

Spiritual Challenges in Times of Persecution

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THE SPANISH INQUISITION

The Mishna in *Taanis* (26b) teaches that both the first Beis Hamikdash and the second were destroyed on the 9th of Av. The Gemara (29a) proceeds to prove that the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed on Tisha B'av and attempts to show the same for the second. However, the Gemara shockingly offers no empirical evidence or verses of prophecy to prove that the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed on Tisha B'av. The Gemara concludes it must have been destroyed on the 9th of Av, because that is the only day that it could have occurred — *megalgin zechus l'yom zakai v'chova l'yom chayav* — merits occur on days of merit and calamities occur on days of

calamity. The very nature of that date on the Jewish calendar is fraught with calamity, so it must be that the second Beis Hamikdash was also razed on the 9th of Av.

It is from this perspective that we say in the Kinna titled *Mi Yiten Roshi Mayim*, that “*ein l'hosif mo'ed shever v'saveirah*,” which is understood to mean that once this date has been set aside as one of tragedy — as one on which we sit and mourn — we mourn other tragedies in Jewish history as well, and we don't add separate days of mourning. Thus, in our Kinnos we find piyutim relating to events that took place after the time of the second Beis Hamikdash as well as events

that do not necessarily correlate directly with the date of Tisha B'av. We describe the destruction of the Crusades, the pogroms and the Holocaust among others.

Notably, there is an event that does coincide more directly with Tisha B'av and yet is absent from Ashkenazi Kinnos, although many Sefardic communities do include it. The Spanish Inquisition of Ferdinand and Isabella was declared on December 27, 1480 and subsequently the Alhambra Decree was issued on March 31, 1492, ordering the expulsion of practicing Jews from the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon and its territories and possessions by July 31, 1492.

Interestingly, that date corresponds to the 7th of Av, but it is reported that it was delayed a few days until the 9th of Av as the Abarbanel in his commentary to Yirmiyahu 2:24 writes:

והנה כשגזר מלך ספרד גירוש על כל היהודים אשר בכל מדינות מלכותו שיצאו כמשלוש חדשים נשלם והיה יום היציאה ט' באב והוא לא ידע מזה הזמן, דיבר כאילו מן השמים הדריכוהו להגבלת הזמן הזה לקיים דבר הנביא שאמר בחדשה ימצאוהו.

When the king of Spain decreed expulsion of all the Jews in his kingdom, he decreed they must leave at the conclusion of three months, and the day of final expulsion was the 9th of Av. The king certainly did not know of the significance of this date, but he spoke as if from heaven they led him to this period of time to fulfill the words of the prophet that those who pursue the Jews won't tire and will find you in that month.

A review of some of the literature of the late 15th century and early 16th century provides a glimpse into the nature of this particular horror. The death toll of the time period is not easy to discern, and historians disagree as to its scope. Jews were allowed to leave, and were only punished if they chose to stay and were perceived to be a negative religious impact on the Christian community of the day.

Many Jews chose to remain and live a life of hidden Judaism. In the public eye they had converted, but in the dark recesses of their homes they chose to remain Jewish. In Hebrew literature they are referenced as *anusim* (the coerced ones), while they are often more broadly characterized as Marranos or Conversos. It was, in fact, the Conversos who were the main target of the Inquisition, whose members wished to rid these legal Christians of any heresy relating to their practice of Judaism.

There are several salient points that emerge from the literature of the time, which give us insight into the unique challenge of this period and its specific tragedy. There was a struggle among the rabbanim as to how to relate to the Conversos — should they be treated as Jews based on the principle *Yisrael af al pi shechata Yisrael hu* — a Jew, even though he sinned is still a Jew? Or is public conversion to another religion worse, in particular when it comes to subsequent generations of *anusim*?

Part of this struggle is a question of balance. On the one hand, it was deemed important to give *chizzuk*, to strengthen those who withstood the test of their faith and left Spain. On the other hand, there were those who wished to remind the Conversos that they could return fully to the Jewish faith.

The Abarbanel wrote of the challenges that those who fled faced on a theological level, and offered words of encouragement. In the opening to his Pesach Hagaddah, he writes from the perspective of those living at the time in very powerful language:

מה הרווחנו אנשי הגלות כמוהו היום במה שיצאו אבותינו ממצרים... כי אפשר שהיינו יושבים שם בשלוה יותר משיבתנו בגלות אדום וישמעאל (שבספרד) וכמו שאמרו אבותינו הלא טוב לנו עבוד את מצרים ממותנו במדבר העמים בתוך השמדות והגירושין, אשר לחרב לחרב ואשר לרעב לרעב ואשר לשבי לשבי.

What have we, here in the exile, gained today since our ancestors left Egypt?... Perhaps there we would be able to dwell in peace and quiet more than here in the exile?! Similar to what our ancestors complained, we were better off in Egypt than dying in the desert with all our persecution and expulsion. Here, those summoned to the sword die by the sword, those in famine are lost to famine and those taken captive are lost in captivity.

The Abarbanel seems to be speaking to the low spirit of the Jews who withstood the religious test, but had to flee their homeland and were in no way safe. And he tries to comfort them to be confident that even after tragedy, Hashem has His plan and a redemption will still come.

“לא אמות כי אחיה ואספר מעשי י-ה” ולפי שראה המשורר ברוח קדשו שיפול ספק גדול בלבבות האנשים אם ישראל יתמו בגלות מתוך צרותיהם, לכן הוצרך לומר כמבטיח ומדבר בשם האומה - לא אמות כי אחיה ואספר מעשה י-ה.

“I will not die, rather I will live and I will tell of the deeds of Hashem.” The great composer (Dovid Hamelech) saw with his divine spirit that a strong sense of doubt would overcome the people and they may think that the fate of the Jewish people will end in the exile, therefore he proclaims and promises — on behalf of the nation of Israel, we won't die, we will live and tell of the deeds of Hashem.

However, the rabbanim were not only concerned about the mindset of those who had overcome the test of the Inquisition and expulsion, but of those who had publicly converted as well, who were still privately and in secret living as Jews.

Rav Yitzchak Arama in his *Akeidas Yitzchak* to Parshas Ki Seitzei writes:

שח לי חכם אחד כי אחד מחכמי הגוים בראותו היהודים שואלין ודורשין גט מאיש יהודי מומר והוא מסרב לגרש האשה היהודית, ששאל לו, למה יבקשוהו ממנו, כי אחר שיצא מדתו ראוי להם להחשיבו כאילו אינו חי והרי אשתו ראויה להחשב כאלמנה לכל דבר. ואמר שהיתה תשובתו אליו, כי לא באה עליו המרה עצמית אלא מקרית כלומר, שינוי השם בלבד... שאין בידו להמיר עצמותו באשר הוא יהודי. אמרתי לו, התשובה הזאת היא אמיתית לפי דתנו והוא מאמרם ז"ל, ישראל אע"פ שחטא ישראל הוא.

A sage reported to me that a wise man of the nations of the world, upon seeing that Jews were asking a man who had converted away from Judaism to write and give a get to his wife, and he was refusing to cooperate, the wise man asked them, "why are you concerned, now that he has left the Jewish faith consider him as dead, thereby she be considered a widow and free to marry another man." And they responded, "his leaving Judaism was not a fundamental change in him, it is just a change of his identification ... there is no way to fundamentally change from being a Jew." I responded, "what you told him was in fact true, as Chazal teach us, that a Jew even if he sins, is still a Jew."

The Abarbanel in his commentary to Sefer Yechezkel in Chapter 20 goes even further:

ישראל אע"פ שחטא - ישראל הוא ואע"פ שעבדו ע"ז על כל פנים ישוב אל העדר אשר ממנו לוקח הוא וזרעו... שבאחרית הימים יעיר ה' לבות המשומידים האנוסים הם או זרעם, לשוב אל ה' ולעשות קצת המצוות... ויתעוררו לבות האנוסים הם ובניהם נשיהם וטפם לנוס... מקרב הנוצרים למרחקי ארץ למלט נפשם.

A Jew, even though he sinned is still a Jew, even if he has worshipped idols he will still return to the flock from which he and his children were taken. In the days of redemption Hashem will awaken the hearts of those who were coercively converted together with their children, to return to Hashem and to a performance of some mitzvos. And their hearts will be awakened, together with their wives and children to run away from Christianity to distant lands to save their souls.

Abarbanel seems to be offering encouragement to those who had succumbed to conversion to realize they are not lost, they are part of the nation. The prophecies for the future redemption are said about them as

well and the door is not closed to a return to Torah and mitzvos.

There is a comment from Rav Avraham Sava in his commentary *Tzror Hamor* to Parshas Vaeschanan, in which he even goes so far as to advise how to keep religion alive in the children, if you can't teach them Torah or openly practice with them.

ואמר והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך... והענין הזה הוא כמו שכתבתי שהתורה הגיעה לסוף הצרות והגזרות שעתידין לגזור על ישראל. להעבירים על דת ושלא יעסקו בתורה. כמו שקרה בגירוש פורטוגאל "ל שגורו שלא ידרשו בריבים ושלא ילמדו לתינוקות. ולקחו כל הספרים והבתי כנסיות באופן שלא יתפללו ולא יעסקו בתורה. עד שכמעט נשתכחה תורה מישראל. כי איך ילמדו לבניהם בלי ספר ובלי מלמד. ולא נשאר להם אלא שילמדום שמע ישראל וידעו איך ה' אחד. ושראו לאהבו ולמסור נפשו על קדושתו. ולכן נתן השם לישראל לאותם זמנים פרשה קצרה של שמע ישראל שהיא כלל כל התורה. ואם לא יוכלו לידע כל הפרשה. למעט ידעו פסוק שמע ישראל שהוא עיקר הייחוד. וילמדו אותו פסוק לבניהם בענין שידעו שהוא השם אחד ולו היכולת:

The verse says, "These words I am commanding you today should be on your heart." The idea is like I have explained, the Torah anticipated the times of tragedy and persecution that will come upon the Jewish people in the future, to force conversion and not allow them to learn Torah as happened in the expulsion from Portugal where they enacted a decree that Torah could not be taught in public, nor taught to children. They took the holy books and the shuls and didn't allow davening or Torah learning, until Torah was all but forgotten from the Jews. For how can Torah be transmitted to their children without a book or a teacher? They were left with only one option, to teach them "Shema Yisrael" so they should know there is only one Hashem and it is Him

we must love and be prepared to sanctify His name in death. So for those periods of time, when Torah can't be taught, Hashem gave us this chapter of "Shema Yisrael" as it in a broad sense includes the whole Torah. And if even that is too much, just the single verse of "Shema Yisrael" should be taught to know that He is the only God and is all-powerful.

Rav Avraham Sava, who himself was expelled from Spain and later from Portugal as well, seems to be speaking to all the Jews of his generation. Both those who are in the midst of the persecution and have fled and those who were Conversos and publicly converted must take active steps to preserve a connection to Hashem. It was for these times that Hashem put Shema Yisrael in the Torah, to teach it to our children so they can hold on to that connection to Hashem, His Torah and His people.

Unfortunately, the situation of the *anusim* led to new halachic literature delving into the status of the *anusim* in different areas of halacha. Some questions related even to the first generation *anusim*, while others were directed at subsequent generations of Conversos, for whom the connection to Judaism became more tenuous.

The Rivash in his responsa, siman 4 addresses questions of kashrus and the Conversos.

עוד שאלת בכתב האחרון אם יוכל אדם מאנוסי הזמן לעבודת כוכבים לדרוך ענבים בגת של ישראל ויהיה היין כשר כאלו דרכו ישראל אם אין. ג"כ יש מהם רבים עושין יין בביתם או באוצרות מיוחדים להם ואומרים שעשאוהו בהכשר כראוי הנוכל לסמוך עליהם לשותותו ואם ישאוהו מעבר לים להעיד עליו שהוא בשר וגם מהם שיומין ישראל לאכול עמו וישים לפניו בשר ויין היבטח בו שהוא כשר בדבריו ויעמידהו על חזקתו שלא יניח ההיתר ויאכילהו אסור בידיים ואעפ"י שחטא ישראל הוא ולא יחוש לכליו אולי בשל בהם

דבר אסור ולענין שחיטתן ומגען אם נחשבם
 כישראלים גמורים אם אין ע"כ:
 You asked in your last letter if one of
 the Conversos of today who converted
 to Christianity is allowed to crush the
 grapes in a Jew's winepress and whether
 the wine remains kosher as if a Jew did it.
 Or many of them make their own wine at
 home or in special store houses and claim
 it was done in a kosher manner; can we
 rely on them to drink the wine? Or can
 we assume the claim that meat is kosher
 or when eating with them that the food is
 in fact kosher? Can we rely on a chazaka
 that they wouldn't choose forbidden food
 over kosher? Even though a Jew who sins
 is still a Jew, do we have to be concerned
 that non-kosher food was made in
 their pots? When it comes to meat they
 slaughtered or wine they touched do we
 treat them like Jews or not?

While these may not seem like
 crucial questions, it reflects a basic
 question of their Jewish status and
 by extension, can we eat with them?
 Can we socialize with them? Are they
 a part of our nation? How do we treat
 them? The deeper messages of this
 question are in fact painful to think
 about. They relate to the very fabric
 of Jewish life and how our fellow Jews
 are to be treated.

The questions relating to Jewish
 identity only became more
 exacerbated in later generations.
 Rabbi Shimon and Tzemach Doron
 (grandsons of the Rasbash who fled
 Algeria in the 1500s) were asked in
 their responsa, *Yachin U'boaz* 2:3,
 about the status of kohanim:

יש לעיין בבעלי תשובה אלו שאנוסי הזמן
 שבאין קצת מהם וטוענים שהם מאותם
 המוחזקין בכהונה ורוצים לקרות בתורה
 ראשון, האם יש לנו להעלותם לקרות בתורה
 ראשון או לא.

We need to examine the status of those
 who have repented from the descendants

of the anusim and are claiming that
 they are positive they came from priestly
 families and are entitled to the first aliya
 when reading the Torah; should we trust
 them or not?

Again, not necessarily the most
 pressing question, but a question that
 points to issues relating to how to treat
 those who descended from people
 who kept Jewish practice in secret, but
 outwardly converted to Christianity.

Perhaps what best summarizes the
 perspective on this tragic period
 emerges from one of the kinnos of
 the time. It is a kinna of unknown
 authorship first brought to light by
 Professor Aron Freimann in 1933.²

הוסר מצנפת ועטרת
 על כל הגולה כותרת
 נפלה עטרת תפארת
 בשו כגנב במחתרת

*The turban and crown was removed
 The header [was removed] from the
 Diaspora
 The glorious crown has fallen
 Ashamed like a thief [caught] in a tunnel*

איך מעומקה של הלכה
 עברו בעמק הבכה
 מעוף צוקה וחשכה
 נסים היום מן המערכה

*How is that from the depth of Jewish law
 They passed to the valley of tears?
 From the weariness of gloom and
 darkness
 They run today from the battlefield*

איה סופר איה שוקל מקרא
 איה דקדוק מאיר אורה
 איה לפול בגמרא
 כי מספרד תצא תורה

*Where is the scribe? Where is the teacher
 of Tanach?
 Where is the one who analyzes [Torah]
 and shines its light?
 Where is the discourse in the Talmud?
 For Torah used to come from Spain*

The paytan is very clearly focusing on
 the tremendous loss of Torah. The
 Torah once emerged so greatly from
 Spain, and now its crown of glory has
 fallen. There are no teachers of Torah,
 there is no one left to delve into the
 depths of the Torah, Torah no longer
 is emerging from Spain.

Perhaps that is the unique element we
 recall in remembering the anniversary
 of the expulsion from Spain on Tisha
 B'Av. We remember the religious
 churban that took place. Jews could
 not learn Torah, many succumbed
 to the Inquisition and their status,
 even while trying to remain crypto-
 Jews, was tenuous and halachically
 concerning. Others needed *chizzuk*
 that redemption can still come, but
 that Torah no longer emerged from
 Spain. Spain as a leading makom
 Torah was lost³ and the depth of the
 loss of that Torah is one that can't
 be quantified. This is part of our
 reflection on the day of Tisha B'Av.

Endnotes

1 The goal of this article is to focus on
 the tragedy of the expulsion from Spain
 from the perspective of Rabbinic literature.
 Occasionally historical data was used and
 although some of the points are debated by
 the historians, I relied for the most part on
 the work *Geirush Sefarad: Korot Umekorot*
 compiled by Rav Yitzchak Goldberg who
 beautifully combines historical data and
 Rabbinic sources.

2 It is published in a volume in honor of R'
 Tzvi Peretz Chayos, *Ma'amarim L'Zichron R.
 Tzvi Peretz Chayos* published in 1933, page
 242.

3 It's noteworthy that many of those who
 fled Spain fled to the Land of Israel and
 formed a basis of the Torah community that
 flourished in Tzfat and Yerushalayim.