Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch
Eikev 2020 "Bury the Past"

Gut Shabbos. Shabbat Shalom. Even though Mekor isn't operational on full time basis, we were privileged this Wednesday to host the wedding of Mekor couple #12, Yael Leiner and David Parvey. Yael and David met because of Mekor, and we are so happy for them and proud that they are now a permanent part of our history. It's also heartwarming to see once again what a resilient community we have that we could have such an event despite the pandemic. This is also the 2nd year in a row we've had a wedding on Tu B'Av, which is a fitting and popular day for weddings, because it's known as the Jewish Valentine's Day.

There are several events which occurred on Tu B'Av, and as we explained at the wedding, we can identify two themes in those events. The 1st is marriage. For example, when the daughters of Tzlafchad were told they should only marry within their tribe, that policy only lasted one generation, and it ended on Tu B'av, allowing the next generation of women to marry thereafter outside their tribe.

In another example, the Mishna in Mesechet Taanit 31a tells us that on Tu B'Av, young people would be set up for matchmaking by going out into the fields and making introductions to one another.

The 2nd theme is burial. For example, during the desert sojourns of the Jewish people, God decreed that they would die within 40 years, and they were to prepare for their deaths by digging graves and lying down in them to await their own deaths. But on Tu B'Av, none of the people lying in the graves ended up dying, and so they knew that from then on, death in the desert was no longer to be their fate. In another famous incident following the 2nd Temple destruction, the Jews of city of Beitar were killed by the Romans, who forced the Jews to leave their bodies out in the sun, to rot. But God made a miracle that that prevented the decay, so the bodies could be buried with dignity. Gratitude for that miracle inspired the 4th blessing of Birkat Ha'mazon.

Another meaningful connection with Tu B'Av is the obscure law about chopping wood to fuel the sacrifices at the beit hamikdash. The custom had it that that Tu B'av would mark the close of the season in which they would chop the wood, and so they referred to it as *yom tavar magal,* the date on which they *broke the hatchet*.   From that phrase, we probably coined the expression, *to **bury** the hatchet*.

At the wedding, we observed that a major aspect of a successful marriage is the willingness to "bury the hatchet" and not remain stuck in the past. I think this insight applies as well to **all** of our important relationships. And the same message is reflected in the sequence of events on our Jewish calendar: aveilut, mourning over the Temple, followed by shiva d'Nechemta the 7 weeks we're in now. Both are steps in the process of moving on from the past.

Aveilut derives from the word *aval*, with the double meaning of *definitely* and *but,* or *however,* which connotes acceptance and transition. And *nachama* entails both consolation and changing your mind, which is the prelude to moving on. This process teaches a vital lesson—you cannot have a fulfilling future if you remain mired in the past.

As we move through this pandemic, which has been a time of loss in so many ways, this lesson can help us create our future, as individuals and as a shul. We have many decisions to make about how we will observe the High Holidays, and we know this cannot be like other years. But instead of responding to our setbacks with apathy or disengagement, we can instead recommit to our vision of Mekor, with financial support and personal enthusiasm and involvement.

Our community's ongoing, intense commitment was the very reason that Mekor grew from a small minyan to become the flourishing shul we all miss. As we have learned time and again, it is in our power to overcome our current limitations only if we can accept the circumstances that have already come to pass, and then turn our focus to the wonderful future that, God willing, awaits us. Shabbat shalom.