

“How can I alone carry?” (1:12)

In the annual cycle of *parshiyos*, we always read *Parashas Devarim*, on the *Shabbos* preceding *Tishah B'Av*, our national day of mourning. This *Shabbos* is known as *Shabbos Chazon*, after the opening word of the *Haftorah*, *Chazon Yeshayahu*, where the *Navi Yeshayahu* foretells the great tragedy to befall the Jewish nation.

Also, an obvious connection to *Tishah B'Av* is the word “*Eichah*,” how, which appears in *Megillas Eichah*, Book of Lamentations, that is read on *Tishah B'Av*. The *Gaon M'Vilna* sees a deeper connection between this *parsha* and *Tishah B'Av* in the third word of our *pasuk*, “*levadi*” – “*Eichah esa levadi*.” “How can I alone carry?” He notes that a form of this word appears in the beginning of *Megillas Eichah*, “*Eichah yashvah badad ha'ir*,” “How the city sits alone.” This gives us a clue to the essence of our national tragedy.

Alone, loneliness, isolated, forsaken, deserted: these synonyms may shed light on Moshe *Rabbeinu's* critique and, by extension, *Klal Yisrael's* tragedy. Moshe was used to bearing the nation's burden. His complaint was that he was alone. We may add that Moshe certainly did not need any assistance. He was quite capable of leadership – even alone. As the popular maxim states, “It is lonely at the top.” The quintessential leader of our nation was at the proverbial “top,” and he was alone. Did anyone care? There are certain areas in life, particular endeavors, that can only be performed alone, by one individual undertaking projects, or making the critical decisions himself. The question is: Does anybody care? Is anybody aware of the responsibility placed on the shoulders of our leadership, a responsibility which they shoulder all alone? Do we empathize? It would be so much easier to shoulder the responsibility, if he knew that he was not really alone.

This same problem occurred in *Yerushalayim*. In the first chapter of *Eichah*, a variation of the phrase, “*ein menachem lah*,” “there is none to comfort her” (*Yerushalayim*), occurs no less than four times. This is what we mourn. *Yerushalayim* is alone, without anyone to comfort her, with no one who cares. We may suggest that the loneliness which *Yerushalayim* experienced was not only a product of *Klal Yisrael's* seclusion from the other nations. It was the separation within, their divisiveness and discord resulting from the *sinaas chinam*, unwarranted hatred among them, which was the cause of the destruction of the *Bais HaMikdash* that left them all alone.

We cannot change what has happened. We can, however, focus on the source of our suffering, the reason for our misery, in order to attempt to correct our problem so that it happens no more. Perhaps, with a little *ahavah*, love, for our fellow man, we can reverse the trend of isolation from one another which has caused so much of our suffering. Let us share the burden with our fellow man, ease his plight, or just be available for moral support. When we are present for our fellow, we can hope that Hashem will, likewise, be present for us.

Returning to our original statement connecting the “*eichah*” of our *parsha* to the “*eichah*” of *Tishah B'Av*, *Horav Moshe Feinstein, z.l.*, takes an alternative approach. He sees the word *eichah* as an

expression of amazement. Rav Moshe's remarks are addressed to the *Midrash Eichah*, which contrasts Moshe's comment with the exclamations of the later *neviim*, Yeshayah and Yirmiyah, who also used the word *eichah*. Moshe saw the people in their moment of glory and tranquility and said, "*Eichah*," an expression of lamentation. Yeshayah saw them in distress and also said, "*Eichah*." Yirmiyah, on the other hand, saw them at a point of total degradation and he too said, "*Eichah*."

In a departure from the standard *pshat*, explanation, Rav Moshe explains the word *eichah* to mean, "How could such a thing be possible?" Moshe wondered how an individual could rise to such eminence that he might even begin to think that he alone could shoulder the burden of leading an entire nation as complex as *Klal Yisrael*. Rav Moshe adds that this same question may be asked of any great leader. Later, Yeshayah wondered how a city that was referred to as a "faithful village," that had leaders who served as paradigms of virtue and piety, could sink to such a nadir of depravity. Finally, Yirmiyah wondered why the destruction occurred. Regardless of the nature of their sins and the seriousness of Hashem's grievance against them, *Klal Yisrael* was still on a much higher moral/spiritual plateau than any of the other nations of the world.

This interpretation conveys a profound message to us: Our highest priority should be to raise ourselves to the spiritual level of old, about whom Moshe *Rabbeinu* wondered, "How can I alone carry the burden of such a distinguished People?" Whatever our ancestors were, or were not, we have no inkling of their spiritual eminence. This is the meaning of the word *eichah*. In other words, one must be on a rather high level for people to question how it could have happened to them. Let us aspire to return to that distinguished position.