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Leadership in transition:  
Reactions to crisis in  
Jewish History



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## Leadership in Transition

### ירמיהו פרק כט

**א** וְאֵלֶּה דְּבָרֵי הַסֵּפֶר, אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יְרֵמְיָה הַנָּבִיא מִירוּשָׁלַם--אֶל-יֵתֶר זִקְנֵי הַגּוֹלָה, וְאֶל-הַכֹּהֲנִים וְאֶל-הַנְּבִיאִים וְאֶל-כָּל-הָעָם, אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה נְבוּכַדְנֶאצַּר מִירוּשָׁלַם, בְּכֻלָּהּ. **ב** אַחֲרֵי צֵאת יְכֲנִיָּה-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַגְבִּירָה וְהַסֵּרִיסִים שְׂרֵי יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם, וְהַחֲרָשׁ וְהַמְּסַגֵּר--מִירוּשָׁלַם. **ה** בְּנוֹ בָתִּים, וְשָׁבוּ; וְנָטְעוּ גִּטּוֹת, וְאָכְלוּ אֶת-פִּרְיָן. וַיִּקְחוּ נָשִׁים, וְהוֹלִידוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת, וַיִּקְחוּ לְבָנֵיכֶם נָשִׁים וְאֶת-בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם תָּנוּ לְאֻנָּשִׁים, וְתִלְדְּנָה בָנִים וּבָנוֹת; וְרַבּוּ-שָׁם, וְאֶל-תַּמְעֻטוֹ. **ז** וְדַרְשׁוּ אֶת-שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר, אֲשֶׁר הִגְלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה, וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בַּעֲדָהּ, אֶל-יְהוָה: כִּי בְשָׁלוֹמָהּ, יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שָׁלוֹם.  
**יא** כִּי אֲנֹכִי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת-הַמַּחְשָׁבֹת, אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי חָשַׁב עֲלֵיכֶם--נָאִם-יְהוָה: מִחֲשָׁבוֹת שְׁלוֹם וְלֹא לָרָעָה, לִיתֵּן לָכֶם אַחֲרֵית וְתִקְוָה. **יב** וְקִרְאתֶם אֹתִי וְהִלַּכְתֶּם, וְהִתְפַּלַּלְתֶּם אֵלַי; וְשָׁמַעְתִּי, אֲלֵיכֶם. **יג** וּבִקְשַׁתֶּם אֹתִי, וּמְצֵאתֶם: **כ** כִּי תִדְרְשׁוּנִי, בְּכָל-לְבַבְכֶם. **יד** וְנִמְצָאתִי לָכֶם, נָאִם-יְהוָה, וְשָׁבַתִּי אֶת-שְׁבִיתְכֶם (שְׁבוּתְכֶם) וְקִבַּצְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל-הַגּוֹיִם וּמִכָּל-הַמְּקוֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר הִדַּחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם שָׁם, נָאִם-יְהוָה; וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי אֶתְכֶם--אֶל-הַמְּקוֹם, אֲשֶׁר-הִגְלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם מִשָּׁם.

### ירמיהו פרק ט

**כב** כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵי-יִתְהַלָּל חֶכֶם בְּחֻכְמָתוֹ, וְאֱלֹהֵי-יִתְהַלָּל הַגִּבּוֹר, בְּגִבּוֹרָתוֹ; אֱלֹהֵי-יִתְהַלָּל עֲשִׂיר, בְּעֲשָׂרוֹ. **כג** כִּי אִם-בְּזֹאת יִתְהַלָּל הַמִּתְהַלָּל, הַשֹּׁפֵל וְיָדַע אוֹתִי--כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה, עֹשֶׂה חֹסֶד מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה בְּאֶרֶץ: **כד**--בְּאֵלֶּה חִפְצֹתִי, נָאִם-יְהוָה.

### שמואל א פרק טו

**כב** וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל, הַחֲפִץ לִיהוָה בַּעֲלֹת וּזְבָחִים, כְּשֹׁמֵעַ, בְּקוֹל יְהוָה: הִנֵּה שָׁמַע מִזְבֵּחַ טוֹב, לְהַקְשִׁיב מִחֻלָּב אֵילִים.

### חגי פרק ב

**ה** אֶת-הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר-כִּרְתִּי אִתְּכֶם, בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם, וְרוּחִי, עֹמֶדֶת בְּתוֹכְכֶם--אֶל-תִּירָאוּ.

### מלאכי פרק ג

**כב** זָכְרוּ, תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי, אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אוֹתוֹ בְּחָרֵב עַל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים. **כג** הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ לָכֶם, אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּבִיא--לִפְנֵי, בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה, הַגָּדוֹל, וְהַנּוֹרָא. **כד** וְהִשְׁיֵב לֵב-אֲבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים, וְלֵב בָּנִים עַל-אֲבוֹתָם--פֶּן-אָבּוּא, וְהִכִּיתִי אֶת-הָאָרֶץ חֶרֶם.

### נחמיה פרק ח

**א** וַיֵּאָסְפוּ כָל-הָעָם, כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד, אֶל-הֶרְחוֹב, אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר-הַמַּיִם; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, לְעֹזְרָא הַסֵּפֶר--**לְהַבִּיא אֶת-סֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה**, אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל. **ב** וַיָּבִיא עֹזְרָא הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה לִפְנֵי הָקָהֶל, מֵאִישׁ וְעַד-אִשָּׁה, וְכָל, מִבִּין לְשֹׁמֵעַ--בַּיּוֹם אֶחָד, לַחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי. **ג** וַיִּקְרָא-בּוֹ לִפְנֵי הֶרְחוֹב אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר-הַמַּיִם, מִן-הָאוֹר עַד-מַחְצִית הַיּוֹם--נִגְדָה הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנָּשִׁים, וְהַמְּבִינִים; וְאֻזְנֵי כָל-הָעָם, אֶל-סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה.

### גמ יומא ח ט

אמר רבי עקיבא: אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרין? מי מטהר אתכם? אביכם שבשמים, שנאמר "וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם". ואומר "מקוה ישראל ה'", מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים, אף הקדוש ברוך הוא מטהר את ישראל.

### Rabba Akiva's response to the end of the Temple and its

Day of Atonement rites was not one of mourning, but a paradoxical sense of uplift. Tragedy had not defeated hope. Indeed it brought about a spiritual advance. The Temple rites might be lost, but they were never altogether necessary. Far from being separated from God, the sinner was now able to come closer to the Divine presence. His words were these: "Happy are you, O Israel. Before whom are you being cleansed and who cleanses you? Your Father who is in heaven."<sup>8</sup>

He meant this: Now that there was no Temple and no High Priest, atonement need no longer be vicarious. The sinner could obtain forgiveness directly. All he or she needed to do was confess the sin, express remorse and resolve not to repeat it in the future. Atonement was no longer mediated by a third party. It needed no High Priest, no sacrifice and no Temple ritual. It was a direct relationship between the individual and God. This was one of rabbinic Judaism's most magnificent ideas—the concept, long prefigured in the Bible but never explicitly set out as such, of *teshuvah*, the "return" of the sinner to God.<sup>9</sup>

### Exile and Expulsion - Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi

Jerusalem and the Temple play important roles in Philo's thought. But it is precisely with regard to them that he reveals a significant dichotomy between ideal and reality. For example, he knows very well the Deuteronomic demand that one be personally present at the Jerusalem Temple for the three annual pilgrimage festivals. Certainly some Alexandrian Jews made the pilgrimage, but for most it was difficult. Philo resolves the problem in his characteristic way, by allegorizing. The true Jerusalem, the true Temple, is at least in part a state of the soul: "What house shall be prepared for God the King of kings . . . ? Shall it be of stone or timber? One worthy house there is—the soul that is fitted to receive Him." And even more radically—"It often happens that people who are actually in unconsecrated spots are really in most sacred ones."

In the mentality of Hellenistic Judaism, diaspora does not yet carry all the heavy freight of the term *exile*, that is, so long as there exists the Temple cult in Jerusalem—and even if Jerusalem, like the entire Land of Israel, is already under Roman domination. The catastrophic dimension of exile really begins to unfold with the destruction of the Temple. Note, however, that unlike the Babylonians the Romans did not expel the entire Jewish population of Judaea. The disaster of the year 70 is initially more the loss of the Temple than the loss of the Land. It is this loss that is at the heart of the ensuing crisis and that begins to endow the diaspora with a genuine sense of *galut*.

## **Rebbe: The Life and Teachings of Menachem M. Schneerson, the Most Influential Rabbi in Modern History - Joseph Telushkin**

The Rebbe devoted his life to making the world aware that there is a loving God who demands loving behavior and to encouraging them to practice the ritual commandments as well and thereby deepen their relationship to God. Again and again he preached the practice of goodness and *ahavat Yisrael*, the love of one's fellow. One reason, I suspect, has to do with the fact that he came to leadership less than a decade after the Holocaust. If the Holocaust had shown the evil of which human beings are capable - underscored, as the Rebbe noted, by occurring in what was arguably the world's most academically and culturally advanced country - the Rebbe wanted to remind human beings of the good of which they are capable. If the Nazis had murdered Jew with Zyklon B gas because it was cheap, a few pennies for each person they suffocated, the Rebbe wanted to elevate the value of the human life. He wanted the whole world to understand that in the absence of God human life becomes devalued. And in the aftermath of the Nazis who had done everything to devalue Jewish life, he wanted all Jews to appreciate that every life has infinite value. And what could illustrate this more dramatically than his commitment to reach out to every Jew and every Jewish community in the world? Every town. Every village. No matter how remote. No matter how minuscule. The infinite value of every life. In all of Jewish history, nothing of this magnitude had ever been attempted before.

### **The Beginning of Wisdom - Leon Kass**

The Children of Israel are, already at this point in our narrative, defined in part by remembrance of things past and in part by anticipation of things to come. They remember especially God's promise to and covenant with Abraham. They anticipate especially the fulfillment of God's promise and the obligation to perpetuate the memory of the covenant into future of the covenant into future generations. Speaking more generally, we may say that the Children of Israel, by looking forward to perpetuate the merit and ways of the ancestors, choose to live with full awareness of time and with full acceptance of change and unavoidable decay. The children of the new way are enjoined to embrace the temporality of human existence because of their attachment to the timelessness of God and the permanence of His promised care, which He works out in human affairs in the course of human time.

Not so in Egypt. As we will see more clearly as we proceed, Egypt, at least in its public and official teachings, is the place that seeks to abolish change and to make time stand still. To be sure, Egyptians have accurate measures of time and precise calendar, but they use them to manage or to stay ahead of natural change-- in the first instance instance, to predict and manage the flooding of the Nile. What the Egyptians seek is changelessness, agelessness, permanent presence, or eternal return and renewal. Whether one looks to the hieroglyph in which the mobile world is represented in static ideograms; or to the worship of the eternally circling but never changing heavenly bodies or of the cyclically rising and ebbing river, with its life-giving overflows; or to the practices of denying aging through bodily adornment and defying death through mummification and preparation for reincarnation --everywhere one

looks, one season Egypt the rejection of change and the denial of death. Ancient Egypt is poles apart from ancient Israel.