

Profiles in Churban¹

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Introduction

Tisha Bav sharpens our awareness of the immeasurable loss of the Beit Hamikdash, as we mourn and lament its destruction. Yet, the Midrash suggests that there is, in fact, a greater devastation than the loss of the house of G-d. The rabbis of the Midrash tackle a difficult passage in Tehillim, which begins:

A Psalm of Asaf. God, the nations have come into Your inheritance; they have desecrated Your Holy Temple; they have turned Jerusalem into heaps.

Tehillim 79:1

מְזֹמֵר, לְאֶסֶף: אֱלֹהִים, בָּאוּ גוֹיִם בְּנִחְלָתָךְ - טָמְאוּ, אֶת
הַיִּכַל קֹדֶשְׁךָ; שָׂמוּ אֶת-יְרוּשָׁלַם לְעֵיִם.
תהילים עט:א

The Midrash explains the difficulty and the resolution:

A Psalm of Asaph. God, the nations have come into Your inheritance. The text should have used a phrase like, 'Weeping of Asaf,' 'Lament of Asaf,' 'Dirge of Asaf'; why does it say, 'A psalm of Asaf'? It may be likened to a king who erected a bridal-chamber for his son which he plastered, cemented, and decorated; but his son entered upon an evil course of living. The king immediately ascended to the chamber, tore the curtains and broke the rods; but [the son's] tutor took a piece of rod which he used as a flute and played upon it. People said to him, 'The king has overthrown his son's chamber and you sit playing a tune!' He replied to them, 'I play a tune because the king overturned his son's chamber but did not pour out his anger upon his son.' Similarly people said to Asaf, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, has caused Temple and Sanctuary to be destroyed, and you sit singing a Psalm!' He replied to them, 'I sing a Psalm because the Holy One, blessed be He, poured out His wrath upon wood and stone and not upon Israel ...

Eicha Rabbah 4:14 (adapted from Soncino Translation)

מְזֹמֵר לְאֶסֶף אֱלֹהִים בָּאוּ גוֹיִם
בְּנִחְלָתְךָ לֹא הוּא קָרָא צָרִיךְ לְמִימַר
אֲלֵא בְכִי לְאֶסֶף נְהִי לְאֶסֶף קִינָה
לְאֶסֶף וּמָה אֹמֵר מְזֹמֵר לְאֶסֶף אֲלֵא
מִשָּׁל לְמֶלֶךְ שֶׁעָשָׂה בֵּית חוֹפֵה לְבָנו
וּסְיִידָה וְכִיידָה וְצִיירָה וַיֵּצֵא בְנו
לְתַרְבוֹת רַעָה מִיַּד עֵלָה הַמֶּלֶךְ
לְחוֹפֵה וְקָרַע אֶת הַוִּילָאוֹת וְשִׁיבַר
אֶת הַקִּנִּים וְנִטַּל פְּדָגוּג שְׁלוֹ אֵיבֹב
שֶׁל קִנִּים וְהִיָּה מְזַמֵּר אִמְרוּ לוֹ
הַמֶּלֶךְ הִפֵּךְ חוֹפְתוֹ שֶׁל בְּנו וְאֵת
יּוֹשֵׁב וּמְזַמֵּר אִמְרָה לְהֵם מְזַמֵּר אֲנִי
שֶׁהִפֵּךְ חוֹפְתוֹ שֶׁל בְּנו וְלֹא שֶׁפֶךְ
חִמְתוֹ עַל בְּנו כִּךְ אִמְרוּ לְאֶסֶף
הַקֵּב"ה הַחֲרִיב הַיִּכַל וּמְקַדֵּשׁ וְאֵתָה
יּוֹשֵׁב וּמְזַמֵּר אִמְרָה לְהֵם מְזַמֵּר אֲנִי
שֶׁשֶׁפֶךְ הַקֵּב"ה חִמְתוֹ עַל הָעֵצִים
וְעַל הָאֲבָנִים וְלֹא שֶׁפֶךְ חִמְתוֹ עַל
יִשְׂרָאֵל הֲדָא הוּא דְכָתִיב וַיִּצַת אֵשׁ
בְּצִיּוֹן וְתֹאכַל יְסוּדוֹתֶיהָ.
איכה רבה ד:יז

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At first glance, it is impossible to fathom associating the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash with a *mizmor*- a song. Yet, we learn that the rabbis viewed the destruction of the physical edifice of the Beit Hamikdash as an act of Divine kindness; instead of pouring his wrath on the Jewish people, the Divine punishment was meted out on the inanimate building materials of the sanctuary.² Despite the great tragedy that is the *Churban Beit Hamikdash*, the destruction of the Jewish people is an even more tragic loss.

This observation is quite understandable. The Beit Hamikdash is valued because it serves as the focus of the Divine presence in this world. It is endowed with holiness because of its intense spiritual character and serves as a *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of G-d's name) bringing G-d into the space and focus of the world. However, there is a greater resting place of the Divine presence and source of *Kiddush Hashem* in the world: the Jewish people. We, the nation of Hashem, are charged with the awesome task of housing G-d in our lives and representing Him in this world. Perhaps even the Beit Hamikdash itself was only a means to channel G-d's presence into the lives of the Jewish people, as it says:

You shall make a Temple for me and I will dwell in them.
Shemot 25:8

ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם.
 שמות כה:ח

This is why the destruction of the people of Hashem is the ultimate *Chilul Hashem* (desecration of G-d's name), as we are the bearers of the Divine presence.

Millions of Jews have walked the timeline of Jewish history, ending their lives sanctifying the name of G-d. Separated geographically and temporally, on Tisha Bav we remember them together and mourn their destruction just as we mourn the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Our traditional *Kinnot* make mention of some specific individuals and has allusions to many others.

Specifically, the sages of Israel are the giants upon whom much of the responsibility to carry the name of Hashem rests. As the Midrash teaches, our forefathers were the *merkavah laShechinah* - the chariot of the Divine presence.³ Hence, their demise in particular is akin to the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Perhaps this is why, in the context of the fast of Gedalya, the Talmud teaches:

The fast of the seventh month is on the third of Tishrei, which is the day that Gedaliah ben Achikam was killed. Who killed him? Yishmael ben Netanya. [The fact that we fast for the murder of one person [teaches] that the death of the righteous is compared to the burning of the Holy Temple.

Rosh Hashanah 18b

צום השביעי זה ג' בתשרי שבו
 נהרג גדליה בן אחיקם ומי הרגו
 ישמעאל בן נתניה הרגו ללמדך
 ששקולה מיתתן של צדיקים
 כשריפת בית אלהינו.
ראש השנה יח:

Thousands of Torah scholars over the millennia have perished *al Kiddush Hashem*, and we contemplate their loss of Tisha Bav.⁴

² For the Halachic implications of this concept and its application on Tisha Bav, see *Biur HaGra* O.C. 554 s.k. 2.

³ Ramban develops this concept in his brief introduction to his commentary on *Sefer Shemot*.

⁴ Perhaps this is why, in our Mussaf of Yom Kippur, once we conclude the portion of the *Avodah*- the description of the Temple service- we lament our lack of a *Beit Hamikdash* and immediately follow it with a lament for the

Below is a tiny glimpse into the lives of several great Torah scholars whose martyrdom we contemplate on Tisha Bav. They span the vast reach of our exile and represent only a minute fraction of the number and stature of rabbinic figures, prominent bearers of the presence of G-d, whom we have tragically lost.

Rabbi Chanina Ben Tradyon

Eretz Yisrael, 2nd century

We dedicate a specific Tisha Bav *kinnah* (*Arzei Halevanon*) to a group of Mishnaic Rabbis who died during the Roman persecutions in the aftermath of the destruction of the Beit Hamidkash. There are four editions of a Midrash known as “*Midrash Harugei Malchut*” that describe what we call the story of the “Ten Martyrs.” The exact description of the Midrash, which presents a Roman tribunal condemning ten Rabbis to death as punishment for the sale of Yosef, has been debated by scholars in terms of its historical veracity. Whether the precise details of the background are allegorical or historical is not germane to the purpose of the *kinnah*, which is to give us a sense of the excruciatingly difficult state of the Jews living in Israel after the *Churban Beit Hamikdash*.⁵

One of the ten martyrs mentioned in the *kinnah* is Rabbi Chanina (or Chanania) Ben Tradyon. Rabbi Chanina was a second generation sage of the Mishna who lived in Sakhnin in the Galilee during the Hadrianic persecutions of the second century. He was known to be a particularly scrupulous and pious individual, who was appointed as an overseer of the communal charity fund. His primary pursuit was the study of Torah, and his teachings and rulings appear in numerous locations in the Talmud. It was his unwavering commitment that ultimately brought his untimely demise as the Talmud records:

They brought R. Chanina ben Tradyon and said to him "why did you study Torah?" He said to them "Because this is what my G-d commanded." Immediately, they sentenced him to death by fire, his wife to death by sword and his daughter to live among prostitutes.

Avodah Zarah 17b

אתיוהו לרבי חנינא בן תרדיון אמרו
ליה אמאי קא עסקת באורייתא אמר
להו כאשר צוני ה' אלהי מיד גזרו עליו
לשריפה ועל אשתו להריגה ועל בתו
לישב בקובה של זונות.
עבודה זרה יז:

The continuation of the passages describes the execution of Rabbi Chanina:

They found R. Chanina ben Tradyon who was sitting and studying Torah and gathering many congregations [for study] and there was a sefer Torah in his lap. They brought him and wrapped him in the sefer Torah and wrapped him in bundles of branches and lit them on fire. They brought wool sponges and soaked them in the water and placed them on his heart so that he would not die

מצאוהו לרבי חנינא בן תרדיון
שהיה יושב ועוסק בתורה ומקהיל
קהלות ברבים וס"ת מונח לו בחיקו
הביאוהו וכרכוהו בס"ת והקיפוהו
בחבילי זמורות והציתו בהן את
האור והביאו ספוגין של צמר
וישראו במים והניחום על לבו כדי

martyred rabbis of the Roman persecutions. This destruction, too, is not only a result of the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* but an approximate equivalent.

⁵ Rabbi Menachem Leibtag notes that the reference to the sale of Yosef in the context of the aftermath of the destruction of the second Temple has a pointed message. The Talmud (*Yoma* 9) teaches that this Temple was destroyed due senseless hatred, the precipitant of the sale of Yosef.

quickly. His daughter said to him "Father, how can I see you like this?" He said to her, "If I were being burned alone, it would be difficult for me. Now that I am being burned with a sefer Torah, Whoever will seeks retribution for the desecration of the sefer Torah (i.e., G-d), will also seek retribution for my desecration." His students said to him, "Our teacher, what do you see?" He said "The parchments are burning but the letters are flying."

Avodah Zarah 18a

שלא תצא נשמתו מהרה אמרה לו
 בתו אבא אראך בכך אמר לה
 אילמלי אני נשרפתי לבדי היה
 הדבר קשה לי עכשיו שאני נשרף
 וס"ת עמי מי שמבקש עלבונה של
 ס"ת הוא יבקש עלבוני אמרו לו
 תלמידי רבי מה אתה רואה אמר
 להן גליון נשרפין ואותיות פורחות
 עבודה זרה ית.

Rabbi Chanina's devotion to Torah and its holiness is manifest in this nearly superhuman form of *Kiddush Hashem*. The image of the scroll burning with its letters soaring to heaven have accompanied generations of Jewish martyrs long after Rabbi Chanina's passing.

Rabbi Elchanan of Dampierre

France, 12th century

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries- the age of the Tosafists- was a period of remarkable Halachic creativity for Ashkenazic communities in France. Following a period of emphasis on exegesis by rabbinic luminaries including Rashi (1040- 1105), a seismic shift occurred as students began to embrace a new approach to Talmudic study: dialectic. This revolution was created by Rashi's grandson, Rabbi Yaakov of Ramerupt (1100- 1171), who analyzed the Talmud as an integrated whole and sought to resolve potentially conflicting passages with a new systematic, creative method. Rabbi Yaakov, known as Rabbeinu Tam, wrote little and his teachings might well have been lost had it not been for his nephew and student, Rabbi Yitzchak of Dampierre (d. ca. 1198), who organized and dictated these lessons to students who recorded them in writing.

Despite this remarkable flourishing of Torah, the Jewish community was in a precarious position. The first crusade in 1096, which decimated the Jewish communities of the neighboring Rhine valley, incited violence in France, and the Jewish community of Rouen was destroyed. On the second day of Shavuot 1146, a band of marauders ransacked Ramerupt and beat Rabbeinu Tam, wounding him severely. The help of a passing nobleman enabled him to escape death. In 1171, a blood libel in Blois led to the burning of the entire congregation, which was commemorated in a fast day for centuries by European Jews.

Rabbi Yitzchak of Dampierre, known as Ri, had four primary students, who wrote his teachings and the teachings of Rabbeinu Tam, known as Tosafot, on the various Talmudic tractates. The first of these four disciples was Ri's son, Rabbi Elchanan. Rabbi Elchanan's wife was the sister of a well known Tosafist, Rabbi Shmuel of Falaise. His son, Rabbi Shmuel, was a noted Tosafist, who is cited in various Tosafot as Rabbi Shmuel ben Rabbi Elchanan. Rabbi Elchanan authored several Halachic works and responsa, in addition to Tosafot which he wrote. His students included noted French Talmudists Rabbi Yechiel of Paris and Rabbi Peretz of Corbeil. He was at least fifty years old and possibly in the midst of glossing tractate Avodah Zara, when he was killed in a pogrom in Dampierre in 1184 during the lifetime of his father.

Rabbi Isaac de Castro Tartas

Brazil/ Portugal, 17th century

In the aftermath of expulsion of the Jews of Spain in 1492, the Catholic Church promoted a series of local church courts to investigate and prosecute Christian heretics, primarily those who had converted from Judaism and were suspected of maintaining their Jewish beliefs and practices. Known as the Inquisition, these courts tortured and killed myriads of *Annusim*, or Marranos, throughout the vast reaches of Christendom for centuries. Nonetheless, many “New Christians” continued to maintain their Jewish identity and practices.

One such Jew was Isaac de Castro, whose parents had escaped Portugal and settled in Tartas, in southern France. Isaac was born around 1623 and was the brother of David Castro Tartas, a famous printer in Amsterdam, where his family had moved and practiced Judaism openly.

Early in life, Isaac went to Parahiba, Brazil, where he lived for several years. He then moved to Bahia dos Santos in Brazil. Although he was not formally known as a *haham*, he was a deeply learned man, and reportedly was engaged in studying and teaching Torah. He was soon recognized as a Jew, arrested by the Inquisition, and sent to Lisbon. Summoned before the tribunal of the Inquisition, he at once reaffirmed his belief in Judaism and his determination to remain true to the faith. All the endeavors of the inquisitors to convert him to Christianity were in vain.

On Dec. 15, 1647 he was led, together with five fellow-sufferers, to be burned at the stake. In the midst of the flames he called out, “Shema Yisrael,” a cry which deeply resonated with the *Annusim* of Portugal. In Amsterdam, the tragic end of this promising young man occasioned deep mourning. A memorial sermon was delivered, and elegies in Hebrew and in Spanish were written in his honor by prominent Jews, including a descendant of the Abravanel. The reign of terror of the Inquisition finally ended with its abolishment on March 30, 1782 by King Ferdinand IV.

Rabbi Mann of Veizin

Lithuania, 18th century

In Veizin, a small suburb of Vilna, in the 18th century, lived an apostate. Angered by the rejection and insults of the Jewish community, he set out to take revenge on his former coreligionists with a nefarious plan. One night ahead of the final days of Sukkot, the apostate stole an icon from a local Catholic church and hid it under the Aron Kodesh in the synagogue. He quickly went to the local parish priest and foretold an upcoming Jewish ritual in which the Jews would take a Christian icon and beat it with willow branches on a specific date. The news enraged the Christian authorities, who bided their time until the date which the apostate had mentioned: Hoshana Rabbah.

On that fateful morning, while the Jewish community was assembled at prayer holding their *hoshanot* (willow branches), the local authorities burst into the shul and found an icon under the Aron kodesh. They immediately charged the Jews with crimes against the church. The Jews stood shocked, stunned in silence. This was interpreted as an admission of guilt, and an anti-Jewish pogrom was unleashed. Many Jews were beaten, maimed and killed. Those who

survived quaked with the fear of the unknown fate that would befall them after the formal trial that they would face.

In the midst of this crisis, Rabbi Mann, an elderly pious member of the community secretly approached the Catholic authorities.⁶ He figured that if he would accept the blame for the incident, then the rest of the community would be spared. The local authorities accepted his admission, and Rabbi Mann stood trial for his “crimes.” On the seventeenth of Tammuz, he was burned at the stake.

For decades, the Jewish community of Vilna, the nearby major Jewish population center, observed annual memorial prayers in memory of “the Kadosh” Rabbi Mann, as he was known for his martyrdom including a unique מלא מלא, whose text is extant, that was composed in his memory.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt”l recalled as a young man hearing a memorial prayer recited in Vilna for the holy Rabbi Mann, whose story was known throughout Vilna and the surrounding Lithuanian Jewish communities.

Rabbi Menachem Ziemba

Poland, 20th century

Rabbi Menachem Ziemba was born in 1883 into a poor Polish, Chasidic family. While still a young man, he distinguished himself by his remarkable erudition. He studied for 20 years, during which time he was supported by his wealthy father-in-law. After the death of his father-in-law (about 1917), Rabbi Ziemba was forced to run his father-in-law's business, but he was not successful, and after years of hardship he agreed in 1935 to become a member of the Warsaw rabbinical council. He had been an active participant in Agudat Yisrael and a member of the council of the Warsaw Jewish community.

Rabbi Ziemba was a prominent rabbinic leader in the Warsaw ghetto and one of the last Warsaw rabbis to remain in the ghetto after the first wave of extermination. Dr. Hillel Seidman, chief archivist of the Warsaw ghetto, described Rabbi Ziemba's presence in the ghetto:

Throughout the many vicissitudes of the Ghetto, Rav Ziemba's apartment remained a source of light, warmth and encouragement. He had to move house five times – either because of the contraction of the Ghetto or for his own safety – but always his home was full of people seeking advice or reassurance. They were not disappointed. The wisdom and unshakable trust of generations was distilled in Rav Menachem's personality; with his genius, he had little difficulty in finding the apt phrase suitable for each petitioner and every occasion. All his sentiments were rooted in Torah sources and reflected the eternal truths.

Dr. Seidman described how under extreme danger, Rabbi Ziemba broke open the roof of his apartment to construct a primitive Sukkah. Rabbi Ziemba oversaw a network of underground Yeshivot in bunkers and cellars, visiting the students, testing them in their studies and encouraging them, while outside chaos reigned.

⁶ Accounts of this story differ as to whether “Reb Mann” was formally a Rabbi or just a pious elder.

At a meeting of its surviving leaders on January 14, 1943, he gave his approval and blessing for an uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. In an inspiring address, he stated:

Of necessity, we must resist the enemy on all fronts... We shall no longer heed his instructions... Sanctification of the Divine Name manifests itself in varied ways. During the First Crusade, at the end of the 11th century, the Halakhah ... determined one way of reacting to the distress of the Franco-German Jews, whereas in the middle of the 20th century, during the liquidation of the Jews in Poland, it prompts us to react in an entirely different manner. In the past, during religious persecution, we were required by the law 'to give up our lives even for the least essential practice.' In the present, however, when we are faced by an arch foe, whose unparalleled ruthlessness and program of total annihilation know no bounds, the Halakhah demands that we fight and resist to the very end with unequalled determination and valor for the sake of Sanctification of the Divine Name.

Rabbi Ziemba's scholarly works acquired great renown among students since they were an unusual amalgam of the dialectical approach common in Poland and the logical and penetrating method of the Lithuanian yeshivot. He published a volume of responsa, *Zera Avraham* (1920), and a monograph on the laws of carry on Shabbat *Totze'ot Chayyim* (1921) before the war. However, his life's work, consisting of manuscripts of sermons, commentary on the Talmud Yerushalmi and Rambam and many more responsa were lost in the Holocaust.

Rabbi Ziemba insisted on remaining in the Ghetto and fell prey to the Nazi murderers at the beginning of the uprising in the Spring of 1943. His remains were reinterred in Jerusalem in 1958.

Rabbi Dr. David Halevi Applebaum

Jerusalem, 21st century

Rabbi Dr. David Applebaum was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1952 and grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. He spent his teenage years studying at Hebrew Theological College in Chicago under the tutelage of Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik. He became one of Rabbi Soloveichik's foremost disciples and continued studying with him at Yeshivas Brisk; Rabbi Applebaum received Yoreh Yoreh and Yadin Yadin semicha from Rabbi Soloveichik.

While in Chicago, he earned his B.A. from Northeastern University in 1972 and a master's degree in biological sciences at Northwestern University. He received his M.D. from the Medical College of Ohio in 1978.

In 1981, after his residency, he emigrated to Israel with his wife, Debra, where he served as a medical director of Magen David Adom, Israel's ambulance corps, in Jerusalem, as well as working in Shaare Zedek Hospital from 1985 to 1988. He left the hospital to found the Terem Immediate Care Center, which revolutionized emergency care in Jerusalem by treating relatively minor injuries in a freestanding clinic, freeing up hospital emergency rooms to deal with more serious cases. In 1986, Dr. Applebaum was presented with an award by the Knesset after treating terror victims at the scene of an attack on King George Street in Jerusalem while still under fire.

In 2002, Dr. Applebaum was appointed head of Shaare Zedek Medical Center's Department of Emergency Medicine, and was viewed in Israel's medical community as one of the country's

leaders in the field. He introduced a number of groundbreaking changes to improve efficiency, introduced the computer tracking of patients, and was insistent on cutting waiting time to an absolute minimum. Dr. Applebaum was on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including Shabbat. When he was out of the hospital, he continued to monitor the treatment of each patient via a computer connection, even when he was abroad. He was a scholar, who authored dozens of articles in medicine and Halacha, and lectured internationally.

David and Debra had two sons and four daughters; David was active at home in the lives of his children and his extended family. Their daughter, Naava, was engaged to be married on September 10, 2003, and on the eve of the wedding, Dr. Appelbaum took Naava for an outing together to Café Hillel on Emek Refaim street in Jerusalem. At 11:20pm a Hamas terrorist detonated his explosives in the café, killing seven people. Among the victims were Naava Appelbaum, the bride-to-be, and her father, Rabbi Dr. David Appelbaum, the remarkable physician who had spent years administering medical care for Israel's victims of terror.

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