

chosen words

Tisha B'Av Perspectives

Enough Edom

Every land into which Klal Yisrael is exiled serves a specific purpose; each is the ideal environment for purging the sin that caused the exile. Yet that concept presents a paradox; the sinfulness of the nations in which we reside often drags Klal Yisrael down further. In Egypt, the Jews became idol-worshippers. In Babylonia, they intermarried with the local population. During the Greek exile, they became Hellenists. And in America, great segments of the Jewish population are literally disappearing into a materialistic, secular society. How, by immersing in polluted waters, are we to become cleansed?

For every exile up until the present one—the exile of Edom—the cleansing process has operated quickly and efficiently despite that paradox. That is because of the nature of the sins that led to the previous exiles. Chazal classify sins in two categories: those caused by physical lust, and those motivated by pride. There is an “advantage” to the first type of sin. When a person succumbs to his physical yearnings, he eventually reaches a limit. He is even sickened by his own overindulgence. At that point, it is logical to reject the sinful behavior and resolve to avoid it in the future. Sin driven by pride, however, has no such natural braking system. The need for power and prestige—the outward expressions of pride—is insatiable.

Each nation in the world has an overriding characteristic, represented by the “sar,” the ministering angel assigned to that nation. To free itself from exile, Klal Yisrael must succeed in toppling that sar by exposing the emptiness of its ethos. Once the overriding mores of the

nation no longer hold sway, the nation is powerless to impose itself upon Klal Yisrael.

We learn that the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash and the subsequent exile was caused by idolatry, immorality and murder. This idolatry, according to Chazal, was motivated by lust—the desire to engage in the immoral practices of the idolators. The Jews convinced themselves that they could latch onto a new creed that would release them from the moral restraints of Torah. Their sin was punished by exile to Babylonia, the perfect environment for them to have their fill of idolatry and immorality. They plunged into Babylonian society, intermarrying and adopting the local mores, until they themselves came to despise it. The sar of Babylonia lost his power, and the Jews returned home.

Today, we are in the hands of Edom, the epitome of the drive for power. In Edom, the overriding ethos is military might, supremacy, winning at all costs. This is the exile we required in order to correct the sin of sinas chinam, a sin rooted in pride. But there's an additional hurdle for Klal Yisrael to overcome—one that has caused this exile to be measured in millennia. If the drive for power cannot be satiated, we will never have our fill of it. We can never discredit the sar of Edom and the culture he represents.

In Edom, Jews, too, marvel at man's power and dominion over nature, his mastery of technology, his ability to send men to the moon and robots to Mars. We, too, accept these feats as an inherent good, failing to question whether they will bring the

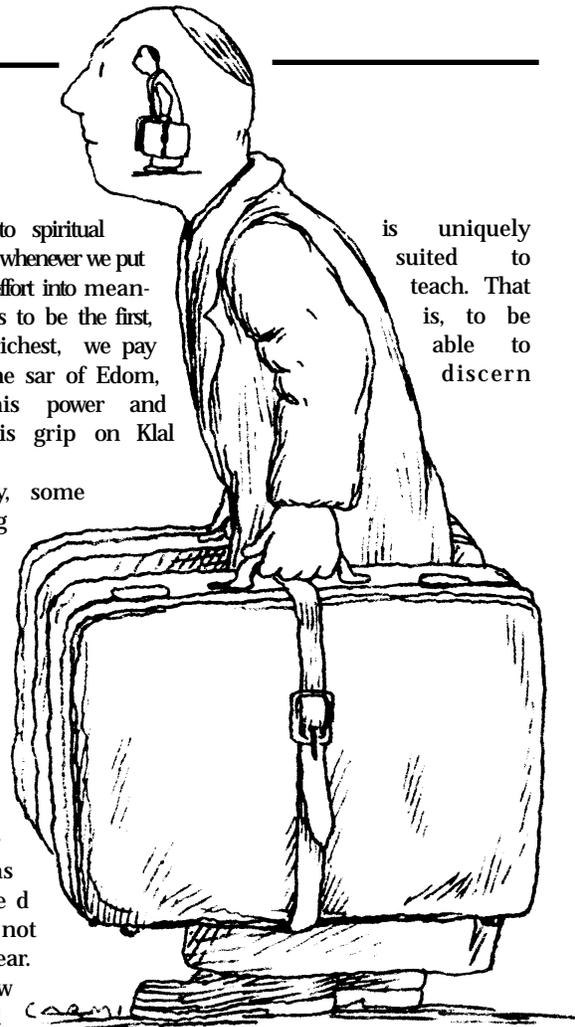
world closer to spiritual perfection. And whenever we put our time and effort into meaningless quests to be the first, best, fastest, richest, we pay homage to the sar of Edom, fortifying his power and tightening his grip on Klal Yisrael.

Yet finally, some cracks are being revealed in Edom's philosophy. Its ultimate ugliness is to become apparent to every thinking person. The vast power Edom has mastered engenders not pride, but fear. Edom can blow up the world with nuclear bombs, poison it with biological weapons, or gag it with pollution. Were the nations of the world able to trust one another, they would very likely today, immediately, trade in the implements of power to achieve freedom from fear.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler saw this awakening as a portent of the times of Moshiach: “When Rome [which is identified as Edom] reaches its extreme and its end is seen, then the light of Moshiach is seen. When this world lies shattered, man will rise to regard all in a spiritual light. That will be the annihilation of the kingdom of Edom—and that is the light of Moshiach.”

If Klal Yisrael is to escape Edom, it must first learn the lessons Edom

is uniquely suited to teach. That is, to be able to discern



“When Klal Yisrael fully rejects the Edom mentality our exile in Edom will be over.”

between real needs and ego needs; real, inner strength and brute strength; spiritual power and horsepower or firepower. Its ethic discredited and its ultimate destructiveness revealed, Edom has only as much power as we give it. Adapted from “Yom Tov Shiurim,” by Rabbi Mordechai Miller, Dean, Gateshead Seminary, with permission from the author



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Knowing What You've Got

You go every day to visit a lonely old lady who lives in a nursing home. You bring her some of her favorite foods, read her the day's headlines, tell her a little about your children and your job. You're doing a great mitzvah. But do you know she's a talented artist? Do you know she can recite all of Tehillim by heart? Do you know that she cared for her own parents and in-laws for many years? One day, she passes away. You may miss her, but you haven't even a shadow of a notion of who this woman really was. To really feel the full measure of a loss, we must first appreciate the full value of what was lost.

The Gemara tells us that "One who fails to mourn properly over the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash will not

merit rejoicing at its rebuilding." Does that mean that a person who doesn't take Tisha B'Av to heart is going to be punished by being left out of the celebration when the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt?

It means that such a person will, in effect, close himself out of the celebration. To understand what there is to celebrate, a person must put his heart and mind into trying to understand and feel what the Beis Hamikdash means to Klal Yisrael. He must try to envision the glory of this edifice, the heights of spiritual joy that accompanied bringing sacrifices. He must ponder what it would be like to have Hashem's presence so clearly, patently in evidence. He must appreciate what we had, so he can feel the full measure of our loss. The

"Tisha B'Av has its roots in an incident that illustrated for Klal Yisrael the true cost of lacking appreciation."

same sensitivity that evokes his grief at the destruction will evoke his joy at the redemption.

Tisha B'Av has its roots in an incident that illustrated for Klal Yisrael the true cost of lacking appreciation. The spies who were sent to explore the Land of Israel came back with their negative report on Tishah B'Av. Their words showed a lack of appreciation for the land and the unique status Hashem had bestowed upon it, and because of the despair their report engen-

dered, Tisha B'Av was marked as a day of tragedy. To rectify that sin, and the sins that led to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, we must sharpen our sense of what we had and what we lost. Then we will merit the incomparable joy of witnessing what's to come. Shabbos Table Discussion:

What would it have been like to live in the days of the Beis Hamikdash?

Adapted from "Reb Michel's Shmuessen," By Rabbi Michel Birnbaum, with permission from Mesroah Publications

Better Relationships

The Law of Kindness

"Jerusalem was destroyed only because its inhabitants decided matters exactly according to Torah law," the Gemara teaches in Baba Metzia. It would seem unfair to give Klal Yisrael the Torah and then punish it for abiding strictly by its precepts. However, it was the lack of kindness, the lack of compassion that turned justice into sin.

The Torah's ideal is not stark justice, but justice colored by compassion. We are directed to develop the ability to forgive, to compromise, to "refrain from exacting one's rightful measure." In doing so, we lose nothing, and gain much, because the reward for this attitude is to be judged by Hashem in the same light.

In Shemoneh Esrei, the blessing for the Avos states "Who recalls the kindness of the Patriarchs and brings a Redeemer to their children's children, for His Name's sake,

with love." Hashem could recall many excellent qualities of the Patriarchs—their devotion, their zeal, their uprightness. But He recalls their kindness, and in its merit, promises redemption to their children's children. Only by upholding that trait do we lay claim to the promise.

Shabbos Table Discussion: In what circumstances is compromise appropriate? When is it not?

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