YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

**parashat *devarim* – *chazon***

**Sicha of HarAV Yaakov Medan**

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Dedicated in memory of Miriame bat Yitele
whose yarzeit is Rosh Chodesh Av

Family Rueff

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Jeffrey Paul Friedman

August 15, 1968 – July 29, 2012

לע"נ

יהודה פנחס בן הרב שרגא פייוועל

כ"ב אב תשכ"ח – י' אב תשע"ב

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה

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**Three Prophesied with the Word “Eikha”**

Summarized by Hadar Horowitz

Translated by David Strauss

Almost every *devar Torah* for Shabbat Chazon begins with *Midrash Eikha Rabba*:

Three prophesied with the word "*Eikha*" – Moshe, Yeshayahu, and Yirmeyahu. Moshe said: "How [*eikha*] can I myself alone bear your cumberance" (*Devarim* 1:12); Yeshayahu said: "How [*eikha*] has the faithful city become a harlot" (*Yeshayahu* 1:21); *Yirmeyahu* said: "How [*eikha*]does the city sit solitary" (*Eikha* 1:1).

R. Levi said: This may be likened to a matron who had three friends. One saw her in her happiness, one in her recklessness, and one in her disgrace. Thus, Moshe saw Israel in their glory and happiness and said: "How can I myself alone bear your cumberance." Yeshayahu saw them in their recklessness and said: "How has the faithful city become a harlot." Yirmiyahu saw them in their disgrace and said: "How does the city sit solitary." (*Eikha Rabba* 1:1)

On one day we read three verses of "*eikha*": Moshe saw the people of Israel in their majesty, Yeshayahu saw the people sinning, and Yirmeyahu saw them suffering punishment. Let us try to understand the connection between these verses, which teach us the reason for the destruction of Jerusalem.

In our *parasha*, Moshe notes his call to the people: "How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife?," and his solution: "So I took the heads of your tribes, wise men, and full of knowledge, and made them heads over you, captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, and captains of fifties, and captains of tens, and officers, tribe by tribe" (*Devarim* 1:12-15).

A reference to the sin of the murmurers (the *mit'onenim*)can be identified here. In both places mention is made of the appointment of officers, and there too Moshe claims: "I am not able to bear all this people myself alone" (*Bemidbar* 11:14).

In the sin of the murmurers the people lusted after food, even though in actuality they had more than enough, as it is stated: "Now the omer is the tenth part of an efa" (*Shemot* 16:36).

The reason for this is that each person was concerned only about himself and about how much he would eat.

Initially, everyone took from the manna the precise amount that he needed:

And when they measured it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating. (*Shemot* 16:18)

In the wake of the long and difficult journey through the wilderness, which included transporting families and livestock over a long distance, people took more manna than they actually needed. Everyone thought only of himself and did not consider the rest of the people, and therefore hunger was created that led to the sin of the murmurers.

As a result, God commanded Moshe to appoint seventy elders to help him bear the burden of the people. It would appear that here Moshe carried out Yitro's advice:

Moreover you shall provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating unjust gain; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. (*Shemot* 18:21)

We find a similar phenomenon in the sins of the people at the time of the siege of Jerusalem, about which Yeshayahu complains in the verse: "How has the faithful city become a harlot! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers."

When we examine chapter 22 in the book of *Yechezkel*, it is difficult to understand exactly what sin caused the destruction:

Behold, the princes of Israel, every one according to his might, have been in you to shed blood. In you have they made light of father and mother; in the midst of you have they dealt by oppression with the stranger; in you have they wronged the fatherless and the widow. You have despised My holy things, and have profaned My sabbaths. In you have been talebearers to shed blood; and in you they have eaten upon the mountains; in the midst of you they have committed lewdness. In you have they uncovered their fathers' nakedness; in you have they humbled her that was unclean in her impurity. And each has committed abomination with his neighbor's wife; and each has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law; and each in you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter. In you have they taken gifts to shed blood; you have taken interest and increase, and you have greedily gained of your neighbors by oppression, and have forgotten Me, says the Lord God. (*Yechezkel* 22:6-12)

It seems that all three hundred and sixty five negative commandments are referenced here! Yechezkel prophesied from Babylon, and therefore apparently had only a general idea about what was happening in Jerusalem. Let us examine the words of Mikha, who prophesied from inside the kingdom of Yehuda:

And I said: Hear, I pray you, you heads of Yaakov and rulers of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know justice? Who hate the good and love the evil; who rob their skin from off them and their flesh from off their bones. Who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones; yea, they chop them in pieces, as that which is in the pot, and as flesh within the caldron. (*Mikha* 3:1-3)

Mikha describes a state of hunger during the siege, in which the men in office used their power to eat more than the rest of the people. The rich had food, while the poor did not. This is the same problem that we saw in the wilderness: Every man looking out only for himself and ignoring the needs of others. This type of thing must never happen; it is flagrant injustice.

Yirmeyahu laments about a different situation. In his time, Israel enters into an alliance with Egypt against Babylon, based on the hope that Egypt will save them. This exaggerated trust in Egypt turns it in the eyes of the people into an alternative to God. Matters deteriorate to the point that the people do the deeds of Egypt, re-enslaving the Jewish slaves after their release:

But afterwards they turned and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids. (*Yirmeyahu* 34:11)

In the moment of truth, the trust placed in Egypt turned out to be a lie; nobody came to help Jerusalem:

All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. (*Eikha* 1:2)

In the end, it was the lack of faith in God that led to the destruction:

Behold, I will command, says the Lord, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire; and I will make the cities of Yehuda a desolation, without inhabitant. (*Yirmeyahu* 34:22)

To summarize, as for the reasons that led to the destruction – Moshe and Yeshayahu describe sins between man and his fellow, whereas Yirmeyahu speaks about a problem in the connection between man and God.

There is a gap of a generation and a half between me and those sitting before me. Your generation is ten times greater than mine in terms of helping others and social justice. In the past we engaged primarily in chance acts of kindness (helping an elderly woman pick up something that had fallen from her). Today, in contrast, helping others is far more institutionalized: volunteering to work with handicapped children, distributing food to the needy, and the like. At the same time, regarding issues of modesty and prayer with a *minyan – mitzvot* between man and God – there has been a sharp decline in your generation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

(This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat Devarim* 5778 [2018].)

1. Permit me a small tangent regarding the songs that are sung in the course of prayer this Shabbat. It is fitting to refrain from dancing and vigorous singing on Shabbat Chazon. In the Rema's synagogue, they would wear weekday clothing on that day. In particular, singing the happy song of *Lekha Dodi* to the mournful tune of *Eli Tziyon Ve-Areha* seems inappropriate. In equal measure, singing *Arba'im shana akut be-dor va-omar am to'ei levav hem* to the happy Carlebach melody seems to demonstrate utter disconnection from the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)