



MOVING ON FROM CHURBAN

Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai instituted several rabbinic enactments to preserve the memory of the Beis Hamikdash within the consciousness of the Jewish people. He believed that the destruction of the Temple was not simply a historical experience that needed to be recorded and recalled, but an event that must animate aspects of our contemporary religious experience.

בראשונה היה הלולב ניטל במקדש שבעה ובמדינה יום אחד משחרב בית המקדש התקין רבן יוחנן בן זכאי שיהא לולב ניטל במדינה שבעה זכר למקדש, ושיהא יום הנף כולו אסור. *In the beginning, the lulav was taken in the Temple all seven days [of Sukkos] and elsewhere on the first day. When the Temple was destroyed, Rav Yochanan ben Zakai instituted that the lulav is taken in all places all seven days as a remembrance for the Temple; [and he instituted] that [chadash (new grain)] is prohibited the entire day of the omer offering. [Although without the Mikdash, chadash should be permitted immediately the morning of the 16th of Nissan, R. Yochanan was concerned that one day, the Mikdash will be rebuilt and chadah will once again be prohibited until the omer offering and people will have been*

accustomed to permitting it first thing in the morning. Therefore, he instituted that it is prohibited the entire day.]

Mishna, Rosh Hashanah 30a

The lulav is now part of our entire Sukkos experience, in order to recreate the spiritual energy of the Temple within the context of our own Diaspora Sukkos observance. The laws of *chadash* and *yashan* must be halachically recalibrated in deference to the ever-present possibility of the Mikdash being rebuilt — at any moment.

While these decrees ensured that we always preserved the memory of the Mikdash through halachic life, they did not address how the Jewish people would relate to the trauma and loss of the destruction of the Temples. The Gemara teaches:

ת"ר כשחרב הבית בשניה רבו פרושין בישראל שלא לאכול בשר ושלא לשתות יין נטפל להן ר' יהושע אמר להן בני מפני מה אי אתם אוכלין בשר ואין אתם שותין יין אמרו לו נאכל בשר שממנו מקריבין על גבי מזבח ועכשיו בטל נשתה יין שמנסכין על גבי המזבח ועכשיו בטל אמר להם א"כ לחם לא נאכל שכבר בטלו מנחות ... פירות לא נאכל שכבר בטלו בכורים ... אמר להן בני בואו ואומר

לכם שלא להתאבל כל עיקר אי אפשר שכבר נגזרה גזרה ולהתאבל יותר מדאי אי אפשר שאין גזרין גזירה על הצבור א"כ רוב צבור יכולין לעמוד בה ... אלא כך אמרו חכמים סד אדם את ביתו בסיד ומשייר בו דבר מועט ... עושה אדם כל צרכי סעודה ומשייר דבר מועט ... עושה אשה כל תכשיטיה ומשיירת דבר מועט.

Our rabbis taught: when the Temple was destroyed, there were many ascetics among the Jewish people who refrained from eating meat or drinking wine. R. Yehoshua approached them and said, "My children, why are you refraining from eating meat and drinking wine?" They said, "We should eat meat from which sacrifices are offered on the Altar and has now ceased? We should drink wine which was used for libations on the Altar and has now ceased? [R. Yehoshua] said to them, "If so, we should not eat bread because the flour offerings have ceased ... We shouldn't eat fruit because bikkurim have ceased" ... He said to them, "My children, come and I will tell you: we can't refrain from mourning altogether because there was a decree against us. We can't have excessive mourning because one cannot impose a decree on the public unless most of the public can keep it ... Rather, our rabbis said that a person

should plaster his house with plaster and leave a small part of it [without plaster].” ... A person can prepare all the needs of a meal but leave over a small amount ... A woman can put on all her jewelry but leave off a small part.

Bava Basra 60b

Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai’s extraordinary leadership expressed itself in navigating a pathway of compromise, which balanced the affirmation of our national trauma with the absolute necessity to confidently move forward in rebuilding our people. Essentially, he conveys that restraint of all material indulgence will cripple our capacity to recover and rebuild from the *churban*. Yet to expel the emotional trauma from our consciousness and life experience denies the extraordinary void that exists within our personal and communal lives. The rabbis, under the leadership of Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai, therefore advances a series of seemingly unrelated mandates that puncture particular moments of progress with a moment of reflection and tangible expression of the loss of the Mikdash. Yet when we look deeper, we can appreciate the common thread among these edicts. They only emerge in the context of personal, communal, and historical progress in moving the Jewish people forward. To encounter these manifestations of national pain, we must find ourselves in the midst of building a new family, building a home, or adorning ourselves for celebration. Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai was guiding and inspiring the Jewish people to never forget their precious Mikdash. But rather than wallow in its demise, we should not lose focus on our mandate and ambitions to progress our people within the *galus* experience.

Am Yisrael has always struggled with *churban* in the context of our

commitment to move our people forward. Tisha B’av, as a day of “*moed*,” embodies this notion as well. Our commemoration of the Mikdash and our history of persecution are always presented within a context of hope and aspiration for a brighter future for Am Yisrael. We need not feel a tension between the observance of Tisha B’av and the rather abrupt re-entry to our contemporary *galus* lives that are, thank G-d, saturated with opportunities for Torah growth, and which enjoy the historically unparalleled and miraculous gift of the State of Israel. Engaging and affirming the progress of the Jewish people is precisely the context within which Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai believed we should memorialize what we have lost. Our memories of *churban* are not intended to constrict our passion and paralyze our progress. Rather, these memories help us recognize what we are striving to rebuild as we move forward with optimism and hope.

In his introduction to the *Achiezer* (published 1922) Rav Chaim Ozer writes:

מחשבות תוגה מתרוצצות בקרב לב חושב:
האם שעת חירום כזאת מכוונה להוצאת
ספרים לאור עולם, הלא ישאל השואל, עם
ישראל טובע בים של דמעות ואתם אומרים
שירה? ... אולם זה כח ישראל סבא לאלקיו
ולתורתו בכל הדורות ובכל התקופות והזמנים,
גם כשחרב חדה היתה מונחת על צוארו,
תורת ד’ היתה שעשועיו כל היום, גם בעת
החורבן אשר כל קיום הלאום היה בסכנה ...
יבנה והחמיה שארית ישראל היתה אוד מוצל
מאש, אשר כעמוד הענן האירו את ישראל
בגולה, על ידם נשמר ונמסר הכתב והקבלה.
*Thoughts of distress should enter the heart
of a thinking person: Is it appropriate
to put out a book in a time of national
emergency? One should really ask: the
nation of Israel is sinking in a sea of tears
and you are reciting celebratory praises?*

... However, this is the dedication of the Jewish people to its Lord and His Torah in all generations and all situations. Even when a sharp sword is resting on its neck, the Torah of HaShem is its enjoyment throughout the day, even in times of destruction where there is a threat to the very existence of the nation ... [During the period of] Yavneh and its scholars, the Jewish people were an ember plucked from the fire which lit up the Jewish people in exile like the Clouds of Glory. Through them, the text and tradition were preserved and passed on.

Rav Chaim Ozer justifies his publication of a Torah work during the unfolding trauma of communal destruction. He saw it as an expression of Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai’s famous choice to preserve the city of Yavneh and the continuity of Torah as the highest ideal within the context of *churban*.

This edition of *Torah to Go* focuses on maintaining *emunah* in times of tragedy and crisis, and chronicles the Jewish people’s journey as a nation that preserves and nurtures its values and ideals, even in the midst of extraordinary persecution. This capacity — not to succumb to the devastation that has been a part of our historical experience, but to reach out and move forward in our faith and Torah observance regardless — is the ultimate secret to our eternal survival. We have incorporated the message of Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai that regardless of our national trauma, we are always moving forward.

May we all find the strength to confront our historical traumas, recognize what we are missing, and summon the courage and fortitude to move our families and communities forward in shaping an inspired future for our people.