

The Nature of Tisha B'Av

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There are many times during the year when we omit tachanun from our prayers. One of the most interesting is Tisha B'Av (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 131:7 & 559:4). Normally, we associate the omission of tachanun with a feeling of joy as at a bris or wedding or during a festival. This leads us to question why tachanun should be left out of our Tisha B'Av prayers; there would not seem to be any joy in Tisha B'Av.

The reality is that this question may not be as perplexing as it seems. When we look at the times when we don't say Tachanun there is another anomaly; another time when the omission of tachanun does not seem to have anything to do with joy. We do not say tachanun in a *beis avel*, a house of mourning (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 131:4). If we understood why tachanun is omitted in a *beis avel* we might gain some insight into its omission on Tisha B'Av. When we look to the rishonim and poskim we find a few possibilities as to why we wouldn't say tachanun in a house of mourning. The different reasons¹ seem to express one central idea that the week of mourning is a time of separation and loss. It is a time when we do not feel that our prayers have been and we do not feel a sense of compassion from on high. So it is inappropriate to have the heartfelt deep request that tachanun embodies. It isn't difficult to see how this might apply to Tisha B'Av. Instead of an individual feeling of disconnect with Hashem, we feel a communal sense of loss and hopelessness in the destruction of the Temples and so many other tragic events.

There is no question that there is an element of this feeling of despair on Tisha B'Av. However, I do not believe that it is the defining factor in not saying tachanun on Tisha B'Av since the Jewish response is never one of depression and hopelessness. It is interesting to note that we also do not say Tachanun on erev Tisha B'Av (Shulchan Aruch 552:12). If the reason was simply that it was a time when we felt a distance with Hashem then it would be difficult to understand why we didn't say tachanun before Tisha B'Av as well. This time the Shulchan Aruch gives us a reason. He explains that Tisha B'Av is called a 'moed' in the first chapter of Eicha (Lamentations). Although the simple reading of the verse would seem to indicate that 'moed' here simply means 'time', the implication is that on some level there is a holiday aspect to Tisha B'Av². How can we understand Tisha B'Av as a celebration of any kind?

The Jewish response to tragedy is certainly to mourn but also to move on and find the light contained within the darkness. There is a debate as to whether *kiddush levana* (blessing the moon) should be done on the night after Tisha B'Av or if we should wait until right after shabbos Nachamu, when we normally say *kiddush levana*. The Ariz"l (quoted in Shaare Teshuva O.C.

¹ One idea mentioned is that the quality of justice (as opposed to mercy) is functioning. See also Rav Shachter (Nefesh HaRav pg. 200) quoting Rav Soloveitchik that the reason is that after the destruction of the Temple our prayers are not heard in the same way.

² It is interesting to note that the Beis Yosef (O.C. 131) gives the reason for not saying tachanun both in a *beis avel* and also on Tisha B'Av as this comparison to Moed/Chag.

549:2) felt that it should be said immediately after the fast due to the fact that Moshiach is born on Tisha B'Av. We announce to the world that the moon will be renewed in recognition of this fact. The idea is that in our darkest hour, the seeds of our greatest redemption are born. Even on the saddest day of the Jewish calendar we refrain from saying tachanun. The message is for us to find the message of hope for a brighter future even within the most challenging and troubling of times.