



Tu B'av

A Time To (Re) build

Tisha B'Av – A Mo'ed

The period of the “Three Weeks,” from the seventeenth of *Tammuz* until the ninth of *Av*, is designated for mourning over our Holy Temples, which were both destroyed during this time. The climax of our mourning is on *Tisha B'Av*, when we sit on the floor, and remember Zion in its ancient glory. We cry and lament the devastation caused by its destruction, just like when we sat on the river banks of *Bavel* crying over our loss, after being exiled there (see *Tehillim* 137:1).

We find that *Tisha B'Av*, although certainly the saddest day on our calendar, is still referred to as a *mo'ed*, a time of meeting, as the verse says, “*Kara alai mo'ed*,” “He announced a time of meeting for me” (*Eichah* 1:15). It is considered to be a *chag*, to the extent that we do not say *Tachanun*, the supplication prayer, on this day. We can understand that the *chagim* of *Pesach*, *Shavuot* and *Succot*, which are times of happiness, when we would ascend to Jerusalem to bask in the presence of the *Shechinah* in our holy *Bet Hamikdash*, are referred to as *mo'adim*. However, how can we refer to *Tisha B'Av*, a day when we mourn over the destruction of our Holy Temples, as a *mo'ed*, “a time of meeting” with *Hashem*?

The three main *Yamim Tovim* are referred to as *mo'adim* because they exemplify the special opportunity of becoming close and forming a connection with *Hashem*. Thus, *Tisha B'Av* also befits the title of *mo'ed*, not because of a feeling of closeness to *Hashem*, but because we are sensing and lamenting how distant we have become from Him. When we stop to contemplate how far we have fallen in our level of connection to *Hashem* and are actually bothered by it, this generates a ray of “light” needed for our reconnection with Him. We can then start to emerge from the “darkness” in which we have become entrenched. The more we mourn over our being distant from *Hashem*, the more we are as if drawing a bow, enabling the arrow, when released, to soar through the air to heights that it would have otherwise never reached, ultimately drawing us closer to *Hashem*.

After having gained recognition on *Tisha B'Av* of how far we have fallen, we have hopefully made a breakthrough that will give us light and hope for the future. It is at this point that we start the *Shivah DeNechemtah*, the Seven Weeks of Comforting. These take us all the way to *Rosh Hashanah*, when, with the correct preparation, we can “meet” and coronate *Hashem*, our King, the Ruler of the Universe. During these weeks, we work on strengthening our connection with Him and our bonds of love for Him, so that when we arrive at *Rosh Hashanah*, we will be ready to accept His Kingship and sovereignty upon ourselves in true awe. During these weeks of comforting, we are essentially trying to rebuild the connection that we had with Him when the *Bet Hamikdash* stood.

Tu B'Av

At the onset of the seven weeks of comforting, there is the special day of *Tu B'Av*, the 15th of *Av*. On this day, many positive events happened to the Jews (as enumerated in the *Gemara* [*Taanit* 30b-31a]). Historically, the first such



event which the *Gemara* relates, took place in the “Generation of the Wilderness.” On *Tu B’Av* of their fortieth year in the wilderness, it became apparent that the decree of death, against those who had cried needlessly after hearing the slander of the spies, had ended. The *Torah* relates that when the spies returned from touring the Land of Israel, they spoke derogatorily about it, spelling destruction for all those who would enter it. Believing their predictions, all the men cried unjustifiably that night, which was *Tisha B’Av*. Due to their unwarranted crying, they were punished by *Hashem* and denied entry into the Land. Instead, they would have to wander in the wilderness, until all those who had been over twenty at the time of the sin would die. This delayed the entry of the Jewish People into the Land for forty years, and the building of the *Bet Hamikdash*. As an additional punishment for their unjustified crying, G-d caused the Jews to cry on that very same night, many years later, when our two *Batei Hamikdash* were destroyed (*Sanhedrin* 104b). Every year on the night of *Tisha B’Av*, those who had been over twenty at the time of the sin were instructed to go and lie in an open grave and sleep there overnight; the next morning only some of them would awaken. When, in the fortieth year, everyone arose from their graves the next morning, they thought they had made a mistake with the date. So, they repeated the process every night until the 15th of the month, when they saw the full moon, and realized that the ninth of the month must have passed. Only then did they realize that the decree had come to an end.

Hashem’s Home – Our Home

Thus, *Tu B’Av* became the day when we would finally be able to enter the Land of Israel and build the *Bet Hamikdash*, the House of *Hashem*, where the Divine Presence could reside. Since this date became auspicious for “building a sanctuary,” our Sages designated it as a day to give those who had not yet found their spouse, the opportunity to do so. The underlying concept of a Jewish marriage is the building of a relationship between a husband and wife, such that the Divine Presence will be able to reside with them. Our Sages teach us (*Sotah* 17a) that when man and wife are deserving of it, the *Shechinah* resides between them. Furthermore, we are taught (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yirmiyahu 7:277*) that one who gladdens a *chatan* and *kallah* is as though he is rebuilding one of the ancient ruins of Jerusalem. The ruin referred to here is the *Bet Hamikdash*. Every Jewish home is like another stone in the future *Bet Hamikdash*. When all the Jewish homes have been brought to completion, the building of the spiritual *Bet Hamikdash* in Heaven will also be complete, and will descend fully-built into our physical world. When we run our homes according to *halachah* and the correct Jewish outlook, our home is, essentially, a mini *Bet Hamikdash*. How apt it is therefore, that on *Tu B’Av*, we enter the mode of rebuilding the home of *Hashem* – the *Bet Hamikdash* – by building our “mini” *Batei Mikdash* through arranging *shidduchim*.

Jacob’s Tents

When *Bilaam* was hired to curse our nation, he tried his utmost to do so; but his mouth, which was controlled by *Hashem*, uttered the following (*Bamidbar* 24:5), “*Mah tov ohalecha Yaakov mishkenotecha Yisrael*,” “How good are your tents, *Yaakov*, your dwelling places, *Yisrael*.” *Rashi* comments that *Bilaam* noticed that the opening of each tent among the Jewish People did not face the opening of another tent. Thus, no-one coming out of his own tent would be able to see into his neighbour’s tent. This respect for privacy made the Jewish People worthy of having the Divine Presence reside amongst them (*Gemara, Baba Batra* 60a).



The basis of a Jewish home is that one acts modestly, and respects the privacy of others. This is not an extra, but a requirement, if one wishes the Divine Presence to reside therein. Consider the following: Do we really need to know what is going on in our neighbour's home? Do we really need to bring "the street" into our home? When a person builds his home according to his spiritual needs, as well as his physical and emotional ones, then the Divine Presence will reside there. When one builds one's own mini *Bet Hamikdash* successfully, it replicates the real *Bet Hamikdash*, which is based on forging a close relationship with *Hashem*.

The Purpose of Getting Married

It is written (*Bereshit 2:18*), "*Lo tov heyot ha'adam levado, e'eseh lo ezer kenegdo,*" "It is not good for Man to be alone, I (G-d) will make a complementary helper for him." The *Netziv* in his *sefer Ha'amek Davar* (ibid.) explains that this verse is not coming to say that it is necessary for a man to have a wife for the sake of continuing the species, as any specie with male and female counterparts will require this. The verse, however, is teaching us that humans require an *ezer*, a helper, which is a far more encompassing role.

The Role of an Ezer

What is the role of an *ezer*? The *Netziv* explains that since Man, unlike other creatures, is a microcosm of the whole creation, he contains within him a multitude of different facets, traits, and characteristics. Some people have a natural tendency towards certain character traits, whereas others have tendencies towards the opposite. Some situations in life may be quite easy for a particular individual to handle, because he naturally possesses the traits necessary to deal with them. In other areas, however, he may struggle, as he lacks the necessary traits to cope with them. It is incumbent on him to make the effort to acquire these precious character traits. In order for man to nurture and cultivate his natural tendencies, personality and character in the best possible way, he will need some help. The role of a wife as an *ezer* is to be there to help him with his life's mission of self-improvement.

Aid or Hindrance

Rashi (ibid.) quotes the *Gemara's* (*Yevamot 63a*) query that the *Torah's* term *ezer kenegdo*, a complementary helper, seems to be contradictory, for the term *kenegdo* literally means "opposing," while *ezer* means a "helper." Is a wife an *ezer*, a helper, or is she *kenegdo*, against him? The *Gemara* explains that in fact this terminology comes to indicate two possible situations, namely, that if a man merits it, his wife will be an *ezer*, a helper, but if not, she will be *kenegdo*, opposing him. How, though, can two separate and opposite scenarios be combined into one phrase, implying that they have a connection?

Blessings of a Wife

Additionally, how can we understand our Sages' teaching (*Yevamot 62b*) that a man with no spouse lacks happiness, blessing and goodness? Moreover, in *Eretz Yisrael* they added that such a man lacks *Torah* and a safeguard. Also, he lacks peace. The implication is that a wife will enable her husband to attain all of these qualities. She gives him happiness, blessing, goodness, *Torah*, security and peace. How can we understand this?



We mentioned that one advantage of marriage is that thereby a man merits learning *Torah*. Can't a person learn or be learned even before he is married? *Rashi* (ibid.) explains that a wife who takes care of the physical chores, thereby enabling her husband to dedicate himself more to learning *Torah*, is helping him to acquire *Torah*. Without a wife, he would need to spend time doing mundane chores, thereby limiting his learning time.

In order to present another perspective on this *Gemara*, and answer the question that we posed on *Rashi*, we first need to understand another piece of *Gemara*.

Why Halachah is like Bet Hillel

The *Gemara* (*Eruvin* 13b) relates that for three years *Bet Shammai* and *Bet Hillel* were in dispute according to whom the *halachah* should be decided. Each argued that the *halachah* should be like them until a *Bat Kol*, a Heavenly voice, declared that "*Elu ve'elu divrei Elokim Chayim*," "Both [ways of deciding the *halachah*] are the words of our Living G-d," and, "*ve'halachah ke'Bet Hillel*," "the *halachah* is according to [the rulings of] *Bet Hillel*." The *Gemara* then asks, if both opinions were Divinely inspired, why did *Bet Hillel* merit that the *halachah* be eternally determined like them? The *Gemara* answers that they merited this because of their conduct, being "*nochim ve'aluvim*," easygoing and patient (*Rashi*). Additionally, they would consider the opinion of those who argued with them, and go out their way to explain why they understood the matter differently. Lastly, they would mention *Bet Shammai's* opinion before theirs. They therefore merited that the *halachah* be fixed according to their ruling. We could understand simply, that as far as *Torah* scholarliness was concerned, their arguments were equally valid, and it was not clear according to whom the *halachah* should be fixed. However, since *Bet Hillel* excelled in the trait of humility, they merited their opinion becoming universally accepted for all generations. We may, however, suggest a deeper meaning, as follows.

After the Majority

Let us examine a question posed by the *Rashba* (*Teshuvot* 2:104): The *halachah* is that when a *Bet Din*, a jury of three judges hears a case, the law is decided according to the majority view. For example, if two judges decide that the defendant is guilty, and the third decides that he is innocent, we rule like the majority. Similarly, if two judges decide that he is innocent and one decides that he is guilty, we will override the single opinion that makes him liable.

What happens, though, if one of the judges abstains, saying that he does not know what to decide? Then, whatever the others say, whether one judge decides that he is innocent and one that he is guilty, or, even if two say that he is innocent or guilty, we still do not have a final decision of three judges. In such a case, the *Gemara* rules that two more judges be brought in to assess the situation, and together the jury will arrive at their decision.

One may ask: If when two judges say that he is innocent, and the third, that he is guilty, the *halachah* is that the defendant is innocent (and vice versa). All the more so, when two judges decide that he is innocent, and the third one is uncertain, the *halachah* should be that he is innocent, as an abstention due to uncertainty is nearer to the side of innocence than if he had ruled him guilty. So, why are we required to add another two judges in such a case?

Hearing Another Side adds Depth



If, for example, when learning a puzzling piece of *Gemara*, and trying to understand it, every thought or reasoning that one says is either accepted by his learning partner, or his partner remains undecided. If his partner does not challenge his reasoning, or try to reach the depths of the *Gemara*, no more clarity or truth will evolve from this. Without hearing another side, a different perspective or point of view, one's viewpoint will be limited to what one thought originally. The best way to assess any case is by first considering every possible point of view, and, only then, giving an opinion. This will enable one to do one's utmost to assess the whole case properly, and make the most correct decision.

Hence, explains the *Rashba*, if one of the judges does not have a definitive opinion, then, not only are they lacking an awareness of all the possibilities of the outcoming *halachah*, but even the definitive opinions of the two judges will lack overall clarity, as they have not taken a point of view that may change their verdict into consideration. Thus, their present opinions are not as well-grounded as when the third judge argues with them, and, despite his view, they nevertheless differ with him. Therefore, if two judges say "innocent" and one says "guilty," the *halachah* is that the defendant is innocent (and vice versa), whereas, if one judge abstains, we must add another two judges to reassess the whole situation.

Humility Brings to a More Complete Understanding

Returning to our discussion about *Bet Shammai* and *Bet Hillel*, the fact that *Bet Hillel* were easygoing, patient and humble "allowed" them to consider other possible opinions, views or angles before deciding the question at hand. Thus, their conclusion about the *halachah* bore more weight, due to their having understood the picture in a more complete way. Hence, the benefit of humility is not indirectly related to the judicial process, but one that has direct and positive influence on the process of reaching a *halachic* conclusion. It was this trait which became the deciding factor in fixing the accepted *halachah* like them. (Afterwards, I found this explanation in the *Tosafot Rid, Eruvin 13b*. See also the *he'arot* of the *Shoel U'Meshiv* printed at the end of the *Tosafot Rid* *ibid*.)

This is not to say that *Torah* discussions should be conducted in a quiet and meek fashion. On the contrary, the *Gemara (Kiddushin 30b)* describes *Torah* discussions as a war, where each side is an enemy to the other until a conclusion is reached. At that point, however, the two sides become close friends having finally arrived at the truth. The trait of humility, however, is a necessary ingredient for this process to develop, since without it the discussion can never begin. This is because each side will never know how to properly express its opposition to the other side's view, since they never really heard it or thought about it.

Through Marriage one Merits the Truth in Torah

Concerning *Chazal's* statement that one who has a wife will merit learning *Torah*, we asked that one is certainly not prevented from learning *Torah* even before he is married. However, according to what we have just explained, we can understand this in a deeper way: In order for one to live in peace and harmony with his wife, there must be mutual understanding. This does not necessarily mean that they must agree about everything. However, each must possess the ability to listen to the other side, contemplate what they are saying, seek out the truth, and weigh up both points of view. Then, there can be harmony. When a person integrates such a regimen into his conduct, it will automatically affect his approach to *Torah* study as well. He will no longer be convinced that his conviction or line of



thought is necessarily correct, until he has tried to understand “the other side of the coin” as well. Since a successful marriage demands humility as the main mode of conduct to understand the needs of others, his ability to understand *Torah* with more breadth and depth will also develop, meriting him with a truer understanding of *Torah*. For this reason, our Sages (*Yalkut* ibid, *Berachot* 6b) tell us that one who makes a *chatan* and *kallah* happy merits *Torah*. Due to his being actively involved in helping build a relationship of understanding and tolerance, he will merit that which marriage can bestow – a truer understanding of *Torah*.

Ezer or Kenegdo

We asked how the two opposing concepts of *ezer*, a helper, and *kenegdo*, a hindrance, can be juxtaposed within the same statement. The *Netziv* (ibid. *Harchev Davar*) explains this according to our abovementioned principle. If the woman presents “the other side of the coin” to her husband, showing him that he may not be right, it can prove to be a tremendous help and salvation in his life. Thus, if one merits it, his wife will be an *ezer*, a real help, by being *kenegdo*, opposing his wrong ways. The humble person will consider his wife’s approach and may well be saved from a grave mistake. If however, one does not merit a good wife, that *ezer* may work against him. By her agreeing and possibly adding ammunition to his bad *middot*, while seemingly being an *ezer*, in truth, she is acting *kenegdo*, as the result will be to his detriment. Thus, the position of *kenegdo*, offering a contrary opinion, can be a real *ezer* in building a man with humility, enabling him to be a most understanding, sympathetic, generous and patient person. On the other hand, the position of *ezer* could be *kenegdo*, when she helps him to magnify his self-centeredness, lack of tolerance and arrogance.

Our Bet Hamikdash

Let us start rebuilding the *Bet Hamikdash* by first building our mini *Batei Mikdash*. These will act as building blocks for the third *Bet Hamikdash* that is being prepared in Heaven. The more we work on our relationships and care for one another, the more *Shechinah*, Divine Presence we will bring into our homes. The auspicious day of *Tu B’Av*, in particular, was fixed by our Sages as a suitable time for building our future homes.

This period of re-forging our relationship with *Hashem* should help prepare us for *Rosh Hashanah*, when we will coronate *Hashem* and accept the responsibility of being subservient to Him, at the level of connection we attained during the *Shivah DeNechemta*, the Seven Weeks of Comforting.