land, leaving a barren and desolate area, with nothing apparent. Rabbi Akiva with his special eyes saw the growth that would come out of the plowing. As he told his colleagues:

“For that very reason, I am laughing. Isaiah the

Prophet said (8:2), ‘I will bring two reliable witnesses regarding my People, Uriah the Priest and Zechariah ben Yevarech’yahu.’ Now what do Uriah and Zechariah have to do with each other? Uriah prophesied in the time of the First Temple, and Zechariah in the time of the Second Temple! But the verse in Isaiah makes Zechariah’s prophecy dependent on Uriah’s. In Uriah’s case, it is written, ‘Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed under like a field.’ In Zechariah we find (8:4-5), ‘Yet again, elderly men and elderly women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem...(and the streets of the city will be full of children, playing in her streets).’ Until I saw the fulfillment of Uriah’s prophecy, I had some doubt as to whether Zechariah’s prophecy would come true. Now that I have seen Uriah’s

Five roots of trauma -
five sources of growth,
with the final one plow-
ing the ground to allow
for the emergence of a
new world.

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prophecy fulfilled in full detail, I know that Zechariah's prophecy will also be fulfilled.”

Hearing that, Rabbi Akiva's colleagues said to him, ‘Akiva, you have comforted us. Akiva, you have comforted us.’

Five roots of trauma - five sources of growth, with the final one plowing the ground to allow for the emergence of a new world.

And we have Rabbi Akiva - and some others in history - to remind and comfort us that something lies beneath the plowed earth.

What we want now is not just comfort, but to see it with our own eyes.

This is all about us; but we do have one request to G-d:

For thousands of years a nation has been mourning because of these ten events. We have not forgotten. We have searched for and found the roots of so many of life's problems. We have brought civilization to this world. We have demonstrated the power of faith and hope, even under most severe circumstances.

How much longer do we need to cry during these Three Weeks?

* * *

How much
LONGER
do we need to CRY
during
these THREE
WEEKS?



THREE WEEKS OF PAIN, SEVEN OF COMFORT & TWO OF RETURN

These weeks offer us a psycho-spiritual system how to heal, grow and rebuild our lives.

Summary of a discourse written by the great Chassid Reb Hillel of Paritch (1795-1864) in which he explains the deeper significance of the “three weeks of rebuke, seven of consolation, two of return”

The Kabbalah teaches that the Three Weeks manifest the concealment of the three intellectual faculties (Chochma, Binah, Daat). The following Seven Weeks express the revelation of the intellect of Atik Yomin (lit. “ancient days,” referring to the higher dimension of Ketter, the crown - the highest Divine revelation) in the seven emotions. And the Two Weeks of Return is the elevation of Malchut achieved through the two levels of teshuvah (“higher teshuvah:

and “lower teshuvah”) that elevates from Biy”a (Beriah, Yetzirah, Asiyah). This is followed by Yom Kippur, when the Second Tablets were given, the revelation of the intellect of Atik Yomin into Biy”a. Followed by Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, when the revelation of Yom Kippur is revealed in great joy.

If you had problems understanding the last paragraph, don’t be forlorn; most of us have the same difficulty. That is why we need Chassidus to

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The Purpose of Fasting

The prophet Isaiah describes a fast day as “a day of goodwill before G-d.” In other words, the negative aspects of the fast day—the mourning, the recollection of our failings, the deprivation of the body—are not what define its essence. At its core, the fast day is a wholly positive phenomenon: a day of opportunity for man to bring himself closer to his Creator.

Why then the need to deny ourselves food and drink on such a day? Only because the material aspects of life tend to erect barriers between ourselves and G-d.

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explain the cryptic language of Kabbalah. Reb Hillel explains it with an analogy of a teacher and student (which is the classical and best example to explain the relationship between the Divine and the mundane). The conventional transmission of knowledge from teacher to student is a seamless process. It does not require a special effort. However, when the teacher (out of his deep love to the student) wants to convey an entirely new concept - one that is beyond anything yet revealed - he needs to collect his thoughts, return into the deepest recesses of his mind until he is ready to begin transmitting the new concept.

During the process of reflection, the teacher will suspend his transmission to the student, while he gathers his thoughts. The deeper he goes into his own mind, the more he immerses into the new concept, the deeper will be his silence.

From the student's perspective this silence can be perceived as a disconnection. He can even think that the teacher has abandoned him. In truth what is happening is that the teacher is connecting ever more with the student. His silence actually reflects a deeper bond with the student; this silence is giving birth to an unprecedented new concept that will afterwards be conveyed to the student.

His silence actually reflects a deeper bond with the student; this silence is giving birth to an unprecedented new concept that will afterwards be conveyed to the student.

Tammuz, the day when Moses broke the Two Tablets when he saw that the people had built the Golden Calf, 40 days after he received the Tablets with the Ten Commandments at Sinai.

On the surface, the broken Tablets are a tragic event and the 17th of Tammuz is the beginning of the saddest time of the year. Yet, following that day Moses returned to Sinai to

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We must therefore lessen our involvement with the material—to the extent of forswearing some of our body's most basic needs—thereby freeing our soul to take advantage of the “day of goodwill before G-d” without hindrance and obstruction from our physical selves.

This explains why in the era of Moshiach the fast days will be “transformed into days of gladness and joy... festival days.” In the perfect world of Moshiach, the physical creation will no longer obscure the face of its Creator; on the contrary, it will equal, and even surpass, the spiritual as an expression of the all-pervasiveness of the divine truth. So there will be no need to suppress the physical self in order to actualize the positive essence of the fast days. Rather, these will be festivals, on which the body's joy and pleasure will contribute to the deepening of the bond between G-d and man.



Loneliness

The Book of Lamentations, traditionally recited on Tisha B'Av eve, opens with these words: Aichah Yoshva Bodad, “Woe, she sits alone.” The destruction of the Temple created a cos-

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beseech G-d to forgive the people. His efforts would take 80 days, but at the end of that period Moses would prevail and return on Yom Kippur with the second set of Tablets. The Second Tablets are in many ways far greater than the first. They revealed an entirely new 'concept' and introduced an unprecedented new energy into existence. This new 'concept' and energy is born in the Three Weeks (the first three weeks of Moses prayer on Sinai). During these weeks Moses was on Sinai, the people below experienced only silence. But above a birthing was taking place. As the Three Weeks progress the silence deepens. The people feel that perhaps they will not be forgiven. The siege over Jerusalem intensifies from day to day, until we reach Tisha B'Av at the end of the Three Weeks, which is the saddest day of all, when the Temples are destroyed. Traditionally the mourning intensifies as these weeks pass and reach closer to Tisha B'Av.

In week one the first intellectual faculty (Chochma) is concealed. Though the 'teacher' is retreating into his mind to generate the new 'concept,' he still can maintain some form of superficial communication with the student. In week two the concealment progresses into the dimension of Binah (understanding). Finally, in week three all levels of intellect are concealed, including the third faculty of Daat (knowledge).

During these weeks Moses was on Sinai, the people below experienced only silence. But above a birthing was taking place.

Yet as the silence deepens, the new 'concept' is developing further and reaching new heights. The greater the silence, the greater the revelation.

Even during this silence, if we look close enough we can detect a glow on the face of the teacher as he experiences the new revelation.

This glow, this aura expresses itself in the seven emotions of the teacher - and they in turn comfort us (the student) in the Seven Weeks of Consolation. In each of the seven

mic loneliness, a personal loneliness. Of all the tragedies, the first one the prophet bemoans is not the destruction, not the killings, not the expulsion, not the exile - but the loneliness. Because all suffering could be endured if we felt we were not alone in our pain. The sense of loneliness and isolation makes the suffering unbearable.

Kabbalistically speaking: Sefer Yetzirah, the Book of Formation states that the sefirot are "ten but not nine." The ninth of Av implies an incomplete and lonely state (ten minus one) -- missing that elusive number one.



The Mysterious Sin

When the prophet Jeremiah prophesied that the sins of Israel would bring about the destruction of the Holy Temple and their exile to Babylonia, he also predicted the duration of their punishment: "So said G-d: After seventy years in Babylonia, I shall remember you. I shall fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place." But when the Second Temple was destroyed 420 years after their return from Babylonia, and the Jewish people were again driven from their land, no pre-set limit was given for their exile.

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weeks we are increasingly comforted as we progressively connect to the 'glowing' seven emotions of the teacher.

The Seven Weeks of Consolation are meant to motivate and prepare us for the work we must do to receive the new revelation birthed in the Three Weeks. This work entails teshuvah: In order to grow and be receptive to a new perspective, we must suspend

our old perspectives and free ourselves from our old patterns of behavior. This teshuvah has two steps - the Two Weeks of Teshuvah, which allows us to finally re-

ceive the new revelation of the Second Tablets on Yom Kippur. After all this work we are finally ready to celebrate our reception of the new 'concept.' And celebrate we do on Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. This in brief is a synopsis of Reb Hillel's fascinating discourse, which apparently is based on the teachings of his teacher, the Tzemach Tzedek.

A FORMULA AND SYSTEM TO COPE WITH CHALLENGES

This explanation provides us with a brilliant formula to cope with our challenges today.

"Where is G-d in all of our pain and hardships?" many of us ask. Why is G-d silent? Will we get through this, and more importantly *how* will we?

Then we must be comforted by the knowledge and the trust in G-d's promise, that the 'destruction' of a previous state allows for the birth of a new one.

These and so many fundamental questions asked today are answered by the 1945 year old system that teaches us

how to deal with loss, how to be comforted and how to rebuild a new world.

Even as we experience great loss, we also witness - and are comforted by - noble heroism and the majesty of the human spirit - perhaps a manifestation of the seven 'glowing' emotions.

Even as we hear silence, we must realize that a great new

The Talmud offers the following explanation: "The first exiles, whose sins were known (for we read how the prophets rebuked them for idolatry, promiscuity and bloodshed), the limit of their exile was also known; the latter exiles, whose sin is not known, the limit of their exile is also unknown."

But on that very same page, the Talmud tells us that the Second Temple was destroyed because of "baseless hatred" between Jews. Why, then, are we told that their sin is unknown?

Said the Chassidic master, Rabbi Velvel of Zbaricz: Such is the nature of "baseless hatred." Each side sees itself wholly in the right. It is the other who is the sinner, the other whose inflexibility is the cause of the dispute. So the strife and animosity go on without end, for one cannot rectify a situation for which there is no guilty party, and one cannot repent of a sin whose origin remains an utter mystery...



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revelation is being born. And we are privileged to be part of it. We are blessed to help precipitate a new era - when materialism will be not an end in itself, but a means to spirituality - to a world whose entire occupation will be to know the Divine, to perceive in all of existence the sublime energy within, the 'hand inside the glove;' a "world filled with Divine knowledge as the waters cover the sea."

But to do so, we must first be cognizant of the tenuousness of the material world (as an end to itself). We must grieve for our losses, stand in awe of the silence and recognize the cracks that have opened up in our existing infrastructures. Then we must be comforted by the knowledge and the trust in G-d's promise, that the 'destruction' of a previous state allows for

the birth of a new one. That the cracks around us reveal a deeper truth. And finally, we must acclimate ourselves to the deeper truth. We must free ourselves - through teshuvah - from our subjective pasts and our hardened habits, and realign our lives to a greater vision of new horizons.

May we use these weeks well to align our lives to the healthy cosmic rhythms of time - the rhythms that reflect the inner patterns of life and inner forces that make existence tick.

May we do our part to prepare ourselves and the world to finally receive and experience the new revelation: the rebuilding of the Third and eternal Temple, the final and eternal Redemption. After the long - 1942 year old - silence, it's about time.

SHABBOS CHAZON

The Shabbat preceding the Tisha B'av fast day is called the "Shabbat of Vision," for on this Shabbat we read a chapter from the Prophets entitled "The Vision of Isaiah."

But there is also a deeper significance to the name "Shabbat of Vision," expressed by Chassidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev with the following metaphor: A father once prepared a beautiful suit of clothes for his son. But the child

neglected his father's gift and soon the suit was in tatters. The father gave the child a second suit of clothes; this one, too, was ruined by the child's carelessness. So the father made a third suit. This time, however, he withholds it from his son. Every once in a while, in special and opportune times, he shows the suit to the child, explaining that when the child learns to appreciate and properly care for the gift, it will be given to him. This

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induces the child to improve his behavior, until it gradually becomes second nature to him—at which time he will be worthy of his father’s gift.

On the “Shabbat of Vision,” says Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, each and every one of us is granted a vision of the third and final Temple—a vision that, to paraphrase the Talmud, “though we do not see ourselves, our souls see.” This vision evokes a profound response in us, even if we are not consciously aware of the cause of our sudden inspiration.



THE DIVINE DWELLING

The Holy Temple in Jerusalem was the seat of G-d’s manifest presence in the physical world. Twice we were given the gift of a divine dwelling in our midst. Twice we failed to measure up to this gift and banished the divine presence from our lives.

So G-d built us a third temple. Unlike its two predecessors, which were of human construction and therefore subject to debasement by man’s misdeeds, the Third Temple is as eternal and invincible as its

omnipotent architect. But G-d has withheld this “third suit of clothes” from us, confining its reality to a higher, heavenly sphere, beyond the sight and experience of earthly man.

Each year, on the “Shabbat of Vision,”

G-d shows us the Third Temple. Our souls behold a vision of a world at peace with itself and its Creator, a world suffused with the knowledge and awareness of G-d, a world that has realized its divine potential for goodness and

perfection. It is a vision of the Third Temple in heaven — in is spiritual and elusive state—like the third set of clothes that the child’s father has made for him but is withholding from him. But it is also a vision with a promise—a vision of a heavenly temple poised to descend to earth, a vision that inspires us to correct our behavior and hasten the day when the spiritual vision becomes factual reality. Through these repeated visions, living in the divine presence becomes more and more “second nature” to us, progressively elevating us to the state of worthiness to experience the divine in our daily lives.

THE KABALLAH AND PSYCHOLOGY OF TISHA B'AV

The Abuse and Restoration of Dignity

In spiritual/psychological terms Tisha B'Av damaged malchus - our inner dignity. As discussed earlier, we are not simply grieving over past events, but over all forms of destruction in our lives - every form of grief and loss evolves from the rupturing of the bond between spirit and matter that occurred when the Divine presence in the Temple no longer found a "home" in our material universe and was compelled to go into "hiding." Each of us has an indispensable soul within, which is the ultimate root of all confidence and sense of purpose. Our convictions, hopes and greatest dreams flow from our inner "malchus" - a profound sense of dignity and majesty that stems from the Divine image in which we were all created. It is the feeling that "you matter" and you have the power to achieve anything you set your mind to.

In contrast, what is the root of all destruction? The annihilation of malchus -

when this dignity is violated. Once that part of you - your purest element, the one that feeds your sense of self-value - is compromised, it's just a matter of time that your life begins to spiral downward out of control, in one form or another.

For some it takes on the shape of raw dysfunctionality. Others are creative enough to find ways to remain functional ("func-

tional addicts") to some extent, and learn how to "cover their tracks" as they maneuver their way day to day. Variations are as numerous as people themselves. Seeing someone use their creative juices -

The greatness of the ascent is in direct proportion to the depths of the descent that precedes it.

not to mention the energy, time and money wasted - for such machinations is, of course, one of the saddest things to observe. Often arrogance is one of the mechanisms used (usually unintentionally) to cover up low self-esteem (a weak sense of malchus).

The question, however, begs: What could bring someone to compromise their own sense of self-worth? Who in their right mind would allow their inner dignity to be

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violated? Human nature is such that we would do anything to not allow ourselves to be humiliated, let alone to allow our entire dignity to be undermined.

The answer is obvious from the question: At the outset no one ever damages their own malchus/dignity. Any such damage is always initiated by someone outside ourselves: A parent, an educator, an adult - anyone that we may have trusted can hurt us, especially in our most vulnerable and impressionable childhood years.

The Arizal explains why the Fifteenth of Av is the greatest of holidays ("there were no greater holidays for Israel than the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur"), because its full moon follows and repairs the "destruction" of the "moon" (Malchus) on Tisha b'Av, when the Temple was destroyed. The greatness of the ascent is in direct proportion to the depths of the descent that precedes it.

The lesson of these days teaches us the terrible consequences of malchus/dignity violated. But awareness of the problem is half its cure: It also instructs us how to repair the rupture: Just as dignity (malchus) on earth was destroyed on Tisha B'Av, we have the power of the full moon on the Fifteenth of Menachem Av to restore dignity, and with even greater intensity than the original.

Jerusalem is a place
of power - potency
that everyone wants
to feed off.

For the sake of our children and their future we need to address these issues head-on, and come up with both preemptive actions as well as appropriate methods to rebuild dignity once it was compromised.

Parents and educators must know that we carry great responsibility and power - with life and death consequences - in cultivating and nurturing the dignity and

souls of our children. And this begins not when the child is twenty, ten, or even two years old. It begins at the moment of birth, and even at the moment of conception.

We live in a profoundly insecure world; malchus/ dignity is the most lacking dimension. Even if we may have plenty of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, love, discipline, compassion, endurance, humility and bonding (the first nine sefirot) - they are only nine, as in the Ninth of Av; without the tenth - and most important - dimension, we are missing the foundation of all life: inner security, self-worth and dignity that makes all the other nine worth their weight and imbues us with the confidence to use our nine faculties with conviction and sense of urgency and destiny.



JERUSALEM UNDER SIEGE

Then and Now

The siege of Jerusalem two millennia ago - which we honor during the Three Weeks - is relevant today as much as then. Throughout history - as well as in our times - Jerusalem remains the crown jewel that every nation aspires to. The Crusaders. The Moslems. Everyone seems to want a piece of this mystical city.

Why is Jerusalem under siege and always been under siege? Because Jerusalem (and even more: the Temple Mount) is a place of power - potency that everyone wants to feed off. Jerusalem in Hebrew (*Yerusholayim*) combines two words: *Yira* (awe), *Sholom* (peace). Awesome harmony. Jerusalem is the place where Abraham offered Isaac at the altar and where Jacob fell asleep and has his ladder dream. Jerusalem is the place from where Adam and Eve were created. That is why all humans - children and carriers of the genes of Adam and Eve - gravitate back to that holiest of places. Jerusalem is the center of the universe, and everyone feels it consciously or unconsciously.

The Promised Land is not merely a nice place to live, a retirement village or a cool vacation spot. It is the spiritual heartbeat of the universe; the portal between heaven and earth. Israel is therefore called the Holy Land because it is the

physical manifestation of the fusion between the spiritual and the material - between the human and the Divine. Holiness means something that simply has less egocentric layers that block out the inner Divine energy.

The centrality of Israel is actually a psycho/spiritual centrality; the purpose of the Holy Land is to serve as the bridge to holiness that will ultimately transform the rest of the world. The Holy Land represents a state of sanctity within each of our souls, and their ability to integrate with our physical lives. Its role as Promised Land - the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the land that consumes the journey of the Jewish people throughout the wilderness - is the destination to which we all aspire.

No wonder nations and religions throughout history have all longed to conquer this small piece of geography. Everyone gravitates to this land. Unconsciously, every nation, religion and individual senses that the Holy land is the spiritual vortex of existence, the place where the doors open up to reach the Divine.

We pray toward the East, toward Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. We stand in New York, Los Angeles, Paris,

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Moscow, London, Bangkok, Sydney - wherever we are on the globe (and even on the moon) - we always face Jerusalem. 5000 years ago, 1942 years ago and today.

Av consists of two letters: Alef and bet - an acronym for the two nations that destroyed the two temples: Adom (the Roman Empire) and Babylon (Shaloh). Our troubles in the Middle East did not begin today. They are an extension of unresolved forces unleashed millennia ago - events that set in motion a series of conflicts that plague us to this very day. Edom (Rome) is the Western, Christian world - descendants of Esau. Babylon is the Eastern, Arab, Muslim world - descendants of Ishmael. All global confrontations are a result of the strange bedfellows created back in the home of Abraham.

As sad as this period may be - we are now in the nine most distressing days of the year, mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temples - these days also carry within its folds the secret

to the greatest success story in history: The mysterious eternity of the Jewish people. Despite all odds - millennia of relentless persecutions, genocides, expulsions, which have elicited many dire predictions of the ultimate demise of the Jew - we are still here!

Where does Jerusalem stand today? Does she sit alone?

Where do we stand today? Do we appreciate the gifts we are blessed with?

This is the time of year that we shed a tear. Not a tear of weakness and despondence. A tear of strength - sensitive to the losses and pains of the world in which we live. A tear of hope - that opens up doors.

Tisha B'Av is the most sensitive, the most vulnerable, day of the year, exposing the most vulnerable parts of our lives.

A day like this must be honored and serve as a source of motivation. It is a day that should serve as a wake up call to appreciate the Divine blessings in our lives.

That we must act on the awakenings and inspirations in our lives.

Through **our efforts** in tapping
and revealing the power of "The Three Weeks"
we will **speedily merit** the time when
"these days will be transformed into **joy**
and **gladness** and **holidays**".

- The Rebbe