

By Rabbi Warren Kasztl

## **UNDERSTANDING THE TISHA B'AV EXPERIENCE**

**Based on the Hashkafa of HaRav Shimon Kessin,  
SHLIT'A**

**In Memory of my Father,  
Paul Kasztl, Yitzchok ben Chaim, Z'L**

As I was sitting Shiva for my Father, my friend and neighbor, HaRav Moshe Lehrfield asked me a brilliant question. The malady of sinat cheenom and the loshon hara it precipitates has plagued our people for centuries. It caused the destruction of the second Bais HaMikdash and countless tragedies since then, including the Holocaust. Reb Moshe asked me, at the very core, what this illness look like on the soul of the individual and by extension, Klal Yisroel? Last week, Erev Shabbat, I called Rov Kessin and posed the question. After claiming he didn't understand the question, he went on to answer it with unparalleled brilliance and clarity, as is his way. I am honored to share his answer with you.

How is it that our nation, coming from Avrohom, Yitzchok, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Dovid and Shlomo, coupled with Sarah, Rivka, Rochel and Leah, has been stomped upon throughout history? Coming from the greatest spiritual beacons and servants of Hashem, we should be the leaders directing the world as it moves forward in history. How is it that despite our heritage, we have been abused by the lowest forms of humanity throughout the ages? The answer to this is a reality that many are unaware of.

The fact is that since the days of Avrohom Avinu, we, the Hebrews, the Israelites, the Jews, call us what you will, have been in a state of mortal danger!! That may sound strange, but it is remarkably true, and for a very good reason. Not only were we the first, but we have been the only people that has respect for the word "no". We have been the moral compass of mankind for over three thousand years, and like it or not, continue to serve in that role today. Our people have been the messengers of Hashem Yisborach declaring His desire and will for mankind since our Avos spread their message, leaving their mark on humanity. Our people have been the ones to say "no" to the physical desires that the ancients justified through their avoda zara. We have been the ones who, despite being persecuted by countless enemies because of our message, remain the focal point around which world history is authored despite the fact that the world powers who persecuted and killed us have been relegated to the history books. History has proven through us that if one does not like the message, it's easier to kill the messenger than live up to the ideals of the message coming from the G-d of all mankind via the Jewish people. This is our role as the "Ohr I'goyim", the

# **TORAT HAR SHMUEL**

**By  
TASHMA**

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**HARSHMUEL.COM TASHMA.NET**

**sharabymail@gmail.com TEL: 0542002882**

“Mamleches Kohanim v’Goy Kadosh” that we are.

Trying to “shoot the messenger” is a concept that Avrohom and Sarah had to endure. How so? It is interesting to note that we never hear anything about the “laytzeni ha’dor”, the scoffers of their generation until Yitzchok was born. Why not?? Their attempts to demean both Avrohom and Sarah were remedied by Hashem Himself. The women claimed that Sarah never gave birth to Yitzchok, but rather found him in the marketplace and adopted him. To clarify that Sarah was Yitzchok’s biological mother Hashem enabled her to nurse countless babies brought to her by the women living close by and even far away. Everyone left knowing without a shadow of a doubt that Sarah was Yitzchok’s Mother. Similarly, those who claimed that Avimelech, not Avrohom was Yitzchok’s father quickly changed their mind when they saw that Yitzchok’s facial features were virtually identical to those of Avrohom, (Midrash Tanchuma – Rashi, Bereshis 25:19). The question remains, why did this happen at this time rather than before. HaRav Yosef Soloveichik, ZT”L explains that the people of Avrohom’s generation fell into one of three categories: There were those who accepted him as truthful and became ardent followers, the “souls” Avrohom and Sarah “made”. Others rejected him outright and ignored him entirely. The third situated in the middle knew Avrohom was right and respected him, albeit with the attitude that when he dies, they will bury Avrohom and his philosophy, enabling them to return to the lifestyle of their choosing without the guilt. When Yitzchok was born – miraculously – that group begrudgingly realized that Avrohom’s philosophy and message were here to stay. As scoffers, they rebelled albeit quietly, against Avrohom and ultimately the concept of “no” from Hashem.

The danger of our people being in the position of representing Hashem and saying “no” to the world manifested itself most acutely prior to World War II. Hitler was interviewed by a German newspaper and was asked directly what his hate for the Jewish people was based on and why was it so passionate. Without missing a beat, Hitler

claimed it was because we were responsible for introducing the Ten Commandments to the world. We had no right to snare the world into believing in a G-d we have to hold by and answer to. We had no right to impose on mankind that when G-d says “no”, it’s “no”. We had no right to take the free choice every person is imbued with and demand that mankind’s decision-making process acquiesce to His Will. No Jew has the right to tell any German how to think, how to choose between right and wrong.

How are we to survive this role that puts us in a position of mortal danger? The answer to this mind-boggling question can be answered with one word: Achdus!! If we are unified as a people, no one can touch us. We express this every weekday in Psalm twenty, verse eight: Esav can come with their “rechev”, their “chariots”, their technologically advanced weapons, and Yishmael can come with their “suseem”, their horses. They can threaten us; they can even try to attack us. If we are bound together as an “aggudah achas”, one solid intertwined rope, all we need to defend ourselves is a unified voice (“v’anachnu”) calling out to Hashem and the enemy will be vanquished. Hashem knows exactly how dangerous it is to say “no” to a world that will do everything to say “yes” to immorality, as they go the extra mile to rid themselves of the guilt and attempt to justify their behavior. He’s Infinitely sensitized to the mortal danger we face because we are in this position. His Protection comes with only one requirement, and that is that we remain unified. That we care for each other and speak in a manner that reflects the love and concern we should have for one another. I don’t have to tell you what will happen if we fail. History has already provided the answer to that question. The formula is relatively simple: With unity, not only do we survive and thrive, but we are on top of the world directing history in a manner that reflects the will of Hashem.

The X-Ray, the “anatomy” of sinat cheenom on Klal Yisroel looks like the Jew described in the “tochacho” at the end of Sefer Vayikra and Devorim. As a nation, we are bruised

and battered and don't know what direction we are going. We're powerless against the forces that seek our destruction and delude ourselves into believing that modern day weaponry will save us. Our enemy's physical weaponry may not destroy us. Torah ignorance, assimilation, intermarriage, and the delusional "green grass" on the secular world's side of the fence will uproot us from our connection and association with anything Jewish. We will disappear as the Mamleches Kohanim v'Goy Kadosh that we are without a bullet having been fired. The very first remedy to save ourselves from this disaster is unity: The knowledge and feeling that when one Jew dies, when one leaves the fold, a part of us dies as well. We've learned much about what "organismic unity" is. We understand the message, we've intellectualized the message and have spoken about it, ad nauseum. We have yet to live it. As long as we do not make a concerted effort on every side to come together and heal the "family" wounds, the message the world has come to demand of us will continue to place us in mortal danger. Tisha B'Av and all that our national day of mourning comes with will remain a present-tense reality.

One of the greatest challenges of this day is in memorializing the destruction that took place almost two-thousand years ago. The difficulty exists because today it is totally misunderstood. Let's gain perspective by answering the following question. The five "inuyim", afflictions identified with Yom Kippur are observed on Tisha B'Av as well. Eating & drinking, anointing oneself, wearing leather, intimacy, and bathing are forbidden. These observances were established for Yom Kippur, a day dedicated to repentance in the hope we will achieve Divine forgiveness. The theme of Tisha B'Av is aveilut, mourning. Why bring observances that reflect the theme of Teshuva into a day founded upon mourning? The answer comes from Mesechet Yoma in the Talmud Yerushalmi. The first Halacha clearly states that any generation that does not rebuild the Bait HaMikdash is guilty of its destruction. The churban is not an event that took place thousands of years ago. It is occurring today, in the here and now of Eretz HaKedoshah and chutz

l'aretz. We're all responsible for the reality that our holiest place, the Kotel, is a retaining wall that was built by Herod, a mass murderer. The Shechina is situated on that wall with a clear view of Moslems walking into what was the Kodesh HaKedoshim. That's why the restrictions of Yom Kippur are part and parcel of Tisha B'Av. Any generation that cannot fix this mess better BEG Hashem Yisborach for forgiveness the same way we do on Yom Kippur, because we are held responsible for it! Worst of all is that we can repair this damage and free the Shechina. Long before Hashem takes our inventory regarding who is Shomer Shabbat, who is particular to eat only Kosher food, are we careful regarding Taharat HaMishpacha, Hashem asks, "Is the family, My Family, getting along with each other"? If Hashem answers "yes" to the last question alone, the quality of life we will enjoy will inspire the Jewish masses to enable Hashem to answer yes to the other three questions, and more. We will want to become fully Shomer Torah u'Mitzvos because via Achdut, Hashem will enable us to cleave to Him, inspiring us to grow in His Torah. "Mitzvah goreret Mitzvah".

One more event needs to be understood. There is the famous story told in Mesechet Gittin, 55b regarding Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. An unidentified man hosted a feast. He sent someone to bring his friend Kamtza to the event. By mistake, he returned with the man's enemy, Bar Kamtza. The host approached Bar Kamtza and asked him why he was there? To avoid a scene Bar Kamtza offered to pay for his meal. The host said no, to which Bar Kamtza offered to pay for half the feast. Once again, the host said no. Bar Kamtza offered to pay for the entire lavish affair. The host forcefully grabbed him and threw him out. All of this occurred in front of a group of Rabbis seated at a nearby table. Infuriated that they did not intercede to keep him from being humiliated, Bar Kamtza devised a plan whereby the Romans would think the Jews were staging a rebellion against them. He told the Caesar that if the Romans offered a beautiful animal for sacrifice at the Bait HaMikdash it would be rejected. Caesar gave Bar Kamtza a beautiful, unblemished animal and in-

structed him to bring it to the Bait HaMikdash. On the way, he cut the animal's lip, rendering it blemished and unacceptable as a sacrifice. The Gemara continues with this event that culminated in the churban Bayit Sheni.

Rov Kessin pointed out something extraordinary about this Gemara. Picture in your mind that you are the parent of a bride at a wedding that you have planned for months. Identify someone who is your "enemy". Unfortunately, we all have people in our lives we dislike. This person inadvertently arrives at your simcha, thinking they were invited (as did Bar Kamtza). A wedding costs thousands upon thousands of dollars. The scenario identified in the Gemara unfolds in real time for you, and your enemy offers, fifty, seventy-five, one-hundred thousand dollars to avoid being embarrassed. Every person I've asked has stated that they would let him stay. Some would take the money, while others would not. What happened between the host in the Gemara and Bar Kamtza was not simple *sinas cheenom* – it was pure, undiluted INSANITY, founded not on simple anger but rage!! All of it occurred while a table of "rabbis" and others were present and aware of what was going on. It's one thing to tolerate negativity, even hate, G-d forbid. These people ignored rage-based insanity occurring publicly right before their eyes. That is sick!! This is not a minor happening shared with us to impart a lesson. It was a sign of the time, the fact that people were willing to ignore something this reprehensible, allowing hate-based insanity to occur without objection.

If I concluded this article here, I would consider myself part of the problem. Something in the way of a solution has to be offered against the malady we still face together. I offer the following for everyone's consideration. The two greatest works of the Chofetz Chaim, ZT'L, were the Mishna Brura and his sefer on Shmiras HaLoshon. If the Chofetz Chaim were alive today, walking through any Bait Midrash in the world, which sefer would he prefer to find in a talmid's bookbag? No doubt, Shmiras HaLoshon, for one very valid reason. Ahavat Cheenom coupled with proficiency in proper speech paves the way for the Geulah to occur.

Although the greatness of the Mishna Brura speaks for itself, the same cannot be said of it regarding the Geulah. This is the juncture where the greatest challenge must be addressed. Even Shmiras HaLoshon comes with two challenges. First, with very few Yeshivot and/or Bait Yaakov schools as the exception, there is no concretized course in *shmirat ha'loshon* using this Sefer. Indeed, the course does not exist in the vast majority of Jewish schools. Secondly, we have a Mitzvah in Parashat Kedoshim (Vayikra 19:17) calling upon us to "rebuke" our neighbor in a way that does not bring sin upon ourselves. In other words, we are required to correct each other in a manner whereby the person being corrected is not diminished in the process. I don't know a single Jewish school that offers a course in assertive communication – being able to speak in a way where the words expressed meet the requirements of Chazal as proper, proactive, positive communication. "Shmirat HaLoshon" teaches us what not to say. Our children need to learn, in the positive, the art of proper, proactive communication. Many will say that this is the responsibility of the parents. Since our children spend the majority of their waking hours in school, isn't it logical that schools should share in teaching and role-modeling this. Let's review: The only way we can survive our position of mortal danger because we are the nation that says "no" is through *achdut*, unity. Unity is manifested most effectively in the way we speak to each other. Ahavat Yisroel, unity, manifested in proper speech will bring the Geulah. Is it not worth our while to teach this in every school? The answer is as obvious as the need!!

Let's conclude with the following. Who can count the number of Jewish groupings between the secular Jewish and Chareidi communities? There are more identities within our ranks that we can count. How do we bring a nation with so many groupings together into the unified reality we are supposed to be? All I can do is make a bold suggestion that some may be critical of. There are many communities in Israel that have forged bonds with what are called "sister communities" outside of our Holy Land. What would happen if a commu-

nity based in proper Torah observance, such as Har Shmuel, reached out to a non-observant community and forged a bond with them. A similar question was asked about seventy-five years ago and the answer resulted in what became a concept called “kiruv”. Someone then had the courage to give this idea, this concept a try and look what it resulted in. The reason I would suggest this for your community is because the beautiful Neshama and gifted mind of your Rav combined with the vibrant and dedicated Kehilla that makes up Har Shmuel is perfectly suited to try this. Imagine how Hashem Yisborach will react to this Chesed. The attempt by itself, irrespective of the results, is worthy of great praise. A few years ago, one Rov and his Shul invited the entire city to bake Challah and experience a Shabbat together. The event was so

successful that it spread like a wildfire throughout the world and continues to take place. No one knew where that first step in Kiruv would lead to. The Rov in South Africa did not know the impact his idea, his program would have. We’re in the same position today, with seventy-five years of Kiruv experience to help assure that the attempt will be met with a respectable level of success.

If we dedicate ourselves to being part of Achdus solution, our holy nation will be able to be the Mamlechet Kohanim v’Goy Kadosh without a sense of mortal fear hanging over our heads. Indeed, my hope for all of us is that this will be the last time we have to endure Tisha B’Av as a day of mourning. May all of us be zoche to enjoy the Geulah together as an “aggudah achat”.