Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yoma 9b, Judaic Classics Library translation

Why was the first Sanctuary destroyed? Because of three [evil] things which prevailed there: idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed... But why was the second Sanctuary destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, [observance of] precepts, and the practice of charity? Because there prevailed hatred without cause. That teaches you that groundless hatred is considered as of even gravity with the three sins of idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed together... Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, brought them three evil decrees as against the three evils which were their own, as it is written (Micah 3:11): "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest."

Raba said: Nebuchadnezzar sent Nebuzaradan three hundred mules laden with iron axes that could break iron, but they were all shuttered on a single gate of Jerusalem, for it is written, And now they attack its gate [lit., ‘door’] together: ‘with axes and hammers they smite’ (Psalms 74:6). He desired to return, but said, ‘I am afraid lest I meet the same fate which befell Sennacherib.’ Thereupon a voice cried out, ‘You leaper, son of a leaper, leap. Nebuzaradan, for the time has come for the Sanctuary to be destroyed and the Temple burnt.’ He had but one axe left, so he went and smote [the gate] with the head thereof, and it opened, as it is written, ‘A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees’ (Psalms 74:5). He hewed down [the Jews] as he proceeded, until he reached the Temple. Upon his setting fire thereto, it sought to rise up, but was trodden down from Heaven, as it is written, ‘The Lord has trodden down the virgin daughter of Judah [the Temple] as in a winepress’ (Lamentations 1:15). His mind was
now elated [with his triumph], when a voice came forth from Heaven saying to him, ‘You have slain a dead people, you have burned a Temple already burned, you have ground flour already ground, as it is written, ‘Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover your locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers.’’ (Isaiah 47, 2) ‘wheat’ is not said, but rather [ground] ‘meal.’

The Maharal of Prague, Sefer Netzach Yisrael, chapter four, p. 58-9

The Shechina [Divine Presence] was among them [the Jewish people in the time of] the First Temple. This was the spiritual level of the First Temple—that it was unique in its spiritual level in that the Shechina dwelled in it. Therefore its destruction occurred when it was not fitting for the Shechina to dwell among them, that is, when [the Jewish people] made the Temple impure, [since] God does not dwell amidst their impurity.”

Discussion Questions:
1. Why were the First and Second Temples destroyed?
2. What does the Talmud teach us about the difference between immediate and ultimate causes?
3. Why do you think it matters for us to understand ultimate causes?

Part Two: Tisha Ba'av, Tshuva, and Redemption

Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Brachot, chapter two, page five. English translation based on Hebrew translation by Rabbi Yechiel Berlev from the Palestinian Aramaic.

It happened that when a Jew was plowing, the ox in front of him cried out. An Arab passed by and heard the scream of the ox. The Arab said to him, ‘Jew, Jew, free your oxen from the pin of the plow, because your Temple has been destroyed.’ The ox cried out a second time. The Arab said to him, ‘Jew, Jew, fasten your ox to the pin of the plow, because your Messiah is born. [The Jew] said to him, what is the name [of the Messiah]? [The Arab answered] Menachem...

[The Jew went to the mother of Menachem] She said, I want to strangle all the enemies of Israel [meaning she wanted to strangle her son Menachem], because on the day he was born the Temple was destroyed. [The Jew] said to her, I am sure that just as the Temple was destroyed on the day he was born, so too it will be rebuild on that day.
Maimonides, Mishna Torah, Hilchot Tshuva 7:5, translation by Immanuel O'Levy

your captivity, and have compassion on you, and will return and gather you from all the nations, then be redeemed immediately, as it is written, “And it shall come to pass when all these things come to pass, and you will return to the Lord your God... and then the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion on you, and will return and gather you from all the nations, amongst whom the Lord your God has scattered you”.

Deuteronomy 1:12, Artscroll translation. (Read on the Shabbat preceding the 9th of Av)

"How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?"

Rabbi Eliahu Ki Tov, in The Book of Our Heritage, teaches: “The purpose of such fast days is to turn our hearts toward repentance by recalling our own misdeeds as well as those of our ancestors. By remembering these misdeeds, which we continue to repeat and which bring on similar calamities, we are motivated to return to the proper path of life.”

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin, page 97b, translation by Judaic Classics Library

Rabbi Eliezer said: if Israel repent, they will be redeemed; if not, they will not be redeemed.

Maimonides, Mishna Torah, Hilchot Tshuva 7:5, translation by Immanuel O'Levy

The Prophets commanded us to repent, for Israel cannot be redeemed without having repented. The Torah has already promised that Israel will repent at the end of her exile and will then be redeemed immediately, as it is written, “And it shall come to pass when all these things have happened... and you shall return to the Lord your God... and then the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion on you, and will return and gather you from all the nations, amongst whom the Lord your God has scattered you”.

Deuteronomy 1:12, Artscroll translation. (Read on the Shabbat preceding the 9th of Av)

"How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?"

Rabbi Yosef Yozel Horowitz (from Mechachamei Hamussar, quoted in Itturei Torah vol. 6 p. 19) comments, “Traditionally, this verse is read to the melody of the book of Eicha, to teach us that if a person refuses to assume the responsibility for communal needs and thinks that by doing so he makes things easier for himself, he will in the end find out that matters will be worse for him and he will remain alone and isolated.” He further states that a person who chooses not to “get themselves dirty” by involving themselves in the social needs around him, is himself a true cause for mourning, as such a person is missing out on what makes him human.

Maimonides, commentary on the Mishna, Rosh Hashana 1,3, based on R’ Yosef Kapach’s translation from the Arabic.

And in the Second Temple [period the Jews] would not afflict themselves on the seventeenth of Tammuz or the Tenth of Tevet, but if one wanted he would afflict himself, and if not, not....And on Tisha B’av they would afflict themselves, even though it was optional, [they did so] because of the
intensity of the calamities [that occurred on that day, as discussed in Masechet Rosh Hashana 18b] as will be explained in Ta’anit.

Dr. David Hanschke of Bar Ilan University (in Tisha B’Av during the Second Temple Period. A Divinely Given Torah in Our Day and Age. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1998) suggests concerning why the Jews would mourn the destruction of the Temple after it was rebuilt: The destruction of the First Temple ended the notion that the House of Hashem is indestructible; it showed the Jews, and the world, that the Temple could be destroyed. The Jews learned that the responsibility for what happens in this world and the responsibility for their continued existence rests on their shoulders alone. The awareness of the past destruction needs to act as the catalyst for preventing future destruction of all types.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do these sources imply about the meaning and purpose of the Three Weeks?
2. Sometimes, people have the idea that the purpose of the Three Weeks is simply “to be sad.” Do the texts we just learned match with your understanding of the meaning of the Three Weeks?
3. If not, which of these teachings do you find more empowering? Which do you think of as being more consistent with Jewish values?

Part Three: Being in the Present, with Foresight

Proverbs 29:18.
Without vision the people destroy, but praised is the person who keeps the Torah.

Ecclesiastes 2:14, Artscroll translation
The wise man has his eyes in his head, whereas a fool walks in darkness. But I also realized that the same fate awaits them all.

Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Sota, chapter eight, page 23.
Rabbi Meir said, it is written [in Ecclesiastes], “The wise man has his eyes in his head.” What about the fool? Where are his [eyes]—in his feet? Said Rabbi Aba Mari: The wise man—when he is at the beginning of a matter, he knows what will be at its end.”
He [Alexander the Great] asked them [the Jewish sages of the south], “Who is called a 'wise man'?” They responded to him, “The person who sees the consequence of their action.”


“Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai had five [primary] disciples...He said to them: Go out and discern which is the proper way to which a man should cling. Rabbi Shimon says: One who considers the outcome of a deed.”

Commentary on the Mishna of the Rambam to Pirke Avot 2:8, partial translation based on R’ Yosef Kapach’s Hebrew translation of the Arabic.

And it says here ‘the one who sees the [outgrowth of an action]--which means to learn from what is now to what will come about...[Rabbi Shimon's] intention is seeing in a person's matters—in all his enterprises that exist in reality—to see what comes out of his actions.

Tehillim 16:8, translation by Artscroll.

“I have set Hashem before me always; because He is at my right hand I shall not falter.”

Pirke Avot, chapter four, Mishna 28, translation by Artscroll.

Rabbi Elazar HaKappar says, Jealousy, lust, and glory remove a man from the world.

Discussion Questions:
1. Think about the qualities in people that are most valued (and therefore the most successful) in our society. Are these the same values that the Torah recommends?
2. What worth do you see in the qualities that our society favors? What limitations can you see in our society as a result of these valued qualities?
3. Do you think that our society brings out the best in a person, the worst, or some combination of each?
4. How can we internalize some of the values that the Torah recommends? Do you think this would help with some of the problems in our society, for example the environmental problem?
5. Do you think that internalizing these values could help bring the Moshiach and rebuild the Temple? If so, how?