Each year on Tisha B'Av, we read Megillat Eicha and recite kinnot. A look at the kinnot reveals that many of them are based on a series of Talmudic aggadot from Tractate Gittin which focus on the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. There is tremendous depth to these aggadot, which require detailed study, but a quick review reveals overarching principles that can be seen throughout.

- The aggadot do not place blame on our enemies, like the Babylonians and Romans, who destroyed the first and second Beit HaMikdash respectively, but teach us to search deeply for the problems within. One example is the Midrash that describes a Bat Kol (Divine “voice”) telling Nevuzaradan, the general who oversaw the destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash, “You burned a burning Temple, you ground ground flour.” In other words, even before the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed by our enemy, it was considered burnt down and lacking spiritual value due to the sins of the Jewish people. Our Sages teach us that the primary blame for the destruction should be placed on ourselves and lead us to reflect on our actions. This same message indicates that our actions will help repair the damage and ensure the ultimate rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash.

- The aggadot tell stories of individuals. For example, the famous story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza describes how one individual was offended when he was embarrassed in front of the nobles of Yerushalayim and sought to seek revenge against the city’s residents, which ultimately led to the city’s destruction. Our Sages are teaching us that the “everyone is guilty” approach can sometimes lead to nobody taking responsibility, so they prefer to place the responsibility on the actions of one individual. The message is that each and every one of us is capable of causing the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, and by the same token, each of us can bring about the process of rebuilding and redemption.

- The tales of destruction we read on Tisha B’Av are parallel to the aggadot recited on Seder Night. The redemption from Egypt is filled with us minimizing, as much as possible, the role of humans or angels in the redemption process, which we attribute fully and wholly to G-d: “I and not an angel, I and not a fiery angel, I am G-d, I the L-rd, it is I and no other.” On Tisha B’Av we find the exact opposite. The blame is placed fully upon ourselves. Our Sages teach us that the redemption from Egypt, entrance into the Land of Israel, and the building of the Beit HaMikdash are all gifts bestowed upon us by G-d and not the results of our own power or strength. It is our own sins and misdeeds which caused us to ruin, and ultimately lose, these precious gifts.

- The tales of destruction are written in Gittin, which focuses on the laws of divorce. Perhaps they were placed there to teach us there is a connection between national destruction and the destruction of a home and family. When a private home is destroyed, it is likened to the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash.
HaMikdash, as our Sages taught: “When a man divorces his first wife, the Altar sheds tears.” In Hebrew, the word bayit, home, is used both for a physical home and family, and also for the Beit HaMikdash, hinting at a connection between personal and national destruction.

Our Sages teach us, “Any generation in which the Temple is not built, it is as if it had been destroyed in their times” (Yerushalmi, Yoma 1a). Meaning each and every generation is responsible to do their utmost to ensure the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash. If a generation does not merit the rebuilding, they cannot blame previous generations, and not even the generation at the time of the actual destruction, but must take the responsibility upon themselves. The destruction of the Beit HaMikdash is based on our actions and deeds, and so too is the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash. It is not just the general actions of the generation, but our individual deeds.

Where must the rebuilding begin? Within our own homes. In the relationships between husband and wife and within the family unit. In our interpersonal relationships. In our constant striving to build a better society with mutual respect, justice and righteousness. A society of chesed, volunteerism and always looking out for one another. As the prophet stated, “Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and they that return to her with righteousness” (Yeshayahu 1:27). May we merit the return of G-d’s presence to Tzion speedily in our days.

Dr. Amnon Eldar is the Director General of AMIT.