

A Question for all Jews

By Rabbi David Bar-Hayim

In a recent response regarding fasting on Tish'a b'Av, I wrote:

On this day we do not just commemorate past events; we examine 'Am Yisrael's failure to live up to its mission to establish a nation-state based on the principles and precepts of the Tora, and plan how to rectify this state of affairs.

I was somewhat surprised when a reader questioned this statement and requested to know on what basis it was made. Frankly, I wasn't just surprised; I was perturbed. The reader clearly felt that on Tish'a b'Av we commemorate a tragedy that occurred nearly 2000 years ago, a periodic maintenance of our national memory bank... and that's it.

But that's not it at all. **What is the purpose of mourning an ancient calamity if not to awaken us to action?**

Rambam z'l writes that the purpose of these fast days is to "awaken our hearts and lead us to T'shuva", because the recollection of our sins and those of our forefathers', and their concomitant negative results, will cause us to mend our ways ([Hilkhoth Ta'aniyoth 5:1](#)). Hazal teach us that HASHEM saw the heart-felt repentance of the people of Nin've, not their sackcloth (see [Yona 3:10](#); [Mishna Ta'aniyoth 2:1](#); [Mishna B'rura 549:1](#)). Fasting is not the purpose; it is a means to an end.

The question is: **On what should we be focusing?**

The Talmud ([TB Yoma 9b](#)), acknowledging that the Jewish people put much energy into the study of Tora during the Second Temple period, asks why the Miqdash was nevertheless destroyed. The initial answer given is *Sinath Hinam* (baseless hatred).

Some people take this to mean that the sin we are required to address during these days is *Lashon HaRa'*. Their rationale is that if people cease speaking *Lashon HaRa'* there will be less hatred between us, and then.....

And then what?

The unspoken assumption is that the Miqdash will then somehow miraculously materialize. This is why every year, during the month leading up to Tisha' b'Av, posters appear all over my Jerusalem neighbourhood exhorting people to study the Haphess Hayim's books on *Lashon HaRa'*. It is no coincidence that in the background of these posters one will always find an image of the Beth Miqdash. The equation goes like this:

Sinath Hinam=*Lashon HaRa*’, ergo no *Lashon HaRa*’=no *Sinath Hinam*=*Miqdash*. The way to build a *Miqdash* is to refrain from *Lashon Hara*’.

I refer to this as **Galuth-Mode G’ula Mechanics** (GMGM). [According to this thesis, Jews can only bring about change in this world by pressing spiritual buttons in other worlds](#). Initiating change in this world based on planning and forethought – such as building a *Miqdash* by actually building it – is unknown in this description of the universe.

I do not believe in GMGM. If people ceased speaking *Lashon HaRa*’ there would almost certainly be less animosity and hatred in the world, but there would still be no *Miqdash*. Why? Because the way to build a *Miqdash* is to build it. And seeing that **erecting the *Miqdash*** – not to mention redesigning and rebuilding the Old City of Jerusalem (a self-evident requisite) – **is a national endeavour of major proportions** and not a project that might be successfully undertaken by a bunch of enthusiasts, **we are talking about the Jewish state being led by a regime motivated and informed by such a vision**. Before you can build, you have to want to build.

The Meaning of Sinath Hinam

So what of the *Sinath Hinam* mentioned in the Talmud?

Shabtai Ben-Dov [explains](#) that the *Sinath Hinam* of the Talmud refers to a symptom of an underlying malaise: **the mysterious inability of the Jewish people to mobilize and act in accordance with HASHEM’s plan for ‘Am Yisrael and the world**.

The fundamental issue is the lack of an overall vision for the Jewish nation. When the Jewish people loses sight of its national purpose, when it cannot motivate itself beyond maintaining the status quo, when it makes do with Galuth-mode Judaism even when in Eress Yisrael, it inexorably degenerates into the European model of class war and economic interests. Lacking any higher purpose, society becomes fractured and directionless.

This is precisely what happened to Jewish society during the Second Temple period when parties and factions flourished. (Think P’rushim, Ssadhoqim, Baythosim, Siqari’im). This should remind you of something; it is nothing more than a description of the Western political system of parties representing different sets of interests which by definition must oppose and hate each other in their struggle for supremacy. *Sinath Hinam*.

During the Second Temple period, our forefathers adopted the foreign, individualist paradigm, the weltanschauung of 'Esau (Esau) who was willing to trade his birthright for pottage. They split into groups that strived for two things: **wealth and political power**.

Shabtai Ben-Dov's insightful explanation is echoed by Hazal: "We know that during the days of the last Miqdash, they studied the Tora diligently and were careful with regards to Ma'asroth. Why, therefore, were they exiled? **Because they loved wealth and hated one another**" (Tosephta M'nahoth 13:4).

When a nation's leaders are obsessed with wealth and power, all idealism goes by the bye. Even Tora study, when divorced from a determination to "walk the walk", cannot save us. To be a Jew is to be an idealist, to live for an idea bigger than oneself. This is the essential difference between the Jewish people and their civilisation and every other nation on earth.

This Tosephta is a good example of the Tora of Eress Yisrael being transmitted by the Talmud Bavli in Galuth shorthand. The EY version of the Tosephta describes a **societal malaise, a nation that has lost its way**; the TB's Galuth version suggests only **individual shortcomings** in the realm of inter-personal relationships (midoth). Only very specific and limited wavelengths – the aspects of Tora relevant in Galuth – can be received in Exile.

Seeing the Whole Picture

The Talmud's statement referring to *Sinath Hinam* as the cause of our downfall 2000 years ago is only part of the answer. To the blight of *Sinath Hinam* we must add the fact, pointed out by R. Shim'on ben Laqish on the very same page of the Talmud, that at the beginning of the Second Temple period **the Jewish people failed to rise up and return to their homeland in order to fulfill our nation's purpose**. If we comprehend and internalize that these two statements describe one and the same malady, then we have all the explanation we could possibly require for the fall of the second commonwealth.

Today the Jewish nation is in the process of returning to its home. Zionism, the movement that brought us home, can take us no further. We are neither non-Zionists nor anti-Zionists. In truth, **we are post-Zionists in the sense that we have graduated beyond what Zionism had to offer**.

We are in dire need of the all-encompassing vision and purpose which were always beyond the horizon of secular Zionism. That vision and purpose are in the Tora, and HASHEM is waiting for us to act.

THE question that all Jews must ask themselves daily is how and where we go from here.

On Tisha'a b'Av the question is just that much more pressing.