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HARAV YOCHANAN BECHHOFFER

וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי אֲחֵרִים כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד  
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EVEN SHESYA  
TISHA B'AV READER



## CHAPTER 1

### Shiva Asar B'Tamuz – The Crack

Shiva Asar B'Tamuz, the seventeenth of the month of Tamuz, is the beginning of the mourning period we call “The Three Weeks.” This sad time is also known as “*Bein Ha'Meitzarim*” - between the straits. The seventeenth of Tamuz and Tisha B'Av are the boundaries of these difficult times, like the **two sides of a gash** in a piece of fabric. Shiva Asar B'Tamuz is like the left side of a gash where it began, and Tisha B'Av is comparable to the right side where the rip ends.

The Maharal<sup>1</sup> tells us that whatever is deficient with the Jewish people that makes an Exile necessary is a gash within the cosmic fiber. **This gash has its parallel in time in the three weeks. This tear begins with the seventeenth of Tamuz**, but it ends with the ninth of Av. Following the analogy, **Tisha B'Av is the end of the rip** that is contained between the two borders. By noon of the following day the effects of the three weeks have ceased. It does not get worse, and it can only get better.

#### Five Tragedies

In light of the above analogy, it should be clear that when we begin to explore the deeper meaning behind Tisha B'Av we will see how it relates to culmination of tragedy as well as potential for new beginning, whereas when examining the seventeenth of Tamuz we should see how everything about it points to the start of trouble and the beginning of the end.

In order to really understand what Shiva Asar B'Tamuz is about, we have to examine the five things listed by *Chazal* as reasons for the institution of a public fast day. The five tragedies include: the breaking of the first **Luchos**, the general cessation of the **korban**

**Tamid** service at the time of the first Temple, the **walls of Jerusalem** were breached leading to the destruction of the second Temple, the wicked Apostomus set fire to a **Torah scroll**, and an idol was set up in the **Beis Ha'Mikdash**.

On a simple level we can see how these things are only the beginning of greater tragedy, as **they lack finality**. The **Luchos** were broken, but new **Luchos** were carved in their place. A **Torah** was destroyed – a calamity, yes – but still a new one can be written in its stead. The **Tamid** offering ceased, but it could have been brought again, as the Temple had not been destroyed at that time. Even though the **walls were breached**, it is clearly just the beginning of the end, not a final destruction.

A surface look at these five catastrophes already gives us some insight, but by looking for a common thread between them we can reach a deeper understanding of why the seventeenth of Tamuz is the beginning of the end.

#### The Light Dims

We immediately see a commonality between the **breaking of the Luchos** and the **burning of the Torah scroll**. Both involve the destruction of the Torah. **The breaching of the walls also relates to this same theme.** *Chazal* tell us that **the walls of Yerushalayim represent Torah**. On the verse “Our feet stood by the gates of Yerushalayim,” (Tehillim 122:2) *Chazal (Makos 10A)* explain that our feet stood against our enemies in war “...And in what merit were we victorious? By virtue of the gates of Yerushalayim, that were engaged in Torah study”. “I am like a wall...” (*Shir Ha'Shirim* 8:10) *Chazal (Pesachim, 87a)* say this verse is speaking of the Torah. From here we derive that a Rabbi teaching Torah must have a solid presentation – **“Torah needs to be firm like a wall”**

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<sup>1</sup> *Netzech Yisroel*, chpt. 8

the common thread between all five of the catastrophes that occurred on Shiva Asar B'Tamuz.

The other occurrences were related to a loss we had in our connection and experience with the Torah, as well as its honor. "Ner l'ragli Devarecha v' ohr l'nesivasi – A candle for my legs are Your Words (the Torah), and a light for my path." (Tehillim 119:105) "Ki ner mitzvah v'Torah ohr – For a mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light (Mishlei 6:23) Torah is compared to light – it illuminates us and gives us perspective, helping us to find our way. In Aramaic the Torah is called *Orysa*, from the root *ohr* – light. Just like the *Beis Ha'Mikdash*, the Torah illuminates us with Divine light.

Even without the Temple the Torah grants us Divine enlightenment, but our connection to Torah itself was affected on the seventeenth of Tamuz. The *Luchos* broke and the Torah was burned. The Divine light began to be extinguished on this day. New *Luchos* could be hewn, a new Torah could be written, purify the Temple and restart the Temple service. Still, the tragedy has begun. The vessel of the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* still remained but the light was dimming. It was the beginning of the end.

### Losing Our Way without the Light

When a society collapses it does not happen overnight. It first loses its perspective. The people lose their self-concept, spirit, and ideals<sup>4</sup>. Their direction is lost as a people. As Hashem's people, the beginning of the end was losing our direction. If we had been able to keep the first *Luchos* we would

The installation of an idol in the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* and the cessation of the *Korbanos* also has a common element. The function of the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* is to reveal Hashem's light. "Yerushalayim is the light of world" (*Bereishis Rabbah*, 59:8). All Divine perspective has its source in the *Beis Ha'Mikdash*. The light it emanates is what allows us to see things from Hashem's perspective.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 4A) says that after Herod felt remorse for killing the Rabbis, Baba Ben Buta gave him a suggestion for a "Tikkun"-repentance and rectification. He was to renovate the *Beis Ha'Mikdash*. He told Herod "You extinguished the light of the world (the Torah) be involved in the light of the world (the Beis Ha'Mikdash)."

This light channeled by the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* certainly cannot be perceived if there is an idol in that very place. The very opposite of the expression of Divine presence blocks any light from reaching us.

On the other hand, what maintains the presence of the Divine presence in the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* are the sacrifices. When they stopped the *Shechinah* began to leave. The effect of the *korbanos* is comparable to how food keeps a soul in its body. Just as the *Neshamah* does not need food for substance, the Divine presence has no need for sacrifices. Yet the *korbanos* keep the *Shechinah* in the *Beis Ha'Mikdash*, just as food sustains the bond between body and soul<sup>3</sup>.

The commonality between the loss of the *Tamid* sacrifices and the setting up of an idol is a resulting dimming of Divine light. This is

<sup>2</sup> . In fact, the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah*, 3:4) says that the original light first emerged from the site destined to be the place of the *Beis Ha'Mikdash*.

<sup>3</sup> See extensive discussion on this in Nefesh HaChaim Shaar Beis chap 5-7

<sup>4</sup> We pray that the political left will spare the USA this fate

be on a higher level. The Torah would be more tangible for us, **more real**. The Torah of the first **Luchos** did not seem like theory, and there was less need for the facility of belief. The first Luchos were reminiscent of the great event at Sinai when we could “**see the sounds**.” All the concepts were so clear, as if they were in front of our faces. With the second **Luchos** Torah learning seems ‘theoretical’. We need to work to understand, and to hold the concepts in our minds. We have to have faith that we will be able to comprehend after we exert much effort. Even after attaining understanding, it feels like ‘ideas’ as opposed to the tangible facts that Torah truly is.

Why were the **Luchos** broken in the first place? Because of **the people’s mistaken perspective**. First, they thought Moshe wasn’t coming back, finally, they decided to take matters into their own hands and formed the golden calf. **Hashem punished them turn for turn**: They sinned by not holding on to the correct perspective. They were not responsible enough to maintain such a lofty perspective as those afforded by the first **Luchos**, so they had to be taken away.

Later in history the sefer Torah was burnt and this also represented the people’s loss of perspective. The **Torah She’B’al Peh** in its entirety was originally studied and transmitted only orally. It was therefore assimilated by the ears. On the other hand, the **Torah She’B’ksav**, the written Torah, is **visual – black on white**.

**Shiva Asar B’Tamuz’s main theme is mourning our loss of perspective**. We lost our ‘black on white’ visual perspective of the Torah. “Seeing is believing.” Conceptual ideas can be easier to forget about. One can ignore them, manipulate them, or even deny them. But what is visible cannot be denied or ignored.

### Where Golus starts

The *Gemara (Sanhedrin, 92a)* states “Anyone without **Da’as** – awareness/perspective will eventually go into exile.” **Loss of perspective leads to exile**.

Likewise, the way to overcome exile is with **Da’as** – correct perspective. As the *Gemara (Brachos, 33a)* says: “For anyone with **Da’as**, it is as if the **Beis Ha’Mikdash** was rebuilt in his days. We lose our direction because we have lost perspective, and we end up in the wrong place. With the correct perspective a person will know how to head in the right direction and reach his destination. For such a person it is as if there is a Temple, because he has the Divine light. By working to access the correct Divine view of the Torah and act accordingly we can merit Divine perspective and light. May we all achieve this, bringing Moshiach speedily in our days.

# CHAPTER 2

## The Three Weeks

### The Secret of Three

When the Talmud records the story of how Jerusalem fell, it described the Jews' survival plan – the **three** wealthiest men of the city would support everyone, **Nakdimon ben Gurion, Calba Savua, and Tzitzit Hakeset**. One would provide **wheat and barley**, one would provide **wine and oil**, and one would provide **firewood**. They had enough provender for **twenty-one** years, and the city would have held out if not for the zealots who were bent on fighting.

But before describing the details and the politics, the *Gemara* first gives a summary of events: The general Vespasian laid siege to the city for **three** years, and only after that was successful in breaching the walls and destroying the Temple. The Maharal reveals amazing insights into the number three. He tells us that the siege had to be **three** years long, no less and no more. At the end of a period of exactly **three** years either the Jewish people or Vespasian would win. Why **three**?

### The Power of Three

The Maharal explains that the power of the Jewish people is **threefold**. We come from **three Avos**. We are the descendants of many great *tzaddikim*, but only the **three Avos** are considered the

pillars of the Jewish people. This is because each of us has every one of their unique traits within us.

**Avraham Avinu** embodies the power of *Gemilas Chasadim* – loving kindness. **Vitzchak Avinu** embodies the power of *Avodah & Gevura* – Divine service and discipline. **Yaakov Avinu** encapsulates *Torah*. Torah is inclusive of law (Gevura) and kindness. This attribute is also called **“Rachamim” - Mercy** as mercy negotiates between law and kindness<sup>5</sup>. The Jewish people fully absorbed and integrated these **“three pillars the world stands on”** (Avos 1:2), and that is why the world stands on the Jewish people. Chazal allude to our integration of these three traits when they say: **“There are three identifying features in the Jewish people: They are merciful (Yaakov), They are ashamed to sin (Vitzchak), and they bestow kindness (Avraham)”** (Yevamos 79A)

### Our Nation

The fact that the Jewish people contain these **three pillars of reality** is expressed in how the nation is composed of **three** types of people with their own different *halachos*: **Kohanim, Levi'im** and **Yisroelim**. **Kohanim** are rooted in *chesed*, they exist to serve Hashem and the people. The *Levi'im* represent the **Gevura & Avodah of Vitzchak** – submitting themselves to guard the Temple<sup>6</sup>. **Yisroelim** represent **Yaakov**, as any Jew can attain the crown of **Torah**.

### Our Festivals

There are **three** major holidays: **Pesach, Shavuos** and **Succos**, and they parallel the **Avos**. **Pesach** corresponds to **Avraham** as the Egyptian exile was foretold to him. In addition, the nation was

<sup>5</sup> This is the secret why the Talmud Bavli calls the Torah **“Rachmana”** – Mercy

<sup>6</sup> The truth is that their music - making and song is also rooted in **Gevura**, but that is a long discussion....

taken out by **kindness** alone, not based on the people's merit. On **Shavuos** the Torah was given with **din** – **laws**, in line with **Yitzchak's** power - the sound of the shofar at the giving of the Torah emanated from the shofar of the ram offered instead of Yitzchak.<sup>7</sup> The Torah (Bereishis 33:17) tells us **Yaakov** made **sukkos**, alluding to his connection to **Succos**<sup>8</sup>.

### Our Torah

The Torah itself is composed of **three**: **Torah**, **Nevi'im** and **Kesuvim**. Torah learning falls into **three** categories: **Mikra** (Tanach), **Mishna**, and **Talmud**. **Koheles** (4:12) tells us: "**V'haChut ha'meshulash lo b'mehyera yinatek** - and a cord of **three strands** will not snap quickly." This is the power in the Jewish people. Yisroel's nature is not merely monolithic– we are a nation with three elemental powers.

### Yerushalayim

The Maharal explains that it is not a coincidence that Yerushalayim had **three** wealthy men with resources that paralleled the **threefold strength** of the Jewish people. **Firewood** is a pure **kindness** of Hashem. Without it we would still be able to eat things raw, and warm ourselves with clothes and blankets alone. In addition, kindness is performed without the recipient earning it or deserving it for any reason. The Hebrew word for reason is

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<sup>7</sup> Rashi on *Shemos*, 19:13

<sup>8</sup> This topic is very deep and profound, but we mentioned some basic associations between the main holidays and the *Avos* to whet the appetite for those interested in exploring the topic further.

<sup>9</sup> See *Netzach Yisroel*. However, see *Chidushei Aggados* where he switches the parallels. He writes that wine and oil represent *Din* because *Din* always has a reason (*ta'am*) and wine & oil have *ta'am* (taste). Wheat and barley, on the other hand, is the sustenance he gives his creations because he has **mercy** on them.

**"Ta'am"** which also means **taste**. Wood has no taste, alluding to Avraham's attribute of **kindness**, which has no **"Ta'am"**.

The **abundance** of wheat and barley parallels the attribute of **Din-law of Yitzchak**. Law makes differentiations, divisions, and delineations, resulting in an **abundance** of details, hence **abundance in general**.

**Wine and oil** are a **mercy** of Hashem. Mercy is hybrid between kindness and law, **Yaakov's attribute of Torah** which synthesizes *Chessed* and *Din*. Although it is possible to endure a tasteless life without complaint, there is still room for created beings to expect **"Ta'am"** - **taste and meaning** in their existence – hence wine and oil that give **"Ta'am"** - taste which also represents meaning.<sup>9</sup>

The siege had to be **three** years. Only after a period of **three** years it would be possible for Vespasian to be victorious, or otherwise fail. The total time between the breach of Jerusalem's walls on the seventeenth of Tamuz until the ninth of Av totaled **three** weeks. The battle was to attempt to conquer our **threefold** power. Sadly, because of our sins, they succeeded.

## Twenty-one – A FULL Three

The Talmud relates how between these **three** extremely wealthy men living in the city at that time they could have supported the people of the city under siege for **twenty-one** years. If the people of Yerusshalayim would have waited it out, the Romans would surely have given up. However, zealots wanted to wage war. They forced the people into that position by burning down the storage houses so they would have to either surrender or fight. Why did *Chazal* give us these particular details? Why is it necessary to mention that the **three** rich men who could support the city with their combined efforts for a total of **twenty-one** years? What is the significance of these numbers?

The Maharal explains that the significance of the number **twenty-one** is **three** units of **seven**. In the negative, we see the number **twenty-one** as the amount of **Days** it took to conquer Yerusshalayim. It took **three weeks** – **three** units of **seven** days. As stated, the Jewish people has a unique three-fold power, with its roots in the solid three-legged **tripod** of the Patriarchs. The **three** pillars break up in detail to **seven** – three times seven being **twenty-one**.

What is the significance of **seven**? The Maharal points out that the Hebrew word for seven – “*sheva*” – can also be read as the word “*sava*” – meaning **sattated**, lacking nothing. An example is the years of **absolute prosperity** versus the years of **absolute hunger** during the time of Yosef in Mitzrayim. Yosef prophesized there were going to be **seven** years of famine that would totally undo the sattuaton of the first **seven** years. Mitzrayim was able to stand up to the seven years of famine because Yosef advised and implemented a plan of utilizing the **absolute fullness** of the first **seven** years to cancel out the famine of the second period.

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<sup>10</sup> Again, just like the significance of the number three, the topic of the number seven is very deep and broad. We present here one facet of understanding.

There are **seven** days in a week. There are **seven** years in the *shmitah* cycle. After **seven** of these cycles there is a *Yovel*-jubilee, year. *Sifras Ha’Omer* follows this same pattern of **seven** times **seven**. Even in secular philosophy the number seven represents completeness<sup>10</sup>.

*Chazal* were certain that after **twenty-one** years we would display our **full** power to overcome the Roman forces, both in detail and in general. There were **three** men, and **each** had the ability to manifest **seven**, the **full** extent of support necessary. The Romans were only victorious then because of Divine decree, its source in the lack of unity amongst our people. That discord is what caused the removal of the “**21 factor**” physically and spiritually. Through attaining unity amongst us we will unleash the **full** merit and power our **three Avos** instilled in us, and we will see the rebuilding of Yerusshalayim in its **full triple** glory, Amen.

## CHAPTER 3

### Origin of Tisha B'Av

#### The crime and the Penalty

The spies Moshe sent slandered the land of Israel. Chazal tell us that this laid the precedent for *Tisha B'Av* being a day when calamities happen, most particularly the destructions of the two Temples. Hashem says: **“you cried for nothing! I will set for you crying for generations to come”** (Ta’anis 29A). The punishment seems way out of proportion to the crime. We were deceived by the **fake news** of the spies; we didn’t know better, so why should we have to pay a **real** generation-spanning price for a **false** narrative?

#### “Ayin” & “Peh”

The book of *“Eichah”*- Lamentations was written by *Yirmiyahu HaNavi* to mourn the destruction of the first Beis HaMikdash and it also prophetically alludes to the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash as well. Nearly the whole book alludes to what caused the whole thing in the first place: the sin of the spies. The book-spanning allusion to the sin of the spies is that all chapters, with the exception of the last one, are all set up in the order of the Hebrew alphabet with the first verse or stanza starting with *“Aleph”* the second verse or stanza with *“Beis”* and so on. The first chapter follows that pattern perfectly. The chapters in the middle are mostly in the order of the *“Aleph – Beis”* with the exception that the letters *“Ayin”* and *“Peh”* are in reverse order where a verse or stanza will start with *“Peh”* and will be followed by a verse or stanza starting with *“Ayin”*. Chazal commented on this and said this is an allusion to the spies that created the whole problem by putting *“Peh”* – the mouth before *“Ayin”* – eyes because **“they said with their mouths not what they did not**

**see with their eyes”**. Two questions immediately arise: If they truly said with their mouths what they didn’t see with their eyes, then verses beginning with *“Ayin”* (=Eye) should be totally absent similar to how a verse beginning with *“Nun”* is absent from *“Ashrei”*. Why are verses beginning with *“Ayin”* (=eye) following the verses starting with *“peh”* (=mouth) alluding to the mouth. Why is the first chapter of which also is written in the order of the *“Aleph – Beis”* fully in the proper order? What happened to the sin of the spies that reversed the *“Ayin”* and *“Peh”*? The Maharal addresses the issue and says something very cryptic: **“it is to teach you what the proper order is.”** This is impossible to take literally. The book of *“Eichah”* is not nearly as ancient as the Chumash or many other scriptures that were also written in Hebrew. *“Eichah”* cannot be the primary source for the proper order of the *“Aleph – Beis”* as Hebrew was used in Speech and in writing for many generations before Yirmiyahu. What does it mean “it is to teach you that this is to be the proper order”? What did the Maharal mean by that?

#### The Footage was Real

Did they really “say with their mouths what their eyes did not see”? They said, “...the nation that dwells there is powerful, and the cities are fortified and great and also the offspring of the giants we saw there. Amalek dwells in the south and the Chiti and the Yivusi and the Emori dwell on the mountain and the C’naananim dwell by the sea”. Compare that with how Moshe himself describes the land forty years later to the generation that will go into the land of Israel in Parshas Eikev: “Listen Israel. You are crossing the Yarden to come and take over nations that are greater and mightier than you; cities that are great and fortified up to the sky; a big and lofty nation, the children of giants that you know and you heard that no one can stand before the children of the giants”. Even when the spies increased the slander of the land of Israel and added “it is a land that consumes its inhabitants” Rashi says, that that is entirely factual. They saw people constantly

burying their dead. In what way did “their mouths say what they did not see with their eyes”?

### Speech or Sight?

Before we unravel these difficulties, there is an interesting philosophical question to be raised. Which comes first – sight or speech? One would think that first you observe and then you talk about what has been observed and this is further confirmed from the order of the “**Alaph-Beis**”, that the letter ‘**Ayin**’ that means eye, comes before the letter ‘**Peh**’ that means mouth. However, this is not the case when it comes to Hashem Himself by the creation of the world. He first said, “Let there be light” and afterwards “then there was light” and then “He saw the light that it was good”. **The idea and the words that articulate the idea preceded the actual visible creation of the entity** and this is true regarding the reality of sight. There was just darkness everywhere, and then Hashem said, ‘Let there be light’, which is the ability to see and only then, was there light and subsequently visibility is possible. What can we learn from this?

### First Newscaster – first Fake News

The first news commentator was the snake. Chava had explained to the snake that they are allowed to eat from all the trees in the garden of Eden, with the exception of the “**Etz HaDaas**”, which Adam had identified for her. The snake gives his narrative that Hashem is barring them from the “**Etz HaDaas**” to stop them from gaining knowledge and power. After Chava listens to the narrative that the snake presented, it says as follows: “**And the woman saw** that the tree was good for consumption and it is enticing to the eyes and it was desirable to attain awareness and she took from its fruit and she ate and she gave to her husband who ate with her”. The obvious question is that she had seen the tree before, as Adam pointed it out to her and told her that it is forbidden to eat from. Why does the tree all of a sudden look totally different? Rash! was clearly bothered by this and says on the

words “and the woman saw”: she saw the words of the snake and they made sense to her and she believed him. We are being taught a frightening lesson: **when you accept a narrative, you cannot help but to actually start seeing that way.** With this we can understand a seemingly counter-intuitive halacha in the laws of Lashon Hara. **The one who listens and believes the Lashon Hara is considered to be a greater sinner than the one who concocted the negative narrative in the first place.** One would have thought that the one who concocted the negative narrative and who is slandering is worse than the one who is being ‘suckered’ into accepting the story. This is not the case. **The one who is lying knows that he’s lying.** The one who ‘buys in’ and believes it turns the lie into his own personal reality and he will always see the slandered literally in the negative light that was presented to him and that person’s life is ruined vis-à-vis the one who accepted the Lashon Hara. If many people buy into the story, that person’s life is really over because those who are willing to believe Lashon Hara make it as real as anything else that they can see.

### Lashon Hara

Where does this power come from? It comes from man’s Divine image, as Onkelos translates when Hashem blew in a breath of life into Adam, “he became a speaking spirit”. We get the power of speech from the Divinity within us and if Hashem can create with words, so can we. **False words create a false reality which will be real to anybody who believes it.** With this the Maharal explains the severity of Lashon Hara. If anyone is ‘in essence bad’, it is he who speaks Lashon Hara, even more than one who commits the cardinal sins. **Lashon Hara is to misuse the very Divine essence of a person to destroy Hashem’s reality and supplant it with a false one.**

### It's all in the spin

As is well known, the difference between *Lashon Hara* and *Motzi Shem Ra* is that *Lashon HaRa* has certain elements of factual information, whereas *Motzi Shem Ra* is a total fabrication. People ask how the Torah could legislate against *Lashon HaRa* if it is the truth. The answer is best expressed by a sharp statement I heard from **HaGaon HaRav Yochanan Zweig, Shlit" a the Rosh Yeshiva of Miami** who said, **"in Lashon HaRa you use truth to distort reality"**. What is evil about *Lashon Hara* is not the raw facts but rather the spin that is placed on those facts. **The narrative and editorial that is superimposed on the facts is the evil of Lashon Hara** and having backed it up with a fact or two, can make that evil narrative even more convincing. **Therein lies the difference between the way the spies describe Israel, as opposed to how Moshe did so forty years later.** They used the same raw facts but the narrative that the spies spun around those facts was one of 'it is hopeless, it is suicide to conquer the land of Israel'. Moshe's spin on those very same facts is "you should know today that Hashem your Lord; He will cross into Israel before you. He is a consuming fire. He will destroy them, and He will subjugate them before you. He will chase them out before you and you will quickly obliterate them like Hashem has said".

With this we can understand how the crying for nothing warrant does indeed something real to cry about. **Having accepted the false narrative of the spies as truth, makes it visible reality for those who accept and believe that narrative.** You must face the reality you created for yourself. With this we can understand why the 'Ayin' does indeed appear in 'Eichah' following the 'Peh'. **Once the Jewish people believed in what the spies were telling them, it became reality as they saw it.**

### Physical & Spiritual – What & Why

The coming to the land of Israel represents the Jewish people coming to the physical realm as we know it. **The physical realm**

**and the laws of nature that govern it are visible, however, what remains invisible is "why" and "for what purpose"**. That is all in the realm of **explanation**. There are many physical phenomena that are clearly visible, but scientists may differ radically in how they explain those phenomena. Case in point: The spies saw many people dropping dead and being buried. They attributed it to the land being a hazardous place to live, when the truth was that Hashem was doing it for the purpose of people being preoccupied with their dead and not taking notice of the strangers in their midst. **That is the essence of the challenge of entering the land of Israel. It is to enter the visible physical realm full of hard facts but with all the causality totally hidden from the eye, along with other concepts that are invisible to the eye like morals and values that are just perceived in the mind.** The Jewish people are to bring the ideas of the Torah and the Torah-perspective of life and superimpose that upon the visible facts of the land of Israel. **If that unification is successful, it results in the open revelation of all the truths of the Torah within the physical inside the borders of the Holy land that has the special quality of displaying the spiritual merged with it.** This is the secret behind the miracles we see in the land of Israel such as the triple crop that grows before Shmittah; how no one invades the land when all the Jewish people ascend to Yerushalayim during the three Regalim; the revealed presence of the Shechinah in the Beis HaMikdash with all the miracles that occurred there on a regular basis and most amazingly, **the extra space that opens up when the Jews bow in the Beis HaMikdash or the miraculous expanse of the city of Tur Malka** recorded in the Gemara in Gittin which mysteriously disappeared when we were exiled from the land. This is the unique challenge in the conquest of Eretz Yisroel. It is not just to liberate the land from the seven nations but is also to connect the land to the spiritual which will have a spill-over effect on the whole world. The land of Israel is the only place on the globe capable of being grafted to the spiritual to the point that the spiritual becomes visible within the land – **to the**

revealed to us in the written Torah or the Halacha l'Moshe M'sinaï, which is like a Pasuk, just not in writing. We are granted creativity in the explanation of those axioms, but we can never deviate from them in any way. **Someone who deviates from these axioms is not creative, he is simply dead wrong.** The written Torah which is the **visible Torah** absorbed with the **eyes**, and anything passed down by Mesorah which has the equivalent status, are plain facts that must be accepted, and our role is to interpret and explain them. **That is to go from "Ayin" - the written Torah visible to the eye, to "Peh" the mouth that carries the oral Torah that explains the written Torah.**

### **Bavli vs Yerushalmi**

The relationship between the written Torah and the oral Torah that we superimpose upon it is a parallel relationship to the Jewish people with their Torah perspective acquired in the desert and Eretz Yisroel which is where those ideas have to be imprinted. If we are successful, the ideas and values of the Torah actually become **visible** within the land of Israel. Whereas, outside of the land of Israel the truths of the Torah remain forever hidden from the naked eye and remain a matter of faith. With this we can understand that even though we are talking about the Oral Torah, we also called it 'the light of the Menorah', **the oral Torah only attains that level of clarity to the point that it can be seen in the land of Israel.** And that is the secret that prophecy, which is visual, is only either in Israel or for the sake of the land of Israel and the Zohar and Yerushalmi that were written in Israel, when coming to make a point say '**Ta chazi!**' – 'come and see'. Part of the penalty of the exile is that we get thrust into the polar opposite situation and Hashem "puts us in **darkness** like those dead to the world" Which the Gemara in Sanhedrin calls 'Talmud Bavli'. **The dialectical method of the Talmud Bavli is a countermeasure to our recognition that we are blind to even the simplest truth and that's why every idea has to be challenged and tested from every angle before it can be accepted as truth and that is why the**

**point that additional space opens up.** The spies failed to make that connection.

### **The Desert vs The Land of Israel**

Contrast that with the generation of the desert under Moshe's leadership where the situation was the polar opposite. **The only thing the Jews saw around them was the supernatural;** the clouds of glory, the miraculous well; the **Manna** from heaven; all the miracles that Moshe did for them and the experience of getting Torah directly from Moshe as if getting it directly from Hashem as 'the Divine presence speaks through his mouth'. **For the Jews in the desert, the spiritual was the visible and they did not know how to cope with the physical that obscures the spiritual.** This is how the **Nefesh Hachaim** explains what it says by the giving of the Torah, 'all the nations **saw** the **sounds**'. The **sounds** represent **ideas** that are in the mind were visible at the time, whereas the things that we would call visible in our day and age, were distant- abstract concepts to them. **The spies couldn't cope with the spiritual being invisible to the eye within the physical realm and thus attributed the wrong explanation to what they saw. That false narrative is 'Lashon Hara';**

### **Our Creativity**

Hashem creates everything from the conceptual level down to the physical level – **in that order.** For Hashem the word, which is the concept, which for us would be carried by speech, comes before the visible emergence of that object. Therefore, for Hashem it is first to say, 'let there be light' and only then, light comes into existence. This is not the case for us. Although man is also to be a creator and to create with his speech like Hashem does, **we don't invent ideas out of nowhere, but rather we create by explaining them.** In other words, **our room for creativity is in the enhancement of the concepts that Hashem created.** As we have said in the past, our room to create with our mouths is in the Oral Torah which is to put explanation upon the axioms that were

Talmud Bavli when making appoint says, **'Ta Shma'** – come and hear, because we are simply blind.

### Getting Back

With this we can understand what the Maharal meant to say, that the first chapter in **"Eichah"** is written in the proper order of **'Ayin'** before **'Peh'**, to teach you that this is the proper order. The Maharal did not mean to say that **"Eichah"** is the source for the order of the **"Aleph-Beis"** but rather, it is a reminder as to the shift that has occurred as a result of being exiled from the land of Israel: **that we were plunged into total darkness. We used to see certain basic truths and yearned to describe and explain them in a manner that is faithful to the truths those visible facts meant to reveal. Instead of that, we're in a world of everyone setting a narrative to be sold as facts.** We are reminded of what we have to yearn for: to get back to the level that there was at Sinai which is the level that we will regain in the future; "all flesh **will see** together that the mouth of Hashem has spoken", and as we say in the *Kedushas* of *Shabbos* – "May **our eyes see** your Kingdom" "May Hashem let us hear **to the eyes of all living creatures**, I will be your master" speedily in our days, Amein.

## CHAPTER 4

### Assessing the Damage

#### Moshe Yishayahu Yirmiyahu

**"Eicha"** – How can I carry by myself your contentiousness, your burdens and your quarrels" (1:12). This Pasuk is traditionally read with an 'Eicha tune' as it is always read before Tisha B'Av. Is there an inherent connection? The Midrash Rabba on Eicha says as follows: "Three prophesized using the word **Eicha**: Moshe, Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu. Moshe said, **"Eicha** – how shall I carry etc."; Yeshayahu said, **"Eicha** – how became like a harlot the faithful city" (which is the designated Haftara that we always read before Tisha B'av) and Yirmiyahu said **"Eicha** – How sat alone....etc."(book of Eicha). The Midrash continues: "said Rabbi Levi, this is like a princess that had three caretakers. One saw the princess in her state of tranquility; one saw the princess in a state of impulsiveness, and one saw the princess in a state of 'ugliness'. Moshe saw the Jewish people in their glory and tranquility and said **"Eicha** – How can I carry you myself..."; Yishayahu saw them in their impulsiveness and said **"Eicha** – How became like a harlot..."; Yirmiyahu saw them in their state of 'ugliness' and said, **"Eicha....."**

It's easy to see a connection between the impulsiveness of the Jewish people that Yishayahu laments and the 'ugliness' that Yirmiyahu laments, because the impulsiveness in the generation of Yishayahu led to the 'ugliness' and destruction in the days of Yirmiyahu, but why is Moshe lamenting? What could possibly be a common denominator between Moshe who sees the Jewish people 'in their glory and tranquility' with the impulsiveness and 'ugliness' that Yishayahu and Yirmiyahu lament?

in the 11<sup>th</sup> principle) that the greatest retribution for transgressing the commandments of the Torah is **Kareis**. What makes **Kareis** the worst punishment even more than Gehinom? **The Rambam defines "kareis" as to erase the transgressor from reality**. The Rambam wanted us to be aware of how the Torah makes an absolute difference. If we keep the Torah, it grants us the only **absolute existence** possible for us, which is clinging to Hashem in Olam Haba. Transgressing the Torah could make the ultimate difference for the transgressor as he is totally deleted from reality. The Nefesh Hachaim (shaar Alef chap 18) explains the mechanics of how that is done. The Nefesh Hachaim points out that you will always find the term **kareis** in the context of the level of soul called **Nefesh**: "Venichresa Hanefesh Hahi" or, "Venichresu Hanefashos HaOso". The **Nefesh** is the lowest level of the five levels of soul: **Nefesh, Ruach, Neshama, Chaya and Yechida** (see more on this in Even SheSiyā Chayei Sarah 5779). The **Nefesh** is the aspect that is called '**shitufa d'gufa**' – **the partner of the body**, as it is the level of soul that inhabits the body and is intertwined with it. The **Ruach's** lowest aspect is connected to the **Nefesh** in the body but its higher aspect is connected to the **Neshama**, which is beyond the body, as are the even higher levels of **Chaya** and **Yechida**. In "**kareis**" – **the severance, the Nefesh is cut off from the Ruach** and the **Nefesh** will go down with the body, **severed** from the other levels of soul. This is enough to delete a person from reality because all that we do and are rewarded and punished for is a partnership between body and soul. This is the secret behind the dialogue between Antoninus and Rebbe (Sanhedrin 91) Antoninus wanted to claim that body and soul can escape Divine judgment by blaming the sin perpetrated on each other, saying "I didn't do it – He did it!". Rebbe gave the famous metaphor of the blind abled-bodied person (alluding to the body) being guided by the lame-sighted person on his shoulders (alluding to the soul), to commit the caper of stealing from the king's orchard together. Each one blamed the other and said, I couldn't have possibly done the

## Kareis & Adam

The Midrash continues: "..... Said Rebbe Levi, the Jews were not exiled until they denied the **thirty-six** sins that are punishable by '**kareis**' as '**Eicha**' has a numerical value of **36**...." What is the connection between '**kareis**' and the exile? This Midrash continues and says "and Rebbe Nechemia said that the word '**Eicha**' is none other than lamentation as the Pasuk says, "Hashem called to Adam and told him and said to him "**Ayeka**" – where are you? Which is spelled exactly the same as '**Eicha**' which Rebbe Nechemia says to read as an acronym "**Oy lecha**" – woe to you. What is the connection between the sin of Adam and what Moshe, Yishayahu and Yirmiyahu are lamenting?

## Why is Churban Habayis in Gittin?

It is well known that the place where the Gemara in the Bavli talks the most about the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, what led up to it and the aftermath is in Maseches **Gittin**, where we have the laws of divorce. Why would Chazal put the discussion of this horrific topic in the tractate that talks about the seemingly civil affair of divorce? There are two clues to solving this mystery. One is the famous Chazal that says "The '**Mizbeach**' – **alter** cries for the one who divorces his first wife" (gittin 90B). Another clue is to be found based on the Midrash above. The Midrash said that the Jewish people were exiled because they denied the thirty-six transgressions that are punishable by **kareis**. The Biblical term for the "**Get**" – **bill of divorce** is "**Sefer Krisus**" - **a book of severance** from the same root as **kareis**. Where do these clues lead us?

## Kareis

The Rambam makes it clear and wants us to internalize as a principle of faith (see Rambam Hilchos Teshuva 8:5 and the Rambam's 13 principles of faith that he presents in his monumental introduction to Perek Chelek in Maseches Sanhedrin

crime, I am blind and the other one said, I couldn't have possibly done it because I'm lame. The king said, get on his shoulders and I will judge you as one person. So also, Hashem judges the body and the soul as one integrated unit. **Our identity is not body and not soul. Our identity is the unique composite being that is man.** That is the secret that the power of free will that is our unique ability to choose and deserve reward or punishment only exists when you have the body and the soul together. Therefore, just severing the Nefesh that inhabits the body from the parts of soul that are above the body is more than enough to delete this person's identity from reality.

### Marriage & Divorce

We have explained at great length (Even Shesiya Chayei Sara 5778) that the relationship of the integrated unit of man and woman, as **"one flesh"** and "He called **"them"** Adam" is a body-soul relationship (Zohar, Chayei Sara). As we explained, this is what Chazal allude to in the halachic principle of **"Ishto KeGufo"** – **his wife is like his body**, meaning to say by contrast that he is her soul. Similarly, Chazal say: "The righteous woman does the will of her husband" (Tana d'Bei Elyahu chap 9). That is the relationship the body has to the soul as the righteous body does what the soul wants. With this we can understand how horrible a needless divorce is. **It is the Kareis of the integrated unit of man and wife as one being.** My Rebbe, Maran HaGaon HaRav Yaakov Weinberg, zt'l the Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisroel used to sum it up that in Judaism, divorce is not to dissolve a partnership, it is amputation of living flesh. Thus, the term, **"Sefer Krisus"**-book of severance is so fitting to describe the tragedy of a divorce.

### The National Scale

As is well known, and it is the theme of the whole book of Shir HaShirim, that the Jewish people and Hashem are like married to each other and the Beis HaMikdash is their home and **the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash is both literally and**

**figuratively a broken home**, with Golus exile being likened to divorce (See Rashi on the first Pasuk on Eicha – Yoma 86B and many other P'sukim in Tanach). This alone would be reason enough to understand why the Agadatas on Churban HaBayis are in Gittin. But it goes deeper than that. Hashem is everywhere, equally and indivisible. However, **His revelation** is special for the Jewish people and for the land of Israel in general and the Beis HaMikdash in particular. **Hashem's revelation in this world is carried by the Jewish people the way a soul is carried by a body.** The level called **"Shechina"** that literally dwells amongst us as a people and is revealed in the Beis HaMikdash is parallel to **our national Nefesh** that inhabits the body. The higher level of national soul that is parallel to the **Ruach**, which is on the one hand connected to the Nefesh in the body and on the other hand, is connected to the other levels of soul in the heaven, is called **'Kudsha Brich Hu'** – (there are obviously levels of Divine revelation parallel to Neshama, Chaya and Yechida but it is not necessary to delve into for the purpose of our discussion). **When all these levels are in place, we have an open lifeline between us and Hashem. This is the alignment that we pray for before performing any Mitzvah in the "L'shem Yichud", we pray for the sake of the unification of "Kudsha Brich Hu and His Shechinah".** This alignment is properly in place when the Beis HaMikdash is standing and the Shechinah is revealed there and this is alluded to in the final stanza of Kah Ribon that we sing in Shabbos Zemiros, "To Your Beis HaMidash return and the Holy of Holies, the place where the **Nefesh** and **Ruach** are united".

### National Kareis

With all these principles, we can understand what the Nefesh Hachaim (Shaar Alef chap 19) says that **Golus is national Kareis** because the level called **"Shechinah"** has been **severed** from **"Kudsha Brich hu"**, like a Nefesh severed from a Ruach and that is why we find the term in the Zohar **"Shechinta Bgalusa"** – the Shechinah per se is in exile, or **"Shechinta B'afra"** –

and all judgments directly from Moshe. As Rashi further explains, they were happy to have other judges that can be bought and bribed. That subtle disconnect from Moshe, the source of Torah was what Moshe was lamenting, **Eicha** – they were glad to have a break in their connection to Moshe, the source of Torah and that break in connection is a **kareis** that is truly lamentable **because they wanted it**. Later in history, in the days of Yishayahu, it's called that the Jewish people were impulsive. **'Impulsive' is to be acting without sound judgement – it is to be severed from the moral conscience**. Their actions were called to like be like a harlot, which is called a Sota, which means, **deviate** (partial severance) but Chazal say it is to act as a **Shoteh** (fool), **cut off** from better judgment. The severance from good judgement leads to the actual severance from Hashem and our homeland, which is the final severance mourned by Yirmiyahu.

### Hope & Yearning

There is hope, parallel to the way the individual can get out of Kareis, if he does Teshuva, is how the nation can get itself out of exile. The Nefesh Hachaim (Shaar Alef chap 18) explains that Hashem in His mercy, does not allow Kareis to sever the entirety of the Nefesh. The highest part of Nefesh which is called the **"crown of the Nefesh"** is inextricably bound up with the lowest aspect of Ruach that is called the **"kingdom of the Ruach"**. The highest part of the Nefesh is a person's will and that's alluded to in the word Nefesh itself, like the Gemara's term, **'Mimah Nafshach'** – either **way you want**. The Gemara says, "Ribono Shel Olam, you know we really **want** to do Your will, but the Yetzer Hara and the Golus gets in the way". With this the Nefesh Hachaim explains the famous Rambam in (ironically) the laws of divorce that when a person is obligated by halacha to divorce his wife but refuses to do so, the Beis Din may appoint someone to beat him until he consents to do so and it's called genuine consent **because deep down, the Jew wants to do what the Halacha says**. The Nefesh Hachaim explains the metaphysics behind this Rambam: it's because the highest

the Shechinah is in the dust. Or in the words of the Gemara (Megillah 29) "when the Jews went into Golus, the Shechinah went into exile with them". The Shechinah in exile is like the Nefesh severed from the Ruach.

### Severing the Lifeline

We now understand the correlation between **Kareis** and **Golus** and the significance that **Eicha** has the numerical value of thirty-six, the number of transgressions punishable by **Kareis**. **Eicha refers to all the times a connection to Hashem or the Torah, which is called the tree of life, has been severed**. Going in historical order, when Adam did the opposite of meriting to eat from the tree of life and ate from the Eitz Hadaas instead, it severed his connection to life and brought death to the world. It severed his potential connection to Torah by changing his mentality of perceiving truth vs falsehood to a lower level of just perceiving desirable versus non-desirable which barred him from the tree of life, which was revealed as the Torah twenty-six generations later. We can now appreciate why asides from his being **exiled (Golus) from Eden he also separated from Chava for 130 years**. He was experiencing Kareis and Krisus on all levels (until 130 years later when he merited a partial restoration, reconciled with Chava and was able to beget Shes, in his Divine image).

### Moshe Yishayahu & Yirmiyahu

In the days of Moshe, where the Jews were in their glory and tranquility, there was a subtle severance from Moshe who is the prime carrier of the **Torah**, which is called "our life" and it is the essence of our connection to Hashem. As Rashi says (1:14) Moshe was disappointed with the Jewish people that they were happy to accept the appointment of judges. Even though it was a good idea on Yisro's part to best administer the nation, and it was also endorsed by Divine command, nonetheless, the Jewish people should have wanted to reject it and insist on receiving all Torah

aspect of the Nefesh which is the will is never severed off from the Heavenly aspect of Ruach. **A Jew's will is always in the right place** and this is the secret behind the “**pintele yid**”, discussed in Seforim. **With the will to do Teshuva that “crown of the Nefesh” could summon all the fallen parts to come back and restore the lifeline.**

### Getting out of Golus

The Nefesh Hachaim only addressed the mechanics in the individual but it is obvious that it is true for the nation also. This is the secret behind that we have to yearn for Mashiach and await him with great anticipation constantly. This is the secret why they ask every Jew when he goes up to Heaven and is judged ‘**tzipisa l’yeshua**’ – **did you anticipate salvation?** (Shabbos 31A). The Kuzari ends his book saying that the Geula will only come when we genuinely yearn for it, as the Pasuk says, “you shall arise and have mercy on Zion for the time has come because your servants **desire** its stones and dust.” This is the secret behind what Chazal say that someone who genuinely mourns Yerushalayim will merit to see it in its joyous state. This will be explained in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5 Mourning & Redemption

### Tisha B’Av – Looking to the Future

Chazal (*Ta’anis*, 30b) tell us that “**Kol ha’misavel al Yerushalayim zocheh v’roeh b’simchasa** – Anyone who mourns for Jerusalem will merit seeing it in its state of joy.” The question begs to be asked: why is it that mourning alone can give us the merit to see Yerushalayim in its splendor, with the *Beis Ha’Mikdash* rebuilt?

To understand this, we must first understand why the act of mourning for the loss of the Temple is actually positive and productive. This is not a new question. After the destruction of the *Beis Ha’Mikdash* the prophet Yirmiyahu was still mourning intensely. There is a legend that the philosopher Plato approached him and asked him a number of questions. One of them was: Is it appropriate for you to still mourn the destruction of Yerushalayim and the Temple? Is this the path of the wise? Does not the intelligent man continue to live in the present, without getting mired in the past?

### Don’t we Only Mourn the recently Departed?!?

We will first look towards the *halachic* view on mourning a family member. If a person loses a loved one there is a mourning process that culminates after a month for most close relatives, and after a year for a parent. The anniversary of the relative’s passing is commemorated in order to raise his or her soul’s heavenly standing, but there is no further mourning after a year has passed from the time the loved one passed away. In fact, after the year’s period is over the mourner is told he must stop grieving, and he is encouraged to move on.

But when it comes to mourning the *Beis Ha’Mikdash* we see that it is most certainly not the case. The *Beis Ha’Mikdash* was destroyed nearly two thousand years ago, and not only do we have a three-week mourning period every year, we express our grief year-round – even in the midst of our greatest joys!

To this day, even on his wedding day the groom breaks a glass under the *chupah* to recognize his feeling of loss for Jerusalem. In the Old City of Jerusalem there is still no live music performed at weddings. During the whole year, a recognizable portion of all of our homes is to remain unfinished in order to remember the destruction.

We are always mourning the loss of our Temple, and we still feel the pain. There is a Divine edict that the pain of losing the deceased should ebb after twelve months (Pesachim54B), but this does not seem to be happening to the Jewish people concerning the *Beis Ha'Mikdash*. Why?

### The Beis Hamikdash lives

It is because the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* is not deceased, it has merely been taken away. This is the same reason Yaakov Avinu never stopped mourning for his son Yosef. *Chazal* tell us that his extended twenty-two-year grieving period was only possible because **Yosef wasn't really dead**. This is why Yaakov could feel perpetual anguish at being separated from Yosef. Rashi comments in *parshas Pikudei (Shemos, 38:21)*, "these are the accountings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of testimony," The two words Mishkan, allude to the, two Temples taken as ***maskon***, - collateral!

The *Beis Ha'Mikdash* was taken as collateral, just as a collateral security may be taken from a delinquent borrower. The Temple still exists, it was never really destroyed. The world is meant to have it – it was merely taken from us temporarily to encourage us to be worthy of it once more by doing *teshuvah*.

### Nothing more Natural than a Beis HaMikdash

The *Beis Ha'Mikdash* isn't dead and gone. It is only missing as of now. In fact, **it is the natural state of the world to contain a *Beis Ha'Mikdash***. The purpose of the world includes "Hashem's desire to have a dwelling place below" (Midrash Tanchuma Naso: 16) to fully express His presence.

*Chazal (Yerushalmi, Yoma, 1:1)* have revealed that if a generation has not had the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* rebuilt in it, **it is as if it has been destroyed in that generation**. What a harsh indictment! They may not have enough merit to rebuild it, but why consider them to be like those who caused it to be destroyed?

**My Rebbe Maran Hagaon Harav Rabb! Yaakov Weinberg Zt"l** Rosh Yeshivas Ner Yisroel explained this based on the understanding that the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* is an integral part of the world's plan. Since the existence of a Temple in the world is the natural state, the world should come back to its equilibrium without outside effort. It must be that the generation's sins are actively preventing the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* from returning. Therefore, it is as if they destroyed the Temple.

### Redeeming the Collateral

The *Beis Ha'Mikdash* is still a reality, and the world is meant to have it. We do not mourn because it has passed on, never to return. To the contrary, we will never complete our mourning period and move on with our lives. **We want to redeem our collateral**. We mourn because it demonstrates that we have not given up. We will mourn until we the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* is restored and we feel complete once again.

This answers "Plato's question" and explains why the act of mourning Yerushalayim gives one the merit of seeing its redemption. **A cessation of mourning would be a declaration of complacency** – implying that we accept the apparent loss of the Temple, Hashem forbid. We do not! The *Beis Ha'Mikdash* is as real to us now as it was to the Jewish people then.

The *Beis Ha'Mikdash* is part of our present reality, and the pain we have in being separated from it is a demonstration of just how connected we are to it. We miss it, it is a part of us, and we will do what it takes to get it back.

May we soon witness the rebuilding of Yerushalayim in merit of our mourning the loss of the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* on Tisha B'Av. With this we demonstrate our connection to Yerushalayim and the *Beis Ha'Mikdash*, and our dedication to participating in Hashem's plan to make this world His dwelling place.