

Introduction

As we approach Tisha B'Av we are reminded of the reasons for the destruction of the Temple, the cause of mourning on this day. The Talmud offers two reasons for the destruction of the Second Temple. On the one hand, the Talmud in Yoma famously states “the Second Temple was destroyed because of causeless hatred” (9b). Yet in *Gittin* Rabbi Yochanan gives a different reason: “the humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulus destroyed our Beit HaMikdash, burnt our Temple and exiled us from our land” (56a).

“Humility” in this context reflects Rabbi Zechariah’s unwillingness to make a difficult halachic ruling. We find a similar use of the expression in the Tosefta of Shabbat (17:4) where Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulus is too nervous to follow either the ruling of Beit Hillel or of Beit Shammai. There too, the Rabbis state (this time it is Rabbi Yossi who says it) that because of his humility the Temple was burnt.

It seems that the Jewish people are held accountable on two levels. The sin of the people was a sin of baseless hatred. However the sin of the Rabbinic leadership was humility – causing them to be too nervous to make difficult halachic decisions. And this was the

Introduction

underlying cause of the baseless hatred amongst the people. Without leaders to tell them what was right and what was wrong, each person, or group of people, decided for themselves, and having decided that they were right, knew with certainty that everyone else was wrong.

The Netziv writes in his introduction to Bereishit:

The praise “just” (*yashar*) is said about the justice of God’s judgment in the destruction of the Second BeIt HaMikdash because that generation were perverse and twisted. We have explained that even though they were righteous, pious and toiled in Torah, nevertheless they were not “just” in their dealings with the world. Because of their hatred for each other, anyone who didn’t serve G-d according to their opinion was suspected of being a Sadducee or a heretic. These arguments brought them to all possible evil, even murder, which in turn brought about the destruction of Beis HaMikdash.

The Hashkafa circle was founded with the aim of learning and delving into different Jewish worldviews. By analyzing a range of texts from throughout Jewish history, from various streams of Jewish thinking, we have used intelligent study to create tolerance and understanding. Our goal is to create future leaders who will understand the multi-faceted nature of Judaism, and the beauty of the range of viewpoints therein.

The articles in this issue focus on two major and essential topics. The first articles discuss the creation and redaction of the Talmud and halacha. The second half of the issue deals with the nature of God and different perspectives on the way God interacts with the world.

Moshe Becker has analyzed and summarized the approach of the *Dorot HaRishonim* to the organization and redaction of the Talmud. Rabbi Meir Triebitz shows how the traditional medieval commentators viewed this process, and Rafael Salber explains the approach of the Netziv to the process of halacha.

Rabbi Triebitz looks at Rambam's explanation of the attributes of God, and how he would answer the difficulties posed by early Christian and Muslim philosophers dealing with this issue. David Sedley writes about a little known medieval Jewish philosopher, Rav Moshe Taku, and his seemingly radical theological claims. Finally Rabbi Triebitz shows the true nature of Rambam's *Moreh Nevuchim* and explains what happened to the 'missing' book of Rambam about Moshe Rabbeinu.

We offer our thanks to Professors Marc Shapiro and Edward Breuer for reading and commenting on Rabbi Triebitz's article 'From Moshe to Moshe', and to Rabbi Yisrael Herczeg for his comments on 'the history of the Talmud'. Thanks are also due to Rabbi Natan Slifkin for his comments on my article, 'Rav Moshe Taku – non Rationalist Judaism'.

We also want to express our gratitude to all those who read articles and offered comments, or editorial advice. Especially Jasper Pirasteh, Rachel Greiff, Rachel Kalen, Sarah Rivka Feld and Steven Sedley.

We pray that this volume will make a contribution to fostering understanding of different Jewish worldviews, and that we may continue to do our part in rectifying the sins that led to the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. May we all merit seeing the rebuilding of Jerusalem with the coming of Mashiach.

David Sedley

Menachem Av 5769, Yerushalayim.

Introduction

A correction:

In my article ‘The Perception of Reality’ in the first edition of Reshimu, the following paragraph on p. 109 should have been attributed to Elijah Judah Schochet's *The Hassidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna* (Aaronson Publishers, 1994), pg. 65.

For the Vilna Gaon, the passage “The whole earth is full of his glory” denoted a manifestation of divine transcendence and divine providence, rather than a manifestation of divine immanence. The text was praising God for the extension of His providence throughout the world, not for the presence of His essence in places of impurity. To the Gaon, the passage spoke of the transcendence of God; to R. Schneur Zalman, it spoke of the immanence of God.

I apologize for this oversight.

