

Compromise or Betrayal

Category: Devarim, Ha'azinu

Today's date on the Jewish calendar has an important message for modern times.

Can't We All Just Get Along... Again?

When two sides disagree, it's common to expect some form of compromise. Typically, both sides make concessions, adjust their positions, and eventually find a middle ground. But in Israel, a significant political divide has persisted for over two years, leaving many wondering, "Why can't they just meet halfway and settle this?"

The problem is, each side is absolutely convinced that the other is leading the country to ruin. And when the stakes feel like "to be or not to be," compromise doesn't feel like an option. If you believe the other side is bringing destruction, then "compromise" feels more like betrayal.

Looking back at Jewish history—whether it's the destruction of the First or Second Temples—there's a clear pattern. Internal conflicts among Jews, with each side convinced the other was leading to disaster, often played a key role in these tragedies.

Today is the 3rd of Tishrei, which technically should be a fast day. However, since it's forbidden to fast on Shabbat, the fast was postponed to Sunday.

[Now, you might be wondering, "Wait a minute, isn't Yom Kippur next Shabbat, and don't we fast then? What makes Yom Kippur different?" The answer is that Yom Kippur is the only fast that's commanded by the Torah, which is why it overrides the mitzvah of enjoying Shabbat. All the other fasts (except the 10th of Tevet) are rabbinic, so they don't push aside the Torah command to enjoy Shabbat.]

Tomorrow's fast is called "Tzom Gedaliah." It's the last of the "Four Fasts" that the Jewish people observe to mourn the destruction of the Temple.

The First Temple was built in Jerusalem about 3,000 years ago by King Solomon and stood for 410 years.

When Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, came to power, he conquered Jerusalem and exiled King Jehoiachin along with the royal court's elite. In Jehoiachin's place, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah as king of Judah. But about ten years later, when a regional rebellion against Babylon broke out—and Zedekiah joined in—Nebuchadnezzar sent his army to besiege Jerusalem.

The siege started on the 10th of Tevet and dragged on for a year and a half. Finally, on the 17th of Tammuz, Babylonian forces broke through the walls of the city. When they entered Jerusalem, they found a population devastated by disease and famine. Within three weeks, they captured the entire city and made their way to the Temple. On the 9th of Av, exactly 410 years after King Solomon had built it, they set the Temple on fire.

Because of these tragic events, the prophets established fasts on the 10th of Tevet, the 17th of Tammuz, and the 9th of Av.

The Final Fast

Now let's talk about the Fast of Gedaliah. Who was Gedaliah, and why is this fast named after him? The other fasts are named for the dates when major tragedies occurred, like naming a war after the day it started. But this fast is named after a person—why?

After the destruction of the First Temple, most Jews were exiled to Babylon, especially the nobility and leaders. But a small group of common people—farmers and vineyard workers—were left behind. The Babylonian king appointed Gedaliah ben Achikam, a Jewish governor, to lead them. Gedaliah was loyal to Babylon, trusted not to rebel, unlike King Zedekiah before him. When Jews who had fled to neighboring countries heard about Gedaliah's leadership, many returned to Judea. Under his wise and sensitive guidance, they began to rebuild their lives and the land.

Gedaliah came from a family with close ties to the kings of Judah, but not everyone was happy about his position. In particular, Yishmael ben Netaniah, a descendant of King David, felt that leadership rightfully belonged to him. He

believed only the Davidic line should rule over the Jewish people, and saw Gedaliah as a traitor for working with the Babylonians.

Just before Rosh Hashanah, Gedaliah received reports warning him that Yishmael was jealous of his power, unhappy with his cooperation with Babylon and was coming to kill him. Gedaliah's allies urged him to take action and eliminate Yishmael before things escalated. Even his army commander suggested a preemptive strike. But Gedaliah refused to believe that he would do such a thing.

On Rosh Hashanah, Yishmael and ten armed men arrived, supposedly to join Gedaliah in celebrating the holiday. While they were eating together, Yishmael and his men suddenly rose up and killed Gedaliah, along with the other Jews and the Babylonian soldiers present.

This assassination led to chaos. A massacre followed, and the remaining Jews in the land fled to Egypt. With Gedaliah's death, any hopes of maintaining a Jewish presence in the Land of Israel were shattered. It was the final blow after the destruction of the First Temple, and Jewish autonomy in the land was lost until the return from Babylonian exile.

The Rebbe explains that the Fast of Gedaliah is unique compared to the other three fasts. The other fasts were established because of tragedies caused by non-Jews, which were seen as punishments for the Jewish people's mistakes. In those cases, outsiders brought about the events. But the Fast of Gedaliah is different because it marks a tragedy caused by a Jew. A Jew, from royal lineage no less, murdered the Jewish governor of Babylon on Rosh Hashanah, effectively ending any hope for a continued Jewish presence in the Land of Israel.

Because of this history, the Fast of Gedaliah puts a special spotlight on the importance of loving and respecting our fellow Jews. It was Gedaliah's tragic death—rooted in a total lack of Ahavat Yisrael—that led to this fast day (Toras Menachem 5742 vol. 1 pg. 17).

In Modern Times

In our time, it's important to realize that no one has the full truth all to themselves. The key to our survival is in our ability to listen, to compromise, and to understand the other side.

Let this be a year of peace—between brothers, neighbors, and friends within the Jewish people. As the Alter Rebbe writes in *Iggeret HaKodesh*: “Please, please, do everything you can with all your heart and soul to firmly implant love for your fellow in your heart.” It’s about making a real effort to understand the other person, to feel their struggles and challenges. When we do that, we bring ourselves closer to the complete redemption.

Peace doesn’t start with big, grand gestures—it starts with small steps, with genuine empathy for others. It’s about seeing the humanity in those around us, and being open to different perspectives, even when we think it’s destructive. When we focus on loving and understanding each other, we’re not just fulfilling a core value of the Torah, we’re also creating the unity that brings redemption closer.

As we enter this new year, let’s remember: peace comes from the little things—the acts of kindness, the moments where we choose to listen instead of argue, and the efforts we make to care for those around us. In doing so, we move ourselves, and the world, one step closer to redemption.