

PARASHA MATOT-MASEI

Shedding
Garments
of Exile

*Rabbi Benarroch
SEC Jerusalem*

One of the most challenging Jewish life cycle events to understand are the three weeks that mark the mourning period for the destruction of our two Temples—the time between the 17th day of *Tamuz* and the 9th day of the month *Ab*. As we are now in the midst of this mourning period, I would like to address its significance, especially for our generation that has had the great privilege of returning to the Land of Israel.

It is relatively easy to get into the High Holy Day spirit. We can all relate to the concept of repentance and a special time period given to self-improvement. On Passover we can well relate to the Exodus story and offer thanksgiving for the miracles of that Exodus. Jewish holidays have a way of creating a mood and somehow allowing us to partake of that mood.

But mourning for the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of our people over two thousand years ago, that is an altogether different story. I have the great privilege to drive the streets of Jerusalem every day. As I look out my window I see a city of majestic beauty. Buildings tower over its beautiful meandering streets. Close to one million Jews live in the city. I am free to wear my Kippa with no fear and practice my religion and no one can say a word. The feeling of destruction is about the last thing one feels in present day Jerusalem. So what then are we mourning? The destroyed city has been rebuilt, its sons and daughters have returned to its streets, and the study of Torah echoes through the alleyways of its neighborhoods.

To answer this question I would like to share a chilling story that is told in the Talmud (Gittin 58). The Talmud relates a story about a Jewish woman by the name of *Zafnat* who was

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*Prayer Schedule***SHABBAT****PARASHA MATOT-MASEI**

Friday, July 9th

Minhah & Arbit 7:00 pm

Candle Lighting 7:49 pm

Saturday, July 10th

Shaharit 8:30 am

Tehillim Reading 6:00 pm

Minhah & Arbit 6:45 pm

Motzei Shabbat 8:28 pm

WEEKDAYS

Sunday, July 11th

Shaharit 7:30 am

Monday, July 12th

ROSH HODESH AV

Shaharit TBA

Tuesday to Thursday

Shaharit 6:30 am

**SHABBAT HAZON
PARASHA DEVARIM**

Friday, July 16th

Minhah & Arbit 7:00 pm

Candle Lighting 7:46 pm

TISHA B'AV

Monday, July 19th

Fast Begins at 8:03 pm

Tuesday, July 20th

Fast Ends at 8:48 pm

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taken captive by the Romans just after the destruction of the Temple. The following story is related.

Resh Lakish once related a story about a woman whose name was Zafnat the daughter of Peniel. Her name was Zafnat (which means to stare) because everyone would stare at her beauty. She was the daughter of Peniel who was the High Priest. She was taken captive and a Roman man abused her all night. The next morning he covered her in seven garments and took her to sell in the marketplace. A man who was exceedingly ugly came and asked to see her beauty. "Fool," exclaimed the master, "there is none more beautiful than her, if you want her then take her (without seeing her)." But the man insisted and the master removed six of her garments. But the seventh she herself tore and placed ashes (in mourning) on them. She turned to G-d and said "Master of the universe, if upon us you did not have mercy then at least have mercy on your mighty

and holy name". Talmud Gittin 58a.

The story is tragic yet needs explanation. What is the meaning of the seven garments used to cover her? Why is the man in the marketplace exceedingly ugly? Is there any significance to her father being the High Priest whose name is *Peniel*?

I cannot help but compare this story to the wrestling match of Jacob with a mysterious man in Beresheet. In both stories a struggle takes place throughout the night. When Jacob emerges from his battle with the mysterious man he names the place "*Peniel*" (See Beresheet 32) the same name given to *Zafnat's* father! What can we learn from the two stories?

I suggest that the struggle of Jacob and the mysterious man represents the struggles of the Jewish people throughout their history. In that story Jacob becomes Israel. The story is a reflection of the many battles the Jewish people will encounter throughout their exiles. But in the end the sun will arise on Israel, and he will emerge victori-

ous. The battle throughout the night will be harsh, Jacob will come out limping, but ultimately he will find redemption. Jacob's wrestling match is the story of exile and redemption.

This is also the meaning of the story of *Zafnat*. Her name not only means beauty but also to be hidden. She represents our desire for redemption that always appears to be hidden from us. She too battles all night with an enemy who defiles her. Then he covers her with seven garments. These represent the hardships of the many years of exile. Her true beauty is hidden, it can no longer be seen. The seven garments represent the challenges of exile, how we suffer and how we and others can no longer see the inner beauty of who we are and what our purpose as a nation is. The final blow will be an ugly enemy who will come; he will be the catalyst for the removal of all those garments of exile. We will then be left with our final garment; the redemption will be close at hand. We will feel the ashes on us, but then we will turn to G-d and say 'Enough is enough; redeem us for Your name's sake,' and then

G-d will hear our cries and return us to our land.

Would it be too bold to suggest that the seven garments were all the different calamities that befell our people during our exile? Are those seven garments not the inquisitions and pogroms we endured? Would it be too bold to suggest that the final ugly enemy was the Nazis? Would it be too bold to suggest that they stripped all the garments from us? Would it be too bold to say that after that dark and cruel enemy had its way with us Hashem heard our cries and dried our tears and returned us to the land of Israel? Would it be too bold to suggest that we are *Zafnat*, we have been defiled throughout the nights of our exile, but now we stand at the threshold of our redemption?

Dear friends, while it may be true that much has been rebuilt in our lifetime we must nevertheless realize the significance of the Three Weeks mourning period. I am the first to agree that while driving the streets of Jerusalem it is hard to feel destruction. But what we must

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In Memoriam

It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and to donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend prayer services in honor of loved ones.

Shabbat / 28 Tammuz
Ezra Said ben Simcha

Sunday / 29 Tammuz
Salim ben Ashair Hanoon

Monday / 1 Av
Aharon Shraga ben Avraham
Ezra ben Avraham Hayim*
Yohanan ben Yehezkel

Tuesday / 2 Av
Shlomo Dallal
Shimon Sarraf

Wednesday / 3 Av
Habiba bat Lulu Nawy
David Stoler

Thursday / 4 Av
Yaakov ben Ezra Kemareh

Friday / 5 Av
Abdala Faraj ben Moshe

Shabbat / 6 Av
Itzhak Rahamim ben Abdullah
Moshe

Names with asterisks are missing family members' information. To update, please call the office at 310.474.0559.

Refuah Shlemah

Please include these individuals in your prayers:
Yonatan ben Alizah ▪ Mazal Tov bat Sulha Mitana ▪ Matilda Louisa ▪ Yaheskel ben Regina ▪ Ayala bat Naomi ▪ Khayah Noa bat Sara ▪ Haim ben Mordechai ▪ Pnina bat Esther ▪ Yosi ben Esther ▪ Victor ben Latif ▪ Ramah Regina bat Farha ▪ Aziza bat Sara ▪ Merna bat Marsel ▪ Judith bat Malka ▪ Ofek ben Yochai ▪ Efrayim Zev ben Fayga ▪ Sulha Matana bat Mozelle

Community News

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is sponsored
in memory of their father

Shimon ben Yahouda, z"l

by
The Sarraf Family

Norma & Sam Dabby Talmud Torah

Kahal Joseph's
after school classes for
kids ages 5 to 13 are
registering for 2010-2011

For information call
310.474.0559 or e-mail
molly@kahaljoseph.org

Learn the Haftarah

Wouldn't you like to chant the final portion from the Torah on Shabbat—the portion known as the Haftarah?

Reserve a Haftarah by calling Sarah at 310.474. 0559. The Haftarah portion can be dedicated in honor of a family life event such as a memorial, a bar or bat mitzvah, or a baby-naming.

Then, schedule time with Saeed Jalali & learn your haftarah with authentic Baghdadi ta'amim, our Iraqi melodies for singing from the Torah & Tanakh.

SHABBAT MITZVOT

We now offer for donation the following Mitzvot on Shabbat: **1. *Petichat Hechal*** The opening of the ark where the Torahs are kept; **2. *Carrying of the Sefer Torah and Sefer Haftara***; **3. *Hakamat Sefer*** The lifting and showing of the Torah; **4. *Mashlim**** The seventh aliya to the Torah who recites Kaddish; **5. *Maftir**** The last aliya to the Torah which includes the reading of the Haftara (read by the clergy unless member reading has been preapproved)

Since we count on your donations to the synagogue to keep our membership fees as low as they are, we suggest a minimum donation for all those who are called to the Torah of \$126 or multiples of \$18 or \$26. We appreciate your support. *Paid members may call the office to book the Mashlim or Maftir in advance, in memory of a departed relative. You will receive confirmation before Shabbat if you will receive the aliya or if there is a conflict. The member may also reserve any other aliya in advance by calling the office. Non-members interested in reserving aliyot should contact Sarah in the office for availability at 310.474. 0559, 11 am-4 pm, Mon-Thurs.

To Publish Notices

To publish information regarding life events such as births, bar/bat mitzvahs, graduations, weddings, anniversaries or passings, call the synagogue office at 310.474.0559 by Wed. at noon.

Halakhot the Days Preceding Tisha B'Av

from *The Sephardic Institute*
www.judaic.org

Overview

The fast of the Ninth of Ab, referred to by the prophet Zechariah, was established as a national mourning day commemorating destruction of the Bet Hamiqdash, sacked on that day by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. The Mishnah (Ta'anit 4:6) relates that four other national calamities occurred in various years on this day: the Almighty's decree that the 'Generation of the Wilderness' be denied entry to the Land of Israel because of the transgression associated with the spies; destruction of the Second Temple (by the Romans in 70 C.E.); capture of the great city Bethar (the last stronghold of Bar Kokhba in the revolution he led, 7 miles southwest of Jerusalem, by the Romans in 135 C.E.); and Jerusalem was ploughed like a field (see Jeremiah 26:18). The full degree of mourning is limited to Tisha B'ab day itself.

Secondary mourning rituals beginning prior to the fast day were established in the course of time. These rituals are increased in intensity as the day approaches. The ultimate purpose of the fast days is to foster repentance and increase the national commitment to Torah and misvot. The giving of charity to the needy is essential on these days.

The Three Weeks

Even though the three weeks beginning with the 17th of Tammuz through the 9th of Ab have often been times of adversity for the Jewish People, the sages did not establish formal restrictions until Rosh Hodesh Ab, as they did not

wish to add to the nation's burden. We have been advised to be more cautious than usual with potentially dangerous situations during these days of dejection.

It is a Sephardic custom to refrain from eating new fruit during the three weeks so as to avoid reciting the blessing of *Shehehiyanu*. This berakha is a joyful thanksgiving expression. We also desist from wearing new clothing during the three weeks. However, at a Brit Milah 'shehehiyanu' is recited. And, on Shabbat, it is permitted to partake of new fruit and recite 'shehehiyanu' and wear new clothing. Most Sephardic communities, as is the practice in Israel, following Shulhan Arukh, desist from having weddings and musical functions for nine days only, beginning Rosh Hodesh Ab. Some Sephardic communities, as do virtually all Ashkenazic communities, desist for the entire three weeks.

The Nine Days

Beginning Rosh Hodesh Ab [which falls on Monday, July 12, 2010] we refrain from optional festive occasions and reduce joyful pursuits. These include purchases of luxuries, new clothing and wedding accoutrements. We refrain from home decorating during these days. We refrain from meat, including chicken, and wine during these days.

Out of respect for Rosh Hodesh, the Syrian community begins these latter stringencies from the second of the month. Meat and wine are permitted on Shabbat during the nine days as well as at a seudat misvah, such as brit milah or *siyum masekhta* concluding study of a Talmudic tractate. Habdala wine is permitted. If a wedding is shortly after Tisha B'ab and time is of the essence, necessary shopping is permitted.

One may have meat during these days if required for health purposes such as may be the case with an anemic person, a nursing or pregnant woman, or one who gave birth within thirty days.

The Syrian community's custom has been to eat meat leftovers from Shabbat during the nine days providing that one did not purposely cook extra for this purpose. Most other Sephardic communities are strict on this. Many authorities hold that with the advent of efficient freezers it is now proper to be strict.

More on Tisha B'Av next week.

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understand is that the building of our land is only the beginning. We still have a long way to go. As I write these words, Gilad Shalit remains in a Hamas prison, tens of thousands of missiles are pointed at our tiny country, our Temple is defiled, and far too many Jews are being lost every day. The layers of our exile have been shed and now it is time for the Jewish people to reveal who they really are. It is time for our light to truly shine forth. Let us all pray that this year will mark the end of our mourning and the beginning of our complete redemption.

Shabbat Shalom

Parasha Matot-Masei

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Haftara pages 725-729