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Yirmiyahu HaNavi writes in *Eichah*, כל רדפיה השיגהו בין המצרים — all her pursuers overtook her in dire straits (1:3). Rashi understands these words literally: The Jews' enemies cornered them in the narrow streets of Yerushalayim.

The Midrash (*Eichah Rabbah* 1:29) understands the words בין המצרים as *within the days of distress*; i.e., "All who pursued her overtook her during the three weeks from the Seventeenth of Tammuz (when the first breach of Yerushalayim's walls was made)¹ to the Ninth of Av (when the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed)."

The Maharsha (*Bechoros* 8b) writes that these twenty-one days correspond to the twenty-one days from the start of Rosh Hashanah (when Heavenly judgment begins) until Hoshana Rabbah (when the final judgment is ratified). Just as the twenty-one days commencing with Rosh Hashanah are days of introspection and *teshuvah*,² so too should the twenty-one days beginning with the Seventeenth of Tammuz until the Ninth of Av be days of introspection and *teshuvah*. This would lead to a joyful time of atonement and absolution, similar to Hoshana Rabbah, as the stain of Klal Yisrael's sins through repentance are bleached.

Interestingly, the Bnei Yissaschar (*Chodesh Tammuz, Maamar* 2, note 7) counts this period as twenty-two days rather than twenty-one (as he includes both Shivah Asar B'Tammuz and Tishah B'Av in

1. See *Taanis* 26a.

2. Based on the prophecy of Yirmiyahu, who saw the vision of a staff made from an almond tree (*Yirmiyahu* 1:11). The Midrash explains that the almond tree blossoms in twenty-one days, corresponding to the 21 days from Shivah Asar B'Tammuz to Tishah B'Av (see Rashi *ibid.*). As flowers of the almond tree are white, both sets of 21 days are a time of *ליבון צנות*, bleaching of sin, through *teshuvah* or suffering, either of which provides atonement.

his count). In this light he says that in these twenty-two days of the “Three Weeks,” there are 528 hours (22 x 24 = 528); the numerical equivalent of the word *מפתח*, *key*.

He writes that these days contain within them the *מפתח הגאולה*, *the key to redemption*. Indeed, in the following pages, as we glean lessons about the Beis HaMikdash, Eretz Yisrael, Shabbos, *Hakaras HaTov*, and *Teshuvah*, among many other topics, we hopefully will become elevated and inspired to behave in a manner that will bring the *Geulah*.

Keys open doors to new possibilities, new concepts, and new opportunities. Let us use the keys contained in the hours of the Three Weeks to open new vistas of *Ahavas Hashem*, *Ahavas HaTorah*, and *Ahavas Yisrael*.

How, then, should our *teshuvah* in these days begin? Aside from the obvious repentance required for the sins that brought the destruction of the Batei Mikdash — the three cardinal *aveiros*, idol worship, immorality, and bloodshed, that cost us the First Beis HaMikdash, and *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred, that cost us the Second Beis HaMikdash — the Rosh Yeshivah of Beth Medrash Govoha, Rav Yeruchem Olshin, suggests that we should be cognizant of Chazal’s teaching (*Shabbos* 119b) that there were other factors that caused these tragedies.

The Talmud introduces each of these causes with the phrase ... *לא חרבה ירושלים אלא* ... Among them are *they desecrated the Shabbos ... they demeaned Torah scholars ... honest people [in the marketplace] had disappeared from [Yerushalayim]*.

It behooves us to study these and the other reasons cited there (see also *Bava Metzia* 30b), to realize where we must change, improve, and repent, so that we elevate our lives and, it is hoped, bring the Third Beis HaMikdash.

The Maharsha (*Shabbos* 119b) writes sadly that almost all the sins listed in the Gemara as causes for the destruction of Yerushalayim were still prevalent in his time. He notes that few people in his era observed Shabbos as carefully as they should, as they failed to study the intricate laws of Shabbos, nor were these laws taught as

widely as they should be. The shaming of *talmidei chachamim* and the refusal to accept their criticism were still everyday occurrences. Financial dealings were often not conducted honestly, with all manner of cheating, charging interest, and even theft not uncommon. The Maharsha writes, "It is proper for every person who fears Hashem to take these points to heart, and whoever has it within his power to protest these matters should certainly do so."

It is appropriate to quote the ArtScroll commentary to this Gemara: "The Sages (*Yerushalmi Yoma* 1:1) taught, 'Any generation in whose days the Temple is not rebuilt is considered a generation in whose days the Temple has been destroyed.' [ArtScroll comments:] When the sins that brought about the Temple's destruction will finally be rectified, we may expect to witness its long-anticipated rebuilding."



Rav Shlomo Wolbe (1914-2005) guides us, focusing on two different areas of *tefillah* during the Three Weeks. He writes that the least one can do during the Three Weeks is to concentrate more intently during *Shemoneh Esrei* on the two blessings regarding the future of Yerushalayim, בּוּנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, *rebuilding Yerushalayim*, and הַמְחַיֵּה הַמֵּתִים, *restoring His Presence to Tzion*.

He then strongly suggests that in *Bircas HaMazon* there also should be a special emphasis regarding this period. He notes that after we thank Hashem וְעַל הַמְּנוּחַ וְעַל הַמְּזֻנָּה, *for the land and for the nourishment*, we pray for Hashem's compassion for Klal Yisrael, for Yerushalayim and Tzion, for the return of the Davidic monarchy, and for the Beis HaMikdash.

Rav Wolbe cries out and asks, "We have eaten and we are satiated, but is that what life is all about? The whole purpose of our existence is that we be worthy for the שְׂכִינָה, *Hashem's Holy Presence*, to rest among us. Thus, during the Three Weeks, in *Birchas HaMazon*, we should pray with increased emphasis and concentration regarding the lack of the Beis HaMikdash and the defiled state of Yerushalayim. *Galus* and satiety are not where we should find our 'comfort zone.'" By his suggested manner of *bentching*, we will feel the pain of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash and yearn for its return.

These thoughts broaden our horizons and give us new perspectives.



The following stories about honesty and *teshuvah* are illuminating.

Most school offices depend on printers, computers, and copiers. Student and financial records, and even classroom materials, rely on modern technology. Hence, office machines must always operate efficiently.

Rabbi Michael Levi is the principal of the Bais Yaakov D'Rav Meir Girls Elementary and High School in Brooklyn. The master diagnostician and technician who keeps his school's electronic equipment in good repair is R' Shlomo Malik, a Satmar chassid.

"Ask R' Shlomo about his story while he was in training," Rabbi Levi said to me. "You'll see, you'll want to write it up. It's fascinating."

Well, he was right, because here it is.

In the spring of 1994, R' Shlomo was a young married man working for Micro Innovations, a computer store in Manhattan. Recognizing his diligence and potential growth, his employers enrolled him in a laptop training course given by Toshiba.

An essential feature of the course was to learn how to take apart and put together a laptop. Its intricate components include memory modules, clips, chips, track pack screws, cooling fan, battery, audio port cable, LCD screen, and keyboard, each comprising scores of parts, many of them tiny.

The instructor, Mr. Morgan Watkins, told the class that their final exam would be to totally disassemble a laptop in the morning, and then reassemble it in the afternoon, after lunch, and have it function perfectly. Each student would be given a large tray with partitions in which he could place the parts in an orderly manner.

On the morning of the test, each of the thirty students worked meticulously, taking apart the laptop and placing every component carefully into particular sections of the tray so that they could easily find it to reassemble the computer. With a Phillips screwdriver and