

Tisha Ba'v

A time to mourn

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Credits: In making this booklet we relied heavily on material from many sources. Unfortunately being that we condensed, reformatted and added to the author's original material, we can't give credit on the individual articles. Instead we will list here (alphabetically) the individuals and websites which we used in compiling the material. Aish.com, Chinuch.org, Hidabrut.com. Rabbis; Daniel Balles, Eli Bohm, Yisroel Gelber, D. Cohen, Zamir Cohen, Benjamin Rapaport, Dovid Rosenfeld. Mrs. Slovie Jungries and Sara Debbie Gutfreund.*

Tishah B'Av, A Background

Everything you wanted to know about Tisha B'Av but had no one to ask.

Why is this day so sad?

The tractate of Ta'anit mentions that there were five cataclysmic incidents that occurred on this.

1.All of Klal Yisroel wept in vain after hearing the evil report of the meraglim sent by Moshe Rabbeinu to explore Eretz Yisroel. Thereupon, Hashem decreed that they should not enter Eretz Yisroel, and this day would be singled out as a day of weeping for many generations to come.

2.The first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed on this day.

3.The second Beis Hamikdash were destroyed on this day

4.During the Bar Kochva revolution, the large city of Betar, in which thousands of Jews lived, was conquered by the Roman legions.

5.The site of the Beis Hamikdash and its surrounding area was plowed over by the Roman prosecutor סופרונורוס.

Who ordained this day as a fast day and how do we observe it?

1.The fast day of Tishah B'Av was established by rabbinic ordinance. The fast was first mentioned in the Prophets, and the Mishnah ordained it to mark the destruction of the Temples — the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC by the army of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia, and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, by Titus and the Romans.

2.The fast falls on the 9th of Av, for a full day, and it is the culmination of the Three Weeks mourning period. This fast is the most serious of the four fast days related to the destruction of the Temple.

3.The main prohibitions ordained for Tishah B'Av include eating and drinking, wearing leather shoes, smearing oils on the body and washing.

4.Other actions are prohibited on Tishah B'Av because of mourning, such as: a prohibition of learning Torah, doing work, greeting people, sitting on a chair (until noon) and more.

5.On Tishah B'Av eve we read the scroll of Eicha (Lamentations).

6.After Eicha and during our morning prayers we recite Kinnos (Dirges).

7.During Shemoneh Esrai by Minchah, we add the prayers of Nachem and Anainu.



What is Eicha (Lamentations)?

1.The Book of Eicha (Lamentations), which is written in scroll form, is read in the synagogue on Tisha B'Av. It describes the calamities experienced by the Jews at the time of the First Temple's destruction.

2.The Book of Eicha (Lamentations) is a collection of five elegies written about the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its inhabitants by Nebuchadnezzar. It is one of five scrolls included in the Bible, and was written by the prophet Jeremiah.

3.The 1st, 2nd and 4th chapters were a prophecy, and actually written 18 years before the destruction. Unfortunately, King Yehoyakim and the nation didn't repent and the prophecy was fulfilled. After the Churban HaShem commanded Jeremiah to rewrite it and add chapter 3 and 5.

4.The scroll features dirges dealing with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its inhabitants. The prophet Jeremiah laments the terrible state of Jerusalem during the siege on the eve of the destruction, the bleak and difficult situation of Jerusalem and its inhabitants after the destruction, and the obscured Divine Providence that followed it. He also justified the harsh sentence imposed on its inhabitants because of their many sins and crimes.

5.Chapter 1 describes the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah paints a vivid picture of a widow weeping at night, with tears on her cheeks, who can find no solace and is abandoned by all of her friends. The implication is that Judea was exiled and her sons were enslaved among the nations, while Zion is sitting, mourning and in ruins, longing for the many pilgrims who used to come through her gates. Jerusalem remembers the bitter destruction, the glorious period preceding it and the fact that no nation had come to her aid. To the contrary, foreign nations with whom the Jews had made a pact and on whom they had relied, reneged on their promises and were happy to see her in ruins.

6.In Chapter 2, the Prophet depicts the tragedy that befell the Jewish people, the decree that had fallen from the heaven to the earth. Jerusalem was burning. The prophet describes children dying from starvation, begging their mothers for food before they expire in their laps. "There is no other similar period in history by which I can comfort you!" the prophet calls out and adds: What is the reason for the Jewish people's terrible suffering? The false prophets who promised that Jerusalem would never be destroyed and that "no enemies would come to the gates of Jerusalem."

7.In Chapter 3 Jeremiah describes his private life, which is an allegory for the suffering of a Jew. He describes the hardships and suffering that he experienced during his life, yet does not lose his faith. Later in this chapter the prophet explains that miracles always surround us and that G-d is good to all even during difficult times. Suffering has a purpose — to cry and feel regret for the mistakes and sins we did which caused all the suffering.

8.In Chapter 4, the prophet Jeremiah returns to describe the horrors of the destruction. The golden radiance has faded; the light of the Temple was darkened. The jewels (the Jews) were thrown into the streets! Precious Jewish children were given into the hands of the brutal enemies. Their tongues stuck to their palates from hunger and thirst, and there was no one to give them bread. Pampered children, who were accustomed to delicacies, were now gathering food scraps from rubbish piles. Their bodies were devastated by hunger, until they became unrecognizable. Their faces were blackened and their skin was shriveled on their bones.

9."The victims of the sword were better off than the victims of hunger." (4:9) Death by the sword was far easier than the slow torment of death from hunger pangs. Merciful women reached the point where they cooked their own children! The nations and their kings could not believe their eyes. The blind fell over the bodies in the streets and their clothes soaked up the blood of the dead. Jeremiah prophesies at the end of the chapter about the destruction of the Second Temple.

10.Chapter 5, the last chapter, is dedicated to hoping for the Redemption. The chapter is one long cry of prayer, faith and hope. Remember what happened to us and see our disgrace. Foreigners inherited us; others sit in our homes. We must pay to drink our water and buy the firewood that was ours. Death by starvation ... young and old brutally murdered. Our joy has turned into mourning. Our crown was taken from our heads. The end of the chapter has a description of foxes roaming the desolate Mount Zion. "For this our heart has become faint, for these things our eyes have dimmed." (5:17). It ends with a plea and cry to G-d: "Restore us to You, L-rd, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old" which is said in a loud and heartfelt voice by the public. The Cantor then repeats this verse.

What are Kinnos?

1.Kinnos are dirges (sad poems) or elegies traditionally recited by Jews on Tisha B'Av to mourn the destruction of both the First and Second Temple in Jerusalem and other tragedies in Jewish history, including the Crusades and the Holocaust.

2.Kinnos have the status of a Minhag (custom). The reason for this Minhag is, that on Tisha B'Av we are supposed to stay connected to the focus of the day.

3.Different Kinnos were composed by different great sages, the oldest Kinnot were composed by Rabbi Elazar Hakalir, who may have been R' Eleazar b. 'Arak or R' Eleazar b. Shimeon from the Mishna. His Kinnos generally follow the style of Eichah Later sage added their own Kinnos particularly after the cursades and holo-caust. Rabbi Yeudah Halevi completely changed the nature of the Kinnot with his compositions. There is no pain or despair over the tragedies of the distant or near past, but rather a longing for returning to Jerusalem in his poem, Tziyon Halo Tishali.

How does Tishah B'Av affects us today?

1. If not for the first Tishah B'Av (and the Jews crying about going into Israel), we would've went directly from Mt. Sinai into Israel. Life on planet earth would be entirely different then we know it, it would've been similar to the Garden of Edan. Unfortunately due to our sins we lost it and must live lives which includes, hardships, suffering and distance from Hashem.

2. When the Jews had the Bies Hamikdash (particularly the first and to a lesser extent by the 2nd), they were closer to Hashem, they saw daily miracles and had prophets amongst them and the nation felt the Devine Presence. Not only were we more connected to the spiritual, but the physical world was much better, fruit grew bigger, tasted better, and took hardly any work to produce.

3. Just as we understand the closer one is to the sun,the warmer he'll feel. So to, Hashem is the source of all blessings and goodness, when we're close to him the world is full of " light" and goodness. Conversely if we are distant from him, there is more pain, suffering and strife in the world. The Bies Hamikdash was like a super powered electromagnetic force keeping us close to Hashem thereby making the world a better place.

4. Part of the punishment of the first Tishah B'Av was that this day in particular and time period in general would be marked with tragedies. I

-.The expulsion of English Jewry was also decreed on, on July 18, 1290. Edward I of England ordered that all Jews be expelled from his country by November 1, 1290, and that those who remained after that date would be executed.

-The Expulsion from Spain was also carried out on Tisha B'Av in 1492. The three months given to the Jews to leave Spain ended on the night 8 Av 1492. Despite the extension ending two days before Tisha B'Av, this event is etched in the collective memory of the Jewish people as part of the tragedies that occurred on Tisha B'Av.

-The mass deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Auschwitz death camp began on the 9th of Av, 1942

5.According to tradition, after the Messiah comes and the Third Temple will be built, Tisha B'Av, like the other fasts over the destruction, will become a day of celebration and joy. The Jerusalem Talmud states that the Messiah will be born on Tishah B'Av.



Halacha Berurah: The Laws of Tisha B'Av

By: Rabbi Elli Bohm. Reviewed by: Harav Yisroel Belsky

When Tishah B'Av falls out on Shabbos, the fast is postponed until Sunday. This causes quite a few halachic differences from a regular year. Those differences will be discussed in grey areas. On a regular year feel free to skip them.

Erev Tishah B'Av

Two meals are eaten on Erev Tishah B'Av in the late afternoon; the main meal and the seudah hamafsekes. The reason we eat two meals is because one may not eat any two cooked dishes during the seudah hamafsekes. Therefore, we eat a regular meal before Mincha and we eat the seudah hamafsekes after.

The Seudah Hamafsekes

A. When Tishah B'Av Falls Out on a Weekday

The seudah hamafsekes is the last meal eaten before Tishah B'Av.

1. One should drink less beverages than one would normally drink at a regular meal. One should not eat sharp, salty, or spicy foods after the meal.
2. One may not drink beer during the seudah hamafsekes.
3. One is permitted to drink coffee and tea at the seudah hamafsekes.
4. During the seudah hamafsekes, it is customary to eat bread and hard boiled eggs. Some have the custom to dip the bread into ashes, saying "This is the meal of Tishah B'Av".
5. One should sit on the ground while eating this meal. It is written in kabbalah that one should not sit directly on the ground, but should separate himself from the floor (i.e. with a sack cloth). One who is weak may sit on a pillow.
6. Even after finishing the meal, one may sit on a regular sized chair until nightfall.
7. Three people over bar mitzvah should not sit and eat the meal together, to avoid being obligated in zimun. If three people did sit together, they should not recite zimun.

B. When Tishah B'Av Falls Out on Shabbos

1. There is no seudah hamafsekes when Tishah B'Av falls out on Shabbos. One may eat a regular fleishige meal during seudah shlishis.
2. Nevertheless, some have a custom to eat only dairy items during seudah shlishis.
3. There is a controversy as to whether one may sit with one's friends during this meal. However, since it is Shabbos, everyone agrees that one may eat with his family, and one may also recite zimun together.
4. One should be careful to finish eating before sunset. One who bentshes after shkiah may bentsh with a kos, since our custom is not to drink it.

Removing Leather Shoes

A. When Tishah B'Av Falls Out On a Weekday

The Maharil writes that leather shoes should be removed before going to shul.

1. In any case, one must remove one's leather shoes prior to sunset.



B. When Tishah B'Av falls out on Shabbos

1. One may not symbolize any mourning on Shabbos, since Shabbos is a holy day that is full of happiness.
2. If one is starting Ma'ariv at the actual zman, one should not put on Tishah B'Av shoes until after borchu of Maariv on Motzaei Shabbos.
3. The paroches is also taken off after borchu. After hearing borchu, one should slip off his leather shoes without touching them. The chazan however, should say ברוך המבדיל בין קודש לחול and take off his shoes before starting borchu.
4. If night has already fallen and the shul has not started Maariv, everyone should say ברוך המבדיל, and take off their shoes before borchu.
5. Preferably, one should wait until after tzeis hakochavim, say ברוך המבדיל בין קודש לחול, and then remove one's leather shoes. Some change from Shabbos clothing into weekday clothing before proceeding to shul to daven Maariv.
6. Most have a custom to daven Maariv in their Shabbos clothing and only change their Differences in Tefilah on Erev Tishah B'Av That Falls Out on Shabbos During Davening.
7. Av Horachamim is said during Shacharis. During Minchah we do not say Tzidkoscha Tzedek. During Maariv on Motzaei Shabbos, יהי נועם is not said, and we start from ואתה קדוש. We also do not recite 15 ייתן לך. Reciting Havdalah on Motzaei Shabbos We do not make havdalah on Motzaei Shabbos, but wait until Motzaei Tishah B'Av to recite havdalah. However, we do recite a בורא מאורי האש on fire after Maariv, before beginning Megilas Aicha.

Learning Torah on Erev Tishah B'Av

1. After midday on Erev Tishah B'Av it is customary to learn only things that are permitted to be learned on Tishah B'Av.
 2. If Erev Tishah B'Av falls out on Shabbos, we do not say פרקי אבות. However, one is permitted to be maveir sedra. If there is a seder with a לימוד קבוע in a Yeshiva, it should not be canceled.
 3. The Maharshal writes that he himself learned after midday and encouraged others to do so.
 4. The מאמר מרדכי writes that since this stringency of refraining from learning on Erev Tishah B'Av will cause a lot of bitul Torah, one may learn anything he wants.
 5. The Vilna Gaon and the Chayei Odom holds that refraining from learning Erev Tishah B'Av is only a stringency and one may be lenient and learn if he wants to.
 6. The Chofetz Chaim writes that even if Erev Tishah B'Av falls out on a weekday, learning is permitted. However, one who is able to learn things which are relevant to Tishah B'Av, should do so. One may be lenient with regard to the aforementioned halachos when Tishah B'Av or Erev Tishah B'Av falls out on Shabbos, and may learn anything he
- Cutting One's Nails

One should preferably not cut one's nail on Erev Shabbos when Tishah B'Av falls out on Shabbos.

General Halachos of Tishah B'Av

1. One may not wash oneself on Tishah B'Av. One who must wash for medical reasons may do whose hands are dirty may wash them. If soap is needed, it may be used.
2. Upon awakening in the morning one may only wash his hands until his knuckles. After his hands are wiped and remain slightly damp, they may be applied to his face and eyes.
3. The same halacha applies to one who washes his hands after using the bathroom.
4. One may use deodorant to prevent a bad odor. 22 One who has to walk over a rough road for a long distance may wear leather shoes if no suitable footwear is available.
5. On Tishah B'Av, one may only learn those things which are relevant to Tishah B'Av such as גיטין דף נונח. or סנהדרין דף קד
6. One may sit on a regular sized chair after midday.
7. One should not greet someone by saying 'hello' or 'good morning' etc., unless one was greeted first. The response should be uttered in a serious tone.



8. One should not read a newspaper.

Reciting Havdalah on Motzaei Tishah B'Av. (when it falls out on Sunday)

1. One should make havdalah without besamim and without fire.
2. If the bracha of besamim was mistakenly said, the borei pri hagafen should be repeated.
3. If one is ill and needs to break their fast, they are required to recite havdalah first. Children under bar mitzvah who are not fasting, may eat without hearing havdalah.

Motzaei Tishah B'Av

One may not listen to music or wash clothing until midday of the day after Tishah B'Av (Yud B'Av).

1. However, if Tishah B'Av was a nidche and was pushed off until Sunday or if Tishah B'Av was on a Thursday and the tenth of Av is Erev Shabbos, one may wash clothing immediately after the fast.
2. However, one may not eat meat, drink wine, or listen to music until the next day.

Miscellaneous Laws

1. The custom is to wait until after Tishah B'Av to recite kiddush levana.
2. There is a controversy among the poskim whether one may write on Tishah B'Av. Some say that it has the same halachos as Chol Hamoed, while others permit one to write in all cases.
3. One should not make his bed until midday.
4. One should say kinus until close to midday so that one should not come to do any work during this time.
5. One should not interrupt saying kinus by talking or by going outside the shul for a while, since one's heart should not be interrupted from mourning over the Beis Hamikdash.



Inspiration, a collection of Essays

Tisha B'Av and the Destruction of the Temple (A Background)

When we think about the Jews living as a nation in Eretz Yisrael, with the Holy Temple as the center of their lives, it sometimes seems like a long-ago legend. But in fact, it is a real – and very long – era in history. Tisha B'Av is a calendar date – the ninth day (Tisha) of the Hebrew month of Av. Tisha B'Av is singled out as a day of national mourning for the Jewish people. It was on this day that first Holy Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonian emperor, Nebuchadnezzar, in the year 423 BCE. By the time it was destroyed, it had stood for more than four hundred years, ever since King Solomon's reign.

Not only was the Temple destroyed, but Jerusalem was conquered and its inhabitants carried away into exile. The Temple, which had served as the heart of the Jewish people for centuries, was gone. The daily sacrifices brought by the Kohanim (priests) were no more. The entire rhythm of Jewish life, marked by the festival seasons and pilgrimages to Temple in Jerusalem, stopped short.

When G-d directed King Solomon to build a Temple, the purpose was to provide a place of utmost purity and holiness, where G-d's presence could "rest" on earth. Miracles occurred on a daily basis at the Temple, and G-d's presence was clear to anyone with sense to see and understand. Even the non-Jewish nations sent sacrifices to our Temple's altar, and knew that this was the channel of blessing into the world.

Fifty-three years after the Jews were forced out of Jerusalem, the Persian ruler Cyrus permitted them to return to their land. This occurred in the year 371 BCE. A few years later, Darius, another Persian ruler, gave the Jews permission to rebuild the Temple. It was finally completed in 352 BCE.

Once again, the Jewish nation had a home and a heart. Sacrifices were able to resume and the many Torah commandments involving the Temple were once again able to be performed.

Nevertheless, the Second Temple era was a time of great strife within the Jewish people. Many sects established themselves and bitter arguments unfortunately took over much of the society. As a result, after many years of warnings by the prophets, G-d allowed the Romans to destroy the Temple. The date was approximately 70 CE, about 420 years after it had been completed.

Once again, the Jews were carried off into exile. The precious vessels of the Temple, crafted of silver, gold and copper according to the directions given in the Torah, were looted and brought back to Rome. The scene is depicted on the Arch of Titus, which was constructed to celebrate the Roman general's victory.

Through this time-line, we can see that our Holy Temples stood in their spot on the Temple Mount of Jerusalem for a total of 830 years. They were the source from which all blessing flowed and toward which all the Jewish people's love and devotion to G-d were directed. Thus, when the Jewish people commemorate Tisha B'Av, they do not only mourn the loss of our land or the demise of two glorious buildings. We mourn the loss of a part of our essence. Yet the loss is not complete, for the same prophets who foretold of the destruction consoled us as well, letting us know that G-d would never abandon His people. As surely as our exile arrived as predicted, the redemption that our prophets have foretold will arrive as well.

Why did Hashem destroy the Bais Hamikdash?

(A Mashal)

There was once a powerful king who had one child, a son named "Alexander", whom he loved more than anything. As a baby, the king gave Alexander the best of everything, often saying that one day Alexander would make a fine king. Unfortunately, when the prince was still a young boy, he began going down the wrong path. He was wild and misbehaved and the older he got the worse his behavior became. The king hired the best educators in the world to teach Alexander and guide him to act as a prince should, but it did not help. No matter what the king tried, the prince continued in his rebellious ways.

The king could not think of anything else to do to help his son. He was worried that the prince's dangerous activities would get him into more trouble than the king would be able to get him out of, so he consulted his advisors. The advisors said, "There is only one thing that you can do to get your son to improve his behavior. You must send him away - far away. He has become too spoiled and corrupt. Send him far from the comforts of the palace and make his life difficult. Hopefully, this will shake him up enough to begin to appreciate all that you do for him. Hopefully, this will help him realize that he must change his harmful ways and leave

the evil path that he had chosen." "But I love him!" the king exclaimed, "I can't send him away!" However, the

king's advisors were adamant, "If you really love him," they said, "you MUST do as we advise, otherwise you may lose him forever". The king, left with no choice, reluctantly agreed.

The next night, six strong men entered the prince's room. They lifted Alexander and carried him toward the palace door. Just before he was taken from the palace, the king called out to his son, "I love you Alexander! You have left me no choice but to send you away but please remember that whenever you are ready to come back to me and truly live as a prince, I will welcome you with open arms". With that, Alexander was placed in a royal wagon and taken to a shack in a small rundown village far from his home. At first, life in the village was really rough for the young prince but instead of mending his ways, he stuck it out and as time went by he began to get used to his new surroundings. He joined a group of bandits, changed his name to "Al", and let his behavior go from bad to worse.

Unbeknownst to Alexander, a few of the king's men were secretly keeping close watch over him. The king was regularly updated with detailed reports about how the prince was doing and how he was behaving. When the king was told that Alexander's behavior had continued to worsen, his advisors declared that Alexander's coat should be taken away. A "thief" was sent and the now coatless prince soon got cold and sick. However, the prince still did not seem to care. The longer the prince was away from the palace, the more he got used to the rough life in the poor village; and the king was left waiting, hoping, to hear his son say he's sorry, or even just that he wants to come home. With the passage of time, Alexander gradually forgot from where he had come and what his life had been like before he had been taken to the village. The more he forgot, the rougher he became. Eventually the King's advisors decided that Alexander needed to be pressured even more so they sent someone to take away all of his food. But that still didn't wake him up. Reluctantly, the advisors told the king that the situation had deteriorated too much and as a last measure the prince should be physically beaten up. With tears in his eyes, the king gave his consent. When the prince was alone, trying to hunt for some food deep in a forest, some thugs approached him. While the King's men were hiding behind some trees a small distance away, the group of thugs began to punch the prince and hit him with big sticks. Just before doing permanent damage, or possibly killing the prince, some of the King's men, who were dressed in disguise, ran in and chased the thugs away.

The prince, who was left lying on the ground, bleeding and in tremendous pain, heard the sounds of footsteps approaching. Looking up, he saw an older man standing above him. After the old man seemed sure that no one else was around, he said to the weak prince - "You fool! Here you are, lying on the floor, poor, sick, hungry, beaten... and you could be sitting on a throne, dressed in the finest clothing, eating a juicy steak."

"You're crazy, old man!" the prince responded, "You're not making any sense, go away!"

"If you had any brains, you'd listen to me! I'm trying to help you!" the old man continued. Then the expression on his face changed from being stern to curious. "You really don't remember, do you?"

"Remember what?" asked the prince.

"Tell me, what's your name and where are you from?"

"My name is Al and I'm from the village around here..."

"NO!" shouted the old man, "Your name is Alexander, and you're from the Capital city, where the king lives."

"What?? No I'm not!"

"Not only are you from the Capital City, you grew up in the palace..." the old man paused for emphasis, "as THE PRINCE!"

"Huh?? You don't know what you're saying..."

"YOU'RE A PRINCE! Your father rules over this entire country."

The prince just stared at the man, not sure which of them was crazy. Then the old man continued, "Your father, His Highness, is a very kind king and a special father, but from the time you were able to talk you were nothing but trouble. The older you got the worse you behaved until you became so ungrateful and wild that the king was left with no choice but to send you away. He didn't want to do it - he LOVED you, but his advisors told him that this was the only way to save his precious son... - I know because I was one of

his advisors at the time. As much as it pained the king, he – out of love – sent you away, but of course he always keeps a close watch on you through his trusted men. THEY are the ones who took your coat. They did it to wake you up... to help you realize how far off you've gone... to inspire you to change and return. THEY are the ones who took your food, and THEY sent the thugs to hurt you. Didn't you find it strange that your rescuers happened to come just in time to save you, out here in the middle of nowhere? They were sent by the king too. Your father hasn't slept in years, waiting for the day that you just shed one tear and say 'Daddy, I want to come home.' "

The prince now looked full of shame. "I really do believe you now", he said in a low voice. "But I've been here so long; I don't remember the palace or what the life of a prince is like. How can I sincerely shed a tear and say I want to return home if I don't know what home is... and I have been happy here..."

The old man took a deep breath and replied, "First of all, you may not know what living royally is like but although you don't really know what you are missing, you do know the pain and suffering that you've felt throughout your years here. If you realize that every bit of pain that you have endured is directly because you were sent away from home – maybe that will make you want to go back. Secondly, even if you don't remember much of your father, just think that there is someone who loves you more than you can ever imagine, who gave you everything, and because he cares so much about you, you're causing him to suffer every moment of every day. That also should make you shed a tear. Finally, if even that doesn't help, think about the fact that you are now so far, you've been away for so long, and have sunken so low that you can't even feel any connection to life in the palace, your special father, or the relationship between the two of you. That itself should be enough to make you cry - to cry because you're so far that you haven't cried... The prince thought about what the wise old man had said and tears began dripping down his cheeks. He sobbed for a bit and then looked up and passionately said "Daddy, I want to come home".

Immediately, the ground started to rumble... and in a few moments a beautiful chariot pulled by white decorated horses and flanked by royal pages appeared. As soon as the chariot stopped, the king himself jumped out of its golden door and ran over to his son. He threw his arms around Alexander and held him tightly. Alexander closed his eyes and hugged his father, understanding that he was finally heading to where he truly belonged. After the long-awaited embrace, the king seated Alexander next to him on the chariot and together, they rode back to the palace where they lived happily ever after.

We have been in galus for 1,944 years. We forced our loving Father, הקב"ה, to send us away from Him and His palace, the Bais Hamikdash, and have suffered ever since. But instead of taking the many messages we have been sent, we haven't changed our ways. Even though generation after generation has seen persecutions, murders, disease, and tragedy after tragedy, we have continued our Sinas Chinam and have not kept Hashem in our minds as much as we should. We've gotten used to galus and are overall pretty happy staying here.

We know that whoever mourns over Yerushalayim will be zoche to see it rebuilt. But how can we mourn? We've never seen the Beis Hamikdash. We don't know what we've lost. But, just as the old man told the prince, there are 3 things that may help. We know very well the suffering that our generation goes through. We unfortunately all know of people who are sick, childless, or in need of other yeshuos. There are so many different kinds of tragedies happening constantly ר"ל. We must recognize that if the Beis Hamikdash were here, there would be a tremendous outpouring of bracha in the world and none of the suffering which we see today would exist. This is because all of our suffering is a direct result of our being in galus and without the Beis Hamikdash.

Second, we must understand that Hashem loves us more than we can ever imagine and gives us everything we have. He wants so much to hear us say "Totty, we want to come home". He destroyed HIS OWN HOME, the Beis Hamikdash, so we wouldn't have to be destroyed. "עמו אנכי בצרה" – Hashem is in pain when we're in pain. How can we not try to think about the "pain" of our Father, for which we are to blame.

Finally, if after all of this we are still having trouble feeling grief over the churban, that itself should really make us cry. We should cry because we can't cry. We have been so distanced from our home and from our Father that we don't even know why or how to cry. That may be the biggest reason for us to cry.



Plato Meets Jeremiah the Prophet

What are we supposed to feel on Tisha B'Av? Aren't we crying over spilled milk?

Why do we fast? Our sages say: "Every generation in which the Temple was not rebuilt, is as if it was destroyed in their days." (Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 1:1)

The Temple was G-d's House in the Land of Israel, where His people went to atone for their sins. It is where the L-rd heard our cries and we were close to Him. This year again we did not merit redemption and were not worthy of a Temple. We are still crying, because tribulations are still looming in the future, ready to join the thousand decrees that have already been decreed against us.

G-d could have built the Temple this year, even at this very moment, but He didn't because we still don't deserve it. This means that even if there was a Temple at this very moment standing tall in rebuilt Jerusalem, it would again be destroyed because of our iniquities.

So we are crying and fasting for the destruction of the Temple which is being destroyed right now because of our many sins. We fast and mourn the destruction that was, and still is, the destruction that began two thousand years of exile and which continues to this day. We are in a spiritual exile today. It was a destruction for both our ancestors and us. And with grief over what has been lost, we beg G-d to forgive His people and restore its former glory.

On Tisha B'Av we not only weep for what was, but also for what is. We weep for our sins, for the Temple that we are not worthy to rebuild this year. We weep for the Redemption which our nation is awaiting after thousands of years of suffering.

For the Holocaust that our people suffered

Every year we repress it, remember it a little and go on. Today there is no place to run, the memorial stands before us reminding us of all we've been through, the Holocaust along with a thousand other troubles, pogroms and atrocities. They all join together with all the torments that our people underwent in one thousand and another thousand years of exile. So how can you not cry on Tisha B'Av, when it is the true source of all our troubles? It was not just one terrible event that came and went, but an event that is still ongoing, that shapes our destiny, that joins a thousand torments to another thousand. One decree after another, one generation after another, with the heart about to burst from all the blows.

On Tisha B'Av we weep for all the tribulations that our nation underwent during the years of its exile, for all the

horrors, the pogroms, the anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Because the destruction of the Temple is the source of all the troubles that the Jewish people went through and are still going through down the generations.

G-d is concealing Himself from us Every day we ask in the Amidah prayer: "Return our judges as in the beginning, and our advisors as before."

Since the Temple was destroyed, prophecy ceased from Israel, the Sanhedrin of seventy-one elders was annulled, and we lost our greatest connections to G-d. Today we are in spiritual darkness, in need of advice and guidance, thirsty to hear the word of G-d. We cry and pray over our severed spiritual connection with G-d.

We will continue to mourn it until G-d will bring back His House and His prophets.

Do you have it hard to make a living? Difficulties in finding a soulmate? Physical or mental pain? Prayers that are unanswered ... They all have one source: the loss of our direct connection with the Creator of the universe since the Destruction of the Temple.

G-d has His reckoning, He has not abandoned us, and everything He does is for our benefit, but all these reckonings are hidden from us since our exile began. G-d is concealing Himself from us, as the Torah warns us about:

"And I will surely hide My Face on that day for all the evil that they did." (Deut. 31)

When a Father hides, He still is present and protecting us, even if we do not see Him. We have lost the direct connection with our Creator. Any difficulties that we have with our faith, all the confusion in the world, all the heresy and evil that is exulting around us, everything starts and derives from the spiritual destruction that was decreed upon us until we will be redeemed.

So when we cry on Tisha B'Av, we are crying about the difficulty to connect to the Torah and its commandments as in the days of antiquity, and about the open faith in G-d that we lost. We are crying for our Father.

There is no memorial day more relevant than Tisha B'Av. We should be asking not how to cry, but how not to stop the tears.

All misery, all physical and spiritual pain, all concealment of G-d, every prayer that was unanswered, all the insecurity that you experienced, every feeling of closeness that you lost because of the many sins and ordeals — put it all together, and then you will feel the destruction of the Temple, the source of our lack of connection, misery and suffering. That is why we are crying and that is why we ask that we shouldn't have to cry next year.

The philosopher didn't understand: Why are you crying over spilled milk?

And here we come to the most important part. It is the point which surprises the gentiles, and brings them to ask: Why are you crying over spilled milk for the past two millennia?

A legend tells that after the first Temple was destroyed, the famous Greek philosopher Plato visited Jerusalem. (According to historical sources, Plato indeed traveled to Asia and probably also visited Jerusalem). The legend goes that the philosopher met the prophet Jeremiah, and saw him crying and mourning over the destroyed Temple.

Plato turned to him in surprise and asked: "How can a great Jewish sage like you cry over wood and stones? You surely realize that it's useless to cry about the past."

Jeremiah replied: "You are a philosopher, so tell me about your philosophical inquiries."

Plato replied that he has no answers for some of his complicated questions in philosophy and then told him several of them.

To his great surprise, Jeremiah proposed firm and clear answers to all his philosophical questions.

The philosopher was stunned and asked in amazement: "Where did you get this remarkable wisdom?"

The Prophet replied: "All this wisdom I accrued from the wood and stones over which I am grieving."

What about the question which the philosopher asked which we brought above?

Jeremiah told Plato: "You asked me how it was possible that a wise man should cry over the past. Unfortunately, I cannot reply to this question, because you wouldn't understand the answer!"

philosopher, G-d was the "source of nature and the cosmos", but to us, G-d is our Father, the closest thing to us. As G-d tells us in the Torah: "You are children to-the L-rd your G-d." (Deuteronomy 14).

Did you notice that when we say, "Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One", we say in the verse that He is our G-d — the G-d who brought us out of Egypt and chose us to be His people.

The great philosopher could not understand this simple thing that every Jewish child feels in his heart: If we would only cry hard enough, all the cries down the ages will join together until our Father will fulfill the wish of his sons, and build the Temple for us again.

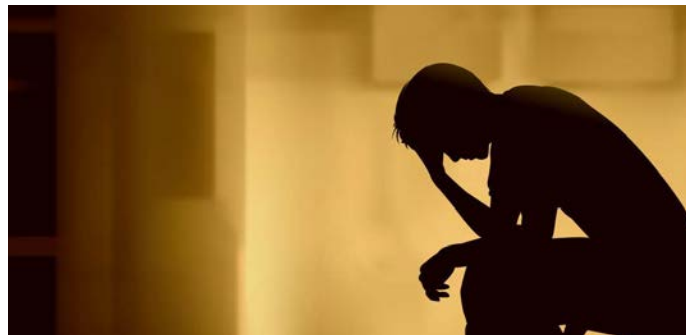
As our sages said: "Whoever mourns for Jerusalem, will merit to see her rejoicing." (Ta'anit 30b)

Whoever wept and mourned over the Temple will merit to rise at the Revival of the Dead when the Temple will be built again. Whoever cried will merit salvation and consolation.

This means that we are not crying over "spilled milk", but we are crying for our future, which will really happen. In the merit of our grief, we will merit to get a new Temple.

The philosopher could not understand this, precisely because he was a philosopher and not a son. We, the sons and daughters, understand that our prayers join together, and there is hope for the Jewish people precisely because we cry to G-d as children and not as philosophers. We are crying to our Father in heaven.

Note: Many have searched for the source of the famous encounter between Jeremiah and Plato. The Rema (Rabbi Moshe Isserlis) wrote in his book "Toras Ha-Olah" that the Greek philosopher Plato came to Jerusalem with Nebuchadnezzar. Rabbi Yaakov Israel Stelle searched for the source to the full legend about the encounter with the prophet Jeremiah, and found it was first published in the book "Gan Yerushalayim" (1899, page 54) by Rabbi Nachman Gedaliah Broder of Lithuania, who heard it from Rabbi Israel Salantar based on a copy of an ancient Roman story.



It's A Gift to Be Able to Cry

Let's cry, because we don't know what to cry about

When the Western Wall became ours again in the 1967 battle for Jerusalem during the Six Day War, Israeli soldiers embraced the stones with their tears. It was an indescribable moment. But two soldiers stood back, somehow feeling distanced. They had not grown up with a connection or an understanding of the Wall. Suddenly, one soldier began to sob.

"Why are you crying?" his friend asked.

"I am crying for not feeling the need to cry." Many of us did not feel the need to cry for the destruction of our Temple in Jerusalem. We did not relate to the devastation, the sorrow and the pain of exile. Though we heard about the tragedies of Tisha B'Av throughout our history, grief eluded us.

To be able to cry is a gift. To recognize what we have lost is a gift. A professor in a Family Therapy program told his class to close their eyes and remember in detail their childhood homes. Each room, the expressions on their siblings' faces, the faces of their parents.

In the middle of the exercise, one of the students burst out crying. After the lesson she explained herself, "I was orphaned at such a young age, I can't even remember one room in my house. I can't even remember one

smile of my father's. You each have homes you can long for. I don't even have one memory. I am crying because I can't even remember what I lost. I am yearning for a home I never had."

Let us think about that student every Tisha B'Av because most of us cannot cry over the Beit Hamikdash, the Temple in Jerusalem that we never knew. We do not remember what we have lost. The distraction and the bright light of our lives often confuse us.

We have left home before we could remember its rooms. We can't remember our Father's voice and His love. But we can cry. We can cry because we don't remember what we have lost. We can cry because we yearn to remember the Home we never had.

Making Tisha B'Av Relevant

How do we mourn what we do not know?

Tisha B'Av night we sit on the floor and read from the Book of Lamentations. In a mournful voice we chant "Alas, she sits in solitude! The city that was great with people has become like a widow. She weeps bitterly in the night and her tear is on her cheek."

We grieve for our Temple that was destroyed. We recall a once golden Jerusalem that now sits in darkness, abandoned. The streets of the city run red with rivers of blood. Lamentations describes a glorious nation being led out in chains as the fires of destruction fill the air. We cry "for Mount Zion which lies desolate, foxes prowled over it."

On Tisha B'Av we are asked to remember the destruction of our holy Temple nearly 2000 years ago. This is our national day of mourning. But it is difficult to feel loss for a Temple we never saw with our very own eyes. Can we feel the pain of exile today?

The Anguish of Exile

Mourning for our Temple means that we feel the solitude, the loneliness, the heartache of being a Jew in the world today. We have been scattered throughout the four corners of the earth and taken into exile. And though we may have settled in our countries, built homes and businesses, created synagogues and schools, we are spiritually homeless. We lack the Bais Hamikdash, the holy Temple where the presence of God was seen and manifested clearly for the entire world to witness.

In the times of the Temple, prophets walked the streets of Israel. We experienced miracles. Jews came together to Jerusalem, celebrated the holidays and spiritually reconnected. The nations recognized our clear relationship with God. Each time we entered this holy place we knew that we were standing in God's home. Every stone spoke to our soul. We encountered holiness. The Temple Mount was the channel through which prayers from the ends of the world would ascend above. There was a tangible emotion of meeting heaven on earth despite the physical limitations. We felt sheltered; protected by our Father.

And though today we are blessed with our land and can caress the Western Wall, a holy remnant of our Temple in Jerusalem, we are still experiencing the trauma of Jewish exile. Unless we take time to ponder we fail to perceive God's obvious plan or sense His enduring love. We lack vision and do not see clearly. We are frightened. We feel vulnerable. Though we are part of the world we have been cast as 'Zionists' and 'Jews,' isolated and embargoed.

On Tisha B'Av we were expelled from our Father's home. It is not just the holy Temple that we mourn. We grieve for ourselves, for our people, for our mighty connection to all that was sacred and now lost. If we want to experience a true Tisha B'Av we begin by understanding the tragedy of exile that has distanced us from our God until today.

Once we comprehend the true meaning of Tisha B'Av we can begin our path toward restoration. The point of the day is not to wallow in pointless grief or melancholy. Judaism guides us to always live with a sense of purpose. Take the sadness and use it as a catalyst to rebuild. Replace destructive emotions with constructive actions. Resolve that today will bring us opportunity to realize our spiritual potential.

What can we do?

1. Boundless Love

During the Second Temple, our strength lied in our unity. When we descended into petty bickering, malicious gossip and animosity, we lost our Divine protection. The Chofetz Chaim writes: "If these sins had the power to cause a standing edifice to be destroyed, then certainly their continued presence among the Jewish people will prevent a new Temple from being rebuilt. We have no choice but to strengthen our efforts to correct this sin...for how long are we to remain in exile?"

Do not allow this time to pass you by. If someone you know is feeling pain, imagine what it is like to live in their shoes. Ask yourself: what can I do to make this better? Even a daily call, an encouraging card, an offer to do an errand would help alleviate the burden. Don't underestimate the power of one. Just as one painful word may destroy, all it takes is one kind word to rebuild. Stop yourself from spreading gossip, sarcastic put downs or senseless fighting. Feel the pain of our brothers and sisters in Israel. Pray each day for our soldiers. Ask God to watch over our boys and guard them well. We must show God that we are once again His united children.

2. Spiritual Connection

Though our Temple was destroyed, our connection to God has endured the centuries through the study of Torah. We have survived inquisitions, pogroms, crusades and holocausts because we remained faithful Jews. Today many of us have grown spiritually disconnected. And even if we have the knowledge, often the passion for Judaism is lost. Reclaim the joy of mitzvot and begin the spiritual reconstruction that is required for us to rebuild our nation. God has granted us the gift of Torah so that no matter where we find ourselves, we can restore our souls. This is our hope for the future; the key to the end of our exile.

3. Mourn for Jerusalem

Do we really feel the void that exile has brought? Do we ever stop and think about the destruction of God's home? When we stand under the chuppah we break a glass to remember Jerusalem. When building or renovating a home, we leave a small area unfinished to recall the destruction of our Temple. In our greatest moments of joy we are compelled to realize that our happiness is incomplete. How can we celebrate a house when God's home has been burned?

Let us take a moment and mourn. Let us recall the Temple that once stood in all its glory. Search deep inside and yearn for the Divine connection that sheltered us. Shed a tear today for our nation and all that we have lost.

The First Tish B'Av

On the ninth day of Av, God teaches us just how painful it is when He isn't there.

"When [the month of] Av begins, we lessen our joy" (Talmud Ta'anit 26b).

The month of Av commemorates the destruction of two Temples, as well as countless other tragedies throughout Jewish history. It is a time in which we lessen our joy.

The Talmud (ibid. 29b) illustrates this principle. How do we lessen our joy? If a Jew faces a lawsuit, he should delay it. His luck is bad this month; better to push it off.

It is a very curious example. If I were authoring the Talmud and wanted to illustrate lessening joy, I would have written, "Therefore, we do not celebrate weddings, go to concerts, go to the beach, etc." Why of all things does the Talmud mention court cases? Is winning in court somehow the Talmud's definition of "joy"?

Let us look at the origins of Tisha B'Av. The first Tisha B'Av occurred at the start of Jewish history, during the Jewish people's sojourn in the desert. Twelve spies are sent to scout out the Holy Land and bring back their

report. They see giants dwelling in fortified cities. They return to report that the land is frightful and forbidding. It would be impossible to conquer it; there is no point even trying. The people lose heart and cry the entire night. That night was the night of Tisha B'Av.

God saw their tears and responded: "You cried tears of naught, and I will establish for you [on this day] tears for all generations" (Talmud Ta'anit 29a).

There is certainly much poetic justice in God's response. We cried without basis, so God will give us reason to cry. But I believe when we think about it we will see that there is a great deal of actual justice in God's words as well.

The sin of the spies really makes no sense. Why were the people so scared? Because of giants? Fortified cities? Didn't they just witness the Ten Plagues and the Splitting of the Sea? Weren't they subsisting daily on a well which followed them in the desert and manna which fell from heaven? Did they really not know what any small child is taught today – that God is all-powerful, that He can do anything? Were they really afraid that the Creator of heaven and earth could not fight against a bunch of giants that He Himself created?!

The answer to this revolves around one of man's great struggles in life. Of course the Jewish people knew that God is all-powerful. They saw this close up: They were living right in His presence in the desert. But that was just it. Living so close to an omnipotent God is scary. He saw their every move; His Divine Presence was visibly before them in the Tabernacle. As much as God loves us and cares for us, being right in His presence is intimidating. How could we possibly disobey Him?

But the Land of Israel would be different – or so the Israelites thought. They would no longer be living with a supernatural spring and manna falling from the heavens. They would have to till the soil and sow the earth, growing bread through the sweat of their brow. They would live "natural" lives, just a little bit more removed from God. And likewise, they would have to take arms to conquer the land. An all-powerful God could do anything of course. But the Holy Land was not going to be a place of open miracles, as the Exodus from Egypt. They would have to fight for the land and occupy it on their own. And they needed to send spies, to determine how best they might conquer it.

But there was one problem. If the Jews were going to go it on their own, they didn't stand a chance. How in the world were the puny Israelites going to take arms against massive giants? And so they cried. They wanted to feel vulnerable, just a little more distant from God. But if they were, they hadn't a whisper of a chance. They had much to cry about.

God responded to their tears: "You want to feel distant from Me – the vulnerability of being on your own in this world? Then I'll give you reason to cry. I will withdraw the Divine protection which is the lot of the faithful, and let you feel how painful life is. It was too intimidating having Me close up at all times? Then you'll get your wish! I'll remove My guiding Hand. And you will see just how painful and empty life will become."

Thus, the month of Av is the one time of year in which we cannot just glibly say everything will work out for the best. We cannot be so sanguine that God will take perfect care of us. This is the one time in which God withdraws His Divine providence to let us experience the pain of distance from Him.

We can now understand the Talmud's illustration of lessening our joy: We should not go to court since the odds are not in our favor. Is that the primary definition of joy? Yes, it is. There is no greater joy than realizing God is with us, and that whether we recognize it or not, everything He does for us is for our best. This is the one time of the year in which God withdraws His loving Divine providence from us. In order to show us how much we need Him, God removes Himself from the picture just a little bit. You didn't want to be too close to Me? Then feel the distance. And you will recognize just how painful life without God can be.

The Talmud there continues as follows: “Just as when Av begins we lessen our joy, when Adar begins we increase our joy.” Adar is the month in which the holiday of Purim occurs. In the Purim story, God appeared to be hidden. There were no open miracles. But when the story closes and the salvation occurs, it was clear that even in His hiddenness God was orchestrating events all along. If sadness is not seeing God in our lives, the ultimate joy is recognizing that even when God appears hidden, He is really there all along, caring for us behind the scenes. If we truly learn the lesson of Av and yearn to bridge the apparent distance between God and mankind, we will recognize that in His concealment He was really there for us all along.



Letter to My Beloved on Tisha B'Av

A letter from us to Hashem describing how we feel on Tish B'Av

My Dear Beloved,

I miss you. Every summer, as the weather warms, I feel a loneliness deep in my heart. I think back to the days when we used to be together in one home. We were so close. You would protect me and look out for my every need. When I needed to feel your love or seek your guidance, I knew exactly where to turn. You allowed me to give to you in a way that brought us closeness. I sacrificed for you and you knew it. There was an unbreakable trust between us. Knowing you were with me brought me great joy.

But over time I disappointed you and I let you down. What was important to you was not important to me. I became self-centered and distant. You lost your trust in me and I lost my trust in you. Eventually you had me leave our home, so I could not return and life has never been the same. I felt your anger towards me. It has been a very painful struggle. The love and clarity I once had has vanished. Each time I walk by the site of our old home, I am flooded with memories of a different life.

I want you to know that I have not for one second forgotten about our relationship, and I am trying to change. I have worked on opening myself up and learning how to have a real relationship. I want to be better, even though the dark world I now inhabit sometimes obscures my vision and makes this effort so very hard. At the same time, it has allowed me to become stronger and in made me realize I can be who you believe I can be.

I am trying... and I am crying out to you again. I desperately yearn for the day we can reconcile and rebuild our home.

Please know I have changed. I am not the same as I was before. Please give me another chance. Please rebuild Your Temple so we can dwell there together again, forever.

Your Beloved,

The Jewish People

Tisha B'Av

The Jewish people experienced a special bond with the Almighty when the Bais Hamikdash, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, existed. During this period, the Jewish nation received unique Divine countenance and protection. The letter then moves to the pain of the separation and the pain of viewing the Kotel (Western Wall) which was the sight of the Temple. The two Temples were destroyed and the Jewish people went into exile, scattered throughout the world and distanced from the Almighty. The Talmud explains the root cause of this destruction – the Jews' practice of "sinas chinam" (baseless hatred) among themselves. The Jews experienced a time of great darkness, dislocation and disconnection from God that continues to this very day as we witness the rise of global anti-Semitism, alienation and assimilation.

We beg for reconciliation with our Beloved – God Himself, this healing reflected in the rebuilding of the holy Temple in Jerusalem where God's Presence will once again dwell.

The Hebrew month of Av, a month representing the mourning of the Temples' destruction, precedes Elul – the month of repentance that proceeds Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. "Av" (spelled Aleph Bais) can be read as a Hebrew acronym for "Elul ba" – "the month of Elul is approaching," Feeling the pain of separation and longing for our rightful return is an emotional and spiritual precursor to heartfelt repentance. When we experience the lack and yearn for its removal, we atone for rupturing our relationship and make ourselves ready for reconciliation.

History of Churban Bais Sheini

The Second Bais HaMikdash - A Long Downward Spiral

A condensed history, of the events leading to the destruction of the 2nd temple.

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION TO THE ERA.

The era of the second Bais Hamikdash lasted for 420 years ending with the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash by the Romans in 70 C.E. Towards the end of this era, there was constant religious strife between the Saducees (Tzedukim), those who denied the divine origin of the Oral Law and freed themselves from the yoke of mitzvos, and the Pharisees (Perushim), which included the vast majority of the nation, who remained true to the laws of the Torah and followed the Rabbis.

As we study this history we will constantly see, that the source of all the troubles culminating in the Churban, were all from the infighting among the Jews. Through out history we were never able to be destroyed from the outside. It is only when the Jews turn against one another and don't follow the sages, that G-d allows our enemies to have the upper hand.

There was one period of calm before the final storm -the ten-year reign of Queen Shlomis Alexandra (76-66 b.c.e.). Queen Shlomis restored political and religious peace to Judea, and her brother Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach restored the authority of Torah to the land. When Queen Alexandra died, an era of unparalleled disaster began, which culminated in the loss of Judea's independence, the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, and the seemingly endless exile of the Jews from their homeland which has lasted until the present day.

When Queen Shlomis died, civil war erupted between her two sons, Aristobulus and Hyrcanus, over who would succeed her. Eventually, the two brothers decided to mediate their case before the Roman general Pompeii. Pompeii chose the weak and submissive Hyrcanus as king, hoping to use him as a puppet to eventually impose Roman rule over Judea. When the Jews who were loyal to Aristobulus refused to accept Pompeii's decision, Roman troops marched in Jerusalem to quell the rebellion. Eventually, Judea was placed under the authority of the Roman proconsul of Syria and was heavily taxed by Rome. This was the beginning of the end -over 100 years before the actual Churban, the two brothers ended Judean independence by involving Rome in their personal dispute. A Roman governor was placed over Judea; Judea was divided into five states, and the Sanhedrin (Jewish Rabbinical High Court) was banned.

PART 2 - AT WAR WITH ROME & KAMTZA BER KAMTZA'S ROLE.

The Roman governors constantly oppressed the Jews and allowed lawlessness to reign in the land. The Jews were tormented by non-Jewish residents in their own land, but were not legally allowed to bring claims against foreigners. In 66 C.E., the Roman governor of Judea, Florus, seized money from the Bais HaMikdash treasury, and provoked the Jews into rioting against him. On one day, 3,600 Jews were killed when Roman troops were sent in to quell the riots. In response to this bloodshed, the Jews began revolting against the Romans. The Emperor Nero became convinced that the Jews were not just rebelling against the abuse of the Roman governor, but against the Roman Empire itself. He sent his best general Vespasian with 60,000 soldiers to end the Jewish revolt. Vespasian's troops conquered the north of Israel, and marched on to Jerusalem.

There was a story behind Emperor Nero's conviction that the Jews were rebelling against Rome. In fact, there were many stories behind the tragedy of the fall of the once proud and glorious Jewish nation. The nation had fallen to a low spiritual state characterized by social decadence and baseless hatred. The Sages cite the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza as the event that caused the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash.

It began with a party. Like most parties, there were the invited, the not invited, and the exceptionally unwelcome. Bar Kamtza had the misfortune of both being invited and being exceptionally unwelcome. In family affairs this happens sometimes, but here it was unintentional.

The host of the party had a friend and an enemy, whose names were quite similar, one called Kamtza and the

other Bar Kamtza. Since it was a fancy affair, hand-delivered invitations were sent out. Unfortunately, the messenger confused the friend and the enemy, and delivered an invitation to the wrong person, who subsequently came to the party.

It is surprising that Bar Kamtza would go the party of someone whom he knew disliked him. Perhaps he thought that the invitation was a move toward reconciliation and therefore was happy to receive it, showing up to demonstrate his own willingness to put aside the past. In light of this, what happened next is even more tragic.

Upon seeing his enemy at his home, enjoying the food he had provided, the host, feeling quite incensed, told this invited/unwelcome guest to get out of his house immediately. Rejection, and all the more so such a public rejection, would be very painful to Bar Kamtza. He tried to reason with the host and pleaded, "Please don't throw me out. I will pay you for whatever I eat, but please do not embarrass me."

The host refused.

"I will pay you for the cost of your entire party, just please do not force me to leave."

The host refused and threw him out.

It is remarkable that it was worth more to the host to hold on to his hatred than to have his entire party paid for in full. In any case it was a bad move, and things got worse from there. The Sages of the generation were present at this gala affair and did not protest the host's treatment of Bar Kamtza.

Now, Bar Kamtza, by this time was in a pretty bad mood. When he saw all the Sages sitting there silently, he concluded that the way he was being treated was fine with them. If so, they were also to blame and he would take his revenge on them as well.

Bar Kamtza went to the Roman authorities and told them that the Jews were rebelling against them. They asked for proof. He said to them, "Send a sacrifice to be offered in their Holy Temple and you will see that they will refuse your sacrifice."

The Romans sent an animal with Bar Kamtza to the Holy Temple to check what he was saying.

On the way, Bar Kamtza made a slight blemish to the animal that would render it unfit according to Jewish law. When he got to the Temple some Sages argued that they should offer the sacrifice anyway because not to do so would be endangering their lives. Their opinion was not heeded. Some suggested that they should kill Bar Kamtza so that he should not go back to the Romans and incite them against the Jews. This opinion was also not heeded. In the end, the offering was not brought up, and Bar Kamtza took his revenge by going back to the Romans and slandering the Jews, leading to the destruction of the Holy Temple, the loss of many lives, and our subsequent exile.

If we consider the centrality of this story in the destruction of the Holy Temple, and the level of tragedy that resulted from it, it stands to reason that it is about more than just a dislike between two people. When we take a closer look, we see that it is a story about a lacking in the humanity of the Jewish people as a whole, from the greatest scholars to the common man. There is a question that screams out from beginning to end: Why didn't anyone do anything?

When Bar Kamtza was publicly shamed, why did no one try to help him? When Bar Kamtza later came to take vengeance, threatening the lives of the entire Jewish people, why do we find no dialogue trying to appease him? At the very least, he should have been killed in self-defense as the Talmud teaches that if someone comes to kill you – kill him first! The level of passivity that we find when it came to considering others' welfare, whether emotionally, as in the case of Bar Kamtza's shame, or physically in the case of his revenge, is astounding. Where was our humanity?

When the Sages taught that the Holy Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred, this is what they were referring to. Hatred is not just actively doing others harm. It is also about not caring. It is about seeing others in pain, others in danger, and not caring enough to get up and do something. If we think about, treating others like they do not exist is the greatest hatred.

If we wish to rebuild the Holy Temple, we need to begin with our hearts. When we care enough to really see the people that are around us, whether they are our spouses, children, work associates, or neighbors, we are laying the foundation of our sanctuary. Each time we move beyond ourselves and take action to make a positive difference in the life of another, we are adding a golden brick. With time, sensitivity, and positive action, we have the power to heal and rebuild the heart of our nation and build a holiness that will last forever.

PART 3 - CIVIL WAR ERUPTS IN ERETZ YISROEL.

During this period of oppression by the Romans, three Jewish factions emerged in Yerushalayim. Each one was characterized by a different approach toward the Romans. These included the Zealots, who advocated open revolt against the Romans, the Moderates (the Rabbis and the majority of the nation), who strived to avoid violence, and the Friends of Rome, who were loyal to Rome. The Friends of Rome were comprised mostly of Tzedukim and corrupt Kohanim Gedolim. Most of the Tzedukim were so assimilated that they were barely recognizable as Jews. Most Jews were moderates -they wanted to fulfill the Torah laws and avoid confrontation with the Romans. As the years passed by, the Zealots increased in number as the Roman oppression increased. The Zealots included violent members who were called Biryonim, and criminals who were called Sicarii. The violent members of the Zealots inflicted constant terror upon their fellow Jews. The Jews were more frightened of the Zealots than they were of the Romans. The Sicarii traveled around in bands committing robberies and murder against their fellow Jews. This set the stage for a civil war. Ultimately, the actions of the Zealots aided the Romans to defeat them and destroy the Bais Hamikdash.

Civil war eventually broke out between the Zealots and the Friends of Rome due to the violence the Sicarii committed against them. The Zealots invited the Edomites, whose ancestors had been forcibly converted to Judaism as slaves by Yochanan Hyrkanus, to join them. The Zealots and Edomites killed the leaders of the moderates and murdered even innocent citizens. After the Edomites had their fill of plunder and murder, they left the city and Yerushalayim under the control of the Zealots and their leaders, Yochanan of Gush Chalav and Elazer ben Shimon. However, the Tzeduki Kohanim Gedolim and leaders, and their allies, the Friends of Rome, did not accept the domination of the Zealots. They appointed a leader, Shimon bar Giora, and began a civil war that was unsurpassed in its violence and ruthlessness.

Many years prior to this, the peaceful citizens of Yerushalayim had been storing provisions for months in case of a Roman siege. Three wealthy men, who were students of R' Yochanan ben Zakkai, donated huge storehouses of flour, oil, and wood. There were enough supplies to survive a siege of 21 years. Shimon bar Giora burned these storehouses in order to force the Jews to fight Rome. A terrible famine ensued in Jerusalem.

PART 4 - RABBI YOCHANAN BEN ZAKKAI'S GAMBLE.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, the head of the Sanhedrin, was the leader of the Jews in that era. He countered every attempt of the Tzedukim to change the halacha. One day, as he was walking on the streets of Yerushalayim, he saw a group of Jews sitting around a boiling pot of straw. They each took turns sipping the water with the greatest of pleasure. R' Yochanan ben Zakkai felt brokenhearted from the pain of seeing the nation of Yisrael reduced to actually taking pleasure from the food of animals.

He decided to attempt to ease the suffering of his people. He sent a message to his nephew, Abba Sikarah, one of the generals of the Zealots, to meet him clandestinely. R' Yochanan ben Zakkai asked him, "How long are you going to let the people die from starvation? If we surrender to Rome, we may be able to save Yisrael, Yerushalayim, and the Bais Hamikdash. Abba Sikarah replied, "Your words may be true, but there is nothing I can do to change things without being killed by my peers."

R' Yochanan ben Zakkai begged his nephew to think of a way he could leave the city and meet the Roman general Vespasian. Abba Sikarah instructed his uncle to pretend he was ill and on the verge of death. He should then instruct his students to announce that he had died. The Zealots allowed the city gates to be opened for the dead, and his students would carry him out.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai did as his nephew advised him, and his two students, R' Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, carried a casket with their teacher in it to a burial vault outside the city. The students returned to the city, and when night fell, R' Yochanan ben Zakkai searched for the Roman camp.

When he encountered Vespasian, he said, "Peace upon you, Emperor, peace unto you." Vespasian replied, "You deserve to be killed for two reasons. First of all, you addressed me as the Emperor, which I am not, and secondly, if you think I'm the Emperor, why didn't you come earlier?" Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai answered, "You are the Emperor because if you weren't, Yerushalayim would not fall into your hands. It is written, "Levanon will fall through a mighty one" (Yeshaya 10:34). Mighty one is a reference to a king and Levanon is a reference to the Bais Hamikdash. Regarding your second question, I did not come earlier because the Zealots did not allow me to leave."

While they were still speaking, a messenger arrived from Rome to announce that the Emperor had died and Vespasian had been appointed in his place. Vespasian was astounded by R' Yochanan ben Zakkai's foresight and decided to grant him three requests.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's first request was "Give me Yavneh and its Sages." This request was vital to insure that the study of Torah would not cease. The future of Bnei Yisrael could not be guaranteed without the continuing study of the Torah.

His second request was that the family of Rabban Gamliel be saved from harm. This would insure that the royal line of the descendants of Dovid Hamelech would continue.

His third request was that a doctor be sent to cure R' Tzadok, the Gadol Hador. R' Tzadok had davened and fasted for forty years over the impending Churban, and was close to death.

Vespasian granted these three requests. He then left for Rome to assume his new position as Emperor. His son Titus took over the command of the army troops in Judea. Part 5: The Roman Attack Creates Unity Among the Jews After The Pesach Bloodbath

PART 5 – THE PESACH BLOODBATH, INFIGHTING AMONGST THE JEWS.

Titus, the newly appointed commander of the siege against Yerushalayim marched to Yerushalayim with an army of 80,000 soldiers. The Roman army was within the sight of the city, but inside the city the various factions continued to contend with each other. Many Jews, at the risk of their lives, had decided to come up to Yerushalayim for Pesach despite the swiftly approaching Roman army. The moderates actually opened the gates of the Bais Hamikdash and allowed the Jews to bring the Pesach Korbanos. The extremist also entered the Bais Hamikdash disguised as peaceful Jews. Once inside, they revealed the swords they had hidden on their bodies, and opened warfare on the moderates. They began murdering the moderates as well as innocent Jews. The moderates became frightened of the panic and murder among the hordes of Jews in the Bais Hamikdash, and they did not fight back. The extremist now controlled the entire area of the Bais Hamikdash.



PART 6 – ROME ATTACKS

The Romans began engaging in active warfare the day after Pesach. The conflicting Jewish factions finally joined together to fight the common enemy. The eastern part of the wall was defended by Yochanan and his men, and the remaining parts were defended by Shimon bar Giora and his men.

The Romans assaulted the northern wall with their battering rams. Their catapults hurled stones into the city.

The Jewish warriors counteracted by hurling stones and burning torches onto the Romans. After fifteen days of warfare, on the seventh day of Iyar, the Romans breached the third outer wall. After continued fighting, they breached the second wall, and the new city was now controlled by the Romans. The Romans burned all the houses and stones, and prepared to attack the Old City.

In order to conquer the Old City, Titus and his troops would first have to conquer the Antonia Fortress, a fortress which protected the Old City on its north. He ordered his troops to build a huge rampart close to the wall. He would then position his war machines on it and attack. However, his plan was preempted by Yochanan and his men. They dug a tunnel underneath the camp and filled it with wood and tar. They then ignited it, and the tunnel collapsed, causing the rampart to collapse as well. The Roman catapults and battering rams were destroyed by the resulting fire.

Titus realized that it would not be easy to defeat the Jews through warfare. He decided that instead he would conquer them through starvation. He ordered his soldiers to build a stone fence around the city and seal all its exits. The exits were guarded day and night. The famine grew worse throughout the city but the Jewish warriors fought on.

Meanwhile, the Romans cut down all the trees around Yerushalayim to build new rampart for the assault against Antonia Fortress. The mountains surrounding Yerushalayim became barren and desolate. The Romans cut down all the foliage around Yerushalayim for thirteen miles. The orchards, gardens and fruit trees that had graced Yerushalayim with their beauty were gone.

The Romans dragged the battering rams up the ramps they had built against the walls. The Jewish warriors had become weakened by hunger and were unable to effectively resist the assault. Originally, the Zealots were not affected by hunger because they had built up their supplies by snatching food from others.

Eventually however, they ran out of supplies and became desperately hungry. They ate their horses, and when their supply ran out, they ate the horses' dung. They ate their leather saddles and their weapons and then desperately searched for grass and foliage without success.

The Jews on top of the walls were able to see the Romans eating in their camp. The smell of the roasting food was torturous for them. Some of the warriors were so hungry that they surrendered to the Romans. A few Romans could not bear the sight of their swollen bodies and gave them food, but their wasted bodies could not digest real food and their stomachs burst.

Jewish leaders of the time calculated that 601,575 dead Jews had been brought through the gates of Yerushalayim. This did not include the countless dead bodies left unburied in houses and streets, victims of starvation or violence. This also did not include the dead bodies in the Bais Hamikdash and the suburbs of Yerushalayim. The dead bodies lying on the streets included important leaders of the Jews whom the terrorists prevented from being buried.

PART 7 – LIFE FOR THE JEWS

The roofs were filled with women and small children expiring from hunger, and the corpses of old men were piled in the streets. Youths swollen with hunger wandered like shadows in the market place until they collapsed. No one Mourned the dead, because hunger had deadened all feeling. Those who fell to the ground turned their eyes for the last time to the Bais Hamikdash and beheld the defenders still fighting and holding out (Yosephus: The Jewish Wars, 5:10).

Hunger was ravaging the city. Thousands of people died. Those that still clung to life fought each other over

everything edible and even non-edible, such as straw, rodents and insects. When a dead horse or another dead animal was discovered, people would die fighting over it because there was no other source of sustenance. Dire hunger eliminated all sense of shame. Husbands would snatch food from their wives, and mothers from their children. In an unbelievable act of horror, a mother even slaughtered, cooked and ate her beloved only son, fulfilling the pasuk in the Torah: "And you will eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters you will eat" (Vayikra 26:29).

As the siege continued, young and old people wandered around the streets in a stupor. Starved men and women searched through sewers and dunghills for food. Carcasses were strewn on the streets -of humans and animals. Eventually the streets were so full of dead bodies that it was impossible to walk down the street without stepping on them. Houses were full of dead bodies. Jews actually dug their own graves and laid down in them until they succumbed. No one was left to tend to the dead or to cry over them. All emotions, including sorrow, had disappeared in the face of the terrible hunger.

The Zealots ruthlessly murdered anyone caught trying to smuggle out of the city walls to forage for food on the assumption that they would surrender to the Romans. The Zealots would also murder anyone who was found with a private supply of food. They would even torture people to reveal where their food was hidden, and then snatch the food for themselves. They were not even motivated by hunger since they originally had their own supply of food-they simply wanted to increase their own supplies. Eventually, however, their supplies became depleted and they too succumbed to hunger. Ultimately, Yerushalayim fell because of the famine that the Zealots inflicted on their own people and ultimately, on themselves. The famine was what caused the defeat of the city and of the Jews.

The desperate Jews that did manage to traverse the city walls to forage for grass and herbs were rounded up by the Romans. The Romans flogged them, tortured them, and crucified them before the walls of the city. Five hundred Jews were crucified every day.

The Zealots forced the families of the crucified Jews to ascend the city walls to witness the fate of those who surrendered. Some Jews were so desperate that they jumped over the walls anyway, preferring to risk crucifixion than a slow agonizing death from hunger.

PART 8 – ROMANS ENTER THE BIES HAMIKDASH

By the end of Tammuz, the Romans had breached the walls of the Antonia Fortress and occupied it. There was now a clear path to Har Habayis. The warriors who were still able to fight retreated behind the high walls of the Bais Hamikdash. The Romans' next step was conquering Har HaBayis. Yochanan and his followers fought off the Romans valiantly until the Romans were forced to withdraw into Antonia. The Romans then breached one of the walls surrounding the inner courtyard of the Bais Hamikdash, the Azara. The Romans attacked the Jews with swords, and the Jews fought back, in the worst battle ever waged inside Yerushalayim. The Romans and Jews were crowded together in a close area with no place to escape; their dead bodies fell on top of each other. From the morning until the night, the Azara was filled with blood, which flowed like a stream. Most of the dead were Romans; the Jews had won the upper hand during this battle. The surviving Jews stripped the Roman corpses of their weapons.

Titus was slowly realizing that conquering the Bais Hamikdash was going to be a long protracted struggle. The Romans had lost tens of thousands of soldiers, and were still not close to conquering the city. They almost gave up all hope, saying, "We won't win against this city even if we fight to our death. Let's end this war now and leave the city before it becomes the place of our death." Titus, however, was not ready to give up and ordered his soldiers to destroy the Antonia Fortress, which provided them with a wide area to attack the Bais Hamikdash.

Throughout the Roman siege and assaults, the avodah in the Bais Hamikdash had continued without cease. The Kohanim continued bringing korbanos even as warfare took place in the courts of the Sanctuary. On the seventeenth of Tammuz, no lamb could be found for the Korban Tamid, and the korbanos ceased. In addition, the Kohanim had joined the warfare, and no Kohanim remained without a mum. The Jews mourned the cessation of korbanos and saw it as an ominous sign.

Titus became aware of the Jews' inability to continue bringing korbanos and of the effect the famine was having inside the city. He decided to try to make peace. He sent his spokesman, Josephus, to persuade the Jews to surrender. The Jewish warriors turned deaf ears to his words and ejected him from their presence. They continued to believe until the very end that Hashem would ultimately save them.

PART 9 - THE SOUL OF THE NATION IS DESTROYED

In the morning of the ninth of Av, the Sanctuary still stood, although the adjacent walls had been burned. The starved and fatigued Jewish warriors, who were far outnumbered by the Romans, continued to drive off the Romans. However, the time of reckoning had come. Hashem removed His protection from the holiest spot on earth, leaving it vulnerable to the Romans.

The Romans had set fire to the gates of the Bais Hamikdash, which had been tightly sealed by the Zealots. The silver covering the gates melted, and the wood burned. When the gates had been obliterated, the path to the Kodesh Kodeshim was revealed. The next day, the Romans ignited the golden gate of the Kodesh Kodeshim itself.

The gate melted and caved in, and the Kodesh Kodeshim was revealed. This happened on Tisha B'Av, the same day the Bavlim violated the Kodesh Kodeshim of the first Bais Hamikdash, four hundred and ninety years earlier.

The Jews frantically tried to prevent the fire from spreading, unsuccessfully. A great cry arose as the Jews saw their beloved Bais Hamikdash go up in flames. Some Jews could not bear the thought of life without it, and threw themselves into the flames.

The Romans ran to the site, and ruthlessly ransacked whatever they could. Every Jew in the vicinity was murdered including women and children. There were so many Jews killed that the floor of the Bais Hamikdash was completely hidden by the bodies. The sounds of screaming and moaning filled the air, mingling with the sound of crashing as the walls of the Bais Hamikdash caved in to the ground. Blood streamed across the floor of the Bais Hamikdash down the eastern steps. The famished Jews of the Upper City were witness to the horrible sounds and sights taking place in the Lower City.

The Romans placed their idol in the Bais Hamikdash, and brought sacrifices to it. They sang, and celebrated their victory. They plundered the golden keilim of the Bais Hamikdash.

That evening, Titus celebrated his victory by bringing a harlot into the Kodesh Kodeshim. He spread a Torah on the floor and violated it. He then took a sword and cut the curtain, which miraculously, began oozing blood. Titus then shouted, "I have killed the Lord of Israel." In truth, the blood was a sign of Hashem's pain over the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash.

PART 10 – LIFE UNDER TITUS

Titus ordered that all the surviving warriors and anyone connected to the Zealots should be killed. Anyone vulnerable, such as the elderly and ailing, were also killed. The remaining young survivors were divided into groups. Anyone over seventeen were sent as slaves to the copper mines of Egypt. Those under seventeen were sold as slaves. Many were sent to Greek cities to become living entertainment for the masses at the circus, where they were forced to fend off gladiators and wild animals. The Romans then chose 700 of the tallest, fittest, and attractive Jewish youths. This group would be marched to Rome to take place in Titus' victory parade.

While these selections were taking place, 11,000 more Jews died from starvation. Altogether, 1,100,000 Jews died from the sword or from hunger, and 97,000 were taken captive. Thousands of captives were taken to Rome and other cities to be sold as slaves. The life of a Jew was worse than worthless. Titus announced, "Whoever does not kill a Jew shall be killed." As time went on, Titus declared, "Whoever kills a Jew must pay a fine of forty zuz." Eventually, Titus announced, "Whoever kills a Jew will be killed."

All the Jews in the Roman Empire were taxed. This was the Fiscus Jusaici (the Jew tax); it was fifteen shekel every year. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai sadly said, "Those who did not wish to pay the tax to the treasury of the Bais Hamikdash will now pay the tax to their enemy. Those who refused to give the half-shekel are now forced to pay fifteen shekel. Those who did not repair the streets and the roads for the olai regal are forced to make repairs for the attendants of the emperor." (Mechilta Shemos 19:1).

The captives were aware that many of them would be forced into a life of immorality. Many chose to die rather than sully their neshamos. The Gemara relates a story about this.

Four hundred boys and girls were taken captive for a life of shame. When they realized what was in store for them, they asked, "If we drown in the sea, do we have a share in Techiyas Hameisim? The oldest among them answered:

"It is written, 'Hashem said, I will bring back from the depths of the sea' (Tehillim 68:23). 'I will bring back from Bashan' -this means from the teeth of the lion; 'from the depths of the sea' -this speaks of those who drown in the sea." As soon as the girls heard this, they leaped into the sea. The boys reasoned that if the girls gave up their lives to avoid immorality, they should give up their lives to avoid unnatural immorality, and they too leaped into the sea. Concerning such as these, Scripture (Tehillim 44:3) says; "For your sake we are killed all day, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Gittin 57b).

PART 11 – THE ROMANS CELEBRATE.

The Romans were eager to celebrate their victory over Israel in the only way they knew how-with ruthless cruelty and violence. Titus first traveled to the Middle Eastern cities, where thousands of Jewish captives were tortured and murdered, all in the name of celebration. In the year 71 C.E., Titus sailed to Rome. The emperor Vespasian, Titus' father, came out to greet him, accompanied by the Roman masses.

The young and handsome captives were forced to march down the streets of Rome, while carrying the golden keilim of the Bais Hamikdash. Titus ordered a huge arch to be constructed which depicted his victory over Israel. The Arch of Titus, which can still be seen today, has images of the Jewish captives in chains, carrying the Menorah. The celebration culminated at the temple where the Romans paid homage to their idol.

The Romans also minted a special coin in honor of their victory. One side of the coin showed an image of Emperor Vespasian's head, and the other side showed a woman in chains crying under a palm tree, guarded by a Roman soldier. "Judea Capta" (Judea is captured) was inscribed on the coin.

The Keilim of the Bais Hamikdash were placed in the Temple of Jupiter in Rome until 455 C.E. In that year, the Vandals conquered the city, looted all of its riches, and hauled them to their capital, Carthage, North Africa. The location of the keilim today is unknown.

The Roman emperor, Vespasian, died nine years after Yerushalayim was conquered, in 79 C.E. His son, Titus, succeeded him. Titus ruled Rome for only two-and-half years. In that short amount of time, Rome was plagued with three tragedies, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, a widespread fire in Rome, and an outbreak of the bubonic plague. Titus utilized the Roman treasuries to rehabilitate the nation after these tragedies.

Some said that Titus was repentant over the destruction of Yerushalayim and the Bais Hamikdash. While Titus was the Emperor, Rabban Gamliel, who had become the leader of the Jews after the death of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, traveled together with Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua to Rome. They pleaded with him to alleviate the abuse of the Roman governors in Judea.

In Rome, the Sages saw the exiled Jewish children playing in the streets. The children were playing with piles of dirt, pretending they were piles of grain. "This much must be set aside for the terumah tithe, and this much must be set aside for the ma'aser tithe," (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 7:13).

PART 12 - TITUS PUNISHMENT.

When Titus had traveled back to Rome on a ship with the keilim of the Bais Hamikdash and Jewish captives, a fierce storm began, and the ship was in danger of capsizing. Titus said, "It seems that the Jewish God only has power in the sea. He drowned Pharaoh in the sea and Sisra as well. Now He wishes to drown me in the sea, too. If He wants to show His strength, let Him come up on dry land and fight with me there." A heavenly voice said, "Brute, son of a brute. I have a tiny creature, a gnat. Go up on dry land and fight against the gnat."

When Titus alighted from the ship, a gnat flew into his nose, and gnawed at his brain. He suffered from it for seven years. One day, as he was walking on the street, the banging from a blacksmith's shop calmed down the gnat. Titus was relieved that he had found the answer for his pain. Every day, a blacksmith was brought to hammer in his presence, and calm down the gnat. The gentile blacksmiths were reimbursed for their time, unlike the Jewish blacksmiths. Titus, said, "For the Jew it is enough that he sees the revenge against his enemy."

Sadly for Titus, the gnat soon adjusted to the noise of the hammering, and continued to attack his brain despite the noise. Chazal say that when Titus died, a gnat the size of a large dove was found inside his brain.

Titus, who died suddenly at the age of forty, had given orders before he died that his body should be burned, and his ashes scattered over the seven seas. He reasoned that this would prevent the Jewish God from finding him and punishing him for afflicting His nation. Titus caused a desecration of Hashem's name when he destroyed the Bais Hamikdash, and exiled the Jews. People said, "The God of this nation had wrought many miracles. He took them out of Egypt and drowned Pharaoh and his armies in the sea. He did the same to Sisra." When the nations heard about the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, and the exile of the Jews, they came to the conclusion that Hashem must have been powerless to save the Jews this time.

Titus, and the Roman nation have long since faded into oblivion. The powerful Roman empire was ultimately obliterated by a primitive nation. The Jewish people, who were oppressed, murdered, and scattered to the four corners of the world, live on until this day.

PART 13 - ASARAH HARUGEI MALCHUS

On the 25th of Sivan, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel, the Prince, and Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha, the former Kohen Gadol, two of the ten great sages killed by the Romans, were captured. They were killed on the day the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed.

When Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Yishmael were imprisoned, Rabbi Yishmael began to cry bitterly. Rabbi Shimon said to him, "Soon you will reside among the tzaddikim in the next world. Why are you crying?"

'I'm not crying because of my imminent death, said Rabbi Yishmael, "but because I'm being led to execution like a criminal. What did we do to deserve this? Maybe we weren't careful in taking care of the poor? Did we think only of ourselves instead of the widows and orphans?"

When they were taken to the executioner, both of them begged to be killed first. "Let me be killed first so I should not have to see the death of my colleague." The executioner drew lots, and it fell on Rabbi Shimon. The executioner took his sword and cut off the head of Rabbi Shimon. Rabbi Yishmael bent down and lifted the head of Rabbi Shimon, placing his eyes against Rabbi Shimon's eyes, and his mouth against R' Shimon's mouth. "Holy lips! Lips that never spoke anything but the mysteries of the Torah now lick the dust!" He wept, and the sound of his weeping reached the heavens.

The daughter of Titus heard the crying and ran to see what was happening. She saw Rabbi Yishmael and was astounded; she had never seen such a handsome man. She ran to her father and begged him to save Rabbi Yishmael so she could save him for herself. Titus refused to allow him to remain alive, but he granted his daughter the skin of Rabbi Yishmael's face. He ordered that Rabbi Yishmael be skinned alive. When the executioner reached the place on his head where his tefillin had rested, Rabbi Yishmael screamed.

"For my life, I do not cry, but for my tefillin, I cry." After they had skinned him, they cut off his head. His skin was preserved and Titus' daughter placed it in a glass jar by her bed.

When Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava heard about the death of Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Yishmael, they tore their clothes, and donned sackcloth. They said, "If there was any good in the world, it was due to the merit of Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Yishmael. Much misfortune must be coming to the world. Hashem took these two chachamim so they won't have to suffer the future travails."

Part 14 – AM YISROEL CHAI!

Give me Yavneh and its Sages!" Nearly 2,000 years have passed since Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai stood before the Roman emperor and asked of him, not for the preservation of the state, because it was no longer a state of Torah, and not for the preservation of the Bais Hamikdash, because Herod's name was associated with it -but for the preservation of the Oral Law Torah, which depended on Yavneh and its Sages. He knew that if there was the Oral law of the Torah, there would be a people of the Torah; and if there was a people of the Torah, there would be a land of the Torah; and in the future -a state of the Torah. With "Yavneh" and its Sages, he saved everything.

Now this emperor, his people, his empire -Rome, the world power: where are they now? But the people of the Torah, the people of Yavneh and its Sages are alive and vigorous, every day awaiting the coming of the righteous Mashiach and the establishment of the state of the Torah in the land of the Torah. The towering personality of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai is likewise kept vigorously alive in the hearts of the people of the Torah, and every new generation learns to love and revere him, just as they do "Moshe and Aharon among His Kohanim, and Shmuel among those who call upon His name..." (Psalms 99:6)" (Iyunim by R' Eliyahu Dessler)

Ironically, it was Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, the greatest sage of the time, who was able to envision a future without the Bais Hamikdash and under foreign rule. The Zealots and others who refused to heed the wisdom

of the Sages were the ones that refused to live under Roman rule, with tragic consequences. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai understood that the Roman conquest was inevitable, but he did not give in to despair. He realized that the Jews could survive under foreign domination, they could survive without the Bais Hamikdash, and they could even survive in foreign lands. However, Klal Yisrael cannot survive without the Torah, and therefore Torah had to be preserved at all cost. He and his students moved from Yerushalayim before its destruction, and settled in Yavneh.

Yavneh became the new spiritual hub of the Jews, and insured their survival. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai became the spiritual leader of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael, and all around the world. In Yavneh, he established a yeshiva, schools and shuls. New shuls were vital as davening replaced the korbanos in the Bais Hamikdash. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai also reestablished the Sanhedrin, which was essential for the proper preservation of the Torah. The Sanhedrin determined the date of each new month, and the time of each leap year.

The foresight of Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai when he pleaded with Vespasian to grant him Yavneh, saved the nation from losing the light of Torah along with the loss of the Bais Hamikdash. Sadly, Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai remained in doubt the rest of his life over his decision to avoid requesting that Yerushalayim and the Bais Hamikdash be spared, a request that he was certain would be denied. On his deathbed, he cried as he said, "I don't know in which direction I will be taken." The remaining Sages had no doubt; they aptly called him, "the Light of Israel." (Berachos 28b).

