

Tisha B'Av and the Sin of the Meraglim

וַתִּשָּׂא כָּל הָעֵדָה וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶת קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכוּ הָעָם
בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא.
בַּמִּדְבָּר יָדָא

*The whole community lifted their voices
and the nation cried that night.*

Bamidbar 14:1

מאותו שעה נגזר עליהם חורבן הבית שהרי
ליל ט' באב בכו ואמר הקב"ה הם בכו בכיה
של חנם ואני אקבע להם בכיה לדורות.
רש"י, תהלים קו:כז

*At that moment, the destruction of
the Temple was decreed, because the
night that they cried was Tisha B'Av so
HaShem said, "They cried for nothing, I
will establish crying for generations."*

Rashi, Tehillim 106:27

The two Batei Mikdash
were destroyed on Tisha
B'Av and we mourn every
year on this night and day. Yet the
inception of our yearly mourning
was the *cheit hameraglim*, the sin
of the spies recorded in *Parashas
Shelach*. It behooves us to analyze the
connection.

The Purpose of Churban Beis Hamikdash

יש שם ימים שכל ישראל מתענים בהם מפני
הצרות שאירעו בהן כדי לעורר הלבבות
ולפתוח דרכי התשובה ויהיה זה זכרון
למעשינו הרעים ומעשה אבותינו שהיה
כמעשינו עתה עד שגמר להם ולנו אותן
הצרות שבזכרון דברים אלו נשוב להיטיב
שנאמר והתודו את עונם ואת עון אבותם וגו'.
רמב"ם, הל' תעניות ה:א



Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

*There are days when all of Israel fasts
because of the troubles that occurred on
[those days] in order to arouse our hearts
to open the paths of repentance and to
serve as a commemoration of our evil
actions and the actions of our forefathers
whose actions, like ours, caused troubles
for them and for us. By commemorating
these things, we will repent and do good
things as it states, "they shall confess their
sins and their fathers' sins."*

Rambam, Hilchos Ta'anios 5:1

It is apparent from the Rambam that
the destruction of the two Temples
and the other disasters associated with
Tisha B'Av have a double function:
1) They are punishments for our
evil deeds; 2) They are stimuli for
repentance and to do better things.

The Sin of the Spies

The original sin of Tisha B'Av was
the *cheit hameraglim*. Within that sin
clearly lies the core cause of all of
the subsequent sins that led to the
churban of the Batei Mikdash. What
was the core sin of the spies? In a very
long analysis of the *cheit hameraglim*,
the Ramban, in his *Commentary on the
Torah*, quotes the verse in Tehillim:

וַיִּמָּאֲסוּ בְּאֶרֶץ חֲמֹדָה לֹא הֶאֱמִינוּ לְדְבָרוֹ: וַיִּרְגְּנוּ

בְּאַהֲלֵיהֶם לֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹל ה': וַיִּשָּׂא יָדוֹ לָהֶם
לְהַפִּיל אוֹתָם בְּמִדְבָּר: וּלְהַפִּיל זֶרְעָם בְּגוֹיִם
וּלְזַרְוֹתָם בְּאַרְצוֹת:
תהלים קו:כד-כז

*They loathed the precious Land and did
not trust His word, they complained in
their tents and did not listen to the voice
of G-d. He raised His hand for them
to die in the desert and to scatter their
children among the nations and disperse
them in all countries.*

Tehillim 106:24-27

This verse explicitly connects the
cheit hameraglim with the great Exile
and Diaspora of the Jews throughout
the world for centuries, which itself
was the result of the *churban Beis
Hamikdash* (destruction of the
Temple). What is the core sin that is
highlighted in these verses? "They did
not trust His word." The core sin was
a lack of faith in G-d's words, a lack of
trust and reliance on G-d.

It is true that the *meraglim* and the
Jews were terrified by the powerful
native inhabitants of Israel. Thus, a
military and historical perspective
was justified. Yet the Torah demands
of us, the Jewish people, a different
perspective — the perspective of faith.

Our sages say:

בא חבקוק והעמידן על אחת שנאמר וצדיק
באמונתו יחיה.
מכות כד.

Chabakuk established the single most important of all principles when he said, "The righteous person lives with his faith."

Makkos 24a

Whether it is faith in Hashem, faith in the Torah, faith in the Jewish people, faith in Jewish destiny, faith in Mashiach, faith in redemption, or faith in a better, more perfect world, faith is the core belief of the Torah. It is our charge and responsibility. It is central to who we are as G-d's chosen people.

Yes, Eretz K'na'an was terrifying for the *meraglim* and the newly freed Jewish people. But where was their faith? Faith is not just for easy, comfortable times. Faith is true for all times. Faith must be there especially in times of challenge and crisis.

Tzadik be'emunaso yichyeh, the righteous live with faith — at all times, especially in times of crisis. The core sin of the *meraglim* was lack of faith in Hashem during a terrible

crisis. As such, we can conclude that all of the other disasters which we commemorate on Tisha B'Av — especially the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash — were all a result of lack of faith in Hashem and His Torah. Yes, there were terrible crises, foreign dominations, wars, assimilation, internal disunity and dissent among the Jews, which preceded the destructions of the Batei Mikdash. However, had we had sufficient faith, we would have overcome these crises. But we lacked faith. We did not trust G-d's promises, words and protocols sufficiently and the crises overwhelmed us just as that first crisis of faith at the time of the *meraglim* overwhelmed our forefathers in the Sinai desert.

Tisha B'Av as Rectification

As the Rambam points out, the Torah's view of national disasters is twofold: 1) it is punishment for our evil deeds; 2) it challenges us to do teshuva, to rectify our evil-doing.

Certainly the destruction of our Batei Mikdash, the city of Yerushalayim, and our dispersion throughout the Diaspora, wreaked horrific punishment upon us. But how have we used the Diaspora experience as a way to rectify our sins?

The answer is simple. Tisha B'Av is the greatest act of Jewish faith! If the core sin that caused our punishment was lack of faith, then Tisha B'Av is the greatest reaffirmation of our own *emunah* — eternal Jewish faith.

The story is told that Napoleon Bonaparte was fascinated by Jewish survival and wanted to discover their secret of survival. One Tisha B'Av night, he walked to the Jewish synagogue in disguise and saw all

of the Jews on the floor crying by candlelight. He inquired about this and was told that today is Tisha B'Av, the time for national Jewish mourning for the Beis HaMikdash. He then said, "If a nation can mourn and cry for its ancient Temple for more than 1,700 years, then that nation will see its Temple rebuilt." This apparently inspired Napoleon to take an interest in rebuilding the Beis HaMikdash.

Napoleon had discovered the secret of Jewish survival — faith. Despite the Diaspora, Jewish faith was exceedingly strong. The Jews always believed there would be a Third Temple. Therefore, they never stopped crying over the first two Temples.

כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה
בשמחתה.
תענית ל:

He who mourns for Jerusalem will surely merit happiness [when it is rebuilt].

Ta'anis 30b

על המת נגזרה גזרה שישתכח מן הלב ולא על
החי.
רש"י, בראשית לו:לד

When someone dies, there is a heavenly decree that allows the death to be forgotten, but [this decree] does not apply to someone who is alive.

Rashi, Bereishis 37:34

Death is final. We shouldn't mourn the dead forever. Life goes on and the period of mourning for the dead has a limited time frame. If someone is alive but has disappeared, his family must never forget him and must incessantly work for his release!

The Jewish Temple is not dead forever, G-d forbid. It has disappeared only to come back! Therefore our mourning — our commemoration — is unending. Our sages call the mourning of Tisha B'Av "*aveilus*

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yeshana” — old mourning. It goes on and on because we believe in the rebuilding of the Temple in our own time.

We believe. We have faith in Hashem, in His words, in His Torah, in the promises and prophecies of redemption. Tisha B’Av is the greatest act of Jewish faith. Faith is the core testimony of Tisha B’Av. Through Tisha B’Av, the ultimate redemption will come.

Jewish Faith Today

When we look at the Jewish people today, we are absolutely astonished at

our people’s incredible faith. We are a scant 70 years since the Holocaust when we lost six million brothers and sisters in an unspeakable unique disaster. Yet today, we have more than six million brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisrael. Our people did not panic and flee Jewish destiny because of the Holocaust. On the contrary, with incredible faith and courage, we returned with G-d’s help to our Holy Land, rebuilt its wastelands and the ancient holy capital of Israel, Yerushalayim. This despite endless wars and terrorism, animosity and world-wide opposition to our nation. Our return is clearly a miracle after

over 1,900 years of Diaspora. No sea has split, no manna has fallen from Heaven, but yet we are miraculously in Eretz Yisrael. What is the secret of this Jewish return?

Emunah — Jewish faith. The 1,900-plus commemorations of Tisha B’Av have worked. Our faith is still incredibly strong. We have thereby returned to Medinat Yisrael, with G-d’s help, forever. *Tzadik be’emunaso yichyeh*, the righteous one lives with his faith. This is our faithful generation. May G-d bless it speedily with the full redemption.