

17 Tammuz: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow<sup>1</sup>

Adena Muskin

In the Jewish consciousness, time is fluid. Past, present, and future exist simultaneously in our collective memory. This timelessness is at the heart of Jewish feast days and even more so our fast days. As Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik so eloquently explains, “Our historicity is expressed in covenantal constancy and identity. Not only do we remember our past but we relive and re-experience it.”<sup>2</sup> On Pesach, we celebrate *yetziat Mitzrayim* (the exodus from Egypt) as though we are the ones being liberated. Similarly, we commemorate Shiv’a Asar B’Tammuz as though we are currently experiencing the tragedy. Today – two thousand years after the loss of our homeland, our city, our temple, our most intimate connection with the *Shechina* – we grieve as though we are witnessing the destruction. We fast, we pray, we repent, and we mourn; for this is our own tragedy as well.

The *Mishna* lists five tragedies that befell the Jewish People on this day:<sup>3</sup>

חמישה דברים אירעו את אבותינו בשבעה עשר בתמוז... נשתברו הלוחות, ובטל התמיד, והובקעה העיר, ושרף אפסטמוס את התורה, והעמיד צלם בהיכל (תענית ד:ו)

Five events occurred to our ancestors on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz...The Tablets were broken, the *Tamid* [Daily Offering] ceased, the [walls of] the city [of Jerusalem] were breached, Apostomos burned the Torah, and an idol was placed in the Temple. (*Taanit* 4:6)

The connection between these seemingly incongruent tragedies underscores the true reason we grieve: We mourn God’s disaffection the Jewish People. Although the physical destruction was terrible (*Megillat Eicha* describes the horrors in anguished detail), what we truly long for is the closeness of the Almighty.

*Am Yisrael* is endowed with a special *kedusha*— a sanctity that differentiates and elevates us. This *kedusha* is manifest in three different physical realms: קדושת המקום (sanctity of place), קדושת הזמן (sanctity of time), and קדושת האדם (sanctity of man). The *Mishna* describes the loss of all three. The sanctity of our holiest city was destroyed when the Romans breached the walls of Yerushalayim.<sup>4</sup> The sanctity of the *Beit Hamikdash*, the holiest place on earth, was

desecrated by the presence of an idol. Similarly, the *korban tamid* sacrifices were a constant indication of the daily Divine presence. When the *tamid* was abolished, weekdays lost their intrinsic sanctity. Time became more mundane. Most devastatingly, the Jewish People lost sacredness. The *luchot* were God’s unique creation (“מעשה אלקים” – *Shemot* 32:16), a physical gift to the Jewish People. When they were shattered, *Bnei Yisrael* lost an irreplaceable holy connection. The destruction of the *luchot* was the manifestation of the diminution of the eternal covenant – with the Almighty, leaving the Jewish People bereft of the holiness the *ברית* offered. The burning of the Torah, on the same date several hundred years later, mirrored this removal of God’s word from His nation. On this day, place, time, and man became significantly diminished of holiness.

Shiv’a Asar B’Tammuz is the result of our moral bankruptcy, our crumbling failure, our inability to achieve our sacred purpose. It is a day to recognize our communal shortcomings and their inevitable consequences.

However, the narrative does not end with our national catastrophes. Just as we relive the past, we simultaneously experience the future. This is why we not only mourn, but also repent. For we know that our holiness can be restored through repentance. This is not mere belief; it is God’s promise:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָקוֹת צוֹם הַרְבִּיעִי וְצוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְצוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵית יְהוּדָה לְשִׂשׂוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה וּלְמַעֲדִים טוֹבִים וְהָאֵמֶת יְהַשְׁלֹם אֲהַבּוּ (זכריה ח:יט)

So says the Lord of Hosts, the fast of the fourth month [17 Tammuz] and the fast of the fifth month [9 Av] and the fast of the seventh month [Tzom Gedalia] and the fast of the tenth month [10 Tevet] will become joyful and happy and good festivals for the house of Judah; you shall love truth and peace. (*Zecharia* 8:19)

When we repent as a nation, when we love truth and peace, then we shall no longer grieve on this day. Shiv’a Asar B’Tammuz will once again be filled with holiness, with the sanctity of place, time, and above all, the Jewish People.

<sup>1</sup> This is written with tremendous gratitude to מורי ורבי, Rabbi Berger, for his constant encouragement and brilliant teachings.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man* ed. Michael S. Berger (Jersey City: Ktav Publishing House, 2005) 172.

See also his essay “Avelut Yeshana and Avelut Hadashah: Historical and Individual Mourning,” in *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering, and the Human Condition* eds. David Shatz, Joel Wolowelsky and Reuven Ziegler (Jersey City: MeOtzar HoRav, 2003).

See also his 1968 two-part lecture “Shall I Weep In the Fifth Month” and “Against the Enemy that Oppresses You: The Basis of Historical Fasts.”

<sup>3</sup> There is no shortage of Jewish suffering on Shiv’a Asar B’Tammuz. In 1239 Pope Gregory IX confiscated all Talmudic manuscripts; in 1391 over 4,000 Jews were killed in Toledo, Spain following the Christian conquest of the Iberian Peninsula; 1559 saw the Jewish Quarter of Prague pillaged and burned; 1941 witnessed both the shooting of 4,000 Jews of the Bialystoker Ghetto as well as the abduction and murder of hundreds of Jewish women in Khotin, Ukraine; in 1944 the Kovno Ghetto was liquidated; and in 1970 the Libyan government ordered all Jewish property confiscated.

<sup>4</sup> In the time of the First Temple, the walls were breached by the Babylonians on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Tammuz.

## The Requirement of Candles for Shabbos and Yom Tov

Yaakov Kellner

The Mishnah,<sup>1</sup> in discussing which fuels are appropriate for lighting Shabbos candles, cites Rabbi Ishmael's opinion that "We may not light with tar, because of the honor of the Shabbos."

The Gemara<sup>2</sup> asks: What is the reason for this?

Rava said: "Because the odor of tar is offensive, the Sages issued a decree prohibiting its use for Shabbos candle-lighting, lest one forsake the light and leave."

Abaye said to him: "So let him leave!" [In other words: There is no obligation to eat the Shabbos meal in a lit room.]

Rava responded: "[I forbid using the offensive fuel] because I hold that kindling Shabbat lights is an obligation [*chova*]."

Tosefos<sup>3</sup> explain that Rava means one is obligated to eat in a place with light, to fulfil the *mitzvah* of *oneg* (pleasure) on Shabbos. Abaye agrees that one is required to light Shabbos candles, but argues that the candles need not be in the same room as the meal.

Tosefos then cite an opinion suggesting that since Rava specifically used the word *chova* (requirement) and not the word *mitzvah* (commandment), the actual lighting of the *ner shel Shabbos* does not require one to recite a *beracha*. Accordingly, if a *ner* was already lit, one would not be required to put it out and relight it with a *beracha*, for the *mitzvah* is not the act of lighting, but rather a *chova* – a requirement – that there be light in the room during the Shabbos meal. Rabbeinu Tam takes issue with this opinion and argues that *ner Shabbos* does require a *beracha*. In his view, if a flame was already lit in the room, one would need to put out the fire and relight it with a *beracha*.

Rabbeinu Tam's opinion is supported by the Gemara Yerushalmi's statement, as quoted by Hagahos Maimonios (Hilchos Shabbos 5:1), that *ner Yom Tov* [which is the same *mitzvah* as *ner Shabbos*] requires a *beracha*.

The Bais Halevi explains that there are two elements of *ner Shabbos*, corresponding to the two *mitzvos*, respectively, of honoring Shabbos (*kavod*) and experiencing pleasure on Shabbos (*oneg*).

1. According to Abaye, the obligation is to create the light before Shabbos, because he holds that the *mitzvah* is a fulfillment of *kavod* exclusively. Therefore, one would be required to extinguish a pre-existing *ner* and relight it with a *beracha*.
2. According to Rava, there exists an additional requirement to have light where we are eating on Shabbos, so we can experience

*oneg* - pleasure - from the light. Rava's wording indicates he is not arguing against Abaya's concept of *kavod* Shabbos, but is adding the element of *oneg* Shabbos.

In short, according to the Bais Halevi, *ner Shabbos* entails two distinct *mitzvos*: *kavod* and *oneg*. The *beracha* is required only for the *mitzvah*-act of lighting, namely, for *kavod* Shabbos.

The Gra, in his commentary on Shulchan Aruch, says the *mitzvah* of *kavod* Shabbos is fulfilled before Shabbos (e.g. by preparing the Shabbos meals) and *oneg* Shabbos is during Shabbos (e.g. eating the meals).

According to both the Gra and the Bais Halevi, the reason we light *neiros* on *Erev Shabbos* [besides the prohibition against lighting once Shabbos begins] is for *kavod* Shabbos. This understanding of the *mitzvah* should apply to Yom Tov as well: although there is no prohibition against lighting a fire (from an existing flame) on Yom Tov, we still should light on *erev* due to the *mitzvah* of *kavod*.

Another reason we should light before sundown is presented by R' Yosef, the son of the Drisha, in his introduction to his father's commentary on the Tur *Yoreh Deah*. He writes that his mother insisted on lighting prior to the onset of Yom Tov, based on the principle that any *melacha* one is able to perform before Yom Tov should not be done on Yom Tov. Therefore, she insisted that the *neiros* be lit *before* Yom Tov and not *on* Yom Tov.

The Chasam Sofer, on Shabbos 23b, argues against this point and permits lighting candles on Yom Tov (as is the custom of many); his reasons would warrant a separate essay.

<sup>1</sup> Shabbos 2:2, Talmud Shabbos 24b

רבי ישמעאל אומר, אין מדליקין בערב, מפני כבוד השבת.

<sup>2</sup> Shabbos 25b

מאי טעמא? אמר רבא, מתוך שריחו רע גזרה שמא יניחנה ויצא. אמר ליה אביי. ויצא! אמר ליה, שאני אומר הדלקת נר בשבת חובה דאמר רב נחמן בר רב זבדא ואמרי לה אמר רב נחמן בר רבא אמר רב הדלקת נר בשבת חובה רחיצת ידים ורגלים בחמין ערבית רשות ואני אומר מצוה.

<sup>3</sup> Tosefos ibid.

הדלקת נר בשבת חובה - פי' במקום סעודה דחובה היא שיסעוד במקום הנר משום עונג אבל מהדלקת נר גופיה לא הוה פריך אביי דפשיטא דחובה היא דהתנן (לקמן דף לא:) על ג' עבירות נשים כו' על שאינן זיהרות בהדלקת הנר...

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