

How Do We Move Past Tisha B'Av?

We are now in a period called *bein hametzarim* when we mourn the destruction of our Holy Temples. How do we leave this period of *bein hametzarim*? How do we move from experiencing oppression to living a meaningful life free of oppression? In this article, I will show how our rabbis have guided us and we will see how these lessons are relevant to our daily lives.

Our rabbis teach us:

שלשה מרחיבין דעתו של אדם אלו הן דירה
נאה ואשה נאה וכלים נאים.
ברכות נוז:

There are three things that expand the mind (da'at) of a person: a nice home, a nice wife and nice utensils.

Berachos 57b

The nice home represents our bodies.
The nice wife represents our souls.
The nice utensils are the five senses that we use to connect the body to the soul. If we know how to combine these three things: the body, the soul and the senses, we gain a broad perspective on life.

When our rabbis discuss expanding one's mind, they use the term "*da'at*" — wisdom. What is *da'at*? It is gateway to insight and understanding. The Gemara teaches us:

אמר אב"י נקטינן אין עני אלא בדעה במערבא
אמר ר' דודא ביה כולא ביה דלא דא ביה מה
ביה דא קני מה חסר דא לא קני מה קני.
נדרים מא.

Abaye stated: We are of the opinion that the only way to be considered poor is if one



Rabbi Meir Goldwicht

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

lacks wisdom. In the West (Israel) they say: He who has this (wisdom) has everything and if he doesn't have it, what does he have? If he acquired it, what is he lacking, if he didn't acquire it, what has he acquired?

Nedarim 41a

When we use the term *naktinan* (we are of the opinion), it is a matter of practical halacha. One who acquires wisdom has everything. One who has not acquired wisdom, hasn't acquired anything. Wisdom represents connection. The first time we find the word *da'at* in the Torah in reference to man is the verse "*Ve'ha'adam yada et Chava ishto*, the man 'knew' his wife." (Bereishit 4:1). This establishes the word *da'at* as a form of connection. A *bar da'at* is someone who becomes *bar/bat mitzvah*. *Da'at* transforms one from a minor to an adult, someone who knows right from wrong. Our rabbis instituted Havdalah in the beracha of Shemoneh Esrei, which discusses *da'at*, because without *da'at* one cannot distinguish between Shabbat and weekday (Yerushalmi, *Berachot* 9:2). Hashem gives us *da'at* and we can distinguish between the holy and the mundane, between darkness and light.

Our rabbis also teach us:

א"ר אלעזר כל אדם שיש בו דעה כאילו נבנה
בית המקדש בימיו.
ברכות לג.

R. Elazar said: Anyone who has wisdom, it is as if the Holy Temple was built in his days.

Berachot 33a

We can infer the inverse of R. Elazar's statement that one who does not have wisdom, it is as if the Holy Temple was destroyed in his days. The Beit Hamikdash is a place where we can see what a nice home really is. We can see what a nice wife is — we see the Divine presence, we see the hand of Hashem, we see the miracles that were a regular part of the Beit Hamikdash. When we look further, we can see what it means to have nice utensils: the Mizbeach (altar), the Shulchan (table), the Menorah etc. The Beit HaMikdash was a place where Jew and non-Jew alike could recognize how a nice home, a nice wife and nice utensils can expand the mind of a person. However, when the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, we lost our perspective on the nice home, nice wife and nice utensils.

Whenever someone builds a home, he should leave a small area incomplete as a remembrance of the *Churban*. Why? Because we spend a lot of money, time and effort to build beautiful homes for ourselves, but we can never forget what a nice home really is. A nice home is the body that

houses our souls. Similarly, the Beit Hamikdash houses the Shechina. The small square the we leave over in our homes is to remind us not to forget this concept. We must always remember what a nice home really is.

From the time of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, we have lost our sense of a nice home, nice wife and nice utensils. However, as R. Elazar taught us, if we want to restore that concept we have to acquire *da'at* and expand our minds. Every person must build a personal temple. We must build within ourselves, the nice home, the nice wife and the nice utensils.

A “nice home” refers to our bodies. First and foremost, we must follow what the Rambam says (*Hilchot Deiot* chapters 3 and 4) that we need to be healthy in order to serve Hashem properly. We have to eat well, sleep well, exercise and realize that all of these activities are part of our service of Hashem.

A “nice wife” refers to our souls. How do we nurture and recognize our souls? Learning Torah is not enough. There are people who spend a lot of time studying Torah, but don't have pure souls. One area that people can work on is how they relate to others. We must recognize that every time we violate an interpersonal law, it is also a violation of a mitzvah between man and Hashem. In order to elevate our souls, we must have greater sensitivity toward others. Part of our time spent learning Torah should focus on how we can be more sensitive to others.

When Hashem kicked man out of the garden of Eden, he gave Adam and Chava “*kotnot or*,” leather cloaks. According to our rabbis, these cloaks were made from an animal called the *tachash*, which has a very colorful skin. Why did Hashem choose the skin of this particular animal? He was giving Adam

and Chava a message. Different color clothing represents different types of people. When you see someone wearing only white, they look like a health care professional. When you see someone in a black robe, it might be a judge. When you see someone wearing green, it is a soldier. Hashem was telling Adam and Chava that they should not let the color of their clothing define them. They should build up their souls from the inside and let that be what defines them. We should be able to see the soul of a person, whether they are learning Torah, working at the office or playing ball.

The nice utensils represent our senses. Hashem wants us to use these senses properly, to connect the nice home represented by our body with the nice wife represented by our souls. With unprecedented access to “see the world,” our eyes are able to see things never seen before in previous generations. This can present a tremendous opportunity to grow our souls, but it also represents a major challenge. The music we listen to can elevate our souls but can also steer people in the wrong direction. Our rabbis have a term called *shevirat hakeilim*, the breaking of the utensils. This refers to times when our senses are not used to connect the body to the soul, when that connection is broken.

How do we use these senses in a way that can elevate our souls? As we mentioned earlier, the first time the word *da'at* appears in the Torah is when Adam “knew” Chava. The second time, it appears in a different context:

כִּי יִדְעֶתְיוּ לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנֵיו וְאֶת בְּתוּלָתוֹ
אֶחָדָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָוֹ ה' לְעִשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט
לְמַעַן הִבִּיא ה' עַל אֲבֹרָהֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלֵיו.
בראשית יח:ג

I have known him because he commands his children and members of his household to follow him. They follow the path of

God to perform righteousness and justice in order that God can bring to Avraham, that which He has spoken about to him.

Bereishit 18:19

What is the context of the word *da'at*? How is Avraham being complimented? When we see what Avraham really wanted when he asked for a child, we can see why Hashem gave Avraham this compliment.

After Avram rescues Lot, he makes the following statement:

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם ה' אֱלֹקִים מֶה תִּתֶּן לִי וְאֲנֹכִי
הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי וְבֵן מְשֻׁק בֵּיתִי הוּא דִּמְשַׁק אֶלְיֶעֱזֶר:
וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם הֵן לִי לֹא נִתְּתָה זָרַע וְהִנֵּה בֵן
בֵּיתִי יִרְשׁ אֹתִי:
בראשית טו:ב-ג

And Avram said: God my Lord, what can you give me when I am childless and the possessor of my house is Eliezer of Damascus. And Avram said, behold you have not given me children and behold the members of my household will inherit me.

Bereishit 15:2-3

The two verses seem repetitive! Why does Avram state twice that he is concerned that he will be inherited by members of his house? Furthermore, why does it state “And Avram said” twice? Wasn't this a single statement?

The Netziv explains that Avram was addressing two separate issues:

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם וְגו': מֵאִמֵּר שְׁנֵי, וְלֹא הִיָּה בִּיחָד
עִם מֵאִמֵּר הָרֵאשׁוֹן, וְהֵינּוּ מִשׁוּם שֶׁהִשְׁכִּיל
אֲבֵרָהֶם מִמָּה שֶׁלֹּא הִשְׁיֵב הַקֶּב"ה מֵאִוְמָה כִּי
שָׁאֵל שֶׁלֹּא כַּהוֹגֵן לֹמֵר “וְאֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי”
אַחַר שֶׁכִּבֵּר הַבְּטִיחוֹ הַקֶּב"ה עַל זָרַע, מִשׁוּם הַכִּי
חֹזֵר וּפִירֵשׁ שִׁחְתּוֹ. “הֵן לִי לֹא נִתְּתָה זָרַע” דְּכַל
רְצוֹנִי הוּא לְהַשְׁרִישׁ אִמּוֹנַת ה' ע"י זָרַע, וְאַחַר
שֶׁהִגַּעְתִּי לִימֵי זְקֵנָה וְעֵדִיִּין אֵין לִי זָרַע א"כ אֶפְיָלוּ
אוֹלֵיד בְּסוּף יָמַי וְשִׁנּוֹתַי, הֲלֹא אֵךְ “בֵּן בֵּיתִי יִרְשׁ
אוֹתִי,” הֵינּוּ, עֵיקַר מֶה שִׁישׁ לִי בְּעוֹלָם שֶׁהִיא
פְּעוּלָה זוֹ תִּגַּע לְבֵן בֵּיתִי וְלֹא לִזְרַעִי.

And Avram said etc. This is a second statement and was not said together with the first statement. This is because

Avraham understood from the fact that God had not responded at all, that when he said “I am childless” it was an inappropriate request. God had already guaranteed him that he would have children. For this reason [Avraham] made another statement to clarify. “Behold you have not given me children,” my only desire is to instill faith of God through my children and now that I am reaching old age and I have no children, even if I have a child in the last few years of my life, “the members of my household will inherit me.” My main legacy in life will go to my household and not to my children.

Avram never doubted that he would have children. This was promised to him by Hashem. He was, however, concerned about the timing of the fulfillment of the promise. If Avram had a child when he was too old, he wouldn't be able to properly transmit his ideals to his child. If he only had a chance to give him a basic education, then the legacy will be passed on through Eliezer, who spent many more years studying with Avram. But Avram wanted a child who could totally incorporate Avram's values and ideals. Someone who could appreciate the concept of the nice home, the nice wife and the nice utensils. To this request, Hashem responds:

וְהִנֵּה דָבָר ה' אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא יִירָשְׁךָ זֶה כִּי אִם
אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֶּעֶיךָ הוּא יִירָשְׁךָ.
בְּרֵאשִׁית טו:ד

These are God's words to him saying: This one will not inherit you, but rather one who comes from your guts, he will inherit you.

Bereishit 15:4

What does it mean “who comes from your guts?” Do men bear children? R. Shimshon Refael Hirsch explains:

ממעריך, לא “הלציר” או “ירכיק”. הלצים וירכיקים הם חלקים חמריים גרידא של הגוף; ואילו המעים הם משכן הרגשות - בייחוד: של

השתתפות בצער והמיית רחמים. הרי זו מידה יהודית מובהקת, והיא נחלת כל זרע אברהם (עי' יבמות עט ע"א). אפשר ללמד תורה לאחרים ולמסור להם ערכי רוח. אך קשה לשנות ולזכך את האופי; כי מקור המידות והתכונות הוא בעיקר ממעי אבות. אדם ניכר במידותיו ובתכונותיו, לאו דוקא בשכלו. ובנים חייבים תודה להוריהם - על מה שירשו “ממעיהם”. גם זרע כנען יכול להוסיף דעת ולהתחנך לקיום מצוות. אך אי אפשר לחנך אדם להיות בעל רגש יהודי - אנושי. הרגש היהודי עובר בירושה ממעי אברהם אבינו. והקב“ה השתית את בניין עמו על יסוד הנטייה שיש בו מלידה: להתנדב בשמחת לבב לכל מעשה מוסרי וטוב.

“From your guts,” not from your loins or your thighs. Loins and thighs are merely physical body parts. The guts are the repository for one's feelings, specifically for feeling someone's pain and feelings of mercy. This is a foundational Jewish trait and it is the legacy of all descendants of Avraham. One can [easily] teach Torah to others and transmit values to them. However, it is difficult to change and sharpen one's character because the source of our traits and proclivities is from the “guts” of our forefathers. A person can be recognized through his traits and proclivities, not necessarily through his intellect. Children must be grateful to their parents for what they inherit from their “guts.” The people of C'na'an could have studied and trained to fulfill mitzvot. However, they could not have been trained to have Jewish emotions. Jewish emotions are inherited from the guts of Avraham our forefather. God built His nation on the foundation that there is an innate desire to happily participate in all good deeds and self-growth.

The guts represent our innermost feelings. Let's say you hear really good news. You start dancing in the streets. You are the happiest person in the world and anyone who sees you can see your happiness. However, you feel it on the inside, in the guts. On the flipside, if someone receives bad news, they

also feel it on the inside. This is what is meant by the verse in Eicha (1:20) “*mei'ai charmamaru*”— my guts burn. The guts are the home for our feelings. Hashem told Avram that he will have enough time to pass on the feelings of Judaism to his child. Avram was 75 years old when he made his journey to Eretz Yisrael, Yitzchak was born when he was 100, and Avraham died at the age of 175. Avraham had 75 years to pass on the *Yiddishkeit* to Yitzchak, the feelings and emotions that go along with the laws and traditions. This is why Hashem uses the word *da'at* to describe his relationship with Avraham. Avraham placed such a heavy emphasis on bridging the body with the soul through his senses. He appreciated the effort it took to do this and wanted this to be a major part of his legacy. He personified the message that a nice home, a nice wife and nice utensils lead to an expansion of the mind and for this reason, Hashem describes His relationship with Avraham as one of *da'at*.

If we use our utensils — our senses — properly, without *shevirat keilim*, we can experience the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash. Our rabbis state:

אמר רבי שמעון בן חלפתא, לא מצא הקדוש ברוך הוא כלי מחזיק ברכה לישראל אלא השלום.
עוקצין ג:ב

R. Shimon ben Chalfeta said: God only found one utensil that can hold the blessings of Israel: [the utensil of] peace. **Uktzin 3:12**

Our rabbis specifically use the word *k'li*, utensil. The nice utensils are the bond between the body and the soul. It is through our senses, through our emotions and the way we connect our bodies to our souls that we are able to create the perfect utensil, the utensil of peace, which ultimately will lead to the building of the Third Beit Hamikdash.