

On Wednesday evening and Thursday morning we gathered to commemorate *Tisha B'Av*, the dates that our first and second Temples were destroyed. On Wednesday night, we read the Book of Lamentations (*Eicha*). On Thursday morning, we read *Torah* and *Haftarah* portions about the destruction of Jewish people and the promise from God to take care of us if we are willing to follow the commandments.

Our Sages tell us that the Jews were responsible for the destruction of our Temples. The first one was destroyed because we worshiped idols rather than Adonai. The second one was destroyed because of *Sinat Chinam*, the senseless hatred of each other.

While it would be wonderful if those practices were not a problem for us today, in reality both of them are still being practiced.

Material possessions and celebrities are our new idols. We read People Magazine with more zeal than we do the Torah. We are more drawn to the mall than we are to the synagogue. Many of us feel momentarily fulfilled by our possessions. But this fulfillment does not sustain us long term.

And we certainly still engage in *Sinat Chinan*, senseless hatred and gossiping about people in our lives. Our Sages remind us that as bad as the idol worship that destroyed our first Temple was, that Temple was rebuilt in a mere 70 years. But the Second Temple, the one that was destroyed by senseless hatred and gossip has still not been rebuilt.

We had an important conversation at our Thursday morning *minyan* about whether to rebuild the Temple. During that discussion it was pointed out that we Jews have to build our inner Temple before rebuilding our outer Temple can even be contemplated. We understood that each one of us is responsible for creating a connection to goodness and Godliness in our own lives so that we can act with goodness and Godliness with other people.

We can create that inner Temple by following *Rambam's* three principles of *Ahavat Yisrael*, loving each other.

These three principles are often referred to as 'senseless love.'

- We are obligated to speak well of others, sharing our joy at seeing their inner beauty. The act of speaking positively allies us to each other. It makes us aware that we are all part of one community and family.
- We are obligated to care for each other's material needs. By being aware of how frail and needy our bodies make us, we become more forgiving and tolerant. Whether we have a lot of money or a little, we can always give our time and attention even when we can't give money.
- We are obligated to seek out situations that bring honor to others. We joyfully acknowledge when others do something worthy and holy. We encourage them to become role models by continuing to act in righteous ways. We tell others about the righteousness that we witness.

It seems so easy to speak negatively about others. It feels like power and it bonds us to others who hear us and join with us. But that will certainly create divisions where there need to be connections.

Imagine how much would change if we thought, spoke and heard positive things about the people in our lives. Imagine how much would change if we could talk about doing acts of loving kindness, if we would talk about an inspiring piece we read in a Jewish book, if we would honor a person who is not well know but is kind and gentle.

When we take our focus away from senseless hatred and idol worship and place our focus on what is positive and loving around us, we will not only change how we see other people but we will change how we see ourselves.

Imagine if *Tisha B'Av* was the day we celebrated our strength and power as Jews, not the day that we remember that we were vanquished. We will have that celebration when we make our inner Temples strong enough so that we will be ready for an outer Temple.

Whether the Third Temple is actually built is not the most important matter for us. Becoming ready for that to happen, becoming a righteous and holy person is the most important matter for us. And we can each do that if we follow *Rambam's* principles: speaking well of others, caring for each other's material needs and seeking out situations that bring honor to others. When we put our attention on the positive things we see and feel, we build our inner Temple and make our community a more comforting place to live.

Shabbat Shalom.