



## ***Tisha B'Av***

### ***Sinat Chinam***

#### ***Ba Le'taher/Ba Le'tamei***

On the verse (*Mishlei* 3:34), "*Im la'leitzim hu yalitz, v'la'anavim yiten chen*," "If one befriends scoffers, he will scoff, and if [one befriends] the humble, he will find favour," *Reish Lakish* (*Yoma* 38b) expounds, "*Ba le'tamei potchin lo, ba le'taher mesayin oto*," "One who comes to be defiled, they allow him [he is given the opportunity to do so], one who comes to be purified, they assist him." The *letz*, the scoffer, is the primary example of a person who comes to defile himself, "*ba le'tamei*." The *anav*, the humble person, on the other hand, is "*ba le'taher*," the one coming to purify himself. The "*ba le'tamei*" is allowed to go the way he chooses. The door is open for him to go on the wrong path if he chooses to do so. This is learned from the aforementioned verse, which writes regarding the *letz*, "*hu yalitz*," "he will scoff," which implies that he himself is involved, and no-one else (*Rashi Yoma* *ibid.*). However, the "*ba le'taher*" is aided to reach the state of purity that he is seeking. This is learned from the verse, which states that if man befriends humble individuals, "*yiten chen*," he will be granted favour. Since he will learn to act humbly, like them, his deeds will find favour in the eyes of others. Nevertheless, this is only because G-d grants him favour in their eyes.

Let us understand: If this is what the verse is coming to tell us, then, why is a "*ba le'tamei*" represented specifically by a "*letz*?" Surely, there are other fitting examples of a "*ba le'tamei*" as well? And, why is a "*ba le'taher*" depicted as a humble individual? Furthermore, the *Gemara* writes that the humble person is aided and granted "*chen*," favour. Why is "*chen*" the necessary quality given to the humble person?

#### **Paraffin or Afarsimon Oil**

Before answering these questions, let us continue on in the *Gemara*. *Rabi Yishmael* explained the concepts of "*ba le'tamei*" and "*ba le'taher*" with the following parable: A customer wishes to buy some paraffin or *afarsimon* oil. If he wants to buy paraffin, the seller will probably tell him to serve himself. However, if he is coming to buy *afarsimon* oil, the seller will probably say, "Wait for me, I want to measure it out together with you, so we can both benefit from its fragrance."

When selling a foul-smelling product, the seller will not want to involve himself; hence, he tells the buyer to get it himself. However, when selling a product that emits a pleasant fragrance, the seller will want to join in and help out.

How does the above parable depict the case of "*ba le'taher*?" The one who chooses to do "good" receives Divine help, "*mesayin oto*," to achieve his goals. Yet, in the parable, when the seller offers to help him (see *Maharsha*, *ibid.*), he does so in his own interests, to be able to enjoy the aroma, but not necessarily in the interests of the buyer. Additionally, the *Gemara* portrays it as if they will only be able to both enjoy the sweet fragrance when the seller is helping out, "*ani ve'atah*," "you and I," implying that if the seller would not help out, the buyer would not be able to enjoy the *afarsimon* at



all. Why should that be so? Surely, if the buyer were to measure out the *afarsimon* oil by himself, he would certainly gain?

#### **Letz versus Anav**

Let us begin answering our questions by returning to the *Gemara*, and understanding the concepts of “*ba le’tamei*” and “*ba le’taher*.” The “*ba le’tamei*” is a *letz*, a scoffer, one who does not take life seriously and is the personification of a haughty person (see *Rabbenu Yonah Shaarei Teshuvah* 3:175). Thinking that he knows best, he drives *Hashem* out of his life and scoffs at everyone else, as he travels along independently.

The “*ba le’taher*” is the person who chooses to do “good.” He takes the correct path at “the fork in the road,” for he wishes to purify himself. He personifies the *anav*, the humble person, who lowers himself, understanding that one cannot do whatever one wants; rather, one must subjugate oneself, and follow G-d’s route. The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 5a) writes that *Hashem* says, “Whoever is haughty, I cannot live together with him in the world.” This is because a haughty person thinks (*Devarim* 8:17), “*Kochi ve’otzem yadi asah li et ha’chayil ha’zeh*,” “My own strength and power have enabled me to achieve this wealth.” One who feels this way, essentially, expels the Divine Presence that resides within him. This is what the verse (*ibid.* 14) means when it states, “*Ve’ram levavecha ve’shachachta et Hashem Elokecha*,” “You will become haughty, and forget *Hashem*, your G-d.” Since he thinks that he can manage well by himself, G-d leaves him to manage life on his own. (The *Steipler Gaon* writes, in *Chayei Olam* [*chelek* 2:27], that due to their haughtiness, people suffer from confusion and doubts in matters of faith. They have driven out the Divine Presence that resides within every Jew. Such people wish to lead their own lives, and hence, their faith becomes shaky. When a person humbles himself, admitting that G-d runs the world and everyone’s life, he invites the *Shechinah* to reside within him once again, thereby reinstating his faith.)

Hence, the “*ba le’taher*” is one who has chosen to humble himself – an “*anav*.” He realises that he cannot manage by himself, and brings *Hashem* into his life. He is rewarded with a “*chen*,” the ability to find favour in the eyes of others. One who has “*chen*” will find it is easier to manage in difficult situations, as people will be more accommodating towards him. The “*letz*,” haughty scoffer, on the other hand, is one who chooses not to subjugate himself and prefers to manage on his own. He does not humble himself to do what is right, and therefore, will not find favour with others. He will be left alone, and none will be accommodating towards him. The “*anav*,” who humbles himself, thereby choosing the correct path, brings *Hashem* into his life, and merits favour.

#### **Buyer and Seller Involvement**

In the parable, we mentioned that when the buyer wishes to purchase goods with an unpleasant odor, the seller will not want to be involved in measuring it out. However, when buying the pleasant-smelling goods, the seller will want to be involved, so that he too can benefit from its fragrance.

If, when purchasing something, the buyer chooses the article and takes it home, then the seller merely serves as an address to receive the money. Alternatively, if the buyer leaves it up to the seller to organize everything, including delivery, then all that the buyer must do is decide to buy and pay for it.



In the parable, the one buying the paraffin is really doing everything. He chooses to buy it, pays for it, measures it, and takes it home, without much involvement on the part of the seller. When buying the *afarsimon* oil, however, the seller does all the work for him. All the buyer need do is to decide what he wants to buy and pay for it. So too, the "*ba le'tamei*," who chooses evil, is left to "do everything" himself and stray along the undesirable path, if he so wishes. However, the "*ba le'taher*" is treated differently. As soon as he decides to take the correct path, everything is done for him. Although this may not be obvious, if he were to choose to do everything on his own, with no Divine Intervention, he would not achieve anything. When he allows *Hashem* to do the job and simply join in, then, true help may be received.

#### **Hashem's Involvement**

Similarly, in our battle with the *yetzer hara*, if not for *Hashem's* help, we would definitely not be successful in overcoming it. Essentially, *Hashem* is the one who deters the *yetzer hara*, but He wants us to demonstrate that we wish to purify ourselves and not fall prey to it. Sometimes the Evil Inclination is very persuasive in trying to lure us to sin. This is meant to test and show our level of determination to withstand temptation. If we triumph, however, this is not because we invested greater effort; rather, it is *Hashem's* doing, as He restrains our *yetzer hara*. Our input was merely to show more determination in choosing the correct path.

In our case, the "*anav*" is a "*ba le'taher*" – he wants to choose "good," and humbles himself to do *Hashem's* service. However, his purification is solely in *Hashem's* hands. He cannot do it himself. Therefore, in the parable, "*mesayin oto*" is not illustrated by *Hashem* just helping us do it; for if we would be actually trying to do it, we would never be "*mitbasem*," enjoying the pleasant fragrance, as it is far beyond our capabilities.

Now, we may explain as follows: The person who wants to buy a pleasant commodity is helped – "*mesayin oto*." However, the way he is helped is by letting the seller do all the work. That way, the buyer will also benefit; not only by ending up with the product, but also because now everything is attributed to him, as if he has actually done it, receiving just a bit of help. However, if the buyer tries to do the work by himself, then he will not end up being "*mitbasem*," as he did not allow *Hashem* to do it, but thought that he was doing it himself.

#### **We Choose and Hashem Does**

When coming to purify ourselves, we must allow *Hashem* to purify us, letting Him take over and do everything. Nevertheless, because we chose to act correctly, the action is attributed to us. In truth, whether we do an *averah* or *mitzvah*, it is completely *Hashem's* power and energy doing it. In the case of an *averah* (*rachmana litzlan*), we cause G-d against His Will, as it were, to inject energy into something that He does not want to do. *Hashem* has decided that it must be this way; otherwise, there would be no free choice, which is for our good. Hence, the *Gemara* (*Avodah Zarah* 54b) writes that when a person engages in a forbidden marital relationship and bears offspring from it, he, as it were, forces G-d to imprint His image on the *mamzer*, the illegitimate child, born from such a union. Similarly, when we do a *mitzvah*, after having made the correct decision, G-d does everything. (Obviously, in this scenario, *Hashem* is happy to be carrying out that which is in accordance with His Will). It only looks as if we have done it, but essentially, He has done everything. Since G-d is happy that we chose to do His Will, he is "*mitbasem*" from this, and we empower Him, as it were, through



our choosing to do “good.” Consequently, we are also “*mitbasem*,” enjoying the fact that we have performed His Will.

### ***Molichin Oto***

The *Gemara* (*Makot* 10b) writes, “*Be’derech she’adam rotzeh leilech bah molichin oto*,” “A person is led upon the path that he wishes to go.” Whether his path is a good one or not, “*molichin oto*,” he will be led in the way he wishes to go. The *Gemara* proves this concept threefold, firstly, from an incident in the *Torah* involving *Bilam*, secondly, from an incident in *Neviim*, and thirdly, from a verse in *Ketubim*. The verse from *Ketubim* is (*Mishlei* 3:34), “*Im la’letzim hu yalitz u’le’anavim yiten chen*,” the same verse from which the *Gemara Yoma* (*ibid.*) learned the concept of a “*ba le’tamei*” and “*ba le’tahev*.”

As we have explained the *Gemara*, a “*ba le’tamei*” is treated differently to a “*ba le’tahev*.” The doors are opened for a “*ba le’tamei*” to go the way he chooses. However, a “*ba le’tahev*,” who chooses correctly, is given Divine help to be successful. Yet, the above *Gemara* in *Makot* seems to indicate that both are treated equally. Concerning both it states, “*molichin oto*,” that a person is led along the way that he or she wishes to go. How can we reconcile these two *Gemarot*?

### **Setting Out or Already on the Journey**

When on “the road of life,” one may find oneself in one of two situations: One may be standing at a crossroads, needing to decide which road to take. One may choose the correct, upward path in life, or the road that spirals downward. At this crucial point, one is “*ba*,” coming forward to start a journey, and deciding on a plan of action. The second scenario is one who is already travelling along one of these roads, whether the good path or the detrimental one, and is well into the route (see *Rabbenu Yonah Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:11). The *Gemara* in *Yoma* (*ibid.*) refers to a person at the crossroads, deciding which road to take. He has not yet set out on any route. If he chooses the correct way, the higher route in life, acting with humility, then, he is given Divine help – “*mesayin oto*.” If he picks the road leading downhill, the one of haughtiness, then the door is open for him to take that route. No-one will stop him, but no-one will help him. The *Gemara* in *Makot* (*ibid.*), however, discusses a person who is already travelling along his chosen route. Whatever route he is on, he will be led along it. If it is the positive, upward trek of the humble one, he will be led along that road, maybe even unwillingly. This is what *David HaMelech* expressed when he wrote (*Tehillim* 119:59), “*Chashavti derachai ve’ashiva ragli el eidotecha*,” “I considered my paths, and made my legs return to Your testimonies.” *Chazal* (*Vayikra Rabbah*, *Bechukotai*) explain that *David* was saying, “*Hashem*, every day I think or say that I will go to this place or that, but my feet end up taking me to the *Batei Knessiot* and the *Batei Midrashot*.” Similarly, one travelling along a “bad” route, entrenched in evil, with evil as his goal and aim, will be pulled along this route. Even if he does not presently want to do evil, “*molichin oto*,” he is led upon it. (The exception to this is if a person decides, “I am now changing roads,” then, he may change direction. This is because he has, in fact, created a new crossroads, to enact a complete change in his life, by rerouting his journey, and showing remorse for his bad deeds [see *Rabbenu Yonah*, *ibid.*]).





At every crossroads, let us endeavor to be a “*ba le’tahev*,” choosing the correct path. After that, we will be led along that path, as *Chazal* describe (*Pirkei Avot* 4:2), “One *mitzvah* leads to another,” which is the spiral staircase leading to perfection (see *Rabbenu Yonah Pirkei Avot* *ibid.*).

### ***Kamtza and Bar Kamtza***

The *Gemara* (*Gittin* 55b-56a) discusses at length the famous incidents that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and other cities in Israel at the end of the period of the second *Bet Hamikdash*. At that time, *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred towards one another, was rampant amongst the people of Israel. This was actually the cause of the destruction of the second *Bet Hamikdash* and the underlying theme of the following story of *Kamtza* and *Bar Kamtza* (see *Maharsha, Gittin* 55b).

The *Gemara* (*ibid.*) relates that there was a person hosting a banquet, who told his servant to invite his friend *Kamtza*. However, the servant mistakenly invited a person who had a very similar name, *Bar Kamtza*. The problem was that this character happened to be the enemy of the host. When seeing *Bar Kamtza* at his *seudah*, the host instructed him to leave. Not wishing to suffer the embarrassment of having to leave, *Bar Kamtza* asked to stay, and even offered to pay for his portion. When the host was insistent that he leave, *Bar Kamtza* offered to pay for half of the banquet, but his plea fell on deaf ears. Desperately, he offered to pay for the entire banquet, but the host, not budging from his position, physically threw him out. Beside himself with embarrassment and appalled by the fact that the rabbis present at the *seudah* did not even try appealing to the host to have pity, *Bar Kamtza* decided to take revenge against the Jews, plotting to teach them a big lesson. He went to the Roman Emperor, and told him that the Jews were rebelling against him. The Emperor wanted *Bar Kamtza* to verify his accusation. So *Bar Kamtza* told him to send a sacrificial offering to the Jews and see if they would offer it up. The Emperor agreed, and sent *Bar Kamtza* as an emissary to bring the sacrifice to the *Bet Hamikdash*. On the voyage to *Eretz Yisrael*, he made a blemish in the animal’s eyelid, or some say its lip, rendering it unfit to be offered up. When he presented the animal to the *Kohanim* in the *Bet Hamikdash*, they noticed the blemish and asked the Sage, *Rabi Zechariah Ben Avkulos*, what to do about the animal. He was in a dilemma if he should offer the sacrifice with a blemish, as this may cause an onlooker to say that one may offer blemished sacrifices. However, perhaps they should kill *Bar Kamtza*, who was a threat to the Jewish Nation? *Rabi Zechariah* refused to do so, because this may cause people to say that for blemishing a sacrifice one is punishable with death. *Rabi Zechariah Ben Avkulos*, acting over-tolerantly, chose not to sacrifice the animal and to leave *Bar Kamtza* alive. This enabled him to continue his wicked plan, which ultimately led to the destruction of the *Bet Hamikdash*.

We may ask: why did the rabbis at the *seudah* keep quiet and not endeavour to protect *Bar Kamtza*’s honour by objecting to the embarrassment that he was being subjected to? Furthermore, why was *Rabi Zechariah Ben Avkulos* overly tolerant of him? Surely, in such a life-threatening situation, one may offer a sacrifice, even though it has a blemish (see *Magen Avraham* 656:8). Alternatively, such a *malshin*, an informer, who is jeopardizing the Jewish Nation, should have been killed (see *Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 388).

### **The Severity of Embarrassment**

*Sefer Devarim* is *Moshe Rabbenu*’s book of *mussar*, ethics and values, in which he rebuked the Jewish Nation for their shortcomings, before his passing. Even so, *Moshe Rabbenu* did not begin his parting



rebuke in a direct fashion. The people could understand his message even when said as a hint, and they would then accept it more graciously. This way, he would be safeguarding the honour of the Jewish people, for to embarrass the people in public was not acceptable. The *Torah* places great emphasis on not embarrassing our fellow Jew. The reason, explains *Rabbenu Yonah* (*Pirkei Avot* 3:11), is that embarrassing someone is tantamount to killing them. Just as when someone is killed their blood is spilt, so too, when embarrassing someone, one causes the victim's blood to rush to their face, which makes them appear red, and then they turn pale white, as the blood drains from their face. The severity of embarrassing someone is such, writes *Rabbenu Yonah*, that just as one must be prepared to give up one's life so as not to transgress one of the three cardinal sins – idolatry, adultery or murder – similarly, it is preferable to die, rather than to embarrass another person.

The prohibition against embarrassing our fellow man is so severe, that our Sages teach us that *Hashem* will avenge the embarrassed person. This is what happened at the time of the destruction of the second *Bet Hamikdash*. The *Gemara* (*Gittin* 57a) says in the name of *Rabi Eliezer*, "Come and see how powerful embarrassment is, as due to it *Hashem* helped *Bar Kamtza*, He destroyed His House, and burned His Sanctuary." The embarrassment suffered by just one person was enough to cause *Hashem*, as it were, to avenge it and destroy the *Bet Hamikdash*, His Holy Abode on this world, which affected the whole nation. The novelty of the *Gemara* is the extent to which a "*ba le'tamei*," namely *Bar Kamtza*, was assisted. He chose a path that was highly detrimental for himself and the whole Jewish Nation, and yet, because he suffered embarrassment, *Hashem* actually helped him in his evil endeavours. This is an exception to the aforementioned *Gemara* in *Yoma* (*ibid.*), which tells us that a "*ba le'tamei*" is allowed to proceed on his own discretion, while only a "*ba le'tahev*" receives Divine Aid.

Now we may understand why the rabbis who were present at the *seudah* did not object to what was happening and why *Rabi Zechariah Ben Avkulos* did not arrive at the correct *halachic* decision. The answer is that "*mesayin oto*" means that G-d takes the situation, as it were, into His own hands. He is in charge and runs the show. It is not just "*potchin lo*," leaving a person to do whatever he wants, but rather, *Hashem* takes care of everything. Therefore, He did not let the rabbis object nor *Rabi Zechariah Ben Avkulos* to make the right decision. *Hashem* caused him to have misplaced humility, and therefore, be unable to decide on the correct mode of action. This is referred to in the verse (*Yeshaya* 44:25), "*Meshiv chachamim achor*," (G-d) causes the wise to lack the correct response (see *Iyun Yaakov Gittin* 57a).

The extent of the destruction that embarrassment can cause is such that *Hashem* helped *Bar Kamtza* destroy His Own Abode on this world, just to avenge the embarrassment that he felt.

#### ***Malbin Pnei Chavero Be'rabim***

*Rabbenu Yonah* (*Shaarei Teshuva* 3:141) explains that besides the fact that embarrassing another person is equivalent to murdering them, additionally, it can cause an individual to forfeit his *Olam Haba*. The *Mishnah* (*Pirkei Avot* 3:11) teaches us that one who embarrasses his friend in public forfeits his portion in the Next World. For one who murders knows the severity of his misdeed and the extent of his sin, and will therefore be closer to repenting for his actions. Nevertheless, one who embarrasses another will probably not realise the extent of his sin and is therefore much more unlikely to repent. (This is similar to what *Rabbenu Yonah* [*Berachot*, beginning of the first *perek*] and



the *Rema* (603) write, “There is a greater need to repent for transgressing a *safek averah*, a possible prohibition, than a definite one.” If one definitely transgressed, it is clear to him, and he knows that he must repent. However, if he is in doubt whether he really sinned, he will not feel the same level of remorse. He may always tell himself that maybe it was not really a sin, or he may justify his actions, by saying that in such a situation it was permitted, or perhaps, convince himself that it never happened, etc. In such a scenario it is much harder to repent.)

### **Three Cardinal Sins or *Sinat Chinam***

With *Rabbenu Yonah's* insight, we can understand the *Gemara* in *Yoma* (9b), which explains the difference between the sins that brought to the destruction of the first *Bet Hamikdash*, and to the destruction of the second. The *Gemara* explains that at the time of the first *Bet Hamikdash*, transgression of the three cardinal sins was widespread; people served idolatry, committed adultery and murder. In the time of the second *Bet Hamikdash*, though, the transgression of cardinal sins was not the problem; rather, it was the baseless hatred which was rampant. Their hatred was not even concealed in their hearts, as people embarrassed one another in public. The *Gemara* deduces from the fact that the first *Bet Hamikdash* was rebuilt after seventy years that the transgression of the three cardinal sins was not as severe as the *sinat chinam* of the second *Bet Hamikdash*. For while we merited a rebuilding after the first *churban*, which was caused by violating the three cardinal sins, we still await the restoration following the second *churban*, which was caused by *sinat chinam*. Additionally, the *Gemara* explains that at the time of the first destruction, our sins were revealed, and hence, the end of the Babylonian exile and the rebuilding of the *Bet Hamikdash* were also revealed. However, the sins of the second *Bet Hamikdash* were not revealed, and therefore the end of that exile has still not been revealed.

As *Rabbenu Yonah* mentioned, it is easier to do *teshuvah* for sins that are revealed, than for those that are not. Hence, after the first destruction of the *Bet Hamikdash*, it was easier to come to repentance. People understood that they had sinned, their sins were obvious, and the extent of their damage was also visible. Therefore, after seventy years they were allowed to rebuild the *Bet Hamikdash*. However, at the time of the destruction of the second *Bet Hamikdash*, their sins were not revealed, and people did not recognise the severity of what they had done. Hence, the end of the exile has not yet come, as a result of not appreciating the gravity of embarrassing our fellow man in public, and resultantly, our lacking the appropriate *teshuvah*.

Certainly, due to the technological breakthroughs of recent times, we are confronted with powerful, evil influences, which tempt us to transgress the three cardinal sins, Heaven forbid. However, our fight against baseless hatred must be waged with no less ferocity. It will enable us to end our exile, and merit seeing the third *Bet Hamikdash* built speedily in our days. *Amen*.