



**RABBI AARON**

Editor, Torah Tidbits

**GOLDSCHIEDER**

## Bringing Your Own Brick

There is a widespread custom to read in a mournful voice the verse which contains the word *Eicha* from *parshat* Devarim. The *haftarah* which is read on that same Shabbat, taken from the book of Yeshayahu, also contains the evocative word *Eicha*, and is also read in a mournful melody. And of course when the book of *Eicha* is read on the evening of Tisha B'Av in synagogues throughout the world, those chapters are read in a mournful tone beginning with the word *Eicha*.

Why should all three readings follow this unique custom?

Perhaps we can trace this practice back to a midrashic teaching that weaves a common conceptual theme between all three. The following is the first midrashic comment on the book of *Eicha* (*Midrash Rabbah* 1:1):

“Three prophets used the expression *eicha* (*How* - an utterance of amazement or disbelief). Moshe, Yeshayahu, and Yirmiyahu...Rabbi Levi said: This may be explained by means of parable. A noblewoman who fell from grace had

three attendants: One saw her when she was in her state of tranquility, one saw her when she was in her state of rebelliousness, and one saw her when she was in her state of shame. So too, Moshe saw Israel when they were in their state of glory...Yeshayahu saw them in their state of disobedience...Yirmiyahu saw them in their state of shame...”

Moshe witnesses the burgeoning of a nation but is exposed to argumentative people. Yeshayahu saw them as they were stumbling and Yirmiyahu lamented the tragedy of their behaviors leading them to their banishment and the painful exile of *galut*.

The *Sfat Emet*, Rebbe Yehuda Aryeh Leib of Ger, explains that the common expression *Eicha* used by all three prophets is not coincidental. The Midrash rather points us to a fundamental connection between these three prophecies. The message conveyed in this rabbinic teaching is that the latter sins of the Jewish people had their roots in the actions of the earlier generations. Had the earlier generations perfected their ways, the eventual sins that led to the destruction would not have come to pass.

The *pasuk* tells us Yirmiyahu's lament: “Our fathers have sinned [*chatu*] and are no more, and we have suffered for their

iniquities [avonoteihem] (Lamentations 5:7). The expression חט , *chet*, refers to an unintentional sin, whereas חטא , *avon* refers to a sin that is premeditated. Yirmiyahu laments: The sin of our forefathers was unintentional, but it was left unchecked and emerged in us, their descendants, as premeditated *avonot*. Just as an individual who starts to sin in even a minor way finds it difficult to arrest his slide and eventually commits greater transgression, so it is with the nation. The ‘sin’ of the fathers festered, and became the iniquity of their children.

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Moshe said, “How can I alone carry your contentiousness...! (Devarim 1:12) You are too great for me to judge alone. It is necessary to appoint judges to assist me. The nation had descended slightly so that they were no longer fit to be under the direct guidance of Moshe. This descent went uncorrected; the people fell further and further until Yeshayahu was forced to declare: “How has [the faithful city] become a harlot.” And the downward spiral continued until the sins of the people brought about the destruction of both the Temple and Jerusalem, and Yirmiyahu’s lament: Eicha, how she sits in solitude!” (Sfat Emet, Devarim Tisha B’Av, 5640, 5637).



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This is the point of the parable of the noblewoman who fell from grace. Each point of her decline led her further along until she finally found herself in a state of abject humiliation. Each of her three attendants saw her at different points along this descent, and expressed amazement and sadness appropriate to the state in which he found her.

The *Sfat Emet* is highlighting how mistakes and transgressions not attended to at an early stage, over time, easily expand and exasperate. This is true for an individual but it is also the case on a national scale. This is comparable to two lines that are not exactly parallel - their divergence is initially small, and barely noticeable - but the further they extend, the more they diverge. As time passes they share no proximity to one another.

The Rebbe posited that this is the meaning of the Talmudic statement : “A generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt, is guilty for its destruction” (*Yerushalmi, Yoma 1:5*). In other words, a generation which has not taken up the task to rectify sins that caused destruction in the past are now also culpable. Otherwise, if they rectified matters, the Beit Hamikdash would be rebuilt.

”הענין הוא דכל החטאים שבכלל ישראל היה קצת מהם בשורש דורות הראשונים, דכמו (ש) כל הזכותים של בני ישראל הם מאבותיהם, כן אם היה תיקון גמור בשורש, לא היה נצמח(ים) החטאים אחר כך” (שפת אמת תר”מ ד”ה במדרש איכה)

This lesson is not meant to overwhelm us. On the contrary. It is meant to be empowering. The esteemed Rebbe of

Ger inspired and uplifted his chassidim exhorting them that their actions have a direct impact on the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash.

This viewpoint is reminiscent of a beautiful story told of the great Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1787). One night the holy Rebbe had a dream. In that dream he saw the angels that were running quickly. Each one was carrying a brick and bringing it for the building of the holy Temple in Jerusalem. There were thousands of angels all bringing bricks for the building of our long-awaited Temple in Jerusalem. Reb Elimelech went over to one of the angels and asked him, “Why are there so many angels bringing bricks? The angel turned to Reb Elimelech and said to him, “Don’t you know? Each person needs to bring their own brick for the rebuilding of the Temple.” (“The Night That Unites” p. 214)

Following a meal when reciting the *Birkat Hamazon* we express our aspirations and longing for the Beit Hamikdash with the words “Rebuild Jerusalem, the Holy City, speedily in our days.” The Chassidic Rebbes interpreted this line based in the story above. Most translate the phrase ‘*beemehayra v’yameinu*’, speedily in our days” to mean that we are praying that Jerusalem and the Temple be rebuilt quickly so that we will be able to see it in our own lifetime. However, the phrase can be understood to mean not “in our days” but “with our days.” In other words, let us rebuild Jerusalem by the way we fashion and live each day; healing the flaws of yesteryear. In this way each of us needs to take on noble tasks and accept the

responsibility of bringing our own brick so that the Temple will finally be rebuilt.

This inspiring theme is voiced by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook zt"l (1865-1935) in a memorable comment he makes on the Pesach Haggadah. The well known passage "In every generation, we are obligated to see ourselves as if we have come out of Egypt" is generally understood to mean that in the Seder night we should envision ourselves leaving Egypt. That is why we reenact the event by eating matzah and maror and celebrating the deliverance by drinking the wine. Rabbi Kook understood the phrase differently. He taught: Each and every person must feel that he or she has a contribution to make to the overall perfection of the nation of Israel and the world. Each individual has a unique role to play in perfecting his or her own generation. Egypt was only the beginning of the process; God's "outstretched arm" continues to guide us. We are responsible to realize our mission and propel things forward, bringing the Redemption closer each day (*Haggadah Olat Re'iyah* p. 47)

"חייב כל אחד להשלים, להשיג ולהרגיש את חלקו בשלימות המעלה, השייך לארכו ולדורו, המגיע לו מיציאת מצרים." (הגדה עולת ראייה, מז)

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883), the famed founder of the Mussar movement, offered a practical application based on his reading of the opening Midrash of Eicha. When contemplating one's actions, one must keep in mind not only how they will be impacted in their own life, but also the effect it will have on their children and beyond. A slight deviation on one's part

can, if not corrected, have an ill effect on future generations. A slight movement toward increasing positive actions and making better choices can cause untold benefits that will be realized generations later (*Torat Rav Yisrael MiSalant* p. 209).

Parshat Devarim, which is always read the Shabbat prior to Tisha B'Av, opens with words of rebuke. However a closer look reveals a hidden love for Israel and Hashem's eternal belief in His people. The Netziv of Volozhin (1816-1893), in his classic *Haamek Davar* penned a short introduction to each book of the Torah. Here he writes that Moshe saturated this book with words of mussar, ethical and moral wisdom meant for every Jew; everyone, he says, can discover teachings sweet as 'milk and honey.' Even Yehoshua, Moshe's closest disciple, writes the Netziv, would consistently study and review this single book of Devarim as a source of inspiration and guidance. He adopted this book, so to speak, to be used as his own '*mussar sefer*'.

"עד שגם יהושע רבן של ישראל השקיף בזה הספר תמיד. ומזה יתבונן כל אחד לפי כחו. וימצא דרך ישר להלך נכחו" (נצי"ב, פתיחה לספר דברים)

In the coming weeks as we hear the reading of *Sefer Devarim* each Shabbat we open our hearts to its messages of encouragement and motivation. We are meant to imbibe these teachings, each of us in our own way; assimilating and inculcating these ideals so that we steadily move closer and closer to the *geulah shleima* and to the rebuilding of *Yerushalayim Ir HaKodesh*, '*beemehayra v'yameinu*' - 'quickly, with our days.' ■