I used to think that “Sinat Chinam” was the only reason for the Churban, and only used in the context of Tisha B’Av. Of course, it’s certainly a significant reason, but I sometimes felt it led me to empty cliches on achdut and achdut alone. I also found that people often used the term “Sinat Chinam” when it was convenient for them.

Over the past few years, I discovered that Chazal recorded many other very clear reasons for the Churban.

It’s not exactly politically correct, and perhaps not oft quoted, but this is what’s written in Masechet Shabbat:

לֹא חָרְבָה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אֶלָּא בִּשְׁבִיל שֶׁבִּיטְּלוּ קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע שַׁחֲרִית וְעַרְבִית.

“Yerushalayim was destroyed only because its citizens intentionally omitted recitation of Shema morning and evening.”

לֹא חָרְבָה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אֶלָּא בִּשְׁבִיל שֶׁבִּיזּוּ בָּהּ תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים.

“Yerushalayim was destroyed only because they disparaged the Torah scholars in it.”

לֹא חָרְבָה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אֶלָּא בִּשְׁבִיל שֶׁבִּיטְּלוּ בָּהּ תִּינוֹקוֹת של בֵּית רַבָּן.

“Yerushalayim was destroyed only because schoolchildren there were interrupted from studying Torah.”

לֹא חָרְבָה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אֶלָּא בִּשְׁבִיל שֶׁלֹּא הֹכִיחוּ זֶה את זה.

“Yerushalayim was destroyed only because the people did not rebuke one another.”

There are many other fascinating reasons which describe a society that has lost its faith, its respect for its identity and the ability to care for others physically and spiritually.

I was a little embarrassed that I hadn’t known of these lessons from the Churban. Maybe today we should be addressing these issues too?

When we think of the Churban as the destruction of a building, we mistakenly define the tragedy. It was not just bricks and mortar that were destroyed. It was a different reality.

Nowadays, we are educated to believe what we once knew and felt. It’s difficult to explain in words the lack of something we never experienced. A spiritual center to which all our hearts were connected.

We have to exert ourselves to experience kedusha for even a moment, when once, Yerushalayim was the epicenter of constant holiness for every person. Imagine people in a make-believe world who think marriage means sending a weekly text message and speaking on the phone once a month. They don’t realize there are much deeper and more meaningful levels of communication. They simply don’t know they can strive for so much more. We’re crawling in first gear when we should be flying!

Av is a reminder for us to dream, to strive higher than our routine reality. It’s like the broken glass at a wedding, which symbolizes our incomplete reality, and reminds us there is still work to do.

The Midrash personifies Yerushalayim in a poignant statement the city makes to Bavel after she sees Bavel rejoicing and reveling in her destruction: “If Heaven had not already waged war against me, could you have done so?” After these questions, Yerushalayim tells Bavel, “A dead lion you have killed, ground flour you have ground, a burnt city you have burnt, a destroyed Temple you have destroyed.”

This is an incredible statement.

Bavel has just plucked the ripe fruit, easily conquering. Bavel hasn’t killed, burnt or destroyed.

Yerushalayim was already destroyed, crumbled from within.

The Mikdash was not externally destroyed until we destroyed it internally.

The city was not externally burned until we burned it from within. From then until today, our enemies simply exploit our own vulnerabilities.

If we lack faith or motivation, if we are divided, if we forget our identity and tradition, if we become addicted to extremist struggles instead of dealing with the essence, with what is important – we are the burners and destroyers.

In Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah’s famous “spider web speech,” he outlines the ways that will allow Israel to crumble from within. The tanks and nuclear weapons are not the essence, he says. The essence is Israel’s faith and Jewish identity.

If Nasrallah understood this dynamic, of ground flour and a destroyed Temple, surely we can understand it too?
The Shabbat following Tisha B’Av is called Shabbat Nachamu, named after the first verse in the haftarah: "Be comforted, my people.”

This Shabbat is the first in a series of Sheva deNechemta, the seven Shabbatot of comfort between Tisha B’Av and Rosh Hashanah, when we read seven haftarot of Geula, all written by Yeshayahu.

One of the verses he writes is: "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, All you who love her! Join in her jubilation, All you who mourned over her.”

Chazal comment on this verse: Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit and see her future joy.

Yerushalayim is not just a prize received at the end. This is something much deeper. One who didn’t study for the test and happened to get 100 will not rejoice in the same way as someone who studied, worked hard and invested. A guest at a sumptuous meal will not enjoy it as much as the host who took the trouble to cook, prepare and set the table.

To appreciate what we have, we must acutely feel what we don’t.

To truly merit happiness, we must also mourn.

One who cultivates a spiritual connection with the destroyed Yerushalayim throughout his life will better appreciate its rebuilding.

When we truly understand the reasons for the Churban, we can begin to repair.

The Talmud divulges the first question we will be asked when we enter the World to Come: "Did you look forward to Redemption?” Meaning, did you accept the situation, or did you try to fix it? Did you strive for Geula?

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