

The Spanish Inquisition

~ A Day of Foreboding

Tishah B'Av is the most wretched day on our calendar. It is such a miserable day that Yirmiyah HaNavi, who was born on Tishah B'Av, cursed the day of his birth.

From time immemorial, Tishah B'Av has been the most tragic day for Klal Yisrael. The Mishnah records five major tragedies that transpired on Tishah B'Av.¹ The Mishnah begins with the very first Tishah B'Av after Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, when the *meraglim* returned from their mission to Eretz Yisrael. Their frightening report resulted in Klal Yisrael's crying bitterly that night, as the *pasuk* states, וַתִּשָּׂא כָּל הָעֵדָה וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶת קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכוּ הָעָם, בְּלַיְלָה הַהוּא *The entire assembly raised up and issued its voice; the people wept that night (Bamidbar 14:1).*

The Ribbono Shel Olam observed our tears; He saw us crying disappointedly — disregarding His assurances that the desirable land of Eretz Yisrael would truly be theirs to conquer. The Gemara states,² אַתֶּם בָּכִיתֶם בְּכִיָּה שֶׁל חֵן וְאֲנִי קוֹבֵעַ לָכֶם בְּכִיָּה לְדוֹרוֹת, “You cried for naught,” said Hashem; “I will now give you reason to cry on this night throughout the generations.”

The Mishnah goes on to report that both the First and Second *Batei Mikdash* were destroyed on Tishah B'Av. The great city of Beitar was captured on Tishah B'Av, and Turnus Rufus plowed over Yerushalayim on Tishah B'Av as well.

The prophet Yirmiyah had good reason to curse this ominous day.

Throughout our history, Tishah B'Av has been like a lightning rod for Jewish tragedy. The city of Alexandria, which was larger than Beitar, was also destroyed on Tishah B'Av.

The Jewish community of England was expelled on Tishah B'Av in the year 1295. This is alluded to in the *pasuk*, כָּלֶה גֵּרָשׁ וְיִגְרֶשׁ, *He shall drive you out of here* (*Shemos* 11:1), writes the Abarbanel (*Yirmiyah* 2:24), as the numerical value of כָּלֶה, 55, is a reference to the year 1295, which is 5055 in the Jewish calendar.* In addition, the Jews of France were expelled on Tishah B'Av, and World War I began on Tishah B'Av.

I recall that when I was twelve years old, Tishah B'Av fell out on Shabbos. I was walking to shul with my father on the Shabbos before my bar mitzvah. We davened at the Agudah of Avenue L, and as we neared the shul we could see the location where the shul was supposed to be, but it was no longer there. It had burned down on Friday night, the night of Tishah B'Av.

What is most likely the worst tragedy to have occurred on Tishah B'Av since the *Churban Beis HaMikdash* was the tragedy of the *gerushei Sefarad*, the tragedy of the Spanish Inquisition.

🌀 *Spanish Jewry*

When the First Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the Jews were exiled to Bavel. Many of the Jews made their way to Europe, and some arrived in Spain. When Ezra HaSofer eventually returned to build the Second Beis HaMikdash, he called to the Jews to return to Eretz Yisrael. Just as most of the Jews in Bavel remained there and did not answer his appeal, so too did many

* See further in this essay for the formula to convert the Hebrew date to the secular date.

Jews remain in Europe — including in Spain.

After the Second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, more Jews immigrated to Spain. About the year 68 CE, the Spanish Jews comprised two distinct factions. There were Jewish families who had been there since the destruction of *Bayis Rishon*, and there was a second group comprised of the Jews who arrived there after *Churban Bayis Sheini*. For about 1400 years, there was a large flourishing Jewish community in Spain. The major Torah Academies of Bavel, Sura, and Pumbedisa declined in the tenth century, and Spain subsequently became the epicenter of Torah Jewry.

I would like to debunk and clarify a historical myth.

☞ *The Golden Age of Spain That Wasn't*

There is an expression “The Golden Age of Spain.” However, this is somewhat inaccurate. There was no Golden Age for Spanish Jewry. Jewish history in Spain was replete with massacres, pogroms, and persecutions — continuously. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were burned, tortured, or forcibly converted.

Jewish history is relative. There was a small window of about two hundred years during which we had some degree of respite. However, the vast majority of the 1400 years that we were in Spain — from 68 until 1492 — was one long stream of antisemitism and persecution.³

Ironically, the only respite occurred when Spain was overrun by the Mohammedans, but there was no tranquility for Spanish Jewry while Spain was under the dominion of Rome and the Christian world.

The “Golden Age of Spain” appears to be a misnomer. Rav Eliyahu Ki Tov explains that the origin and meaning of the seemingly misplaced title is the result of a classic Jewish phenomenon that is commonly seen in the exile. As Klal Yisrael journeys through *galus*, upon occasion we find ourselves looking back longingly at a time that we erroneously recollect as having been a wonderful experience for us. But this is merely a product of our collective imagination.

We saw this when the Bnei Yisrael were in the *Midbar* and they recalled the “good times” they had in Mitzrayim. “*Zacharnu es hadagah*, We remember the tasty fish” and the other delicacies of which we were able to partake while living in Mitzrayim. The people were remembering events that had never transpired.

Mitzrayim was a holocaust. We were enslaved with intensely challenging and physically crushing labor. Our children were disposed of by the Egyptians, unceremoniously tossed into the Nile River. When brick quotas were unmet, Jewish children were used in lieu of the missing bricks. A full eighty percent of our people perished in Mitzrayim. We suffered terribly, yet our memory narrowed in on one fact — we had fish — and suddenly our time in Mitzrayim seems to have been pleasant instead of what it really was.

This is part of our Jewish nature: to focus on one small benefit and have fond memories of that specific point in time, of that particular event. So, too, writes Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov, the Golden Age of Spain is somewhat of a misconception.

❧ *The Abarbanel and the Spanish Inquisition*

We know a great deal about the Spanish Inquisition. Much of what we know and understand about that black time in history is gleaned from secular sources. In contrast, the following is what is considered the most authoritative and comprehensive firsthand account from perhaps the greatest Jewish luminary of the time: Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel, whom the Beis Yosef refers to as *hanesher hagadol*, the great eagle.⁴

Rav Don Yitzchak Abarbanel lived from 1438 to 1508. He was a prolific writer, authoring *Rosh Emunah*, a commentary on the Rambam’s *Moreh Nevuchim*; a Haggadah called *Zevach Pesach*; and a trilogy on the coming of Mashiach under the heading *Migdol Yeshuos: Yeshuos Meshicho, Mayenei HaYeshuah*, and *Mashmi’ei Yeshuah*; and, of course, his magnum opus: his *pei-rush* on Tanach.

The Abarbanel records much astonishing historical information in his *hakdamah*, introduction, to *Sefer Yehoshua*, in his

peirush to *Hoshea*, and, most extensively, in his introduction to *Sefer Melachim*.

The Abarbanel began his career in Portugal, where he was an adviser to King Alfonso, whom he described as a “righteous ruler.” When Alfonso died in 1481, he was succeeded by his son, João II. João executed most of his father’s advisers, whom he falsely accused of treason.

The Abarbanel was among those summoned by João — allegedly to provide advice and guidance. However, the Abarbanel was warned as to João’s true intentions and told that his life was in danger. He immediately fled, with his pursuers at his back. He crossed the border into Spain literally moments ahead of his pursuers.

He arrived in Spain, penniless and in complete anonymity — something that can be at times valuable for a rabbi. Residing in Toledo, his newfound respite allowed him to work on his commentary on *Sefer Yehoshua*, *Shoftim*, and *Shmuel*.

Not long thereafter, he was summoned to serve as the finance minister to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. In this capacity, the Abarbanel assisted the king and queen in raising Spain to the status of a financial superpower. However, peace and tranquility would not last long for the Abarbanel.

In the year 711 CE, the Arabs had crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and conquered large parts of the Iberian Peninsula. Ferdinand and Isabella embarked on their ambition of Reconquista, to reconquer the region and wrest it from Arab control. In 1487, Malaga fell to the Christian monarchs — with only a single Arab stronghold remaining to complete the Spanish goal of Reconquista.

And then the ominous year 1492 arrived.

On January 2, 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella won a great victory: They attacked and conquered Granada. This was one of the greatest victories in world history. Granada was annexed to the kingdom of Spain.

When arrogant King Ferdinand returned from battle, he sought to find a way in which to show gratitude to the “god” of

the religion that was newly embraced in Spain.

In the words of the Abarbanel: **וַיֹּאמֶר עָשׂוּ בְּלִבּוֹ בְּמַה אֶתְרַצֶּה**, **לֹא־לִהּ**, and he said to himself, “There is no better way to repay my god than to gather all these miserable Jews who walk in darkness together and force them to embrace the ‘true religion.’ And if they fail to do so, I will banish them from the Iberian Peninsula.”

The Abarbanel adds: **וַיֵּצֵא דְבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ** — like the **דָּת** of **פָּרַס** **וּמְרִי**.

Many Acharonim find *remazim* in *Tanach* for this year of tragedy, 1492. The Abarbanel writes (*Hoshea* 5:7) that it was the year in which this *pasuk* in *Yirmiyah* was fulfilled: **מִזְרַה יִשְׂרָאֵל יִקְבְּצֵנּוּ**, **וְשָׁמְרוּ כְּרֻעָה עֲדָרוֹ**, *The One Who scattered Israel, He shall gather him in and guard him as a shepherd [guards] his flock* (*Yirmiyah* 31:9). The word **מִזְרַה** is a *remez* to 1492.

🌀 *Converting From Jewish to Secular Dates*

There is a formula that can be employed to convert the Jewish calendar year to the secular calendar year. We drop the millennial number from the Hebrew date, and then add the number 1240. This will provide the current secular year. As an example, we are currently in the Jewish year 5781. Dropping the five, the millennial number, leaves 781. Adding 780 to 1240 gives 2021, which is the current year in the secular calendar.

מִזְרַה, which is a *remez* to the year 1492, has a *gematria* of 252. We then add the number to 1240 to arrive at 1492. Thus, the *pasuk* in *Yirmiyah* hints at the year 1492.

The *sefer Tzemach Tzeddek* was authored by Rav Dovid Ganz, a *talmid* of the Rema. As a young man, he traveled from Germany to Cracow because he yearned to learn Torah from the Rema. Rav Dovid Ganz was an accomplished astronomer who corresponded with the renowned astronomers of his time, Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler. He had been encouraged by the Rema to write a book on history.

The *Tzemach Tzeddek* identified a *remez* to the year 1492 in the *pasuk*: **רָנִי עֲקָרָה לֹא יִלְדָּה פֶּצְחִי רִנָּה וְצִהְלִי לֹא חָלָה בִּי רַבִּים בְּנֵי שׁוּמְמָה**

מִבְּנֵי בְּעוֹלָה אָמַר ה', *Sing out, O barren one who has not given birth; break into glad song and be jubilant, you who have not been in birth travail. For the children of the desolate [Yerushalayim] will outnumber the children of the inhabited one, said Hashem (Yeshayah 54:1).* The word רְבִים has a numerical value of 252; once again, a reference to the year 1492 and its desolation.

One of the *gedolei Yisrael* who was among the *gerushei Sefarad* was Rav Yosef Yaavetz. In his *sefer Ohr HaChaim*, he offered reasons that he believed explained why Klal Yisrael was subjected to such nefarious decrees. The Bnei Yissaschar, Rav Tzvi Elimelech M'Dinov, in his commentary to Rav Yaavetz's *sefer*, notes another *remez* to the year 1492. The *pasuk* states, בָּרֶן יִחַד, בּוֹכְבֵי בֶקֶר, *When the morning stars sang in unison (Iyov 38:7).* בָּרֶן has a *gematria* of 252; again a reference to the year 1492. Additionally, he points out that the word בָּרֶן is an acronym for בְּעֵינֵינוּ נֶא רְאֵה, a prayer in the *Shemoneh Esrei* asking Hashem to please take note of our suffering, of our challenging plight.

The Abarbanel documents that King Ferdinand issued a proclamation that any Jews who would not accept Christianity as their faith within a three-month period would be banished from Spain. The three-month window concluded in the ominous month of Av. This, writes the Abarbanel, is the meaning of the *pasuk*: בָּה' בְּגֵדוּ כִּי בָנִים וְרִים יִלְדוּ עֲתָה יֹאכְלֻם חֵדֶשׁ אֶת הַלְקִיָּהֶם, *They betrayed Hashem, for they begot alien children; now a month will devour them with their portions (Hoshea 5:7).*

The month that was predestined for tragedy, the month that consumed them once again with the destruction of the Second Beis HaMikdash and only left a small remnant — this month will consume even that small remnant of the Jewish people, that tiny fraction that still exists.

Frighteningly, not only did King Ferdinand set the date for the month of Av, but the dagger in the heart was the fact that the final date of the ultimatum — conversion or expulsion — was Thursday, August 2, 1492: Tishah B'Av.

King Ferdinand did not intentionally pick Tishah B'Av. וְהוּא, לֹא יָדַע מִזֶּה הַזְּמַן דְּבָר, and he had no inkling as to the significance

of the date which he had chosen, writes the Abarbanel. He continues, בָּאֵלוּ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם הִדְרִיכוּהוּ לְהַגְבִּילָת הַזְּמַן הַזֶּה, it was as if he had been Heavenly directed to choose that specific date.

Thus, the law was set in place: Any Jew in *Sefarad* (Spain), Sicily, Majorca, and Sardinia was forced to decide between converting to Christianity and being evicted from his home and country.

The Abarbanel describes sitting in the palace when this decree was issued. Unable to contain himself, he risked life and limb by shouting, “Save these people! What do you want from them!? Why are you doing this!? If it is money you seek, we are ready to pay a hefty fee for each Jew. Money is not an issue.” He pleaded with the officers and with the officials who were charged with enforcing this awful edict.

On the day before this *gezeirah* was signed into law, the Abarbanel pleaded with King Ferdinand himself. The king was moved by his impassioned pleas and was ready to reconsider. However, the evil inquisitor Thomas de Torquemada rushed into the room, carrying a cross and ranting and raving. His arrival shook Ferdinand and Isabella to the core. Terrified, they ordered the Abarbanel out of the room, and they signed the decree. All Jews were required to convert or to leave by Tishah B’Av.

The Abarbanel adds that as evil as King Ferdinand may have been, it was Queen Isabella’s incitement that really drove the evil ruling. וְהַמְלִיכָה עוֹמְדָת עַל יְמִינוֹ לְשַׁטֵּנוֹ, and the queen stood to his right, to provoke and incite.

Interestingly, Torquemada was Queen Isabella’s personal confessor.* In 1483 he was appointed to the role of Grand Inquisitor. Within a few years of his assumption of this post, the Spanish Inquisition took over 30,000 lives. The cries of the victims of the torture chambers reverberated throughout Spain. The smoke from the pyres of the auto-da-fé hovered like a dark cloud over the Iberian Peninsula.

The Abarbanel writes that since being exiled from

* *Early Acharonim*, page 37, by R’ Zechariah Fendel.

Yerushalayim, Klal Yisrael had not experienced a tragedy as severe as what happened in Spain. In that three-month period, primarily towards its end — during the time between Shivah Asar B'Tammuz and Tishah B'Av — three hundred thousand Jews were forced to leave Spain. This figure does not include the hundreds of thousands who accepted the alternative and converted to Christianity. (In addition, another two hundred thousand Jews had converted to Christianity in 1391, 101 years previously.)

The Abarbanel was given an exemption to the evil decree. He alone was given permission to remain in his home, unharmed, without having to renounce his faith. He could continue in his capacity as the finance minister of Spain. However, he chose to leave with his brothers and sisters, and he joined them as they were exiled.

He describes that as they left their homes, the Jews were comforted by one thing, and one thing only: וַיֵּצֵא מֶלֶכָם לִפְנֵיהֶם יְהוָה: בְּרֹאשָׁם, *Their king will pass in front of them, with Hashem at their head.*⁵ They felt the *Shechinah*, the Presence of the Ribbono Shel Olam, going into exile with them. They were not alone.

When they embarked on their journey, the Jews had no idea where they would go. Some went to Portugal, others to Navarre. Suffering, broken, hungry, and tired, many opted to travel by sea. The Abarbanel testifies that many of their boats capsized or sank. He himself boarded a ship bound for Naples.

During the course of his travels, he lost the only manuscript of his *peirush* on *Sefer Devarim*. When he arrived in Corfu, he met someone who somehow had made a copy of this manuscript. The Abarbanel utilized this copy when he published his *sefer* on *Devarim*.

In the year 1493, the Abarbanel and his fellow refugees were strangers in a foreign land, as he writes, גָּרִים הָייֵנוּ. The word גָּרִים has a gematria of 253, alluding to the year 1493. It was during this time, while living in Naples, that the Abarbanel completed his commentary on *Sefer Melachim*.

Rav Yechiel Halpern (1660-1742) wrote a very important historical treatise entitled *Seder HaDoros*. The high regard in which the *sefer* is held is apparent from the fact that the Chida not only studied it, but he wrote footnotes to the text. Rav Halpern was a descendant of the Maharshal, and he writes that the entirety of the *Tochachah* was manifest during the time the Jews were expelled from Spain. The *gerushei Sefarad* suffered tremendously, and all of the curses contained in the *Tochachah* were fulfilled.

He records an incident that is truly heart-wrenching.

A refugee from Spain, a Jew expelled from his home, fled by sea. He was accompanied by his elderly father and his young son. His father was weak and hungry, and he was slowly dying of starvation. When the boat docked, the man set out to obtain food for his father. Not having any money to purchase food, he begged a baker for a loaf of bread. The baker refused, but eventually agreed to give him a loaf of bread in exchange for his son. The man was in a terrible quandary; he opted to leave his son at the bakery and run back to his dying father with the loaf of bread.

Sadly, when he returned to his father, he found that his soul had already returned to his Creator. The refugee raced back to the bakery. The evil baker refused to accept the returned loaf, and he would not allow the child to leave with his father.

This is truly one of the most terrible episodes I have ever heard.

The Abarbanel writes that Klal Yisrael had not experienced a tragedy of the magnitude of the Spanish Inquisition since the time of the *Churban Beis HaMikdash*, when we were exiled from Yerushalayim. These words of the Abarbanel reverberate in my mind, prompting one simple question.

~ Tishah B'Av: *A Time to Mourn All Our Tragedies*

It is Tishah B'Av. We are not eating, we are not drinking. We are sitting on the ground. We are not wearing our usual footwear. We gather together in shul. We lament and cry about the *Churban HaBayis*, the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. As we recite the *Kinnos*, we cry for other tragedies that have befallen our people throughout our history. The *Kinnos* are not limited to any specific event, and we shed many tears for our national suffering throughout the long and bitter years of *galus*.

In the twenty-first *kinnah*, *Arzei HaLevanon*, we cry for the *Asarah Harugei Malchus*, the Ten Martyrs, although none of them was killed on Tishah B'Av.

In the twenty-fifth and thirty-third *kinnos* we lament and bemoan the *gezeiros* תתני, the horrible abuse we experienced at the hands of the Crusades in the year 1096. This also did not transpire on Tishah B'Av, yet it is mourned in our *Kinnos*.

In *Kinnah* 41, *Sha'ali Serufah Va'eish*, we cry for the public disgrace of our *sifrei kodesh*, the burning of volumes of the Talmud in the streets of Paris in 1241.

More recently, we have begun to incorporate *kinnos* that were authored specifically to lament the horrors of the Holocaust, a tragedy that affected many of us personally. These have been included in our davening on Tishah B'Av — despite their not necessarily having occurred on that date.

We include these in the Tishah B'Av liturgy because we recognize that all Jewish misfortune and tragedy can be traced back to the *Churban Beis HaMikdash*.

~ *Where Is the Kinnah for Gerushei Sefarad and the Spanish Inquisition?*

As we study the Tishah B'Av *kinnos*, we are struck by an oddity. There is an event that is glaringly and conspicuously absent. Where is the *kinnah* lamenting the expulsion of the Jews from Spain? Why is there no reference at all to what the Abarbanel

dubbed the worst tragedy to happen since we were expelled from Yerushalayim?

The entirety of *Kinnos* is recited, and the day of Tishah B'Av goes by, and yet there is no mention of the Spanish Inquisition. This appears to be an egregious omission that requires explanation. After all, the Crusades, the Ten Martyrs, and the Holocaust are all referenced, despite their having occurred during other dates on the calendar. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain was orchestrated by the Ribbono Shel Olam to occur on the very day of Tishah B'Av, a fact that is certainly not mere coincidence. Yet, not a word about it in all of the *Kinnos*.

There must be some very fundamental reason why we don't mourn this terrible tragedy on Tishah B'Av, on the anniversary of its having begun.*

🌀 *Musical Accompaniment While Being Exiled?*

I would like to share a historical fact.

As the three hundred thousand Jews were leaving Spain on Tishah B'Av 1492, there was a *psak* issued by the *gedolei Yisrael*, among them the Abarbanel. The ruling issued — a *hora'as sha'ah* for that specific time and place — was that they should be accompanied on their journey by orchestral music. They left Spain amidst music and song. On Tishah B'Av, the musicians played — something we normally regard as forbidden.

There were a few reasons for this interesting ruling.

The Rabbanim sought to boost the spirits of the exiled multitudes who were forced to abandon their homes. They wanted to encourage them, to infuse them with hope and *bitachon* that Hashem was with them.

Furthermore, they were employing music as a way of expressing gratitude to Hashem that they had withstood the *nisayon* and did not convert to Christianity. They were *zocheh* to be

* Although a *kinnah* composed to lament the tragedy of the Spanish Inquisition is preserved in the *sefer Shevet Yehudah* of Rav Shlomo ibn Virga, it is not included in our liturgy of Tishah B'Av.

mekadesh Sheim Shamayim, to sanctify God's Name, and that was a cause for celebration.

Rav Eliyahu Ki Tov tells us another reason for the music that filled the air as the Jews were expelled from Spain. There is a fundamental lesson being taught by this seemingly incongruous act. The Rabbanim wanted Klal Yisrael to learn that we never cry when we leave *galus*. We shed tears only when we leave Yerushalayim.

Therefore, they were directed to leave Spain, not with tears, but with music and song.

It was a tragedy, a devastating event. Over three hundred thousand Jews were left homeless, evicted from a country where they had flourished for centuries.

But they had never truly belonged in Spain. They were not really leaving their homes. They were leaving a place of exile, a stopping place along the long road of *galus*. A Jew does not cry when he leaves a place of exile. Because we don't belong there.

Rav Yechiel Halperin records the following startling comment in his entry for the year 1620. In writing about the suffering at the hands of the Crusades, the author of the *Sma* (*Sefer Me'iros Einayim*) was asked why the community of Worms (Vermaiza) suffered far more persecution, pogroms, and *gezeiros ra'os*, evil decrees and edicts, during the times of the Crusades than any other *kehillah*.

The *Sma* writes that the *kehillah* of Vermaiza was founded by Jewish exiles who made their way to Germany following the destruction of the First Beis HaMikdash. After seventy years of exile, many Jews returned from Babylon to Eretz Yisrael, but none returned from Worms.

The community in Yerushalayim wrote to the people of Worms, urging them to join them in their new homes, in their settlement in Yerushalayim. The complacent Jews of Worms dismissed the invitation. They responded, "You stay where you are, in the great Yerushalayim, and we will stay where we are, in the little Yerushalayim."

They were too comfortable in *galus*. That is why they suffered

more devastation than the rest of European Jewry.

Rav Avraham Saba, one of the great *kadmonim*, was one of the leaders among the *gerushei Sefarad* and author of the classic work on *Chumash, Tzror HaMor*. He was similarly asked why the Jews of Spain suffered so much. What was the reason they suffered such a terrible fate? The Tzror Hamor⁶ answered, “It was their arrogance; they were under the illusion that they were in their own land, and they constructed homes that were grand and ostentatious — like palaces.”

🌀 *The Absent Kinnah Explained*

לְבִי אוֹמֵר לִי — I am compelled to believe that the reason there is no *kinnah* for the Spanish expulsion is for the very same reason that they played music as they left Spain. As painful as it may be, we do not cry when we leave *galus*. As hard as it is, we cry only when we leave Yerushalayim.

This is the lesson of the downfall of Spanish Jewry. As successful and as affluent as a person may be, it is crucial never to get too comfortable. We don’t belong here. And we are not going to be here forever.

As grandiose as the Golden Age of Spain was, never have Jews in the history of our people been more comfortable in *galus* than the Jew in America. Look just how comfortable we are in this *goldene medinah*, just look at the contemporary scene of American Jewry. Seven out of every ten Jewish weddings are intermarriages, *Rachmanah litzlan*.

Even in our somewhat insulated society, we build homes and we drive cars and we conduct ourselves as if we are going to be staying in this country forever. And I hate to break it to you. That is not reality. America is merely a stop along the long road of our bitter exile. In fact, America is the last stop.

🌀 *The Last Stop*

Rav Chaim Volozhiner was the primary disciple of the Vilna Gaon, and he is considered the father of the concept of a *yeshivah* as we know it today.

One morning, in Rav Chaim's yeshivah, the *bachurim* were surprised by the onset of terrible and painful crying in the middle of the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Shacharis. They looked for the source of the loud wailing and were astonished to see Rav Chaim Volozhiner sobbing uncontrollably. The students began to tremble, tears welling up in their eyes at the sight of their Rosh HaYeshivah crying so bitterly.

When davening was over, Rav Chaim left the *beis midrash* and entered his private study. The *talmidim* of the yeshivah could not understand what could possibly have moved their Rosh Yeshivah to tears in the middle of davening. They asked Reb Dovid Tevil, the author of the *sefer Nachalas Dovid*, to approach Reb Chaim and ask him why he was moved to bitter tears.

Reb Dovid entered Rav Chaim's study with great trepidation, and in a quivering voice he informed Rav Chaim that the entire student body of the yeshivah was gripped with fear as a result of their rebbi's crying.

At first, Rav Chaim was reluctant to explain. Eventually he acquiesced, taking the fact that he had been moved to tears publicly, in the presence of his students, as a sign from Hashem that he should in fact include them in the reason behind his tears.

Rav Chaim told Reb Dovid, "My dear *talmid*, you should know that the day will come when the pillars of European Jewry will topple, when the yeshivos will be uprooted and destroyed.

"But there will be one more stop before the arrival of Mashiach. The last stop will be America. The tenth and final exile of the Torah will be America. Babylon, North Africa, Egypt, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and America. America is the last stop."

Rav Aharon Kotler, in *Mishnas Rav Aharon*, records this as an authentic *mesorah*:⁷ הַחֲנִיָּה הָאֲחֵרֹנָה תְּהִיָּה אֶמְרִיקָה.

Here we are, at the final stop of this long and arduous journey we know as *galus*. We don't know how much longer we will be here. We hope we will be here *b'shalom*, in peace, until this stop is over and we can finally return to Eretz Yisrael. But the sad verdict of history is that when a stop along the *galus* journey

comes to an end, we are lucky if we can leave fast enough with the shirts on our backs.

~ *We Are Not Home; We Don't Belong Here*

If there is one thing that we learn from the omission of the Spanish Inquisition from the *Kinnos*, if there is one thing that we can learn from the music of the *gerushei Sefarad*, it is that we never cry when we leave *galus*. We don't belong in *galus*, and we have never belonged in *galus*. We don't belong in Spain, and we don't belong in North Africa. Neither do we belong in France, Hungary, Poland, or America.

We belong in Eretz Yisrael. We belong in Yerushalayim.

If we merely open our eyes, we will appreciate that we live in historic times. We see the words of all the *Neviim* coming to fruition. All the *Neviim* promise us that before the coming of Mashiach, the Ribbono Shel Olam will gather Klal Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael from the far-flung corners of the globe.

Every decade recently we have been seeing Hashem doing just this: gathering Jews to Eretz Yisrael. First the Iranians, then the Russian Jews, and then, in the following decade, the Jews of Ethiopia. More recently, many Jews from France have made their way to Eretz Yisrael. There is no question that we here in America are coming up on Hashem's list of those to return to Eretz Yisrael.

Just as we left Spain triumphantly, with song and music, so too will we rejoice when the Ribbono Shel Olam takes us out of America as well.

We hope and fervently pray that this final stop will not last much longer, and that this will be the last mournful Tishah B'Av. May we be *zocheh* to all go up to Yerushalayim together.

Endnotes

1	תענית כו..	4	בית יוסף או"ח סימן קסח.
2	שם כט..	5	מיכה ב, יג.
3	ספר התודעה רב אליהו כי טוב עמ'	6	סוף פרשת בהר.
	טז.	7	משנת רבי אהרן חלק ד עמוד קצ.