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**The Hebrew Month of Av: Disaster and Consolation**

**By Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller**



By every measure the Jewish month of Av is tragically , one in which the worst disasters in our history took place.

Disaster is no stranger to us. In many ways it is part and parcel of G-d's covenant with Abraham. When Abraham was told that his people would be chosen, G-d told him that there would be a price to pay. What is that price? One look at Jewish history tells us two pieces of information that make us . One is that we don't disappear because we recognize that we are a people who are united in what the Vilna Gaon would refer to as "rectifying ourselves and rectifying the world." The other is that the when we try to disappear, the results have been disastrous.

Abraham was a seeker. His search took him far beyond his one land, and even further from the assumptions that virtually everyone else in the entire world had about life. To Abraham, G-d was not only in the heavens, but very much here in the earth, with us. Abraham integrated the world of thought with the world of action. While other religious thinkers at the time would be deep into meditation, Abraham was chopping vegetables and serving platters of food to his innumerable guests.

He was not a glorified version of Conrad Hilton of the ancient world. What did Abraham have in mind?

**A Powerful Promise from G-d**

Abraham believed that the world of thought, emotion, and action were never meant to be fragmented into three autonomous worlds

, out of touch with each other. Life should be seamless. G-d promised him that his path would not disappear when he dies. He would father a nation, and they would preserve his heritage.

When G-d promised him a future, Abraham had one question. "How do I know that I will pass on this inheritance?"

Abraham did not doubt G-d's power. He had followed G-d from Ur to Israel, Egypt, and back to Israel without ever once expressing the slightest reservation. He was concerned that his descendants might make choices that would in effect divorce them from their Creator. The fact that *he* was devoted, compassionate, and willing to make sacrifices was no guarantee that his children would not be self-centered materialists. After all, how many of us live lives that are really carbon copies of the lives of our parents and grandparents?

**Abram and the Vultures**

In reply, G-d said:

Bring me threefold heifers, threefold goats, threefold rams, a dove and a young pigeon. (Abram) brought all these for Him. He split them in half, and placed one half opposite the other. The birds, however he did not split. Vultures descended on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

When the sun was setting, Abram fell into a trance, and he was stricken by a deep dark dread. (G-d) said to Abram, "Know for sure that your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs for 400 years. They will be enslaved and oppressed... A smoking furnace and flaming torch passed between the halves of the animals. On that day, G-d made a covenant with Abram saying, "To your descendants I have given the land." ([Genesis, 15:9-18](https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.15.9-18?lang=he-en&utm_source=aish.com&utm_medium=sefaria_linker))

G-d is telling Abraham that there are two ways that our identity will be preserved. One way is through the sacrificial offerings. It isn't necessary to view sacrifices as archaic. The Hebrew word for sacrifice, "*Korban*," literally means an object that brings something close. The animal self within us (and let us be honest, we have quite a menagerie tucked away in our psyche) can distance us from G-d by making us less and less aware of the part of us that is real, enduring, and ultimately most genuine -- our spiritual selves. The way the animal self was uplifted during the time of the Temple was actually through touching and offering an animal that was, in a certain sense, our twin, and letting the experience change us.

**Following Abraham’s Path**

**of Seamless Devotion to G-d**

Today, we uplift our inner selves through prayer, and the outer world through mitzvot (observing G-d's commandments) that involve our relationship to our animal selves. Mitzvot like the laws of keeping kosher, take us along Abraham's path of seamless devotion to G-d, uniting the physical and spiritual worlds.

Suppose we opt out? Free choice is never removed. But G-d will not allow us to choose, as a nation, spiritual oblivion. We will be exposed to beastly empires. The German wolf was no mascot. It was a symbol of everything German. We will suffer, be enslaved, and find alienation where we yearned for acceptance.

*"Your descendants will be foreigners in a land which is not theirs....they will be enslaved and oppressed."* We have lived out this prophecy in Egypt (the first exile, and prototype of all future editions), in Babylon, Greece, and Rome. While these names seem distant and dusty, they are underpinnings of the civilizations that have attacked us with bestiality that almost defies words.

We have emerged from each confrontation with the vulture that seeks to consume us, shaken but alive.

**Treblinka…..York (England)……..Spain…**

What words are there in human vocabulary that described what happened in Auschwitz, in Treblinka, in Eastern Europe? In York where a castle was burned along with the Jews hiding inside? In Spain where they burnt people at the stake for the crime of being Jewish?

We have not disappeared from the map. We have emerged from each confrontation with the vulture that seeks to consume us, shaken but alive. Whatever else we knew when we left the camps, it was that what we are and what we want to be cannot even remotely resemble what the Germans have chosen to make of themselves.

This is not to the Holocaust, but rather is what has prevented us from disappearing into Babylon, Spain, or Greece. In each instance we rediscovered ourselves by facing the mirror and rejecting the image that we once thought was our own, knowing now beyond a shadow of doubt that it is not our image, nor it will ever be.

The month of Av is the time in which we confront this aspect of our history.

**The Symbolism of the Sign of the Lion**

The astral sign of the month is the lion. It symbolizes our encounter with raw force. Interestingly, the first day of Av is the anniversary of the passing of Aaron, Moses' brother, who was known as the ultimate man of peace. What this tells us is that that although we may currently be distant from G-d and from our higher selves, ultimately there will be the peace that he envisioned; peace that is based on the emergence of our higher selves and the part of us that is man not beast. Nothing can be further from this than the peace based on mutual fear that is all we can realistically aspire to if we see the current war in Israel without its historical frame.

The Talmud tells us that the Messiah will be born on the 9th of Av. This is the day in which both Temples were destroyed, the Spanish expulsion of the Jews took place, and World War One, the "parent" of World War Two, broke out. What this tells us is that the same covenant that promises suffering, promises redemption. They are two sides of one coin; labor and birth.

**Nothing Less than a Miracle**

The fact that we are here at all in the 21st century is nothing less than a miracle.

We may never allow ourselves to forget what we have suffered. The fact that G-d is committed to never allowing us to disappear does not exonerate those who have perpetrated history's worst crimes against us. Their intentions were evil, their choices were made consciously, and most significant of all, their bestiality knew no bounds.

We must also not allow ourselves to forget who we are, and why we have survived. We are G-d's people with a mission to fulfill Abraham's covenant. We aim towards living seamless lives, elevating the physical, and having faith in G-d. The fact that we are here at all in the 21st century, that we have not forgotten who we are, and that we are committed to continuing to live out our covenant is nothing less than a miracle.

The 15th of Av was a time of joy. In ancient times it was a day in which marriages were arranged, and new beginnings celebrated. It was a time in which we began again, expressing not just who we don't want to be, but who we can be.

May this Av bring us joy, fulfillment, and consolation.

*Reprinted from the current website of aish.com*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on Sinas Chinam and the Destruction**

**Of the Beis Hamikdosh**

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**QUESTION:** Was the Beis Hamikdash destroyed because of sinas chinam, baseless hatred, among frum Jews?

**ANSWER:** No, there’s no sinas chinam among the Jews. Don’t let anyone tell you that. The sinas chinam the Gemara talks about means the causeless hatred of the type that comes from Avneri, the representative of toeivah in the Knesses today. He hates decent Jews. The communists there too, or the Mapai, they hate the Jews. That’s the sinas chinam; but decent Jews don’t have sinas chinam.

In the times of the Beis Hamikdash it wasn’t Shamai and Hillel and their talmidim who had sinas chinam. It wasn’t the Pharisees and the multitudes of the frum Jews who were their followers, who were the problem. The sinas chinam was from the Tzedukim and the Notzrim. They hated the Sages and the frum Jews who sided with the Sages. And it was because they were Jews, it was their sinas chinam for which the Jewish nation suffered. I understand that even some well-meaning writers and speakers have attempted to apply the accusation of baseless hatred to the frum Jews at the time of the churban, but it’s a serious error.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Mattos-Masei 5784 email of Toras Avigdor (Tape #R-55, May 11, 1971).*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Dvarim-Chazon 5784**



The nine days of mourning for Jerusalem’s fall and the destruction of the Temples are upon us. This Shabat, which always precedes Tisha B’Av itself, takes its name from the haftorah of the prophet Yeshayahu read in the synagogue. The words of the prophet condemn the social ills of his times and society – governmental corruption, economic unfairness and a lack of legal and social justice. But these are the problems that have plagued all human societies from time immemorial. And they are omnipresent in our current world and national society today as well.

**The Torah Never Demands the Impossible**

So, at first glance, one could conclude that the prophet is making impossible demands, since human behavior and social interactions can never eliminate these issues fully. And we are all well aware that the Torah never demands the impossible from its human subjects. So, what is the point of the prophet’s criticism and harsh judgments? What is it that he really demands from us fallible mortal creatures?

I feel that he demands of us that we at least realize and recognize the shortcomings in our society. We may not be able to correct them all completely, but we should know that they exist. We should never allow apathy the ability to overwhelm our better instincts and arrest our never-ending quest for an improved social structure.

The prophet demands that we remain relentless in trying to improve the social conditions of the world we live in even if we know at the outset that complete success is beyond our human capabilities. By accepting our societal deficiencies without a murmur of regret or complaint we become complicit in our own eventual destruction.

**No Sense of Shame or Embarrassment**

The Chafetz Chaim is reputed to have said that what motivated him to write his monumental work about the evils of slander and evil speech was that he noticed that people who had engaged in such speech no longer exuded a sigh of regret over their words. Evil speech had become societally acceptable and there was no sense of shame or embarrassment present about engaging in that type of behavior.

Shame is a great weapon for good and when it disappears from society, when brazen self-interest and greed is somehow legitimized, then the prophet warns us of impending doom. Politicians disgraced by their previous behavior openly vie again for public office as though having served one’s time in jail or being forced to resign from public office wipes their slate clean permanently.

**What the Prophet Demands of Us**

A society that knows no shame, whose leaders never recognize the moral turpitude of their past behavior, dooms itself to the ills of favoritism, corruption and unfairness that will plague its existence. The prophet demands of us that even if we are unable to correct all ills and right all wrongs, we should at least be ashamed that such ills and wrongs exist within our society.

That recognition and sense of shame that accompanies it serves as the basis for possible necessary improvement in social attitudes and societal behavior. Then the prophet’s optimistic prediction “Zion shall be redeemed through justice and those who return to it will also find redemption through righteousness“ will yet be fully fulfilled.

Shabbat shalom

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

**Every Jew Can Use the Inspiration of the Torah to**

**Positively Influence Others**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



This week we begin the Book of Deuteronomy, with the Torah portion of Devarim. As the Torah relates, Moses complained that the leadership of the Jewish people was too great a task for one person. "How can I myself alone bear your weight, and your burden, and your strife?" he asked. The Jewish people are simply too numerous and diverse for one individual to be able to guide them all.

In answer, G-d instructed Moses to "Choose wise and understanding men...captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, etc." This would relieve the burden and help Moses lead the Children of Israel.

**From this we learn a practical lesson:**

Every Jew has been entrusted with a special mission by Moses: to conduct his life according to the dictates of the Torah, and to exert a positive influence on the people around him so that they, too, may comport themselves in the same manner.

An individual may find this daunting, and ask how it is possible for a single person to wield so much power. "How can I alone fulfill such an important mission?" he might wonder.

**The Task of Bringing Happiness to G-d**

Furthermore, every Jew has been enjoined with the task of bringing G-d happiness, by transforming the world into a suitable "dwelling place" for the Divine Presence, as it states, "Let Israel rejoice...and be happy in the joy of the L-rd Who is pleased and glad to dwell in the lower spheres."

A person may question how he can be expected to derive the strength for such an awesome assignment.

The Torah's answer is that G-d grants every Jew the ability to successfully fulfill his function in life, including having a positive influence on others.

**G-d Gives Unique Powers to Every**

**Jew to Fulfill their Life Purpose**

Every Jew receives the Torah from Moses as a personal inheritance, as it states, "The Torah that Moses commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Jacob." Therefore, when a Jew holds the Torah dear, he receives all the necessary powers to conduct his life accordingly, in the same way that G-d helped Moses fulfill his mission (through the "captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, etc.") to lead the entire Jewish people.

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The Midrash relates that had the Jews been worthy, the above Torah verse, "How can I myself alone," would have sufficed. Unfortunately, such was not the case, and we must therefore read the verse in Lamentations on Tisha B'Av, "How lonely sits the city that was full of people."

**A Time When We Won’t Have**

**to Recite Lamentations Anymore**

From this it is clear that when a Jew conducts his life according to Torah and emulates Moses' example, he nullifies the entire concept of exile and the destruction of the Holy Temple. This will lead to a time when the recitation of Lamentations will no longer be necessary, as the Final Redemption with Moshiach will already be a reality.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Devarim 5761/2001 edition of L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn. Adapted from the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s talk on 3 Menachem Av 5741/1981.*

**Is It OK to Celebrate the Elimination of an Arch-Terrorist?**

**By**[**Tzvi Freeman**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/193/jewish/Freeman-Tzvi.htm)



**Tzvi Freeman**

***Question:*** Is it inappropriate to be celebrating the death of an arch-terrorist? Is that a Jewish value?

***Response:*** You’ve asked what I could only call a very Jewish question. For one thing, it’s so typically Jewish to feel guilty about rejoicing. Aside from that, the wisdom of our sages on this topic runs deep and thick. When do you know a wisdom is deep? When at first glance it seems full of contradiction.

Let’s start with Solomon the Wise, who writes, “When the wicked perish, there is joyful song.”[1](javascript:doFootnote('1a1507393');)

**A Seeming Contradiction**

Sounds pretty unequivocal. Until you find another statement of the same author, in the same book: “When your enemy falls, do not rejoice, and when he stumbles, let your heart not exult, lest the L‑rd see and be displeased, and turn His wrath away from him.”[2](javascript:doFootnote('2a1507393');)

The Talmud mirrors the tension. We find: “When the wicked perish from the world, good comes to the world, as the verse states, ‘When the wicked perish, there is joyful song.’”[3](javascript:doFootnote('3a1507393');)

. . . while in the same volume, the [Talmud](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2537389/jewish/Talmud.htm) has already told us, “When the Egyptians were drowning in the Sea of Reeds, the angels wanted to sing. G‑d said to them, ‘The work of My hands is drowning in the sea, and you want to sing?’”[4](javascript:doFootnote('4a1507393');)

We aren’t the first to note these paradoxes and more. Now is not the time to list every resolution suggested. Instead, let’s get straight to the heart of the matter:

What is so terrible, after all, about celebrating the death of a wicked evildoer? Why would you even think it decrepit to rejoice that a man who himself rejoiced over the demise of so many others, and connived ingeniously to bring destruction and terror across the globe, should now be removed from it? Is it so horrible to feel happy that the world has just become a better, safer and happier place?

**The Failure of Those Who Are Not**

**Outraged by Those Who Do Evil**

No, it’s not. That’s perfectly legit. On the contrary, someone who is not celebrating at this time is apparently not so concerned by the presence of evil upon our lovely planet. Those who are outraged by evil are carrying now smiles upon their face. The apathetic don’t give a hoot.

If so, when Pharaoh and his henchmen, who had enslaved our people for generations—mistreating them with the utmost cruelty, drowning our babies and beating workers to death—when they were finally being drowned in the sea, why would not [G‑d](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/433240/jewish/God.htm) Himself rejoice?

Simple: Because they are “the work of My hands.” For this, they are magnificent. And a terrible loss.

As another prophet put it, “As I live, says the L‑rd G‑d, I do not wish for the death of the wicked, but for the wicked to repent of his way so that he may live.”[5](javascript:doFootnote('5a1507393');)

**Is Your Celebration Over Your**

**Enemy’s Fall Self-Serving**

For the same reason, Solomon tells you not to rejoice over the fall of your enemy. If that’s the reason you are celebrating—because he is *your* enemy, that *you* have been vindicated in a personal battle—then how are you better than him? His wickedness was self-serving, as is your joy.

But to rejoice over the diminishment of evil in the world, that we have done something of our part to clean up the mess, that there has been justice—what could be more noble?

That, after all, was the sin of many of these terrorists: They recognize G‑d. They are often deeply religious men. They pray to G‑d five times a day and thank Him for each of their nefarious achievements. The sin of the terrorists is to refuse to recognize the divine image within every human being, to deny the value G‑d Himself places upon “the work of My hands.”

To them, this world is an ugly, dark place, constructed only so that it could be obliterated in some final apocalypse, and they are ready to help it on its way. With that sin, all the worship and religiosity is rendered decrepit evil.

So, there’s the irony of it all, the depth and beauty that lies in the tension of our Torah: If we celebrate that a person was killed, we are stooping to his realm of depravation. Yet if we *don’t* celebrate the elimination of evil, we demonstrate that we simply don’t care.

We are not angels. An angel, when it sings, is filled with nothing but song. An angel, when it cries, is drowned in its own tears. We are human beings. We can sing joyfully and mourn both at once. We can hate the evil of a person, while appreciating that he is still the work of G‑d’s hands. In this way, the human being, not the angel, is the perfect vessel for the wisdom of [Torah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1426382/jewish/Torah.htm).

Sources

See Maharsha on Sanhedrin 39b; Midrash [Shmuel 4:22](https://www.chabad.org/15833#v22).

**Footnotes**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1507393/jewish/Is-It-OK-to-Celebrate-the-Elimination-of-an-Arch-Terrorist.htm" \l "footnoteRef1a1507393) [Proverbs 11:10](https://www.chabad.org/16382#v10).

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1507393/jewish/Is-It-OK-to-Celebrate-the-Elimination-of-an-Arch-Terrorist.htm" \l "footnoteRef2a1507393) [Proverbs 24:17](https://www.chabad.org/16395#v17)–18.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1507393/jewish/Is-It-OK-to-Celebrate-the-Elimination-of-an-Arch-Terrorist.htm" \l "footnoteRef3a1507393) Sanhedrin 113b.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1507393/jewish/Is-It-OK-to-Celebrate-the-Elimination-of-an-Arch-Terrorist.htm" \l "footnoteRef4a1507393) Sanhedrin 39b.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1507393/jewish/Is-It-OK-to-Celebrate-the-Elimination-of-an-Arch-Terrorist.htm" \l "footnoteRef5a1507393) [Ezekiel 33:11](https://www.chabad.org/16131#v11).

*Reprinted from the current website of Chabad.Org*

**Thoughts that Count**

**for Our Parsha**

*These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel* (Deut. 1:1)

Comments Rashi: "Since these are words of reproof...he mentions them [only] in allusion out of respect for Israel." However, we find that the very same sins Moses only hints at here are explicitly detailed later on in the Torah. This apparent conflict is resolved by the Midrash: As soon as the Jews heard Moses' words of rebuke they sincerely repented; when a person repents out of love, "his deliberate sins are transformed into mitzvot." Thus, after the Jews repented Moses was free to enumerate their sins, as by doing so he was adding to their merits. *(Imrei Elimelech)*

*Reprinted from the Parashat Devarim 5761/2001 edition of L’Chaim.*

**Between the Straits**

The Midrash characterizes the three weeks between the Seventeenth of Tammuz and Tishah B’Av as the time when demons prowl and the destroyer lays waste at noon. It is the time when our people’s pursuers – demons in bodies of flesh and blood – overtook and laid waste to her as well.

Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (Michtav MeEliyahu, Vol. 2, p. 48) points out that the Midrash is teaching us not only of a phenomenon that occurred at the time of the destruction, but of one that recurs throughout history. The edict banishing the Jews from England was signed by the English monarch on Tishah B’Av in the year 1290. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain occurred on Tishah B’Av in 1492. And World War I, which caused great upheavals for European Jewry and was the precursor of World War II and the Holocaust, essentially began on Tishah B’Av of 1914, the day that Germany declared war on Russia.

**More Recent Events During the Three Weeks**

[None of these events occurred on the spur of the moment. All were preceded by incidents and plans that took place “between the straits.”] In a fascinating book, “The Hidden Hand,” Rabbi Yaakov Astor expands on this theme and adds several other events to this list, among them:

The Seventeenth of Tammuz, 1934, was “the Night of the Long Knives,ˮ the internal purge of the murderous Nazi party, which consolidated the power of the Nazi leader, whose blotted name we will not dignify with mention in these pages. And the gas chambers of Treblinka began their grisly work precisely on the day of Tishah B’Av, 1942.

The fact that these misfortunes befall our people during the Three Weeks is in fact a source of consolation to us. For it makes us realize that these events are not mere happenstance, but are part of the Divine plan and orchestration of history.

**Obviously the Hand of G-d**

Rav Desser (ibid.) quotes a prominent historian to the effect that the Spanish tyrant would surely have reconsidered his actions had he only known how much faith and hope he implanted in the Jews whom he banished by expelling them on Tishah B’Av, unwittingly demonstrating to them that it was none other than the hand of G-d that directed them even in their time of distress, and that in their exile He had sent them on a great and exalted mission.

The hand of G-d is not only upon us during these times; it is also with us. Our Sages say that Mashiach was born on Tishah B’Av (Yerushalmi Berachos 2:4). With the destruction are sown the seeds of redemption. Rabbi Yaakov Astor (ibid.) points out some fascinating examples from more recent history.

As mentioned, the Spanish expulsion of 1492 occurred on Tishah B’Av. The very next day, Columbus set sail from Spain on a voyage in which he would discover the New World, planting seeds that would take 400 years to sprout into the haven that America would become for Jews fleeing the cauldron of Europe before and after the Holocaust. And on that same day of infamy of Tishah B’Av 1942 that saw Treblinka’s gas chambers begin their operation, the Nazi leader gave the inexplicable order to divert his eastern armies to attack Stalingrad, a strategic blunder that initiated the decline of the Nazi war machine and that many military historians regard as the fateful turning point in the fortunes of World War II.

**Destruction Initiates the Process of Redemption**

The seeds of redemption were sown amid the ashes of destruction. [Rav David Cohen (Ohel David, Rus 2:23) makes a fascinating calculation to show that Rus conceived the progenitor of the Davidic and Messianic dynasty on the night of the Seventeenth of Tammuz.] It is not just that destruction and redemption coincide. Destruction initiates the process of redemption.

Maharsha (on Bechoros 8a) observes that the 21 days between the Seventeenth of Tammuz and Tishah B’Av parallel the 21 days between Rosh Hashanah and Hoshana Rabbah. Just as the latter period is one of Divine forgiveness and closeness, so too, the 21 days “between the straits,” when the tribulations of exile and suffering move us to repentance, atone for our sins and bring us closer to G-d.

Moreover, both periods are times when we are keenly aware of the hand of G-d in our lives - whether it is the hand that strikes or the hand that caresses. They are times of mo’ed, appointed times of meeting our Father in Heaven.

**The Days Were Originally Designated to be Times of Joy**

Rav Leib Minzburg (Ben Melech on Yemei Bein HaMetzarim, p. 11ff) suggests an additional understanding of this festival-like quality of the time “between the straits.” Both the Seventeenth of Tammuz and Tishah B’Av were originally designated to be times of joy - the former as the day that our ancestors were to receive the First Tablets, and the latter as the day they were to contemplate the reports of the spies encouraging them with reports about the goodness of the land to which they were returning.

Because of our sins, however, we transformed them from days of joy into days of mourning – days on which we caused the Tablets to be shattered and on which we shed tears of no substance, rejecting the land of our fathers.

When our repentance and atonement are complete, these times will revert to being the times of joy they were always meant to be, when the shattered and scattered fragments of our people are made whole again in our Holy Land and the tears are dried from upon every face.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Devorim 5783 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the Kleinman Edition Midrash Rabbah – Eichah.*