

Introduction:

Tein li Yavneh vechachameha!

As we read the story of *churban Habayis*, the destruction of the Holy Temple, we learn about a number of leaders who distinguished themselves in navigating the Jewish people through the trauma of destruction, while simultaneously building a foundation for a future survival. Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai, recognizing the danger of the zealots escalating the confrontation with the Romans, clandestinely makes his way out of Yerushalayim. He encounters Vespasian, and immediately predicts the Roman leader's impending ascendancy to the emperorship of Rome. In return for this extraordinary act, Vespasian provides Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai with the opportunity to make three requests. The most ambitious and dramatic request made is "*Tein li Yavneh vechachameha*, Give me [the city of]



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Yavneh, and its Torah scholars."

The language seems peculiar; why not simply say "*Tein li chachmei Yavneh*, give me the Torah scholar of Yavneh?" It appears that Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai was trying to convey that not only were the Torah scholars themselves central to the perpetuation of the Jewish people, the community within which they find themselves plays an equal role in the vitality of their leadership. Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai understood that it is the interface between the Torah leaders and the community where the eternal strength of the Jewish people finds its

most poignant expression. He wasn't only trying to save the substance of Torah thought; he was also attempting to rescue the paradigm of communal infrastructure that allows that leadership to serve the community.

On Tisha B'av, we mourn the extraordinary loss of talmidei chachamim, yeshivos, and even seforim throughout Jewish history. Yet some of the Kinnot address the communal contexts within which our scholarship thrived. It is the customs and culture of Jewish communities that provide the framework for the vibrancy of our continued commitment to Torah and mitzvos. The synergy that develops between communal institutions and Torah leaders is paramount to developing a thriving Jewish community. Tisha B'av is a time to reflect on the hundreds of Jewish communities that we have lost over the centuries, and devote ourselves to investing in our own, to ensure an enduring and inspiring impact upon the next generation.

May this be our final Tisha B'av in the Galut, and may we all find ourselves reestablishing our communities in Eretz Yisrael, *bimheira biyameinu*, speedily and in our days.

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