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## Av II

### The Seven Stages of Apostasy (ספרא בחקתי)

On the Ninth of Av, we commemorate the destruction of “the House of God” in Zion with fasting and mourning. We gather in our modern “temples” or in the venerable “houses of assembly,” which still bear witness to the medieval Galuth. On that day, the sound of Jeremiah’s lament reaches us from out of the heaps of rubble, burned black by the destroying fires. It comes to us from out of the debris which is all that remains of the City of God: “What has caused it to become deserted, the populous city?”

It might well be appropriate to remember *God’s* answer to this lament, for it was God Who announced at the cradle of Jewish national life that this destruction would one day take place. It might well be appropriate also to take instruction from the commentary made by the Torah-sages concerning this Divine answer. Some of these sages lived only a short time after the period of destruction whose direct consequence they had to bear—and atone for.

ואם לא תשמעו לי, it says in the תוכחה, the Divine Warning which holds up the mirror of its own future before Israel just before its entrance into landed national life.—

ואם לא תשמעו לי ולא תעשו את כל המצוות האלה — ואם בחקתי תמאסו — ואם את משפטי תגעל נפשכם — לבלתי עשות את כל מצותי — להפרכם את בריתי you will not hearken unto me and will not do all of these Commands and if you will scorn My Laws, and if your soul will spurn My Judgments so that all of My Commandments are not carried out, and so that you renounce My Covenant—”

(Levit. 26, 14–15)

This warning is commented upon in the Sifra as follows; “Many do not study the Law, but they fulfill it. Concerning these men, this Scriptural quotation says: ‘You will not hearken and you will not do.’ From this we learn that one who does not *study* the Law will also not continue to *fulfill* it.

“Many neither study the Law nor fulfill it; but they do not scorn those who fulfill it. Referring to these men, these Scriptural verses say: ‘If you will scorn My Laws.’ We learn from this that one who neither

studies the Law nor fulfills it will ultimately also *scorn those who fulfill it*.

“Many do not study the Law and do not fulfill it, and they also scorn others who fulfill it; but they do not hate the sages, who teach it. Concerning them, these verses say: ‘and if you will spurn My Judgments—.’ Here we learn that one who neither studies nor fulfills the Law, and scorns those who fulfill it, will also come to *hate the sages*, who teach it.

“Many neither study the Law nor fulfill it, and hate the sages, who teach it; but they do not *oppose* the observance of the Law by others. Concerning them, these Scriptural verses say: ‘—so that all of My Commandments are not carried out—.’ From this we learn that one who neither studies the Law nor fulfills it, and scorns those who fulfill it, and hates the sages who teach it, will ultimately *oppose* the observance of the Law by others.

“There are many who neither study the Law nor fulfill it, scorn those who fulfill it, hate the sages and oppose the fulfillment of the Law; but they nevertheless acknowledge that the Law was revealed on Sinai. Concerning this category of people, this Scriptural passage says: ‘all of My Commandments.’ This is to teach that one who does not study the Law and does not fulfill it, who scorns those who fulfill it, who hates those who teach it, and who opposes the observance of it by others will ultimately *deny the entire Revelation of the Law at Sinai*.

“A man can have fallen into all of these errors, but so far he might not have denied the existence of God. Concerning this, the Scriptural passage concludes with: ‘so that you renounce My Covenant.’ This teaches that one who has fallen into all of these errors *will ultimately also deny the existence of God entirely!*”

Hence the tradition recorded in the Sifra perceives in the individual verses of this Scriptural warning the outline for the history of the development of apostasy against God and His Law, an apostasy which began innocently but continually grew.

This development passes through the following stages, as explained in the Sifra: the study of the Law is abandoned; the Law is no longer fulfilled; those who live according to the Law are scorned; the sages, who teach the Law, are hated; observance of the Law by others is opposed; the Divine Revelation is denied; the existence of God is denied. Or, in the words of Sifra, **לא למד — לא עשה — מואס באחרים — מונע את האחרים — כופר במצות — כופר בעיקר העושי** — שונא את החכמים — מונע את האחרים — כופר במצות — כופר בעיקר

The consummation of this development of apostasy and its spread

throughout all levels of the Jewish community was forestalled by the merciful God. He accomplished the rescue of our nation by bringing about the downfall of the degenerate state and the destruction of the Sanctuary, which had been desecrated.

לא למד—Apostasy begins with neglecting the *study* of the Law. The seed of corruption which grows until it becomes complete apostasy is sown, not in the area of practical life, but rather in the area of the theory of living. It is not sown during a man's business or professional life, but rather during the period of his education in the schools and in his intellectual activity. The seed of this corruption is sown when mental and spiritual nourishment is withheld from him.

God's Law maintains its spiritual foundation among the people only as long as the younger generations study the Word of the Torah; only as long as their elders continually renew their awareness of the Truths contained in the Torah-teachings and their awareness of the very serious importance of satisfying the requirements of the Torah.

Recklessness and falsehood can never prevail where earnestness and truth continually renew themselves in the hearts and minds of men. Our way of life may temporarily become alienated from the Torah, weak moments may give rise to errors, and evil example and the lure of sin may celebrate their momentary triumphs; but the *המאור* *שבה*, the Divine Light, which implants the Word of the Torah in our hearts *מחזיק למוטב*, always leads us back to the right road. God has established His Word with a power that shatters all self-interest and consumes the cinders of passion.

Alas, there were periods in our history when we became indifferent toward the Divine Law. We imagine that we can content ourselves with putting the Divine Word into practice and can dispense with its study or even "hearkening" to it.

To put it another way, during such periods we believe that we can tend the vine, which is *מעשה*, or deeds, without tending its root, which is *הלמד*, or study. The result is that we lose the vine together with its root;—that is, we will very soon abandon our life of Torah-deeds, just as we abandoned our life of Torah-study.

Although we may not realize it, the abandonment of Torah-study cannot fail to lead to complete apostasy. In this abandonment there is the *כונה למרוד בו*, as the Sifra puts it, the intention—perhaps still dormant—of refusing obedience to the Law. Having ceased to study the Law, we become indifferent to it.

We then consider it unnecessary to continually renew our aware-

ness of the requirements of the Law. We no longer feel the need to continually make ourselves more familiar with the Divine Will, to penetrate ever more deeply into the infinite profoundness of His Word, and to strengthen our earnestness concerning our duties toward the Divine Will! Once we have ceased to study Torah, have we not also broken with the Law?

Life is capable of bringing us trials, and bad example and passion have the power to tempt us. In addition, delusion can come with all of its fraudulent teachings, with its stupidity wrapped in the cloak of wisdom, with its thoughtlessness hidden behind a sincere countenance, with its lies concealed by the phraseology of Truth. These influences are capable of planting *their* axioms, principles, and opinions in our vacant minds and hearts, where only Torah principles and Torah concepts belong. Against such odds, how difficult it is for our people to escape the snare of apostasy!

A few sentences of catechism learned in our youth and a few Scriptural verses taught according to a subjective concept of their meaning do not bring about this apostasy.

בבקר בבקר ביום ובלילה, the circumstances of life, together with human recklessness, exert their deceitful, seductive influence every day. Only a daily association with the Divine Word can prevent the association with falsehood.

Although a person may have no wish to conduct himself according to godless principles, once he enters upon an erring path he will continue to travel it. One who wishes to retain the strength to rescue himself from the beaten paths of error, must not associate with those who try to destroy the victorious power of all that is pure, good, and true by means of skillful, false, superficial reasoning and clever irony.

In order to prevent one's leisure time from being spent with such pernicious company, he must keep his delight in the Divine Word alive, and all his life he must daily strengthen himself anew at the fountain of the Divine Teaching. He must root himself mentally and emotionally in *the Torah teachings* and he must desire to live out his active life only in accordance with the *Divine Word*.

A man must be such that בחורת ה' חפצו ובחורתו יהגה יומם ולילה, only then will he be one who בררך הטאים לא עמד ובמושב לצים לא ישב, and only then can אשרי האיש be applied to him. Only such a man will prove himself as a person who makes authentic progress.

However, if the mind and heart are separated from the Divine

Teaching, then the Godly way of life will fade away together with its benefits.

הא כל שאינו למד אף אינו עושה, if one ceases to study the Law, he will also soon cease to fulfill it.

A Jew seldom remains at this stage, however. If his spiritual consciousness of the Divine Teaching disappears, and then he estranges himself from the Divine Law in his way of life, he will soon also come to scorn those who continue to be loyal to the Divine Law in their lives, מואס באחרים העושים. It is inevitable that he will come to feel antagonistic toward those who are loyal to the law. Precisely because Judaism is a Law which shapes life, opposition to its precept continually manifests itself.

If Judaism were a "religion," a system of belief and opinion, a confession of faith, it would not be necessary to manifest this faith and belief outside of the churches. Thus, there would be no "religious differences" *outside* of the churches.

All that would be necessary is a compromise by which the religion is securely locked *inside* the churches. Once that was done, there would no longer be any "religious differences" at all.

It would then suffice to favor the simple decorum by which the conscience of every person speaks silently with God, or by which he enters an empty church in order to find solitude.

Only Judaism is Law; only Judaism manifests itself in a person's deeds, in the way he lives. A person's way of living cannot be hidden or disguised. He cannot spend his whole life quietly meditating in a place of tranquillity and solitude where only God sees him.

The apostate from the Godly Law encounters the antithesis of his family and social life when he encounters Torah-loyal family and social life. At every step he feels newly impelled to pass judgment on himself and his brother. Every Torah-loyal Jew is a living reproach to the Jew who is estranged from the Law. The estranged Jew *has a need* to inwardly overcome this reproach, and he attempts to overcome it first of all by means of—*scorn!*

He cannot criticize or condemn the conscientiousness which quietly and reproachfully confronts him in the Torah-loyal life. He cannot criticize or condemn the moral strength which is clearly apparent in the self-control displayed by Torah-loyal Jews, and in their eagerness to make sacrifices. He cannot criticize the strength that is required in order to renounce so many desirable things and so many enjoyments

for the sake of a higher concept; and he cannot criticize the strength evident in the complete sincerity which characterizes Torah-loyal Jewish life.

He cannot criticize or condemn all of this. He must therefore try to scorn it in order to justify himself in his own eyes, for he must seek a position by virtue of which, as he imagines, he will be *above* these Torah-loyal people; a position which enables him to look down on them with scorn and contempt because they still confine themselves within the boundaries of the Divine Law.

He must persuade himself that his sophisms, his brand of wisdom, and his apostasy constitute progress, that his dissoluteness constitutes freedom. He must convince himself that the Law was clearly not given to *him*; that it was not given to men of breeding and discernment such as he, nor to men of his social rank, nor to men who possess whatever other superb qualities he ascribes to himself. He must convince himself that the Divine Law would have no significance or value in the Olympian realms where his intellect dwells.

In short, contemptuous toward the Torah-restrictions enacted by God, he must climb to the levels to which the Divine Warning refers: **אם בחקתי תמאסו**.

There, he removes all "drivel" from the Divine Law until it can be easily perceived that much of the Law is "anachronistic;" until it is obvious that this "irrelevant material" is valuable only for those who have not yet mentally escaped from under the Egyptian burden of bricks, or for those who still breathe the oppressive air of Galuth and medieval darkness. He declares that this "irrelevant material" might have been beneficial and necessary in former times, but certainly cannot be of any use to free men.

There, on the sublime heights, the intellectual rabble are separated from the intellectual patricians, and the Law which was dictated by God is left to the intellectually impoverished, the uneducated, and the ignorant.

There, the superior man confers upon himself the diploma of "rationalism," "enlightenment," or whatever other beautiful terms are used to describe it. He stigmatizes those who are loyal to the Law, describing them disparagingly as "living in darkness and superstition," and as irrationally clinging to "rigid religious formalism."

There, the "enlightened" man is at last able to think of loyal devotion to the sublime Law of God as being a low, base trait

which, thank goodness, he has eliminated from his character. He agrees wholeheartedly with the writer of an article in a highly prestigious contemporary "scientific" magazine, who was shameless enough to refer to this loyal devotion as *dog-like obedience*.

The "enlightened" man pities his unfortunate brothers who still languish in their enslavement to the Law, who still walk in the darkness of the valley below. He rejoices over the invigorating height which he has reached from which he looks down with refined, scornful relish upon the miserable, blind, prejudiced ones who are still lost below in the mist of the abyss.

כל שאינו למד ואינו עושה סוף שהוא מואם באחרים העושים, one who does not study the Law and does not fulfill it will ultimately scorn those who do fulfill it.

He bestows pity and heaps contempt upon his unfortunate brother who still gropes in darkness. Even more intensely he hates the men who, in his opinion, are to blame for all of this "misery," whose activity begets that obstinate loyalty to an antiquated Law, that stubbornness which he bemoans; whose teaching still maintains that darkness which envelops his brothers.

He has correctly sensed where the source of this unparalleled, unbending, joyfully self-sacrificing devotion to the Law is to be found. It is a Law which, as he imagines, has laid an oppressive burden of sacrifice upon its adherents and is to blame for the scorn and persecution to which they are subject. He has discerned the fact that this Law would have passed from the scene long ago if it had had its roots only in earthly existence. He recognizes that it would no longer be in existence if it lacked the ability to permeate the entire spiritual life of the nation.

The teaching of the Torah could have been made the duty of the priests only. Its fulfillment could have been assigned to the people, in the manner of other religions. Scriptural precepts could have been fulfilled only in accordance with their superficial meaning, and the Oral Law could have been disregarded. However, if all of this had been done, this people would never have dedicated all its life to this Law, and this Law would never have survived its battle with the ways of the world.

The sages, whom God, in His mercy, gave to this People of His Law, possessed an unparalleled, profound, spiritual understanding of their high, Godly Calling as being לחרות ולהעמיד תלמידים הרבה לעשות סיג לחורה ולהעמיד תלמידים הרבה לעשות.



They understood that their function was to maintain and protect this Law in practice and to render its ideology the common property of an entire people.

Motivated by this understanding, they saturated the people's whole foundation of life with the roots of the Law. They designated every Jew a priest, sentinel, and soldier in the Cause of the Law and thereby caused the tree of Life and Knowledge to grow. Throughout the centuries all of the attempts to destroy this tree have failed. In attempting to destroy its Divinely-protected life and strength, its enemies in every age have succeeded only in becoming conscious of their own powerlessness.

Therefore, those who scorn this Law, who bemoan this people's loyalty to the Law as dismal prejudice, turn their full hatred upon the sages. They are at pains to lower the character of the sages, their activities, their teachings, and their wisdom in the people's estimation, hoping that they might destroy this Law's ability to endure at the root. It is this hatred that is the most splendid proof of the genuine greatness of our sages.

הא כל שאינו למד ואינו עושה ומואס באחרים העושין סוף שהוא שונא את החכמים, one who neither studies nor fulfills the Law and scorns those who fulfill it, will also come to hate the sages who teach it.

However, the apostate does not long remain content with scornful indifference and inactive hatred: כל שאינו למד ואינו עושה ומואס באחרים: העושין ושונא את החכמים סוף שאינו מניח לאחרים לעשות. Moving away from the study and fulfillment of the Law leads to scorn for those who fulfill it and hatred for those who teach it. After that, complete fanaticism soon develops. The apostate then sees loyalty to the Torah as a lamentable, even criminal trend, against which it is meritorious to use coercion, if necessary.

When the apostate, early in his development, begins to part company with those who are loyal to the Torah, he makes frequent use of the words "tolerance" and "freedom of conscience." He maintains that a person is responsible only to God for his relationship toward Him. He demands the right, in the name of tolerance and freedom of conscience, to live according to his convictions, as he calls them.

He is of such a delicately sensitive nature during that early stage, that he decries the "intolerance" and "fanaticism" of those loyal to the Torah even when they merely venture a criticism or a sigh of dissatisfaction over his transgression against a Sacred Law which, in their steadfast convictions, they hold to be Divinely-given.

However, when he arrives at the more advanced stage he forgets

the principles to which he had declared himself loyal at the beginning and in whose name he progressed beyond the first stages of his development.

It is now no longer enough for the apostate to be able to live undisturbed according to his convictions, as he calls them; to him there is no well-being and no peace as long as *his* convictions have not become the *only ones* recognized as right and valid.

He sees in the Law an intellectual slavery from which it is the Godly task of a second Moses to redeem his unfortunate brothers. In Torah-loyalty, he sees superstition, backwardness, and at the same time a calamity which is to blame for all the miseries of the past.

He sees in "liberation" from the yoke of the Law a goal so high and so humanitarian that every means which seems capable of bringing about progress toward this great goal must be employed.

He has so completely lost the ability to understand his Torah-loyal brothers that he can no longer fathom how people could be so devoted and loyal to such a Law, how people could so joyfully wear its chains, and could find so much bliss in making all of the sacrifices that it demands; he is completely unable to grasp the fact that he is dealing with a pure, deep, inner conviction.

He now persuades himself that he must condemn what he previously only pitied, lamented over, and at most felt contempt for. To him, resistance to abandoning the Torah is malice and obstinacy. In his mind, all loyalty to the Law is hypocrisy which must be exposed: he considers it Israel's national misfortune which obstructs all progress.

It is deeply characteristic that, as indicated in this ancient Divine warning, this apostasy, which has now progressed to the stage of waging a fanatic war to obliterate the Law, can consummate itself without the apostate ever admitting his apostasy to himself and others; without his ever denying the Divine Revelation of this Law, against which he and those like him mobilize all of the weapons of coercion and all of the promptings of fanatical delusion. However, from there, as stated in the Sifra, it is but a short step to becoming one *כופר במצות*, who openly denies the Revelation and Giving of the Law at Sinai.

Up to this point the apostate has abandoned first the study of the Torah and then the fulfillment of it. He has scorned his Torah-loyal brothers and has then come to hate the sages, who are the teachers of the Law. Lastly, he has reached the stage of waging fanatical campaigns of persecution against those loyal to the Law.

Nevertheless, he still has *תורה מן השמים מתן תורה*, the Giving of the

Law, the Divine origin of the Law, written on his standards as his principle. Indeed, he has truly fought his anti-Torah campaigns under this banner. He has persuaded himself and others, or believes that he has persuaded himself and others, that God Himself requires the abandonment of His Law; that He was not really as serious as the sages said He was about His Law being binding upon us forever.

He has attempted to persuade himself and others that God requires that we hold fast to the spirit of the Law but does not require that we hold to the letter of it; that God leaves it to the Jews of each era to construe the spirit of the Law as they desire, and to put their subjective concept of the Torah's spirit into "modern" forms invented by them.

The apostate has persuaded himself and others, or believes that he has persuaded himself and others, that fundamentally the teachers of our nation, who were so wise, understood the Law and its requirements, but very little else; that their wisdom was only clever shepherds' wisdom; that, by perpetrating a "pious fraud,"—(could there be any greater blasphemy than the use of such an expression?)—they substituted their own spirit for the Divine Spirit.

He had convinced himself that the teachers handed down their own ideas, declaring them to be Divine traditions, and intended that all of their teachings should do justice not to the Will of God but to the demands of times in which the earnest fulfillment of the Law was insisted upon.

He is convinced that just as the teachers of our nation catered to the demands of *their* era in this way, we must cater to the demands of *our* era, which stipulates that we violate all of the provisions of God's Will in order to be "up-to-date."

He imagined that, under the auspices of these sophisms, the Godly Law could be destroyed in the name of the Godly Law. He asserted that obliterating the work of the sages is the true way to carry it on. He attempted to prove that he was the model of a true disciple of God at the same time that he exerted himself to tear God's eternal Covenant to pieces before the eyes of all the world.

Yet, every Word of the Divine Teaching and Traditions as handed down by the sages clearly and distinctly pronounces the sentence of destruction upon all who attempt to convert such fantasies to reality. Therefore, these advanced thinkers chose to invent their own explanations of the Divine Teaching and the traditions of the sages. They

“distorted the Words of the living God.” They perverted the teachings of the sages. They took individual Torah-statements and parts of Scriptural texts out of context and assigned to these quotations meanings which harmonized with their desires.

Above all, they retained the ancient modes of expression but rejected their true meanings and clothed the new lie in the vestments of the ancient Truth.

They sought to make the people err regarding the meaning of this Teaching and Tradition, and tried to use the Law itself to justify the obliteration of the observance of the Law. Thus, the war of obliteration that these “performers” had declared against the observance of the Law led them back to the study of the Law itself, the study whose abandonment was the first stage in the development of their apostasy.

They took up the old volumes of the Teaching and the Tradition once more, volumes which they had left untouched for so long. They drew upon them in order to flavor their preaching of apostasy with words selected from Torah sources and thereby make it appear that the Teaching of Life teaches what *they* advocate.

They used the Torah volumes as an aid in their attempt to destroy the holy fortress of the Law under the banner of the Law, and in order to urge treachery toward the Law in the name of the Law.

However, falsehood was shattered against the rock fortress of Truth. Delusion vanished before the irresistible power of reality. The “enlightened” are no longer successful in deceiving themselves and others as to which view is correct.

*The logic is inescapable:* If the account of the Divine origin of the Jewish Law is not a fable, then that Law must still be binding today. If God spoke at Sinai, then, relatively, all human thought, opinions, and talk mean nothing; then His irrevocable Will and the eternally binding nature of His Laws state clearly and unequivocally that there is no room for the idea of an implicit, self-exempting authority, granted to every era.

If our fathers were not scoundrels or blockheads,—and if it is true that every Word of Tradition transmitted by them testifies to their uprightness and wisdom—then their Tradition from Sinai is exactly that—the Tradition from Sinai. It is not a system of superstition that was used to oppress the people and to captivate simple minds.

To sum up: if the Torah is **בן השמים**, the Revelation of God, if the mitzvot are **מסיני**, the Law of God, then the Torah and the mitzvot

cannot become obsolete, and they do not belong to the past. The living present and the entire future are theirs. They are victorious for all time and cannot be overcome by the passage of time.

However, if someone wishes to abrogate this Torah, these mitzvot, this Law, and he says that the Law is obsolete and that the nation must be "emancipated" from it, he can no longer carry the standard of the Revelation of the Law. He will end by denying that the Law was revealed by God.

If someone has progressed from neglecting the study and fulfillment of the Law to scorning those who fulfill it and hating those who teach it, and has arrived at the stage of waging a fanatic war of persecution against the observance of the Law, **טוף שהוא כופר במצות שנאמר**, מטיני, he will end by denying the Divine origin of the Sinaitic Law.

However, even this is not the final stage of *Jewish* apostasy. The non-Jew, the Noachide, to whom the Law was not revealed, but who is inwardly aware of the Divine Revelation and is reminded of it in the phenomena of nature and in the events of history, is able to maintain the concept of *God* within him. He is able to recognize the power of His Hand which is evident in nature and in history. To the extent that he understands all of these matters, he is able to hold the Godly voice of conscience as sacred, and to acknowledge that the Divine Will regarding the requirements of the ethical Laws is binding. Although he does not possess the Sinaitic Revelation, he will always be able to avoid descending to the level of denying the existence of God.

By contrast, the Jewish apostate has fallen away from the Sinaitic Law. He has passed through the stages of apostasy until he has reached the stage in which he claims that the Law was not Divinely revealed, and that therefore there is no reason why he should not cast off the heavy burden of Torah observance. With the help of the same sophisms, he will arrive at the final stage of apostasy, which is the *denial of the existence of God*.

Let us assume that God *exists*, and that God is *God*, the independent Creator, Educator and Lawgiver, the independent Ruler and Exerciser of Power, the Supreme Judge in history. We will also assume that the Creation is the product of His Will, and that it is His Will that men shall serve Him by applying their power of free choice in the faithful fulfillment of the Divine demands.

Also, suppose that we hear someone claim that God's Power and Will do not extend beyond certain limits or boundaries. The person

declares the proven fact of the Revelation of His Will an impossibility. He asserts that God did not utter His Will at Sinai because He *cannot* speak to man; because he *cannot* speak to man by any means other than through the medium of His Creation and His deeds; and that the Scriptural statements which say that “God spoke to Moses” and “God spoke to your entire Nation, you heard words, you saw no form—” are therefore folk-legends and fables!

If the assumptions we made were correct, a person who is reckless enough to make his whole life a contradiction of this Law must at least admit to himself the *possibility* that it was revealed by God. “What if it *actually is* God’s Law and God’s Will *after all?*”

A person can rid himself of *this* bothersome uncertainty only if he rids himself of the idea of *God*, or reduces this most important idea to a dead idol that is so unreal, will-less, and powerless, *that it can no longer annoy him.*—הא כל שיש בו כל המדות הללו סוף שהוא כופר בעיקר—, one who has fallen into all of these errors will end by also completely denying the existence of God!

On the 9th of Av, the day of fasting and mourning, the sound of lamentation reaches us from out of the ruins of Jerusalem:

What has caused it to become deserted,  
The populous city!

In this lamentation there is the cry of anguish:

Jerusalem transgressed,                      חטא חטאה ירושלים  
Therefore she was banished!                      על כן לגדה הייתה

(Lamentations I, 8)

This cardinal transgression was not neglect of the Temple and the sacrifices. It was not indifference to “Divine Service and ceremony.” This cardinal transgression was the sin which is the root of all evil, the one which evoked the nameless lamentation. This sin was the neglect of Torah-study. It was the destructive ignorance of God’s Law, the ignorance which causes mind and heart, the places where thought and action originate, to remain untouched by the light and power of the Divine Word, and fall prey to error and delusion, to recklessness and passion. This was the destructive ignorance through which Jewish minds and hearts became preoccupied with every aspect of living, except the fulfillment of God’s Will.

על מה אבדה הארץ?

ויאמר ה' על עזבם את תורתִי!

Why was the Land ruined?

“Because they neglected My Teaching!” says God.

(Jeremiah 9, 11–12)