

How to Make This Our Last Tisha B'av

The Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 9a) makes the following statement about the maximum length of world history:

ששת אלפים שנה הווי העולם שני אלפים
תוהו שני אלפים תורה שני אלפים ימות
המשיח.

The world is destined to exist for 6,000 years: the first 2,000 were nothingness, the second 2,000 were years of Torah, the final 2,000 years are ready for Mashiach.

The first 2,000 years were the years that preceded the birth of Abraham. Before his arrival, idol worship had taken a firm grip on the world's inhabitants to such a degree that a simple belief in one God was seen as lunacy. We are told that at a very young age, Abraham started to contemplate the amazing world around him and began believing in one ultimate God as Unity in the universe. This stage of world history devoid of knowledge of God and filled with ungodly idol worship is called *tohu vavohu*, or amazing nothingness.

The second set of 2,000 are called the years of Torah, as the rise of Abraham and his Godly teachings culminated with the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai in the Jewish year 2448. From that point on, the world was filled with knowledge and fulfillment of Torah.

Following the 2,000 years of Torah, the last set of 2,000 are fitting for



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the redemption of the world and the coming of the Mashiach. As Rashi explains (*Avodah Zarah* 9a), after the fourth millennia, the Messiah should have come and released Israel and the Jewish people from the domination of the nations.

The Four Exiles

Over the course of Jewish history, the Jewish people have been subjected to four exiles. The prophet Daniel foretold that during these four exiles, the Jewish people would find themselves subjected to four kingdoms: the Babylonian, Media/Persian, Greek, and lastly the Roman kingdom of Edom. Although some have written of a possible fifth exile at the end of days, the four of which Daniel and others spoke of are the main exiles that would torment our people for thousands of years.

A central theme of all the prophecies of every prophet of Israel is that we have control over our destiny. If we sin, we are punished, and if we repent, we can make things right again.

Nowhere is this more evident than the last of these four exiles, the exile

of Edom. This final exile is considered very different from all the three that preceded it, because, unlike the others, this fourth exile was given two potential end times. Let's see these times in the prophecy of Isaiah.

The prophet Isaiah (60:22) said this about the end of days when the final exile would come to an end:

הקטן יהיה לאלף והצעיר לגוי עצום אני ה'
בעתה אחישנה.

The smallest will increase a thousand fold, and the youngest into a mighty nation, in its time, I will hasten it.

This last expression is worth examining: “in its time” (*be'itah*), “I will hasten it” (*achishena*). It seems as though Isaiah was seeing contradictory visions, and they are appearing in the same verse. Either God brings the end in its appointed time, or He will hasten it, it can't be both. The Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 98a, resolves this apparent contradiction by making the following statement: if we merit it, God will hasten the redemption — *achishena*, and bring us our long-awaited Messiah. If, however, we do not merit the early intervention of the Messiah, we are still guaranteed of his arrival, but that will occur at the end of the

6,000 years — *be'itah*.

As the Chofetz Chaim (*Zechor L'Miriam*, Ch. 18) writes,

כתיב הנה אנכי שולח לכם את אליהו הנביא,
וכאשר נדייק היטב נראה דלא כתיב לשון
אשלה שמשמע לעתיד אלא כתיב שלח
בחולם לשון הוה, וכונתו יכול אני לשלוח
אותו לכם בכל עת ובכל זמן רק אם תזכו לזה.
*The prophet Malachi tells us, "Behold,
I send you Eliyahu HaNavi" (Malachi
3). When one pays careful attention one
sees it is not written in the future tense,
eshlach — "I will send," but rather
sholeach — "I send" in the present tense.
This implies that God can send him to
us at any time and any moment — if we
would only merit it!"*

According to Isaiah, this present exile that we are currently experiencing can come to an early end. However, in order for that to happen, and thereby merit the coming of the Mashiach, the rebuilding of the Third and final Temple in Jerusalem, and the return of our people to their destined homeland, we need to accrue certain merits. What exactly are these merits that would bring an end to our exile and do away with all the related fast days connected to the destruction of our First and Second Temples, including Tisha B'av?

Bringing the Galut to its Early End Time

The *Sfas Emes*, (Re'eh, 5641) writes that we can bring the redemption by loving our fellow Jews:

כיון שעל ידי שנאת חנם נחרב, כל שכן שעל
ידי אהבת ישראל יהיה נבנה.
*Since the Temple was destroyed by
baseless hatred, therefore, it will surely be
rebuilt by loving our fellow Jews.*

This, says the Chasam Sofer, is alluded to in the Ha Lachma Anya section of

the Pesach Haggadah. In Ha Lachma Anya, we are shown that we can expedite our redemption through good deeds, specifically those deeds that involve mitzvot that are *bein adam l'chaveiro*. The Chasam Sofer explains that this is why at the beginning of the Passover seder we invite guests into our homes saying, "Whoever is hungry, come and join the seder," and then we begin to discuss the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. In the merit of taking care of our fellow Jews, we can redeem ourselves from exile. Thus, the Pesach seder culminates with the hope and prayer of the final and greatest redemption, the rebuilding the Temple and the statement "Next year in Jerusalem." It all starts, however, with taking care of guests.

Indeed, the Gemarah, *Gittin* 55b, states that Jerusalem was destroyed because of the story involving Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, a story of an uninvited guest who was rejected because of *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred. In the story, a certain man had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy called Bar Kamtza. He once made a party and said to his servant, "Go and bring Kamtza." The man went and brought Bar Kamtza, presumably Kamtza's son.

When the man who gave the party found Bar Kamtza there he said, "You are my enemy; what are you doing here? Get out!" To avoid the incredible shame he must have felt at this slight to his honor, Bar Kamtza responded "Since I am already here, let me stay, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink." The host refused. After much negotiating paying for different amounts of the feast, the host ejected Bar Kamtza, who left feeling a considerable amount of embarrassment. This event, says

the Gemara, was the catalyst for the eventual destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. This story demonstrates the exact opposite of what the Pesach seder demands of us, inviting others to our Pesach seder, and thereby taking care of their physical and spiritual needs.

The Chafetz Chaim writes that Mashiach will come when we maintain peace in our communities by eradicating both baseless hatred and speaking in derogatory ways about others:

והנה כתבו הספרים בשם הזה"ק דבי כנישתא
חדא אם היו שומרים מדת השלום כדבעי
יכולים לזכות לביאת המשיח א"כ ביאת
המשיח תלוי בדינו וידוע דמדת השלום אין
אנו יכולים לזכות בו רק אם נהיה זהירים
מתחלה מעון שנאת חנם ולשון הרע.

*It is written in the name of the Holy
Zohar that even one congregation that
maintains peace properly can merit
bringing the Mashiach. Therefore, the
coming of the Mashiach is dependent
upon us. And it is known that preserving
peace can only be accomplished if we are
careful in avoiding both baseless hatred
and speaking derogatorily of one another.
Each individual who endeavors to rectify
these shortcomings will have a share in
rebuilding the future Temple; without
this, the Temple could remain destroyed
forever, God forbid.*

Shmirat HaLashon, 2:7

Taking Revenge and Bearing Grudges

Two areas of *bein adam lachaveiro* mitzvot that we can sometimes overlook are *lo tikom*, not taking revenge, and *lo titor*, not bearing a grudge. Not taking revenge or bearing a grudge seem to play a central role in the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, and therefore apply to Tisha

B'Av. On Tisha B'Av, these are areas we need to work on. The Chafetz Chaim in his concise list of mitzvot, which are mitzvot we are able to perform today, lists these two negative commandments as their own separate prohibitions. He defines revenge as repaying a person who has harmed you in the same way they treated you. If you asked to borrow an item from someone, and he refuses, and then he wishes to borrow one of your items that normally you would have lent, but you don't in order to exact revenge, you have violated a Torah prohibition.

Bearing a grudge is connected to taking revenge, but potentially could be much worse. If, in the above example, after not lending you an item, your friend asks you for something, and unlike in the "revenge" scenario **you do** lend them, but you keep hatred in your heart by saying or maybe even thinking, "I am not like you, I am kind and caring, and I lend things," you have transgressed the prohibition against bearing a grudge. The challenge with bearing a grudge is that unlike revenge, the hate is less evident and may only remain in your heart. This is exactly what the Torah wanted to avoid.

The Chafetz Chaim refers to these two character defects as *raot meod*, extremely bad. He then gives a short piece of advice on how to overcome them: "all matters and concerns of this world are 'hevel' (vapid) nonsense and triviality, and it is not worth taking revenge over them." His use of the word "hevel" is I'm sure deliberate, and reminds us of the words of Shlomo HaMelech at the start of Kohelet, when he calls all of existence "*hevel havalim*," vanity of vanities. The word *hevel* also means steam. Steam looks and feels real, it can even burn you,

but it is just air that will soon dissipate.

Had the players in the Kamtza and Bar Kamtza story been attentive to all of these ideas, and given up on their desire for revenge, bearing a grudge, and holding anger in their hearts, and been careful with their words of *lashon harah*, perhaps the Beit Hamikdash would still be standing today. Of course to rebuild it, maybe these are a few areas of *bein adam lachaveiro* we can all work on. Let's examine another area of Jewish life that Chazal tell us can also bring the present exile to an end: Shabbat.

Just One Shabbos and We'll All Be Free

The Gemara in *Shabbat* 10b, states that Shabbat is the only mitzvah that Hashem refers to as a *matana tova*, a great gift. The commentators have different opinions as to what exactly is the nature of the gift of Shabbat. One opinion is that the gift is the great reward we receive for keeping Shabbat. Another opinion is that the great gift that comes with observing Shabbat is the speedy redemption of the Jewish people from their exile. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 118b) quotes Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai who said:

אלמלי משמרין ישראל שתי שבתות כהלכתן
מיד נגאלים

If the Jewish people keep two Sabbaths, they would be immediately redeemed.

According to the *Midrash Rabbah* (Shemot 25:12), the power of Shabbat is such that even one Shabbat would suffice to redeem the Jewish people.

What is it about Shabbat that gives it this ability of shortening the exile? The midrash explains that since Shabbat is equal to all of the mitzvot in the Torah, by keeping Shabbat we are effectively keeping all of the

mitzvot, even those that we are incapable of keeping today. The merit of all Jews keeping Shabbat is enough to bring the redemption and end our current state of exile.

The redemptive quality of Shabbat was historically recognized not only by the Jews, but even by enemies of the Jews. The Gemara in *Megillah* (12b) tells us that Vashti would humiliate the Jewish women by making them violate Shabbat. What did Vashti hope to achieve by tormenting her Jewish subjects in this way? Rav Yonatan Eibshitz (*Yaarot Dvash* 2:2) says that this testifies to the incredible power of Shabbat that even an evil person like Vashti felt the importance of that special day, and by making the Jewish women break Shabbat, she could keep them in exile and prevent their redemption. [Her plan did not work as these women were forced to break Shabbat and were not held liable for their actions. Hashem acted *mida keneged mida*, measure for measure, against Vashti, and that's why the Megillah itself tells us she met her demise "on the seventh day," which was Shabbat.]

Only a minority of Jews observe Shabbat. Is it realistic to assume that all Jews will become observant of Shabbat? We might respond: Who knows the value of every Jew? Maybe one new shomer Shabbat person is considered an entire world? We can take it upon ourselves if possible to invite a non-observant Jew to our home for Shabbat so they can taste the beauty of a real Shabbat. Or perhaps the Gemara is intended for those who are already shomer Shabbat. The Gemara is asking us all to improve our observance by reviewing the halachot of Shabbat and spending our precious time on Shabbat more wisely. What

are we discussing at the Shabbat table? How are we acting toward others on this special and holy day? We all can get more out of Shabbat, which Hashem Himself called an *oneg*, delight.

If Our Ancestors Couldn't Do It, How Can We?

There is a principle of *yeridot ha'dorot*, the decline of the generations. Each generation is a little weaker spiritually than the previous generation. How then can we be expected to merit the Mashiach if those great people who preceded us couldn't? This question is tackled by Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (*Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Vol. IV, pp. 301–2), where he gives us a rather reassuring answer.

He writes that although it's true that previous generations of Torah scholars were superior to us in terms of their Torah learning and mitzvah observance, that doesn't mean their merit was any greater than ours. As he puts it:

מה תועלת בגלות, הרי הדורות פוחתים והולכים, ואיך יבוא התיקון? אבל האמת היא שככל שהדורות מתקטנים והסביבה מתרחקת יותר מתורה, הקידוש השם שבכל נטיה קלה לתורה ולעבודת ה' מתרבה ומתגדל עד אין שיעור ... שעתה גברה מאד הסטרא אחרא והמעט שעושים עתה חשוב לפניו יתברך כהרבה שעשו הראשונים.

What is the benefit of our exile; our generations grow increasingly out of touch with spirituality, how can the rectification of the world be possible? The truth is that as the generations become distanced from Torah, any involvement with Torah study and mitzvot tremendously sanctifies the Name of God ... now, the force of the Sitra Achra, evil, is great, and whatever little is achieved now is considered by God on par with the great deeds that were accomplished by the earlier generations.

So although we are far from the spiritual achievements of our ancestors, Hashem looks at the environment each generation finds itself in. Hashem is looking for quality of service, not necessarily the quantity of it. Each person is required to improve themselves in relation to the

circumstances they find themselves in. Though we live in spiritually challenging times, we shouldn't be despondent because, as the Chafetz Chaim (*Zechor L'Miriam*, Ch. 18) reminds us:

ש"אין הקב"ה רוצה ממנו גדולות ודברים שאי אפשר לנו להשיגם אלא כל אחד ואחד לפי מה שהוא כפי יכולתו.

God does not expect from us great accomplishments and things that are impossible for us to achieve. Rather each person should strive to accomplish what is within his capability.

We all have our areas to work on and improvements to make in our spiritual service *bein adam laMakom* and *bein adam lachaveiro*. *Bein adam lachaveiro* and *bein adam laMakom* are represented by the way we treat others and the importance we give toward Shabbat. If we can invest our energies toward these two areas of spiritual life, then God willing, this will be our final Tisha B'av and we'll see the coming of Mashiach and the rebuilding of the Third and final Beit Hamikdash speedily in our days.

