

**A Reader
for Tish'a B'av**

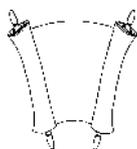
**A Season
of Sorrow
and Hope**

Eight Original Essays

A Reader for Tish'a B'av

A Season of Sorrow and Hope

*Eight Original Essays
by the Staff of the
Cincinnati Community Kollel*



5760

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*To enrich
the Cincinnati Jewish community
by creating an environment
of Torah study
and providing access
to our spiritual heritage.*

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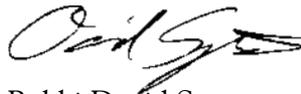
Preface

For over 3300 years, Tish'a B'av (the ninth day of the month of Av) has been the national day of Jewish mourning. Its notoriety began with the evil report of the spies about the land of Israel, resulting in G-d's decree that the generation that received the Torah at Sinai would not enter the Holy Land. It is, as well, the anniversary of the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem, the expulsion from Spain in 1492, and countless other Jewish tragedies throughout the ages. This confluence of events is not mere coincidence, but rather indicates the negative and harsh potential of this day.

Yet, within this sorrow there lies a seed of hope. Our rabbis had a tradition that the Messiah would be born on Tish'a B'av. Moreover, Scripture refers to Tish'a B'av as *mo'ed*, an interface with G-d, a term normally associated with festivals. This is to remind us that even when G-d seems to have forsaken us, He is really right there with us, only we need to change the relationship from a negative one to a positive one. This would allow us to achieve the assurance of our sages; that one day, Tish'a B'av will be one of the greatest of holidays. May we merit it speedily in our days.



Rabbi Meir Minster



Rabbi David Spetner

Two Eyes, Two Temples

The period of the Three Weeks culminates with the fast of Tish'a B'av, the last of the set of four fast days that mark great tragedies in the history of our nation. The purpose of our fasting, explains Maimonides,¹ is to encourage a thoughtful examination of our own actions, and to consider which of them resemble the misdeeds that led to these tragedies in the first place. It is due to our repetition of these errors that we continue to suffer from these calamities. When we contemplate what we have lost, we must consider the causes as well as the magnitude of the tragedy.

On Tish'a B'av we mourn the destruction of both the First and Second Temples. The Talmud² attributes these two calamities to very different failures of behavior.

Why was the first Temple destroyed? Because of three iniquitous things that existed there—idolatry, immorality and bloodshed.

...They were wicked people but they placed their trust in the Holy One, Blessed is He. But the Second Temple—we know that the people occupied themselves with Torah, mitzvohs and acts of kindness—why was it destroyed? Because of gratuitous hatred that existed there. This teaches you that gratuitous hatred is tantamount to the three cardinal sins of idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed, put together.

1 *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Fasts, 5:1

2 *Yoma* 9b

Although the Talmud's closing remark equates the severity of these sins, there would seem to be no commonality in the nature of these transgressions. Nevertheless, we mourn their losses simultaneously. According to Maimonides, then, we must consider these sins together in our introspection. How can we bring these seemingly disparate failings into a single focus?

The Temple was the site of the performance of two distinct commandments, whose focus highlighted different aspects of our relationship with G-d. Firstly, it was a place to serve G-d, where the wide range of sacrifices and services were offered on a daily basis and at special times during the year. Secondly, it was the place to fulfill the commandment of *aliyas haregel*, the requirement to ascend and appear before G-d during the Three Festivals (Passover, Shavu'os, and Sukkos). Maimonides³ stresses that this was to be a gathering, an opportunity to assemble as a people. The Temple was then a place of strength and focus for the nation, as well, accentuating the value of man, in his role of serving G-d. Both of these elements were lost with its destruction.

There is a fascinating law regarding the obligation to appear before G-d at the Festivals, which offers an insight into the dual role of the Temple as well as the sins that led to its destruction. The Talmud⁴ states that only those who benefited from vision in both eyes were required to appear in the Temple; a man blinded in one eye was exempt. This unusual exemption is not found in other commandments in the Torah, and it is hard to imagine what impact this handicap might have on the performance of this *mitzvah*. What is the Torah saying to us by creating this limitation, in regards to appearing before G-d?

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter discusses the deeper meaning of this exemption in the following terms. A man's two eyes, in this context, represent two different perspectives on the status and relative greatness of mankind and, ultimately, how man and G-

³ Book of Mitzvos, positive commandment 20

⁴ Chagiga 2a

d relate to each other. The right eye represents the potential and lofty heights we are capable of achieving. The left eye represents a different reality—our frequent failings, as well as our insignificance in comparison to G-d. Both perspectives are valid and present an important balance in our lives. Man's potential for achievement and growth is almost limitless, far beyond our imagination. We can point to many great men and periods of great spirituality in our history as examples of this capacity. However, we can never lose sight of man's frailty and the potential for temptation and sin. After all, man is but flesh and blood. As Abraham said to G-d, "Behold, now, I desired to speak to my L-rd although I am but dust and ash."⁵

There is a great danger, however, when one perspective is ignored and we see ourselves through only one eye. Left unchecked, man's confidence in his ability and potential will ultimately lead to arrogance and his downfall. An overemphasis on man's weakness and insignificance, on the other hand, will lead to despair and prevent him from seeking to reach his true potential. The Torah instructs us to approach the Temple with both eyes, with a healthy balance of these two perspectives, and to live our lives with the depth of this perception. In fact, as we have seen, the Temple is the place where these two perspectives come together in the *mitzvos* that we perform there. The *mitzvah* of appearing together before G-d allows us to see our greatness and potential as a people. This recognition becomes apparent specifically in the place where we subjugate ourselves in service and sacrifice to G-d. This is a clear vision for our success.

The contrasting sins of our ancestors can be viewed as a common failure to balance these two perspectives properly. The First Temple was destroyed because the people were wicked, and saw themselves as such. They suffered from a diminished view of their own worth and failed to see their potential to improve. Rather than attempting to change, they helplessly relied on G-

⁵ Genesis 18:27

d to protect them, when their fate was truly in their own hands.

The Jewish people experienced this despair and inadequacy before. When the spies returned to the wilderness with a frightening report of the might and harshness of the land of Israel, the people assumed that they could not conquer the land. Where was their faith?

It was not G-d's ability that they doubted, but their own worthiness of His help. They refused to believe that they could live at the level of divine miracles. The result was the first tragedy associated with the day of Tish'a B'av, the decree that they would not enter the land of Israel. These two errors, a lack of faith and a misplaced faith, came from the same root: failure to realize their own great potential. They could see from only one of their eyes.

The tragedy of the Second Temple was from a similar failure of perspective, but this time from looking only through the eye of man's greatness. They had reached great levels of observance, but they failed to be concerned with the possibility of stumbling. Their arrogance led them to the "gratuitous hatred" which was their downfall. The Talmud ⁶ introduces the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, the classic example of this baseless hatred, with the following verse. *Praiseworthy is the man who always fears, but he who is stubborn of heart will fall into misfortune.*⁷ They fell because they failed to grow with the proper caution and fear of arrogance, seeing only their greatness and potential, because they ignored their second eye, the eye of man's weaknesses.

The lesson of man's two eyes speaks to us today, as well, as we seek balance in our lives and strive to serve G-d properly. There are two perspectives from which to view our status. We possess tremendous abilities and can reach great heights, but we should never become too self-absorbed or assign absolute value to what we are. We must consider all of our possibilities, yet be

⁶ Gittin 55b

⁷ Proverbs 28:14

cognizant of our vulnerabilities. When we feel too helpless to grow and achieve, we must open our other eye and recognize our great potential. This positive perspective will empower us when we feel unable to make a difference. At the same time, we must temper our sense of achievement and vision with the perspective of our own shortcomings and a constant concern that we continue to ascend towards G-d.

Jerusalem—At the Center of the World

One hundred years ago, the liberal leadership of much of Jewry was promoting the irrelevance of Jerusalem and its destroyed temple. “Berlin is our Jerusalem!” they announced. The apocalyptic degree of error in their faith in Berlin was tragically revealed long ago. Jerusalem and the remains of its Temple become only more relevant with each passing day. Not since 1967 have Jews entered Tish’a B’av with Jerusalem and the Temple Mount so directly in the spotlight of world attention. It is an opportunity for us to appreciate the significance of this holiest of sites, so we may better understand what we lost with the destruction of the Temple.

On Sunday, July 30 of this year, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak reassured his cabinet, saying, “...Sovereignty can not be given away, as this is the site of our Temple.” As much as this “red line” may be a function of political realities, politics too represents deeply held beliefs. Why is it that we are so intransigent about the Temple site? Is it merely sentiment? What would be so terrible if we were to plan a different future site for the Third Temple? (This is not to suggest that the preservation of life does not necessarily override considerations involving the Temple, or vice versa. That is a separate discussion.)

First let us ask a more fundamental question. Why must there be a specific location for serving G-d at all? Why isn’t wherever it’s convenient good enough, like with a synagogue? After all, isn’t G-d everywhere?

Yes, it is true, G-d is everywhere. However, He designed the world in such a way that that He can be perceived more clearly in certain locations. Our Sages tell us that this is a process that began with Abraham. G-d's *Shechina*, Presence, was manifest and could be more readily felt in the homes of our Patriarchs. When the Jewish people built the Tabernacle in the wilderness, once again, G-d allowed Himself to be felt more immanently. The final and permanent home to the *Shechina* was created with the erection of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Let us now see why this most contested piece of real estate on the face of the Earth was chosen as the site for G-d's manifest Presence.

Our Sages tell us of three miracles that would occur in Jerusalem in the times of the Temple, in which there would be a suspension of space in varying degrees. The first was in the city of Jerusalem itself. During the three annual Festivals, the entire nation would visit Jerusalem and, despite the massive assembly, no one ever so much as commented that they were uncomfortably crowded. The second was in the courtyard of the Temple. People would be crushed against each other in a relatively small area, and yet when it came time in the service to prostrate themselves, there was ample room for everyone, thus briefly overriding the normal laws of physics. The third was a constant spatial paradox, which existed only in the Holy of Holies, in the spot of the Ark of the Covenant itself. The Holy of Holies measured twenty cubits¹ across, yet when you would measure the space between the walls and the Ark it would measure ten cubits on either side. The Ark literally did not take up any space!

We are all familiar with the story of how our ancestor Jacob lay down to rest as he fled from his brother Esau. He had a prophetic dream that made it clear to him that the spot where he had slept was no ordinary place. He proclaimed on arising, "How *norah*, awesome, is this place. This is none other than the house of G-d and this is the gateway to heaven." Jacob saw

¹ One cubit equals between 1½ and two feet.

deeply and understood the true significance of the place. The place where he had slept was destined to become the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple, the home of the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the Tablets of the Law.

The Hebrew word that Jacob used, *norah*, is spelled with the four letters *nun*, *vav*, *raish*, and *aleph*. These are the very same four letters that spell the Hebrew word for the Ark, *Aron*, which would one day be situated in the spot where Jacob had slept. *Norah* is a characteristic that describes how physical limitations are suspended when G-d interfaces with the world, as was represented by the paradox of the Ark. G-d's keeping the Jewish people in existence through the millennia, despite countless efforts to destroy them, is also an expression of the attribute of *Norah*. An allusion to this is found in the promise G-d made to Jacob in that very dream. He told him that he would watch over him throughout his exile and eventually return him to the land of his fathers. Jacob, whom G-d would later name Israel, is synonymous with the nation he founded, the Children of Israel. Our Sages show how Jacob's history foreshadows our national history, down to our present return to the land.

In *Midrash Tanchuma*, our sages quote a verse from Ezekiel that speaks of “*tabur haaretz*,” the navel of the world. The *midrash* explains this phrase by telling us that the land of Israel is in the middle of the world; Jerusalem is in the middle of Israel; the Temple is in the middle of Jerusalem; the Sanctuary is in the middle of the Temple; and the Ark is in the middle of the Sanctuary.

What does the *midrash* mean?

Everything in the world that is nourished from another source has a point of connection with its source of nourishment. It is an axiom of Jewish mysticism that the physical world is nourished and literally “materializes” out of the spiritual. The *midrash*, then, is teaching us that just as the umbilical cord of a baby connects it to its mother, so too there is a place on Earth that is the connection to our source of existence. We must note that the stone upon which the Ark sat is known as *Even Shesiya*,

the Foundation Stone, for out of it the world was founded.

The *midrash* is also telling us that the connection is not exclusively in the place of the Ark. Rather, the connection is in the form of concentric circles of diminishing significance, with each circle less intimately connected to the spiritual world.

Judaism teaches that the dimension of space is an exclusive function of the physical world. In the spiritual “world” there is no space. There are spiritual forces and beings, to be sure, including our souls, but they cannot be spoken of as being “here” or “there.”

As we mentioned above, Jacob identified the area as the “gateway to Heaven,” for this is precisely what it is. More than anywhere else on Earth, it is where Heaven meets Earth. As we see from the miracles and from the *midrash*, the area of the Temple took on part of the quality of the spiritual world, namely the suspension of space. Each area took on that quality more consistently, according to how close it was to the center. In Jerusalem, on only three occasions a year, there was an almost natural expansion, allowing everyone to be comfortable. In the Temple courtyard, whenever a crowd gathered, there was an almost visible paradox. And in the place of the Ark, space simply ceased to exist.

Alas, today our holy places have this capacity only in potential. We need G-d’s Presence to return, manifest in our midst, to make it actual. May we merit it, speedily in our days.

Mission Impossible

The blackest, darkest, most terribly horrifying day in Jewish history. A day filled with destruction, annihilation, demolition, and slaughter. The day both our temples were set ablaze as we watched our hope burn to the ground. The day Pope Urban II declared the first crusade, which killed 10,000 Jews in its first month. The day we were thrown out of our homes and expelled from our land—from England in 1290, and from Spain in 1492. The day Britain and Russia declared war on Germany, resulting in World War I. This war eventually led to World War II and the killing of six million Jews (may G-d avenge their blood!). This day is marked on the Jewish calendar as the ninth day of the month of Av.

What is the cause of all these terrible events? Is it a coincidence? Could it be that all of the most horrifying events of our history fell on the same date just by chance? There must be an answer for this.

The answer can be found in the Talmud (Ta'anis 29x). There Rava states, in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, that the day when the spies came back and gave their evil report on the land of Israel (described in Numbers 14) was the eighth day of Av. As the Jews were making their way through the desert towards the land of Israel, twelve men were sent ahead to spy out the land. Ten out of twelve came back and reported in front of their nation, saying, "The inhabitants of the land are too strong, the cities are fortified, and there are giants among them. There is no way we will be able to defeat them." The Jewish people believed these spies and the entire nation began to cry. According to the Talmud, on that day G-d proclaimed, "You wept a cry

without cause; therefore I shall establish for you a weeping for generations.”

At first glance it does seem as if the spies had a terrible lack of faith. After witnessing what Hashem did to the Egyptians (the ten plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea), after receiving the Torah, and living in the desert with manna falling down from the heavens, how could they possibly think Hashem was incapable of leading them into the land of Israel? How could the generation pegged as the *Dor Hade'ah*, the Generation of Knowledge, lack such a fundamental understanding in the greatness of G-d? Although the penalty seems severe, we can understand the need for punishment.

However, if we delve into the commentaries, we will see that the matter is not so simple. Rav Moshe Ben Nachman (Nachmanides, the great biblical exegete, halachist, kabbalist, philosopher, and poet) struggles to figure out what the spies did wrong.

First, Moses sent these men to spy out the land. In so doing he instructed them to report whether the people were strong or weak, few or many, and whether the cities were fortified or unfortified. In short, Moses expected a real and realistic report of the land. So what was wrong with the spies stating that the Canaanites were strong, and that their cities were fortified? Did Moses expect the spies to lie in their report? In addition to this, if you look later on in the Torah, Moses himself was even more discouraging than the spies. Moses speaks to the nation in the book of Deuteronomy, warning the Jewish people of the strength of the Canaanites, their fortified cities, and the giants that live in the land of Israel.

Perhaps the Jews were wrong for sending spies in the first place. They should have trusted that G-d would do miracles for them the same way he had in Egypt and at the Red Sea. Nachmanides says that this is not true. There is an important rule: We can not rely on miracles. Nachmanides asks, earlier, in his commentary on the story of Noah, why it was necessary for

Noah to build an ark. Why did Noah have to waste so many years building this massive boat? As massive as the boat was, it would not have been able to hold all of the animals in the world. We know how many of thousands of species of animals exist, and scientists are constantly discovering new species of animals. So how did they all fit into the ark? The answer must be that it was a miracle. If it was a miracle, why did Noah have to build a boat altogether, asks Nachmonides? Let a boat fall down from heaven or let them be saved some other way! He answers that we can not rely on miracles. We always have to do everything in our power. We have to take into account and use our natural resources. Here too, although the Jews in the desert were living with miracles, they were still required to do everything in their power to prepare for the upcoming battles. The Jews had to plan a strategy, to know where to attack first and where to keep away from. We see that their wars were fought in a normal way.

In addition to this, later on, before Moses and Joshua both went to battle, they sent out spies. Hence Nachmanides has difficulty figuring out what the spies did wrong.

Further research in the commentaries causes the question to become even more perplexing. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, the great early twentieth century scholar, struggles to figure out the sin of the spies. He brings another reason why the spies were correct, if not commendable for spying out the land of Israel. He quotes the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni, which records the exchange between Moses and the spies. The spies came to Moses, saying, "We need to go spy out the land." Moses responded, "Why?" The spies replied that "G-d promised the people of Israel that when they enter the land of Israel they will inherit great wealth." They continued, "The people of Israel know we are coming and are very afraid, and as a precaution they will probably hide all their money and valuables." The spies worried that if they conquered the land, but did not inherit great wealth, Hashem's word would be nullified. In order to prevent such a disgrace they felt it was necessary to spy out the land and dis-

cover where the valuables were.

According to this, it seems as if the spies' intention was only to bring glory to G-d. So what went wrong? How could whatever minor fault, if any, that we will discover on the part of the spies and/or the Jewish people be the cause of so much future suffering and anguish for the Jewish people? All of the commentaries struggle to figure out what exactly went wrong. Yet the Talmud says this is what caused crying for all generations.

Before answering this, there is one more minor detail that is important to note. Besides the physical threat upon entering the land of Israel, there also existed a great spiritual threat. There was a tremendous amount of idol worship and promiscuity in the land of Israel at that time. Perhaps the spiritual obstacle was even greater than the physical obstacles. The Jewish people had worked very hard to reach the level necessary to receive the Torah. To become and to remain the Chosen Nation is no easy task. We are expected to live with higher standards, being that we are the Chosen Nation. It takes great strength to remain on this level and not to descend to the level of the surrounding nations.

The spies themselves were on a high spiritual level. Each was a leader of his respective tribe. They saw that in the natural order of things there was no way that the Jewish people could withstand the tests that faced them. Without a doubt, they knew that the Jewish people would fall physically and spiritually.

However, the mistake of the spies was that they did not realize their own incredible abilities. Every Jew has a tremendous power. Every Jew has the ability to go beyond nature. The Jewish people are called G-d's firstborn. If we realize who we really are, nothing and no one can ever stop us!

Caleb and Joshua were two spies who did not sin. The Torah states that as the spies told over their evil report, Caleb quieted them down. Caleb did this by claiming "*Yachol nuchal*—we can do it and we will succeed. *Aloh na'aleh*—we can go up to the land of Israel and conquer it." What Caleb said was right;

we did have the ability to go up and conquer the land. The Jewish people were not aware of their own greatness. This is what caused crying for generations. The Jewish people did not recognize their own incredible abilities.

In the spies' evil report they said, "We looked like grasshoppers in the eyes of the inhabitants of the land of Israel." The spies viewed themselves as "small," and this was their sin. From this sin came all the future tragedies that would befall the Jewish people throughout the ages. Each and every Jew has the same test to fulfill their unique mission, which they were created to do in this world. We all have the ability to fulfill this mission, regardless of how impossible it may seem.

The holy Ba'al Shem Tov, in his explanation of the cause of failure and defeat, states that failure comes from a Jew not realizing his incredible potential. A Jew can have false modesty and think he is a "nothing." This type of modesty is in reality a terrible sin. We have to scream, just as Caleb screamed in front of the whole nation. We must scream his words, "*Yachol nuchal, we can do it!*" Even if our mission seems impossible, we can succeed. Our potential is limitless.

The cause of all the tragedies that occurred on the ninth of Av was that the spies and the Jewish people did not realize their ability. This is what we must reflect on, on the ninth of Av. Let us learn from the spies' sin that we have the ability to stand up to any test. If we realize and live up to our amazing potential, then next year, G-d willing, the ninth of Av will be a holiday.

The Mask of Tish'a B'av

“The Canaanite, the king of Arad, who dwelled in the south, heard that Israel had come by the route of the spies, and he warred against Israel...” (Numbers 21:1)

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 3a) relates to us the following idea. “What was it that he (Arad) heard? [Arad] heard that Aaron had died and that the Clouds of Glory had left the Jewish people, and he now had permission to war with Israel.” Aaron was the symbol and pursuer of peace (*Shalom*), and as long as peace and unity (*achdus*) existed in Israel, this Canaanite, who represented Amalek, was scared to war with Israel. He knew that when there were peace and unity, all enemy efforts would be useless.

We may ask ourselves, when did Amalek gain the chutzpah to wage war against the Jewish people? The perfect time to wage war against the Jewish people is at a time when the enemy detects separation in the hearts and dissention in the camp, as it is written in Lamentations 1:5 (*Eicha*, the *Megilla* traditionally read on *Tisha B'Av*): “All her persecutors overtook her within dire straits.” This verse is interpreted in the following manner: All the persecutors and haters of Israel go to war with Israel when they, the Jewish people, are enveloped in troubled times.

This idea is proven with a verse about Abraham (Genesis 13:7). “Friction developed between the herdsmen of Abram’s flocks and those of Lot; the Canaanites and Perizites were then

living in the land.” What was the reason the Torah connected these two seemingly irrelevant facts? Perhaps we can understand this verse in a similar vein to the previous idea. When are foreign nations dwelling in the land of Israel and doing whatever they please? Only when there is a fight between the shepherds of Abram and Lot. The fighting between Abram and Lot gave strength and might to the Canaanites and Perizites to rule in the land and do evil.

However, the opposite is true as well: **When there is unity in the Jewish people, it dulls the strength of the enemy**, so that they are unable to rule in the land.

This is the meaning of the verse quoted earlier. What did Arad hear? What did he hear that gave him the strength to fight with the Jewish people? Did he not see or hear of all the miracles that G-d performed for the Jewish people when they left the land of Egypt? Why was Arad not scared to battle with the Jewish people? The answer for these questions can be found in the deeper meaning of the Talmud’s statement above, that “[Arad] heard that Aaron had died.” The Clouds of Glory were removed because there was no more peace in the land, no more togetherness. The nations of the world are unaware of the inner workings of the heart of the Jewish people. All they know is what their eyes can see on the outside, and when they see that the honor which should be accorded to the Jewish people has been removed, the fear of fighting them is also removed. This is the strength Amalek needed to go and fight the people.

I would like to answer in this essay the following question: What is it about the Jewish unity that is able to repel Amalek?

I would like to begin my answer with the following question. After hearing of Haman’s horrible plan for the Jewish people, “Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the King’s chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a message for Mordechai, to learn what this was and why it was.” (Esther 4:5) What does this mean?

Our Sages tells us, referring to this verse, Esther thought

that perhaps the Jewish people had rebelled against the tablets (*luchos*) upon which the writing of the Ten Commandments could be seen equally on both sides.

On the surface, the words of our Sages are puzzling. What difference does it make if the tablets were written clearly on both sides?

It appears that the tablets were written in such a miraculous fashion to teach an important fact with regard to the Jewish heart: The Torah is connected to the Jewish people in such a way that it is necessary for each Jew to have it engraved in his heart so that it compels him to perform the commandments. A Jewish person must sanctify G-d in everything he does so that all other nations see that he is a member of the Chosen People and exclaim, "How great is the nation of Israel!"

To bring out this point, I would like to share with you a Midrash. The Midrash relates a story regarding Shimon ben Shetach, one of the greatest scholars of his generation. One time he acquired a donkey from an Arab merchant. When he returned home with his new donkey, his students noticed that there was a special jewel hanging from the neck of the donkey. They expressed how G-d had blessed him with such a treasure. However, Shimon ben Shetach responded that he had purchased a donkey, not a jewel! He then went back to the Arab merchant and returned the jewel. The Arab merchant, excited about the return of his jewel, responded, "Blessed is the G-d of Shimon ben Shetach," a clear sanctification of the name of G-d.

What brought about such a response from this merchant? It was the greatness of character that he noticed in Shimon ben Shetach. For when put to the personal, private test, this sage prevailed over his desires and returned the stone. The merchant was so overwhelmed when he saw this, that he understood there is no study hall or college that can produce a man of such character except the *beis midrash* where he learned Torah, the wisdom of heaven. *Furthermore*, he thought, *since Shimon ben Shetach grew up and was raised on the knees of Torah, and this is how he*

acted, it must be that the Torah is from heaven—therefore I will bless the G-d of this great man. This recognition of the Arab merchant came from the the **actions** of Shimon ben Shetach, not just from his inner feelings of closeness to G-d.

This idea can be understood, as well, from the words of one of the *Kinnos* (elegies) that we say on Tish'a B'Av. In *Kinna* 21, the tragic execution of the Ten Martyrs is chronicled: “The overlord, with soul steeped in evil, turned to slay Rabban Shimon [ben Gamliel]. The scion of Aaron (Rabbi Yishmael, the High Priest) asked permission to cry over this son of royalty. He took [Rabban Shimon’s severed] head and placed it on his lap [and lamented]. ‘O pure menorah!’ He placed his eyes upon its eyes, and his mouth upon its mouth, in absolute love. He cried out and said, ‘O mouth that was strong in Torah—how suddenly a violent and cruel death has been inflicted upon you!’”

What was the necessity for Rabbi Yishmael to first take the head of his slain colleague and place it on his lap before delivering his eulogy? Maybe we can say the following: Rabbi Yishmael was the High Priest. He desired to eulogize and speak the praises of Rabban Shimon. However, it was impossible to summarize the greatness of such a man. Therefore, he used the head and his lap as a symbol. This was the type of man to whom everything he understood to be true to the Torah became part of his everyday actions. There was no separation between his understanding of Torah law and his performance of the command. This is why Rabbi Yishmael took the head and put it on his lap, to show that the head and the feet worked together in this great sage, and wherever this pure and intelligent mind went, so did its feet.

This helps us to understand a *midrash* in Leviticus. When Moses entered the Tabernacle for the first time, he heard a beautiful voice call to him. He responded, “I hear what G-d is saying to me.” Then G-d said to Moshe, “‘*Shalom*’ is what I am saying to you, for there is nothing else that connects my heart to the heart of the Jewish people other than peace.”

What is the meaning behind this *midrash*? Rabbi Mordechai Rogow explains that when Moses entered the Tabernacle, he was entering the heart of the Jewish people, for the verse tells us (Exodus 25:8) “Make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell amongst all of you.” Moses heard, from the Holy of Holies of the Jewish heart, a beautiful voice, and a praiseworthy voice; for the heart of a Jew is so beautiful and splendid that the voice of Hashem can emanate from its sanctuary. Then Moses, lover of the people of Israel, who gave his life for the people, said, “I hear what G-d is saying to me.” In essence, although Moses heard the voice of G-d, he still needed to understand exactly what Hashem was saying about the Jewish people. What is Moses referring to? What is he asking G-d to say about this people? Has G-d a grievance with the people?

The Almighty replies to Moses with the following response; “*Shalom*’ is what I will speak to them.” This means: “My word and desire from this people are only peace and harmony. I desire that there should be peace between the heart and the hand. For the hand is the agent of the heart, and with the hand one has the capability to act upon the holy desires of the people. Therefore, I ask for peace between the heart and hand. For in My heart I have nothing against this people, for the heart of the Jew is a pure heart and a holy heart—so much so that this heart is fit to be a sanctuary of G-d, the place where My presence is to dwell. Any claim I would have against this people would be if there were no peace and harmony among them. Their hearts and hands and feet must be ready to do the will of G-d.”

With all this in mind, I think we can answer our original question. Why was Amalek no longer scared of the Jewish heart? What is it about the Jewish heart that is able to repel the likes of Amalek?

For the answer, we go back to Esther. What was the message Esther sent to Mordechai? When she heard the plans and horrible things Haman had to say about the Jewish people in front of Ahasuerus—“They don’t follow the laws of the land,

and they don't hold the King in the highest of honors—" Esther asked herself; "How is it possible that G-d would allow such claims against his people? It must be that they rebelled against the tablets which were written in this miraculous fashion." Yes, they prayed, they manifested their love of G-d even to the extent that they were willing to give up their life for the sake of sanctifying his name, but this was not enough; for there was no peace. Haman knew this, and consequently he took a different approach; he saw the divisions among the people. As Haman himself said to Ahasuerus (Esther 3:8), "There is a nation, separate and split amongst the other nations in your land." The Jews were a separate nation at that time; not only were they separate in location, but also in brotherhood. This is what Haman saw, and that is the avenue he used to show how worthless these people were to the King.

Now we see that the same was true for the King of Arad as well, as is proven from the verse in Lamentations, "All her persecutors overtook her within dire straits." We must remind ourselves of this important idea when we hear the reading of Lamentations—and this verse, in particular—in our synagogues this year.

We must remind ourselves of the following, as well: The Torah tells us (Leviticus 19:13) "Do not hate your brother in your heart." Why does the Torah use the words "in your heart?" Because if one would express and speak out his grievance to his brother, he would see that there is nothing to fight about. The hurt was only a misunderstanding on someone's part. With peace, our hearts are capable of relating to our brothers as well as to G-d in our *mitzvah* observance.

Let us merit the rebuilding of the Temple and our return to Israel. G-d will always dwell in our hearts in this special way, as long as we have peace.

The Reason for the Destruction

The Jews rebelled and declared independence in Judea in 66CE. The Roman legions responded with a vengeance, ransacked Jerusalem, and destroyed the Temple. These were the external circumstances that resulted in Jerusalem's destruction. The talmud (Gittin 55b) records for us a seemingly insignificant incident and identifies it as the root "cause" of the destruction of Jerusalem. Let us examine this incident in detail and perhaps uncover the significance of this seemingly insignificant event.

There was a man who was friendly with [a man named] Kamtza but at odds with [another, named] Bar (the son of) Kamtza. He made a feast and asked his servant to invite Kamtza. The servant returned with Bar Kamtza. The man said, "What is my enemy doing here? I will throw him out!" Bar Kamtza pleaded, "Since I am here, leave me be, and I will pay for my meal. I do not want to suffer the embarrassment of being thrown out." He was refused. Bar Kamtza pleaded further, "I will pay half the caterer's bill!" He again was refused. He begged, "I will pay the entire cost of the meal—just do not throw me out!" The host then physically picked him up and threw him out! Bar Kamtza thought, *there were Rabbis at the meal and they did not protest! They must condone such behavior. I will therefore get revenge! I will incite the Roman Emperor against the Jews!*

The Talmud records how Bar Kamtza carried out his plan.

He asked the Emperor to test the loyalty of the Jews to the Caesar. The emperor sent a sacrifice to the Temple, which the Jews mistakenly refused to offer. The emperor was incensed, and sent a massive army to destroy Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the results were not only the destruction of Jerusalem but the destruction of the Temple as well.

There are two points in this incident which require explanation. Why is the destruction of the Temple blamed solely on this incident? A national tragedy of the magnitude of the destruction of the Temple and the ensuing exile, which has lasted over nineteen hundred years, could not have possibly been caused by such an unfortunate but seemingly minor occurrence! Secondly, the Talmud identifies Kamtza as also to blame for the destruction. Why is Kamtza faulted in this story? A careful reading of the Talmud shows clearly that he does not even appear as a character in the narrative, only as a friend of the host.

The Maharal of Prague, in his commentary to the Talmud, explains that this incident was indicative of the main problem that affected the Jewish people at that time—*sin'as chinam*, baseless hatred. This comes out of an analysis of the names of the people involved in the story, Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. The name Kamtza comes from the Hebrew word *kamatz*, to separate or remove. The Temple was a very strong unifying force in the Jewish people; all the main religious events were performed there and only there. In addition, three times a year all the Jewish people gathered there for the Holidays. The incident of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza underscored the reason why the Jews lost the Temple, their great unifying force. Clearly, the Jews had become “separated” into factions or “removed” from one another.

The Maharal further explains that arguments and factions ran so deeply into the fabric of the Jewish people that even a person's friends and alliances were made only because of which group he/she belonged to. Hence, his friend was Kamtza and his enemy was Bar Kamtza. *Bar* in Aramaic means outside of, or to exclude. His fellow Jew was considered “outside” of his friend-

ship. The host was not inclusive in his love of every Jew; he included some and excluded others. This spiritual malaise prevented us as a people from taking advantage of the Temple and its unifying qualities.

The necessity of unity among different factions is especially relevant in our troubled times. Our friends should not be chosen by the criteria of conformity to our particular social, religious, or political leanings. By viewing all Jews in a favorable light we would be better people and our communities would benefit, as well.

A Passover Lesson for Tish'a B'av

Tish'a B'av is a name associated with the destructions of both of our Temples and numerous later tragedies.¹ Yet, in reality, Tish'a B'av has its roots much earlier in our history. In our first year as a people, spies returned from a mission into the Land of Israel with a foreboding description of an unconquerable land. Our ancestors were faced with a test of faith. Rather than bolster themselves with trust in G-d, the Jewish People failed the test, weeping in hopeless despair. As the Midrash relates,² G-d responded to their mournful reaction with the devastating projection, "On this night they wept for naught; in future years they will cry on this night with reason." This tragic incident occurred on the ninth of Av, and with this unwarranted display of grief, the foundation was laid for well-grounded crying on this date throughout history.

Yet the sins of our early ancestors would not, in and of themselves, have brought tragedy to any particular future generation. The Prophets and, later, the Sages sought out the failings which gave rise to any tragedy and certainly to a calamity on the scale of the destruction of "G-d's abode." With regard to

1 Examples include: 100,000 casualties as Betar is destroyed—9 Av, 132CE; First Crusade declared by Pope Urban II – 9 Av, 1095; expulsion of Jews from England—9 Av, 1290; Spanish Inquisition culminates in expulsion – 9 Av, 1492; First World War, which brought claimed the lives of 120,000 Jewish soldiers, led to over 400 pogroms, and ultimately brought about Second World War and Holocaust, begins – 9 Av, 1914; deportations from Warsaw ghetto begin – 9 Av, 1942.

2 Taanit 29a

the Second Temple's destruction, the Talmud relates³ that the fault that sealed the fate was groundless hatred.

We find ourselves in a world still lacking the Temple and the powerful display of our relationship with G-d implicit therein. And we find ourselves in a world where Tish'a B'av and its message of repeated national tragedy is still painfully meaningful. What are the steps by which we can expect to counter the evils which have brought us to this state?

In our search for an answer we must travel back even further in our national history, but we must first make a detour to the Passover Seder.

Many families have a custom to dip an egg in salt water during their Seder. Why? Basing his words on a *midrash* in *Eicha Rabbah*, the Rama notes the calendrical fact that the first day of Passover is always the same day of the week as the upcoming Tish'a B'Av. As the egg is often used as a symbol of mourning,⁴ it serves as a good reminder of this forthcoming day of lamentation. This cryptic explanation leaves us with a very perplexing difficulty. Why would we want to mention the ultimate day of gloom and despair at the joyous Passover Seder?

Our solution is based in part on the remarkable insights presented by Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon in his work, *Mat'nos Chaim*.

All inter-Jewish hatred has at its root the jealousy and hate hurled against Joseph by his brothers. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their wives, had each been the sole "Jews" of their respective generations. The sons of Jacob were the very first generation to experience diversity. Unfortunately, mistrust and jealousy led to hatred and near murder of the seemingly most divergent brother, Joseph. The discordant tone sounded in this very first generation of diversified Jewish experience resonates in all future situations of communal dissonance. After selling Joseph into slavery, the brothers masked their cruel undertak-

3 Yoma 9b

4 See Rashi's commentary on Genesis 25:30. The oval shape of an egg alludes to the speechlessness and cyclical nature of mourning.

ing by dipping his tunic into the blood of a goat, giving the appearance that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. This “dipping” is in a sense the climax of their cruel deed.

The sale of Joseph laid the foundation for our Egyptian exile. And several generations later, when we were being prepared to leave that ordeal, G-d reminded us that our Exodus was predicated upon a willingness to combat the infighting that brought us there in the first place. G-d hinted this to us by commanding us to dip certain grasses in the blood of the Pascal lamb. Even on a simple level, this peculiar dipping can be seen as a reminder of the “dip-ended” sale of Joseph, which cast us into slavery.

A better understanding of the context of this dipping will enhance our appreciation of this message.

Passover celebrates our Exodus from Egypt. But this theme is not unique to Passover. We reflect on it daily in the concluding paragraph of the *Shema*. We mention it in each Shabbat and holiday *Kiddush*. And in the first of the Ten Commandments, G-d chooses as His self-description, “The L-rd ... Who took you out of the Land of Egypt.” What gives the Exodus this vast prominence?

One particularly significant derivative of the Exodus was the prominent display of G-d’s involvement in our world. Rejection of G-d is generally formulated in one of three manners—absolute denial of G-d as Creator, acceptance that He created the world but lack of belief in His ability to control it, and belief that He has the ability but disbelief in His interest to do so. G-d’s dramatic manipulation of all spheres of nature, while freeing us from our oppressive masters, shattered all of these heretical misconceptions.⁵ We recognized that He is in absolute, active control of the world He Created. This truth serves as the foundation for many rituals and celebrations throughout our year and life-cycle.

Acceptance of G-d’s involvement in our world can have impact in the interpersonal sphere as well. Jealousy, anger, and

5 This theme is based in part on the remarks of Nachmanides (on Exodus 13:16).

hatred can all be deflected by the recognition that, ultimately, G-d is running the show. As the *Sefer haChinuch* writes, regarding the craving for revenge,⁶ the realization that G-d may be sending a message through a human messenger can drastically alter one's reaction to this apparent adversary. Secondly, as described in the work *Michtav Me'Eliyahu*,⁷ the root of these interpersonal failings is an intense focus on self. Recognition that there are a Master and a Master Plan humbles the otherwise self-centered person and helps him develop sensitivity to others.

We can now better appreciate the symbolism of the Passover “dipping” as a counter to the “dipping” by the brothers of Joseph. Only when recognizing this lesson of Divine control can we be expected to live up to its corollary of Divinely-inspired interpersonal behavior. Simultaneous to our Exodus experience with its enhanced perception of G-d comes the capacity to perfect our attitudes and actions toward our fellow man.

As we near Tish'a B'av, this message becomes all the more significant. We don't have the luxury of viewing Tish'a B'av from afar while celebrating at the Seder. In that context, dipping the mourning-related egg serves to remind us that the Seder night corresponds to the upcoming Tish'a B'av and we are challenged to rid ourselves of the sinister traits that led to the Temple's destruction. Now, with the approach of Tish'a B'av itself, the realities of Destruction and Exile are brought into greater focus. Recognition of these tragic, perpetual tragedies behooves us to bear in mind the message of the “dippings.” We are reminded that by focusing on G-d's guiding hand, we can replace hatred and jealousy with love and sensitivity, and warrant a renewed relationship with G-d.

6 Mitzvah 241

7 Vol. 3, p. 215

A Man's House is His Temple

G-d said: “There will again be heard in this place—about which you say, ‘It is destroyed, without man and without animal—’ in the cities of Judah and in the yards of Jerusalem, which are [now] desolate... The sound of joy and the sound of happiness, the voice of a groom and the voice of a bride, the sound of people saying, ‘Praise G-d, L-rd of Hosts, for G-d is good!...’ For I will return the captivity of the land, as [it was] at first,” said G-d. (Jeremiah 33:10-11)

...Rabbi Chalbo said, in the name of Rav Huna, “Anyone who benefits from the feast of a groom, yet doesn’t entertain him, makes light of [the aforementioned] five ‘voices...’ But if he does gladden the groom, what is his reward? ...Rav Nachman bar Yitzchok said, “It is as if he rebuilt one of the ruins of Jerusalem, as it is said, ‘For I will return the captivity of the land, as [it was] at first, said G-d.’” (Talmud, Berachos 6b)

What do celebrating a wedding and rebuilding the Holy City have in common?

The Malbim¹ points out that marriage represents a meeting of the physical and the spiritual. Our Sages taught that woman represents *chomer*, matter, while man embodies *tzura*, form. Together, they represent the combination of body and soul in every human being.

Although the Malbim himself takes this concept in another

¹ Quoted in *Yalkut Shlomo*, a collection of the Malbim’s writings. “Malbim” is an acronym for Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel.

direction, perhaps we can use it to answer our question and explain the words of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchok.

Jerusalem is arguably the most spiritual place on earth. Nowhere is G-d's Presence felt as greatly as it was in the Holy of Holies, when the Temple stood. Jacob, rising from his dream of a ladder up to the sky, exclaimed, "How awesome is this place! It can only be the house of G-d, and this the gate of the heavens!" (Genesis 28:17) Even today, we pray facing Jerusalem, and our prayers travel through Jerusalem on their way to heaven.

Jerusalem, then, the Holy City, is the nexus of heaven and earth. The union of husband and wife, on a much smaller scale, represents this meeting of the physical and the metaphysical. Participating in a wedding fosters this union, much like rebuilding Jerusalem; that may be Rav Nachman bar Yitzchok's point.

But one suspects that the connection between a married couple and the ruins of Jerusalem is more than just symbolic.

After the Yom Kippur War, Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef was summoned by the rabbinate of the Israeli Army to participate in a tribunal, which would determine the marital status of hundreds of *agunos*—women whose husbands were missing in action and possibly dead, but who could not remarry if Jewish law still considered them married. The rabbi accepted the invitation, and this is an excerpt from his explanation:²

The matter weighed heavily upon me, because of the shallowness of my acumen and the depth of the subject. But I took to heart what [the Bach³ once] wrote:⁴

Allowing an *aguna* to remarry releases a certain element of the Great *Aguna* (a euphemism for the Divine Presence, which was exiled with the destruction of the Temple, and has remained helplessly homeless ever since). About [the exile of G-d's Presence], King Solomon wrote (Ecclesiastes 4:1): "I

2 Responsa *Yabi'a Omer*, vol. 6, *Even Ha'ezer* 3

3 Rabbi Yoel Sirkis, author of the *Bayis Chodosh* ("Bach" is an acronym).

4 "New" Responsa, no. 64

have seen the tears of the oppressed, yet there is no one to comfort them.” **Whoever releases an *aguna* today is considered to have rebuilt one of the ruins of the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to have saved an element of the “Woman of Valor” (presumably a euphemism for the Torah or for the Divine Presence).

Rabbi Yosef refers to esoteric, mystical concepts, but it’s apparent that “rebuilding the ruins of Jerusalem” is a very real thing, and not just a metaphor. It describes something that is *actually taking place* as one releases an *aguna*—and, perhaps, when one attends a wedding.

So what is this rebuilding, and how does it happen?

Rabbi Avigdor Miller offers a surprising answer: A perfect marriage is a Holy Temple in its own right.

To explain this, we first must understand what was lost when the Temple was destroyed—and, in the process, what we are supposed to be mourning for during the Three Weeks and on Tish’a B’av.

When the Temple was destroyed, the joy of our nation was lost. For hundreds of years, the Jews lived in relative isolation, in the fraternity of their coreligionists. The Festivals were observed by the entire nation, together, and there was a synergy created by the combined celebrations of thousands of Jewish families and congregations, flocking to Jerusalem for what amounted to a reunion and a pep rally, three times a year, in Jerusalem.

The exile of the Jewish people also brought with it immeasurable suffering, both immediate and eventual. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed or forced into slavery by the Romans. Our people has since been subjected to countless persecutions by innumerable nations, who considered it a kindness if they allowed us to scrape away a meager existence.

But the most significant wound inflicted by the destruction was our inability to provide a home for the Divine Presence, to serve G-d unimpeded by heathen influences, and to maintain a

relationship with G-d so affectionate that King Solomon clothed it in the metaphor of the Song of Songs.

That final loss, says Rabbi Miller, can be regained in a Jewish home. Our Sages tell us that when there is peace between man and wife, the Divine Presence rests between them. And it doesn't stop there. When husband and wife encourage other to grow in spirituality, when their children are instilled with a love of G-d and a desire to learn His Torah and to serve Him properly, the home becomes a wellspring of holiness, much as the Temple was in its time.

That being the case, a Jewish wedding becomes the consecration of a Holy Temple—and the participants its builders.

As we go through the motions of mourning the loss of the Temple, we should ask ourselves how much we really do miss it. A good measure of our feelings is our efforts to compensate for the holiness of the Temple by sanctifying our own homes. This is the lesson of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchok.

Relating to Our Loss

In an ever faster-changing world, where seemingly “with-it” parents have problems relating to their children, it’s no wonder that Tish’a B’av presents an unusually difficult challenge to even the sincerest of Jews. If tackling the generation gap leaves us frustrated, how are we to begin to get a handle on relating to the spiritual loss we suffered as a people almost two thousand years ago with the destruction of the Temple? Unlike our brethren in Israel, we don’t even have the opportunity to be reminded of the destruction by viewing the physical remnants of the event. (I remember, one year, as a yeshiva student in Jerusalem, being awakened to the enormity of the destruction while walking around the walls of the Old City on the day before Tish’a B’av.)

Nevertheless, the mere fact that Tish’a B’av exists as a day in the Jewish calendar compels us to expend our energies to try and link past to present. Would the Rabbis have mandated the reading of the book of Lamentations and the recital of *Kinos* (elegies), not to mention the restrictions they enacted on the day (refraining from eating, drinking, bathing, etc.), for a mere commemoration? This would be inconsistent with the Jewish perspective on holidays in general. The commentators tell us that “Jewish time” moves in a spiral, that the same spiritual energy that was present, for example, at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, is present in subsequent years each and every fifteenth day of the Jewish month of Nissan, the day the Exodus occurred. Capitalizing on that energy in our time, through observing the *mitzvos* of that holiday, enables us to change ourselves in the present and build ourselves for the future, and not just remember the past.

First and foremost, then, we must show how indeed the loss of the Temple in 70CE touches our lives today. It's interesting to note how often in our prayers the Rabbis interweave the personal mourning an individual would observe, upon losing a relative, with the national mourning we as a people suffer over our destroyed Temple. Our final words to a mourner upon leaving his home, "May the Omnipresent console you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem," corroborates this connection. Just as we are commanded, in the laws of mourning, to rend our clothing over the loss of a relative, so we must tear our clothing upon seeing the physical destruction of the Temple.

Another connecting of personal and national mourning that we find is in the special prayer traditionally inserted into the Grace After Meals in the home of a mourner. (Today not everybody is accustomed to say this prayer; however, it does find its source in the Talmud.) Included in the prayer we find the following:

O Comfort, Hashem our G-d, the mourners of Jerusalem and those who mourn this sad event. Console them from their mourning and gladden them from their grief, as it is said, "Like a man whose mother consoles him, so I will console you, and in Jerusalem you will be consoled... He who repairs the breaches of Israel, may He repair this breach from us and from this sad event, for life, peace, and for all good..."

If we take note of the end of this blessing, we notice the Rabbis chose to describe the loss of a loved one as a "breach." This is of note because in the Talmud, the Rabbis instruct us to comfort those who have suffered a *monetary* loss with another formula, namely, "G-d should replenish your lacking." (Berachot 16b) How do we understand "repairing a breach" (again, used in reference to a relative passing on) to be different in implication from "replenishing a loss" (financial misfortune)? Clearly the Rabbis, who are generally very consistent in their terminology, saw the need to distinguish between the two.

I venture to suggest the following obvious but significant distinction. Debilitating as a loss may be, it does not disable. One can continue to function with the remaining resources at his disposal. Not so with a breach. Any cattle farmer knows that a hole in a corral or fence means that, in time, none of the animals that were formerly enclosed will remain behind. A breach unrepaired does not simply make continued existence difficult—it makes it impossible.

This is the breach created by death. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tucazinsky, of blessed memory, in his classic work *Gesher HaChaim (The Bridge of Life)*, clarifies for us why indeed we mourn for the dead. Writes Rabbi Tucazinsky:

What the Torah intended by commanding us to mourn was to emphasize the loss of the treasure that is life, that which offers man the opportunity immeasurably to advance and ascend... The living are then to take this lesson to heart and to utilize life to achieve the goal which was set for it.

Every soul has a purpose for coming into this world: spiritual elevation, in a way unique to itself. With death, obviously, further perfection of the soul (at least by the individual himself) becomes impossible. To the extent that the departed soul used its time on earth to become elevated, a spiritual vacuum is left behind that no one else can fill. Given that no individual exists as a unit, but rather as a part of the greater Jewish people, the loss of one person's unique spirituality isn't a personal tragedy but rather one that effects the entire Jewish people. Like the hole in the fence, a missing piece in the mosaic that is the Jewish people should result in all of us being incomplete in some way. It is G-d, however, the Rabbis tell us, in His abundant mercy, Who steps in to mitigate the tragedy of what has occurred by seeing to it that the departed soul's loss (the breach created) doesn't make life hopeless for those of us remaining in this world.

The Rabbis felt the term "breach" to be equally appropriate to the loss of our Temple. Here the challenge really begins—

after all, life seems to go on Jewishly even without the Temple. In reference to the Temple, can we possibly say that if G-d would not step in to mitigate our loss, we would encounter, as with death of a loved one, a hopeless situation?

Why is the Temple called 'Lebanon' (*levanon*)? Because it whitens (*malbeen* in Hebrew, similar phonetically to *levanon*) the sins of Israel. (*Midrash*)

Until the Temple was built, the world stood on a two-legged throne; once built, the world was given a solid foundation." (*Midrash Tanchuma*)

What is the meaning of the verse (Song of Songs x:x) 'Your neck is like the Tower of David?' This is referring to the Temple, which is compared to the neck. Just as, when the neck is severed, life ceases, so life ceases from Israel without a Temple. (*Midrash*)

In many places in our tradition, the centrality of the Temple in fostering our relationship with G-d is expressed. The Ramban (Nachmanides), in his commentary on the Torah, explains to us that the erection of the Tabernacle in the desert was to provide a more permanent resting place for the Divine Presence that was manifest on Mount Sinai at the time of the giving of the Torah. Why do we need a place on earth where the Divine Presence is manifest? The answer is simple. The closer G-d is to us, as it were (which is not to say that G-d is physical), the closer, naturally, we can be to Him (if we so choose). In *Ethics of the Fathers* we are told that ten miracles were performed daily for our ancestors in the Temple. The *Chassid Ya'avetz* (a Torah giant of the nineteenth century) explains that as a result of these miracles, the state of existence that existed in the Temple area mirrored Adam's state of existence before the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Just imagine how this intense spirituality could inspire one who experienced it, first hand, to bring more spirituality into his everyday life.

We are all aware that one of the central activities performed in the Temple was the bringing of sacrifices. The Hebrew word for sacrifice, *korban*, shares the same root as the Hebrew word *korov*, which means “close.” The commentators tell us that by going through the physical process of bringing a sacrifice, we are assisted in picturing the detrimental effects of sins on the soul. This in turn helps align ourselves with the will of the Creator as it is expressed in the Torah, creating a greater connection between G-d and ourselves.

Drawing closer to G-d is the process of spiritual elevation that we mentioned earlier to be the purpose of our existence. Given the preeminent role the Temple plays as a catalyst in our spiritual growth, we can begin to understand why the Rabbis referred to its loss using the same terminology describing the loss of life, a “breach.” As we mentioned earlier and express in our prayers, G-d repairs the seemingly irreparable breach created for us by death. So, too, in the absence of the Temple, all hope isn’t lost. G-d has given us the ability to draw close to Him in ways comparable to the opportunity we had when the Temple stood. The Talmud tells us, for example, that when Torah scholars delve into the laws of the Temple service G-d views it as if the Temple was built in their days (see Menachot 110a).

Though this may be a consolation, it can in no way function as a substitute for the real thing. The spiritual ascent possible, given the resources we presently have at our disposal, pales in comparison to the spiritual treasures that we could amass with a Temple rebuilt. May we merit to internalize this reality this year to a deeper extent than we’ve ever done before, and merit to see a rebuilt Temple and the final redemption.