

FOREWORD

The OU PRESS, in conjunction with Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd., is proud to present this edition of the Tisha B'Av *Kinot* with a commentary by the *gadol haTorah* of the previous generation, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, a giant whose status is best exemplified by the fact that he is simply referred to as The Rav – rabbi par excellence.

The Rav was a profound philosopher and Talmudist, but he often said that he saw himself as a “simple *melamed*,” a teacher whose job it was to help his students understand the messages and beauty of halakhic Judaism. He was a *Rosh Yeshiva*, but also a communal rabbi, the chief rabbinic figure in Boston and the head of the Maimonides School and Synagogue in Boston. In these *kinot* commentaries, we see him as the superb communal teacher he was.

In most synagogues, *kinot* – the liturgical poems recited on the major day of fasting and mourning for the destruction of the Temples – are read through quickly with little understanding. The Rav perceived that to understand the message of Judaism, one had to understand its language. Rather than rush through the *kinot*, the Rav established a custom – now adopted by many communal religious leaders – to spend the day at Maimonides explaining the *kinot* to all who would come to listen. Sometimes, the Rav would simply explain the words to those who could not appreciate the nuances of the language. Sometimes he would draw on his vast knowledge of Jewish sources to explain the references that went unnoticed. Always would he explain the connection of the text to the Jewish experience of his audience. Over the years, thousands of laymen and scholars would come to sit on the mourning floor with him and listen as he explicated the meaning of the liturgy.

I was one of those privileged to hear the Rav’s recitation and elucidation of the *kinot*. The *mesora* – the Jewish tradition – permeated his very being, and simply by being in his presence and listening to him read the *kinot* one was drawn into the *mesora* and experience of Jewish history. Time and again, he made the text come alive, helping his students appreciate the meaning of the day – and the meaning of the days it commemorated. Through exposure to his intense feelings of faith, one also felt that the *mesora* is not limited to the heritage of a glorious past. Those present

sensed, by their encounter with the Rav, that the *mesora* speaks as well to the future, as it endows Jewish existence with noble destiny. Reading *kinot* with the Rav helped us focus not only on all the past tragedies of Jewish history but also on the messianic hopes that transcend them. We could not help but feel that the Rav himself personified this temporal dialectic of *mesora*. Having lived through the era of the *hurban* of the wellsprings of *mesora* in Europe during the Holocaust, and the destruction of our illustrious past, the Rav, in whose very persona the *mesora* was enshrined, laid the foundation for the rebuilding of our heritage and forged a new beginning for the transmission of *mesora* into the limitless future.

The mourning on Tisha B'Av reaches the apex of *avelut* where no solace and comfort is possible or appropriate. It is a day designated only for *kinot*, tears and profound mourning. Yet, remarkably, on this, the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, we do not recite *Taḥanun*. The reason given is that Tisha B'Av is called a *mo'ed*, a holiday. This semi-festive quality is due, the Midrash tells us, to the fact that the Messiah was born on the day of the destruction of the Temple. The paradox of not reciting *Taḥanun* on this day is critical to the Tisha B'Av experience. It is a statement of hope in the future and absolute faith in our destiny. Even within the midst of our ashes and despair, lie the seeds of our ultimate redemption. Phoenix-like, the Jewish nation will arise again.

The Talmud (*Makkot* 24b) tells us that Rabbi Akiva and some of his colleagues were walking near the destroyed Temple. His colleagues, upon seeing a wolf traverse the Holy of Holies, began to cry at the sight of the desolation of the *Mikdash*. Rabbi Akiva, however, began to laugh. When asked by his colleagues why he was laughing, Rabbi Akiva answered that now that Uriah's prophecy of the destruction was fulfilled, so will Zechariah's prophecy of the redemption of the city, when the young and old will again fill Jerusalem's streets, be fulfilled. Though on Tisha B'Av, in our mind's eye our gaze is riveted on all the horror and pain that has befallen our people, we must also, like Rabbi Akiva, retain the vision of salvation and peace that will some day surely follow.

Alas, the Rav is no longer with us, but his teachings remain. Through this volume we can still learn with him, giving further meaning to our mourning experience.

For those of us who knew the Rav, the publication of this edition has

been a labor of love. We have been ably assisted in our endeavors by our publishing partner, Koren Publishers Jerusalem. Matthew Miller, Raphaël Freeman, Rabbi David Fuchs, and the entire Koren team embraced the *Mesorat HaRav Kinot* project with enthusiasm. With their professionalism, we have, collectively, succeeded in presenting the Jewish community with a volume of rare value and beauty.

This edition is graced by Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb's translation of the *kinot*. When we were confronted with the need to compose an English translation of the *kinot*, Rabbi Weinreb accepted the challenging task, and he has provided us with a monumental literary opus. Faithful to the original, consistent with scholarly precedent, and yet sensitive to the emotional outpouring of the *paytan*, his translation conveys the feeling as well as the meaning of the *kinot*. Rabbi Julius Berman, Chairman of the OU PRESS Commission, was a prize student of the Rav, and this edition is a testament to his mission of disseminating the Rav's writings and teachings.

It is a special pleasure for me to thank my long-time friend Rabbi Simon Posner for his work as editor of this volume. From the very beginning, he infused this endeavor with his extraordinary talents, intelligence, and literary skill, never losing sight of the whole picture while overseeing every aspect of the project, no matter how minute. If not for his diligence, dedication to the Rav's legacy, and devotion to detail, we would not be able to sit low and yet be raised spiritually by reading the *Kinot* with the Rav's insights.

This Lookstein Edition of the *Kinot Mesorat HaRav* has been dedicated in honor of Rabbi Haskel Lookstein. Beloved by his congregation and esteemed by colleagues and lay people alike, Rabbi Lookstein has always been inspired by the Rav's *kinot*, and this edition is a fitting tribute to Rabbi Lookstein's lifetime of service to the Jewish community.

We are grateful for the generous assistance provided for the publication of this volume by Rabbi Lookstein's many friends and members of Kehilath Jeshurun, as well as by the Fishel, Friedman, Katz, Keilson, Kupietzky, Siegel, Singer, Skydell, and Straus families.

Menachem Genack
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