

HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

SERIES 2: 41 - TZOM GEDALIA - HISTORY, MEANING AND MESSAGE OU ISRAEL CENTER - FALL 2022

A] THE 'MINOR FASTS'

A1] ORIGINS OF THE FASTS

1. כשתקנו הנביאים אחר חורבן בית המקדש הראשון ארבעה צומות, תקנו אותם כדוגמת צום יום הכיפורים, שכן בדרך כלל תקנו חכמים את תקנותיהם כדוגמת מה שנצטוונו בתורה. וכמו שצום יום הכיפורים נמשך יממה שלמה כך גם תקנו את ארבעת הצומות. וכשם שבצום הכיפורים אסורים בחמישה עינויים: אכילה ושתייה, רחיצה, סיכה, נעילת הסנדל ותשמיש המיטה, כך תקנו גם בצומות על החורבן. וכך נהגו במשך שבעים שנות גלות בבל. וכשחזרו עולי בבל לבנות את בית המקדש השני, נתבטלו הצומות והפכו לימי ששון ושמחה.

ה. אליעזר מלמד, פניני הלכה, זמנים פרק ז הלכה א'

The 4 'minor fasts' were originally instituted by the Nevi'im following the destruction of the First Temple. Since their template for a fast day was Yom Kippur, they gave these new fasts - Zecher Lechurban - the same structure as Yom Kippur. They started the night before, ran for 24 hours and included all 5 'inuyim' - eating/drinking, bathing, anointing, wearing leather shoes and sexual relations. When the Second Temple was being built, the question arose - should these fasts continue?

2. ז (א) ויהי בשנת ארבע לדרגוש המלך הלה דבר'ה' אל-זכריה בארבעה לחדש התשעי בכסלו: (ב) וישלח בית-אל שר-אצור ורגם מלך ונאישו לחלות את-פני ה': (ג) לאמר אל-הכהנים אשר לבית-ה' צבאות ואל-הנביאים לאמר **האבכה בחדש החמישי הנזר כאשר עשיתי זה כמה שנים:** פ (ד) ויהי דבר-ה' צבאות אלז לאמר: (ה) אמר אל-פלעם הארץ ואל-הכהנים לאמר **כי צמתם וספורו בחמישי ובשביעי וזה שבעים שנה הצום צמתני אני:** (ו) וכי תאכלו וכי תשתו הלא אתם האכלים ואתם השתים: (ז) הלא את-הדברים אשר קרא ה' ביד הנביאים הראשנים בהיות ירושלם ישבת ושלחה ועריה סביבתיה והנגב והשפלה ישב: פ (ח) ויהי דבר-ה' אל-זכריה לאמר: (ט) כה אמר ה' צבאות לאמר משפט אמת שפטו וחסד ורחמים עשו איש את-אחיו: (י) ואלמנה ויתום גר ועני אל-תעשקו ורעת איש אחיו אל-תחשבו בלבבכם: (יא) וימאנו להקשיב ויתנו כתר סדרת ואזניהם הכבדו משמוע: (יב) ולכם שמו שמיר משמוע את-התורה ואת-הדברים אשר שלח ה' צבאות ברוחו ביד הנביאים הראשנים ויהי קצף גדול מאת ה' צבאות: (יג) ויהי כאשר-קרא ולא שמעו כן יקראו ולא אשמע אמר ה' צבאות: (יד) ואסערום על כל-הגוים אשר לא-ידעו והארץ נשמה אחריהם מעבר ומשב וישמו ארץ-חמדה לשמה: פ

ח (טז) אלה הדברים אשר תעשו דברו אמת איש את-העו אמת ומשפט שלום שפטו בשעריכם: (יז) ואיש את-רעת רעהו אל-תחשבו בלבבכם ושבעת שקר אל-תאמרו כי את-כל-אלה אשר שנאתי נאם-ה': ס (יח) ויהי דבר-ה' צבאות אלז לאמר: (יט) כה-אמר ה' צבאות צום הרביעי וצום החמישי וצום השביעי וצום העשירי יהיה לבית- יהודה לששון ולשמחה ולמעדים טובים והאמת והשלום אהבו: פ

זכריה ז, ח:טו-יט

7 1. In the fourth year of King Darius, on the fourth day of the ninth month, Kislev, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah. 2. When Bethel-sharezer and Regem-melech and his men sent to entreat the favor of the LORD, 3. [and] to address this inquiry to the priests of the House of the LORD and to the prophets: "Shall I weep and practice abstinence in the fifth month, as I have been doing all these years?" 4. Thereupon the word of the LORD of Hosts came to me: 5. Say to all the people of the land and to the priests: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth and seventh months all these seventy years, did you fast for my benefit? 6. And when you eat and drink, who but you does the eating, and who but you does the drinking? 7. Look, this is the message that the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets, when Jerusalem and the towns about her were peopled and tranquil, when the Negeb and the Shephelah were peopled. 8. And the word of the LORD to Zechariah continued: 9. Thus said the LORD of Hosts: Execute true justice; deal loyally and compassionately with one another. 10. Do not defraud the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the poor; and do not plot evil against one another. 11. But they refused to pay heed. They presented a balky back and turned a deaf ear. 12. They hardened their hearts like adamant against heeding the instruction and admonition that the LORD of Hosts sent to them by His spirit through the earlier prophets; and a terrible wrath issued from the LORD of Hosts. 13. Even as He called and they would not listen, "So," said the LORD of Hosts, "let them call and I will not listen." 14. I dispersed them among all those nations which they had not known, and the land was left behind them desolate, without any who came and went. They caused a delightful land to be turned into a desolation.

8 16. These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to one another, render true and perfect justice in your gates. 17. And do not contrive evil against one another, and do not love perjury, because all those are things that I hate—declares the LORD. 18. And the word of the LORD of Hosts came to me, saying, 19. Thus said the LORD of Hosts: The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month, and the fast of the tenth month shall become occasions for joy and gladness, happy festivals for the House of Judah; but you must love honesty and integrity.

The people came to Zecharia as the Second Temple was being built and asked whether they should continue to fast over the churban? His response was sharp and critical - we do not fast because of the destruction, but because of our corrupt behavior which caused the destruction! As long as that behavior continues, we must continue to fast. Only if we learn to 'love honesty and integrity', will there be hope for true redemption! Our focus on a fast day is simultaneously on three things (i) what happened in the past - churban/tzom; (ii) how it will improve in the future - sasson/simcha; and (iii) what we can do in the present to make that happen - love truth and peace.

• It is clear from the response of Zecharia that a special emphasis was placed during the 70 year exile on the Fast of Tisha B'Av and the Tzom Gedalia - the fast of the seventh month¹. Were these seen as days of greater sadness than the other two 'minor fasts'?

A2] STATUS OF THE FASTS IN DIFFERENT PERIODS

3. קרי להו צום, וקרי להו ששון ושמחה! ... אמר רב פפא: הכי קאמר: בזמן שיש שלום (רש"א - שישראל שרויין על אדמתן) יהיו לששון ולשמחה. יש שמד - צום. אין שמד ואין שלום - רצו מתענין, רצו אין מתענין. אי הכי, תשעה באב נמי - אמר רב פפא: שאני תשעה באב, הואיל והוכפלו בו צרות.

ראש השנה יח:

Rav Papa understood that the minor fasts were instituted in three modes. When the Jewish people dwelt in peace in their Land, they were days of rejoicing. When there was exile and persecution, they were days of fasting. But when there was neither redemption nor persecution the people could decide whether or not to fast², other than 9 Av. Since 9 Av was a day of so many tragedies, the fast applied even in 'in between' times.

4. ... וצבית שני לא היו מתענין לא עשירי צבצת ולא שבעה עשר צתמוז, אלא הרוגה יתענה או שלא יתענה. ולפיכך לא היו יולאין על צבצת ועל תמוז ... והיו מתענין תשעה באב על פי שהוא מסור לרזונם מפני שהוכפלו בו צרות ...

פ' הרמב"ם שם

Rambam states that the people DID fast on 9 Av during the 2nd Temple period³, but not in Tammuz nor in Tevet⁴. It seems that he read the distinction of 'shalom' and 'no shalom' as applying even during that period. As such, 9 Av was, even then, still a fast due to its special status as a day of tragedy⁵.

5. תירן כגמ' דדוקא צזמן שיש שלום ממש דהיינו צצנ"י שולטין. וצזמן שקלקלו הכותים וכתקיניו שלוחין לא היו שולטין החשמונאים. ואז רלו צום רלו שמחה, לכן אין שולחין צהם שלוחים כנ"ל. ויתכן פ"י זה לפמ"ש לעיל משמעות הרמב"ם צפיה"מ דצבית שני נמי אחר שצטל מלכות חשמונאי והיו כפופין לאו"ה נקרא 'אין שלום'.

שפת אמת ראש השנה יח:

The Sfat Emet explains the Rambam as follows. Even during the 2nd Temple period, there were times of shalom and times without. When things were going badly and the Jews were not in control they would have the option of fasting on the minor fasts even though there was a Temple, and 9 Av was always a fast during that period

- What is the status of our times today? Most poskim define 'shalom' as when there is a Temple⁶.
- However, for most Jews in most times, galut has not been a time of open 'shmad'⁷.
- Our times have the 'in between' status when there is a voluntary element⁸ to the minor fasts (other than 9 Av). However it seems clear from the Rambam⁹ that these fasts are now effectively compulsory.

1. According to some mefarshim, the actual dates of the fasts were not fixed, so the 'fast of the fifth' may be 9 Av or 10 Av. So too with the other months in which a fast was decreed. 3 Tishrei is actually mentioned in Megilat Ta'anit as a day of celebration during the late Second Temple period. This may indicate that Tzom Gedalia was not observed at that time (see below) or the fast day could have been on a later day in Tishrei.

2. This is the position of most Rishonim. However, the Ritva (Megilla 5a, Rosh Hashana 18b) understands that the fasts themselves were not optional but the people could chose whether to observe the other four stringencies.

3. Many rejected this text in the Rambam as flawed and insisted that the 9 Av was NOT a fast-day during the 2nd Temple. R. Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer O.C.1:34:3) takes this view, quoting the Tashbatz (2:271), and brings other proofs that 9 Av was a day of joy during that time. However, manuscripts of the Rambam's commentary confirm the above reading as correct.

4. Interestingly, he omits Tzom Gedalia. Is this simply because the context of his commentary here is when the Sanhedrin sent out messengers to communicate the date of the new moon and Tzom Gedalia is irrelevant since messengers would in any even go out in Tishrei to fix Succot. Or is the Rambam hinting that Tzom Gedalia may have had a stronger status even during 2nd Temple times (as we saw it singled out in Zecharia during the period of the Babylonian exile).

5. The phrase והוכפלו בו צרות refers not to a double destruction of the Temple, but multiple tragedies.

6. Rashi (Rosh Hashana 18b) on the one hand implies that that shalom means the existence of the Temple, but also (s.v. *she-yesh*) explains shalom to mean that the non-Jews do not have dominion over Israel. Many poskim understand that he equates these two, meaning that the existence of the Temple demonstrates that the non-Jews do not have dominion over Israel.

7. Tashbatz (2:271) rules that when there is indeed a time of *shmad* the fasts are compulsory together with all 5 inuyim. There is no record that communities actually practiced this.

8. The Rosh (Rosh Hashana 1:6) rules that the community decides if the fasts are to be observed. The Ritva (Rosh Hashana 18b) rules that the local beit din decides.

9. Hilchot Ta'anit 5:5. The Rambam rules that the minor fasts apply today even on Fridays and are pushed off to Sunday if they fall on Shabbat.

6. ועכשיו נהגו הכל כמ"ש רבינו וברי בן חובב על כל ישראל עד שיבנה ביהמ"ק.

מגיד משנה הלכות תעניות פרק ה

In practice, all four of the 'minor fasts' are obligatory in our times, until the rebuilding of the Temple בימינו!

7. א הכל חייבים להתענות ארבע צומות הללו ואסור לפרוץ גדר. הגב: מיחו עוצרות ומיניקות שמלטעות הרצב אין להתענות. ואפילו אינן מלטעות אינן מחוייבות להתענות אלא שנהגו להחמיר. ודוקא בג' לומות, אבל בט' צאצ מחוייבות להשלים. ב צומות הללו, חוץ מט' באב, מותרים ברחיצה וסיכה ונעילת הסנדל ותשמיש המטה. ואין צריך להפסיק בהם מבעוד יום.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות תשעה באב ושאר תעניות סימן תקנ סעיפים א-ב

The Shulchan Aruch rules that the minor fasts are theoretically 'optional' today but everyone is obligated to keep them so as not to be 'poretz geder'. Pregnant and nursing women do not fast on them, other than 9 Av. Furthermore, they start only in the morning, and the other 4 inuyim of refraining from washing, anointing, leather shoes and sexual relations do not apply.

8. (ו) מותרים ברחיצה וכו' - דשעה שרלו וקבלו עליהם לאום בכל הארצות תענית הג"ל לא קבלו עליהם שיהיו בחומר ת"ל כט"ז, לפי שאין רוב הלבוש יכולין לעמוד זה [ח]. ובעל נפש יחמיר [ט] ככולן כמו בט"ז.

משנה ברורה סימן תקנ ס"ק ו

9. (ח) ועיין בעטרת זקנים שכתב דעכשו אין נוהגין לרחוץ בג' לומות. וכתב צפרי מגדים דהיינו בחמין אבל צלונן יש לומר דשרי בג' לומות. והוא הדין פניו ידיו ורגליו בחמין יש לומר דשרי. (ט) דהאידנא מלוי גזרות מן עובדי גלולים. ואם כן חל עלם החיוב על הג' לומות כמו על ט' צאצ לפי דברי הרמב"ן. וגם הגר"א צביאורו מסכים לדברי הרמב"ן. ועיין צאליה רבה בשם השל"ה דבעל נפש צריך להפסיק גם מצעוד יום.

שער הציון סימן תקנ ס"ק ח-ט

The Mishna Berura rules that a 'ba'al nefesh' should be strict and observe the extra inuyim even on the minor fasts and even start the fasts the night before! Even though this is not widely practiced, he understands there to be a widespread custom not to bath one's entire body in hot water on the minor fasts. Also, since the Jewish people have often been in times of real shmad, the minor fasts may in such times be intrinsically obligatory and not simply customary. In such a situation the Ramban and the Gra rule that a person should keep all the inuyim on every fast.

B] TZOM GEDALIA - THE HISTORY

B1] THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS

- The Biblical account of the story of Gedalia appears in two places - in brief in 2 Melachim 25:25-26 and in greater depth in Yirmiyahu Chapter 41.

10. (כג) וישמעו כל־שרי החילים המה והאנשים כִּי־הִפְקִיד מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל אֶת־גְּדַלְיָהוּ וַיָּבֵאוּ אֵל־גְּדַלְיָהוּ הַמִּצְפָּה וַיִּשְׁמַעֵאל בֶּן־נְתַנְיָה וַיִּחַנְנוּ בְּרֶגְרֵם וַיִּשְׁרְיָה בְּרֶגְרֵם הַנְּטֹפְתִי וַיִּאָּזְנֶהוּ בְּרֶגְרֵם הַמַּעֲכָתִי הַמָּה וְאֲנָשֵׁיהֶם: (כד) וַיִּשְׁבַּע לָהֶם גְּדַלְיָהוּ וַלְאֲנָשֵׁיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֶל־תִּירְאוּ מֵעַבְדֵי הַכַּשְׂדִּים שָׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ וְעַבְדוּ אֶת־מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל וַיֵּטֵב לָכֶם: ס וַיְהִי בַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׂבִיעִי בָּא וַיִּשְׁמַעֵאל בֶּן־נְתַנְיָה בְּרֶגְרֵם הַמִּצְפָּה מִזֵּרַע הַמְּלוּכָה וַעֲשָׂרָה אַנְשִׁים אִתּוֹ וַיָּכּוּ אֶת־גְּדַלְיָהוּ וַיָּמָתוּ וְאֶת־הַיְהוּדִים וְאֶת־הַכַּשְׂדִּים אֲשֶׁר־הָיוּ אִתּוֹ בַּמִּצְפָּה: וַיִּקְמוּ כָל־הָעָם מִקְטָן וְעַד־גָּדוֹל וְשָׂרֵי הַחֵילִים וַיָּבֵאוּ מִצְרָיִם כִּי יֵרָאוּ מִפְּנֵי כַּשְׂדִּים: {ס}

מלכים ב' כג-כה-כו

The brief account in Melachim tells us that Gedalia ben Achikam was appointed by Babylon and urged cooperation with the Babylonian rulers. Yishmael ben Netania was, however, of Davidic royal blood. He assassinated Gedalia and the Jews and Babylonians in his court. After this many people fled to Egypt to escape the retribution of the Babylonians.

11. YIRMIYAHU CHAPTER 39

1 In the ninth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, in the tenth month, King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon moved against Jerusalem with his whole army, and they laid siege to it. 2 And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, on the ninth day of the fourth month, the [walls of] the city were breached. 4 When King Zedekiah of Judah saw them, he and all the soldiers fled. They left the city at night, by way of the king's garden, through the gate between the double walls; and he set out toward the Arabah. 5 But the Chaldean troops pursued them, and they overtook Zedekiah in the steppes of Jericho. They captured him and brought him before King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon at Riblah in the region of Hamath; and he put him on trial. 6 The king of Babylon had Zedekiah's children slaughtered at Riblah before his eyes; the king of Babylon had all the nobles of Judah slaughtered. 7 Then the eyes of Zedekiah were put out and he was chained in bronze fetters, that he might be brought to Babylon. 8 The Chaldeans burned down the king's palace and the houses of the people by fire, and they tore down the walls of Jerusalem. 9 The remnant of the people that was left in the city, and the defectors who had gone over to him—the remnant of the people that was left—were exiled by Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, to Babylon. 10 But some of the poorest people who owned nothing were left in the land of Judah by Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards [רַב־טַבָּחִים], and he gave them vineyards and fields at that time.

11 King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon had given orders to Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, concerning Jeremiah: 12 "Take him and look after him; do him no harm, but grant whatever he asks of you." 13 So Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, and Nebushazban the Rab-saris, and Nergal-sarezer the Rab-mag, and all the commanders of the king of Babylon sent 14 and had Jeremiah brought from the prison compound. They committed him to the care of Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan, that he might be left at liberty in a house. So he dwelt among the people.

CHAPTER 40

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards [רַב־טַבָּחִים], set him free at Ramah, to which he had taken him, chained in fetters, among those from Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon. 2 The chief of the guards took charge of Jeremiah, and he said to him, "The LORD your God threatened this place with this disaster; 3 and now the LORD has brought it about. He has acted as He threatened, because you sinned against the LORD and did not obey Him. That is why this has happened to you. 4 Now, I release you this day from the fetters which were on your hands. If you would like to go with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you. And if you don't want to come with me to Babylon, you need not. See, the whole land is before you: go wherever seems good and right to you." 5 But [Jeremiah] still did not turn back. "Or go to Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has put in charge [אֲשֶׁר הִפְקִיד מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל] of the towns of Judah, and stay with him among the people, or go wherever you want to go." The chief of the guards gave him an allowance of food, and dismissed him. 6 So Jeremiah came to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah, and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land. 7 The officers of the troops in the open country, and their men with them, heard that the king of Babylon had put Gedaliah son of Ahikam in charge of the region, and that he had put in his charge the men, women, and children – of the poorest in the land – those who had not been exiled to Babylon. 8 So they with their men came to Gedaliah at Mizpah – Ishmael son of Nethaniah; Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah; Seraiah son of Tanhumeth; the sons of Ephai the Netophathite; and Jezaniah son of the Maacathite. 9 Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan reassured them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well with you." 10 I am going to stay in Mizpah to attend upon the Chaldeans who will come to us. But you may gather wine and figs and oil and put them in your own vessels, and settle in the towns you have occupied." 11 Likewise, all the Judeans who were in Moab, Ammon, and Edom, or who were in other lands, heard that the king of Babylon had let a remnant stay in Judah, and that he had put Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan in charge of them. 12 All these Judeans returned from all the places to which they had scattered. They came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and they gathered large quantities of wine and figs.

13 Johanan son of Kareah, and all the officers of the troops in the open country, came to Gedaliah at Mizpah 14 and said to him, "Do you know that King Baalis of Ammon¹⁰ has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to kill you?" But Gedaliah son of Ahikam would not believe them. 15 Johanan son of Kareah also said secretly to Gedaliah at Mizpah, "Let me go and strike down Ishmael son of Nethaniah before anyone knows about it; otherwise he will kill you, and all the Judeans who have gathered about you will be dispersed, and the remnant of Judah will perish!" 16 But Gedaliah son of Ahikam answered Johanan son of Kareah, "Do not do such a thing: what you are saying about Ishmael is not true!"

CHAPTER 41

1 In the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, who was of royal descent and one of the king's commanders, came with ten men to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah; and they ate together there at Mizpah. 2 Then Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the ten men who were with him arose and struck down Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan with the sword and killed him, because the king of Babylon had put him in charge of the land. 3 Ishmael also killed all the Judeans who were with him—with Gedaliah in Mizpah—and the Chaldean soldiers who were stationed there. 4 The second day after Gedaliah was killed, when no one yet knew about it, 5 eighty

10. Baalis of Ammon was also interested in rebellion against Babylon - see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baalis>

men came from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria, their beards shaved, their garments torn, and their bodies gashed, carrying meal offerings and frankincense to present at the House of the LORD. 6 Ishmael son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he walked. As he met them, he said to them, "Come to Gedaliah son of Ahikam." 7 When they came inside the town, Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the men who were with him slaughtered them [and threw their bodies] into a cistern. 9 The cistern into which Ishmael threw all the corpses of the men he had killed in the affair of Gedaliah [אֲשֶׁר הִכָּה בְיַד-גְּדַלְיָהוּ] was the one that a King Asa had constructed on account of King Baasha of Israel¹¹. That was the one which Ishmael son of Nethaniah filled with corpses.

CHAPTER 43

4 So Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers and the rest of the people did not obey the LORD's command to remain in the land of Judah. 5 Instead, Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers took the entire remnant of Judah—those who had returned from all the countries to which they had been scattered and had sojourned in the land of Judah. 6 men, women, and children; and the daughters of the king and all the people whom Nebuzaradan the chief of the guards had left with Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan, as well as the prophet Jeremiah and Baruch son of Neriah 7 and they went to Egypt. They did not obey the LORD.

Yirmiyahu Chapters 39-43

B2] GEDALIA - WHO, WHAT, WHERE AND WHEN

- Gedalia is likely to have come from the tribe of Binyamin. His grandfather, Shafan, was a royal scribe and advisor to King Yoshiyahu¹².
- There is academic debate as to whether he was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar as a governor or as a vassal king over Judea.¹³
- His administrative center was Mitzpa (in Binyamin) - identified by almost all archeologists as Tell en-Nasbe, around 12 km north of Jerusalem, currently in the middle of Ramalla¹⁴. From the way in which Yishmael and very few fighters overcame Gedalia and his men, it appears that the Babylonian military presence in Mitzpa was limited.
- Seder Olam Rabba (26) states that the assassination occurred in the year of the destruction so Gedalia's tenure was only 52 days. Some academics take the view that the events are likely to have occurred around four or five years after the destruction of Yerushalayim (582/1 BCE). Others place the events shortly after the destruction of the Temple.¹⁵
- There are different opinions as to the date of which Gedalia was actually killed. The Gemara¹⁶ and the Rambam¹⁷ state that he was killed on 3 Tishrei.

12. וַיְהִי בַחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶשְׁמַעְיָאֵל בֶּן-נְתַנְיָהּ בֶּן-אֱלִישָׁמַע מִזְרַע הַמְּלִיכָה וְרַבִּי הַמְּלִיךְ וַעֲשָׂרָה אַנְשִׁים אֲתָוּ אֶל-גְּדַלְיָהוּ בֶן-אֲחִיקָם הַמְצַפְתָּה וַיֹּאכְלוּ שָׂם לֶחֶם יַחְדָּו בַּמְצַפָּה. (רד"ק) - כּוּמוּ מִחַר חֹדֶשׁ וּזְרָ"ה נִכְרַג גְּדַלְיָה בֶן אֲחִיקָם. וּקְצֵעוּ הַתְּעִינָה צְמוּלָאֵי ר"ה מִפְּנֵי שְׂבוּא י"ט).

ירמיהו מא:א

The Redak understands that assassination was on Rosh Hashana but the fast was delayed until after Yom Tov.

13. כְּתַצ רְצִינוּ יְרוּחַס (נִי"ח ח"צ קסד). שְׁלֶשֶׁת צַתְשָׁרֵי שָׁבוּ נִכְרַג גְּדַלְיָה בֶן אֲחִיקָם אֲמָרוּ כִּי צְרָאֵשׁ הַשְּׁנָה נִכְרַג וְגַדְחָה תְּעִינָתוֹ לְיוֹם חוּל ...

בית יוסף אורח חיים סימן תקמט

This is also the position of the Beit Yosef in the name of Rabbeinu Yerucham.¹⁸

11. This raises the specter of the civil wars between the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim (Baasha) and the Southern Kingdom of Judea (Asa). R. Binyamin Lau (*Jeremiah - The Fate of a Prophet*, Maggid 2013 pp 200-206) sees deeper lingering resentments in this second massacre. The northern tribes in Samaria had long been at war with Judea and, even when King Yoshiyahu was able to achieve some level of rapprochement, with the removal of the northern temples in Beit El and Dan, many in Judea resented the northerners. When Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria exiled the northern tribes he introduced the Samaritans, leading to assimilation and intermarriage of the remaining northern Jews. Many in Judea looked down at their northern brothers and rejected their place in Klal Yisrael. As such, when Yishmael saw a band of Jews from Samaria coming to Judea to mourn the Temple in Yerushalayim, Yishmael looked at them with utter contempt. The second massacre was a way to ensure that Judea 'had the last laugh'.

12. 2 Melachim 22:8. Shafan was involved in the famous discovery of the scroll which led to the teshuva movement of Yoshiyahu and the people. Shafan's own father (Azalia) and grandfather (Meshulam) are recorded in 2 Melachim 22:3. Gedalia's father, Ahikam and his uncle, Gemaria, were also important players in Jewish life towards the end of the First Temple period. As such, Gedalia's family were nobility just one level below the Davidic royal family. The previous appointment by Babylon of Tzidkiyahu from the family of David had gone badly wrong. Therefore appointing an alternative royal line (Binyamin had of course been a previous royal house) was politically expedient.

13. See John Ritzema, *After Zedekiah: Who and What Was Gedaliah ben Ahikam?*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Vol 42.1 (2017): 73-91.

14. There has been a trove of archeological findings in and around Mitzpa which corroborate and expand the biblical account of the story of Gedalia. See John Ritzema, *After Zedekiah: Who and What Was Gedaliah ben Ahikam*, Journal of the Study of the Old Testament Vol 42.1 (2017) 73-91 and <https://www.geni.com/people/Gedaliah-ben-Ahikam-Governer-of-Judah/6000000019127590015>.

15. See Tova Ganzel, *The Fast of Gedaliah: Its Continued Observance Significance in the Restoration Period*, Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies 20 (2010), 51-69. Ganzel analyses the textual evidence relating to Yirmiyahu and Yechezkel and quotes the academic positions.

16. Rosh Hashana 18b - see below.

17. Hilchot Ta'anit 5:2.

18. The Karaites actually observe Tzom Gedalia on 24 Tishrei based on Nechemia 9:1.

C] TZOM GEDALIA - THE MESSAGES**C1] THE ATONEMENT OF THE DEATH OF TZADIKIM**

14. צום השביעי - זה שלשה בתשרי שבו נהרג גדליה בן אחיקם. ומי הרגו? ישמעאל בן נתניה הרגו - ללמדך ששקולה מיתתן של צדיקים כשריפת בית אלהינו.

ראש השנה יח:

Chazal¹⁹ portray Gedalia as a victim and a tzadik, which reflects the straightforward message of the Biblical account.

C2] RIGHTEOUS NAIVETY IS A DANGEROUS MISTAKE!

15. דכתיב (ירמיהו מא:ט) וְהַבּוֹר אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁלִיךְ יָשָׁם יִשְׁמַעְיָאֵל אֶתְּוֹ כָּל-פְּגַרְי הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הִכָּה בְיַד-גְּדַלְיָהוּ. וכי גדליה הרגו! והלא ישמעאל הרגו! אלא מתוך שהיה לו לחוש לעצת יוחנן בן קרח ולא חש - מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו הרגו. אמר רבא: האי לישנא בישא, אף על פי דלקבולי לא מבעי - מיחש ליה מבעי.

נדה סא.

However, here Chazal imply that Gedalia was somehow responsible for his own assignation and the murder of so many others by Yishmael b. Netanya. His refusal to believe that Yishmael would stoop so low was naive and dangerous. So too, says Rava, even though lashon hara should not be accepted as unquestionably true, it should be taken seriously enough to take reasonable precautions.

16. אמר רבי יוחנן: ענוותנותו של רבי זכריה בן אבקולס, החריבה את ביתנו, ושרפה את היכלנו, והגליתנו מארצנו. (רש"י ענוותנותו - סבלנותו שסבל את זה ולא הרגו).

גיטין נו.

In a similar vein, Rabbi Yochanan later said about the destruction of the Second Temple that the excessive 'humility' of R. Zecharia ben Avkulus lead to destruction of the Temple and our exile. R. Zecharia ben Avkulus had been unwilling to sanction the killing of Bar Kamtza, even though he was trying to inflame the Roman authorities against the Jews.

17. אבלה נפשי וחשך תארי גם פליטתי אשר עזבו ושארי	בית תפארתי כנשרף ביד הארי [נבוכדנאצר] דועכו כהיום בשלשה בתשרי
המים הזידונים שטפנוו בדלקם זקני שארית אשר פלטו מיום נקם	ובוססו מקדש ובוזו חלקם חבלו עתה ביד גדליה בן אחיקם

סליחה (מח) לצום גדליה, רב סעדיה גאון

R. Sa'adia Gaon wrote a Selicha for Tzom Gedalia which we say today. He writes that the temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (ביד הארי) and the zekeinim was later slaughtered through/by Gedalia (ביד גדליה). However, the version of the Selicha in our books has been changed (censored?) to read 'חבלו עתה ביום צום גדליה בן אחיקם'. The selicha is included in Rav Saadia Gaon's siddur with the original wording:

חַבְלוּ עֵתָהּ בְּיַד גְּדַלְיָה בֶן אַחִיקָם זְקֵנֵי שְׂאֵרֵית אֲשֶׁר פָּלְטוּ מִיּוֹם נִקְמָה

• Critically, at NO POINT in this episode did any of the protagonists - Gedalia, Yishmael or Yochanan b. Kereach - consult with the prophet Yirmiyahu who was living among them²⁰.

C3] TO AWAKEN US TO THE POWER OF THE 10 DAYS OF TESHUVA

18. ועוד יש לכוון צזכ לפי שזכ נעשה צזי ימי תשובה והיה לו לישמעאל שברגו להתעורר בתשובה, והוא לא היה חושש צכך. והוסיף צרה לישראל צברייגתו לגדליה שהיה הצלה לכלל ישראל כמפורש צירמיה. לפי צציימים חלו חנו מתפללים על החיים ציום הצג' מימי התשובה צבו נהרג גדליה שהיה לנו נפילה צו ציום יש לנו לדאוג ציותר ולצקש רחמי שמיא

מהרש"א חידושי אגדות מסכת ראש השנה יח:

The Maharsha emphasizes that Yishmael killed Gedalia during the 10 days of Teshuva when he should have been even more conscious of the need to avoid aveira. The awful events of the assassination of Gedalia impress on us the need to daven even harder for life and to avoid such terrible bloodshed.

19. This description of Gedalia also appears in the Tosefta Sota 6:10 and Sifrei Devarim 31.

20. In Yirmiyahu Chap 42 the people, led by Yochanan ben Kereach, DO ask Yirmiyahu to consult with God as to whether they should remain in Eretz Yisrael or go to Egypt. When Yirmiyahu tells them that God wishes them to remain in Eretz Yisrael they simply call him a liar and accuse him of political machinations!

C4] TO REMIND US OF YOSEF AND THE DANGER OF SINAT CHINAM

• The appointment of Gedalia marked a moment of great hope for the Jewish people. Although the Babylonians had destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem and exiled many of the people, a remnant was allowed to stay. Gedalia, an honest and sincere ruler, was placed in charge of the people. He improved the economic situation and the exiles began to return!! Maybe this could be the rebirth of the Jewish state.

- R. David Forman²¹ analyses the story of the demise of Gedalia in parallel to that of Yosef. Note the following comparisons:
 - (i) Nevuzadran is called 'Rav Tebachim'. The only other person in Tanach with similar name is Potiphar - 'Sar Hatebachim'
 - (ii) Gedalia's appointment is described with the word 'hifkid'. This verb is used frequently for the various appointments of Yosef in Egypt and is used by Yosef to describe the ultimate geula.
 - (iii) Gedalia, like Yosef, gathers together the harvest into storage.
 - (iv) Yochanan's question - 'how can we allow him to kill you' parallels Reuven's question to the brothers - 'how can we kill Yosef'.
 - (v) The 10 men who kill Gedalia are parallel to the 10 brothers who wanted to kill Yosef. They also sit down to break bread together.
 - (vi) The treachery is associated with the town Shechem.
 - (vii) Yishmael sheds fake tears to fool the 80 men. The brothers shed fake tears to fool their father.
 - (viii) The word for the massacre of the 80 is 'vayishchatu' - the same as the word for the killing of the goat which fooled Ya'akov.
 - (ix) The victims were thrown in to a pit, and not just any pit but a special one!
 - (x) Yishmael's fraternal jealousy of Yitzchak parallels Yishmael's (from Yehuda) jealousy of his 'brother' Gedalia (from Binyamin). Note also the sale of Yosef to the Yishmaelim.
 - (xi) The aftermath of the events was exile of the people in Egypt.

• The story of Gedalia is about how sinat chinam extinguished the last hope of the Jewish people. Gedalia could not believe that his 'brother' would turn on him and refused to stoop to the level of killing Yishmael first. Yishmael, whether through resentment, jealousy, or self-righteous anger, wishes to eliminate Gedalia; the ends justified the means.

- This ties in with the message of Zecharia 70 years later when the people are rebuilding the Second Temple and ask whether they still need to fast over the Churban as they had in Bavel. Zecharia stresses that they kept the 'fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh' - ie 9 Av and Tzom Gedalia. Dr. Tova Ganzel suggests that these fasts represent two disasters of the Jewish people - bein adam lemakom and bein adam lechavero. Zecharia tells them that, only when these ills have been addressed can they consider stopping these fasts!²²
- After two days of focus on God as our father, we understand that we also have siblings and are responsible to treat them accordingly.

C5] TO WARN US AGAINST THE DESTRUCTIVE ACTIONS OF JEWISH EXTREMISTS

19. וַיִּקְרָא יְשַׁמְעֵאל בֶּן-נְתַנְיָה וְעֹשֶׁרֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-הָיוּ אִתּוֹ וַיִּכּוּ אֶת-גְּדַלְיָהוּ בֶן-אַחִיקָם בֶּן-שָׁפָן בַּחֶרֶב וַיָּמָת אֹתוֹ אֲשֶׁר-הִפְקִיד מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל בְּאַרְצָ (מצודת דוד - כמו על אשר הפקיד ר"ל הסבב כי על שהפקידו צארן ונתקנא צו).

ירמיהו מאב

*The Tanach tells us that Yishmael killed Gedalia because he had been installed as ruler. This was not only because of personal jealousy, but also due to political motivation. Gedalia, together with Yirmiyahu, had been part of a political camp urging compromise and negotiation with Babylon. Yishmael had been part of the political camp of Tzidkiyahu who favors rebellion against and opposition to Babylon.*²³

20. After Gedaliah's appointment, there was a genuine possibility that despite their loss of self-government, and notwithstanding the tragedy of the destruction of the Temple, Jewish life could continue in the Land of Israel, and Jews could have set their efforts to rebuilding their lives and their national infrastructure. But this was not to be. Ishmael son of Nethaniah "from the royal family", and a group of royal loyalists, loathed Gedaliah's cooperation with the Babylonians and perceived it as an act of treachery, as collaboration with the enemy. In the final analysis, these unscrupulous monarchists, who cruelly murdered in the name of their idealistic opposition to any cooperation or accommodation with the governing Babylonians, directly caused the flight en masse of the remaining Jewish population in Judah....
- When we fast of Tzom Gedaliah we are mourning a terrible moment of Jewish infighting²⁴; but more significantly, we are marking the self-inflicted act by which the land became empty of Jews for the first time in seven hundred years.

Rabbi Alex Israel, II Kings In A Whirlwind, p367-8

21. See <https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/hidden-meaning-behind-tzom-gedaliah>

22. Ganzel also flags that the period of Zecharia was one which lacked clarity as to their status of galut/geula. On the one hand they were rebuilding the Temple. On the other, most Jews still lived in Bavel and the Yishuv in Israel was weak and poor. Parallels with our times are apposite.

23. This is reminiscent of the political factions at the end of the Second Temple period when the Rabbis urged negotiation with Rome and the nationalist zealots urged violence against Rome.

24. Uriel Simon relates this the assassination of Rabin in *The Murder of Gedaliah: An Anatomy of Self-Destruction*, in *Seek Peace and Pursue It: Topical Issues in the Light of the Bible*, (Yediot Acharonot 2002) p218-26

D] THE ROLE OF THE FASTS IN LINKING PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

21. א יש שם ימים שכל ישראל מתענים בהם מפני הצרות שארעו בהן כדי לעורר הלבבות לפתח דרכי התשובה ויהיה זה זכרון למעשינו הרעים ומעשה אבותינו שהיה כמעשינו עתה עד שגרים להם ולנו אותן הצרות. שזכרון דברים אלו נשוב להטיב שנאמר (ויקרא כו:מ) והתודו את עונם ואת עון אבתם וגו'

ב אלו הן יום שלישי בתשרי שבו נהרג גדליה בן אחיקם ונכבת גחלת ישראל הנשארה וסבב להתם גלותו. ועשירי בטבת שבו סמך מלך בבל נבוכדנאצר הרשע על ירושלים והביאה במצור ובמצוק. וי"ז בתמוז חמשה דברים ארעו בו. נשתברו הלוחות. ובטל התמיד מבית ראשון. והבקעה ירושלים בחרבן שני. ושרף אפוסטומוס הרשע את התורה. והעמיד צלם בהיכל.

ד וארבעה ימי הצומות האלו הרי הן מפרשין בקבלה (זכריה ח:יט) צום הרביעי וצום התמישי וגו'.

רמב"ם הלכות תעניות פרק ה

The Rambam connects many ideas in his description of the 'minor fasts' - including history in the past, memory linking that to the present and teshuva connecting the past, present and future.

22. There is, though, one form of outsourcing that tends to be little noticed: the outsourcing of memory. Our computers and smartphones have developed larger and larger memories, from kilobytes to megabytes to gigabytes, while our memories, and those of our children have got smaller and smaller. In fact, why bother to remember anything these days if you can look it up in a microsecond on Google or Wikipedia? But here, I think, we made a mistake. We confused history and memory, which are not the same thing at all. History is an answer to the question, "What happened?" Memory is an answer to the question, "Who am I?" History is about facts, memory is about identity. History is his-story. It happened to someone else, not me. Memory is my story, the past that made me who I am, of whose legacy I am the guardian for the sake of generations yet to come. Without memory, there is no identity. And without identity, we are mere dust on the surface of infinity.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks - 'Rediscovering our Moral Purpose'²⁵

It is essential to transition from history - essentially factual, detached and morally neutral - to memory, which is experienced in the present, deeply personal, and can be laden with moral implications for our future actions.

25. From R. Sacks' acceptance speech on receiving the Templeton Prize, July 2016. Available in full at <http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/node/6551/full>

APPENDIX - THE ACCOUNT OF GEDALIA IN JOSEPHUS²⁶

23. 1. Now the general of the army, Nebuzaradan, when he had carried the people of the Jews into captivity, left the poor, and those that had deserted, in the country, and made one, whose name was Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, a person of a noble family, their governor; which Gedaliah was of a gentle and righteous disposition. He also commanded them that they should cultivate the ground, and pay an appointed tribute to the king. He also took Jeremiah the prophet out of prison, and would have persuaded him to go along with him to Babylon, for that he had been enjoined by the king to supply him with whatsoever he wanted; and if he did not like to do so, he desired him to inform him where he resolved to dwell, that he might signify the same to the king. But the prophet had no mind to follow him, nor to dwell any where else, but would gladly live in the ruins of his country, and in the miserable remains of it. When the general understood what his purpose was, he enjoined Gedaliah, whom he left behind, to take all possible care of him, and to supply him with whatsoever he wanted. So when he had given him rich presents, he dismissed him. Accordingly, Jeremiah abode in a city of that country, which was called Mispah; and desired of Nebuzaradan that he would set at liberty his disciple Baruch, the son of Neriah, one of a very eminent family, and exceeding skillful in the language of his country.
2. When Nebuzaradan had done thus, he made haste to Babylon. But as to those that fled away during the siege of Jerusalem, and had been scattered over the country, when they heard that the Babylonians were gone away, and had left a remnant in the land of Jerusalem, and those such as were to cultivate the same, they came together from all parts to Gedaliah to Mispah. Now the rulers that were over them were Johanan, the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah, and Seraiah, and others beside them. Now there was of the royal family one Ishmael, a wicked man, and very crafty, who, during the siege of Jerusalem, fled to Baalis, the king of the Ammonites, and abode with him during that time; and Gedaliah persuaded them, now they were there, to stay with him, and to have no fear of the Babylonians, for that if they would cultivate the country, they should suffer no harm. This he assured them of by oath; and said that they should have him for their patron, and that if any disturbance should arise, they should find him ready to defend them. He also advised them to dwell in any city, as every one of them pleased; and that they would send men along with his own servants, and rebuild their houses upon the old foundations, and dwell there; and he admonished them beforehand, that they should make preparation, while the season lasted, of corn, and wine, and oil, that they might have whereon to feed during the winter. When he had thus discoursed to them, he dismissed them, that every one might dwell in what place of the country he pleased.
3. Now when this report was spread abroad as far as the nations that bordered on Judea, that Gedaliah kindly entertained those that came to him, after they had fled away, upon this [only] condition, that they should pay tribute to the king of Babylon, they also came readily to Gedaliah, and inhabited the country. And when Johanan, and the rulers that were with him, observed the country, and the humanity of Gedaliah, they were exceedingly in love with him, and told him that Baalis, the king of the Ammonites, had sent Ishmael to kill him by treachery, and secretly, that he might have the dominion over the Israelites, as being of the royal family; and they said that he might deliver himself from this treacherous design, if he would give them leave to slay Ishmael, and nobody should know it, for they told him they were afraid that, when he was killed by the other, the entire ruin of the remaining strength of the Israelites would ensue. But he professed that he did not believe what they said, when they told him of such a treacherous design, in a man that had been well treated by him; because it was not probable that one who, under such a want of all things, had failed of nothing that was necessary for him, should be found so wicked and ungrateful towards his benefactor, that when it would be an instance of wickedness in him not to save him, had he been treacherously assaulted by others, to endeavor, and that earnestly, to kill him with his own hands: that, however, if he ought to suppose this information to be true, it was better for himself to be slain by the other, than to destroy a man who fled to him for refuge, and entrusted his own safety to him, and committed himself to his disposal.
4. So Johanan, and the rulers that were with him, not being able to persuade Gedaliah, went away. But after the interval of thirty days was over, Ishmael came again to Gedaliah, to the city Mispah, and ten men with him; and when he had feasted Ishmael, and those that were with him, in a splendid manner at his table, and had given them presents, he became disordered in drink, while he endeavored to be very merry with them; and when Ishmael saw him in that case, and that he was drowned in his cups to the degree of insensibility, and fallen asleep, he rose up on a sudden, with his ten friends, and slew Gedaliah, and those that were with him at the feast; and when he had slain them, he went out by night, and slew all the Jews that were in the city, and those soldiers also which were left therein by the Babylonians. But the next day fourscore men came out of the country with presents to Gedaliah, none of them knowing what had befallen him; when Ishmael saw them, he invited them in to Gedaliah, and when they were come in, he shut up the court, and slew them, and cast their dead bodies down into a certain deep pit, that they might not be seen; but of these fourscore men Ishmael spared those that entreated him not to kill them, till they had delivered up to him what riches they had concealed in the fields, consisting of their furniture, and garments, and corn: but he took captive the people that were in Mispah, with their wives and children; among whom were the daughters of king Zedekiah, whom Nebuzaradan, the general of the army of Babylon, had left with Gedaliah. And when he had done this, he came to the king of the Ammonites.

Josephus - Antiquities of the Jews

26. As a collaborator with the Roman, Josephus emphasizes the positive aspects of Gedalia, who urged collaboration with the Babylonians. For an analysis of how Josephus projects the story of Gedalia through the lens of contemporary Judeo-Roman politics see Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus' Portrait of Gedaliah*, Shofar, Fall 1993 Vol. 12 No. 1 pp 1-10