

This week is Aseres Yemei Teshuvah and ends with Parshas Ha'azinu.

The Rambam in Hilchos Taanis explains why there is a concept of taanis in the first place. He writes that there is a mitzvas assei to cry out to Hashem with every tzoro that comes upon a tzibbur. It is a form of doing teshuvah. When a tzoro comes and we cry out to Hashem, we send a message that these tzoros come about because of our aveiros.

The Rambam is talking about all past, current and future tzoros in history. He is telling us that making any kind of social, economic, or political analysis to explain why the tzoro is happening, is completely wrong. Tzoros come to Klal Yisroel because of aveiros. Period. No exceptions. By explaining away these tzoros by appealing to blind historical forces or simply random events, is a form of cruelty. It will encourage people to continue their bad behavior and this will in turn cause more tzoros to Klal Yisroel – and that is cruel.

The Rambam is talking to us and he is describing our current events. Right now, Israel is experiencing a very intense wave of terror – there are two or more attacks being carried out every single day. If we try to explain this wave of terror in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and failure of negotiations, etc., the Rambam is saying it is all wrong. We need to introspect and look at our aveiros.

This is clearly what it says in Parshas Bechukosai – אף עמי קרי אף – והלכתם עמי קרי אף – אני אלך עמהם בקרי

This is clearly what it says in Parshas Ha'azinu:

{ז} זָכַר יְמוֹת עוֹלָם בֵּינוּ שְׁנוֹת דָּר וְדָר שֶׁאֵל אֲבִיר וְיִגְדָּךְ זָקְנֶיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָךְ: {ח} בְּהִנָּחַל עֲלֵינוּ גּוֹיִם בְּהַפְרִידוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם וַיֵּצֵב גְּבֻלַת עַמִּים לְמַסְפֵּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Rashi says זָכַר יְמוֹת עוֹלָם בֵּינוּ שְׁנוֹת דָּר וְדָר is referring to the historical tragedies that Hashem brought to the ancient world because of their aveiros: Dor Enosh and Dor Hamabul.

וְיִגְדָּךְ שֶׁאֵל אֲבִיר refers to the Nevi'im who warned Klal Yisroel of the impending churbon if they don't change course.

{ח} בְּהִנָּחַל עֲלֵינוּ גּוֹיִם בְּהַפְרִידוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם וַיֵּצֵב גְּבֻלַת עַמִּים לְמַסְפֵּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Again, look at Rashi. He says:

בהנחל עליון גוים. כשהנחיל הקב"ה למכעיסיו את חלק נחלתם, הציפם ושטפם: **בהפרידו בני אדם.** כשהפיץ דור הפלגה היה בידו להעבירם מן העולם, ולא עשה כן, אלא יצב גבולות עמים, קיימם ולא אבדם: **למספר בני ישראל.** בשביל מספר בני ישראל שעתידין לצאת מבני שם, ולמספר שבעים נפש של בני ישראל שירדו למצרים, הציב גבולות עמים. שבעים לשון:

There are seventy nations with seventy languages, corresponding to the seventy members of Yaakov's family who went down to Egypt.

Chazal tell us that there are 70 malochim, and Hashem assigned each nation to an angel. But Klal Yisroel has no angel – so Hashem took Klal Yisroel for Himself as His nation.

The idea behind this is that each non-Jewish nation has its own culture and national character, and they are guided through history by their angel towards their national destiny. There was one time in history where the Greeks ruled the world, and Persia ruled the world, and after all of them, Rome ruled the world. Each one rose to great power and influence on the world stage, but today, they are just countries among other countries. Every nation has its cycle of ascent and decline – following the laws of history. But for Klal Yisroel, there are no angels, and there are no laws. Hashem is directly controlling the events of

Jewish history.

What determines our history is one thing – our relationship with Hashem. This is why we have days of taanis. It is to cry out to Hashem in teshuvah and introspect, until the tzoro passes.

This explains our fasting for tzoros that are currently happening. But why do we fast for past tragedies? The Rambam says those fast days are days of teshuvah – we need to be reminded of the aveiros which brought about those tragedies and how those aveiros are being perpetuated today in our time. If we would do sufficient teshuvah, we would have a Beis Hamikdash today. The reason we still mourn the churbon and the tragedies that surrounded them, is because those aveiros which caused the churbon then are still continuing uncorrected till today.

Why was the murder of Gedaliah ben Achikom so tragic that Klal Yisroel made a separate fast day just for that? How was this a national tragedy on par with the churbon Beis Hamikdash?

The gemara says that the churbon habayis came about because Klal Yisroel committed the three severe aveiros of avodo zoro, gilui arayos and sh'fichus domim. The nevi'im of the time were yelling and screaming about it, telling Klal Yisroel to do teshuvah and avoid churbon. But the Nevi'im were ignored. Not only were they ignored, but they were even persecuted for speaking out and criticizing Jewish society. The Jews were not able to tolerate the criticism.

After the churbon and golus Bavel, there was a small group of Jews who remained in Eretz Yisroel under the leadership of Gedaliah ben Achikom. Hashem wanted to preserve a Yishuv that would do teshuvah and maintain a core community of avodas Hashem in Eretz Yisroel – to make the return from golus much easier. But because Gedaliah was killed, these seeds of rebirth that Hashem was planting were destroyed.

Hashem always prepares the way for Jewish renewal before a massive churbon takes place. Chazal express this idea when they say Moshiach is born on the day of the churbon. The Yishuv in Tzefas was established in time for the Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492 to find a place to rebuild their Yiddishkeit. In the years before and during the Holocaust, Hashem arranged that the centers of Yiddishkeit were transplanted around the world.

So too here, the small Yishuv in Eretz Yisroel after the churbon remained dedicated to avodas Hashem led by the tzaddik hador to prepare for the return of the golus. This would have been a natural way to bring the golus Bavel to a close. Instead, Gedaliah was killed because the people he was leading didn't want to be pressured to live up to the high standards that he was setting up. So Hashem found a different way to bring the Jews back to Eretz Yisroel – through the miracles of Purim.

It has always been true that people resist having to live up to high standards. There is a very unpopular mishnah in Avos which says עשה לך רב. Make sure you set someone up as an authority over you. Everyone needs a role-model who they have to answer to and measure up to.

When the leader of Klal Yisroel is a great tzaddik who is establishing the standards that you have to live up to, it becomes very uncomfortable for certain people. They prefer to pay lip service to a godol hador who they have no personal connection to and who makes no personal demands on them to change their lifestyle. This type of godol is very

popular – because you don't have to answer to him personally.

So the people in this yishuv started all kinds of political manipulations and false accusations, and as a result, Gedaliah was killed. So even after the churban – a tragedy that unfolded exactly how the nevi'im predicted – Klal Yisroel still didn't want to listen. They are continuing this behavior of rejecting the guidance of the tzaddikim who were supposed to lead them after the churban. So Hashem threw up His hands and took a different approach to the golus.

We have to open our eyes.

The shirah of Ha'azinu is filled with vital insights. Hashem created us as a nation, gave us the Torah and brought us to Eretz Yisroel. But He didn't just give us territory. It was a fully developed land with commerce and industries that were fully functional and ready to support our settlement. The houses were built and the flocks were set up – everything was ready!

{י} 'מִצְאָהוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִדְבָּר וּבְתַהוֹ יָלַל יִשְׁלַחן יִסְבְּכְנָהוּ יְבוֹנְנָהוּ יִצְרְנָהוּ כְּאִישׁוֹן עֵינָיו:
{יא} כְּנֹשֶׁר יַעִיר קִנּוּ עַל גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחַף יִפְרֹשׁ כְּנִפְיוֹ יִקְחָהוּ יִשְׁאָהוּ עַל אֶבְרָתוֹ: {יב}
ה' בְּדָד יִנְחָנוּ וְאִין עִמּוֹ אֵל נִכְרִ: {יג} יִרְכְּבֵהוּ עַל בְּמַתֵּי אֶרֶץ וַיֹּאכַל תְּנוּבַת שְׂדֵי
וַיִּנְקֵהוּ דְבַשׁ מִסְּלַע וְשִׁמְן מִחֲלָמִישׁ צוּר: {יד} חֲמַאת בְּקֶר וְחֶלֶב צֹאן עִם חֶלֶב
כְּרִים וְאֵילִים בְּנֵי בָשֵׁן וְעֵתוּדִים עִם חֶלֶב כְּלִיֹּת חֹטָה וְדָם עֲנַב תִּשְׁתָּה חֶמֶר:

But Klal Yisroel had it too good. They didn't want to recognize that it was a gift from Hashem because they didn't want to have the great debt of gratitude. They turned to avodo zoro.

{טו} וַיִּשְׁמַן יִשְׂרוּן וַיִּבְעֹט שְׁמֹנֶת עֲבִית כְּשֵׁית וַיִּטֵּשׂ אֶלּוֹהַ עֲשָׂהוּ וַיִּנְבֵּל צוּר
וַיִּשְׁעָתוּ:

I remember during the Six Day War, there were open miracles that allowed a small number of Jewish soldiers to conquer large swaths of Arab territory in a very short period of time.

Even the non-religious leaders openly admitted that it was supernatural Divine intervention which allowed it all to happen. No-one was able to deny it – at the time it was happening before their very eyes.

But five years later, it was all forgotten. The IDF took all the credit for

the miraculous victory. The punishment is that Hashem brings a non-people to plague us with all kinds of terror and disruption. This is the tzoro that we are suffering from today. It is clearly a fulfillment of the posuk:

{כא} הִם קִנְאוּנֵי בְּלֹא אֵל כְּעֶסוּנֵי בְּהַבְלִיָּהֶם וַאֲנִי אֶקְנִיאֵם בְּלֹא עִם בְּגוּי נִבְל
אֶכְעִיָּסָם:

Hashem plants the seeds of rebirth at the time of churban. It is up to us to take those sparks and fan them into a fire.

80 years ago today, Klal Yisroel experienced one of the biggest tzoros in our history. But in the midst of that disaster, Hashem planted the seeds for unbelievable explosion of Torah learning around the globe. This is how we rebuild after every churban. The foundations of this country were being built on Torah communities of the Talmidei HaGra and Baal Shem Tov. The secular Zionists only came afterward. We were able to rebuild Yiddishkeit after the Holocaust by having a core community exclusively serving Hashem in kedushoh and taharoh here in Eretz Yisroel.

The purpose of a taanis is, for each one in his own way, to try to understand Jewish history and appreciate where we went wrong.

90 years ago, there was a small handful of yeshivos in Europe, totaling not more than a thousand bochurim. Most of Jewish youth were in secular universities studying all kinds of philosophies and cultures of European nations. They thought they were the future of the Jewish people. Hashem taught them a very bitter lesson – all these cultures that the "enlightened" Jews were so enamored with – thinking they represented the height of human civilization – eventually showed their true colors. They were all false gods who turned on them with the most vicious persecution and mass-murder. Jews left Yiddishkeit in droves to join the Russian communist party. Joseph Stalin was probably the biggest butcherer in the history of humanity.

Hashem gives us the ability to rebuild through Torah. We have to learn Jewish history from the proper perspective. The fast days we have in our calendar are specifically designed to teach us the lessons of history that we have to learn, and apply them to today's problems.