

Talmud Passage of the Week

The Ninth of Av: When God's Holiness Is Withdrawn From Our Presence

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Dear Friends,

I'd like to let you know about another Talmud study opportunity. As a way to help people fulfill the mitzvah of studying some Torah, Mishnah and Gemara every day, Maqom is posting a portion related to Parshat Hashavua on a weekly basis at the Jewish Communications Network (JCN) in their [study area](#).

Feel welcome to kick this sort of study off with the same great level of exchanges you've provided Maqom at this site.

Now, on to our new passage.

Mishnah Taanit 4:6:

On the ninth of Av it was decreed against our ancestors that they would not enter the Land [of Israel], the first and second Temples were destroyed, Betar was taken and the city [of Jerusalem] was plowed up. With the advent of Av we should limit rejoicing.

Gemara, Bavli 29a-b, Steinsaltz, Volume 14, p. 207-208:

Our Rabbis taught: "After the Temple was destroyed for the first time, groups of young priests gathered together with the keys of the Sanctuary in their hands. And they went to the roof of the Sanctuary, and said before Him: "Master of the Universe! Since we have not merited to be faithful treasurers, let the keys be handed over to You." And they threw them upwards and something like the palm of a hand came forth and received them from them. And they jumped and fell into the fire...

"When Av comes in, we reduce rejoicing, etc." Rav Yehudah the son of Rav Shmuel bar Shilat said in the name of Rav: Just as when Av comes in we reduce rejoicing, so too when Adar comes in we increase rejoicing. (29b) Rav Pappa said: Therefore a Jew who has litigation with a non-Jew should avoid him during Av when his luck is bad and he should present himself during Adar, when his luck is good.

Background:

The "Flowers of the Priesthood"

The young priests, the very hope for the future, who might have provided the lineage for the restored Temple only seventy years later, withdrew from life and God cooperated. God takes the keys, for safekeeping as it were, and the priests turn themselves into sacrifices on the alter and rise through the smoke into God's waiting hand, as it were.

Betar and the Tragedies of the Ninth of Av

The tragedies that befell our people on the ninth of Av are well known. The fall of Betar brought the Bar Kokhba revolt to an end. This revolt began around the 70th anniversary of the Temple's fall. The Jews of that period thought that history would repeat itself. After seventy years of exile and destruction, the Jews would be allowed to return and the revolt was paving the road to that glorious future. How bitter an awakening, then, when history did not repeat itself. The Temple would not be rebuilt. That generation, and subsequent ones, wondered what they had done that was so heinous that the Temple could not be rebuilt for them.

Avoiding Litigation in Av

The cyclical nature of Jewish history is reflected in Jewish law. Shulhan Aruch, Orach Hayyim 551:1 states that Jews who have litigation with non-Jews should try to avoid court proceedings during the month of Av, or at least until after the ninth.

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare this passage to our last passage on the Seventeenth of Tammuz. What symmetries are present?
2. Is the month of Av an unlucky time, at least until the ninth? Would you avoid certain activities during this period?
3. Does God withdraw holiness from the world when it can no longer contain God's holiness? How do we recognize when it is time to "throw up the keys to heaven"? Is it ever time to do that?