

Good Shabbos, everyone

I want to thank the sponsors of today's drasha:

- Sarah and Rick Bernard, in honor of Aunt Isabel Levinson's 100th birthday.
- Todd Heller & Ruth Klein, in memory of Irving Klein, father of Dr. Ruth Klein, whose yahrtzeit is 7 Av.
- Shimon Millrod and family, in memory of Shimon's mother, Sylvia Millrod, שיינא ציביה בת אבא יוסף ז"ל, whose yahrtzeit is 4 Av.
- Hillel and Dena Soclof, in memory of Hillel's brother, Israel Soclof, Yisroel ben Avraham Abba, whose yahrtzeit is 10 Av.

Thank you for your dedication to the shul. May all the neshamos have an aliya, and may everyone be granted health and happiness in the zechus of your generosity.

Unfortunately, this week we saw surges of Covid 19 in many states, and we also saw an uptick of cases in Maryland. Baruch Hashem, our members have been following all proper safety protocols in shul, and I urge everyone to remain extremely diligent regarding keeping all safety rules—proper hygiene, masks when in public buildings or in crowds outdoors, and social distancing at all times. Seeing surges in many states in the U.S. and in Israel is greatly concerning. This week, the Chief Rabbinate in Israel called on everyone in Israel to say Avinu Malkeiu daily, as they struggle to control this pandemic. Our thoughts are with our brothers and sisters in Israel and people throughout the world who are struggling to defeat this invisible foe. May Hakadosh Baruch Hu send us a refuah lamakeh bekarov...amen.

On Tisha B'Av this week, we will sit on the floor, to read Megillas Eicha, and we will ask the important question of Yirmiyahu HaNavi, "Eicha." How did this happen to us? How did we get here; to this terrible place?

It is a question asked repeatedly as we read through the kinos and relive the suffering of Jews throughout our history—Eicha? How did it happen? How can we repair it?

But we must remember that this journey of tragedy and suffering began with the sin of the Meraglim, when the Jewish people doubted Hashem's protection and rejected His plan for them to enter Eretz Yisrael, their intended homeland. It also traces back to Talmudic times, with the sin of sinas chinam, baseless hatred between Jews...as evident in the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, which remains with us today.

The Meraglim and sinas chinam are the root cause of all Jewish national suffering...a lack of emunah in Hashem and a lack of love between Jews.

But what is it really all about? What is the deeper significance of these two episodes?

Yirmiyahu HaNavi begins **Megillas Eicha**, which laments the destruction of Yerushalayim, with the word "Eicha." He asks, "How is it possible? How could such a tragedy have happened?"

At the beginning of creation, after Adam Harishon ate from the eitz hada'as, Hashem calls to him and questions him with the word "Ayeka"—literally, "where are you?"

The **Medrash** sees a parallel between Yirmiyahu's use of the word "Eicha" and Hashem's questioning Adam with the word "Ayeka." The words are spelled with the same four letters, alef, yud, chof, hei, but they have different nekudos, vowels.

But what possible connection can there be between these two words and episodes, which occurred so far apart, in terms of time, location, and context?

**Rav Soloveitchik** suggested that, on a deeper level, Hashem's "ayeka" question to Adam provides the answer to Yirmiyahu's question of "eicha," the lament over the suffering of the Jewish people.

After Adam ate from the eitz hada'as, why did Hashem introduce the conversation with Adam HaRishon with what seems to be such a strange question? Why did He not ask, "What did you do?" or "Why did you transgress My commandment?" Why did he ask "ayeka," where are you?

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that, by asking Adam "ayeka," Hashem was saying to Adam that the only way you could have committed this sin was by mentally blocking out the reality of standing in My Presence. You have created a distance between us that, until now, had not existed. Sinning and transgressing against Hashem creates a distance between man and his Creator.

That is also what the cheit hameraglim was all about. The Jews did not feel the closeness of Hashem. They did not feel His presence in their lives, and that is why they were anxious and afraid to go into Eretz Yisrael. They had created a psychological and emotional barrier between themselves and Hashem. They had created distance.

And that is what the Medrash is teaching us by connecting the word "eicha" and "ayeka." Yirmiyahu was saying, on behalf of the long suffering and disheartened Jews, "eicha," how can it be? In using this word, he alludes to Hashem's question to Adam about sin in general, "ayeka"? and is also saying to the Jewish people "where are you?"

Yirmiyahu is saying that the answer is that the Jewish people have separated themselves from Hashem, and instead of closeness, there is distance.

In truth, as the **Nefesh Hachaim** teaches, the Churban Habayis was the inevitable conclusion of a relationship that had already soured. The Jewish people, by that point, had just been going through the motions. The Beis Hamikdash was an empty shell by that time. It had stopped representing anything deeper.

In the haftara we read this Shabbos, "Chazon Yeshayahu," Yeshayahu speaks harshly on behalf of Hashem to the Jewish people before the Churban: "Lama li rov zivcheichem, yomar Hashem," 'Why do I need all of your sacrifices?', says Hashem." "Lo chafatzti," "I don't want them!" "Ki savou leraos panai, mi bikeish zos mi-yedchem," "When you come to me to be seen before My face [on the Shalosh Regalim], who asked this of you?" "Chadsheichem umodaichem sanah nafshi, hayu alai latorach; "Your new moons and your festivals, My soul hates; they have become a burden upon Me." Finally, the navi says in the name of Hashem, "When you spread your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you."

There is something paradoxical in the words of this rebuke to Klal Yisroel. On the one hand, the Navi is chastising Klal Yisroel for their evil, both inside and outside the Bais Hamikdash. Yet, at the same time, he is testifying that they were performing mitzvos! They were keeping Yom Tov; they were bringing korbanos, and many, at that; and they were davening to Hashem! How can we reconcile this contradiction?

**Rav Hirsch** provides us with a very insightful answer. From an external perspective, Jewish life at the time was vibrant. The Beis Hamikdash was still standing. The fire on the mizbeach was aflame. On the Shalosh Regalim, the people went to the Beis Hamikdash. To eyes fixed on externals, nothing was missing. But from an inner-focused perspective, evaluating the motivations of Klal Yisrael, there was a lack of sincerity and feeling in their actions. Their mitzvos had become at best rote, habitual performance; and more likely hypocritical acts, not representative of intent and meaning. What is a korban if it does not represent a relationship—bringing oneself closer to God. What is tefilah if it is just words and doesn't further one's relationship with Hashem? Outwardly, the Jews were connected to Hashem, but inwardly they were cut off from Him. There was no relationship. Mitzvos without sincerity plagued Klal Yisrael in Yeshayahu's time, and this challenge confronts us today as well.

Yirmiyahu conveys this message and expresses his distress by using the word "Eicha" 36 times in the Book of Eicha, corresponding to the 36 times the word "Kareis" "to be cut off" is used in the Torah [Krisus 2a].

And according to **Rav Soloveitchik**, that was the essence of the great tragedy of the Churban HaBayis. Greater than the loss of Jewish lives in the Churban and greater than the loss of the magnificent Beis Hamikdash was the loss of our intimate closeness and relationship with Hashem. More than a technical punishment, the mourning on Tisha B'Av reflects the loss of our special relationship with Hashem.

The **Gemara Berachos (3a)** teaches us that three times a day Hashem laments, "Woe to the father who had to banish his child from the table". Hashem is pained by the chasm between us, as much, or perhaps even more, than we are.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ג עמוד א

אמר רב יצחק בר שמואל משמיה דרב: על כל משמר ומשמר יושב הקדוש ברוך הוא ושואג כארי ואומר: אוי לבנים שבעונותיהם החרבתי את ביתי ושרפתי את היכלי והגליתים לבין אומות העולם.

But our consolation is that we have the knowledge that this is not an irreparable breach. To the extent we see ourselves connected to Hashem and we live our lives consistent with that knowledge, the relationship can be restored, immediately.

That is why the Gemara in Taanis says that anyone who mourns for the Churban helps restore the loss. And to the extent that we restore our relationship with Hashem, we better understand our connection to one another, repairing the sinas chinam, baseless hatred.

The Torah teaches, ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני ה', love your neighbor as yourself, I am Hashem.

קדושת לוי (ליקוטים)

וזה הפירוש ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני ה', כלומר מה שאני מצוה שתאהב לרעך כמוך, מחמת שאני ה' ואל אחד בראנו, לכן מחויב לשמוח בשמחת חבירו וכן להיפך חס ושלוש .

As **Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev** taught, the secret of loving your neighbor as yourself is understanding that we are all connected to one another through Hashem, who created us all.

The **Sefer Hakesav Vahakabala** writes that the reason Hashem expects us not to be jealous of others is that we are commanded to love Hashem, not just with our hearts בלבבך, but with **all** our hearts, בכל לבבך,

הכתב והקבלה שמות פרק כ

(יד) לא תחמוד. רבים יתמהו על זאת המצוה איך יהיה אדם שלא יחמוד דבר יפה בלבו כל מה שהוא נחמד למראה עיניו, והלב חומד מעצמו בטבעו נגד בחירת האדם, וע' בראב"ע ממשל הכפרי, ויראה כמו שכתב בעל הברית, אחר שה'

צוה אותנו על האהבה באמרו ואהבת את ה"א בכל לבבך, מה מקרא חסר אם היה כתוב ואהבת את ה"א בלבבך, ומה ר"ל במלת בכל, אלא שהכונה שיהיה לבבך מלא באהבת ה', כלומר שלא יהיה בלב רק אהבת ה' לבד, The love of Hashem, feeling connected to Hashem, should be all consuming. It should define us. It should remind us at all times about who we are, where we came from, how we must live our lives, and also our connection to one another. It should lead directly to ahavas chinam.

When we yearn for the Beis Hamikdash and a relationship with Hashem; when we understand that the Beis Hamikdash and Yerushalayim, Hashem's home, are our lifeblood, it connects us to Hashem and also binds us all together, seeing ourselves connected to one another through our Creator.

In a published essay, **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin** records an event that took place just after the conclusion of the 1978 Camp David Accords. President Jimmy Carter submitted a letter for Prime Minister Menachem Begin that caused the Israeli leader to turn pale and promptly return the letter unsigned to the leader of the free world. "But I did not ask you to give up Jerusalem" said the astonished American president. "I only asked that you put it on the negotiating table."

Begin answered in his characteristically poetic style: "For two thousand years, we Jews have been reciting a verse from King David's Psalms at every wedding ceremony:

אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכה ימיני תדבק לשוני לחכי אם לא אזכרכי  
"If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand be forgotten. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I hold thee not above my highest joy."

"But does Judaism not state that you must give up a limb in order to save the entire organism?" answered Carter. "Yes," countered Begin, "but not if the limb is one's heart. No human being can live without a heart. **Jerusalem is the heart of Israel and the heart of the Jewish people.**"

We must understand and internalize that Yerushalayim, and the makom Hamikdash, is the heart of the Jewish people. It is our lifeblood. To repair the loss of the Beis Hamikdash, we must fill our hearts with ahavas Hashem and ahavas habriyos.

Despite this daunting challenge, it gives us hope to know that Yerushalayim, whose destruction we currently mourn, is also the city from which the redemption of humanity will come one day. Yerushalayim, once the symbol of destruction and loss, will become a symbol of reunification and restoration. According to our Neviim, this message will be conveyed at the end of the days from the Holy Temple in Yerushalayim, to which all the nations will flock. At that time, they will beat their swords into plowshares, forsake entirely the cultivation of warfare and "the nations will all call upon the name of Hashem and serve Him with a united resolve."

Yerushalayim will become the vehicle for Israel's expression of the purpose for its being, the fulfillment of a redeemed world of peace.

We have both the obligation and the ability to transform this vision into reality by taking it upon ourselves, each day, to do our part, to love Hashem with all our heart, and also to increase love of one another without cause, and in this merit, we will witness the full rebuilding of Yerushalayim, bimhera viyamenu...amen.