

# Bereavement and Consolation

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*And I will make their mourning into joy, and I will  
comfort and gladden them from their suffering.*

**Yirmiyahu 31:12**

והפכתי אבלם לששון ונחמתים ושמחתים  
מיגונם  
ירמיהו לא:יב

*Tisha Be'av* is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar. This is the day on which “painful events were repeated” (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b), when both of the Holy Temples were destroyed, and the totality of Jewish tragedy is commemorated. And yet, every year, almost immediately upon the conclusion of the day of *Tisha Be'av*, we celebrate *Shabbos Nachamu*, the *Shabbos* of “comfort” and the joyous day of *Tu Be'av*, which is considered one of the two most festive days of the year. How do we explain this curious juxtaposition?

The question is amplified further when we consider the unique character of the mourning period that leads to *Tisha Be'av*. When a person mourns the death of a parent, an “*aveilus chadashah*” (new experience of loss), the most intense period of mourning is the first day, followed by the seven day “*shiva*” period that restricts hygiene, grooming and movement, followed by a less-restrictive thirty day period that still prohibits haircutting, followed by an attenuated mourning period of twelve months. By contrast, the mourning for *Tisha Be'av*, an “*aveilus yeshanah*” (old experience of loss), becomes more intense as time progresses, beginning with the three weeks, during which haircuts and marriages are prohibited, then advancing to the month of Av during which laundering is prohibited, and then culminating with *Tisha Be'av* itself, in which the observances of the day are akin to the most intensive observances of a mourner observing “*shiva*.”

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (see *Out of the Whirlwind*, pp. 9-30) explained that the reason for the distinction between the two mourning patterns is because the purpose of the mourning of a parent is to confront the immediate pain, and then eventually to re-adjust to a pattern of normalcy. By contrast, the purpose of the observance of *Tisha Be'av*, commemorating catastrophes that go back thousands of years, is to gradually reach a level of sensitivity and appreciation for the terrible loss that has befallen us, starting with a dull, almost imperceptible awareness, which gradually cascades into a crescendo of bitter mourning.

However, if the purpose of the mourning period ending in *Tisha Be'av* is to increase the intensity of the mourning experience, how can we expect that almost immediately after the climax of bereavement, we will somehow have the capacity for comfort, and even for the celebration six

days later of the day of *Tu Be'av*, one of the happiest days on the Jewish calendar? More puzzling is that the comfort and celebration are planned in advance, regardless of whether or not the Temple will actually be rebuilt immediately after *Tisha Be'av*.

Perhaps the message is that there is in fact no contradiction. The term “*nachamu*” which heralds the *Shabbos* after *Tisha Be'av* and headlines the *haftorah* of that *Shabbos*, has a double meaning, as explained by *Rashi* in *Bereishis* (6:6, and 27:42) with respect to other variations of the word *nichum*: “*Nachamu*” can mean either to be comforted, or to have a change of mind. True comfort can only be achieved when the fullest extent of one’s anguished emotions have been expressed, so that there can be a “change of mindset” from mourning to joy. It is only at the point that the mourning for the loss of the Holy Temple has been most acutely felt that the ultimate experience of comfort becomes possible. Thus, the mourning for *Tisha Be'av* is both a pre-requisite for the ensuing comfort and a prescription for future joyousness.

The notion of mourning as a pre-requisite for future joyousness is spelled out in the following Talmudic passage:

*Make Jerusalem happy and gladden it, all who love her shall rejoice with her, gladden all those who mourn for her.” (Isaiah 66:10) From here it was taught that one who mourns Jerusalem shall behold its joyousness, but one who does not mourn Jerusalem will not behold its joyousness.*

**Ta’anit 30b**

שמחו את ירושלים וגילו בה כל אהביה  
שישו אתה משוב כל המתאבלים עליה.  
מכאן אמרו: כל המתאבל על ירושלים  
זוכה ורואה בשמחתה, ושאינו מתאבל על  
ירושלים - אינו רואה בשמחתה.  
מסכת תענית דף ל:

Furthermore, Rabbi Shaul Yedidya Shochet (early 20<sup>th</sup> century), author of *Ahavat Shaul (drush l’yom sheni shel Shavuot)*, observes that the experience of mourning creates the immediate capacity to appreciate the joyousness of the Temple. This is why the Talmud uses the present tense, *זוכה ורואה בשמחתה* (which literally means “beholds its joyousness”) and not the future tense *יזכה ויראה*. In this vein, it is also interesting to note that the *Ramban* quotes a version of the text (in his *Toras Ha’adam*) that states *זוכה ורואה בנחמתה* – the mourner of Jerusalem experiences its *comfort*.

But why should it be that the full intensity of the mourning for the Temple creates the immediate capacity for comfort, and even for joy? One simple explanation, based on the Talmudic passage quoted above, is that the mourning creates the eligibility for the Temple to be rebuilt, for Jerusalem to be restored to its glory. We are comforted because, through mourning our loss, we have become eligible for salvation, and therefore we have the right to participate in eager anticipation for the redemptive moment to occur.

However, another possible explanation for the immediate capacity for comfort is inherent in the words at the beginning of the fifth chapter of *Megilat Eikhah* – *זכר ה' מה היה לנו* – remember, Oh G-d, what we have experienced. Most commentators understand the phrase as referring to a recollection of destruction, and a cry for compassion regarding our devastation as a people. But there is another interpretation from the *Alshikh HaKadosh* that appears to be reflected in the elegy *Eikha Atzta B’apekha* by Rabbi Elazar HaKalir, in which the phrase *זכר ה' מה היה לנו* is utilized as a refrain to provide a contrast between the grandeur of the Temple period and the

ravaging consequences of its destruction. According to the *Alshikh*, the words זכר ה' מה היה לנו do not refer to the period of defeat, but rather to the time of triumph, when Jerusalem and the Temple were in their glory. He explains that it is impossible to mourn our current state of spiritual poverty and political subjugation without a remembrance of the sovereignty and spiritual prosperity that we once possessed as a people, the same way that a pauper who is born indigent is less equipped to bemoan his lack of riches than a wealthy person who has become impoverished and constantly recollects what he has lost.

Accordingly, our capacity to mourn properly on *Tisha Be'av* is ultimately dependent upon a recollection and appreciation of what it means to be spiritually rich, to bask in the divine presence of *HaKadosh Barukh Hu* in the Holy Temple, and to engage in His service in an atmosphere pervaded with holiness. It is only when we realize how impoverished we have become in our mundane existence in exile, and gradually grasp, through the progressive sequence of the mourning experience, the full extent of our loss and devastation, that we are able to comprehend and therefore experience the mourning of *Tisha Be'av*. Once we have achieved this heightened state of recognition, as the *Ahavat Shaul* explains, we can appreciate the joy that is attainable through regaining our previous state of spiritual majesty. This understanding enables us to transform the intensity of the mourning experience into a period of comfort and even joy, as we once again perceive the purpose of our strivings in this world, and look forward to re-living an existence that is inextricably woven with a connection to the Almighty.

This renewed appreciation for redemption elucidates the significance of *Tu Be'av*. The Talmud (*Ta'anit* 30b, immediately following the discussion about *Tisha Be'av*) describes various reasons regarding the celebration of *Tu Be'av*, including the identification of *Tisha Be'av* as the day that members of different tribes were given permission to marry each other, and other auspicious occasions. However, Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen Me'Lublin in his work *Pri Tzadik* (volume 5) notes that there is another key allusion to the special nature of *Tu Be'av* contained in the *Mishnah* in *Ta'anit* (26b).

The *Mishnah* records that the two greatest *Yamim Tovim* (days of celebration) on the Jewish calendar are *Tu Be'av* and Yom Kippur. After describing the festivities of these two days, the *Mishnah* quotes the verse from *Shir Hashirim* (3:11): צאינה וראינה בנות ציון במלך שלמה בעטרה: שעתרה לו אמו ביום חתונתו וביום שמחת לכו. The *Mishnah* then expounds upon the latter part of this verse: זה מתן תורה – ביום חתונתו – the day of his marriage: this is the day that the Torah was given. *Rashi* explains that the day of marriage is a reference to Yom Kippur, the day that the *luchot shmiot* (second set of Tablets) were given to the Jewish people. The *Mishnah* concludes with an exposition upon the second half of this concluding phrase זה בנין בית – וביום שמחת לכו – the day of happiness of his heart: this is the day of the future building of the next Holy Temple. The *Pri Tzadik* notes that based on the sequence of the *Mishnah*, the day of “happiness of his heart” must be a reference to the holiday of *Tu Be'av* (see also *Maharsha ad loc*, who writes similarly), on which day he concludes that the Holy Temple will be re-built in the future!

After the mourning of the Temple has been observed in all of its intensity and has elicited an appreciation of the grandeur that we seek to re-experience through the re-building of the Holy Temple, we are prepared not only for the comfort of *Shabbos Nachamu* but for a “change of

mindset” from mourning to celebration, reflected in the celebration of *Tu Be’av*, heralding the future building of the Holy Temple. May we all witness the full and ultimate realization of this celebration, when even the day of *Tisha Be’av* itself shall be transformed into a day of jubilation upon the building of the third *Beit Hamikdash*, may it happen speedily in our time.