

***From Hatred to Understanding, from Understanding to Love* - Devarim 5781**

This is a very special shabbat. We are outdoors, enjoying the evening air, wonderful company, hosts, and shortly, also to share a meal. This is so peaceful, I cherish these moments, and wish for moments like these to continue. But even as we pray and work towards peace, we learn from lessons in life and in history.

As shabbat ends tomorrow evening, our calendar reveals the date of Tisha B'Av, the 9th of the Hebrew month of Av. It is not a particularly important date in most liberal practices of Jewish life, even though it is one of the two dates that we have a major public fast. Tisha B'Av, and Yom Kippur are major fast dates. Yom Kippur is of course connected to the fast that we have on the Day of Atonement. Tisha B'Av commemorates various tragedies of Jewish history, including the destruction of the first and second temples.

Why are each of these major fast days?

Upon first glance, Tisha B'Av is connected with physical damage – the destruction of our first and second Temples, while Yom Kippur is connected with repentance, atonement, something more connected with being human and our failings.

So they seem so very different. But hold on... According to Jewish tradition, God allowed the Second Temple to be destroyed because of *Sinat Chinam*, senseless hatred between the people of Israel who were unable to get along with one another. As proof of the destructive force of *Sinat Chinam*, the Talmud records the story of *Kamtza* and *Bar Kamtza* and connects it to a path that led to the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, a wealthy man was planning a large party. The man instructed his servant to bring an invitation to his friend Kamtza. By mistake, however, the servant brought the invitation to a man named Bar Kamtza, who happened to be on bad terms with the host. Bar Kamtza arrived at the party, and the host immediately instructed him to leave. Bar Kamtza, not wanting to be embarrassed, offered to reimburse the host for whatever he consumed. The host continued to refuse, even as Bar Kamtza offered to pay for half, and then all, of the party. Then, in front of all the guests, including many respected sages who made no move to interfere, the host physically removed Bar Kamtza from the party.

Angry and humiliated, Bar Kamtza took his revenge by telling the Roman Emperor that the Jewish people were rebelling and that they would reject any offering that the Emperor would send to be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem. When the Emperor sent a fine calf, Bar Kamtza intercepted it and made a tiny, almost unnoticeable blemish on the calf, that would make it unacceptable as a sacrifice.

Upon receiving the calf and noting its nearly imperceptible blemish, the sages debated what to do and seemed inclined to offer the calf on the altar of the Temple and avoid antagonizing their already tense relationship with Rome. Rabbi Zecharia ben Abkulas, however, worried that people would come to believe that it was permitted to offer a blemished animal. The calf was not sacrificed. The Romans did indeed destroy the Temple. In the Talmud, Rabbi Yochanan remarked: “Through the scrupulousness of Rabbi Zecharia ben Abkulas, our House has been destroyed, our Temple burnt and we ourselves exiled from our land” (Talmud *Gittin* 56a).

On Tisha B’Av, we recall this story. Can we possibly consider that this fast day is simply about the physical destruction of the Temple?

We might now ask, according to Jewish tradition, God allowed the Second Temple to be destroyed because of...what? What happened in this story?

What are antidotes to Sinat Chinam, baseless hatred? (Ahavat Chinam)

Understanding – self & others; Culture of togetherness, rituals that connect, increase understanding. Sinat Chinam is incompatible with connecting with the Divine. Unconditional love, compassion.

As we begin Deuteronomy, essentially Moses’ final words to the generation of Israel that is about to enter the Promised Land, we may also reflect on the lessons we have learned in life. What life lesson you have, or bit of wisdom that might address Sinat Chinam? Or better yet, promote Ahavat Chinam?

May the teachings from our own lives spread the blessing of ahavah, love, and overcome sinat chinam. May we work for the day when all will be at peace and baseless hatred a distant memory.

Shabbat shalom! – Rabbi Lisa