

Make It, Don't Break It!

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Parshat Pinchas

Rightly or wrongly, there is a certain sense of apprehension that adheres to the months of Tammuz and Menachem-Av. This is due to the fact that the three-week period of *Bein HaMetzarim* (literally, “Between the Straits”; also known as “The Three Weeks”) begins in the second half of Tammuz and continues through the first ten (yes, ten*) days of Menachem-Av. In this period of mourning the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* (Holy Temple) and our long, long exile that resulted from it (and that still continues, to our regret and shame), many of us wonder how we can mourn a “loss,” the absence of something we never had. Although we can’t answer that question, we nonetheless sense that something is missing and we are uneasy.

While it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to understand the absence of the *Beit HaMikdash* and what its immediate loss entails, there are many results that we can understand and grieve—and do something about.

There are two things we need to know about Tammuz. It was on the 17th of this month that Moshe Rabbeinu broke the *Luchot*, the Tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were engraved. He broke them after he descended from Mount Sinai and saw the Jews’ revelry while worshipping the Golden Calf. Rebbe Nachman

teaches that when the *Luchot* were broken, Tammuz lost its *vav* (ו, going from וווו to ו) (*Likutey Moharan* I, 217). Losing the *vav* means we are liable to forget the Torah we have learned. This is already reason enough to cry—since any kernel of Torah knowledge connects us that much more to the Divine, its disappearance weakens the connection. But it can get worse, God forbid.

Forgetting Torah can lead to losing her. Because the Torah is not just information. It's God-given advice on how to live a Godly life. God forbid, forgetting the mitzvah of "Love your friend as [you love] yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) leads to not loving your fellow Jew, then to being jealous of him, and finally to hating him for no good reason. Such *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) is the cause of our exile (*Yoma* 9b). As perpetrator and victim, almost every one of us has tasted the ephemeral sweetness of *sinat chinam* and the bitterness of its long-lasting sting.

Sinat chinam has a number of other deleterious effects. We all know the confused "logic" of frustration and hurt feelings. Rancor prevents us from helping others. Rejection creates destructive rivalry. Bitterness creates feelings of superiority. All of these combine and break the *Luchot* again and again, because when we lack love and respect for our fellow Jew, we move away from the Torah. Why? Because the Torah is not automatically yours, or mine, or any Jew's: "It is not your inheritance" (*Avot* 1:17). It is *ours*, but only when we are a community: "Moshe commanded us the Torah; it is an inheritance of the community of Yaakov" (Deuteronomy 33:4).

Receiving the Torah required that we be as one person, united (Rashi on Exodus 19:2). Today as well, we deny our individual selves and our national self access to the Torah and her advice if we fail to properly love our fellow Jews. So we have to be spiritually smarter and bigger to resist all the specious reasoning and temptations that lead to making a Golden Calf. We have to restore to Tammuz her *vav*, the *vav*

hachibur, the connecting-vav, so our hearts, our people and our Torah will be restored, swiftly and soon, with the coming of Mashiach. Amen.

* The 10th of Av is also touched by mourning, in part because it was on this date that the *Beit HaMikdash* actually burned down.

a gutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

–Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Pikadon 5:14*