

Tzom Gedalia's Relevance **Rabbi Maury Grebenau**

With many of the fast days it is not uncommon for people not to be fully aware of the reason for the fast. Even when people are aware of the reason for the fast it can be difficult to connect to things which occurred so far in the past. Connecting a day with more recent events can help us to understand the day more clearly.

Tzom Gedalia recalls the murder of Gedalia at the hands of another Jew, Yishmael. Gedalia was a Jewish governor in Israel appointed by Nevuchadnezer (See Yirmiyahu Ch. 40 and Melachim Bet Ch. 25 for the fuller story). Having a governor in Israel allowed the Jewish keep to keep a modicum of autonomy even while they were under the rule of another power. Gedalia was murdered by another Jew on the 3rd of Tishrei and we fast in his memory. The question is why this tragedy deserves a fast. No doubt it is terrible when a Jew kills another Jew but unfortunately this has happened a number of times in our history without having a specific fast day for each event.

The Maharsha (Rosh HaShanah 18b) points out a number of specific aspects which make this situation different. One critical piece was the effect on the Jewish people. Once the leadership in Israel had been toppled by another Jew the Jews were no longer given the autonomy to rule themselves. This was just one more step in the exile and just as many of the other fast days, represented another step moving away from a built up Beit HaMikdash in Israel and more towards exile.

The Maharsha also points out that the fact that this took place during the 10 days of repentance (from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur) exacerbates the tragedy here. How could a Jew come out of two days of prayer and introspection and then murder another Jew?! Even if Yishmael was not in shul, the fact that such an act could happen at such a time for introspection makes it all the more heinous. This is an excellent beginning to understand the nature of the day and one more parallel may help us to bring it home.

Herman Wouk, a Pulitzer Prize-winning Jewish American author, writes¹ about being present at the funeral of Yitzchak Rabin. The prime minister of Israel at the time, had just been killed by Yigal Amir for his political views. Mr. Wouk passed a rabbi that he knew during the procession and said just two words to him: "Tzom Gedalia." The rabbi nodded in agreement and they both moved on.

Mr. Wouk aptly and succinctly compares the events of Tzom Gedalia to the murder of a Jewish official by another Jew for his position or opinions. We don't have as much information as to the aftermath of Gedalia's murder and how it painted the Jews in the larger world and

¹ Introduction to his book *The Will to Live on: The Resurgence of Jewish Heritage* (2000)

within our own people. Comparing this event to Rabin's murder can help us to gain perspective. In the wake of Rabin's murder there was profound shock and sadness and a need to look deeply into how some of the discussions about politics were occurring. We can imagine Gedalia's murder as a time of profound chillul Hashem and a sense of hopelessness as we slipped entirely into exile and away from our homeland. It is a day to be used for introspection and a renewed commitment to be able to work out our differences together as one nation.