



TES, TOV, AND TISHA B'AV: THE HIDDEN PROMISE OF FUTURE REDEMPTION

Tisha B'Av is a day of mourning over a great number of communal tragedies that have occurred over the course of a long and painful exile. While the date is most closely associated with the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash, the Mishna (*Ta'anis* 26a) teaches that the Bar Kochba revolt against Roman rule in Judea came to a violent and bloody end on Tisha B'Av, when Jews were massacred at Beitar in 133 CE. One year later, on the same date, the Roman general Turnus Rufus plowed over the Temple Mount, reducing the site to rubble.

Other tragedies occurred on or near Tisha B'Av, including the beginning of the First Crusade in 1096, then expulsions from England in 1290, France in 1306, and Spain in 1492. Germany entered the First World War on Tisha B'Av, 1914, starting the international conflict that would

ultimately result in the Second World War and the Holocaust a few decades later. The Nazi's Final Solution received formal approval on Tisha B'Av, 1941, and the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto began a year later, on Tisha B'Av, 1942.

Many of these events have been incorporated into *Kinos*, reflecting the status of Tisha B'Av as more than just a day of mourning over the Batei Mikdash, but a day of mourning over the pains and travails of exile and *hester panim* in general.

And it all began when the spies returned from their forty-day tour of Eretz Yisrael, thousands of years ago. Carrying with them the bounty of the land, they extolled Eretz Yisrael as a "land flowing with milk and honey," as Hashem had promised them. But then they quickly turned to words of warning and caution: Its inhabitants are mighty, its cities huge

and fortified, and the offspring of the giants dwell there. "We cannot go up against these people," they said, "for they are stronger than we. It is a land that consumes its inhabitants" (*Bamidbar* 13:27-32).

The spies' report frightened the Jewish people, and as night fell, they wept. "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this desert," they complained to Moshe and Aharon. "Why does Hashem bring us to this land to fall by the sword, our wives and children will be as spoils. Is it not better for us to return to Egypt?" (*ibid.* 14:1-3).

That night was Tisha B'Av, and as punishment for their faithlessness, not only was that generation barred from entering Eretz Yisrael, but Hashem established Tisha B'Av as a day of mourning. The Gemara (*Ta'anis* 29a) records Rebi Yochanan saying, "Hashem said: You wept needlessly

that night, therefore I will establish for you a day of weeping for generations.”

We might think that the date — Tisha B'Av — was mere happenstance; because the Jewish people's response to the spies' report occurred on Tisha B'Av, the day was doomed to become a day of weeping for generations to come. The Gemara, however, implies otherwise.

While calculating how we know that the spies returned on the 8th of Av, and the Jewish people's cries occurred on the 9th, the Gemara explains that the spies left on the 29th of Sivan and toured Eretz Yisrael for 40 days. That would mean, however, that the spies returned on the 9th of Av, and the Jewish people's reaction, and the subsequent decree barring them from Eretz Yisrael, occurred on the 10th, and not on Tisha B'Av. Abaye resolves this difficulty by answering that the month of Tammuz of that year was a full month of 30 days, so when the spies returned, it was the 8th of Av. Abaye adds that this is alluded to in a *pasuk* in Eichah (1:15): “He has called an appointed time (*mo'ed*) against me to crush my young men.” *Mo'ed* in this context is interpreted to be a reference to Rosh Chodesh, and the verse means, Hashem created an additional Rosh Chodesh so that Tisha B'Av would become a day of destruction.

Abaye's allusion indicates that the establishment of Tisha B'Av as a date of communal tragedy was not coincidental, but rather divinely orchestrated. Hashem purposefully made Tammuz of that year a full month of 30 days so that the decree barring that generation of Jews from Eretz Yisrael would specifically fall out on the 9th of Av, and the same day, by consequence, would become a day of weeping for generations. What

purpose was there in the selection of this date? Why would it matter if the events of Tisha B'Av occurred on the ninth or the tenth or any other date on the calendar?

To answer this question, we need to consider another event, one that occurred many hundreds of years later, just before the destruction of the First Beis HaMikdash. Chazal tell us that the prophet Yirmiyahu wrote Megillas Eichah (*Bava Basra* 15a), and the Midrash (*Eichah Rabbah* Pesichah 28, Parasha 3, 1) further tells us that the composition of the megillah is recounted in a dramatic story found in Sefer Yirmiyahu (ch. 36). During the reign of King Yehoyakim (the third-last king of Yehudah), Hashem told Yirmiyahu to take a scroll and write upon it all the words Hashem spoke to him concerning the fate of Yisrael and Yehudah. The contents of the scroll were an early version of Megillas Eichah, comprising the first two and fourth chapters of the final edition, “*Eichah yashvah*,” “*Eichah ya'iv*,” and “*Eichah yu'am*.” All three chapters were structured as an acrostic covering the 22 letters of the Aleph-beis.

Yirmiyahu instructed his scribe, Baruch ben Neriah, to read the scroll before the Jewish people in the Beis HaMikdash, in hopes of encouraging them to repent, and avoid the impending destruction of Yerushalayim foretold in Yimiryahu's prophecies. When the king, Yehoyakim, heard of the public reading of Eichah, he took the scroll, rent it, and cast it into a fire. Subsequently, Hashem instructed Yirmiyahu to rewrite the original book on a new scroll. And when Yirmiyahu dictated the original text to his scribe, Baruch ben Neri'ah, he added “*devarim rabim ka'heimah*,” many more similar words. Chazal understand this verse to be an allusion

to what would become the third chapter of Eichah, “*ani ha'gever*,” which is a triple acrostic — unlike the first two and fourth chapters, which are structured as single acrostics. Instead of one verse corresponding to each of the 22 letters of the Aleph-beis, there are three verses for each letter.

Two questions emerge from this story: First, why did Yirmiyahu think that it was necessary to add an additional chapter to the original composition? In the aftermath of Yehoyakim's burning of the first scroll, Hashem commanded Yirmiyahu to rewrite “all the original words that were on the first scroll.” What was Yirmiyahu's purpose in adding “many more similar words.”

Furthermore, in light of Chazal's understanding that these “many more similar words” were the third chapter of Eichah, the order of the final composition becomes difficult to understand.

Given that the original composition comprised what would become the first, second and fourth chapters, we would expect that these passages would be grouped together as the first three chapters of Megillas Eichah, and what would become the third chapter would actually be added after the original composition. Why did Yirmiyahu add the new chapter, “*Ani ha'gever*,” in between the chapters of the first edition of Megillas Eichah?

Rabbi Chagai Preschel, in his book *Chagvei HaSelah al Megilas Eichah*, indicates a comment of the Maharasha (*Bava Kamma* 55a, *Chiddushei Aggados* s.v. *Ha'ro'eh*) that addresses these two issues.

The Gemara quotes Rebi Yehoshua as saying, “If one sees the letter ‘tes’ in his dreams, it is a good sign for him,” and explains that since the first appearance

of the letter “tes” in the Torah is in the word “tov” (“*Va’yar Elokim es ha’or ki tov*,” And Elokim saw that the light was good [Bereishis 1:4]), “tes” is therefore a positive sign.

Based on this Gemara, the Maharsha explains the ordering of the chapters in Megillas Eichah: While the letter “tes” generally connotes good, on *tes b’Av* (Tisha B’Av), the two Batei Mikdash were destroyed, and the “tes” was transformed to represent evil and suffering. The first two acrostic chapters of Eichah, “*Eichah yashvah*” and “*Eichah ya’iv*,” were composed by Yirmiyahu to represent the destruction of both Batei Mikdash. Therefore, the verses corresponding to “tes” in both chapters connote evil and tragedy:

טמאתה בשוליה לא זכרה אחריתה ותרד
פלאים אין מנחם לה ראה ה' את עניי כי
הגדיל אויב.

Her impurity is on her hems, she was heedless of her end, She has sunk appallingly, With none to comfort her.— See, O Lord, my misery; How the enemy jeers!

Eichah 1:9

טבעו בארץ שעריה אבד ושבר בריחיה מלכה
ושריה בגוים אין תורה גם נביאיה לא מצאו
חזון מה.

Her gates have sunken into the earth, He has destroyed and broken her bars Her king and her leaders are in exile, Instruction is no more; Her prophets, too, receive no vision from the Lord.

Eichah 2:9

But lest we think that destruction of the two Batei Mikdash signified the removal of all good from the Jewish people, and the permanent shift of “tes” from “tov” to evil, Yirmiyahu composed what would ultimately be the fourth chapter of Eichah, which concludes with the words “*Tam avonech bas-Tzion, lo yosif l’hagloseich*,” “Your iniquity is expiated, O daughter

of Zion, He will not exile you again.” The destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash and the subsequent exile will be the last exile the Jewish people face. Once they return to Eretz Yisrael, and the Beis HaMikdash is rebuilt, the scourge of dispersion will never come upon us again. And as a hint to the re-emergence of this “tov,” Yirmiyahu began the verse corresponding to “tes” with the word “tov”:

טובים היו חללי חרב מחללי רעב שהם יזובו
מדקרים מתנובת שדי.
Better were those slain by the sword than those slain by famine. Who pined away, [as though] wounded, For lack of the fruits of the field.

Eicha 4:9

This subtle hint, that the “tes,” which once connoted tragedy and destruction, would once again come to represent “tov,” was later prophesized by Zechariah with his famous words:

כה אמר ה' צב-אות צום הרביעי וצום
החמישי וצום השביעי וצום העשירי יהיה
לבת יהודה לששון ולשמחה ולמאמרים טובים
והאמת והשלום אהבו.

So said the Lord of Hosts, the fast of the fourth and the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of tenth, shall be for the house of Yehudah for joy and happiness and for festivals, but you must love honesty and integrity.

Zechariah 8:19

The “tes” of Tisha B’Av will no longer be a day of mourning and pain, but a day of “tov,” a day of goodness and joy and happiness.

However, when Yehoyakim burned the original scroll, Yirmiyahu was afraid that his actions would have dire spiritual consequences for the Jewish people, and the destruction of the scroll would result in the failure of his prophecy that the “tes” of Tisha B’Av will revert to being a day of goodness

and joy. Therefore, Yirmiyahu added another chapter in between the first two and the fourth. Unlike the original composition, this chapter comprised a triple acrostic, and for the verses corresponding to the letter “tes,” Yirmiyahu wrote the word “tov” three times:

טוב ה' לקנו לנפש תדרשנו. טוב ויחיל ודומם
לתשויעת ה'. טוב לגבר כי ישא על בנעוריו.
Hashem is good to those who trust in Him, to the soul that seek Him. It is good to hope silently for Hashem's salvation. It is good for a man that he bear a yoke in his youth.

Eichah 3:25-27

In this fashion, Yirmiyahu intended to reaffirm and ratify the promise written in the subsequent chapter: “*Lo yosif l’hagloseich*,” Hashem will not exile you again. The “tes” of Tisha B’Av will permanently become a “tes” of “tov.”

The Maharsha’s approach explains why Yirmiyahu thought it necessary to add an extra chapter to the original scroll of Megilas Eichah, and why he arranged the chapters of Eichah in the order we have it today. It also sheds light on our first question: Why did Hashem orchestrate that Tisha B’Av, of all the dates in the calendar, would become the “day of weeping for generations”?

The selection of Tisha B’Av was due to the significance of the 9th, symbolized by the letter “tes.” “Tes,” as the Gemara in *Bava Kamma* tells us, is generally a good sign, because the first appearance of the letter in the Torah is in the word “tov,” good. Hashem chose Tisha B’Av as the date of communal tragedy and destruction to intimate that even though the day would serve, for more than two thousand years, as a day of mourning, its essential nature is a day of “tov.” And even though that “tov” would be hidden and obscured by the churban and the travails of exile,

when the exile comes to an end, and Tisha B'Av becomes a day of gladness and joy, that "tov" will be permanently reinstated. Behind the tragedy lies a promise of hope, symbolized by the very date chosen by Hashem to be the day of communal catastrophe.

This approach helps explain several halachos regarding the tefillos of Tisha B'Av. Even though Tisha B'Av is a day of profound mourning, and many practices and customs reflect that reality, there are several tefillos that are omitted because Tisha B'Av is simultaneously treated as a festival. While Abaye interprets the aforementioned verse, "He has called an appointed time (*mo'ed*) against me to crush my young men" (Eichah 1:15), to allude to the additional day of Rosh Chodesh established to ensure that Tisha B'Av would become the day of communal tragedy, the simple interpretation of the verse is that Tisha B'Av itself is called a "mo'ed."

For this reason, the *Shulchan Aruch* writes that Tachanun is omitted on both erev Tisha Bav (*Orach Chaim* 552:12) and Tisha B'Av (559:4), just like Tachanun is omitted on the eve of a festival and on the festival itself. Likewise, if Tisha B'Av falls out on Sunday, "tzidkascha tzedek" is

omitted at Mincha on the preceding Shabbos (ibid. 1), and "Vihi noam" is omitted on Motzoei Shabbos (ibid. 2). Furthermore, the Rema (ibid. 4) tells us that Slichos are not recited on Tisha B'Av, because Tisha B'Av is called a *mo'ed*.

These omissions are, perhaps, some of the most perplexing features of Tisha B'Av. How can the saddest day in the Jewish calendar be considered a *mo'ed* at the same time, and warrant the exclusion of tefillos in the manner of a Rosh Chodesh or Yom Tov?

The *Aruch HaShulchan* (552:14) explains that Tisha B'Av is treated as a *mo'ed* to demonstrate our confidence in Hashem's promise that the day will ultimately become one of joy and gladness, as foretold by Zechariah. But this answer seems insufficient, because if our treatment of Tisha B'Av as a *mo'ed* is in anticipation of the date eventually becoming a holiday, the same laws should apply to the other communal fasts as well, which are also included in Zechariah's prophecy, and yet the halacha is that Tachanun and Selichos are recited on those days.

If we understand, however, that the very date of Tisha B'Av reflects Hashem's promise that the day will ultimately become a joyous

festival, we can explain why Tisha B'Av is treated as a *mo'ed*, and what distinguishes it from other communal fasts. Tisha B'Av is not a *mo'ed* in anticipation of the fulfillment of Hashem's promise, as recorded by the prophet Zecharia. It is treated as a *mo'ed* because the very date, the ninth of Av, reflects and symbolizes the eternal promise of "tov," Hashem's guarantee that our suffering in exile is transient, and the final, permanent redemption is forthcoming. This feature is unique to Tisha B'Av alone, and thus the three other communal fasts are not treated as a *mo'ed*, and, consequentially, both Tachanun and Selichos are recited on them.

"Hashem's kindness has not ended, nor are His mercies exhausted" (Eichah 3:22). The "tes" of Tisha B'Av is testament to that enduring assurance that Hashem has not removed His kindness from us. "Tes" signifies "tov," and even on the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, when centuries of tragedies are remembered and mourned, a promise of redemption and hope is inexorably linked to the verse date of Tisha B'Av. The same promise articulated by the prophet Zechariah: "The fast of the fifth ... shall be for the house of Yehudah for joy and happiness and for festivals."

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