

Dear Chavraya,

In the rabbinic imagination, the Land of Israel rests at the center of the world. A source of spiritual sustenance throbbing with life-blood, she is compared to the navel in the body of a human being. An idealized vision that is particularistic in its starting point, it is universal in the scope of its concern. At the center of the Land of Israel is Jerusalem. At the center of Jerusalem is the *Beys Hamikdosh/the Holy Temple*, and in the innermost part of the Holy Temple is the foundation stone of the world. In the innermost part of ourselves as a people and as individuals, we discover the core of our relationship with the world around us, the umbilical cord of connection that joins us to all others. The *Beys Hamikdosh* was believed to be intrinsic to the wellbeing of the world. Its destruction, therefore, represents, God forbid, the destruction of the world.

We mark that destruction and numerous other tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people on *Tisha B'Av*, the ninth day in the Hebrew month of *Av*. A day of mourning and fasting, *Tisha B'Av* marks the destruction of both Temples that stood in Jerusalem, the first destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. and the second by the Romans in 70 C.E. By extension, a day for remembering all brokenness and destruction in the world, *Tish B'Av* is in effect a *yahrzeit* for the very world in which we live. In its haunting melodies and dirges, the day is a chilling reminder of what can happen, and in that it is nothing less than a call to save the world.

Beginning this Saturday night, *motza'ei Shabbos*, and lasting until sundown of Sunday night, *Tisha B'Av* begins this year in the fading light of August 9th, anniversary of the day the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. These days of remembrance for those who were incinerated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki also mark the beginning of human ability to destroy the world. Shattering the Jewish world of that time, as the Holocaust did in our time, the destruction of the Holy Temples in Jerusalem marked the destruction of the world in microcosm. Threatening the entire world now with the ability to obliterate Creation, the possession of nuclear weapons by any nation is the ultimate affront to God.

The rabbis taught that the *Bayit Sheni*, the second Temple, was destroyed due to *sinat chinam*, wanton hatred. The Slonimer Rebbe teaches that this destruction did not come as punishment, but as a natural consequence of people divided from each other. As the gateway to *Tisha B'Av*, this Shabbos of *Parashat D'varim* is called *Shabbat Chazon*, the Shabbos of Vision. The name comes from the first word in the *haftarah* for the day, the prophetic reading from the book of Isaiah that begins with the words *Chazon Y'shayahu/a Vision of Isaiah*. Beginning with a vision of destruction, the reading ends with a vision of renewal. According to tradition, the *Mashiach/Messiah* will be born on *Tisha B'Av*. Against a backdrop of destruction, we look ahead to a world at peace. Woven into the tapestry of mourning is a thread of hope. Remembering the destruction of the *Beys Hamikdosh* in Jerusalem, the hope of *Tisha B'Av* lies in our promise to save the *Beys Hamikdosh* that is the world.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Victor