

Parshat Devarim 2018
July 21, 2018
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Shabbat Shalom!

A few weeks ago, a good friend came up from New Jersey for her annual visit. Her visit coincided with a particularly hot and steamy week in Boston, and we decided to spend one day indoors at the well air-conditioned Museum of Fine Arts.

When we visit the museum together we take advantage of the free guided tours, and that day was no exception. We took a one hour highlights of the collections tour followed by a shorter 30 minute mini-tour and ate lunch.

Maybe I had seen one too many examples of the museum's religious art that day, none of which was Jewish. So I went to the visitors' center and asked if they had a list of the Jewish art in the museum, knowing from previous visits that there are many beautiful pieces scattered throughout the building.

A volunteer at the visitors' center found and printed for me a short list of currently displayed Judaica. I looked at the "official" list and promptly told him it was missing what I consider to be the highlight of the Judaica collection at the MFA, and *one of the few remaining concrete artifacts in the world* connected to tonight's observance of Tisha B'Av.

Intrigued, he asked to accompany us as we went off in search of the treasure.

The artifact connected to Tisha B'Av that I referred to is a 1,948 year old silver coin, minted by Jews in Jerusalem, sometime in the months before the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70. The ancient Hebrew words on the coin say "Shekel of Israel," and it can be found in the Gallery for Ancient Coins.

The year 70 was the year the Romans destroyed the Second Temple after a 5 year Jewish uprising and is referred to as the year when the Jewish exile began. The destruction of the Second Temple is one of the several calamities that are commemorated on Tisha B'Av, which falls tonight, at the conclusion of Shabbat. On this long list of disasters suffered by the Jewish people is the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians in the year 586 BCE, the defeat of the Bar Kochba rebellion in the year 135, and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.



Fortunately for us, there is strong and hopeful lesson in how to cope with the memories of our difficult history in this week's Parsha.

Every year on this Shabbat, the one preceding Tisha B'Av, we begin reading from the fifth book of the Torah, the book of Deuteronomy. In the beginning of the parsha there is a verse that gives us a preview of tonight's chanting of the book of Lamentations.

In chapter 1 verse 12, Moshe says to the people of Israel (and this is traditionally chanted in the Eicha melancholic trope) "Eicha esah levadi"-- how can I alone bear your contentiousness, your burdens and your quarrels," when he recounts to the Israelites the troubles they caused him over the past 40 years.

In the book of Lamentations, the opening phrase is "Eicha yashva ba'dad," "how (eicha) lonely lies the city once so full of people." Both phrases contain the words "eicha" and "badad" or "levad," words of haunting loneliness, whether used in connection with Moshe, the city of Jerusalem, or in our own lives, as individuals.

Appearing for the first time in the Torah, in the first verse of the parsha, is the Hebrew phrase "kol Israel," meaning "the people of Israel." These words are found eleven more times in the book of Deuteronomy.

According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the reason the Israelites were referred to previously as "b'nei Israel," the children of Israel, was to illustrate the vertical linkage between Israelites' in their biological heritage--parent to child to grandchild, down the generations.

With the phrase "kol Israel," there is a change in the message that Moshe is sending the Israelites. As they prepare to enter the Promised Land, they must transition into a nation of adults, with responsibilities to each other to build a society together. The Israelites must undergo a shift from a group of individuals with a common ancestry to a nation bound by collective responsibility--now linked horizontally, as opposed to primarily vertically.

The first time Howard and I came to Temple Aliyah was on erev Tisha B'Av, shortly after we moved to Needham in the summer of 2002. At that time we were surprised by how sparsely populated this town appears to be in the summertime, and it was hard to imagine that anyone would show up on a beautiful summer evening to observe Tisha B'Av. Amazingly, there were several dozen people there that night and I remember thinking, what kind of people are these, that

they come together to sit on the floor in the dark together remembering ancient history?

Maybe it is both the *vertical* transmission of history and faith, from parent to child, as well as the shared responsibilities of individuals in the community (*horizontal linkage*) to each other that created this community. As we remember historical traumas and confront painful contemporary realities, we are fortified by our duties to and support from one another.

For the vertical transmission of history and faith, I am grateful for the memory of my late grandfather, Irving Karol, z'l. Fifty years ago this summer I was a student in his Ancient Jewish History course at Prozdor summer school. Though most of what he taught went way over my head, certain nuggets of information are deeply embedded in my brain and his love of Jewish history in my heart.

I am grateful to Rabbi Perkins, Cantor Gloth, Rabbi Gordon and all the members of this synagogue for teaching us and leading a vibrant Jewish community in Needham, summertime included.



First Jewish Revolt coinage was issued by the Jews after the Zealots captured Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple from the Romans in 66 AD at the beginning of the First Jewish Revolt. The Jewish leaders of the revolt minted their own coins to emphasize their newly obtained independence from Rome.

In the Revolt's first year (66–67 AD), the Jews minted only silver coins, which were struck from the Temple's store of silver. As the Revolt continued and the silver supplies diminished, other metals were utilized for coins. The MFA example of a silver shekel from the year 70 is unusual and rare.

The coinage of the Jewish revolt (years 66-70 AD) is mostly dated, using Hebrew letters as numerals (*alef*=1, *bet*=2, *gimel*=3, *daled*=4, *he*=5). After Year 1, the letter *shin* (which looks like our "W") appears with the numeral as an abbreviation of the word *shanat* ("year"). **Year 1 shekels** are scarce; **Years 2** and **3** are more common; **Year 4** is very rare; and **Year 5 (year 70)** is extremely rare, with only about 25 examples known.

On **Harlan Berk's** list of the 100 greatest ancient coins, the **Year 5 shekel**, struck between March and August of 70 CE, is number 37. Because these coins circulated for such a brief period, they are generally in excellent condition.