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MOSES' MESSAGE:

One True Religion

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Barred from Entering Israel

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

RABBI BERNIE FOX

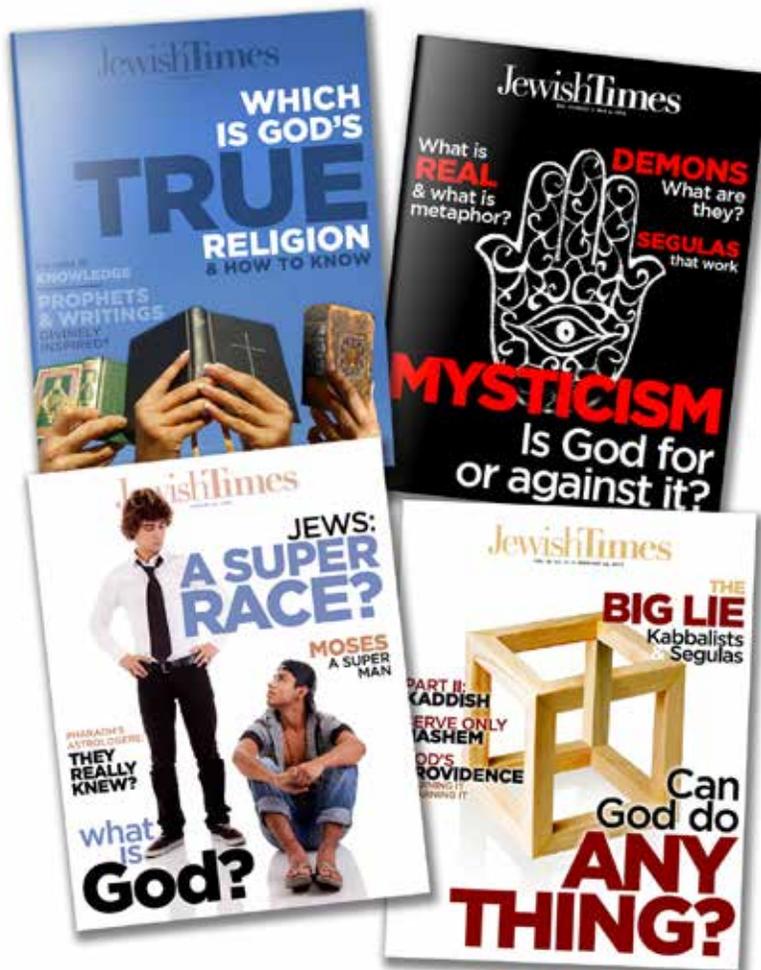
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RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Segulas for marriage?

Question: I received this email, "Join the special prayer for marriage and all salvations in Amuka on the day of segulah of Tu b'Av, H'admor Harav Yechiel Abuchatzeira." When you click, you are asked for \$180! How can anyone assure me that God will answer me?

Moshe — New York, NY

Answer: Will \$180 guarantee a wicked man answered prayers too? This is thievery and a disgrace to Torah that Jews will rob other Jews of money and lie with empty promises. Furthermore, we need not pray at graves, since God can hear prayers anywhere. I suggest you write this organization and ask them to cease such sins, and distortions of how prayer works. ■

Moses' Message: One True Religion

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

THIS WEEK'S Torah reading contains Moses' most profound message to mankind. God's inclusion of Moses' words in His Torah is a direct command to each Jew to share Moses' message. Jews commit the worst crime to our fellow man by concealing Moses' message:



"6. And you shall guard them and perform them [the mitzvos] for they are your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Certainly this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 7. For what great nation has God close to them like Hashem our God whenever we call Him? 8. And what great nation possesses righteous statutes and laws as our entire Torah that I give you today?

9. [Do] only this: guard yourselves and guard your souls exceedingly, lest you forget the matters that your eyes witnessed, and lest you remove from your heart all the days of your lives, and make them known to your children and grandchildren; 10. the day you stood before Hashem your God in Horeb [Sinai] when God said to me, 'Assemble the people and I will make them hear My words in order that they should learn to fear Me all the day they live on Earth, and their children they shall teach.' 11. And you drew close and stood at the foot of the mountain and the mountain blazed in fire up to the heavens; darkness, cloud and thick darkness. 12. And God spoke to you from the midst of the fire; the sound of words you heard, but a form you did not see; only a voice. 13. And He told you His covenant that He commanded you to do, the Ten Sayings [Commandments] and they were written on two stone tablets (Deut. 4:6-13)."

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Moses is consistent. When God threatened to destroy the Jews due to the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses argued that this will become a source of scorn by Egypt, who will say that God took us out of Egypt to “wipe us off the face of the Earth (Exod. 32:12).” God’s intended fame as a righteous and just God will thereby be thwarted. Moses cared for all mankind, that all people recognize God.

Here too as seen above, Moses is concerned not only for the Jews, but also that the Jew produces a Kiddush Hashem — sanctification of God’s name — in the eyes of the world. Like Abraham, Moses wished that all peoples benefit from true knowledge of God. Unlike many of today’s corrupt Jewish communities boasting the fallacy that Jews are superior, Moses recognized the fundamental that God wishes the good for all mankind, who are all created equal. All people descend from the same original couple; Jews cannot be superior. Plus, we must care for all of God’s creatures as we care for ourselves.

God included Moses words above in His Torah, precisely to endorse their truths: all nations will admire the Jew through our observance of the laws that impress the world with the superior nature of Judaism. They will discount their own religions as Jeremiah says, “Our fathers bequeathed us falsehood; futility that has in them no help (Jer. 16:19).” But how will this impression occur?

First, how will the nations “hear all these statutes”? Additionally, will they truly hear “all” of them? They aren’t studying our Torah! Next, Moses says the other nations will respond about the Jews saying, “Certainly this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” Moses’ explanation for this response is, “For what great nation has God close to them like Hashem our God whenever we call Him?” One second...not being in earshot of us, how exactly will the nations know God is close to us “whenever we call Him”? Moses should have skipped that verse, and instead, explained the nations’ admiration of our laws, not because God is close, but because “what great nation possesses righteous statutes and laws as our entire

Torah?” That verse parallels the nations’ response. But Moses didn’t give that second reason alone. He also first said the nations will admire us as wise and understanding because “God is close to us when we call Him.” So, by what exact process will the nations admire the Jew and Torah? Specifically, how does their impression of us depend on these three ideas of,

- 1) God’s closeness to us when we call Him,
- 2) the righteous Torah laws, and
- 3) the fact that Moses gave these laws?

What is this formulation?

Sforno says, “God’s closeness to us when we call Him is taught through God’s selection of the Jewish people.” And this “selection” is none other than His granting the Torah during Revelation at Sinai. This explains why Moses follows with his warning that we must not forget that event (ibid 4:9). For it was this event that renders the Jew and Judaism unique from all religions and peoples. It was this event which remains the only time in all history that in front of masses, (2.5 million people), God gave a religion to mankind, and included proof that the source of that event, and Torah, is Divine. That proof being the sound of a “voice,” meaning “intelligence” — not mere thunder or quakes — which emanated from fire

without any physical form. Fire is the one element in which all life perishes. An intelligent voice heard from inside an inferno, where there is “no form only a voice”, proves that that intelligent being is not of this material world, but is purely spiritual, unaffected by fire. This is precisely why God orchestrated that event using intelligent voice, and fire. He wished to prove that Torah is from God; Judaism is His only religion.

This is why Moses strongly urges the Jews to never forget, and to also teach all children and grandchildren this event. Moses reminds the nation that they were “all” there. This mass testimony of hearing intelligence from amidst a blazing mountain cannot get started, and certainly cannot travel through time as historical fact (accepted by the two major religions) had just a few Jews initiated the claim, or if it were a lie. No, Moses reminds the nation that God “assembled the people.” This was crucial to the validation of God’s one Revelation of religion to mankind. Masses witnessed the giving of the Torah, but no masses witnessed the claims of any other religion. Now for our answers...

The nations must recognize Revelation at Sinai as a reality, the meaning of “God being close to us.” Moses mentions this first, as this is the core fundamental in proving Judaism.

“Judaism is the only religion containing proof of divine origin. Wise Christians and Muslims will accept our history as they accept any history: based on mass witnesses, which is absent in all other religions.”

Secondly, the nations must view the commands as intelligent, evidenced through our intelligent answers to their questions about Torah laws, and through Moses giving us the Torah. Meaning, the wisest of men attested to the Torah’s wisdom, precisely by giving it to us, thereby endorsing Torah as intelligent it in the eyes of nations, who respect wise men. We deduce this: an intelligent man plays a crucial rule; he enables others to identify with

him, and adopt his values.

This, then, is God’s formula for attracting all other nations to Torah as the one true religion, and rejecting their religions as false:

- 1) God is close to the Jew, proved by His Revelation: the event validates Judaism as the only religion;
- 2) Torah laws reflect wisdom;
- 3) Moses gave us the law: the most intelligent prophet enables identification by other peoples.

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Moses chose to convey Revelation as historical truth with the phrase “God being close to us whenever we call Him.” Why didn’t Moses simply recall the historical event, just as he does a few verses later when he admonishes us to not forget that event?

The reason is that Revelation teaches a one-time event. But Moses knew that to attract the nations, a sustained relationship between God and man is of greater value. God didn’t simply give us a Torah and leave it in our hands. God went much further and established an ongoing relationship with the Jew, where He responds “whenever we call Him” as testified throughout the Torah. This relationship is what the other nations value, more than the truth of Revelation. Not yet being trained in the appreciation of Torah wisdom, the nations still have a greater desire for the relationship with their Father in heaven. Although Revelation is what distinguishes Judaism from all other religions, it is the sustained relationship between God and man that appeals more to the rejected sibling. The attention of the Father fills a void in the hearts of the other nations. Other nations might regain their father’s love by following His Torah, as does the Jew.

Finally, the nations will not necessarily hear “all” our laws. Rather, all laws they hear will display great wisdom, reflecting Revelation at Sinai, and God’s relationship with mankind.

God was successful, as Islam and Christianity do not doubt the Torah, which they call the Bible. Islam and Christianity accept the Bible, including words quoted above, that they are enamored by the Jew and Torah, admitting Judaism’s unique status. But this reality is as difficult as a father favoring another sibling over one’s self. The rejected sibling responds either with jealousy and hatred as do Islamists, or they accept the favored Jew but pretend this favoritism is temporary, “until Jesus returns.” Islam confirms the Bible, but fabricates history taking credit many times in the Koran for “giving Moses the Book”, and “giving miracles to Pharaoh.” While Christianity too fabricates God’s words

Mount Sinai: Possible plateau of Moses’ receipt of the Ten Commandments?



by adding a “New Testament” and distorted interpretations to their accepted Old Testament (Bible), so as to change the favored son Moses and the Jews, to Jesus and Christians. They both contradict God’s words to not add to or subtract from the Torah, which Moses said just before the quote above (Deut. 4:2). Neither possesses an ounce of proof for their claims. Their proper approach would be to accept a religion using the identical means employed to accept any historical claim: mass witnesses. And since only Judaism possesses this validation, the wise Christian and Muslim would admit the fallacy of their religions and follow Torah.

“Our fathers bequeathed us falsehood” is what the Prophet Jeremiah says will be echoed by the nations in the future. The Jew can play an essential role in helping to bring about this realization, but not through silent fear of speaking truth. The wise Muslim and Christian will recognize that might does not make right, and that the current events unfolding where one religion threatens others actually backfires, exposing its lack of proof: force is needed instead. One cannot communicate ideas to a boor, so our concern is limited to the wise Christian and Muslim. Such individuals will recognize which religion possesses proof, and which does not. We must be concerned about our fellow man and share truths, enabling them to then use their minds to select their own path in life. By remaining silent, we violate God’s

Torah and reject His concern for all peoples.

God’s Revelation and Moses’ words have stood the test of time; no other religion lays claim to mass revelation. Islam and Christianity therefore resort to “blind faith” since proof is absent. One either believes or does not, that their purported miracles were a reality. But without proof, one is foolish to dedicate his life any religion.

To gain acceptance and traction among adherents, Islam and Christianity adopted the Torah, creating a semblance of a religion. But rejection by their Father in heaven was too much to stomach, so distortions, lies and hatred are the result.

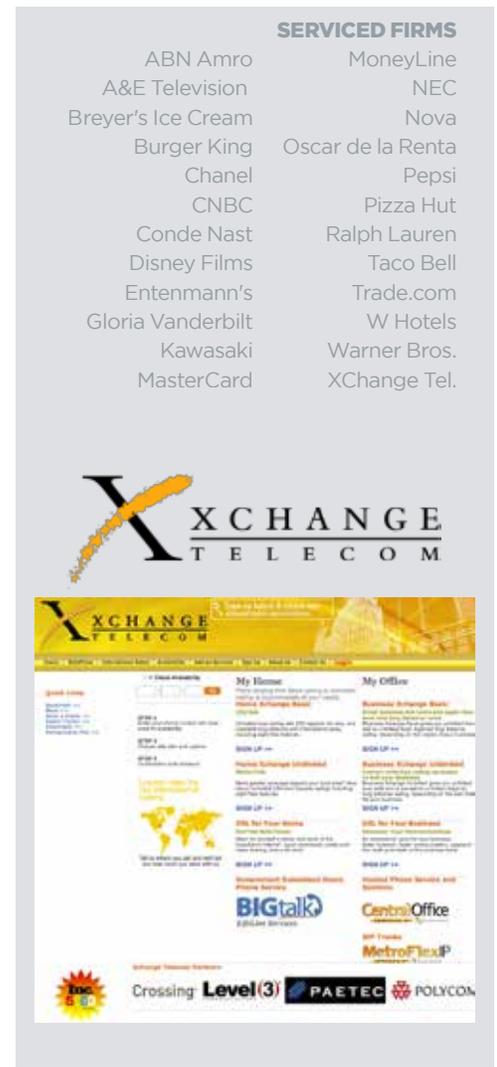
Our obligation as the Jewish nation is to fulfill Moses’ words, where the other nations recognize Torah as unique and admirable, not something of contempt. And this can only occur if we are steadfast in studying Torah, so as to perform it with intelligence, becoming the “wise and understanding people” Moses wished the world would witness and appreciate. This is God’s goal, and we must embrace all other people and share the beauty contained in Torah through a unwavering adherence to Torah study and mitzvos. By doing so, by openly sharing our knowledge with the world, and by abandoning the fallacy of a superior people, we might remove the current contempt against us, and open the hearts of the nations to genuinely inquire into God’s wisdom, and recognize Judaism as His one religion, for His one mankind. ■



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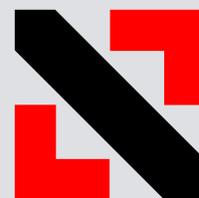
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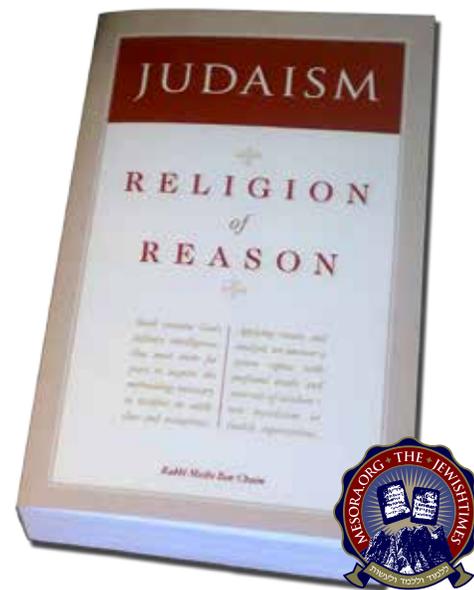
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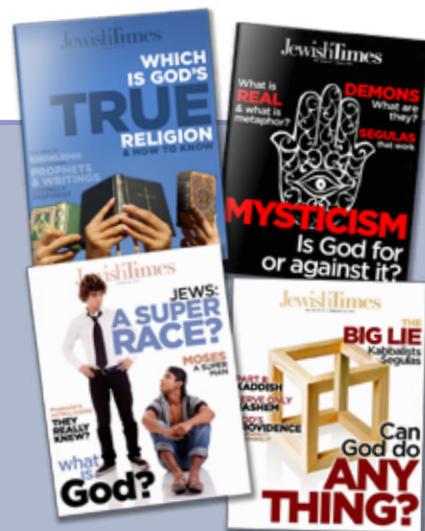
RABBI REUVEN MANN — *Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix*

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RABBI STEVEN WEIL — *Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union*

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PARSHA

Barred from Entering Israel

Moses the Leader

RABBI REUVEN MANN
Rabbi, Young Israel of Phoenix

This week's parsha, Va'etchanan, begins with Moshe recounting his heartfelt prayer that Hashem would permit him to "cross the Jordan" and enter the Holy Land with the rest of the Nation. G-d had decreed that, due to his sin at the "Waters of Contention," he would die in the Wilderness and not fulfill the great mitzvah of "Yishuv Haaretz" (dwelling in the Land). This was a severe blow to Moshe, who seemed unable to come to terms with it. He continued to petition Hashem for a reversal of this verdict until he was told, in no uncertain terms, "Do not speak to Me any further on this matter."

Moshe's fate illustrates the absolute justice of G-d's ways. He plays no favorites, and even those closest to Him come under harsh scrutiny. Indeed, the greater the level of the person, the higher the standard that he is judged by. Rabbi Soloveitchik said that Moshe's sin would not have drawn such a harsh punishment, had it been committed by a lesser person. However, due to the Moshe's exalted spiritual level, he could expect no quarter.

Still, the nature of the punishment is difficult to comprehend. Why did G-d choose to bar him from the chosen Land? Certainly the Creator could have found another way of punishing Moshe. The Rabbis ask, "Why did

Moshe have such a great desire to enter the Land? Did he long to taste its delicious fruits? Surely that cannot be the case!" The Rabbis conclude that there were many mitzvot contingent upon dwelling in the Land, and Moshe longed for the opportunity to perform these unique commandments.

Moshe's attitude toward mitzvot should inspire us all. His fervent desire to be given the opportunity to perform additional commandments comes as a surprise. Our reaction is to wonder that someone who had reached such a high level of perfection would feel that he "didn't have enough merits." Yet Moshe did not have an exalted view of himself. He was the humblest of men and was not complacent about his spiritual level. He wanted to seize every opportunity to reach a higher plane by fulfilling more commandments.

Every Jew should seek to emulate the example of our great teacher. We should never be content with the knowledge and deeds we have attained and should always maintain an attitude of enthusiasm for the opportunity to perform more good deeds and to reach greater spiritual heights.

This intensifies the question we have raised. If Moshe wanted to enter the Land for such a noble purpose, why did Hashem foreclose any further discussion of the matter? In recounting the sin of the spies and the nation's refusal to arise and conquer the Land, Moshe says, "G-d became angry with me also, saying 'You too shall not enter there.'" Moshe was thus included in the decree that the generation of the Exodus would die in the Wilderness.

It is true that Moshe's fate was sealed by his failure to sanctify Hashem at the Waters of Contention; however, that sin was also triggered by the quarrelsome agitation of the people. It was the

will of G-d that the generation that left Egypt and which, despite all the miracles they had witnessed, could not summon the courage to fight for the Land, should die in the Wilderness. Their fate would serve as a lesson for all future generations about the consequences of a lack of faith in G-d's promises.

Moshe was an inextricable part of that generation. He was their leader and teacher, whose task was to transform them, through Torah, from a band of slaves into a "kingdom of priests and holy people." He had brought them a long way, but had not been able to completely erase the effects of Egyptian servitude. Ultimately, the sinful behavior of the people took its toll on Moshe and caused him to sin. Moshe was totally identified with the people he brought out of the Wilderness, but could not lead into the Promised Land. Both he and his people had to share the same fate.

"Ultimately, the sinful behavior of the people took its toll on Moshe and caused him to sin. Moshe was totally identified with the people he brought out of the Wilderness, but could not lead into the Promised Land. Both he and his people had to share the same fate."

The lesson for posterity is that rebellion against Hashem has consequences. Because they could not overcome their fear and trust that G-d would vanquish their enemies, the people did not deserve to inherit the Land. Because they failed to appreciate the greatness of Moshe and provoked him to the point of sin, they lost the greatest leader anyone could have.

The Rabbis say that, had Moshe led the Jews into the Land, he would have built the Holy Temple, and it would never have been destroyed. However, the Jewish people, due to their sins, did not merit this benefit. We can now understand how important it is to appreciate our authentic Torah leaders, to listen to them, learn from them, and work together to lead the Nation to its ultimate redemption.

Shabbat shalom. ■



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Pondering the Imponderable

RABBI BERNIE FOX

And I petitioned before Hashem at that time saying: Hashem, G-d, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand – for what power in the heavens and upon the earth can perform actions akin to Your actions and Your might. Allow me, now, to pass over and see the good land that is on the other side of the Jordan, the good mountain, and the Lebanon. (Sefer Devarim 4:23-25)

1. The order of the annual Torah readings

Over the course of each year the entire Torah is read. The parshiyot – the portions – of the Torah are each assigned a Shabbat. The number of parshiyot exceeds the number of Shabbatot – Sabbaths. Therefore, some weeks, two portions are read in order to complete the entire Torah over the course of the year. However, there are some parshiyot that are assigned to specific Shabbatot. For example, Parshat BeMidbar is usually read the Shabbat preceding Shavuot; Parshat Nitzavim is read before Rosh HaShanah. The Shabbat following Tisha B'Av is among the Shabbatot that are assigned a specific parasha. Parshat VaEtchanan must be read on the Shabbat following Tisha B'Av.[1]

It is notable that, in general, these special parshiyot are associated with the Shabbat preceding a festival. The examples above illustrate this pattern. BeMidbar is read before Shavuot and Nitzavim is read before Rosh HaShanah. This suggests that each of these parshiyot is selected to be read on its

specific Shabbat as a preparation for the festival or observance that will take place in the coming week. However, Parshat VaEtchanan is the exception to this pattern. It is not read before Tisha B'Av; it is read following it.

This presents two problems. First, why is VaEtchanan different from the other parshiyot assigned to their respective Shabbatot? Why does it follow the observance with which it is associated rather than precede it? Second, the rationale for reading a relevant portion in preparation for a festival is obvious. As explained above, the special reading prepares us for the special event in the coming week. What is the rationale for reading VaEtchanan after Tisha B'Av? Tisha B'Av has been observed in the preceding week. A relevant Torah reading cannot prepare us for an event that has already taken place.

When you will give birth to children and grandchildren and you will become long-established in the land, then you will act destructively and make idols and images of all things. You will do that which is evil in the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, to anger Him. I call to testify against you today the heavens and the earth that you shall surely be quickly destroyed from upon the land that you cross the Jordan, there to possess. You will not enjoy longevity upon it. For you will surely be destroyed. (Sefer Devarim 4:25-26)

2. The Tisha B'Av Torah reading

There is an obvious connection between Tisha B'Av and Parshat

VaEtchanan. The Torah reading for the morning of Tisha B'Av is taken from the parasha. This Torah portion is one of the distinctive characteristics of Tisha B'Av. Other fast days – with the exception of Yom Kipur – share a single reading. That reading is taken from Sefer Shemot. It focuses upon Moshe's intercession on behalf of Bnai Yisrael following the sin of the Egel – the Golden Calf. It is selected for fast days because its theme is petition, forgiveness, and Hashem's mercy. On our fast days we ask Hashem to redeem us from affliction and suffering. We learn from this Torah section how to petition Hashem. We adopt Moshe's model and even employ the words and phrases included in this portion. We also learn from this portion that forgiveness can be achieved. Hashem is a G-d of mercy. He awaits us to return to Him. When we sincerely repent, we will be forgiven.

This moving Torah portion is not read on the morning of Tisha B'Av. Instead, it is postponed to the afternoon. The morning reading is from Parshat VaEtchanan. It begins with the passages above. Why is this reading selected for Tisha B'Av in place of the usual fast day Torah portion?

How does she dwell alone! A city that was populous is a widow. Great among nations, a princess among states is a vassal state. (Megilat Eichah 1:1)

3. Tisha B'Av recalls an imponderable disaster

Tisha B'Av recalls the destruction of our two Sacred Temples – Batai Mikdash. It has been designated by our Sages to also commemorate all of the tragedies and disasters that have befallen our people in the long years of our exile and wandering. The observance begins at night with the reading of Megilat Eichah – Lamentations. This work was authored by the prophet Yermiyahu in response to the destruction of the first Bait HaMikdash – the Sacred Temple. This work opens with the above passage. The first word of the passage

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

and the megilah is eichah – how. The prophet asks how such a terrible disaster could have occurred.

However, the prophet's intention is not to formulate an intellectual question. The sentence is not a quarry. It is an exclamation. How is such tragedy possible! In this very first passage of the megilah an important element of the Tisha B'Av observance is expressed. Tisha B'Av requires that we experience astonishment. We are required to relive the tragedy of the churban – the destruction of the Temples. If we succeed in our task, then like Yermiyahu we will be astonished that such punishment and suffering is possible! One who can quickly and easily come to grips with the churban and feel that he understands it, simply does not appreciate its magnitude.

Some years ago a Holocaust survivor asked me how I can believe in a G-d who allows His own children to be humiliated, tortured, and exterminated. Where was G-d's mercy or justice when six million of His children were decimated! After a brief discussion I realized that I was not being asked a theological question. I realized that I was experiencing a declaration of unbearable anguish and horror. How could the Holocaust be possible! There is no answer because there is no question – only a cry of intense anguish.

Tisha B'Av requires that we feel that anguish. We must strive to imagine the horror of the churban – to grasp the inponderable.

And be said: If now I have found favor in Your eyes, Hashem, let the presence of Hashem be in our midst. For it is a stiff-necked nation and You will forgive our iniquities and take us as a portion. (Sefer Shemot 34:9)

4. A time for grief and a time for consolation

The above passage is taken from the closing of the normal fast day Torah reading. This is the Torah portion that is read also in the afternoon of Tisha B'Av. In the passage, Moshe asks Hashem to forgive the nation's terrible sin – the sin of the Egel. Moshe's request is granted and the people are forgiven.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l suggests that this message is antithetical to the mood of Tisha B'Av morning. It is a message of consolation, hope, and forgiveness. Tisha B'Av morning's theme and atmosphere is of inexorable grief. We are not yet prepared to move beyond our astonishment, horror and anguish.[2] Therefore, this Torah portion is postponed to the afternoon. Through reading the kinot – the liturgical lamentations – recited the morning of Tisha B'Av, we give voice to our perplexity and anguish.

5. The morning Torah reading

Instead of the normal fast day Torah reading, on Tisha B'Av we read a section from Parshat VaEtchanan. What is the relevance of this portion of Tisha B'Av?

Every festival is assigned a specific Torah portion to be read on the occasion. These readings are selected on the basis of their relevance to the festival. Festivals prescribed by the Torah are assigned Torah readings that discuss the festival. Festivals established by Sages are assigned Torah portions that are relevant to the festival. For example, Chanukah commemorates the rededication of the Bait HaMikdash. Its Torah portion discusses the dedication of the Mishcan – the Tabernacle – of the wilderness.

Accordingly, Tisha B'Av is assigned the Torah portion that discusses the occasions that we commemorate – churban, exile, and suffering. On Tisha B'Av morning we read the portion of the Torah that describes a time at which the nation will become complacent and take for granted its blessings. The people will abandon the Torah. They will be punished with exile, affliction, and destruction.

When you are afflicted and all of these things befall you, at the end of days, you will return to Hashem your G-d and you will listen to His voice. (Sefer Devarim 4:30)

6. Parshat VaEtchanan - a message of tragedy and of consolation

The Tisha B'Av morning Torah

portion focuses upon three ideas. The first is that our suffering is not a merely a capricious accident or happenstance occurrence. Our afflictions are a result of our own choices. Wrongdoing and iniquity are punished. The punishment can be severe. Second, Hashem awaits our repentance. When we return to Him, He will accept us. Finally, we are assured that we will repent and that we will be delivered from our suffering. Our relationship with Hashem will be fully restored.

We read these messages on the morning of Tisha B'Av because this is the Torah portion that discusses the events commemorated by the day. However, we are not ready for its messages. We are not prepared to hear its rebuke. When we are overwhelmed in our contemplation of the enormity of our suffering, we cannot accept this message of accountability. Also, we are not yet prepared to be consoled. Messages of ultimate redemption cannot be processed by one who is in the deepest most intense level of grief.

However, these messages are fundamental. They provide context for the catastrophes Tisha B'Av recalls. These messages are harbingers of better times – of peace and an end of all suffering and affliction. So, as with the passage of time, when better prepared, we must return to this Torah reading and consider its messages. Therefore, the Sages assigned Parshat VaEtchanan to the Shabbat after Tisha B'Av.

In short, Parshat VaEtchanan differs from the other parshiyot assigned to specific Shabbatot. These other parshiyot are each read in preparation for the festival to be observed in the coming week. VaEtchanan is not a preparation for Tisha B'Av; it is a response. It gives Tisha B'Av a needed context and provides a message of solace and hope. ■

[1] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 428:4.

[2] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways, pp. 1-14.