

The Walls of Jerusalem

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The fast of the 17th of Tammuz commemorates primarily the destruction of the walls of Jerusalem first by the Babylonian in 587 BCE and then by the Romans in 70 CE. It is interesting to note that the breaking down of Jerusalem's walls was a very difficult thing to do and that the sieges lasted for several years. In fact the Romans began to feel that Jerusalem's walls were impregnable. They constructed these huge siege machines, which they rolled up to abut Jerusalem's walls. They denuded all the trees around Jerusalem to build them. They were actually built to be a few feet above Jerusalem's walls so the Roman soldiers could shoot at the defenders of Jerusalem being at the same height or even little higher than the defenders and then just walk right into the city. But the Jewish defenders were smart and they knew how to set these siege machines afire but more than that they dug tunnels under the walls of Jerusalem to be under these heavy siege machines. Then when the Romans attacked them they would set afire the poles, which held these tunnels up under the machines, and they would just topple over burning all the time. The Romans thought that all the fire came from on top of the walls. But just before they were going to lift the siege one of their officers noticed that there were tunnels running under their siege machines right under the walls of Jerusalem. The defenders of Jerusalem did not believe the Romans would be able to notice these tunnels so they never blocked them after each toppling of the siege machines. They were therefore not very heavily guarded. The Romans never broke through the walls of Jerusalem they just sent their troops through these tunnels and entered Jerusalem that way. The very tunnels, which had protected Jerusalem for so long, were now the cause of the bloody Jewish defeat and the cause of Jerusalem being burned and captured.

This should teach us all that the very defense mechanism we have put up to protect ourselves in our interpersonal relationships many times can be used against us. We have to know how and when to use them. This also can apply in the religious sphere also when we want so much to protect ourselves and our children from the bad influences around us we go too far. Instead of protecting our children we make the outside world more alluring and leave our children defenseless against its blandishments.. In Pirke Ovos we learn that we have to know how & what to answer the heretic or tempter. Just like in medicine the best protection against smallpox measles etc is a vaccination. A vaccination of course is really giving a person a very weak or defanged virus, which then protects the body against the full-blown disease.

May our children and we continue to live upstanding Jewish lives because we have learned how and when to use our defensive mechanisms.

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