

# Failure to Grieve

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Rosh Beit Midrash, Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash of Toronto

אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכח ימיני

*If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its strength. (Tehillim 137:5)*

## How could a righteous Jew fail to mourn for Jerusalem?

Our Sages<sup>55</sup> found no shortage of religious causes for the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, blaming the population for dishonesty, disrespect, violation of Shabbat and much more.

However, just one explanation is brought for the fall of another Jewish community, Kfar Sakhnia, and that explanation is most perplexing:

*Rav Manyumi bar Chilkiyah, Rav Chilkiyah bar Tuvyah and Rav Huna bar Chiyya were sitting together, and they said: If anyone knows something of Kfar Sakhnia in Egypt<sup>56</sup>, let him speak. [One then told of a captive betrothed couple from Kfar Sakhnia who refused to touch each other without halachic marriage. The two others told of the community's commitment to justice.] Abbaye asked Rav Yosef: If they were so righteous, why were they punished? Rav Yosef explained: It is because they did not mourn for Jerusalem, as it is written, 'Be glad with Jerusalem and rejoice in her, all who love her; rejoice with her, all who mourn for her.'*

**Gittin 57a**

רב מניומי בר חלקיה ורב חלקיה בר טוביה ורב חייא הוו יתבי גבי הדדי אמרי אי איכא דשמיע ליה מילתא מכפר סכניא של מצרים לימא... א"ל אביי לרב יוסף ומאחר דהוו צדיקים כולי האי מאי טעמא איענוש א"ל משום דלא איאבול על ירושלים דכתיב (ישעיהו ס"ו) שמחו את ירושלים וגילו בה כל אוהביה שישו אתה משוש כל המתאבלים עליה גיטין נז.

This seems an overly harsh punishment for a community credited with absolute righteousness in both ritual and social matters. Indeed, Maharal was troubled by this; after attributing the fall of Tur Malka to this same flaw, he explained that their downfall was more logical consequence than it was punishment:

*Because Tur Malka was not concerned for Jerusalem, to mourn for Jerusalem, they were destroyed as well. For how could they endure, when they were not concerned for that which enabled them to endure? When the body is separated from the heart, the heart enables the person to endure and so the body does not endure. Therefore, when they did not mourn for Jerusalem, which is like a heart for the body, with Beitar and Tur Malka as the two arms, then they were destroyed.*

**Maharal, Chiddushei Aggadot to Gittin 57a**

ומאחר שלא חשו בטור מלכא לירושלים להתאבל על ירושלים נחרבו גם הם, כי איך יהיה קיום להם אחר שאין חוששין על דבר שהוא קיומם, שכאשר הגוף נחלק מן הלב שהלב הוא קיום של אדם ואז אין קיום לגוף, ולפיכך כאשר לא היו מתאבלים על ירושלים שהיא דומה כמו הלב אל הגוף, וביתר וטור מלכא הם שני זרועות, ולכך נחרבו מהר"ל חידושי אגדות, גיטין נז.

<sup>55</sup> See *Shabbat* 119b, *Chagigah* 14a, and *Bava Metzia* 30b, for example.

<sup>56</sup> There is some debate as to the true location of Kfar Sakhnia.

Maharal's explanation only shifts the question, though: If failure to mourn for Jerusalem was so obviously wrong, how could this righteous community fail to grieve? Indeed, Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Lessin contended that they did mourn, but on a level which was not adequate to their spiritual standing.<sup>57</sup> Others, though, identified specific weaknesses which underlay an actual failure to grieve for the suffering of their brethren in Jerusalem.

## Approach 1: Indifference

One approach, based in the words of the Maharal, is to suggest it was a matter of indifference; they did not believe that the fall of Jerusalem would affect their lives, and so they failed to mourn:

*Because of the blessing they experienced, they felt only joy. Mourning for Jerusalem would have been appropriate, but they did not do so...*

כי מכח הברכה שהיה שם לא היה להם רק שמחה, ולפיכך אף כאשר ראוי להתאבל על ירושלים לא היה זה...

This charge against Kfar Sakhnia is similar to that of Yirmiyahu against the Jews of his day<sup>58</sup> and the Talmud against the general Jewish population of the time,<sup>59</sup> describing them as oblivious to the import of invasion, living in the fearless belief that tomorrow would be identical to today. Kfar Sakhnia never understood what it meant to lose Jerusalem – even as their own community became a center for heretics and early Christians.<sup>60</sup>

Rabbi Yaakov Emden identified the same phenomenon in his own eighteenth century era, and he echoed the Talmudic condemnation:

*Now no one pays attention, wishing to love her, seeking her peace and welfare, longing to see her. In our peace in exile, it appears as though we have already found another Israel, another Jerusalem like her. This is why all of the bad events befall us.*

*If just this sin of failing to mourn Jerusalem properly was on our hands, that would suffice to extend our exile. In my eyes it is the most obvious, greatest and most powerful immediate cause for all of the great, terrible, frightening destructions which have found us in exile. Wherever we have scattered, they have been at our throats, never letting us rest among the nations, in lowliness and suffering and poverty, because this mourning left our heart when we were settled in lands not our own. We forgot Jerusalem; she never entered our thoughts.*

**Siddur of Rabbi Yaakov Emden, Introduction to Laws of Tishah b'Av**

כי עתה אין שם על לב מבקש אהבתה דורש שלומה וטובתה ולא מצפה לראותה כמדומה לנו בהיותינו בשלוח בחו"ל שכבר מצאנו ארץ ישראל אחרת וירושלים אחרת דוגמתה על כן באו עלינו כל הרעות אלמלא לא היה אלא עון זה בידינו שאין מתאבלין על ירושלים כראוי די להאריך גלותינו והיא בעיני הסיבה קרובה היותר גלויה עצומה וחזקה לכל השמדות הגדולות הנוראות המבהילות הרעיונים אשר מצאנו בגלות, בכל מקומות פזורינו על צוארנו נרדפנו לא הונח לנו להרגיע בגוים עם שפלותינו ענינו ומרודנו לפי שיצא האבל הלז מלבנו בהיותנו שוקטים בארץ לא לנו שכחנו את ירושלים ולא עלתה על לבבינו **סידור של ר' יעקב עמדין - פתיחה להל' תשעה באב**

<sup>57</sup> HaMaor sheb'Torah, העונש והאדם.

<sup>58</sup> Yirmiyahu 7:4.

<sup>59</sup> Talmud, Gittin 55b.

<sup>60</sup> Talmud, Avodah Zarah 17a, 27b.

## Approach 2: Jealousy

The charge of indifference rings true in our world, in which the ubiquity of inquiries to rabbis regarding attending sporting events and circuses during *bein hametzarim* suggests a Jewish world which lacks awareness of its own loss. However, it is difficult to imagine such ignorance in the world of two thousand years ago, when the sacking of Jerusalem meant the disappearance of the Beit haMikdash, korbanot and the better part of the Sanhedrin's authority, all pillars of institutional Jewish life. Could the righteous Jews of Kfar Sakhnia have been so blind as to miss this impact?

Maharsha offered a different approach, viewing Kfar Sakhnia's attitude as less insouciant and more hostile:

*Because the hands of the people of Jerusalem were upon other cities in various matters, in wisdom and in pilgrimage for holidays, as seen in Eichah Rabti, people hated them, and they were not pained by the fall of Jerusalem.*

**Maharsha, Chiddushei Aggadot to Gittin 57a**

לפי שהיו אנשי ירושלים ידם על שאר עיירות  
בכמה דברים בחכמה ובעלייתן לרגל כדאיתא  
באיכה רבתי ע"כ היו שונאין אותן ולא נצטערו  
על מפלת ירושלים  
מהרש"א חש"א גיטין נז.

This accusation is difficult to comprehend today, though. We are told of Cuthite hatred of Jerusalem, stemming from centuries of animosity,<sup>61</sup> and we are familiar with jealousy of one human being for another, but how could a righteous Jew harbor hatred for Jerusalem on the basis of its religious authority and political primacy?

## Approach 3: Religious Insensitivity

Rabbi Shlomo ben Rabbi Avraham Binyamin Kluger, grandson of the great Rabbi of Brod and better-known as Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, offered a third explanation for the inadequacy of Kfar Sakhnia's grief: Religious Insensitivity.

As we mentioned at the outset, the sages offered numerous explanations for the Divine wrath evinced in the destruction of Jerusalem. For example:

*Rabbi Avahu said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they stopped reciting Shema in the morning and evening... Rav Hemnuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they kept the children from learning Torah... Ulla said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they lacked shame before each other... Rabbi Yitzchak said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they equated the small and the great... Rav Amram, son of Rabbi Shimon bar Abba, cited Rabbi Shimon bar Abba citing Rabbi Chanina: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they did not rebuke each other... Rabbi Yehudah said:*

אמר רבי אבהו לא חרבה ירושלים אלא  
בשביל שביטלו קריאת שמע שחרית  
וערבית... אמר רב המנונא לא חרבה  
ירושלים אלא בשביל שביטלו בה תינוקות  
של בית רבן... אמר עולא לא חרבה  
ירושלים אלא מפני שלא היה להם בושת  
פנים זה מזה... אמר רבי יצחק לא חרבה  
ירושלים אלא בשביל שהושוו קטן וגדול...  
אמר רב עמרם בריה דרבי שמעון בר אבא  
אמר רבי שמעון בר אבא אמר רבי חנינא  
לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שלא  
הוכיחו זה את זה... אמר רבי יהודה לא

<sup>61</sup> Rambam, Commentary to Mishnah, *Nedarim* 3:8.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because they mocked Torah scholars... Rava said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because trustworthy people disappeared...

### Shabbat 119b

These lessons are important; citing the words of Yeshayah and Yirmiyah, the Sages' rebukes pinpoint sins which did trigger destruction, and so they furnish a critical "to do" list for redemption. However, in closely linking human pain with human guilt, these lessons also offer onlookers the opportunity to turn away from that human pain. Even as people who are approached for aid with finances might respond, "Why don't you get a job," or people approached for aid with medical bills might respond, "Quit smoking," the Jews of Kfar Sakhnia could respond to the suffering of Jerusalemites by saying, "It is a Divine decree; accept it with love, repent, and the suffering will end."

As Rabbi Kluger expressed it:

*When a person suffers tragedy which only afflicts him and his flesh, then anyone who has awe of G-d within him... is obligated to accept the Divine verdict as just and to bless for the bad as he does for the good. This is the path of a person who walks righteously, to suffer all ailments that come upon him with a calm spirit...*

*But if harm comes upon a person and upon others... then that person, who may even suffer more than others, may not calm himself and avoid feeling the pain of others... saying that he accepts it upon himself with love. This is a repugnant trait and an ugly path; one may not accept with love the ailment, pain and trouble of others! One who does so is subject to the curse of our sages, "When Israel is in pain and one of them separates from the community, two ministering angels place their hands on his head and say, 'So-and-so who separated from the community shall not see the comfort of the community.'"*

*It is as they said regarding Kfar Sakhnia... The Sages themselves testified that these people were fully righteous, so how could they not have mourned for Jerusalem?! But this is what we have said: They, like all of Israel, felt the great, overarching damage from the destruction of the place of the house of our G-d, but because they were righteous they rallied themselves and restrained the storm in their spirit, they overcame their sorrow, and they accepted it all with love.*

*This is why they were punished – for the pain and mourning of others, they ought to have torn the seal of their heart, to have mourned and poured forth tears!*

**Siach Shlomo, Eivel Yachid p. 12**

חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שביזו בה תלמידי חכמים... ואמר רבא לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שפסקו ממנה אנשי אמנה...

**שבת קי"ט:**

אמנם כל זה יתכן באם יקרה לו לאדם פרטי אסון הנוגע רק אל עצמו ובשרו אז כל אשר יראת ה' נוססה בקרבן... מחויב להצדיק עליו את הדין ולברך על הרעה כמו על הטובה כי זה דרך כל איש ישר הולך לסבול במנוחת נפש כל התלאות הבאות עליו... אכן שוד ושבר אם יקרו ויאתיו על איש ועל בני אדם יחד... אז אין להאיש שהוא אף כי פגעי הזמן נחתו בו יתר מבזולתו להרגיע את רוחו לבל יצר לו בצרת אחרים... באמרו כי מקבל הוא על עצמו באהבה, זאת היא מדה מגונה ודרך מכוערה דאין לקבל באהבה מכאוב, צער וצרת אחרים, והעושה ככה חולה על ראשו קללת חכמנו ז"ל, "ת"ר בזמן שישראל שרויין בצער ופירש אחד מהם באים שני מלאכי השרת ומניחים ידיהם על ראשו, 'פלוגי זה שפירש מן הצבור אל יראה בנחמת הצבור' וכמו שפי' מאמרם ז"ל באנשי כפר סכניא... אחרי שחכמינו ז"ל בעצמם מעידים עליהם שהיו צדיקים גמורים איך יתכן להיות שלא יתאבלו על ירושלים?! אך היא הדבר שדברנו דגם המה ככל בית ישראל הרגישו גודל השבר הכללי מחורבן מקום בית אלקינו רק מאחר דהיו צדיקים התאמצו לעצור ברוחם הסער והבליגו על יגונם וקבלו הכל באהבה ולכן נענשו דעל צער ואבל אחרים הי' להם לקרוע סגור לבם להתאבל ולשפוך כמים דמעוה שליש

**שיח שלמה - אבל יחיד דף 12**

In this light, it is plausible that a perfectly righteous population like that of Kfar Sakhnia, while well-aware of the cost of the *churban*, and not criminally jealous of another city's centrality, might yet fail to grieve properly for the destruction of Jerusalem. Appropriately accepting the justice of Divine punishment can lead to inappropriately accepting the suffering of another human being.

This last explanation is of particular relevance for today's Jew, living in an age when assignment of blame and castigation for sin is the order of the day. Despite Talmudic statements on the ineffectiveness of modern rebuke,<sup>62</sup> we see no shortage of proclamations indicting one or another sector of the Jewish world for its sins. Service in the Israeli army or failure to serve, use of the Internet or banning of the Internet, rampant materialism or failure to seek gainful employment, we have become adept at identifying the errors of others, and blaming the victim for the foibles which led to his downfall. Perhaps we would be better off with less Kfar Sakhnia, and more Yeshayah: "Be glad with Jerusalem and rejoice in her, all who love her; rejoice with her, all who mourn for her."

May we recognize the pain of our brethren who suffer, and mourn along with them, and so merit to rejoice with them this year in a fully rebuilt Jerusalem.

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<sup>62</sup> See Talmud, *Erchin* 16b.