

## Breaking Barriers- The Three Weeks

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles  
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The Shulchan Aruch states that anyone who is truly God fearing should mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple. If this is the province of an elite group, how are we who are not on such a high spiritual level to relate to this tragic event? The deeper question, states the Paamei Moed, is why are we not pained? If we realize that the *beit hamikdosh* was the medium of our connection to God through the *korbanot*, we will indeed mourn its destruction and be disturbed for not sensing Hashem's presence close to us. As the Sifsei Chaim writes, a person who understands that his focus in life should be to bring glory to God's name feels the pain of not having Hashem nearby.

The Nefesh Hachaim explains that it was not the enemy that destroyed our Temple, but our own actions. But a parallel Temple still exists in heaven, and even more so within our hearts, and our deeds on earth have the power to either help rebuild or continue to destroy it. The power of the Three Weeks helps us access our inner *beit hamikdosh*. By strengthening that connection, we are adding to the not yet built third *beit hamikdosh*. Citing Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, Rabbi Chaim notes that during the Three Weeks a person can achieve the same level of forgiveness as on Yom Kippur by working on his inner life. First, he must recognize and feel that something is missing from his life. Only then will he try to improve.

God was not always so distant. When He first created the world, His presence was imminent and palpable. However, when Adam sinned, He removed Himself to the first heaven. After Cain's sin, He removed Himself to the second heaven, and so on with each succeeding human failing, from Enosh who first began idol worship to Egypt where all was depravity, Hashem kept removing Himself degree by degree until He was so far removed from earth that mankind no longer recognized His presence and attributed everything to nature. By contrast, there were righteous men who broke through the barriers and brought God's presence back to earth in similar stages. Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Levi, Kehas, Amram and finally Moshe who, when he brought the *Luchot*, Hashem Himself came

down in a cloud with him. The sin of the golden calf again removed God's presence, but Hashem gave us the *Mishkan* in the desert and later the *beit hamikdosh* as a means of again bringing Him back.

The Sages tell us that the *Shechinah* departed in ten stages, as Hashem hoped the nation would notice and would return to Him. It departed first from the curtain over the Ark to the Cherub, then to the threshold of the Inner Sanctum, and so on until it departed completely. The enemies destroyed the shell, for the "soul", God's presence had left the building. The whole purpose of the *beit hamikdosh*, and indeed of the entire world, was to have a place where God's presence could reside, and we have lost it. When will He return? Only when we return to Him. The first step in the process is the first word of the confessional prayer – *Ashamnu* - We are guilty. We must take personal responsibility, not blame society or circumstances.

Megillat Eicha refers to the day the Temple was destroyed as a festival. For this reason, we don't recite *Tachanun* on this day. The Aleh Shor explains that some festivals are festivals of closeness and some are festivals of distance. But there is yet a third category of being in limbo, of not recognizing or admitting your true level. *Tisha b'Av* is a festival of distance, for on this day we admit our guilt and take responsibility for the distance we have created between Hashem and ourselves.

Taking responsibility is the first step in repairing the relationship, and that step is cause for celebration.

Rabbi Spero points out that Eicha can be read as *Ayekah* – Where are you? This was the question Hashem asked Adam after he ate of the forbidden fruit. And Adam, like so many of us, was afraid to admit his guilt. Hashem continues to ask us, "Where are we? What has become of us?" Before our birth, writes Rabbi Pincus, each of us took an oath to live as a *tzadik*. *Tisha b'Av* reminds us of how broken we are, how we have not been living up to our potential, and Hashem mourns over the destruction of the temple within each of us and the distance between us that that destruction has created. Thus the Three Weeks constitute

a preparation for the *teshuvah* of the month of Elul and of Rosh Hashanah.

The Heorat Derech notes that no other generation has been as challenged as we are, with so many unholy pleasures beckoning on all sides. Our youth, hungry for spiritual content, search to fill themselves with fleeting pleasures. With true prayer, attention to the words, a desire for connection through the prayer, that emptiness can begin to be filled spiritually and can last forever.

Every creature, plant and inanimate object that Hashem created has a mission, writes the Paamei Moed. When they are able to fulfill their purpose, they are filled with joy and sing praises to Hashem. When they cannot fulfill their purpose, they mourn and cannot sing. When *Bnei Yisroel* was exiled, the paths upon which they traveled for the three Festivals mourned, for they could not fulfill their purpose. And we mourned, for we could not fulfill our service by bringing God's presence down into the world as we had done in the *beit hamikdosh*. We could no longer feel whole and complete. Is it any wonder that when our captors demanded that we sing by the waters of Babylon, we could not. We pray for Moshiach, according to the Mesilas Yeshorim, because we want to be able to perfect ourselves through our service to God, not to solve personal problems. That lack should keep us in a constant state of mourning.

The Netivot Shalom teaches that if one tries to copy someone else's service and mission, one is guilty of serving Hashem through strange and improper ways. He then continues by explaining the well known story of the potential convert who approached Shammai and asked to be taught the Torah on one foot. Shammai told him there was no cookie cutter way to serve Hashem. The convert would have to find his own way, and that search is not necessary simple and easy. When the convert then approached Hillel he answered, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend." You are obligated to do what Hashem presents to you, not to someone else. That work on character which you find hateful and difficult, is the precise area you must seek to improve.

## Levels of Chassidut Part 3

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

In his writings, we find that the Rambam placed the laws of the seven days of mourning and the seven days of rejoicing for the bride and groom adjacent to each other. What is the connection? The Rambam wanted to teach us that just as the heart can express both joy and sorrow, so too can we connect to Hashem with both *yirah* (awe) and *ahava* (love) as it says, "Ivdu et Hashem b'yirah vgilu b'rada." Rabbeinu Yonah notes that although

*yirah* and *ahava* may seem contradictory, it is not. When a person contemplates the greatness of Hashem, the awesome feeling it evokes, engenders a desire to do the will of Hashem and to fulfill His *mitzvot*. *Yirah* begins in the heart and then spreads to the rest of the body. It is reflected in how one prays humbly before Hashem.

*Ahava* is expressed through *hidur mitzvah*.

Beautifulizing a *mitzvah* honors Hashem. Rabbeinu Yonah tells us that a Jew must remember that he was created to bring glory to Hashem's name and if he instead disgraces it, he goes against his purpose on this earth. Through the fulfillment of *mitzvot* a Jew connects with his Creator. When he does so with *ahava* and *yirah*, he can reach higher levels of *devikut* and closeness to Hashem.

## Eicha Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

*Megilat Eicha* is not a historical account of the destruction. It is the raw memories of Hashem, Yerushalayim, and the Jewish nation. *Megilat Eicha* is the book of questions and if we read it carefully we can find within it many answers. *Megilat Eicha* contains the questions of the individual struggling with his pain and the questions of the community struggling with their pain. *Megilat Eicha* is a conglomerate of voices eager to be heard and understood. *Megilat Eicha* guides us in our reaction on a both a national and personal level. When we really listen to the verses, when we study the *Midrashim* and commentaries, we will hear our own voice recounting, engaging, and struggling. We will hear echoes of that which we were confused about and traverse the desert of isolation and despair to hear the true message of the *Megilah* - a

message of comfort, clarity and hope. *Megilat Eicha* is the revelation of eicha- Where is Hashem? Where am I going? Who am I?

*Megilat Eicha* was authored by Yirmiyahu who begged and pleaded with *Klal Yisrael* to repent to prevent the impending destruction. Not only didn't the people listen, they attacked and tormented him. He authored two books, Yirmiyahu, his quest to get the Jews to repent and *Melachim*, the reaction of the people to the prophets.

The Gemara classifies three different prophets, those who demand the respect of the father-Hashem, those who demand the respect of the son, *Klal Yisrael*, and those who are balanced, demanding honor for the father and the son. The prophet who demanded the honor of the father was Eliyahu Hanavi. The

prophet who demanded the honor of the son, the representative advocate of *Klal Yisrael* was Yonah who was willing to risk Hashem's wrath not to incriminate *Klal Yisrael*. The balanced prophet is Yirmiyahu. This is very revealing and tells us about the prophet's mission and *Megilat Eicha*. It gives us a lens in which to analyze the verses and try to discern the real message. In fact in many verses within *Eicha* we don't even know who is speaking. It could be Yerushalayim, Yirmiyahu, *Am Yisrael*, and Hashem and on many levels All of them speak because the perspective that Yirmiyahu gives us in *Eicha* is all encompassing, how Hashem, Yirmiyahu, and *Klal Yisrael* view the destruction and how Yirmiyahu tries to bridge all of these emotions into a single unified vision of consolation.