

# Kinot Insights from members of the YU Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago

## Eicha: Night

Rabbi Reuven Brand

Rosh Kollel

Our custom to read the book of Eicha on Tisha b'Av eve, recorded in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 559:2), is perplexing. When else during the year do we read a Megillah at night? Even on Purim, our nighttime recitation of the book of Esther is followed by a daytime reading, which is the more essential of the two. Why then, on Tisha b'Av, is the prevalent custom to read Megillat Eicha only at night?

Night has unique qualities. The Rambam (Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:13) notes that the essential time to acquire "the crown of Torah," the transformational achievement of Torah, is at night. Why should this be so? The Chovot Halevavot (R' Bachya Ibn Paquda, Shaar Ahavat Hashem, chapter six) observes that night has unique characteristics suitable for spiritual attainment: "At night people are more available and less preoccupied... there are fewer distractions and interactions with other people... there is more quiet, and there is a general sense of solitude and greater focus." Nighttime affords one the opportunity to contemplate with a single-minded focus. Hence, the study of Torah in the quiet of night is unparalleled in its quality and purity. The Rambam cites a verse to support this notion. It is a surprising citation that is layered with meaning:

*Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches;  
pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord;*

**Eicha 2:19**

קומי רני בלילה לראש אשמרות שפכי  
כמים לבך נכה פני אדני  
**איכה ב:יט**

The Rambam calls upon this verse from the book of Eicha, suggesting that the crying voice is the voice of homiletic interpretation, the voice of Torah. Yet, the simple meaning of the text and the overall Megillah itself emphasize a very different voice, a crying of sadness. The double meaning of this verse teaches that the two experiences, the joy of Torah and the sadness of sorrow share a common quality: night.

To capture his horrific experience in the Holocaust in a one-word title, Elie Wiesel chose the word night. The darkness, solitude, loneliness and silent character of night convey the feelings

that he seeks to evoke. This is well understood in light of our verse in Eicha. The characteristics of night, which in times of splendor afford us the crown of Torah, are the same qualities that accentuate the suffering of those gripped by sorrow. Night, the time of solitude and contemplation, becomes a jail for those who can't emotionally extricate themselves from their current situation. It becomes a time for crying and wailing, as the verse describes according to the *pshat*, its primary level of understanding. Night exacerbates suffering and its sadness becomes contagious. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 104b) describes how "one who cries at night, his voice is heard", and "one who cries at night, all of his listeners cry with him." This voice of sorrow reverberates throughout the stillness of the night; it is far more painful and piercing than cries heard during the day.

Perhaps this is why we recite Eicha at night, for night is the time of acute suffering. It is the time when the sorrow of the book will be felt most profoundly and its messages will resonate deeply. The glimmer of hope that we can find within the book of Eicha, the tiny light that still shines in the night of our long exile, is that our voice of sorrow will one day be transformed into a voice of Torah, a crown of redemption.

## קינה ג: בליל זה יבכיון ויילילו בני

ר' חגי עליצור

חבר כולל

הקינה הזו מתבססת על המשנה בתענית (פרק ד, משנה ו):

"חמשה דברים אירעו את אבותינו בשבעה עשר בתמוז וחמשה בתשעה באב בשבעה עשר בתמוז נשתברו הלוחות ובטל התמיד והובקעה העיר ושרף אפוסטמוס את התורה והעמיד צלם בהיכל בתשעה באב נגזר על אבותינו שלא יכנסו לארץ וחרב הבית בראשונה ובשניה ונלכדה ביתר ונחרשה העיר משנכנס אב ממעטין בשמחה".

המשנה מתארת 5 אירועים שאירעו בי"ז בתמוז ובט' באב: הראשון – במדבר, השני – בבית ראשון, השלישי – בבית שני, הרביעי והחמישי – בימי מרד בר כוכבא.

הגמרא שם (תענית כט.) מבארת שבחטא המרגלים נקבע ט' באב ליום בכייה לדורות: "וכתיב 'ותשא כל העדה ויתנו את קולם ויבכו העם בלילה ההוא'. אמר רבה אמר רבי יוחנן: אותה לילה ליל תשעה באב היה. אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא: אתם בכיתם בכיה של חנם - ואני קובע לכם בכיה לדורות." - יש בחטאי המדבר יסוד לכל האירועים שקרו בהיסטוריה שלנו.

הרב קוק, באחד ממאמריו היסודיים ביותר – למהלך האידיאות בישראל – מלמד אותנו, שישנן שתי אידיאות בכל קיבוץ אנושי: אידיאה לאומית ואידיאה אלוהית. הייחוד של עם ישראל הוא ששתי האידיאות האלו אחת הן – הזהות הלאומית שלנו היא ייעודנו האלוהי. אפשר לנתח באמצעות הרעיון הזה את היחס בין י"ז בתמוז לט' באב:

ניתן לומר שנראה שהאירועים של י"ז בתמוז עוסקים בתורה ומקדש – השייכים לאידיאה האלוהית של עם ישראל ואילו ט' באב עוסק בארץ ישראל – השייכת לאידיאה הלאומית של עם ישראל.

יהי רצון שנזכה לכך שהמועד המיוחד של ט' באב, שבו עוסקת הקינה, יהפך לנו למועד המיוחד לגאולה שהיא איחודה של האידיאה האלוהית עם האידיאה הלאומית – קיום התורה בארץ ישראל.

## **Kinnah 10: Eicha Yashva Chavatzeles HaSharon**

Rabbi Dovid Asher

Kollel Fellow

This kinnah mourns the destruction of the Temple's kehuna (priesthood). There were many great personalities and groups of personalities lost throughout our various destructions that could have been our focal point. Why do we specifically focus on the kohanim?

The role of the kohanim in the Beis Hamikdash was complex. On the one hand, they were, in a sense, agents of God, in the role of assessing the sota and tzaraas, and blessing the people. On the other hand, they played the role of agents of the Jewish people, as they wore the breastplate with the names of the tribes; and, of course, they brought korbanos on behalf of the people. Agents generally do not have their own identity, but rather do the bidding of others. But isn't the kohein supposedly of higher rank than the levi or yisrael?

The Kohein Gadol wore the tzitz, or the head-plate, and the words "sanctified to God" were engraved on it. In a sense, he wore a hat saying, "Property of God." Considering his stature and power, one would think that he could do what he wanted to do, when he wanted to do it. However, the reality is that no one in our society had a more regimented life.

The concept of being powerful and having self-determination means that we control ourselves without outside interference. The problem is that as human beings we are constantly engaged and involved with the outside world so we are extremely affected by it to the extent that ignoring outside interference is not a possibility.

The only way to "avoid" the aforementioned obstruction is to involve oneself with the world in a manner that he or she controls. In other words, a regimented lifestyle is actually the key to escape being manipulated. The kohein has more laws than other Jews, and the Kohein Gadol had even more rules than his fellow kohanim. Nevertheless, this reality is the key to understanding the supremacy of the kohanim, not their restrictions. It is precisely their multitude of restrictions that gives them more self-determination and thereby the higher rank.

Our people are referred to as "mamleches kohanim," a kingdom of priests. This distinction is partially related to the limitations placed upon us. At first glance they appear to be inhibiting, but we can learn a different lesson by paying attention to the message of kohanim. If we could see the kohein again as he performs his routine, if we could smell the korbanos, if we could experience his leadership in the ideal way, then we can experience that all important model that living a life as an agent of God is in fact an ideal worth cherishing. Let us strive to appreciate the great loss that was the example set by the service of the kohanim.

## **Kinnah 11: Not Just Leaders**

Rabbi Dovi Bergman

Kollel Fellow

At first glance, the story in kina 11 stands out among the kinnot. It doesn't focus on the destruction of the Temple, or on the subsequent exile, but rather on the death of Yoshiyahu, the

last righteous king of Judah, an event that occurred decades before the churban. We will see that this event foreshadowed the coming tragedy. Yet as we read the kina, we wonder what a story so focused on one individual is doing toward the beginning of the kinnot service.

The story opens as the Egyptian army proudly marches through Israel, on its way to wage war with the Assyrian empire. The Egyptians treated Israel peacefully, merely asking for a clear passage through the land. The prophet Yirmiyahu warns Yoshiyahu not to answer peace with war. Ignoring the prophet's instruction, the king proudly musters his troops belligerently against the vast Egyptian army. The outcome is catastrophic. Yoshiyahu is killed by the Pharaoh's archers, and with his death dies the Jewish people's last hope for repentance. From the very beginning of his reign, Yoshiyahu had led the nation toward repentance. The Navi praises his sincerity as unparalleled since the time of Moshe (Melachim Bet 23:25). Yet, by failing to heed Yirmiyahu's warning, Yoshiyahu fell short as a decision maker. Yoshiyahu had put Klal Yisrael on a path of return that could, perhaps, have staved off the churban. With his death, the question of churban transformed from one of "if" to one of "when."

As told by the kina, the story focuses on one individual, Yoshiyahu. However, Chazal add a layer of context, one that trains our sights on the nation's role in this sad outcome. Yoshiyahu's disobedience of the prophet Yirmiyahu appears brazen. It flies in the face of his role as a righteous hero, a spearhead of religious revival. How can it be that such a flawless leader failed so suddenly? What came over the righteous king to ignore a prophet's warning?

Chazal offer a striking answer, actually hinted at in the kina's fourth stanza. They tell us that Yoshiyahu stumbled because he thought too highly of his people. He thought the Jews had followed his lead and totally eliminated idolatry. Had that been true, the Jewish army would indeed have had nothing to fear (see Taanit 22a,b). Sadly, this was not the case. In truth, many Jews had hidden the idols in their doorposts, where Yoshiyahu's police wouldn't find them (Eichah Rabbah 1:12). Those hidden idols erased the merit that Yoshiyahu needed for victory over the Egyptians. In Chazal's eyes, Yoshiyahu died because the people failed him. They didn't live up to his leadership, to his goal of total repentance. Seen this way, the story challenges us to introspect. We must realize that great leadership will never be enough. A leader can lead, but it is up to the followers to follow. If we are dissatisfied with the state of the Jewish people, the first place to look is not at its leaders. We first must look in the mirror, and ask ourselves if we are ready to be led.

## **Kinnah 21: Martyrdom and Faith**

Rabbi Mordecai Turoff

Kollel Fellow

Kinnah 21 conveys the heart wrenching and haunting lament over the cruel and unusual murder of the ten rabbinic giants who met their end at the hands of the Roman Empire. While this kinnah, as well as a similar passage in the Yom Kippur service, paints a most gruesome picture of the brutal slayings of most of the martyrs, it is the death of Rabbi Akiva that has served as the paradigmatic model of martyrdom throughout Jewish history.

The author's depiction of Rabbi Akiva's killing is culled from the Gemara in Brachos 61B

*When R. Akiba was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the Shema, and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the Kingship of heaven. His disciples said to him: Our teacher, even to this point? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by this verse, 'with all thy soul', [which I interpret,] even if He takes thy soul. I said: When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this? Now that I have the opportunity shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged the word ehad until he expired while saying it. A bath kol went forth and proclaimed: Happy art thou, Akiba, that thy soul has departed with the word ehad!* **Soncino Talmud translation**

בשעה שהוציאו את ר' עקיבא להריגה זמן ק"ש היה והיו סורקים את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל והיה מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים אמרו לו תלמידיו רבינו עד כאן אמר להם כל ימי הייתי מצטער על פסוק זה בכל נפשך אפילו נוטל את נשמתך אמרתי מתי יבא לידי ואקיימנו ועכשיו שבא לידי לא אקיימנו היה מאריך באחד עד שיצתה נשמתו באחד יצתה ב"ק ואמרה אשריך ר"ע שיצאה נשמתך באחד

While the reader of the Gemara and the Kinnah cannot help to be astounded by commitment and conviction expressed in the Tanna's final words of Shema Yisrael, the true heroic actions of Rabbi Akivah can perhaps be best seen in the context of the conversation preceding his demise.

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira (the Piaseczner Rebbe) writing in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1941 explains that Rabbi Akiva saw in his students' question a crisis of faith and doubt in God.

*They wanted their teacher, who was firm in his great faith to say something that would result in bestowing faith upon them... So Rabbi Akiva spoke to them from his experience sharing with them the stages of his spiritual attainment.*

*(Esh Kodesh pg. 140, Translation from Nehemia Polen's "Holy Fire" pg. 29).*

Rabbi Akiva spent his final breaths transmitting faith and belief to his students and quelling their fears and doubts. In doing so Rabbi Akiva truly served as a sign, an inspiration<sup>105</sup> for leaders to rise above their own grief and suffering to help piece together the shattered lives of their students and community.

These are the heroes whom we mourn. *For these do we weep and our eyes overflow.*

## **Kinnah 25: Martyrdom or Suicide?**

Rabbi Noah Baron

Kollel Fellow

This powerful kinnah is the first one that deals with a topic other than the Beis Hamikdash. It describes the destruction that befell the Jewish people of the Rhineland – Worms, Speyer, and Mainz - in Germany during the First Crusade in 1096. During this time period, we know of the heart-wrenching phenomenon of people committing suicide in fear of yielding to torture and

<sup>105</sup> See Masechet Semachot chap. 8 where it describes the impact that Rabbi Akiva's death had on R' Yehuda ben Bava and R' Chanina ben Tradyon.

converting and of parents slaughtering their own children to prevent them from being reared as Christians. What is their halachik basis? <sup>106</sup>

In Mishnaic and Talmudic sources, we mainly see martyrdom as passively allowing oneself to be killed instead of doing certain sins. But during the crusades, we see people killing themselves and their own families to prevent being forced to convert. Indeed, we do find sources in the Aggada of people killing themselves to prevent sin and being praised for it. The gemara (Gittin 57b) speaks about 400 boys and girls who were led into captivity to be taken to brothels. They jumped into the sea and drowned themselves to be saved from this fate. The gemara says they entered the world to come. The martyrs of 1096 were probably also aware of the story of the priests jumping into the fires to be burned along with the Beis Hamikdash, and also the story of the woman whose seven sons were put to death because they refused to commit idolatry, after which the mother committed suicide and is praised by the gemara. The Aggada occupied an important place in early Germany as a source of psak, as valid as any other halachik source, which was not the case in Spain and Babylonia. This importance can be seen in the responsa of Rabbeinu Gershom who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century as well as in Sefer Hasidim which was written in Germany in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The strong attachment of the Jews of the Rhineland to Aggada can readily explain their willingness to kill themselves, but we still do not see a source to permit one to kill one's family. The Book of Josippon was greatly appreciated in early Germany and influenced the way they perceived the events of the second Temple. Rabbeinu Gershom hand copied this book and others copied it from him. He only copied books that he considered holy, including the Bible, the Mishnah, and the Talmud so the fact that he copied Josippon shows how much he valued it. At the end of the book, the self-sacrifice of R. Elazar Ben Yair and his followers in Masada is described as great heroism. Not only did they kill themselves, they also killed their children. Josephus also tells us of 5,000 habitants of Gamla who threw themselves with their wives and children into the valley and died. It is true that the Book of Josippon was found in the Islamic countries as well, but it didn't have the same holy status that it had in Germany. It is not surprising that the Book of Josippon does not appear in the writings of the Ashkenazik sages as of the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century because that is when the teachings of the Spanish sages penetrated France and to a certain extent, Germany. But before that, the Book of Josippon had strong influence in Germany and that was their source for the permissibility to kill the whole family.

## קינה ל"א: אש תוקד בקרבי

ר' אפרים רימל

חבר כולל

מדי שנה בשנה בט' באב, נוהג אני לעלות למקום הקרוב ביותר להר הבית, לבית הכנסת שבתוך בסיס מג"ב הקרוי על שם הרב שלמה גורן זצ"ל, הרב הראשי לצה"ל ולמדינת ישראל. בעיצומו של יום טעון זה שבו אנו מתאבלים על חורבנה של ירושלים וחורבן בית מקדשנו, לומר את הקינה הזאת במקום שממנו רואים איך מתקיימים דברי הנביא ירמיהו במגילת איכה (פרק ה' פס' יח): "על הר ציון ששמם שועלים הלכו בו" ממחיש

<sup>106</sup> This is addressed in an article written by Rabbi Avraham Grossman called "The Cultural and Social Background of Jewish Martyrdom in 1096 in Germany" which was pointed out to me by MZ Binter.

עבורי בצורה הברורה ביותר את המרחק הרב שבו אנו נמצאים כרגע בהסתר פנים לעומת המציאות החסרה של גילויי שכינה תמידי שהיה בזמן שבית המקדש היה קיים.

קינה זו הנאמרת בכל תפוצות ישראל בתפילת שחרית של תשעה באב, מבוססת על המדרש באיכה זוטא יט' ומובאת גם בילקוט שמעוני, איכה:

"בוא וראה משה מקלסם במי יתן, שנאמר מי יתן והיה לבבם זה להם (דברים ה' כ"ה), וירמיה אמר מי יתן ראשי מים (ירמיה ח' כ"ג) ... כשיצאו ישראל ממצרים אמר משה הים ראה וינוס הירדן יסוב לאחור (תהלים קי"ד ג'), וכשיצאו ישראל מירושלים אמר ירמיה על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו (תהלים קל"ז א')..."

על אף האוירה הקודרת בקינה ישנה התייחסות מתמדת לקב"ה והשגחתו על עם ישראל. למשל ההנגדה בין "ביתי התכונן ושכן הענן - בצאתי ממצרים, וחמת אל שכנה עלי כעננה - בצאתי מירושלים".

לומדים מכך שבאמת שתי היציאות המנוגדות כל-כך אחת לשנייה באמת טומנות בחובן קשר הדוק, והוא מציאותו של הקב"ה בהן והשראת שכינתו יתברך. הקינה אינה משווה בין הישיבה בארץ ישראל בימי דוד ושלמה כשבית המקדש בתפארתו ובין הגלות כשבית המקדש בחורבנו, אלא בין יציאת מצרים ליציאת ירושלים. הקינה משווה את שתי נקודות השינוי, כאשר הקדוש ברוך מתגלה במלוא עוזו ומחולל שינוי מהותי בחיי עם ישראל. בנקודת השינוי, ואפילו ביציאת ירושלים, כולם רואים את יד ה' במציאות, המחוללת את השינוי.

בנוהג שבעולם, לאחר השינוי שוקעים לתוך מציאות יומיומית שבה קשה לראות את יד ה' במציאות. לאחר השינוי הגדול מגיע הסתר פנים... אם כן, הטרגדיה של החורבן אינה רק בחורבן עצמו, אלא בעיקר, בגלות שבאה אחריו. הגלות גורמת לכך שלאחר גילויי השכינה מגיע הסתר הפנים. לעומת זאת, ביציאת מצרים לאחר גילויי השכינה, עם ישראל מיועד להגיע לארץ ישראל ולהמשיך את גילויי השכינה בחיי המעשה.

לקינה זו יש מספר שינויי נוסחאות. אחת מהן מתארת בצורה מושלמת, דווקא לאור הניגוד בין יציאת מצרים ליציאה מירושלים, את רוח הדברים שאמרנו, ומסיימת בדברי נחמה על הגאולה העתידה דוקא מתוך החיבור בין שתי היציאות שבהן רואים את יד ה' המשגיחה על המציאות תמיד: "יִרְאֲנוּ נְפִלְאוֹת בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם וְיִשָּׁב שְׂכִינָתוֹ אֶל צִיּוֹן וְעִבְדוּתוֹ אֶל תּוֹךְ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם."

## Kinnah 38: Tzion Ateret Tzvi

Rabbi Michael Teitcher

Kollel Fellow

This kinah, written by R. Elazar ben R. Moshe HaDarshan in 13<sup>th</sup> century Germany, lies in the middle of the group of *tziyyons*. The obvious significance of Zion, or Jerusalem, on Tisha B'Av is clear. We mourn the destructions of the Temples and the loss of the city as a national capitol. But the significance of Jerusalem goes beyond these functions. It was, and is, a city whose intrinsic beauty is to be treasured on its own accord, whose splendor not only reflects the presence of the Temple, but the Divine presence, which permeates its very streets and walls.

As Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik noted, the *Tziyyons* serve a distinct purpose among the kinot. While most kinot are mournfully explicit recordings of destruction and persecution, these kinot are not heavily focused on the mourning per se. Instead, we turn our focus to the beauty that has been lost, in order to allow us to mourn more honestly. We reawaken the old transcendent feelings that could only be conjured up in the city's presence. It is a place of spiritual vibrancy, the site of joyous public celebration during festivals, and the refuge in which sinners and the religiously downtrodden seek the shelter of God. More than lamentations, these kinot are really

odes paying homage to the splendor of Jerusalem. By understanding the glory we can better feel the pain of its loss.

The prophet Daniel described greater Eretz Yisrael as *eretz hatzvi* (Daniel 11:16). As noted by Rav Saadiah Gaon (10th cen.), this description is related to the Hebrew word צבא, referring to a military stronghold. Eretz Yisrael provides the Jewish people with a spiritual fortress, from which the lifeblood of the people is safeguarded and pumped to its people both within the land's borders and in the Diaspora.

What Eretz Yisrael is on a macro level, Jerusalem is on a smaller scale. It is at once the seat of the nation's power and symbolic of the reason for the land's significance. Its walls protected the most effective tools we had to live a life of Divine experience. The altar, the ark, the songs of the Levites, all served as catalysts to inspire pilgrims to the city. We have been deprived of these tools, making our spiritual journeys that much more difficult to realize.

Our kinnah ends with expression of the deep yearning we strive to feel for our lost city. We pine for its return to glory with unbridled passion. Finally, we are charged with a call to action:

*Wake up to greet your beloved! Shake yourself from the dust of the ground, when He returns to your palace.*

הַתְּעוֹרְרִי לְקִרְאֵת דּוֹדְךָ וְהִתְנַעֲרִי מִן הָאֲדָמָה  
בְּשׁוּבוֹ אֶל מְעוֹנֶיךָ

In our time, when faced with signs of the return of Jerusalem's splendor, let us make every effort to feel the restlessness that shakes us from our deep slumber. Let it cause us to joyously spring to our feet and embrace the spiritual inspiration embodied in the crown jewel of all cities.