

Exploring Important Themes from Eicha and the Kinnot of Tisha B'av

1. Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways*, pg. 23-24

With *aveilut yeshanah*, there is no spontaneous reaction. The reality of the lack of a *Beit ha-Mikdash* all these years has become normal for us. There is always an equation between reality and normality. Whatever is real is normal, and whatever is normal is real. People do not look upon reality as abnormal. And so, the *avelut* is much harder. There is more than a risk, there is a natural reality that, over time, people will forget.... Thus the mourning of Tisha B'av has to be taught. One must understand it thoroughly and be sensitive to it. We must learn how to mourn, to wail and weep for the *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash*.

2. Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways*, pg. 5

Furthermore, I believe that what is indicated here is that while the study of Torah is prohibited on Tish'ah be-Av, the study of events that happened in Tish'ah be-Av is not only permitted but is, in itself, a fulfillment of *avelut*. Understanding what Tish'ah be-Av means- a retrospective re-experiencing and reliving of the events it commemorates, appreciating its meaning in Jewish history and particularly the consequences and results of the catastrophe that struck us so many years ago that it commemorates-is identical to *kiyyum avelut*. On Tish'ah be-Av *avelut* means to understand what happened, and that understanding or intellectual analysis is to be achieved, as we will see, in the light of both *Torah she-bikhtav* and *Torah she-be-al peh*, the Written Law and the Oral Law... Without the knowledge and understanding that come from such study, our *avelut* would be lacking.

Avelut yeshanah, the mourning resulting from the *hurban Beit Ha-midash* (destruction of the Temple), is different from *avult hadashah*, the private mourning that follows the death of a relative. In the case of the latter, one does not have to understand in order to mourn, to weep, or to feel the loss. But in the case of *avelut yeshanah*, one must understand it thoroughly in order to experience it. That is why we must be permitted to study the events of Tisha Be-Av on that day even though here is a general prohibition of Torah study.

3. איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה א

איכה ישבה בדד. שלשה נביאים נבאו בלשון איכה, ואלו הם. משה, ישעיה, וירמיה. משה אמר "איכה אשא לבדי" (דברים א יב). ישעיה אמר "איכה היתה לזונה קריה נאמנה" (ישעיה א כא). ירמיה אמר "איכה ישבה בדד" (איכה א א).

4. Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways*, pg. 86

Eikhah means "how" or "why": "how is it possible?" "How could you have done it?" "Why did you do it?" "I don't understand." But this raises a very serious question. What right do we have to say *Kinot*, to ask and to complain? Normally, the rule is to the contrary; we are *not allowed* to ask such questions. On any other day, if, G-d forbid, disaster strikes, the law is that a Jew cannot ask *eikhah*, "why." The very question if *eikhah* is intolerable. Who am I to ask *Ha-kadosh Baruch Hu* to explain anything to me? What do you mean, "how" or "why"? Who are you to

understand? What allows you to be so bold? What right do you have to address yourself to *Ha-kadosh Baruch Hu* this way?

...When tragedy strikes, the Jew says *tzidduk ha-din*. He acknowledges the justness of the decree of *Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu*...We never find the question of *eikhah* in the ordinary course of events...

The catastrophe of the *hurban Beit Ha-mikdash* is the one exception to this rule. Indeed, we say things in the *Kinot* that we have no right to say as a matter of course...But in Tish'ah be-Av, we are permitted to do something forbidden to us in ordinary circumstances. The Jew is given special permission in Tish'ah be-Av, to ask *eikhah*. Tish'ah be-Av, the *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash*, enjoys a special license. If we are indeed mourning for the destruction of Jerusalem and the *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash*, we have a right to say *eikhah*, to ask why...

But why is today different? Why are we allowed to do something today that is prohibited to us every other day of the year? Our right to ask on Tish'ah be-Av comes from the precedent set for us by Jeremiah. A special license is granted *Kneset Yisrael* that allows them to ask *eikhah* on Tish'ah be-Av because Jeremiah wrote a book in the biblical canon that begins with the word *eikhah*. *Sefer Eikhah* is not the introduction to the *Kinot*, it is *Kinot*. In fact, *Sefer Eikhah* is known not as *Megillat Eikhah* but as *Megillat Kinot* or *Sefer Kinot*. The first *sefer ha-kinot* was *Eikhah*.

5. איכה רבה (וילנא) פתיחות

ד- רבי אבהו פתח (הושע ו') "והמה כאדם עברו ברית", זה אדם הראשון, אמר הקב"ה אדם הראשון הכנסתי אותו לגן עדן וצויתיו ועבר על צווי ודנתי אותו בגירושין ובשילוחין וקוננתי עליו איכה... שנאמר (שם בראשית ג') "ויאמר לו איכה", "איכה" כתיב, אף בניו הכנסתי אותם לא"י שנאמר (ירמיה ב') "ואביא אתכם אל ארץ הכרמל", וצויתים שנאמר (ויקרא כ"ד) "צו את בני ישראל", ועברו על צווי שנאמר (דניאל ט') "וכל ישראל עברו את תורתך", ודנתי אותם בגירושין שנאמר (הושע ט') "מביתי אגרשם", ודנתי אותם בשילוחין שנאמר (ירמיה ט"ו) "שלח מעל פני" ויצאו, וקוננתי עליהם, "איכה ישבה בדד",

6. תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף קד עמוד א

אמר רבי יוחנן: מפני מה לקו באל"ף בי"ת - מפני שעברו על התורה, שניתנה באל"ף בי"ת.

7. Artscroll Kinnot Prologue pg. XXIII

The use of an alphabetical sequence to praise G-d, or describe a person or concept, denotes totality and perfection. For example, the passage of אשת חיל describes in twenty-two alphabetically arranged verses the entire range of the woman's virtues in following the ways of the Torah, the very Torah that was translated into human expression by means of these same twenty-two letters...

In a less happy use, alphabetic acrostics are employed to symbolize totality of destruction and transgression...in order to indicate that G-d's full fury was unleashed against the people of Israel..

8. Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways*, pg. 211-214

But *Tisha Be'av* is more. It is a day of mourning not only for the tragedies that occurred on it but for *any* exile, *any* tragedy, *any* disaster that has struck our people, whenever it may have occurred.

Tisha Be'av is the day to commemorate *hurban* in general, to mourn for *all* the tragedies and *all* the disasters that have struck the Jewish people throughout our long history. In one of the *kinot* about the Crusades entitled "*Mi yitten roshi mayim*," we read the "*Ve-khi eino le-hosif mo'ed shever vetav'erah*." We are not to add a separate fast day or additional day of mourning to commemorate any additional catastrophe, disaster, massacre, devastation, or destruction. No fast-day other than Tisha Be-Av is to be established; no additional days can be designated to commemorate later tragedies. On Tish'ah be'Av we fast and mourn for *all* our tragedies and *all* our disasters. It is not only the day that commemorates the destructions of the *Batei Mikdash* and the other tragedies that occurred on it, but that day that commemorates *every* destruction, the countless destructions we have experienced as a people down through the ages.

There is a *halakhah* that one must not establish or designate a separate day of mourning in commemoration of a tragedy in addition to Tisha Be-av. The many tragedies and disasters that occurred in Jewish history should be recounted, described and portrayed, mourned and eulogized on Tishav Be-av, not on any other day...

And that is why additional tragedies were introduced into the mourning of Tishah Be-av. The mourning is not only for the *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash* but for much more. It is mourning for *hurban Yisrael* in every fashion and manner, whether spiritually or materially.

In fact, *hurban Yisrael* is a part of the *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash* because, if the *Beit ha-Mikdash* were standing, our destiny would have been different... all of them are a direct result of *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash*. Had the destiny of the *Beit ha-Mikdash* been different, all the catastrophes and disasters would never have happened. If not for the *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash*, the Crusades and the Hitler Holocaust, for example, would not have taken place. Everything, every disaster, is a result of *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash*; that destruction is responsible for everything.

9. Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways*, pg. 253

Up until this point, we have been focused on the *hurban yerushalayim* and *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash*; we recited *kinot* that revolve around *Eikhah*. Of course we dealt with bloodshed, with the fact that many were killed and destroyed... Now we come to something else, the martyrdom of Torah scholars, of whole communities, the deaths of many righteous ones. We have mourned for the *serefat Beit Elokeinu*, we have described its tragedy and our distress in great detail, and now we mourn for the deaths of the righteous, for the martyrdom incurred by the Ten Martyrs and those who were killed during the Crusader persecutions in Germany...

If the *Beit ha-Mikdash* was holy and sacred, and we weep and grieve because it was destroyed, how much more scared were the Jewish communities made up of thousands of great Torah scholars that were destroyed during the crusades. They too are a *Beit ha-Mikdash*. If we speak about the *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash* in a material sense, we also mention the *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash* in a spiritual sense, namely, the destruction of centers of Torah and the extermination of the great scholars and great institutions of Torah. The death of the righteous is just as

disastrous as the destruction of the *Beit ha-Mikdash*...The slaying of *Gedolei Yisrael* warrants mourning and ashes no less than the destruction of *Beit ha-Mikdash*

10. Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways*, pg. 269

We have just mourned and grieved for the destruction of a state, a land, a *Beit ha-Mikdash*, that changed Jewish history and Jewish destiny. We have just mourned and grieved for the massacre and martyrdom of the ten greatest leaders and scholars in *Yahadut*...We have just mourned and grieved for the deaths of thousands of people, of entire communities, of the largest and greatest communities in the Middle ages both spiritually and numerically. These were all tremendous national catastrophes and they have lingered in until this day. And now, suddenly, we are reminded of a story about two individuals, a young boy and a young girl, who suffered because of the fact that Jerusalem was conquered. Are their deaths so important that they should be perpetuated along with the most catastrophic events in our history?

...The answer is clear. We Jews have a different understanding of suffering. In *Yahadut*, the suffering of an individual, even an unknown individual, matters. We mourn for two individuals, a young boy and a young girl, in the same manner as we mourn for the Ten Martyrs or for those who were killed during the Crusades. We have a special *kinah* just for them, as if not two people were involved but a hundred thousand. Who is supposed to remember an individual boy and girl taken captive by some slave traders? We are. We do not forget the individual even in the midst of national disaster and upheaval, even when we are telling the greatest of all the disasters in our history, the *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash*. Simply speaking, a young boy and a young girl are as important to us as our greatest leaders...This is typical of *Yahadut* and our approach to tragedy.

11. Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways*, pg. 305-307

Why were the *piyyutim* beginning with "*Tziyyon*" introduced here, at the end of the *Kinot*? Because on the day of *Tisha Be'av* we have two duties, two obligations. We remember *Tziyyon be-hurbanah*, Zion in its destruction, and we remember *Tziyyon be-vinyanah*, while it was still intact. Until now, the *Kinot* have portrayed the terrible scenes of destruction during the *hurban Beit ha-Mikdash*. Rabbi Elazar ha-Kalir's *kinot*, with which we began, describe the persecution, the horrors, the cruelty of the *hurban*...we remember what happened to Jerusalem on the day of the *hurban*- the bloodshed and destruction, the ridicule and homelessness, the exile and persecution. The Book of *Eikhah* is devoted to that purpose, to the suffering of Jerusalem on the day it was destroyed. This duty we have fulfilled.

And now we are going to fulfill a second duty, to describe and portray the beauty of the Land of Israel, Zion, and Jerusalem *before* the *hurban*, what it was like when it was at peace. The *piyyutim* of "*Tziyyon*" do not speak about suffering or murder... There is nothing there about the *hurban*. On the contrary, it is *shevaho shel Yerushalayim*, a description of how beautiful Zion and Jerusalem were *before* the *hurban*...Their *piyyutim* tell us in glorious colors how beautiful Jerusalem was, the magnificence of Jerusalem, the wisdom of her people, the inner qualities of Zion and the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, and the special holiness that prevailed there *before* the *hurban*, *before* it was destroyed. I would say that these are no longer considered *kinot* but are to be seen as odes to *Zion*, as hymns to *Zion*.

This is necessary because, in order to appreciate the extent of the catastrophe and the disaster, we have to emphasize and have some knowledge of the great beauty of Jerusalem, of the *Beit*

Ha-mikdash, before the disaster occurred. By remembering what Jerusalem was like in normal times, before the *hurban*, one is in a better position to appreciate the magnitude of the *hurban*, the magnitude of what was lost, and to cry for it...

Yes, people know that it was very bad, but they cannot appreciate *how* bad, the full magnitude of the *hurban* and the extent of the destruction, disaster, and catastrophe, because they never saw the cities while they were standing. So, these poets say, let us tell them how beautiful, how wonderful, and how precious the cities were, particularly Jerusalem, so they will understand much better why they should mourn for and share in the great terrible loss that was suffered when they and the *Beit Ha-mikdash* were destroyed... If Jerusalem had been merely a villate, we would not have mourned over its destruction for so long. A village is not impressive. But Jerusalem was beautiful... And so, if Jerusalem was the most beautiful of all cities, if it was the incarnation of sanctity, then it is appropriate to mourn and create an atmosphere of *avelut* for *hurban Yerushalayim*

12. Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways*, pg. 313-315

The *Kinot* concludes with a *kinah* entitled "*Eli Tziyyon ve-areha*, Let Zion and her cities lament." Until this point, we have said a great deal. There has been a lot to say and for which to weep...

What is the content of *Eli Tziyyon ve-areha*? It reflects themes we will have already mentioned many times during our reading of the *Kinot*. Some of the *kinot* we have recited are almost identical with *Eli Tziyyon ve-areha*

...*Eli Tziyyon ve-areha* means to continue to mourn. At the end of the *Kinot*, when we are ready to depart and close the book, we say "No." *Kinot* can never be finished, not until the *Beit ha-Mikdash* is rebuilt. We have already said so many *kinot*, but we have to continue...

Eli Tziyyon! Continue! Mourn for Zion! You claim that you have exhausted all the *Kinot*? So weep without reciting *Kinot!* *Eli*, continue to mourn for Zion. You are "*kemo ishah ve-tzireha*," like a woman who is in labor pain. You cannot tell a woman who is in labor pain, "Do not cry. Do not make noise. Do not raise your voice." Anyone who would say this to a woman at that time is a fool! Because a person in such terrible pain as labor pain *must* react by emitting a sound, by crying and weeping and shouting. It cannot be otherwise. It is a part of human nature!

And the same applies to *hurban Yerushalayim*. As long as the *Beit ha-Mikdash* is not rebuilt, as long as it consists of debris, as long as it is conquered by others and is under the control of idolaters, we cannot stop crying...

That is why at the end of the *Kinot* we say "*Eli Tziyyon ve-areha*." Whatever we have said, no matter how much we have cried, no matter how much we have expressed our grief and complete despair, it is not enough. We did not mourn the way we should have mourned.