



ICJW Bea Zucker Calendar Study Series

“Feminist Inspiration for Living on the Jewish Cycle”

by Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

Fast of the 9th of Av—Broken Temples and Broken Hearts

Context

The 9th of the Hebrew month of Av, Tisha B'Av, is the saddest day of the Jewish year. The destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem marked the end of the priestly service, of Judaism as it had been known and practiced. After the Roman siege and ultimate conquest, Jewish autonomy in the Land of Israel would not return for nearly two millennia. With the destruction of the First Temple, Jewish communities concentrated in Babylonia and other parts of the Middle East, in Egypt, and in Judea. After the destruction of the Second Temple and the subsequent crushing of the Bar Kochba revolt (in 135 CE), some important elements of the Jewish community remained in Palestine, but the consciousness of exile from the Jewish center was unprecedented. The suffering, humiliation and loss of life were vast.

Background

One response to the destruction of the Temple is detailed and ongoing investigations of it. Banished from the Land and Jerusalem, generations of scholars and students have and continue to study and interpret the sacred Temple, its materials, dimensions, functions and functionaries, the daily, weekly, and festival offerings and events, the laws governing the service, and also its demise. They fill volumes of rabbinic materials compiled long after the destruction. Among discussions of the destruction of the second Temple, this passage reveals an important rabbinic attitude -

Why was the second Temple destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, [observance of] *mitzvot*-commandments, and the practice of charity? Because *senseless hatred* prevailed. This teaches you that senseless hatred is considered to be as grave as the three sins of idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed together. (Yoma 9b)

This text assumes the following well-known explanation for the destruction of the Temples -

The First Temple was destroyed because of the idol worship, prohibited sexual relations and bloodshed that took place within, and the Second Temple was destroyed “because they love money and each one hates his/her neighbor.” (Tosefta Menachot 13:22)

Having suffered destruction and loss, the sages do not dwell on upbraiding or even blaming the enemy. In both cases of destructions, they look to the behavior of their fellow Jews and to their relationship with the Divine. After decimating defeat, the sages see little hope of political-military power on the horizon. The failure of the Bar Kokhba uprising in 132 - 135 CE put an end to any imminent hope to affect the enemy. Rather than apathy, bitterness or vengeance, the sages point to causes of destruction *within* and in their relationship with the Divine. Over the behavior of the Jewish People, they have some potential influence. While some might see their attitude as self-blame, the sages are building a solid ethical infrastructure rooted in penetrating self-awareness and critique. They maneuver toward a constructive approach to Jewish life and fate where we are fully

responsible for our values, choices, and behavior regardless of the actions of foes. The implicit goal is to identify and expunge *sinat chinam*-senseless hatred and, by inference, to move forward by strengthening the practice of *ahavat chinam*-unelicited lovingkindness.

One of the ways that the sages conceive the destruction of the Temple is in terms of their relationship with the Divine. Insofar as the Temple was the dwelling of the divine presence on earth among the Jewish People, the ruin of it represents a sundering of that connection. With a focus on divorce—between human partners and as a metaphor for the human-Divine connection—the sages undertake a deep and painful inspection of relationships in society. Probing troubled marriages and their disintegration, the sages find reasons for the destruction of the Temple in the way partners treat and relate to one another.

The root of the term for divorce, *garash*, first appears in the Torah at the conclusion of the story of the Garden of Eden between the Divine and the first humans. The Divine *sends out* Adam and Chava from the Garden of Eden (Bereishit 3:23-4). The biblical foundation for divorce between people is in Devarim. The Torah explicitly speaks of a man *hating* his spouse:

A man takes a spouse and masters/possesses her [by sex]. She does not find favor in his eyes because he finds something *erva*-obnoxious about her, and he writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her away from his house; she leaves his household and becomes the spouse of another man; then this latter man hates her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her away from his house. (Dev. 24:1-3)

This text is the source for men's unilateral power over divorce in Jewish religious law and all of its attendant cruelties. The problem of women denied divorce by incalcitrant male spouses arises because halakha deprives women of the agency to terminate marriage. Orthodox halakhic authorities prevent such women from remarrying and having children until their male spouses grant them a divorce. The Torah authorizes a man to send his spouse away according to his whim, whensoever he finds her distasteful. The woman's views are not mentioned, her will is undisclosed.

With this biblical background in mind, we turn to the longest narrative passage in the talmud, a compilation of stories related to the destruction of the Temple. This compilation appears in tractate *Gittin* - dealing with divorce (55b-58a). Through narrative, the sages subtly probe and implicitly critique intimate relationships and society. They reveal cruelty and corruption in human connections as a root of destruction. The following poignant stories of love and loss conclude the passage.

<p>There was a man who set his eyes on divorcing his spouse, but she had a large ketuba-marriage settlement. What did he do? He invited his friends—ushers from his wedding—feasted them, made them drunk, and laid them all in one bed. He then brought the white of an egg and scattered it among them, brought witnesses and appealed to the <i>Bet din</i>-court. There was a certain elder there from among the students of Shammai the Elder named Baba ben Buta, who said: This is what I have been taught by Shammai the Elder, the white of an egg contracts when brought near fire, but semen becomes faint from fire. They tested it and found that it was so, and they brought the man to the Beth din and flogged him and made him pay her Ketuba. Said Abaye to Rav Yosef: Since they were so virtuous, why were they punished?—He replied: Because they did not</p>	<p>מעשה באדם אחד שנתן עיניו באשתו לגרשה והיתה כתובתה מרובה מה עשה הלך וזימן את שושביניו והאכילן והשקן שיכרן והשכיבן על מיטה אחת והביא לובן ביצה והטיל ביניהן והעמיד להן עדים ובא לבית דין היה שם זקן אחד מתלמידי שמאי הזקן ובבא בן בוטא שמו אמר להן כך מקובלני משמאי הזקן לובן ביצה סולד מן האור ושכבת זרע דוחה מן האור בדקו ומצאו כדבריו והביאוהו לב"ד והלקוהו והגבוהו כתובתה ממנו א"ל אביי לרב יוסף ומאחר דהוון צדיקים כולי האי מאי טעמא איענוש א"ל משום דלא איאבול על ירושלים דכתיב (ישעיהו סו) שמחו את</p>
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mourn for Jerusalem, as it is written; Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her, rejoice for joy with her all you that mourn over her (Isaiah 66:10). Gittin 57a

ירושלם וגילו בה כל אוהביה שישו אתה
משוש כל המתאבלים עליה: גיטין נז

A certain man once set his eyes on the spouse of his master, he being a carpenter's apprentice. Once his master wanted to borrow some money from him. He [the apprentice] said to him [the master carpenter], Send your spouse to me and I will lend her the money. So he [the master] sent his spouse to him [the apprentice], and he stayed three days with her. He [the apprentice] then went to him [the master] before her. Where is my spouse whom I sent to you? he asked. He replied, I sent her away at once, but I heard that the youngsters abused her on the road. What shall I do? he said. If you listen to my advice, he replied [the apprentice], divorce her. But, he said [the master], she has a large marriage settlement [Ketuba]. Said the other [the apprentice]: I will lend you money to give her for her Ketuba. So he [the master] got up and divorced her and the other [the apprentice] went and married her. When the time for payment arrived and he [the master] was not able to pay him, he said: Come and work off your debt with me. So they used to sit and eat and drink while he [the master] waited on them, and tears used to fall from his eyes and drop into their cups. From that hour the judgement of doom was sealed.

Gittin 58a

מעשה באדם אחד שנתן עיניו באשת רבו ושוליא דנגרי הוה פעם אחת הוצרך <רבו> ללות אמר לו שגר אשתך אצלי ואלונה שיגר אשתו אצלו שהה עמה שלשה ימים קדם ובא אצלו אמר לו אשתי ששיגרתני לך היכן היא אמר לו אני פטרתיה לאלתר ושמעתי שהתינוקות נתעללו בה בדרך אמר לו מה אעשה אמר לו אם אתה שומע לעצתי גרשה אמר לו כתובתה מרובה אמר לו אני אלווך ותן לה כתובתה עמד זה וגרשה הלך הוא ונשאה כיון שהגיע זמנו ולא היה לו לפורעו אמר לו בא ועשה עמי בחובך והיו הם יושבים ואוכלים ושותין והוא היה עומד ומשקה עליהן והיו דמעות נושרות מעיניו ונפלות בכוסיהן ועל אותה שעה נתחתם גזר דין גיטין נח:

Both of these stories depict men scheming and abusing their unilateral prerogative to divorce and women's resulting passivity in marriage. In spite of dramatic upheavals in the women's lives, the texts attribute no agency to the women—no response, attitude, personality, motives, desires. In the first story, the text does not even specify the location of the woman spouse while her male spouse arrays limp, unconscious bodies. The text might imply that the man lays her out on the bed among his drunk male friends whom he splatters with egg-white. Does her spouse allude to the alleged deed in some way? Does he maneuver her like a manikin into a suggestive or lewd position? These details are mercifully absent.

In the second story, the apprentice cruelly manipulates and exploits his master and the woman on account of his lust and covetousness. Taking advantage of the master's neediness, the apprentice connives to entrap the woman in his home. He lies to the master, fabricating phony grounds for divorce that enable the apprentice to possess the woman.

The woman executes the directives of the men with august indifference.

- She is sent as a messenger.
- She remains with the apprentice.
- The apprentice lies and tells that she was sexually violated by youths on her way.

- She is divorced on the false basis of having been defiled.
- She is sent out of the house of one man and transferred into the house of another.
- She sits, eats, and drinks with the apprentice, her new spouse.

The text depicts the woman as an automaton, an object, dispassionate about central features of her own personal life, her wedded relationship, her sexuality. Though in the text she does not flinch, is it possible that she has no reaction to lies told about her as the victim of gang rape, to being traded between men? There is no indication in the text of whether she desires the carpenter, is complicit in the adultery, or whether she resists his scheme and attempts to escape his house and the ensuing marriage. Even though the three-day affair transpires in his home, and it would be logical for the text to say that *she* stayed with him, it rather says that *he* stayed with her, perhaps suggesting that he forced her to stay. The brutal story that the carpenter imagines and tells about the woman he plots to marry supports the possibility that he might have coerced her. In the story, she is neutral, void of will. Her apparent passivity contrasts starkly with the emotional force of the tears that her first spouse sheds. These tears signify the destiny of the Jewish People—they seem to cause the divine decree of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple—"From that hour the judgment of doom was sealed." Did the woman cry?!

In the first story, the woman does not even appear in the main orgy scene; she is invisible. Though Baba ben Buta and the *beit din*-court behave justly—revealing the woman's innocence and requiring the man to pay her the amount of her *ketuba*-marriage contract due to her—Jerusalem is nonetheless destroyed. In the second story, the master and the carpenter follow legal divorce proceedings, but Jerusalem's fate is sealed for destruction. Why?

Describing divorce as an outcome of a man finding something obnoxious in his woman spouse and naming her an object of her spouse's hatred, the passage in Devarim lays the groundwork for these talmudic stories. They similarly speak of women as an object, desired or rejected, sent away, passing from one man's hands and into another's. The biblical divorce text describes the fate of an unwanted woman in a detached, legalistic manner, while these stories set women in specific, graphic human contexts. Yet the women characters in the stories are devoid of human qualities—emotion, will, moral agency; they are manipulated by men's actions over which the women seem to exert no influence.

It is important to keep in mind that the story characters are fictional. The way the sages portray women reveals the sages' own attitudes and conceptions. In place of empathy, mutuality, love, caring, and commitment, the stories portray women as objects in a degrading male economy of exchange.

Not only in the human context are tales told of destruction wreaked by adultery and sexual impropriety. Difficult biblical passages explore the infidelity of the Jewish People to the divine partner. Prophets conceive idolatry as adultery and eroticize divine male vengeance against Israel, bride of the Divine. Ezekiel's 16th chapter is a painful example.

<p>Therefore, I will gather all your lovers, to whom you have given your favors, all those whom you have loved, with all those whom you have hated; I will gather them against you from every side, and will expose your nakedness to them, that they shall see all your nakedness. (Ez. 16:37)</p>	<p>לְכֹן הִנְנִי מְקַבֵּץ אֶת-כָּל-מֵאֲהַבֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר עָרַבְתָּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְאֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתָּ עַל כָּל-אֲשֶׁר שָׁנְאוֹת; וְקִבַּצְתִּי אֹתָם עָלֶיךָ מִסְבִּיב וְגִלִיתִי עֲרוֹתֶךָ אֲלֵהֶם וְרָאוּ אֶת-כָּל-עֲרוֹתֶךָ. (יחזקאל טז:לז)</p>
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The prophet envisions the woman's lovers—the very ones who had adulterous sex with her earlier—perpetrating rape and battery. Biblical analyst, Mary Shields demonstrates how the text maneuvers the reader to identify with the divine male perspective. In this model, sexual abuse of the promiscuous woman spouse, Israel, is deserved and just (see full references below). In Ezekiel, the male lovers are God's accomplices to the violations that the text construes as appropriate punishment for the woman's, Israel's marital infidelity.

With the sacred home destroyed, and the bride, Israel sent out, the sages might identify themselves as a despised, divorced spouse to the Divine. Perhaps the sages also resonate with the woman who symbolizes Israel in the prophets, the divorcée in Devarim, and the women in these talmudic stories.

Let us return to an explanation for the destruction of the Temple with which we began, *sinat chinam*-senseless hatred. Struggling to interpret the causes of the ruin of Jerusalem, these ancient texts draw attention to problematic gendered power relations in human marriage and with the Divine. Irrespective of women's particular actions or attitudes, and irrespective of the sages' intentions, these talmudic stories depict a dehumanizing and manipulative attitude toward women that embodies *sinat chinam*-senseless hatred. The marriages are in ruins at their core.

Our exploration of these stories about the destruction of the Temple highlights interlocking brokenness in human marriage and in the Jewish People's relationship with the Divine partner. On Tisha B'Av, we can direct attention toward, mourn, and resolve to heal gender-based *sinat chinam*-senseless hatred in our marriage relationships—human and with the Divine.

"If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to senseless hatred, then we shall rebuild *ourselves*, and the world with us, with *ahavat chinam*-baseless love. (Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot HaKodesh* vol. III, p. 324)

Observances, Practices and Resources

To signify sorrow over the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, Yemenite Jews adopted the stricture of refraining from playing musical instruments with the exception of percussion—often olive tins—until the Temple is restored. View this [Spielberg documentary film](#) with original clips of Yemenite song and dance. For centuries, Yemenite musicians composed, celebrated, and performed while observing the prohibition against instruments. Contemporary Yemenite singer Leah Avraham performs and sets traditional liturgical poetry to music. View these unaccompanied performances [Bat Teiman](#), and of a traditional song, [Alhasami](#).

Throughout the history of mankind, revenge and vengeance have been deeply ingrained in our social fabric. They have been richly portrayed in literature, music, drama, and film. The right to take revenge on the other for an evil deed, an expression of the *lex talionis*, is as old as humankind.

In relation to the sages' apparent vengeance-free approach to the destruction of the Temple, see this fascinating exploration of "[The economy of vengeance](#)" in our societies by *Burkard Sievers and Rose Redding Mersky*.

For critical gender studies perspectives on the metaphoric woman, Israel, in Ezekiel 16, see Mary Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in

Ezekiel 16," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 14 (1998), 5-18; Peggy Day, "The Bitch had it coming to her: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Ezekiel 16," *Biblical Interpretation*, 2000, 8(3), 231-53.

Questions for Discussion

- Traditional liturgy—daily, Shabbat and festivals—recalls and aspires to restore the Jerusalem Temple. The sheer mass of discussion and extent of attention to the defunct Temple indicate its ongoing significance. Studying about the Temple, symbolically re-enacting, recounting, and commemorating its rituals and destruction, and using some of its materials become equivalent to the Temple practices themselves. The centrality of the Temple in study, liturgy, and ritual also perpetuates a deep connection to Jerusalem as the spiritual center of the Jewish People. How do you relate to the edifice of the Temple built from text and prayer?
- How is marriage between humans a model for or derived from human relationship with the Divine? How might we reconceive the Divine lover without the burden of dysfunctional human gendered power dynamics? Read *Shir haShirim*-the Song of Songs as an alternate ancient Jewish model.
- In your opinion, how is earthly Jerusalem in the State of Israel related to the Jerusalem of the Temple periods?
- How ought we to mourn and long for Jerusalem in our time?

Summary of Issues

One formidable metaphor for the relationship of the Jewish People with the Divine is wedding. The building, destruction and exile from Jerusalem express love, progress, deterioration and extreme trauma between the partners to an enduring and difficult marriage. From this perspective, the sages negotiate the causes and meaning of the destruction in the context of their discussion of marriage break-up. This metaphor underlines problematic gender dynamics in complex love triangles of human-Divine and human-human love. By authorizing unilateral male privilege to divorce, Jewish law perpetuates gendered power and abuse. On Tisha b'Av, we commemorate, mourn and revisit persistent forms of *sinat chinam*-senseless hatred that contribute to the ongoing brokenness of the sacred home, the Temple. Rather than blaming external enemies, the sages incline us to take responsibility for destruction by inspecting our lives and relationships, and relating to one another with "baseless love".

Methods & Observations

Addressing aspects of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in a tractate dealing with marriage and divorce, the sages create a framework for bringing the Temple and its rich symbolism into the intimacy of daily life. Improving relationships between men and women, particularly *sinat chinam*-senseless hatred in regard to marriage and divorce is part of the work of commemorating the Temple and sanctification in our time.

Contact

Please address queries and comments to
Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman - bonnadevora@gmail.com