

Drasha on spiritual bypassing and communal tears

For Shabbat Pinchas, 2017

Yirmeyahu 9

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת הַתְּבוּנָה וְקִרְאֵי לַמְּקוֹנְנוֹת וְתַבּוּאֵינָהּ וְאֵל־הַחֲכֵמוֹת שְׁלַחוּ וְתַבּוּאֵנָהּ:

Thus said the LORD of Hosts: Listen! Summon the dirge-singers, let them come; Send for the skilled women, let them come.

וַיִּתְמַהֲרָנָה וְתִשְׁנֶה עָלֵינוּ גְּהִי וְתִרְדְּנָה עֵינֵינוּ דַמְעָה וְעַפְעָפֵינוּ יְדֵלוּ-מַיִם:

Let them quickly start a wailing for us, That our eyes may run with tears, Our pupils flow with water.

כִּי קוֹל גְּהִי נִשְׁמָע מִצִּיּוֹן אִיךָ שִׁדְדָנוּ בְּשָׁנוּ מֵאֲדָר כִּי-עֲזַבְנוּ אֶרֶץ כִּי הִשְׁלִיכוּ מִשְׁכְּנֹתֵינוּ: (o)

For the sound of wailing is heard from Zion: How we are despoiled! How greatly we are shamed! Ah, we must leave our land, Abandon our dwellings!

כִּי-שָׁמַעְנָה נָשִׁים דְּבַר-יְהוָה וְתִקַּח אַזְנוֹכֶם דְּבַר-פִּי וְלַמְדַּנָּה בְּבוֹתֵיכֶם זְהִי וְאַשְׁה רְעוּתָה קִינָה:

Hear, O women, the word of the LORD, Let your ears receive the word of His mouth, And teach your daughters wailing, And one another lamentation.

כִּי-עָלָה מָוֶת בְּחַלּוֹנֵינוּ בָּא בְּאַרְמְנוֹתֵינוּ לְהַכְרִית עוֹלָל מְחוּץ בְּחוּרִים מִרְחֻבוֹת:

For death has climbed through our windows, Has entered our fortresses, To cut off babes from the streets, Young men from the squares.

Tuesday of the week that just passed marked the 17th of the month of Tammuz, and so we began the 3 weeks leading towards the 9th of Av, Tisha'h B'Av. Like Elul which leads us towards the new year, like the month between Purim and Pesach and like counting 40 days of the Omer between Pesach and Shavuot. Our tradition understands something about the importance of a well built process, in our private as well as communal lives.

The three weeks we have just entered are about the process of mourning and allowing grief, anger, rage, depression and death come into our holy places. The metaphor used is the destruction of the

temple in Jerusalem all those years ago – but in my eyes this is just a metaphor for saying something about the destructions happening in our own lives, in our societies and to the Earth itself.

And during this time (three weeks for most Jews in Ashkenaz and 9 days for most Sefardi Jews) people have traditionally kept the rules of mourning – men wouldn't shave, people wouldn't wear leather shoes, meat wasn't eaten etc' etc' – until 9th of Av which is a fast day.

I would just like to remind us of two things –

1. In the land of Israel, this time of year is the when all of nature is dying around us. There hasn't been any rain for about 5 months and all of the fields are yellow – turning brown and grey by now. And it's extremely hot during the day. This is the time when everything is still (and usually when wars start breaking out).
2. The Name for the month, Tammuz, comes from the ancient God Tammuz, otherwise known as Dummuzi (and was also known by other names). And each year, at this time in the summer he would die and the women of Zion and Ziddon and many other cities would weep for him, for this beautiful young god of the fields.

So, this has traditionally been a month of sadness, of remembering all that had been lost and broken, all that had been so very lovely – the beauty of green fields, of a strong god, of a glorious temple, of a people that were once together.

I learnt a new concept this week: Spiritual bypassing, and I'm quoting here from Dr. Robert A. Masters: "Spiritual bypassing, a term first coined by psychologist John Welwood in 1984, is the use of spiritual practices and beliefs to avoid dealing with our painful feelings, unresolved wounds, and developmental needs."

This is where we as people and communities try and focus on healing and happy and healthy. On being positive and full gratitude – even in places where the wound is still bleeding. Needless to say this isn't healthy.

But if we look back at Tammuz and the three weeks we can see tradition has given us time and customs to work on our pain and suffering – we have a valuable tool here as individuals as well as a kehilla.

I go back to the prophet Jeremiah and to his words:

כִּי־שָׁמְעָה נְשִׁים דְּבַר־יְהוָה וַתִּקַּח אֲזִנָּהּם דְּבַר־פִּי וְלִמְדָה בְּנֹתֵיכֶם לָהּ וְאִשָּׁה רְעוּתָהּ קִיְבָה:

Hear, O women, the word of the LORD, Let your ears receive the word of His mouth, And teach your daughters wailing, And one another lamentation.

This very ancient practice of professional, or at least experienced, lamenting was very meaningful in communities which took the idea of *really* being together in sadness. You learn how to cry and weep, you learn how to help people bring out all of their sorrow- together. You allow and make room for being heartbroken and hurting – together. We will learn more about this on the evening of Tisha' B'Av, when we will read a portion of the Book of Eichah (Lamentations).

I think this is the leading sentiment of these 3 weeks and especially Tisha' B'Av.

Only thing is that I've noticed that spiritual acts of sadness can also turn into a form of spiritual bypassing – where we go through the motions of mourning in order to avoid true introspection so that we don't have to change. Worse, we sometimes weep (as a nation) in order to gain power over others and not healing for ourselves. And we can hopefully talk more about this question towards the time of Yom Haatzmaut and Yom Hazikaron.

So, where does this leave us, an active Reform community in 2017?

How do we make this time full of meaning? How do we reclaim these weeks into our congregation in a way that offers us space for searching and researching our sorrows and wounds, private and congregational? How do we make this a time when people know they will have a friend to cry with and a group to share with?

Maybe this should be a time for opening our sanctuary for different groups within ourselves to come and share? Maybe we can create practices of listening very carefully to catch a sound of what is wailing around us?

I'm not giving answers just now- only opening this up so we can think about it together. These are very holy and meaningful weeks, and I know this because they have survived in our tradition as a people

since before we were Jews the way we are now. Let's figure out what's our current Temple which is being destroyed – some people look into their own lives and some look onto the Earth herself.

Let's make this a time when we describe very accurately to ourselves, what used to be so lovely in our lives, what is now dead, where it hurts in us. Let's find ways of sharing this and crying with other people. There will be time for healing afterwards.

Rabbi Gila Caine, 2017