

Friday Evening Message – 24 July 2020

Next Wednesday evening, 29 July, marks the start of the fast of Tisha B'Av—the saddest day in the Jewish calendar, for it was the day on which both of our Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed—the first, by Nebuchadnezzar's troops, the second by Roman forces. For this, we have mourned annually for centuries. But we also associate Tisha B'Av with other tragedies that have occurred to the Jewish nation over time—when the spies returned from Canaan with a bad report; the loss of the Battle of Beitar during the Bar Kokhba Revolt; the ploughing of the Temple Mount a year later; the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290CE, as well as the date of the banishment of Jews from Spain in 1492; and the German declaration of war on Russia that really got the First World War underway...which led, in a real sense, to the Second World War. Tisha B'Av is, among other things, a sobering reminder of the harsher realities of life in this world, a remembrance of times when our hope and faith are severely challenged.

The Talmud (BT Yoma 9b) tells us that the Second Temple was destroyed because of *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred. Even as the Romans were at the gates of Israel's eternal capital, Yerushalaim, we were busily fighting each other, divided into squabbling sects more at war with each other than against the Romans profaning Eretz Yisrael. Perhaps the rabbis were trying to caution us that what should unite us is far greater than that which we allow to divide us, so that when adversity inevitably comes to our gates, we may find favor and the strength to endure, in part by coming together and drawing strength from the rich wells of Judaism, our shared history, heritage, and destiny as a people.

The antidote for *sinat chinam*, the vaccine against this virus of groundless animosity, is *ahavat chinam*, baseless love. Whereas *sinat chinam* destroys temples, *ahavat chinam* can cause them to be rebuilt. The principle of *ahavat Yisrael*, love of Judaism and our fellow Jews wherever they may be, is part of the strength of an enduring people. Just as Tu B'Av—the 15th of Av—follows the sadness of Tisha B'Av with a celebration of joy and love, so we, as we light the candles to usher in Shabbat, can turn sadness into joy and reaffirm that we carry on in spite of it all, still embracing love and life and light and hope. We raise our cups and say "L'chaim!" as our affirmation of confidence and hope. As it says in the Shacharit prayer, *Ashreinu! Mah tov chelkeinu! U'mah na'im goraleinu! U'mah yafa yerushateinu!* "Happy are we! How goodly is our portion, and how pleasant is our lot, and how beautiful our heritage!" Jewish is beautiful! Shabbat shalom!

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