

PARSHAT DEVARIM

29 Tammuz – 6 Av 5784
4-10 August 2024

Torah: Duet. 1:1 – 3:22
Haftorah: Isaiah 1:1-27

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Rabbi Chanina the son of Dosa would say:

One whose fear of sin takes precedence to his wisdom, his wisdom endures. But one whose wisdom takes precedence to his fear of sin, his wisdom does not endure.

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The Gentle Rebuke

“These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan, in the wilderness, in the Plains [of Moab], opposite [the Sea of] Suf, between Paran, and Tofel, and Lavan, and Chatzerot, and Di-Zahav.” - Deuteronomy 1:1

The book of Deuteronomy opens the Torah’s account of how Moses reviewed with his people the forty years they had spent in the desert. In the first verse Moses rebukes Israel by alluding to a number of their rebellious sins against the Almighty during the years in the wilderness. Moses, although primarily rebuking the people, managed nonetheless to suggest an excuse within the words of the rebuke itself, to drop a subtle suggestion of extenuating circumstances for each sin, in at least partial defense of Israel’s backsliding.

“Wilderness”

Moses says “in the wilderness,” rebuking Israel for her lack of faith when the Jews had exclaimed bitterly, “If only we could die in the wilderness,” when they had no water. But Moses selects the general term “wilderness” (rather than naming the actual place where the incident occurred—the Sin Desert between Elim and Sinai) to suggest that it was a severe test of their faith: they could not be held so guilty for complaining of thirst, for they were in “the great and fearful desert of snakes, serpents and scorpions, and aridity, with no water.”

“Plains of Moab”

Moses says, “in the plains,” referring to the place where the Israelites had allowed themselves to be seduced into idol worship by the Moabite women. Again, Moses does not mention the place’s name (Shittim), but emphasizes “the plains”—i.e. the well-known Plains of Moab, which had the environmental effect of bringing out the worst Moabite-like immorality in all who traveled there—a point of defense for the people’s conduct.

“Facing the Sea”

Moses says “facing [the Sea of] Suf,” rebuking Israel for their lack of faith at the Red Sea. The Egyptian army had trapped them at the seashore, and they had exclaimed, “Was it for lack of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness?!” After all the miracles they had witnessed in Egypt, they failed to show faith in G-d’s power to rescue them now. But Moses at the same time hints at the extenuating circumstances, by underscoring that they had faced the sea. With the sea in front and the pursuing Egyptians behind, there was no natural possibility whatsoever of being saved. Though superficially rebuking his people, Moses at the same time gently suggested that they could not be harshly indicted for failing such a severe and trying test of faith.

“Abundant Gold”

After mentioning several other occasions when the Jews sinned in the desert, Moses concluded with “and at Di-Zahav.” The word “Zahav” means “gold”, and Moses’ reproachful reference was to the Golden Calf which they had made—and worshipped. Yet Moses gently suggests that the abundance (“di”) of gold and silver the Israelites possessed had turned their heads and led them to sin outcomes. That’s significant, but not as important as the way we travel. Every tumble is a precursor for a boost. Been bumped? Next flight, expect an upgrade.

By Elisha Greenbaum

On The Haftarah: The Vision of Isaiah

On the Shabbat before Tisha B’Av, called Shabbat Chazon, we read the haftarah that begins with the words: “Chazon Yeshayahu” (“Vision of Isaiah”). The haftarah ends: “Zion will be redeemed with justice, and its captives, with Tzedakah (righteousness).” The question is: Who or what is Zion? And who are the captives? Some simply translate Zion to refer to Jerusalem, and the captives are the Jewish people.

Others understand Zion to be the Jewish people. But if so, then who are the captives? The answer is that Zion refers to Jews who study Torah and do the mitzvahs, and the captives are Jews who are not involved in Torah and mitzvahs. They are called captives because they have surrendered their will to their bodies and their “animal souls.” So-called Zion Jews are redeemed with justice because they earned it. However, the captive Jews are redeemed with Tzedakah because they otherwise can’t be redeemed. We are told that in the end, all Jews will repent and immediately be redeemed. This is an act of kindness, of tzedakah. As Jews, we know that our bodies can be subjected to exile. Our G-dly souls, however, cannot. Even when the soul is sent down to influence the body and the physical world, since it is an actual part of G-d, it is not affected by the dark concealment it experiences. On the contrary, the darkness and the exile cause the soul to bring out hidden strength that had been lying dormant, strengthening its connection with G-d. The body, on the other hand, is subject to the harsh conditions and darkness of the exile. G-d put us in this great darkness so we can transform the darkness into light. While the soul is strengthened because of the darkness, it doesn’t directly affect the darkness. However, the body, through fulfilling G-d’s will in the exile, changes the darkness into light. This light is greater than the light of the soul. It is Hashem’s will, His very essence, which is the greatest light possible. This brings us to yet a third explanation of our verse. Zion refers to our bodies, and v’shaveha (which we had translated as “captives,” but can also mean “returnees”) refers to our souls. The soul is not subject to the exile. Being in the body, which is in exile, is merely a matter of being in the wrong place. It doesn’t need redemption; all it needs is to return. The body will be redeemed with justice because it suffered in exile and did the work, and so it

rightfully earned its redemption. The Neshamah (soul), which did not suffer in exile, returns as a kindness, a Tzedakah. It did influence the body, and so it comes along and receives the greatest revelation through the body: the body's reward for its physical

work in the dark exile, the revelation of G-d's essence. Now we can understand the first words of the haftorah: "Chazon Yeshayahu." Chazon means the vision, and the name Yeshayahu comes from the word Yeshuah, which means "redemption." Our haftorah is

telling us that specifically during times of darkness, which the Three Weeks and Tisha B'Av symbolize, is where you can accomplish the vision of the redemption. We will experience this great revelation with the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

By Yitzi Hurwitz

TISHA B'AV (The 9th of Av)

The History of Tisha B'Av

Tisha B'Av is marked as the most tragic day in Jewish history. In 1313 BCE, the spies returned from the Promised Land with frightening reports, and the Jews balked at the prospect of entering the land. G-d decreed that they would therefore wander in the desert for 40 years.

Both Holy Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed on this date. The First Temple was burned by the Babylonians in 423 BCE (read more) and the Second Temple fell to, and was destroyed by, the Romans in 69 CE, unleashing a period of suffering from which our nation has never fully recovered.

The Bar Kochba revolt against the Romans in 133 CE ended in defeat: The Jews of Betar, in the Land of Israel, were butchered on the 9th of Av, and the Temple Mount plowed one year later on the same date.

Later on in our history, many more tragedies happened on this day, including, in 1290, the expulsion of England's Jews, and the 1492 banishment of all Jews from Spain.

What We Don't Do

The fast begins at sunset of the 8th of Av and concludes at nightfall the following night (delayed by one day when 9 Av is on Shabbat). During this time, we do not

- Eat or drink

- Wear leather footwear
- Bathing or washing ourselves
- Apply ointments or creams
- Engage in marital relations or any form of intimacy
- Sit on a normal-height chair until Chatzot (solar midday)
- Study Torah (except for the "sad" parts that deal with the destruction of the Temples, etc.)
- Send gifts, or even greet one another (you may respond to greetings)
- Engage in outings, trips or similar pleasurable activities
- Wear fine, festive clothing

What We Do

- Following Ma'ariv (the evening prayer) on the eve of Tisha B'Av the Book of Eichah (Lamentations) is recited
- The Talit (prayer shawl) and Tefillin are not worn during Shacharit (the morning prayer) on Tisha B'Av morning
- Following Shacharit, the Kinot are recited
- It is customary to give extra charity on Tisha B'Av
- Following solar midday, sitting on normal-height chairs is permitted
- During Mincha (the afternoon prayer) on Tisha B'Av, the Talit and Tefillin are worn

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, August 4, 2024-29 Tammuz, 5784

Passing of Rashi (1105)

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, known as "Rashi", passed away on the 29th of Tammuz of the year 4865 from creation (1105 CE).

Monday, August 5, 2024-1 Av, 5784

Passing of Aaron (1274 BCE)

Aaron, the first High Priest, brother of Moses and Miriam, passed away at age 123 on the 1st of Av of the year 2487 from creation (1274 BCE). This is the only yahrzeit (date of passing) explicitly mentioned in the Torah.

Ezra Arrives in Israel (348 BCE)

Following their long journey from Babylon, Ezra and his entourage arrived in the land of Israel to be near the newly built second Holy Temple in Jerusalem. A relatively small group came together with Ezra; most Jews, including great Torah scholars, chose to remain in Babylon due to the harsh conditions that were then prevailing in Israel.

Tuesday, August 6, 2024-2 Av, 5784

Vel' d'Hiv Roundup (1942)

On the 2nd and 3rd of Av in the year 5702 from creation (1942 CE), more than 13,000 Jews were rounded up by French police and interred in the Vel' d'Hiv, an indoor bicycle stadium in the center of Paris. They were later transported to Auschwitz to be killed. Within days, the Vel' d'Hiv was cleaned up and ready for recreation.

Friday, August 9, 2024-5 Av, 5784

Passing of "Ari" (1572)

Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, known as Ari HaKadosh ("The Holy Lion") passed away on the 5th of Av of the year 5332 from creation (1572 CE). Born in Jerusalem in 1534, he spent many years in secluded study near Cairo, Egypt. In 1570 he settled in Safed, in the north of the Land of Israel, where he lived for two years until his passing at age 38. During that brief period, the Ari revolutionized the study of Kabbalah, and came to be universally regarded as one of the

most important figures in Jewish mysticism. It was he who proclaimed, "In these times, we are allowed and duty-bound to reveal this wisdom," opening the door to the integration of the teachings of Kabbalah - until then the province of a select few in each generation - into "mainstream" Judaism.

Passing of R. Chaim Ozer Grodzinski (1940)

R. Chaim Ozer Grodzinski served as rabbi of the prestigious Jewish community of Vilna, Lithuania, for over fifty years. He was a distinguished scholar, and he authored *Achiezer*, a collection of halachic responsa.

A devoted communal activist, R. Chaim Ozer worked together with the fifth and sixth Lubavitcher Rebbes, R. Sholom DovBer and R. Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, on many projects to ease the plight of Russian Jewry (such as the 1929 struggle to send matzah into the Soviet Union).