

NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM
THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Putting Sins in Context

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּמִדְבַּר בְּעֶרְבָה מִזֶּה סוּף בֵּין
פָּאָרָן וּבֵין תּוֹפֵל וּלָבָן וְחִצְרֹת וְדִי זָהָב: (דברים א, א)

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Yisrael on the other side of the Yarden, in the Wilderness, in the plain across from Suf, between Paran, and between Tofel and Lavan, and Chateiros and Di Zahav. (*Bemidbar* 33:38)

Since they are words of reproof, and it mentions here all the places where they angered *Hashem*, the verse did not state the point openly and mentioned it only by way of allusion. This was out of respect for the Jewish people. (*Rashi*)

The first verse of the *parshah* mentions a lot of places but doesn't say what happened there. Rashi gives one reason for mentioning these places, explaining that they were all places where the Jewish people sinned, and since the Torah did not wish to spell out their sins, it merely alluded to them by mentioning the places where they occurred.

However, as we know, the Torah bears more than one interpretation.

וּכְפֹטִישׁ יַפְצֵץ סֶלֶע – Like a hammer shatters a rock.¹

Just as a hammer shatters a rock into many splinters, so from one verse can emerge many interpretations.²

Accordingly, there is room to offer an additional reason for the Torah's mention of these place names.

Resh Lakish said: What is the meaning of אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁפָּטוֹ פָּעָלוֹ – “Of his judgment, his deeds?” It means that where a person's judgment is, there his good deeds are mentioned.³

¹ Yirmeyahu 23:29.

² Sanhedrin 34a.

³ Yevamos 78b.

A person's good deeds are mentioned in the same place where he is being judged. His virtues and positive characteristics are to be voiced. This is learned from *Shaul Hamelech*. When he was judged regarding the *Givonim*, his merits came up, as well.

This is because judgment and reproof need to be done in a truthful manner that relates to the nature of the act being judged. It is thus necessary to mention the person's merits as well, because his good deeds throw light on the true nature of his bad deeds.

Let's say a person sinned by not giving *tzedakah* when approached by a pauper. We need to know how he normally behaves in order to understand what happened here. If he usually is stingy and refuses to give, we may assume that his refusal to donate this time was a wrong deed. But if he always cares for the poor and sees to their needs, and just this time he turned away from a pauper, it shows that his act has a different nature altogether. It's not because he evilheartedly committed a wrong deed. He just wasn't paying attention, that's all.

This is why a person's merits need to be mentioned every time he is judged for his sins. Otherwise, his sins are cast in a false light.

It is even more important to make mention of any extenuating circumstances or other factors that might explain the sin. All this serves to clarify the true nature of the act. The Hebrew word for reproof, *תוכחה*, also means demonstrating and bringing proof for the truth of something.

The Jewish people's sins had a lot of extenuating circumstances and other factors that brought them on. Although these circumstances and factors were not sufficient to fully justify what the people did, they still need to be taken into account in order to fairly judge what the people did. The good side and

the excuses need to be considered, too.

This is why Moshe mentioned the Jewish people's sins by means of these allusions, which bring out the positive points that are in the Jewish people's favor, as will be explained.

"In the Wilderness" is explained by Rashi as the sin committed in the *Midbar*, where they said *הַמִּבְּלִי אֵין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לָמוֹת בְּמִדְבָּר* – "Aren't there enough graves in Egypt, that you took us to die in the Wilderness?!"⁴ Here the Torah mentions the people's great merit that they followed *Hashem* into the Wilderness in the first place. Furthermore, the sin itself was caused by being in the Wilderness, in a desolate and inhospitable place.

"In the plain (*ערבה*)" is explained by Rashi as the sin of *Pe'or*, which they committed in the plains of Moav (*ערבות מואב*). The place they sinned was mentioned because the Moabites who lived in that place were the ones who caused them to sin. The Jewish people were not seeking out sins, *chas v'shalom*. On the contrary, the Moabites set them up and craftily enticed them. If the Torah would have said that they sinned in "Pe'or," it would have sounded as if they were seeking idolatry. Thus it says, "In the plain (*ערבה*)," to hint that they happened to come upon a place where there were evil people who deliberately caused them to sin.

"Across from Suf" is explained by Rashi as referring to when they came to *Yam Suf*, where they said, *הַמִּבְּלִי אֵין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לָמוֹת בְּמִדְבָּר* – "Aren't there enough graves in Egypt, that you took us to die in the Wilderness?!"⁵ Here, too, the Torah mentions that they were facing the Sea of Reeds

4 *Shemos* 14:11.

5 *Ibid*.

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

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and were in mortal danger, and this caused them to complain. And the general rule is **אין אדם נתפס על צערו** – a person should not be held to account for what he said in his time of pain.

“Between Paran” is explained by Rashi as the wilderness of Paran, where they sinned by sending the *Meraglim*. *Chazal* say:

Why is it called “Paran” (פארן)? Because they increased and multiplied (פרו ורבו).

They sinned because they had a lot of children. It is natural for a person to be afraid of dangers that threaten his children. People fear for their children’s welfare even more than they fear for their own. In this passage, the children are mentioned many times. The Spies said **יהיו לבז** – “Our little ones will be taken captive,” and regarding the punishment, it says **יהיה לבז** – “Your little ones, about whom you said that they will be taken captive....” This implies that the love they felt for their children was a major factor in bringing them to sin.

“Between Tofel and Lavan.” This refers to the

Manna. The people made accusations against the *Mon*, complaining that “no human being can ingest and not excrete.”⁶ They were living on a very high spiritual level, like that of angels, and they didn’t want to keep it up, because they were afraid that if they will fall from their high *madreigah*, they will be punished severely. Thus they wanted to live like normal human beings, who ingest and excrete, not like angels, who eat *Mon*. This idea is alluded to by “Tofel and Lavan.” [“Tofel” is related to **תפלו**, to make accusations. And] the *Mon* was white, “*lavan*.” This food was very, very fine. They could not bear its refined, exceedingly lofty nature.

“And Di Zahav.”

Because of the silver and gold (“*zahav*”) that You showered on the Jewish people, to the point that they said, “Enough! (“*dai*”), this caused them to make the Golden Calf.⁷

This last one is a proof to the whole interpretation, which is based on the idea that the place names are to excuse and partially justify the sins committed by the Jewish people. ●

6 Yoma 75b.

7 Berachos 32b.

SPECIAL TOPIC

Yirmeyahu and Plato

There is a tradition that when *Yirmeyahu HaNavi* saw *Beis HaMikdash* in ruins, he fell down and wept bitter tears. The Greek philosopher Plato met him and asked, “You are the wisest of the Jews. Why are you crying over sticks and stones? And another thing: Why do you cry over the past? Whatever happened is over and done with. A wise person does not cry over the past; he builds the future.”

Yirmeyahu answered him, “First of all, all my wisdom comes from these ‘sticks and stones.’ And

When You Can’t Contain the Light

regarding your second question, I will not answer you because this is a very deep matter and you won’t be able to understand it. Only a Jew can understand the profound meaning of crying over the past.”¹

Tears, with Joy

Indeed, Yirmeyahu cried bitterly over the destruction of *Beis HaMikdash*. However, we find that joy was also expressed regarding this *churban*.

1 Lev Eliyahu (*Shevivei Lev, Eichah*); see also *Gan Yerushalayim*, p. 54.

As mentioned earlier, *Tehillim* 79 is a “song” that was sung over the destruction of *Beis HaMikdash*, and the *Midrash* explains that this is because *Hashem* merely poured out His wrath on sticks and stones, rather than destroying the Jewish people.² This was cause for “song.”

Early Torah sources say that when *Hashem* poured out His wrath on these sticks and stones, “There was great joy.” As mentioned before, this is one of the reasons for the *minhag* to rise from sitting on the ground at noontime of *Tishah b’Av*.

This requires explanation. Why should the moment of the *churban* be a cause for joy? How can we be happy that the ‘sticks and stones’ of *Beis HaMikdash* were set to fire?

And an even bigger question: What is the meaning of, “He poured out His wrath”? Human beings may vent their wrath and calm themselves down by smashing an object. But how could such a thing be said about *Hashem*? If the Jewish people needed to be wiped out due to their sins, what did it help to destroy *Beis HaMikdash* instead? How did that obviate the need to destroy the Jewish people?

Body and Soul

Every living being is composed of two parts: body and soul. Every soul is connected and fitted to the body it occupies. A human body has a human soul, and an animal body has an animal soul. A person stands erect on two feet, with his head up, because this is fitting to his soul, which comes from above. An animal goes on all four with its head facing down because it comes from the ground. Body and soul fit one another because all the movements of the body are actually movements of the soul. This idea is expressed by *Chazal*’s teaching:

The soul fills the whole body.³

If an animal soul would be placed inside a human body, and connected to it, that person would become lowly and physical, because he has a lowly

animal soul. But it would be an even greater tragedy if a human soul would be placed in an animal body and connected to it.

This is the subject we will now discuss.

Big Lights and Small Vessels

In early Torah sources, body and soul are called “vessel” and “light,” respectively. The soul is the light contained and held within the body. The vessel and the light need to fit one another.

If the vessel, i.e., body, receives less light than its capacity to hold, it cannot function up to par, but it still exists. However, if it receives more light than it can hold, it “shatters.”

Chazal express this idea as follows:

Anyone whose deeds are greater than his wisdom, his wisdom lasts. And anyone whose wisdom is greater than his deeds, his wisdom does not last.⁴

Regarding this, I heard that R. Chaim of Brisk was once asked as follows: Let’s say there are two people. One has twenty units of deeds and ten units of wisdom. His wisdom will last, because his deeds are greater than his wisdom. The other person has 300 units of deeds and 500 units of wisdom. His wisdom won’t last, because his wisdom is greater than his deeds. But why is this so? Why is he inferior to the first person, if he has so much more on all accounts?

R. Chaim answered that the second person is indeed greatly inferior to the first, because his greater wisdom obligates him to have deeds that are even greater than that.

Wisdom is the “light,” and deeds are the “vessels.” If a person’s wisdom is greater than his deeds, this means the “light” is greater than the “vessels,” and as a result, his wisdom doesn’t last. It “shatters.”

This is what Yirmeyahu was saying to Plato: When *Beis HaMikdash* stood, there was great light. It radiated tremendous holiness and wisdom and closeness to *Hashem* in the world.

However, the Jewish people of that generation were not fitting to hold so much light. Their evil

² *Eichah Rabbah* 4:14.

³ *Berachos* 10a.

⁴ *Avos* 3:9.

deeds damaged the “vessels.” The Jewish character and way of life degenerated. They worshipped idols, engaged in forbidden relations, spilt innocent blood. And they had baseless hatred for one another.

Yet, there was still an abundance of light. If a Jew sinned, he went to *Beis HaMikdash*, offered a *korban*, and his sin was atoned. On *Yom Kippur*, the scarlet thread turned white. Everything was atoned.

Such a situation was untenable, and it caused a shattering. The vessels couldn’t contain the great light, and they almost shattered completely. In other words, the Jewish people was almost lost, *chas v’shalom*.

Hashem in His great mercy did not want the Jewish people to perish due to their sins, so instead He diminished the light. He destroyed *Beis HaMikdash*, the light of the world, and thus saved the Jewish people from annihilation.

Thus we see that on the one hand there was cause for great joy — the Jewish people was saved. *Hashem* in His great mercy diminished the light, and the vessels could continue to exist. On the other hand, there was great pain over what was lost: the “sticks and stones” were destroyed. In other words, the abundance of light and wisdom and holiness and closeness to *Hashem* and presence of the *Shechinah* that *Beis HaMikdash* provided – it all came to an end. This is what Yirmeyahu wept over so bitterly.

“Lights” and “Vessels” in Our Generation

Sadly, we sometimes attend funerals, and we hear *hespedim* in which is mentioned the *Midrash* on the *pasuk*, “My Beloved descended to His garden... to pick roses.”⁵ The *Midrash* says that “My Beloved” is *Hashem*, and “to pick roses” means to take away the *tzaddikim* from among the Jewish people.⁶ *Hashem* takes away the best.

We need to know that this is not just a figure of speech. *Hashem* really does take away the best from among us, in order to save the Jewish nation as a whole. Because when there are *tzaddikim* and

outstanding individuals living in our midst, this elicits a terrible demand on the Jewish nation: if there is such an abundance of Torah and light among you, why aren’t there more good deeds?

So just as it was in the time of *Beis HaMikdash*, *Hashem* destroys the edifice. Back then He poured out His wrath on “sticks and stones”; He diminished the light in order to save the vessels. And so He does today as well. *Hashem* takes away the *tzaddikim*, thereby diminishing the light, in order to save the Jewish people.

As the saying goes, when it comes to *tzaddikim* and *roshei yeshivos*, we expect them to be like those of previous generations, but when it comes to the rest of us, we want to be as Jews are today. However, what would happen if this would actually come true? What if the *Chafetz Chaim* would live in our generation? Either he would uplift us all, or *chas v’shalom* he would destroy us all. This is because the light has to fit the vessels.

The Rambam tells us what a working man was like in the past:

If he is a craftsman, and he engages in his work three hours a day, and in Torah, nine hours...⁷

Today it is hard to find working men like this. But we still remember the working men of the previous generation who would get up before dawn and learn before they went to their jobs. A working man would not learn less than three or four hours a day.

For the most part, today’s working men are not like this. Why? Because they went to *yeshivos* when they were young, and they remember how they sat and learned ten hours a day — and those tremendous aspirations of their younger years often remain with them. Learning for just three hours a day is so paltry that it means almost nothing to such a person.

Nowadays we have very high aspirations. To learn less than all day is like nothing in our eyes. This is where we come to the *churban*. What happens when a person can’t learn all day? He is liable to end up not learning at all, because he doesn’t reduce his aspirations and adjust them to the “vessels,” that is, to his actual capabilities. This is *churban*. ●

⁵ Shir HaShirim 6:2.

⁶ Shir HaShirim Rabbah 6:1.

⁷ Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:12.

Tears of Pride

A Moed Revolutionizes You

The *Tur* writes about *Tishah b'Av*:

We don't recite *tachanun* because it is called a "*moed*."¹

We have mentioned previously that *Tishah b'Av* is called a "*moed*" and that this is based on a *pasuk*.² It signifies that there is an aspect of joy to *Tishah b'Av*. This day is when *Mashiach* is born, giving us a touch of hope and joy that consoles us a bit at this bitterest of all times.

Every *moed* of the year is supposed to revolutionize a person. For instance, *Pesach* is *zeman cheiruseinu*, on which a person should feel as if until yesterday he was sunk in the lowest levels of impurity and spiritual bondage, with all that this entails — and on *Pesach*, *Hashem* brought him out of Egyptian bondage, into eternal freedom. Today he is a "new person." He is a free man.

Shavuot is called *zeman matan Toraseinu*. On this day we receive the Torah anew every year. This, too, should revolutionize us and our whole way of life.

Rosh Hashanah is a special time on which we revolutionize ourselves in our *kabbalas ol Malchus Shamayim*, accepting *Hashem's* complete sovereignty. And so it is with all the *moadim*.

There is no question about it: if we will take a good look into the meaning of *Tishah b'Av*, and actualize it, this "*moed*," too, will truly revolutionize us.

Indeed, it is not easy for a person to revolutionize himself, but when he at least knows what the goal is, he can utilize his strengths in order to get there, to bring about a total inner change. But if a person is not aware what the goal even is, he surely will never attain it. He may be compared to someone who wants to hike to a certain city, but doesn't know its

name or location. If that's how it is, all his walking is not going to help him get there.

Tears Are the Tools

Each *moed* has its special mitzvos, which serve as spiritual tools that enable us to attain the inner content of the *moed*.

What about *Tishah b'Av*? What "tool" do we have on this day?

The *avodah* of crying.

This is a powerful and unique tool that enables us to attain the inner content of this *moed*. To appreciate how powerful such crying is, consider the following.

Let's say one night a person goes to sleep late, and he also wakes up late, after the time of *Krias Shema*. Then he continues on with his day as if nothing happened. He doesn't give it any special thought. In fact, he is not alone in this. There are many others like him who aren't overly disturbed by reciting *Krias Shema* too late.

Now let's imagine that a special day in the year would be designated to strengthen our observance in this area. A day on which all of *Klal Yisrael* gathers together, sits on the floor, and bitterly weeps over the sin of missing the time of *Krias Shema*.

I am sure that if we would have such a day, people wouldn't miss the time of *Krias Shema*. An activity that moves the heart to tears has a big influence on a person. It brings him to amazing attainments.

So it is when everyone joins together to lament and cry over the destruction of *Beis HaMikdash*. This great mourning makes the situation as serious in our eyes as an actual death. And a death affects a person's heart like nothing else. Due to this, after *Tishah b'Av* we are able to come to a time that is purely joy with no sadness or pain at all. It seems that this is what *Chazal* meant when they taught us that the day of *Tishah b'Av* is a "tool" that is capable of

¹ *Tur*, *Orach Chaim* 559.

² *Eichah* 1:15.

bringing *Mashiach's* birth.

It is very hard to grieve and weep over *Beis HaMikdash*, since we never merited to see it and experience its spiritual light. This problem disturbs many. People wonder what they can do to arouse their stony heart and shed a tear or two.

But in truth, feeling the pain is the second stage. It is the second thing we have to work on. The main problem is with the first stage: we don't have a clear understanding of what *Tishah b'Av* is all about. The most important object is to know our goal.

We will now focus on that.

The Pride of Yisrael

It is written:

וְאִם לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּהָ בְּמִסְתָּרִים תִּבְכֶּה נַפְשִׁי
וּמִפְּנֵי גָוָה – And if you do not heed this, My
soul will cry in secret because of the pride...³

Chazal interpret this verse in a most amazing and profound way.

Said R. Shmuel bar Inya in the name of Rav: *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* has a place called “in secret.” And what is the meaning of, “because of the pride”? Said R. Shmuel bar Yitzchak: Because of the pride of *Yisrael*, which was taken from them and given to foreigners. R. Shmuel bar Nachmani said: Because of the pride of the Kingdom of Heaven.⁴

This *galus*, which we have been in for so many years, has caused a tremendous decline in the spiritual level of the Jewish people, to the point that nowadays, to our dismay, many Jews don't keep Torah and *mitzvos*. Nevertheless, it is only over “the pride of Yisrael” or “the pride of the Kingdom of Heaven” that *Hashem* cries. Until the destruction of *Beis HaMikdash*, *Hashem* cried “in secret.” From

then on, this crying has broken out of its secret quarters, as the above *Gemara* goes on to say.

What is “the pride of Yisrael” over which *Hashem* cries?

It is clear that the *Gemara* doesn't mean the negative character trait of arrogance. Rather, it means the eminence and prestige of *Yisrael*, and that of the Kingdom of Heaven.

If you walked down the street and noticed a neglected old man sitting on a bench and counting the cars passing by in his boredom, you probably would not even bother to give him a second look. You would just walk right by with zero interest. But if someone whispered in your ear right then that he is actually one of the wealthiest men in the world, you would immediately change your attitude and gaze at him with respect.

This is the kind of “pride” that the *pasuk* is speaking of. It means importance and eminence.

Here's another example: When we see someone walking along and recognize that this is the famous Dr. so-and-so, the sought-after specialist with a worldwide reputation, we naturally relate to him with proper respect, as befits his status. This is what is meant by “pride.”

This trait of treating important people with honor and esteem is inherent to man's nature. But how deep of an impression important people make on us — this is something that changes according to the generation and the times.

I heard a story from R. Yisrael Chaim Kaplan that illustrates this point beautifully. When he was a child, he lived in a little town that was part of the Russian Empire. One day, the Czar himself paid a royal visit to the town. During the visit, they honored the mayor of the town and sat him down in the Czar's carriage, right across from His Highness himself. The mayor was so terrified of the Czar that he sat stiff as a stone, not even turning his head to the side.

In our times the whole idea of kingship doesn't exist anymore. We can't even grasp its meaning. But

³ *Yirmeyahu* 13:17.

⁴ *Chagigah* 5b.

that's how it was when there was a king.

In the time of *Beis HaMikdash*, *Tzidkiyahu HaMelech* was treated with wondrous respect and esteem by the whole world. And not just him, even his ministers. When one of them would visit a faraway country and would walk in a public place, all the locals would prostrate themselves before him, due to the honor of Yisrael.

This is the “pride of Yisrael” among the nations. It was well known to all the nations of the world that the Jewish people, and only the Jewish people, are the “children” of the Creator. They are His special people.

For this reason:

לֹא הָאֱמִינוּ מַלְכֵי אֶרֶץ כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֶל כִּי יָבֹא
צָר וְאוֹיֵב בְּשַׁעְרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם – The kings of the
earth and all the inhabitants of the world
did not believe that an enemy and oppressor
would enter the gates of Jerusalem.⁵

Nowadays, who would believe that a little country from somewhere could come and conquer the United States, the superpower of the world? Similarly in those days, it was unimaginable that some nation could bring down the Jewish nation, whose citizens at that time were on an incomparably lofty level. Here is one detail that serves to illustrate the point:

The Jews of that generation had the ability to utter one of the Names of *Hashem* and thereby call down the angel of fire to defeat the enemy. (For this reason, *Chazal* say that when *Hashem* wished to deliver the Jewish people into the hand of Nevuchadnezzar and exile them, He changed the names of the angels in heaven, so the Jews would not be able to invoke their names and bring them to their defense.⁶)

This is actually the tremendous question with which *Yirmeyahu HaNavi* opens the book of our mourning:

אֵיכָה יָשְׁבָה בְּדָד הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עִם הָיְתָה
כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבָּתִי בְּגוֹיִם שָׂרָתִי בְּמַדִּינֹת הָיְתָה לְמַס – How did she come to dwell alone, the city
of a great populace become a widow, great
among nations, ruler among countries,
become a tributary?⁷

Yirmeyahu's question goes unanswered. How could it be that the most eminent city in the world, to whom the whole world paid homage, suddenly sank to the depths of disgrace? (By the way, it is possible that the answer to this question is to be found in the question of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to *Adam HaRishon*: “Where are you [איכה]?”⁸ But this is not the topic of our discussion.)

On *Tishah b'Av* we recite the *kinah* of “*B'tzeisi miMitzrayim — B'tzeisi miYerushalayim*.” This *kinah* juxtaposes the glory of *yetzias Mitzrayim* with the abject state of going into *galus*. It expresses the idea that the miracles and supernatural events that surrounded our exile from *Yerushalayim* were no less than the miracles of leaving Egypt!

We did not merit living in the period when *Yerushalayim* was at the height of its glory, so we don't know what it was like. But it is important for us to know that the main topic of world interest, the subject most discussed by people all over, was: “What does the G-d of the Jews have to say?” and “What does He want of us?” (*Lehavdil*, it was like the way that everyone nowadays wants to know the Dow Jones average or the exchange rate of the dollar.) This tells us a little of the “pride of Yisrael,” over which *Hashem* cries in secret.

The Pride of *Malchus Shamayim*

And what is the “pride of the Kingdom of Heaven”?

The world has certain norms, and something that goes against them looks strange. For instance, here in *Eretz Yisrael* we are used to having sloped roofs

⁵ Eichah 4:12.

⁶ See Midrash Tehillim 36:8; Rashi, Yirmeyahu 21:4 and Yeshayahu 29:12.

⁷ Eichah 1:1.

⁸ Bereishis 3:9.

covered with red tiles. To our eyes, this color is pretty and blends in. But if all the sloped roofs would be painted green, and only one person would have red tiles, his roof would look strange to us. Similarly, all things are judged according to the norm in that place and time.

So it is also with people's interests, which change from generation to generation. What are our interests nowadays?

Let's say I would stop my talk in the middle and tell the audience that a passenger plane crashed, and I have in my possession the "black box" with all the information of the plane. I am sure that no one would get tired and start yawning in the middle of my account. They would want to hear the details. Similarly, if a person starts reading a thriller novel before going to sleep, he might find it hard to put the book down. He is liable to stay up very late at the expense of hours of sleep.

Unfortunately, it is not that way for us with Torah learning. Many people can't sit in front of a *Gemara* for half an hour before starting to feel tired.

Back in the golden days when *Beis HaMikdash* was standing, it was natural for a child of ten to learn *Mishnayos* or a *Gemara Bava Metzia*, and be so riveted by it that he couldn't rest until he finished the *masechta*. Learning the holy Torah was the avid interest of the Jewish people.

This was the "pride of the Kingdom of Heaven." When *Hashem* dwelled in *Yerushalayim*, the things that fascinated and absorbed Jewish people were Torah, *tefillah*, and *avodas Hashem*.

This is why the prophets who reproved the people in those days did not speak of the sin of *bitul Torah*. Neglect of Torah study was not a problem back then. Everyone simply loved to learn!

When two Jews would meet in the street, their topic of conversation would be in *sugyos* of *Shas*. Nowadays, even if people start to speak in learning when they meet one another, the conversation usually turns to other, more mundane issues, which have unfortunately become an essential part of our lives and interests. (A kindergarten teacher once told me

that she wanted to tell the children a story, and one of the children asked that she not tell them "tzaddikim stories." This is such a painful thing to hear. A story about *Eliyahu Hanavi* is "boring." Only animal or fantasy stories are "interesting." What a sorry state!)

Hashem cries about these two things: the pride of *Yisrael* that was taken from them and given to the nations, and the pride of the Kingdom of Heaven that is no more.

This helps us understand the following teaching of *Chazal*:

HaKadosh Baruch Hu cries over three kinds of people every day: he who can engage in Torah study but doesn't; he who can't engage in Torah study but does; and a community leader who lords it over the public.⁹

It makes sense that *Hashem* cries over someone who can engage in Torah study, but doesn't. Such a person is wasting time that could be used to acquire something with eternal value. But why does *Hashem* cry over someone who can't engage in Torah learning, yet learns anyway? If he is learning, why is this a cause for tears?

The answer is that we are speaking of a person who finds Torah learning hard and burdensome, but he pushes himself to learn nevertheless. He learns Torah out of *mesirus nefesh*. However, the true way to learn Torah is out of love for *Hashem* and a desire to know His Word — like a son, who doesn't need "mesirus nefesh" in order to do a favor for his father whom he loves.

This, too, is a part of *Hashem's* crying over the pride that is no more.

Crying over Ourselves

Actually, in order to find something to cry over we don't need to dig into the troubles of the past. Today's world gives ample reason for crying.

Yirmeyahu HaNavi laments:

⁹ Chagigah 5b.

– אם תאכלנה נשים פרים עללי טפחים
Shall women eat the fruit of their womb,
the infants they care for?¹⁰

When Jerusalem was under siege, women ate their own children out of hunger. This is indeed horrible. But I would say that I saw with my own eyes something even worse: Jewish mothers feeding their children pork!

Yirmeyahu laments further:

– בלע ה' ולא חמל את כל נאות יעקב
Hashem consumed, without compassion,
all the dwellings of *Yaakov*.¹¹

Chazal describe the magnitude of the massacre. They say that hundreds of giant baskets were filled with *tefillin* of the slain.¹² But I cry over the millions of Jews who never in their lives merited putting on *tefillin*. This is because *tefillin* without heads is surely preferable to heads without *tefillin*: when a head is crushed, *chas v'shalom*, and it is no longer possible to put *tefillin* on it, the person to whom the head belonged is in *Gan Eden*. But if *tefillin* is not placed on a Jewish head, this causes eternal damage to the soul.¹³ It is an especially weighty sin.

We bewail in *kinos* the children who were tied by their *peyos* to horses and dragged to a cruel death. But I am sure that if *Yirmeyahu HaNavi* would be alive today, and would see the hundreds of thousands of Jewish parents who give their children haircuts in the style of non-Jews, without leaving over any *peyos*, he would most definitely bemoan this as well.

¹⁰ *Eichah* 2:20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2:2.

¹² *Eichah Rabbah* 2:4.

¹³ *Rosh Hashanah* 17a.

מי יתן ראשי מים ועיני מקור דמעה ואבכה
– If only my
head would be water, and my eye a fountain
of tears, I would cry day and night for the
slain of my people.¹⁴

And it is not just over those who strayed far from Torah that we need to cry. Above all we should be crying over ourselves. Most unfortunately, we don't love Torah learning the way we should.

If we find our children lacking interest and excitement in their learning and davening, it is likely that the example we set for them is to blame. Perhaps the child senses that his father learns, prays, and keeps *mitzvos* because he knows that his *parnasah* and his very life depend on this, and because he desires eternal reward in *Olam HaBa*. So he pushes himself to fulfill his Torah obligations, in a spirit of *mesirus nefesh*, rather than out of heartfelt love for *Hashem*. This is what *Hashem* cries over.

In former times a Jew always felt that the Torah was a real *sam hachayim*, a life-giving potion. He sought it out like a deathly ill patient in the hospital seeking a cure. He felt that letting go of Torah was letting go of life.¹⁵

The *avodah* we need to do on this day is to cry over our lack of connection and closeness with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and with the *Torah HaKedoshah*. In addition, we need to establish in our hearts and minds that Torah and *mitzvos* are the most beautiful and prestigious thing there is. This is where the sweetness of life is. ●

¹⁴ *Yirmeyahu* 8:23.

¹⁵ See *Kiddushin* 66b.