

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

D'varim-Chazon & Tish'a b'Av 5783

## D'varim - Disagreements

It is generally known that the Baal Korei (Torah reader), upon reaching verse 1:12 in our Parsha, abruptly changes the traditional cantillation, the trop. For a brief moment, the dirge-like tone of Eicha interrupts and dominates. The clear explanation is that the word EICHA suddenly reminds us of the same opening word in Megilat Eicha which we read on Tish'a b'Av night.

The question is this: This word, EICHA, conveys a sense of gloom and despair, and it engenders a mood quite in keeping with the mournful atmosphere of Tish'a b'Av. In the context of the Parsha's opening narrative, however, it is hard to understand Moshe's distress and displeasure - as conveyed by the usage of EICHA - at the People's many questions. After all, wasn't this his role, namely, to be the wise mediator and sagacious judge to resolve the controversies, reconcile the differences and bring about peace? Why should he be so troubled and irritated?

S'forno addresses this issue. In his view, Moshe's dismay was directed at the sheer volume of the petty gripes - "frivolous lawsuits", if you will - that

required enlisting so many judges and consumed so much time that the ultimate objective of entering Israel was obscured and side-lined.

Indeed, there are certainly many disagreements that demand the serious attention of the jurist. But when people get upset about rather trivial matters, when they constantly bicker about issues that ought to be easily resolvable between themselves, it speaks to a sad immaturity and "spoiled" self-centeredness that prevents them from staying focused on what really counts and where they ought to be devoting their time and energy. It suggests that there may be other, more concealed issues at play: matters of ego, payback revenge, power grab schemes, etc. - that all have the capacity to adulterate the dispute at hand and make it all but impossible to resolve the matter peaceably.

And so, Moshe had every reason to be disturbed by the litigious behavior of the People. The EICHA in the Parsha is, therefore and unfortunately, quite appropriate. If the first Tish'a b'Av was a consequence of the People's balking at entering Israel, the S'forno's insight may well explain why they couldn't "see the forest for the trees".

Perhaps this explanation also gives new meaning to the sin of SINAT CHINAM, the reason given for the

destruction of the Second Temple (Yoma 9b). Indeed, when hatred becomes baseless and simply pointless, when people cannot get along "for no good reason", everyone pays the price. And when such acrimony becomes endemic and spreads and infects the national polity, the result is churban, devastation.

One need not spell out the message here. The view from hills of Jerusalem sees the world as having to deal with some grave and potentially catastrophic dangers, with Israel and the Jewish People in the center of things (Aren't we always and so often, not by choice!). There are real, important things to pray for this Tish'a b'Av. Hopefully, by placing our differences in proper perspective and rising above our overly sensitive natures, our prayers will reflect what really matters and we will merit the transformation of Tisha B'Av into a joyous festival.

## **9th of Av - Change**

We are in the week of Tish'a b'Av and the mood darkens. Rav Soloveitchik often spoke about the uniqueness of Tish'a b'Av in that the day is not only a day of fasting, but it is also a day of mourning. Mourning for what? Clearly, it is for the destruction of the Temple. The problem, of course, is that this catastrophe is impossible for us to grasp. We were not there to

witness and experience the Mikdash in its sacred glory. How then can we mourn such a miraculous period when we don't even know what we missed?

The Rav offered this explanation. The era of the Mikdash did not exhaust itself in the sacrificial rite. It was much more than that. It was a time when children and parents, grandparents and grandchildren mingled happily in the streets of Jerusalem. There was song and laughter in the air. It was a time of pure, unimpeded progress and success. There was a palpable presence of HaShem that transformed the everyday into sacred and inspired living. In short, it was a period of wondrous self-fulfillment; a life brimming with meaning and purpose.

In a recent article in the Jerusalem Post, Rabbi Stewart Weiss impressively captured the era of the Beit HaMikdash thusly: "[The Temple] was a unifying force - the unifying force - in ancient Israel, the spiritual focal point that brought the nation together. Three times a year at least, the people - rich and poor, farmer and skilled worker - would come from near and far to recharge their souls in Jerusalem. The Beit HaMikdash was a place where everyone could find common ground, sharing a purpose - connecting to God on one's own level - that every person could relate to; and that unity of spirit is something we are in dire need of today.

"The Beit HaMikdash [also] offered an opportunity to seek forgiveness, to say, "I'm sorry, I messed up, but I want to be better." Influenced to confess our faults and then pledge to redress them, we would emerge 'cleaner' than we were before, with our self-esteem restored. In a society where it is so difficult, almost painful to accept blame and look inward at our own shortcomings, the Beit HaMikdash, an icon of self-examination, offers a welcome alternative.

"And [finally] the Beit HaMikdash also influenced us to give thanks, to recognize just how fortunate we are to have what we have and be where we are at this place in time. In that holy place of Kohanim and Psalms, we put aside all our groans and gripes and acknowledged the innumerable gifts showered upon us at every moment. In humbly bringing the Korban Toda offering, we lived up to our collective name 'Yehudim,' from the word for "thanks"; and were influenced to count not our bad breaks, but our blessings."

Do we live in such a climate today? Were it only so! The central fault, however, does not lie in the absence of the Mikdash. As Rav Nebenzahl has powerfully written (Sichot, Bamidbar, pp. 293-296), it is not so much that Jerusalem has been destroyed, but it is we - often ignorantly and unaware - who are in this tragic state of churban. It is our pettiness, selfish-

ness, baseless hatred, jealousy, insatiable cravings... that impedes and disrupts any chance of redemption. We are the churban! If so, then it is in our power to change things. The Beit HaMikdash does not physically exist - yet. But in our psyche, in our collective imagination and historical memory, the concept of this unique House of Gd can still uplift us, and urgently remind us that only when we remedy the churban within, only then will HaShem repair the churban without!

Tish'a b'Av is destined to be a festival. It's just a matter of "when", not "if". And that "when" depends upon each of us. 🙌