



# SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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**דברים/DEVARIM**

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Living for Other Jews

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In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל  
who loved and supported Torah learning.

## Devarim

### 1 Day of Mourning is enough

Many people ask why we don't mark Yom HaShoah, the Holocaust Memorial Day, as is done in many other communities and synagogues.

There are several reasons for this. Firstly, there is a problem with halacha. Yom HaShoah is on the 27<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. The majority of the days in the month of Nissan are considered happy days. There are the eight days of Passover as well as the first 13 days of Nissan that are marked by the historic dedication of the Mishkan. For these reasons, Nissan is a month that Jewish law forbids mourning; we don't recite Tachnun prayers and we don't deliver eulogies at funerals.

Likewise, for those of you who may have noticed, we normally stop seven times as the casket is carried at funerals towards the grave. But in Nissan, we don't do this.

Therefore, there's really no place for marking Yom HaShoah in Nissan, because it is a day that is the "opposite of happiness," as the Rebbe would put it.

So then, you may wonder, why was Yom HaShoah put in Nissan? Couldn't they have put it in a different month?

Here the answer got a little more passionate. When Holocaust survivors got to Israel after the war, they were faced with two "problems."

One, the community in Israel, and everywhere else in the world, didn't believe them. It was simply hard to believe such stories of horror. Who could believe that they literally took babies and physically threw them into fires alive and other such infinitely dreadful things? A lot of people thought that they were mixing fact and fantasy, mixing what actually happened with what they thought happened.

But there was a second problem that was much more serious: a lot of people were angry at them. They complained against them, "Why did you go like sheep to the slaughter? Why didn't you show any resistance? How could you let them kill millions of Jews without fighting back?"

During the famous Eichmann trial, Gideon Hausner, the prosecutor, asked an individual on the witness stand: "How many people were in the concentration camp where you were stationed?" The survivor answered: "Ten thousand." Hausner continued: "How many guards were there?" He answered: "Twenty guards." So Hausner asked him, "And you all weren't able to overpower the guards and kill them? Why didn't you do anything?"

So the witness responded with an answer that is impossible to forget. He said: "Let's say that we succeeded in overpowering them and killing them. What would be the next step? Where would we run? The entire Europe was overrun by the Nazis and many local citizens were catching Jews and turning them over to the Nazis, as actually did happen to many Jews who succeeded in escaping the camps, and were caught again and again in many places! So where were we supposed to run?"

But for somebody who was not there in the inferno, who grew up in Israel at the time the State was established, a time when the entire mentality was that you have to be strong and you have to fight back against the Arabs and teach them a lesson... that generation was not able to understand how Jews did not show any resistance, and they felt embarrassed by the Holocaust survivors.

Now, G-d helped the Israelis, and they found a little light in this darkness—they found a little Jewish pride: the story of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, in which Jewish youths organized a revolt in the ghetto and killed many Nazi soldiers before the Germans crushed them.

So when it came to designating Yom HaShoah, they connected it to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, so as to symbolize Jewish strength during the Holocaust. That is why the full name of Yom HaShoah is really "Yom HaShoah V'Hagevurah," the "Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day." And since the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began on Passover eve, they therefore chose a date that fell in the month of Nissan.

But there's really more to it than that.

A rosh yeshivah, once came from Israel to visit the Rebbe when he was giving out dollars for charity each Sunday. The rosh yeshivah told the Rebbe that he had come to deliver a speech in the U.S. He quoted the Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin page 106, in which the ancient Sage Rabbi Yochanan says, "Woe to the nation that exists when G-d redeems His sons," and which Rashi interprets to mean, "Woe to the nation which in those days contemplates hindering the Jewish Nation."

The rosh yeshivah then said to the Rebbe that we see that all the countries that tried to hinder the Jews from returning to the Holy Land collapsed: the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire, the French under Napoleon, and the Russia of the Czars. Now, the rosh yeshivah was warning that if the Americans would constrain and hinder the Jews from settling in the Holy Land, the same thing would happen to them.

But the Rebbe interrupted him and said that it is not the Jew's mission to wish negative things upon the countries of the world. Just the opposite—a Jew needs to tell them that if they help the Jews, things will be good for them.

So the rosh yeshivah asked the Rebbe, "But doesn't Rabbi Yochanan say those things in the Talmud?" To that, the Rebbe responded, "Leave it for Tisha B'Av—study that part of the Talmud together with all the negative things we study on Tisha B'Av."

What the Rebbe was saying here is that this is the Jewish outlook how to deal with and remember the Tzaros of our people.

Judaism has dedicated one day on which we mourn for all the sorrows of Jewish history, both ancient and recent. This day is Tisha B'Av, the Ninth of Av. On this day, we mourn not just for the Destruction of the Holy Temple but for all our suffering. Anyone who opens the Book of Kinot which we read on Tisha B'Av will find lamentations for all the troubles of Jewish history, whether the Ten Martyrs of the Roman Empire, the Chmielnitzki Massacres of 1648 and 1649, the burnings of the Talmud, and so on.

In reality, G-d Himself established this. On the day that the Spies returned from the Holy Land and told our ancestors in the desert that they would not succeed in conquering the land, the Torah (Bamidbar 14:1) tells us, "the Nation cried that night." On this, the Talmud (Tractate Taanis 29a) comments, "that night was the Ninth of Av, and G-d said to them, You are crying for no reason today, but I will give you good reasons to cry for generations to come."

Indeed, we see that many historical Jewish tragedies occurred on the Ninth of Av: the Destruction of the First Temple, the Second Temple, the fall of Beitar, and even the expulsion of the Jews of Spain in 1492.

But troubles that happened at other times are also mourned on Tisha B'Av—since if we mourn for those troubles or bad things on the days on which they actually happened, we'd need to mourn every day of the year, G-d forbid.

Someone once told me that when he was a kid, he would go to shul with his father on Tisha B'Av, where he would see the old rabbi sitting on the floor and crying profusely. It made a profound impression on him—here sits an old Jew crying about something that happened 2,000 years ago. It was almost incomprehensible that a person could feel such pain that he would be moved to tears about something that happened 2,000 years ago.

When he grew up, he understood that the rabbi was not just crying about the Holy Temple—he was also crying about the Holocaust and his personal problems, about how he was getting older and older, about how the synagogue kept getting emptier and emptier, and about any other problems.

Happy days, on the other hand, are constantly being added. We're always creating new holidays. But days of mourning? Once a year is enough.

That's why if someone is looking for the opportunity to mourn his losses in the stock market, or that he can no longer run in the marathon like he did in the good old days, or that his hair and teeth are falling out, let him dump all these troubles in one bag and come mourn over them on Tisha B'Av.

Let us hope and pray that this year be the last sad Tisha B'Av of Jewish history, and may we merit the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days, amen!

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