

(PREPARED FOR HIRT PARTY 9/10/02 & MIDTOWN 9/11 MEMORIAL)

- Perspective: Catastrophes, both man-made & natural, have plagued mankind from the beginning of time. In my lifetime: Stalin's Gulag, WW II, Khmer Rouge, Cambodia, etc. For us Jews: שואה: proportionately, WTC cataclysm would have resulted in 80+million victims! Still, for US this WTC terror made us, happy optimistic country, realize our vulnerability etc. Hence: very significant for future of USA
- Debate in NYC as to how commemorate 9/11/01 WTC bombing. Some = leave it in its devastation, everlasting mourning; others = mostly restore financial offices as sign victory, defiance of terrorists
- There's more to this debate than participants know!
- Talmud—of 2 minds on reaction to catastrophe: זכר לחורבן, זכר למקדש – mourning or hope?
- Examples: laws promulgated זכר לחורבן—as: prohibition on instrumental music; unpainted slab on wall. Also, זכר למקדש—as: Halakha requires Lulav to be waved only one day, but after Destruction—7 days; זכר למקדש—כורך מצה ומרור כהלל; Amemar's ruling that Counting of Omer only days, not weeks, זכר למקדש, bec all mitzvah of Omer=זכר למקדש, not תורה דין
- The arguments, both Talmudic and contemporary, are reflections of deeper ambivalence in the universal human psyche in relating to catastrophes, whether natural or man-made, resulting in paradoxical reactions. On one hand, deep grief/mourning/defeat/despair... On other, defiance/struggle/ hope/healing/striving to overcome
- So, in relating to death of a loved one/close relative— אבלות שמקורה בהתבדלות מחברת בני אדם followed by ניחום אבליים and gradual reintegration into society...
- So, the Kaddish—always problematic: what is relation text to death? Ans: BOTH defeat & victory, קדיש דאסתחתא , which speaks of the banishment of idolatry, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the coming redemption, is recited at two radically different occasions: by the mourners standing at the open grave of a loved one, and by participants at a מסיבת חסכת!
- So, on verse וישיבו ירושלם קברי בני דוד וכבוד עשו לו במותו כל יהודה וישבי ירושלם (דברי הימים ב' ל"ב), Talmud (BK 16) relates, וכבוד עשו לו במותו - מלמד, שהושיבו ישיבה על קברו -- At very time they buried their beloved and victorious king, they transformed part of their grief into hope, their despair into triumph.
- Again, both opposites coexist—despair and hope, defeat and triumph, mockery and admiration
- Perhaps best symbol of this paradox of two contrary emotions resulting from one cause (catastrophe) = שופר –reaction to “normal catastrophe” of life (מי חייה ומי ימות)—the שברים = weeping and lamentation , surrounded by תקיעה לפנייה ותקיעה לאחריה symbols of joy/exultation
- Thus—שואה = both זכר לחורבן, זכר למקדש—and יום העצמאות and יום השואה—celebrate forever but also try to recapture/resurrect beautiful/vital life European Jewry