

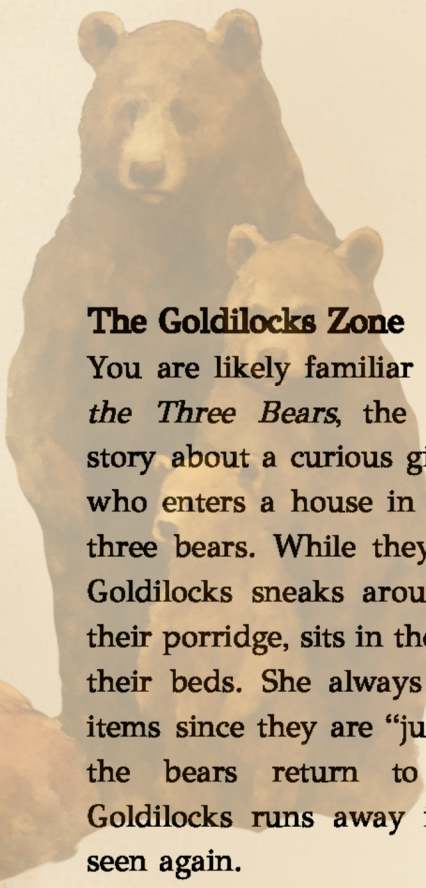
בס"ד

DEDICATED BY ANONYMOUS
IN HONOR OF KLAL YISROEL DOING THEIR BEST OUT THERE...

TISHA BEAV

FROM KINOT TO TINOK

WRITTEN BY RABBI ORI STRUM



The Goldilocks Zone

You are likely familiar with *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, the legendary children's story about a curious girl named Goldilocks who enters a house in the forest owned by three bears. While they are out and about, Goldilocks sneaks around the home, tastes their porridge, sits in their chairs, and lies in their beds. She always prefers baby bear's items since they are "just right." Eventually, the bears return to their home, and Goldilocks runs away in fear, never to be seen again.

Notwithstanding the strange details of the story, the message of Goldilocks has gone far beyond the pages of a children's bedtime storybook. Scientists and psychologists look to good old Goldilocks (or perhaps, better stated, "bad old Goldilocks," after all, she did steal!) to explain our planet and psyche.

The circumstellar habitable zone, a specific orbital region around a star where a planet's surface temperature can support liquid water (i.e. life), is widely known as the "Goldilocks Zone." According to NASA, if Earth was where Pluto is, the Sun would be barely visible and Earth's ocean and much of its atmosphere would freeze. It would be unlivable. On the other hand, if Earth took Mercury's place, it would be too close to the Sun and its water would form a

steam atmosphere, quickly boiling off. Also unlivable. The location where Earth currently sits in relation to the Sun (mind you, this distance is about 93 million miles, or 149.6 million kilometers away) is the perfect spot—it's just right—and allows for life to exist and flourish. Hence, scientists and astronomers refer to Earth as the "Goldilocks Zone" of our solar system.

The Goldilocks Principle (or Goldilocks Rule) is also a concept used by behavioral psychologists that describes the human preference for options, environments or challenges that are "just right" – neither too extreme nor too mild. It states that optimal performance, motivation, or success occurs at a perfectly balanced middle ground.

Extremes are not good.

Goldilocks knows this. The location of our planet shows this. Human psychology proves this.

And guess what? Deep down, the YEHUDI (a Jew) represents and exemplifies this!

What it Means to be a Jew

In Parshas Pinchas, the Torah records the names of the Jewish families in a quite unique way. Each name is written with the

Hebrew letter **HEI** (ה) before it and a **YUD** (י) after it. For example: *Mishpachas HaChanochi*—משפחת החנכי, *Mishpachas HaReuveni*—משפחת ראובני, and so on. Together, the prefix and suffix form a Name of G-d [י-ה, KAH], as if to say that G-d Himself testifies to the purity of the Jewish Nation.

Rashi tells us: “*He’til HaKadosh Baruch Hu Shemo Aleheim* (הושיט ידו עליהם) *Hashem placed His Name upon them. Hei Mitzad Zeh V’yud Mitzad Zeh* (ה' א"א מצד זה וי"ד מצד זה) — a letter HEI on this side and a letter YUD on that side.”

Indeed, Dovid HaMelech (Psalms 122:4) refers to the Jewish people as the *Shivtei Kah* (שבטי יה—tribes of KAH), a nation of YUD and HEI. The Gemara (Menachos 29b) reveals that Hashem created two worlds—Olam Haba and Olam Hazeh—with these two letters. Olam Haba (World to Come) was created with a YUD, and Olam Hazeh (This World) with a HEI.

The Av Beis Din of Nitra, HaRav Shmuel Dovid Ungar zt'l (1886-1945), writes in his *Sefer Na'os Desheh*,¹ that the representation of *Hei Mitzad Zeh V'yud Mitzad Zeh* (ה' א"א מצד זה וי"ד מצד זה) speaks to the *tachlis* (Divine purpose) of each one of us. We are

tasked with a mission of adjoining worlds: Olam Haba with Olam Hazeh. The World to Come with This World. Man was placed in the middle of these two seemingly separate worlds, with a sacred purpose and mission of bringing them together.

The Vilna Gaon shares a fascinating reason why the Jewish people are called YEHUDI (יהודי). The *Milui* (מילוי means *filling out*, and is the method of letter expansion, where we take a Hebrew letter and spell it out in full) of YUD (יוד) are the letters VAV/DALED (וה), and the *Milui* of HEI (ה"י) is YUD. As a result, the very name for a Jew—YEHUDI (יהודי)—is YUD/HEI plus their *Milui* (VAV/DALED and YUD).

We are the *Shivtei Kah* (YUD/HEI), and we have been chosen by G-d to fulfill our duty of *Hei Mitzad Zeh V'yud Mitzad Zeh*: to unite worlds together, to connect heaven and earth, to align the spiritual and physical, to infuse our daily grind with spiritual energy, and to make a *dira b'tachtonim*, a dwelling place for G-d down here in this world.

The golden path of a Jew—the just right path—is the middle path, the *derech memutzah*. The Jews are a people that embody balance, harmony, and fusion.

¹ See *Na'os Desheh*, Pinchas, pg. 110



Bais HaMikdash: Heart of the Planet

My friends, in order to properly tap into the inner depth and meaning of Tisha Beav and truly understand the seriousness and intensity of the day, we must first take a step back and see Eretz Yisroel with the proper perspective. Because, to better understand *what* we lost, we must focus on *where* it was lost.

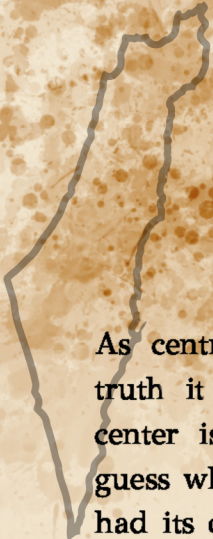
Did you ever notice the unique placement location of Eretz Yisroel?

It is not located in the freezing North or South Pole, extreme polar places inhabited by polar bears, penguins, and narwhals. Instead, Hashem designed His beautiful world with Eretz Yisroel specifically at “the center of the world,” like the verse in Ezekiel (38:12) describes it as “טבור הארץ—the center of Earth.” The commentator, Radak, explains: ונקראת ארץ ישראל טבור הארץ לפי שהיא באמצע העולם כמו שהטבור באמצע הגוף—*And the Land of Israel is called the navel of the earth, because it is in the middle of the world, just as the navel is in the middle of the body.*

Indeed, the Zohar (Terumah, 157a) states: “ארעא קדישא אמצעייתא דעלמא—the Holy Land: Center of the world.”

The Land of Israel is the spiritual *Goldilocks Zone* of our planet. It’s not located on the extreme sides of Earth, but rather at the center. In the middle. Its location is “just right.”

We, the people of the land, are perhaps meant to tap into the significance of the geographic location of our homeland, which is positioned—in G-d’s Infinite Wisdom—at the center of the planet. It is a reminder for us not to live at the poles. Not to be too extreme. Not to be frozen and stuck. Not to isolate and polarize spirituality (*ruchni*) and physicality (*gashmi*) as two far and distinct entities. But rather, like Eretz Yisroel, we are meant to be centered and unite the two worlds; we are meant to bring *ruchni* and *gashmi* together and solder them. Fuze them. Unite them. After all, it is a land of *chibur*—connection. ירושלים הבנויה כעיר אחת—*The built up Jerusalem, like a city that is united together* (Psalms 122:3). We are meant to connect to the *chibur*-nature of the land, and find the middle path—the *derech memutzah*—and strive for vitality, openness, vibrancy and flowingness. Eretz Yisroel is a “*land flowing with milk and honey*.” Flowing with life. Flowing with holiness. Flowing with greatness and meaning. Flowing with connection between the spiritual and physical.



As central, though, as Eretz Yisroel is, in truth it too contains its own center. That center is the holy city of Jerusalem. And guess what? Even the holy city of Jerusalem had its own center. That center, my friends, was none other than the Bais HaMikdash. The Bais HaMikdash was the center of the center of the center! As the Midrash Tanchuma (Kedoshim, 10) says: אָרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹשֶׁבֶת בְּאֶמְצָעֵיתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, וִירוּשָׁלַיִם בְּאֶמְצָעֵיתָהּ שֶׁל אָרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בְּאֶמְצָע יִירוּשָׁלַיִם—*The Land of Israel sits at the center of the world; Jerusalem is at the center of the Land of Israel; the Temple stands at the center of Jerusalem.*

The Bais HaMikdash was the place in this world that represented this concept of “connecting heaven and earth” the most. It was the paragon *derech memutzah*. The Bais HaMikdash was like a Divine kiss, where heaven and earth met; a physical structure here in this world that directly paralleled the spiritual structure up in heaven. *Bais HaMikdash shel matah kneged Bais HaMikdash shel maaleh*. The highlight service of the Bais HaMikdash was the sacrificial offerings, where animals were offered on the altar as a means of achieving *hiskarvus* (closeness) with Hashem. The Bais HaMikdash stood as an exemplary model of a relationship with the Divine. Uniting heaven and earth. Spiritual and

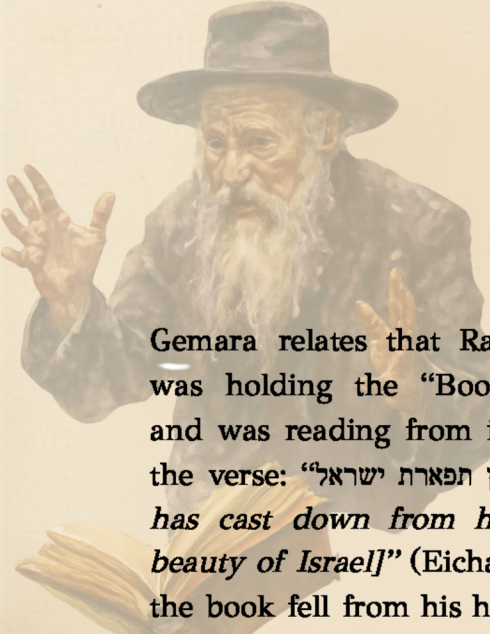
physical. Holy and mundane. Channeling this world to a much higher place.

I hope we are beginning to see what makes this day of Tisha Beav so significant. The Bais HaMikdash wasn't a random skyscraper in Dubai. It wasn't some hotel on Miami Beach. It wasn't a towering structure in the heart of Manhattan. The Bais HaMikdash was the heart of the planet. It was the most central place in the world. It was the ultimate spiritual *Goldilocks Zone*. It was the quintessential place in this world of “just right”—representing perfect balance, harmony, fusion, and coexistence.

On Tisha Beav, that center point of the world was destroyed. Why? In quite simple terms, because we—the ambassadors of G-d—weren't living in sync with the purpose and goal of the Bais HaMikdash. Instead of being centered and middle-grounded, we went too far...too extreme. Instead of uniting YUD and HEI, we distanced them. We didn't live up to our own name and spiritual identity.

The Book of KINOT

Eicha, the book that we read aloud during the fast of Tisha Be'Av (to mourn the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash) is referred to by the Gemara (Chagiga 5b) as סֵפֶר קִינּוֹת, *the Book of Lamentations*. The



Gemara relates that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was holding the “Book of Lamentations” and was reading from it. When he reached the verse: “השליך משמים ארץ תפארת ישראל” – *He has cast down from heaven to earth [the beauty of Israel]*” (Eicha 2:1), in his distress the book fell from his hand. He said: “*From a high roof to a deep pit.*” In other words, there is no greater fall than from the heavens to the earth! (see Rashi, *ibid.*).

The very first verse in all of Tanach (Bereishis 1:1) states: **בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ** – *In the beginning, when G-d created the HEAVEN and the EARTH.* Our Sages point out that שמים (HEAVEN) is spirituality (*ruchnius*), and ארץ (EARTH) is physicality (*gashmius*). In other words, Hashem created both, and this dual creation is really a calling for us to bridge and unite them as one. To bring the two worlds together. ***Hei Mitzad Zeh V’yud Mitzad Zeh!***

The Navi is lamenting the fact that we had a tremendous נפילה, a fall from heaven to earth.

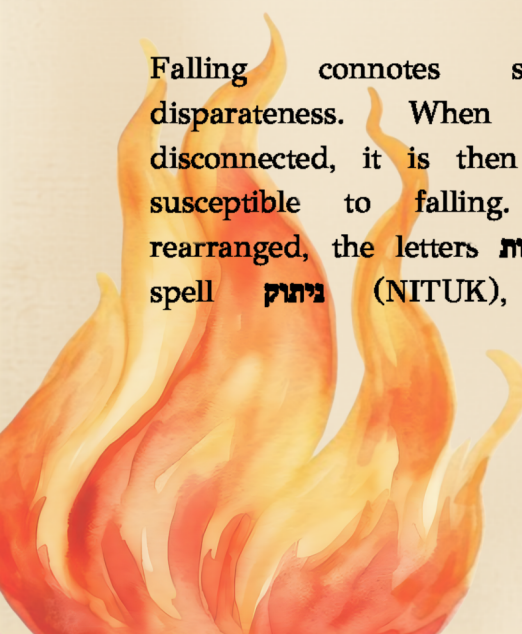
Falling connotes separation and disparateness. When something is disconnected, it is then capable of and susceptible to falling. Indeed, when rearranged, the letters **קִינּוּת** (KINOT) also spell **נִיחּוּק** (NITUK), which means

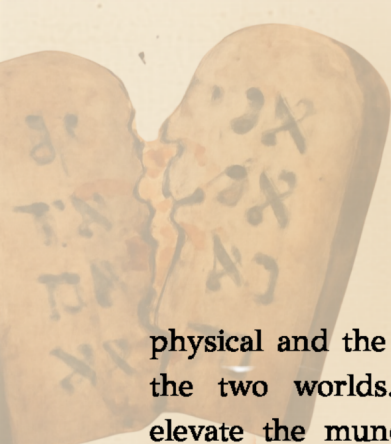
disconnected. NITUK (separation and disconnectedness) can lead to KINOS (lamentations, hardship, difficulty, falling, and churban), *chas v’shalom*.

Heaven and earth were not meant to be separated; they were meant to be joined and united as one. On Tisha Beav, we mourn the fact that we “fell” from heaven to earth. There was a detachment, if you will—a NITUK that led to KINOT. Instead of attaching heaven to earth (the purpose of creation!), we disconnected the two. Instead of living in the spiritual *Goldilocks Zone*, we became extreme. We went too far to one side. Instead of the balance of EMES (אמת), we got caught up in the extreme of SHEKER (שקר).² Figuratively, we left the center of the planet, veering off to the poles!

Fascinatingly, the same letters which spell **קִינּוּת** (KINOT) and **נִיחּוּק** (NITUK) also spells **תִּיקּוּן** (TIKUN), which means to repair, fix, and improve. Our Sages refer to this world as an **עוֹלָם הַתִּיקּוּן** (OLAM HATIKUN), a world of repair and improvement. The function of this world is to unite the

² The word אמת contains the first, last, and middle letter of the aleph-bais, representing the stability of truth. In contrast, the word שקר contains three letters bunched together at the end of the aleph-bais standing on the rocky foot of the kuf (ק), representing the instability of falsehood.





physical and the spiritual. To bring together the two worlds. To bridge the gap and elevate the mundanity of this world to its inner-dimension of holiness. If instead of being involved in TIKUN we are busy with NITUK, that can lead to KINOT, *chas v'shalom*.

Where We Went Wrong

The two bookends of the *Three Weeks* are *Shiva Asar B'Tammuz* (17th of Tammuz) and *Tisha Beav* (9th of Av), both of which, historically, represented moments where we went way off center, to the side of extreme.

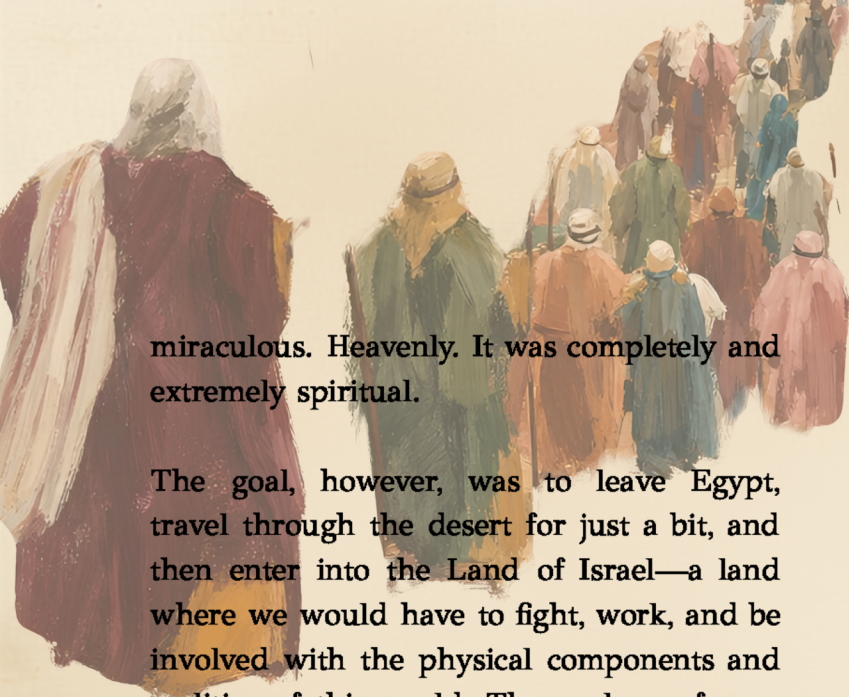
Shiva Asar B'Tammuz, which marks the start of the 21-day mourning period, was the day when Moshe Rabbeinu came down the Mountain and broke the Luchos in response to our dancing around the Golden Calf (Eigel HaZahav).

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky makes the point that Moshe didn't throw down the Luchos right away when he heard that the nation degenerated. He gave them the benefit of the doubt. It was only once he saw them *dancing* around the Golden Calf that he decided to break the Luchos. He realized that the Jewish people were not just serving idolatry, they were *enjoying* their worship of idolatry! That was a grave mistake. An extreme mistake.

The sin of the Golden Calf demonstrated an extreme level of heretical behavior on behalf of the Jewish people. Additionally, the Jewish people miscalculated the day when Moshe was supposed to return. When the Satan showed them an image of a dead Moshe in the sky, they said with confidence: "Moshe is surely dead" (וְדָאֵי מַת מֹשֶׁה). They were so convinced. So sure. How extreme, right?

Tisha Beav, which marks the end of the *Three Weeks*, was also a day of extremism. It was the day when the 10 Spies (*meraglim*) returned from spying out the land and delivered a negative report, causing the Jewish nation to cry for naught (a בכיה של חנם) in despair.³ After leaving Egypt, Hashem brought us through the *midbar* (desert), where we lived in a tremendously lofty spiritual realm. Hashem protected and guided us by means of the Clouds of Glory (ענני הכבוד). He fed and nourished us by means of the well (באר) and the *manna* (מָן). It was extraordinary. It was

³ They proclaimed, "We are unable to ascend!" (see Shelach, 13:31). They were so sure (yet again!). So convinced. Despair is an extreme mindset, one that is extremely dangerous. The great Chassidic master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslev, taught us a vital reminder for life: Ein Shum Yi'ush Ba'olam Klal (אין שום יאוש בעולם כלל)—there is no such thing as despair!



miraculous. Heavenly. It was completely and extremely spiritual.

The goal, however, was to leave Egypt, travel through the desert for just a bit, and then enter into the Land of Israel—a land where we would have to fight, work, and be involved with the physical components and realities of this world. The goal was for us to live in both worlds. To live up to our name. To connect YUD and HEI. To unite heaven and earth. To elevate the mundane to a level of spirituality. To create a *dina b'tachtonim*.

The spies, however, wished to only remain in the spiritual realm. They spoke negatively about the land because they wished to remain in the lofty spiritual condition of the *midbar*. They didn't want to leave heaven. They wanted to fly high in the sky, never to make a landing (idea based on Sfas Emes and Lubavitcher Rebbe).

Anything extreme, however—even extreme spirituality—is not ideal. Remember, we are the *Shivtei Kah*, joiners of the YUD and HEI, dwellers of both worlds, uniters of heaven and earth. Living just in the “spiritual” is nice, and for a period of time, was indeed necessary. However, it wasn't the end game and certainly not the goal.

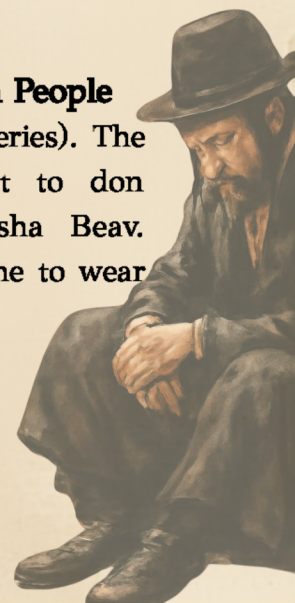
If you think about it, this journey of the Jewish people from the desert to Eretz Yisroel actually parallels the journey of each of our souls. Our souls—*נשמות*—began way up in heaven, connected to the *Kiseh HaKavod*—the Throne of Glory. It was extraordinary. It was miraculous. Heavenly. It was completely and extremely spiritual.

But it was not the ideal. Hashem sent down our souls to a world of physicality and mundanity, in order to bestow upon us even more good and give us the opportunity of achieving even higher levels of connection with the Divine. He sent us down from heaven, in order to connect heaven and earth, YUD and HEI. He sent us from one world on a mission to unite the two worlds together.

When we sit on the floor on Tisha Beav and recite *קִינּוֹת* (KINOT), it is a stark reminder of our great fall from heaven to earth; a reminder of our involvement in *נִירוּק* (NITUK) instead of *תִּיקּוּן* (TIKUN)—separating worlds instead of joining them together.

Tefillin: The Glory of the Jewish People

This brings us to Tefillin (phylacteries). The general adopted practice is not to don Tefillin on the morning of Tisha Beav. Instead, we wait until Mincha time to wear



them. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim, 555:1) states: *נוהגים שלא להניח תפילין בתשעה באב* — *we are accustomed not to put on Tefillin on Tisha Beav in the morning.*

Why, though? Why do we wait to put on Tefillin only later in the day? Is it possible, perhaps, that this *halacha* is communicating to us a deeper message about the day?

There is a powerful and important connection between Tisha Beav and Tefillin.

The prophet Isaiah foretells (Isaiah 61:3) that when Moshiach arrives, the Jewish nation will be given a crown instead of ashes—**קֶטֶר תַּתַּח אֵשׁ**. A crown represents glory and recognition,⁴ whereas ashes represent mourning and destruction. Indeed, during the mourning period, the Jewish people are in the opposite realm: **אֵשׁ תַּתַּח קֶטֶר**, *ashes instead of a crown.*⁵

Our Sages⁶ teach us that PE'ER (פאר) is a reference to Tefillin. Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol

says⁷ that the verse "*And all the nations of the land shall see that the Name of G-d is called upon you and will be afraid of you*" is a reference to the head-Tefillin. In the morning, we recite the blessing of OTER YISROEL B'TIFERA (עוטר ישראל בתפארה), *Who crowns Israel with splendor.* This blessing, in particular, is talking about Tefillin.⁸

While it is true that the entire human population is made in the image of G-d, there is only one nation that is likened to His (firstborn) children. That nation is us, the Jewish people. We are called בנימ, children of G-d. And so, here's a simple mathematical equation: **If G-d is the King, and we are His children, that makes us princes and princesses;** we are a nation of royalty and majesty.

The Jewish people are honored with the prestigious title of TIFERES YISROEL

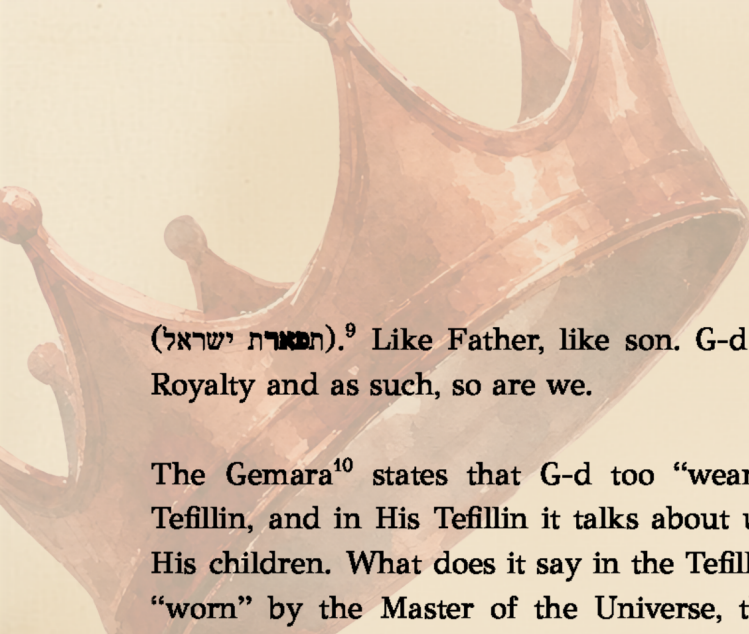
⁴ We will be recognized as G-d's children, as His Chosen Nation.

⁵ Ateres Zekeinim (Shulcha Aruch, Orach Chayim 555:1) mentions this play-on-words phrase in the name of the Kol Bo and Raavad.

⁶ See Talmud Bavli, Tractate Berachos 11a and 16b — חזין מן התפילין, שנהר נאמר — חזין מן התפילין, שנהר נאמר: "פארך נבול עליה" בקם "פאר", שפאר: "פארך נבול עליה"

⁷ See Talmud Bavli, Tractate Menachos 35b — "ויראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא — עליה ויראו משה", פוגא, רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר: אלו תפילין שבראש ומצו שהתפילין עוז הם לישלאל — דקתיב: "ויראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליה ויראו משה". ומגא, רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר: אלו תפילין שבראש

⁸ It's worthwhile to note that even women make this blessing, even though they do not wear Tefillin. They don't need Tefillin to remind them of their beauty/grandeur...



(תפארת ישראל).⁹ Like Father, like son. G-d wears Royalty and as such, so are we.

The Gemara¹⁰ states that G-d too “wears” Tefillin, and in His Tefillin it talks about us and His children. What does it say in the Tefillin “worn” by the Master of the Universe, t

The Baal Shem Tov (Kis Savo 4) says an amazing thing. Hashem's essence is impossible to comprehend, so instead of exalting Himself directly, He exalts Himself in His children, like a father who prides himself in his son.

⁹ Of all places, ironically, this description is given in the Book of Lamentations (Eicha 2:1) – השליך משמים ארץ תפארת – ישראל

Again, we are the *Shivtei Kah*. We are called YEHUDI. We live with the beauty and harmony of *Hei Mitzad Zeh V'yud Mitzad Zeh*. We, like Yaakov Avinu (Yisroel), are a joiner of two worlds. We model what it means to live a spiritual existence in a world of physicality. We show that Torah and “everything else” are not disparate elements, but one. We embody the lesson that the walls of the Shul and Bais Midrash extend far beyond its actual physical walls.

Every morning when we don Tefillin, essentially we are showcasing this unique ability. We bind the head (Shel Rosh) to the arm (Shel Yad), ultimately representing the *chibur* (connection and joining) of heaven and earth, spiritual and physical, into one harmonious and beautiful flow. Maybe this is the depth of the rule: *Sach Bein Tefilla L'Tefilla Chozer Unievarech* (סח בין תפילה לתפילה חוזר ומברך)—*If one spoke between donning the hand-Tefillin and the*

⁹ Of all places, ironically, this description is given in the Book of Lamentations (Eicha 2:1) – השליך משמים ארץ תפארת ישראל

¹⁰ See Talmud Bavli, Tractate Berachos 6a — אמר ליה רב נחמן בר יצחק קרב תיבא בך — אביו: הני תפילין דמרי עלמא מה כתיב בהו? אמר ליה "וימי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ"

*head-Tefillin, he must recite the blessing again.*¹¹

During the morning of Tisha Beav, we don't put on Tefillin. On some level, we've lacked pride in G-d. We haven't lived with *Hei Mitzad Zeh V'yud Mitzad Zeh*. We failed to bind the head-Tefillin with the arm-Tefillin. Instead of joining worlds, we pushed them apart. We fell from heaven to earth. We lived in the realm of imbalance and fallacy. We veered off-center and were too extreme. We were *just not right*...

And so, we own our mistakes and acknowledge our failure in this regard and for just a few hours—during the heart of the Tisha Beav mourning—we refrain from donning Tefillin. Our crown is removed.

But it's only temporary. As the day progresses and the mourning restrictions begin to ease, guess what? We need to come back to our Tefillin. We need to don it once again. We need to place the crown proudly back upon our heads, returning our sense of Jewish pride. We recommit ourselves to binding our head-Tefillin with our arm-Tefillin, and in so doing, we bind

heaven and earth, spiritual and physical, soul and body. We bind worlds together.

We return to a state of TIFERES—beauty, harmony, and balance. We tap back into our calling and destiny, and we remind ourselves that no matter what, G-d takes pride in us, His children. *Bein Kach U'Bain Kach, Nikra'u Banim*.

A Soft Spot for G-d

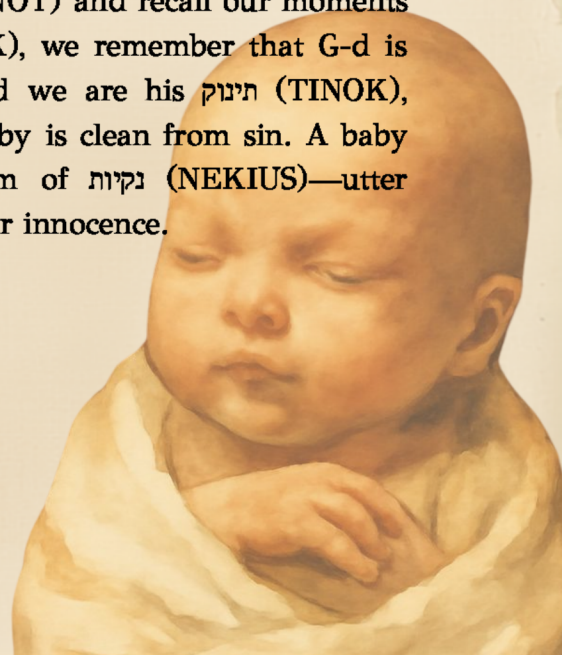
The fast of Tisha Beav occurs in the month of Av (אב), a word which means “father.” Of course, this is not a coincidence. As much as we've endured darkness and made mistakes along the way through the lengthy exile, G-d is still our Father and loves us dearly.

If you rearrange the letters of קִנּוּת (KINOT), נִתּוּק (NITOK), and תִּינוּק (TINOK), it spells something else: תִּינוּק (TINOK), or baby.

What's the message?

You see, my friends, because even as we recite קִנּוּת (KINOT) and recall our moments of נִתּוּק (NITOK), we remember that G-d is our Father and we are his תִּינוּק (TINOK), His baby. A baby is clean from sin. A baby is in the realm of נְקִיּוּת (NEKIUS)—utter purity and sheer innocence.

¹¹ See Talmud Bavli, Tractate Menachos 36a – אָמַר רַב הֲסָדָא: קָם בֵּין תְּפִילָּה לַתְּפִילָּה – חֲזַר וְקָבַד



Of course, it goes without saying that our negative actions need to be amended. Of course, we are held responsible if the Bais HaMikdash is not yet rebuilt. All true.

But one of the deep messages of Tisha Beav—a day, which is actually called a MOED (festive holiday)—is to not forget that there is a part of us that is clean, completely pure and untainted by any bad whatsoever. That inner-TINOK is our soul, our NESHAMA—a spark of G-dliness. That part of us is “just right.” That part of us takes pride in G-d, always. That part of us shines brightly. That part of us only knows good...because it only knows G-d.

By Mincha time on Tisha Beav, we don our Tefillin, thus reinstating our crown of glory.

Although the Torah says that the placement of the head-Tefillin should be *Bein Einecha* (בין עיניך), Jewish Oral tradition teaches that this doesn't actually mean directly between your eyes, but rather the Tefillin are to be placed on the top section of the head, above the brain.

Where exactly is the proper location for the head-Tefillin? The Gemara tells us something fascinating. The head-Tefillin should be placed by “מקום שמוחו של **תִּינוֹק** רופֵּס” (*Makom Shemocho Shel **TINOK** Rofes*)—the

place where the baby's head is soft."⁴² We put the head-Tefillin right there, by the soft spot of a baby's head, directly above the dwelling place of the soul (NESHAMA).¹³

Isn't it quite strange that our Sages describe the head-Tefillin location using the terminology and biology of a baby's head? A baby doesn't even wear Tefillin! Could there be a deeper message?

I'd like to suggest an idea.

What is the function of the soft spot on a baby's head? The soft spot at the top front of the baby's head (anterior fontanelle) is a diamond-shaped space between the baby's skull bones that allows the head to compress and safely emerge through the birth canal. Without this maneuverability and flexibility of the baby's head, the baby would not be able to leave its mother.

This imagery is fascinating. At the very end of Parshas Bo (the last verse, Bereishis 13:16), in midst of the *Yetzias Mitzrayim* (Exodus) story, the Torah introduces us to

¹² See Talmud Bavli, Tractate Menachos 37a – "על דבר מצוה" – זו קיבורת, – "בין צדיקה" – זו הקדש. נכתב אמר דבי רבי יצאי: מקום שמוחו של תינוק רופס

¹³ See Siddur HaTefilla of the Rokeach (pg. 292) – והיו לטוטפות בק עיניכם בבין העינים במקום שמוח חיתק רופס ששם שכן הנשמה שם התפילין, כמו על הארון מקום שכניה

the mitzvah (commandment) of Tefillin to serve as a reminder that G-d took the Jewish people out of Egypt.

In Egypt, the Jewish people were likened to a fetus in its mothers womb. The Exodus was, therefore, likened to our birth as a TINOK (a baby), as we finally emerged from Egypt (מצרים)—the land of borders and extreme physicality.

Every time we don the Tefillin and place the holy crown upon the area of our “soft spot,” perhaps we are reminded of a few things.

Firstly, we are reminded of our royal and majestic identity. The unique physical diamond-shaped soft spot perhaps sheds light on its spiritual nature. Diamonds, of course, are the precious gems worn on honorable crowns. It makes so much sense, then, that the spot of the head which parallels the dwelling location of the soul, is diamond-shaped. Remember, Tefillin is called PE'ER (פֶּאֶר). It is our royal crown.

Secondly, we are reminded that we each have a “soft spot” for G-d and G-d has a “soft spot” for us. Deep inside, there is a part of us that is a pure TINOK, a soul that is completely dependent and subservient to G-d. And like a precious TINOK, we are

completely enveloped by a deep love from our Creator.

Finally, we are reminded that just as our nation emerged from its extreme bondage, so too we can emerge from whatever national and personal bondage/struggle/exile we may find ourselves in. We are never stuck. We can always be free. The soft spot of a baby is indicative of its ability to emerge from the birth canal.

We may find ourselves in *Galus*, in the *Bein HaMitzarim*, but guess what? It will end. We are not stuck in the birth canal. We are not stuck at the borders. We are not stuck in the extreme. Like the flexibility of a newborn baby, the Tefillin's placement upon that very soft spot reminds us that we too can emerge from this time period of darkness, and we too can and Be'ezras Hashem will embrace the freedom of the ultimate redemption.

לשנה הבאה בירושלים!

If you found chizuk in these words, or have a ha'arah to add, I would be happy to hear from you: rabbistrumo@gmail.com