

This coming *Motzai Shabbat* and Sunday, we will observe *Tisha B'Av*. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah* relates: There was a woman in Rabban Gamliel's neighborhood whose son died in his prime, and she would cry for him every night. Rabban Gamliel would hear her cries, would remember the destruction of the *Bet Hamikdash*, and would cry with her until his eyelashes fell out. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Chaim Zaichyk z"l (1906-1989; *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Bet Yosef-Novardok in Buchach, Poland; later in Israel) asks: What connection was there between that woman's loss and the destruction of the Temple? Did Rabban Gamliel need inspiration from that woman's crying to feel the loss of the *Bet Hamikdash*? Moreover, why didn't he share the woman's pain and cry over her loss?

R' Zaichyk explains: The *Midrash* is conveying Rabban Gamliel's understanding that any personal tragedy that an individual experiences is an outgrowth of one collective tragedy of the Jewish People – the destruction of the *Bet Hamikdash*. If we merited, we would live securely, in a constant state of "The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor" (*Esther* 8:16). In that woman's tears, Rabban Gamliel heard the tears of the thousands and myriads of Jews who died during the destruction of the Temple and other tragedies, and he cried for each individual and for the nation collectively.

For us, too, continues R' Zaichyk, personal tragedies can help us to feel the pain of the national tragedy. None of us can fully grasp the destruction of the *Bet Hamikdash*. But, we can focus on a personal loss and, from there, come to feel our national loss. (*Ohr Chadash: Bein Ha'meitzarim* p.492)

Tefilah

This year, we will *iy"H* devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we continue discussing the thirteen types of prayer identified by the *Midrash Rabbah* and *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni*.

R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) writes: "**Pegi'ah**" is stubbornly praying again and again for something that is needed badly. We read (*Yeshayah* 1:15--in this week's *Haftarah*), "When you spread your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; even if you were to pray a great deal, I would not listen." [That verse is speaking of the time of the destruction of the first *Bet Hamikdash*, when *Hashem* concealed Himself.] The implication is that, under other circumstances, *Hashem* will listen when one prays incessantly, so long as what is being requested is not detrimental to the person praying.

The *Gemara* (*Ta'anit* 8b) relates: In the days of Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani there was a famine and a plague. The people asked him, "What shall we do? We cannot pray for two things!" He answered, "Pray that the famine end, for when *Hashem* gives plenty, He will have to give life also so that we can enjoy His blessing." [Until here from the *Gemara*.] R' Pincus asks: Why did the people say, "We cannot pray for two things"? Three times a day, in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we pray for many more than two things!

R' Pincus explains: The type of prayer the *Gemara* is referring to is *Pegi'ah*, which is more than just repeating the same prayer; it is single-minded focus on what is being requested. If one cries out for two things at the same time, it means that he is not focusing sufficiently on any one thing to be assured a response.

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“Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding, and well known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads.” (1:13)

R' Yeshayah Halevi Horowitz z"l (the *Shelah Hakadosh*; rabbi of Prague and Yerushalayim; died 1630) writes: At the same time that Moshe Rabbeinu was rebuking *Bnei Yisrael* (see *Rashi z"l* to verse 1), he also praised them [by pointing out the good qualities that were required of, and found in, their leaders]. This is consistent with that we read in *Mishlei* (9:8), “Do not rebuke a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.” This means: When you rebuke someone, do not say, “Such and such is wrong with you.” Do not say to him, “You are a scoffer or a bad person.” If you do that, he will hate you and will not listen to you. Rather, tell him how wise he is, and how his actions are beneath him. This is what the verse means when it says, “Rebuke a wise man,” *i.e.*, when you rebuke him, first make him feel wise. (*Shnei Luchot Ha'brit*)

R' Mordechai Hager z"l (1922-2018; *Vizhnitz-Monsey Rebbe*) elaborates: If one rebukes another person by telling him that he is bad, that person may conclude that he is beyond redemption and that he may as well throw off the yoke of Heaven entirely. Rather, build up the person and tell him that, precisely because he is such a great person, his actions are inappropriate.

R' Hager continues: This applies, as well, when one studies *Mussar* privately. One should never conclude that he is lost and, therefore, give up on himself. Rather, he should know that he is, in fact, pure [-- he just has areas in which he needs to improve].

R' Hager adds: The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 5a) identifies three tactics for defeating the *Yetzer Ha'ra*: studying Torah, reciting *Kri'at Shema*, and picturing one's own day of death. However, early *Chassidic Rebbes* taught that there is an even more effective tactic: to meditate on the purity, greatness, and holiness of one's own soul, which, say our Sages, was “quarried” from under *Hashem's* “Throne of Glory.” No matter how much a person struggles, he should keep this in mind.

(*Torat Mordechai: Mussar Avicha*)

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Rashi z"l (to *Bereishit* 18:23) describes prayer as “war.” In what sense is prayer “war”? R' Pincus explains: It is not that one speaks harshly to *Hashem*, as if to an enemy. Rather, in war, one must focus all of his missiles on the target and not shoot haphazardly. Likewise, to use the *Pegi'ah* form of prayer, one must be extremely focused, in addition to being persistent. (*She'arim B'tefilah* p.69)

“May Hashem, the Elokim of your forefathers, add to you a thousand times yourselves, and bless you *Ka'asher Deebair* / as He has spoken regarding you.” (1:11)

R' Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer z"l (1880-1933; rabbi of Krakow, Poland) writes: Moshe Rabbeinu blessed *Bnei Yisrael* that *Hashem* should multiply them a thousand times over, as if to say: G-d willing, all will go well with you, the Jewish People. But, he added: Remember that *Hashem* is blessing you even “*Ka'asher Deebair*,” which may be translated, “when *Hashem* speaks harshly about you,” *i.e.*, a time of strict judgment.

(*Chiddushei Rabbeinu Yosef Nechemiah Al Ha'Torah*)

“Eichah / How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels? Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding, and well known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads.” (1:12-13)

Midrash Eichah Rabbah notes that three prophets used the word “*Eichah*”: Moshe (in our verse), Yeshayah (in today's *Haftarah--Yeshayah* 1:21, “How has she become a harlot, faithful city that was full of justice?”); and Yirmiyah (in *Eichah* 1:1, “How does she sit in solitude, the city that was great with people . . .”). The *Midrash* continues: This may be likened to a noblewoman who had three servants. One saw her in her days of living peacefully, as Moshe saw *Bnei Yisrael*; one saw her in her wild days, as Yeshayah saw the Jewish People; and one saw her in her disgrace, as Yirmiyah saw the nation. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Yitzchak Shmelkes z"l (1828-1906; rabbi of Lvov, Galicia) asks: If these three prophets saw the Jewish People in three different states, as the analogy in the *Midrash* implies, then why did they prophesy using the same expression--“*Eichah*”? He explains with another analogy:

There are three types of doctors: Some doctors cannot correctly identify an ailment until its symptoms are quite pronounced. Better doctors can identify the ailment as soon as the patient shows the earliest symptoms. The best doctors can identify an ailment, or a proclivity to a certain ailment, even in a seemingly healthy patient.

R' Shmelkes continues: The three prophets mentioned in the *Midrash* were not prophesying about three different states of the Jewish People. Rather, they were all prophesying about the eventual destruction of the *Bet Hamikdash* and the exile, and therefore they used the same word--“*Eichah*.” Moshe Rabbeinu was like the third, most expert doctor; even when *Bnei Yisrael* were living peacefully in the desert, he saw the first hints of the ailment that would ultimately bring disaster. Yeshayah's prophetic vision was less acute; he saw the impending doom only after the first signs were evident. As for Yirmiyah, he saw the forthcoming destruction and exile only when they were inevitable. (*Bet Yitzchak*)