

# Collected Tisha B'Av

## Insights from YU

### Community Rebbetzins

#### **Introduction**

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*A Rebbetzin is in a unique position, acquired solely by virtue of being married to a rabbi. She balances raising a family, her own profession and her husband's demanding schedule. In addition she takes her "volunteer" role as rebbetzin very seriously and greatly impacts on the growth of her community by working as a team with her husband and through her own multiple unique contributions to their synagogue.*

*The Center for the Jewish Future recognizes the invaluable role of this often "unsung heroine". It provides programming for the newer rebbetzins through the Rebbetzin Esther Rosenblatt Rebbetzins Yarchei Kallah where they have the opportunity to meet with seasoned professionals to discuss issues of self, family and community in a safe and supportive environment and to network with each other. Other resources are offered as well.*

*We are honored to present to you, a collection of articles from our rebbetzins to provide a unique perspective on Tisha B'Av and its themes. The collection represents a variety of styles and perspectives and highlights the humanity, passion and intellectual sophistication of our rebbetzins. May Hashem bless them with success in their many roles.*

#### **Yissurim and Teshuva**

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The year is 70 C.E. We have been exiled from Israel and the *Beit Hamikdash*, our Temple desecrated and destroyed. We were warned that such destruction would come if we, as a nation, did not do *teshuva* (repentance), but we did not listen. It is difficult to wrap our minds around the horrors that we have seen or heard about. Everybody is either mourning a personal loss, or knows someone who is. We struggle with the philosophical questions around how Hashem lets

this much suffering happen; can any offense warrant this degree of punishment? And what of those who suffered but did not sin?

The problems of theodicy have always weighed upon us, as they should. But there is another dimension to the experience of suffering, a psychological dimension that is affected by, but not defined by, its philosophical cousin. We may find ourselves at something of a loss, when experiencing overwhelming pain, to make sense of the seemingly contradictory sources that seem to steer us in opposite directions when we try to make sense of the role of *s'char va'onesh*, reward and punishment, in a Torah framework. We find sources that seem to indicate that all suffering comes as a result of our flaws and errors, and that we therefore need to take actions to correct those mistakes. We also find sources that indicate that some events in this world happen by chance and that some suffering cannot be explained by sins. So how are we to think about *teshuva* as a response to suffering when we are confronted with it?

The Talmud and *halachic* (Jewish legal) sources often advocate *teshuva*, repentance, as the appropriate response to the experience of suffering. The Talmud (*Berachot* 5a) teaches:

*If troubles befall a person, he should examine his actions.* | אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו יפשפש במעשיו.

The implication is often taken as suggesting a causal relationship, a variation on “there is no suffering without sin” (*Shabbat* 55a). If someone is experiencing suffering, why should he examine his actions? Because that’s where he’ll find the reason for his troubles as well as the path he should take to rectify his errors. The Rambam too, in *Hilchot Teshuva* (1:4) explains that one does not achieve *kapara*, atonement, for some transgressions, until he undergoes *yissurin*, or suffering. This makes for a tidy counterpart to the Talmudic teaching as it suggests that the suffering is both a direct result of a transgression and provides the needed atonement for it.

But we also have another concept. The continuation of the above-mentioned Gemara in *Berachot* 5a, suggests the notion of “*yissurin shel ahava*,” literally, ‘afflictions of love.’ These sufferings are not to be interpreted as a punishment of any sort, or as a needed atonement, but rather to provide a name and context for suffering which cannot or should not be perceived as retribution. So, ostensibly, if a person responding to suffering approaches it through some variation of this idea, that his pain is not a punishment for mistakes or shortcomings but simply is, then he would not be required to be “*mefashpesh bema’asav*,” and repent beyond whatever repentance he would otherwise engage in.

But what if we look at our sufferings and say that we are not looking for reasons, not looking to connect the causal dots to try and ascertain what spiritual ailment brought our suffering upon ourselves (and then, perhaps, also imagine that we can protect ourselves from future pain)? What if at the same time that we do not accept the idea that we are being punished, we still want to respond in a spiritually constructive way? What if we are interested in *teshuva*, but resist the idea that we should interpret particular sufferings as Divine chastisement for our shortcomings? Is there a way to reconcile these two approaches and engage in the “examining of actions” in response to the suffering without endorsing the idea that the suffering was caused by whatever of these actions may be faulty?

Maybe we can. Rabbi Morey Schwartz in *Where's My Miracle?* discusses Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi's explanation from *Sefer HaKuzari* about how G-d interacts with the world. He writes that there are four different categories that encompass the different ways in which Divine providence operates: 1. Phenomena under direct, Divine intervention, 2. Natural phenomena that are specifically directed but that come to be through the laws of nature, 3. Incidental phenomena that happen through the laws of nature by chance and 4. "Chosen" phenomena which come about through the human being's exercise of his free will.

If we accept Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi's division, we must then concede that we will not always know (and likely never know) into which category a particular instance of suffering falls. The philosophical question of how to frame the experience remains unanswered. However, alongside this existential ambiguity, we have not lost the "halachic" imperative (to borrow the Rav's concept from "*Kol Dodi Dofek*") to respond in a constructive way. And what better way to respond than to be "*mefashpesh bema'asav?*" We need not ascribe causality to an event or experience to be able to take advantage of the opportunity to learn from it. Maybe this particular instance of suffering was from the first category, phenomena directly from Hashem, and when we examine our actions and find a fault, we may really have discovered a metaphysical cause. When we do *teshuva* for that fault, we are fulfilling what *Chazal*, our sages, hoped we would when they advocated such examination of actions. But maybe we won't find the particular fault that led to our suffering. And maybe this particular instance of suffering is from category three and was a naturally occurring phenomenon that happened by chance and there is no specific fault to which it can be traced. But the point is, even then, that we can still engage in the "*pishpush be'ma'asim,*" the examining of actions. We can create an opportunity for growth out of our pain even when there may not be a particular offense leading to a particular consequence. If part of how Hashem wants us to grow in life is to take advantage of the small and enormous challenges that inevitably occur by virtue of living in a natural world, then maybe this type of *teshuva* is exactly what we are supposed to do in response to suffering even if it is not coming in response to a particular sin. How can we do this? Perhaps we become more patient, generous and compassionate with others by having greater experience to draw on. Maybe we are slower to judge others, seeing that we sometimes require more forgiveness ourselves. Perhaps the intensity of our reaction to the event may lead to introspective questions that lead to deeper self-understanding. That can be a part of *teshuva* too.

Many of us have grown up learning or have heard in adulthood about the sins for which the *Beit Hamikdash*, the Temple, was destroyed. We may have heard the story about Kamtza and Bar-Kamtza and the idea of "*sinat chinam,*" baseless hatred of others. Perhaps we have even heard the phrase that "whoever does not merit seeing the Temple rebuilt in his days, it is as if it was destroyed in his days" which may be interpreted as placement of guilt on each of us.

In the intellectually sophisticated and wonderfully diverse communities of the Modern Orthodox world we see different responses to this perspective. Many people find the historical thread between us and the generation of the *churban*, the destruction, connective and empowering. Hashem is waiting for us to do *teshuva* and then the *Beit Hamikdash* will be rebuilt and *Mashiach* can come. The justice of Hashem's ways may not be clear to us but it is

incontrovertible. For these people, the exhortation to be “*mefashpesh be'ma'asav*” may inspire growth and *teshuva*. Others are somewhat reluctant to assume a degree of personal responsibility for the destruction of the Temple and all the other myriad horrors to which we have been exposed. For these people, those dots do not connect. For them, the instruction to examine their actions in response to suffering can backfire, leaving them feeling alienated and resentful rather than connected and motivated to grow. However, the possibility of taking advantage of Tisha B'Av and its focus on the suffering and destruction that we have endured as a nation, not as an exercise in blame and guilt but as an opportunity to think about ways in which we can grow, may be a more palatable alternative that can lead to real *teshuva* as well.

Our communities have mystics and rationalists, people who connect through learning and people who connect through mitzvot. Paths to *teshuva* are not uniform either. It is essential that community leaders help to provide opportunities for different paths of *teshuva* so that all the roads that we take as a people lead not to Rome, but to Jerusalem.

## Practicing

Tikvah Ellis

Rebbetzin, Herzlia Adas-Yeshurun Synagogue, Winnipeg, Manitoba

There is a dog in our neighborhood named Bruiser. He is not much of a Bruiser. He is an old dog and a small furry puff ball at that. To top it all off Bruiser is blind. My kids like to pet all the “petting doggies” in the neighborhood, so my preschoolers were introduced to the concept of disability. Although Bruiser cannot see, he does like kids and can find them by smell. Sometimes after petting Bruiser we talk about his blindness and I always mention that people can also be blind or have any number of disabilities.

Once we went to the Sharon Home, the local Jewish nursing home, and met a blind resident. Afterwards, I spoke to my children about the lady we had met and was happy to see that they had a framework for understanding her blindness. Their experiences with Bruiser served as practice for meeting someone disabled.

*Just as when Av begins we decrease happiness, so too when Adar begins we increase happiness.*

**Taanit 29a**

כשם שמשנכנס אב ממעטין בשמחה כך משנכנס אדר מרבין בשמחה.  
תענית כט.

Adar and Av both come every year. That means when we are happy, we know we will be sad again and when we are sad we know we will be happy again. Even when things are going well, we know that we will encounter tragedy again. It would be very short-sighted to think that our kids are sheltered from thoughts of death and destruction. When I taught kindergarten sometimes death would come up in the *parsha* and every kid would have something to say. Just like we know that Tisha B'Av is on next year's calendar, we know our children will have to encounter death. It is a scary reality but all we can do is practice for it.

When there is a death in the community that my children have any link to at all, I tell my children about it. I even take them to make shiva calls when appropriate. We always make sure to review appropriate behavior. My husband is a shul rabbi and our social circle is very large. Many

of the deaths I tell my kids about could be hidden from them easily; and it might save them a little pain and sadness. But it would not teach them about the full cycle of life, nor prepare them for community life. Our children must practice this part of life just like any other. My daughter made her first shiva call when the woman who passed away was the mother of a close friend and neighbor. My daughter was able to come and be *menachem avel* (comfort a mourner) for the first time when the death did not personally affect her.

Another time I took my kids on a shiva call before school. My daughter very gently and shyly gave one of the *avelim* (mourners) a hug. When I took my kids to school, I wrote them each a big mitzvah note. Very real catastrophe is incongruent with the bright cheery world of kindergarten and mitzvah notes. But, our kids are part of a wider world that includes terrible things.

Several months ago my husband's Zayde died. He was my children's great grandfather and a man they knew and loved. They were very sad and troubled by Zayde's death. But I was so glad that they had encountered death before we returned to California for Zayde's funeral and shiva. They were able to learn about death and the mechanics of proper shiva behavior when they were not sad. That practice allowed them to better handle the time after Zayde's passing. They were at the shiva house the entire time and knew how to behave and give comfort to my mother-in-law. They were as prepared as they could be.

In this article, I wrote about the importance of teaching children to handle tragedy because we know terrible things do happen. But, conversely, even in the saddest moments we must know that joy will come. I bless us all that out of the depth of our despair comes great joy and many blessings.

## **L'Torah, L'Chuppah, U L'Kiddush Hashem**

Julie Goldstein

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One inauspicious day in the year 1096, a young Jewish mother named Rachel saw to the slaughter of her own four children. Fearful of the children's conversion by Christian crusaders, the mother erupted in tears, beat her face, brashly accused God of withholding His love, and then unflinchingly carried out the gruesome slaying, even as her little son cried out "My mother, my mother, do not slay me." Carefully arranging the bodies of her dead children in her arms, the mother then waited to meet her own death at the hands of the crusaders.

This gut-wrenching story of child martyrdom, and others like it, appears in medieval Jewish descriptions about the violence perpetrated against the Jews during the First Crusade.<sup>74</sup> Rife with similar accounts, Jewish Crusade literature glorifies child martyrdom, describing children making grand sacrificial gestures, such as preparing knives and positioning their bodies for

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<sup>74</sup> This story is presented in two of the three Hebrew Crusade Chronicles, namely the Mainz Anonymous and Solomon bar Samson chronicles, as well as in a medieval *piyyut* (liturgical poem) included in the standard Ashkenazi corpus of *Kinnot*. See the chronicles in Chazan, Robert. *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 238 and 258. For the *piyyut*, see Artscroll *Kinnot*, 294.

slaughter, mothers killing their nursing infants, “eating their own fruit, their newborn babes,” and escorting their children to execution “as if to a beautiful bridal canopy.”<sup>75</sup>

Although these texts are painful to read, the Crusades, and specifically the slaughter of children, have become focal points of our commemoration and grief on Tisha B’Av. In the first *kinnah* (elegiac poem) explicitly not about the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple), Tisha B’Av is described as a day for recalling Crusade martyrs, including children:

*... I shall arouse the bitter of heart, the confounded one, to weep with me, over the beautiful maidens and the tender lads, wrapped in their scrolls and dragged to the slaughter...  
Please take to your hearts to compose a bitter eulogy, because their massacre is deserving of mourning and rolling in dust as was the burning of the House of our God, its Hall, and its Palace. However, [we] cannot add a [new] day [of mourning] over ruin and conflagration, nor may [we] mourn any earlier—only later. Instead, today [on Tisha B’Av], I will arouse my sorrowful wailing, and I will eulogize and wail with a bitter soul, and my groans are heavy from morning until evening. Over the House of Israel and over the nation of Hashem, because they have fallen by the sword...*

**Kinnot for Tisha B’Av (Artscroll Translation pp. 270, 275)**

ואבכה עמי מרי לבב הנבוכים,  
על בתולות היפות וילדים הרכים,  
בספריהם נכרכים ולטבח נמשכים

...  
שימו נא על לבבכם מספד מר  
לקשרה, כי שקולה הריגתם  
להתאבל ולהתעפרה, כשרפת בית  
א-לקינו האולם והבירה, וכי אין  
להוסיף מועד שבר ותבערה, ואין  
להקדים זולתי לאחרה, תחת כן  
היום לויית אעוררה, ואספדה  
ואילילה ואבכה בנפש מרה, ואנחתי  
כבדה מבקר ועד ערב, על בית  
ישראל ועל עם ה' כי נפלו בחרב.  
קינות לתשעה באב, מי יתן ראשי  
מים (קינה כה)

According to this *kinnah*, Tisha B’Av functions as a day that encompasses all tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people through its history. Rejecting the notion that individual tragedies maintain their distinctiveness, we are taught that all of them stem from one tragic source—the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*. Like the *Churban* (destruction of the Temple), which resulted in the loss of the Jewish people’s religious, political, social, economic, and legal epicenter, the Crusades brought about an utter de-centering and destabilization of the medieval Jewish communities of Germany. Repeatedly called upon by the literature to recall and re-envision the slaughter of children, we may ask: How did child martyrdom, specifically, come to epitomize the turmoil experienced by Jews as a result of the Crusades?

Understanding how children were perceived in medieval Ashkenaz, under normal circumstances, may provide insight into the meaning of child martyrdom. A window into Ashkenazic perceptions of children may be found in a unique child-centered ceremony created by Jews during the Middle Ages, and aimed at initiating male children into the world of Torah study. This dramatic ceremony, which took place annually on Shavuot, generally involved wrapping five-year-old boys in *tallitot* (prayer shawls), escorting them into the lap of a teacher at the synagogue, introducing them to the letters of the *alef-bet* and the book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus) and, in some cases, engaging them in a peculiar riverbank ritual. The author of the definitive

<sup>75</sup> See Habermann, A. *Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Tsarfat*. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1945) 224, Chazan, Robert, 272, Bernfeld, Simon. *Sefer Hademaot*. vol. I. (Berlin: Eshkol, 1923) 198, and Carmi, T. *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1981) 375.

study on this subject, Ivan Marcus, notes that the texts describing the ceremony draw two major implications about children.<sup>76</sup> Firstly, they indicate that children, during the initiation, become equated, through verbiage and symbolism, with the *Bnei Israel* (children of Israel) at Mount Sinai. In this view, the child's separation from home, transition to synagogue, initiation into education and, sometimes, post-initiation riverbank excursion, was seen as mimicking the journey from Egypt, to desert, to Sinai, to incorporation into the world of nations at the banks of the River Jordan.<sup>77</sup>

Secondly, the texts imply that children became synonymous with the text itself, with Torah. Wrapped protectively in a *tallit*, escorted by scholars into the synagogue with fanfare, literally ingesting words of Scripture inscribed onto cakes and eggs, and being metaphorically linked to symbols such as flour, honey, milk, and water, the child was seen as simultaneously entering the Torah as the Torah entered the child. From this perspective, the child and Torah became one.<sup>78</sup>

According to Marcus, the most unique aspect of this rite of medieval Jewish passage was not the metaphorical association of children with the *Bnei Israel* or with Torah, metaphors that could claim a history in ancient Judaism, but rather the ritualization, the performance, and the acting out of the metaphors that took place.<sup>79</sup> Taking the metaphors out of the theoretical realm of literature and playing them out in real life, Jews of medieval Ashkenaz, on a practical level, relived Sinai through the revelation experienced by their children on Shavuot and through their children's incorporation into a homogenous community of Jews.

We may see in the Jewish Crusade literature that the acting-out of these metaphors was extended by medieval Jews to times of crisis as well. Looking at the texts, including some of the *kinnot* we recite on Tisha B'Av, we may discern the same metaphorical associations of children-as-nation and children-as-Torah that are implicit in the Jewish initiation ceremony. Firstly, we can see that Jewish writers repeatedly point to male children, specifically, as undergoing some kind of initiation process through their slaughter, resulting in a new level of intimacy or encounter with God as well as their incorporation into a homogenous "new" community of Jews residing in Paradise (the platonic Jewish community, so to speak). Asked, at the crucial moment before martyrdom, questions like "Do you wish to exchange your God for a wretched idol?" "Do you wish to enter into hell or paradise?", and "Do you wish to receive the countenance of the Divine presence?", boys are invited to join the community of martyrs and usually accept the invitation.<sup>80</sup> The moment of martyrdom, then, was seen as a rite of passage, wherein the child became part of the Jewish nation. The unification of disparate parts of the Jewish people is a theme that recurs in the Jewish literature, in phrases such as "They sacrificed each other until the blood flowed together," and "The blood of husbands mingled with that of their wives, the blood of parents with that of their children, the blood of brothers with that of their sisters, the blood of teachers with that of their

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<sup>76</sup> Marcus, Ivan G. *Rituals of childhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>77</sup> Marcus, 79-80.

<sup>78</sup> Marcus 53-60.

<sup>79</sup> Marcus, 6-7, 56-58, 74.

<sup>80</sup> Chazan, 230, 240, 260, 291.

students ... the blood of infants and sucklings with that of their mothers.”<sup>81</sup> Through child martyrdom, a new unified nation of martyrs was seen as having been created.

Secondly, we may discern the equation of children with Torah in the Jewish crusade literature.

Recalling *Kinnah* 25, which states “... the tender lads wrapped in their scrolls and dragged to the slaughter,” we may note that, indeed, much of this *kinnah* is devoted to mourning over the Torah, Torah scholars, and children, as if they are one and the same. The Jewish reports on the Crusade are even more explicit:

*There was a Torah scroll there in the chamber. The crusaders came into the chamber, found it, and tore it to shreds. When the saintly and pious women, the daughters of kings, saw the Torah had been torn, they called out loudly to their husbands: “Behold, behold the holy Torah, for the enemy is tearing it.” The women said all together “Woe for the holy Torah, ‘perfect in beauty,’ ‘the delight of our eyes.’ We would bow down to it in the synagogue and our little children kissed it. We honored it, yet how has it fallen into hands of these uncircumcised and impure.”*<sup>82</sup>

Just as mothers describe children as having kissed the Torah in this passage, *Kinnah* 22 asks the Torah to mourn for children who died during the Crusade: “Torah, O Torah, gird yourself in sackcloth and roll yourself in ashes, make yourself mourn for your only son ...” Thus, the literature seems to point to a reciprocal relationship between children and Torah. Furthermore, this passage describes the Torah as “the delight of our eyes,” a phrase that is derived from Ezekiel 24: 16, 21, and 25. In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet speaks to the Israelite community, warning them to accept their fate and not to mourn when God strikes “the delight of your eyes,” which Ezekiel explicitly explains twice, as a reference to “sons and daughters.” It would appear, then, that the same phrase used by the *navi* (prophet) to refer to children is applied by the Jewish Crusade writers to Torah. Perhaps, most importantly, this passage pits the “holiness,” “beauty,” and “honor” of the Torah against the status of the “uncircumcised” and “impure” Christians. Taking the contrast between Torah and Christians to its logical conclusion, the Torah can be seen as synonymous with “circumcised” and “pure,” two qualities seen as ontological to the Jewish child.

In a sense, then, child martyrdom functioned for medieval Jews as a rite of passage akin to that of the Child Initiation ceremony. During a period of tremendous religious upheaval, in which the threat of the forced conversion of children loomed large, Jews assured children’s incorporation into the community and unity with Torah through the act of child martyrdom. At a time of destabilization, similar to the *Churban*, in which a fully spiritual Jewish life could not proceed as usual and religious identity lay in the balance, child martyrdom served as a ritual that helped to fortify the sanctity of Jewish children and, thereby, the Jewish community as a whole. In lieu of positive rituals such as the Child Initiation ceremony, Jews created a new, simultaneously tragic and regenerative space, in which the child and community could achieve its greatest spiritual potential. *Kinnah* 22 describes this exchange of the life ritual for the death ritual:

*Neither a man nor a woman showed weakening pity for the*

ולא חסו גבר וגבירה, על בנים

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<sup>81</sup> Chazan, 255.

<sup>82</sup> Chazan, 240, 260.



[children whose] faces were like a splendid tiara. Instead they girded themselves with abnormal courage to smash the head and sever the spine. Then they addressed them with these words, 'We merited not to raise you in the Torah['s ways], let us bring you nearer [to God], like burnt-offering and incense.'

**Kinnot for Tisha B'Av (Artscroll Translation pg. 257)**

צפירת תפארה, אבל אזרו גבורה  
יתרה, להלום ראש ולקרוץ שדרה,  
ואלימו דברי באמירה, לא זכינו  
לגדלכם לתורה, נקריבכם כעולה  
והקטרה.  
קינות לתשעה באב, החרישו  
(קינה כב)

While Jews in the Middle Ages had all the same hopes that we do, encompassed by the blessing “L'Torah, L'chuppah, u-l'maasim tovim (the blessing recited at the time of circumcision, lit. To Torah, to wedding canopy, to good deeds),” they ultimately saw their children achieve those blessings via *Kiddush Hashem* (martyrdom, lit. sanctifying the Name of God). Thank God, today, we have the ability to see our children as small community members and embodiments of Torah, in a positive way. As the wife of a community rabbi, I had the rare opportunity of reintroducing the medieval Jewish Child Initiation Ceremony, with all its implications regarding children, to my *shul*, on the occasion of my son's birthday. In addition, on Simkhat Torah, I often find myself “acting out” the metaphor of children-as-Torah by dancing with the children of our *shul*. However, on Tisha B'Av, as I recall all the tragedies that have struck the Jewish community throughout the ages, I am reminded of the precariousness of this stability and the painful ways that Jews throughout history have tried to preserve their sanctity in the darkest of ways. Every generation finds its own sacred space, language, and way of getting close to God. May we all find our own unique ways of holiness and see the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

## Tisha Be'av and Yosef Hatzadik

Miriam Gross

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The story of Yosef Hatzadik also tells the story of the Jewish people learning how to live in *galut* (exile). The commentators describe this instance of *maaseh avot siman levanim* (the actions of our forefathers foreshadow the lives of their descendants) as paving the way for how we, his ancestors, should navigate our own existence in the post exile world, living among the nations. His conduct and character serve as an inspiration for us and we can learn from all that he did right, just as much as we can learn from all of his mistakes and missteps. There is a Midrash that Gavriel Hamalach came to Yosef while he was in jail and taught him the 70 languages (*Sotah* 36b). If we are to understand this Midrash in a more figurative way, it could mean that Gavriel taught Yosef how to take his message and translate it into a way that the other nations would understand without compromising the integrity of that message.

As Jews, we are constantly trying to assert our relevance in and share our message with the world. When translated thoughtfully and articulately, our message can make a *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of G-d's name) and bring people closer to G-d and Torah. But the message translated without thought can be destructive and create a terrible *Chilul Hashem* (desecration of G-d's name). The same talents and strength of spirit that drive us as Jews to succeed can

bring us down as well. The nations of the world seem keenly aware of when we misstep and falter. Yosef experiences that same success as well as the scrutiny that comes along with it.

Yosef, as a role model, is driven by vision, truth, survival and pride, and made decisions considering *diyukno shel aviv* (the image of his father). He understands that his role is essential yet the story playing out is so much bigger than him alone. These are the qualities that have enabled Jews to rise up to such great levels of success after painful times of persecution, and yet perverted, these are the traits that have led us astray.

Knowing that we come from greatness gives us confidence but also responsibility. We must keep building the equity of Torah for the next generation even in times of Torah scarcity so that we do not deplete the years of investments made by past generations in times of Torah abundance.

Some Jews may leave Torah, exploring other passions and yet maintain a cultural identity, and manage not to destroy the fabric of the Jewish people. This only remains true as long as the investments of their ancestors continue to kick in dividends, and as long as many dedicated Jews are still investing. When the Torah 'economy' is not good and we are not reinvesting dividends, we begin to consume principal until our spiritual balance falls into the red. We have to look to the future with passion and confidence, *yesh sachar lipeulatech ... veyesh tikvah l'acharitech*, there is a reward for your efforts and hope at the end (Yirmyahu 31:15). The future holds up hope; The past provides context, meaning and integrity. This is the message of Yosef and the message of Tisha Be'av. One day it will be celebrated as a *chag* (holiday). That is an interesting thought but one day is not now, we might say. In truth, the fact that one day it will be a *chag*, actually informs the nature of how the day can and should wash over us. It is the promise of a majestic future and the memory of a devastating and glorious past that entwine to create the day of Tisha Be'av, mourning and hoping all at the same time and in the same breath.

## The Mourning Relationship

Naomi Kohl

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*Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit to see its rejoicing; and all who do not mourn for Jerusalem will not see its rejoicing.*

**Ta'anit 30b**

כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה  
בשמחתה ושאינו מתאבל על ירושלים אינו  
רואה בשמחתה  
תענית ל:

What does it mean to mourn? It's a question I ask myself when I am trying to understand the meaning and connection that Jewish traditions, history and practices have in my life. Why are we mourning Jerusalem? What's the point? When one "mourns" on Tisha b'Av, how does that look? Feel? Should I be crying on the outside? Inside? Should we all be too upset to eat, talk or go on with regular activities? Are you sad? What are you sad about?

For each one of us, the answer will be different. Some of us will mourn the loss of the Beit Hamikdash, a building that was host to Hashem's presence; others are mourning the loss of

community that went along with having everyone together in Yerushalayim. Some are mourning the lack of closeness they feel to Israel or to Hashem because of the state of destruction we are in. The fact that we all are mourning something different on Tisha b'Av shows the rich and unique impact the Beit Hamikdash and Yerushalayim have in our lives.

Mourning is about connecting to a lost relationship, whether to an object or human being. We experience the loss of something or someone no longer physically in our lives. Jewish tradition tells us that when we mourn the loss of a loved one, we are not obligated in any *mitzvot*, because the pain is so terrible and one cannot think or be involved with anything else. But the loss of a loved one connotes that there was a relationship, someone who was loved. In order to mourn on Tisha b'Av we need to connect to our loved one: the Beit Hamikdash and Yerushalayim. Many of us have been privileged to experience/ get a glimpse of what it means to have a relationship with and rejoice in Eretz Yisrael. Others mourn the lack of relationship. They understand the greatness that once existed and that exists today and they mourn the inability to connect to something amazing. Yes, we recognize our loss of relationship and connection, but how do we internalize the personal level of devastation which led to the tradition of not being obligated in *mitzvot*?

Unfortunately, almost two years ago I watched my community mourn the loss of one of our loved ones. Gilad Schwartz z"l a student, friend, and community member of the Orthodox community at the University of Maryland, passed away less than a week before beginning his sophomore year on campus. Students were totally devastated, and we worked hard to find a way to commemorate him; a meaningful way to show respect and admiration for the incredible person Gilad was.

Each week at University of Maryland we have a wonderful program called Pizza Parsha, where anywhere from 50-100 students come together to learn Parsha and eat pizza with friends. Gilad was a regular at this program; it provided him the opportunity to take a break from classes, get something to eat, and discuss the parsha and whatever was on his mind with friends. When it was time for his *shloshim*, a month after his death, we decided to dedicate that week's Pizza Parsha in his memory. We prepared in the traditional way, by having a *dvar Torah* and preparing sources in order to pay tribute to the wonderful person he was and the impact he had on our community. But there was actual mourning that took place at the program that evening when we as individuals and as a community reflected on the relationship we had with Gilad and his unique approach to Judaism. Some people connected to Gilad through learning, not just by reading the parsha but by learning a piece of Torah we chose from the Rambam that reflected the way he approached life. Gilad's close friends connected to him by speaking and sharing personal stories and inspiration from his life. Lastly, there were those that connected to him through song. Gilad was a musician, so his friends closed the program by singing a song they wrote in order to show their connection and to mourn in a way that expressed the depths of their relationship with Gilad.

When we try and connect to Yerushalayim and the loss of the Beit Hamikdash today, we all need to connect to our relationship with Yerushalayim in order to really mourn something so significant. We may mourn the loss of: the closeness to spirituality, the feeling of being at the

crossroads of the world, being invited by total strangers for Shabbat and feeling at home, or the loss of real shwarma. When we each contemplate our relationship to Israel and the thought of that being taken away, then we can really connect, but we need that song, picture, story or Torah to inspire and connect us to the relationship we are trying to recapture.

This loss of experiences may be indicative of what the phrase teaches – that one who mourns will be able to rejoice. However, I think it could also be read backwards: one who once rejoiced is one who will be able to truly mourn. If you never connected or rejoiced, it will be hard for you to mourn.

The Beit Hamikdash and Yerushalayim in its perfected state were something that was prematurely taken from the Jewish people, just as Gilad was taken from our community. We should feel the devastation of not being able to rejoice in the true presence of Hashem in a city that is in its full glory. Hopefully, through our efforts to find our connection and to mourn individually in our own way and as a community, we will be able to rejoice and connect to true *simcha*... .. *Mehara Hashem Elokeinu, od yishama b'arei Yehuda u'vechuzot Yerushalayim, kol sasson v'kol simcha*...

## Tisha B'av and the Power of Love

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Tisha B'av is a day of deep mourning for the Jewish people and marks two of our largest national calamities; the destruction of both the first and second Beit HaMikdash. The Talmud (*Yoma* 9b) teaches us that the first Beit HaMikdash was destroyed because of three sins: idolatry, sexual immorality and bloodshed. It would seem logical that if the Jewish people were committing these three cardinal sins, that their service to HaShem had been so disregarded and their connection to Him so severed, that there wasn't room for HaShem's Shechinah to rest and remain in the holy Temple. Yet, even after committing these grave sins, the second Beit HaMikdash was built a mere seventy years later. In contrast to this, the second Beit HaMikdash was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE and yet, here we are in 2012, still waiting, still longing for the third Beit HaMikdash to be built. What could have caused the destruction of the second Beit HaMikdash so long ago, that still today we haven't merited its rebuilding? What terrible sin could we be guilty of that the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Yoma* 1:1) would state of us that "any generation which does not see the Beit HaMikdash rebuilt is considered to have destroyed it?!"

The Talmud (*Yoma* 9b) gives us an answer:

*Why was the Second Temple destroyed, seeing that during the time it stood people occupied themselves with Torah, with observance of precepts, and with the practice of charity? Because during the time it stood, hatred without rightful cause prevailed.*

מקדש שני, שהיו עוסקין בתורה  
ובמצות וגמילות חסדים מפני מה  
חרב? מפני שהיתה בו שנאת  
חנם.

The Talmud seems to be saying that the nation's service to HaShem had improved; the Jewish people were learning Torah, doing mitzvot and were meticulous in their relationship with HaShem. They seem to have corrected what their downfall was in the destruction of the first

Beit HaMikdash and yet it wasn't enough to keep the second Beit HaMikdash standing. It was what the Talmud calls "sinat chinam," hate without reason or cause and their lack of respect and acceptance of others that caused the complete destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. They were working to enhance and perfect their personal relationship with HaShem but not working on their relationships with others, with their spouses, children, friends or community members. The Jewish people were under the influence of a colossal misunderstanding. They hadn't realized that one of the greatest ways to show love of HaShem is by loving one another and fulfilling the mitzvah of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha* (love your neighbor like yourself), through the realization that each and every person is created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in the image of G-d. I once heard an idea from the Lubavitcher Rebbe that helps us to understand this point with the following parable: What if someone said to you, 'I love you, but I don't like your children?' You would probably say: 'You may think that you love me, but you don't really. You don't care for what I care most deeply about. Obviously, you don't know anything about me, and you don't know what love is, either!' Loving a fellow human being, another child of G-d, is showing we love what He loves, cares for who He cares for, and is ultimately one of the greatest ways to demonstrate love of HaShem.

On the Shabbat before Tisha B'av, known as *Shabbat Chazon*, we read from the book of Isaiah:

*Why do I need your numerous sacrifices?...I am sated with elevation-offerings... the blood of bulls, sheep and goats I do not desire...Bring your worthless meal offerings no longer, it is incense of abomination to Me... My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times... When you spread your hands in prayer I will hide My eyes from you, even if you were to intensify your prayers, I will not listen; your hands are replete with blood. Wash yourselves, purify yourselves, remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes; cease doing evil. Learn to do good, seek justice, vindicate the victim, render justice to the orphan, take up the grievance of the widow.*

**Isaiah 1:11-17**

לָמָּה לִי רַב זִבְחֵיכֶם יְאֹמֵר ה' שְׂבַעְתִּי עֲלוֹת  
 אֵילִים וְחֶלֶב מְרִיאִים וְדָם פְּרִים וּכְבָשִׂים  
 וְעֲתוּדִים לֹא חָפְצְתִי. כִּי תִבְאוּ לְרֵאוֹת פָּנַי  
 מִי בִקֵּשׁ זֹאת מִיָּדְכֶם רִמַּסְתֶּם חֲצָרַי. לֹא תוֹסִיפוּ  
 הָבִיא מִנְחַת שָׁוְא קִטְרֹת תוֹעֵבָה הִיא לִי הַדָּשׁ  
 וְשִׁבְתָּ קְרָא מְקָרָא לֹא אוֹכֵל אֶנּוּ וְעֲצָרָה.  
 חֲדָשֵׁיכֶם וּמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם שָׁנְאַה נַפְשִׁי הִיוּ עָלַי  
 לְטָרַח נִלְאִיתִי נִשְׂאָה. וּבְכַרְשֵׁיכֶם כִּפִּיתֶם  
 אֲעֲלִים עֵינַי מִמֶּכֶם גַּם כִּי תִרְבוּ תִפְלֵה אֵינְנִי  
 שְׁמַע יְדֵיכֶם דְּמַיִם מְלֹאוּ. רַחֲצוּ הַזְּכוֹת הַסִּירוּ  
 רַע מֵעַלְלֵיכֶם מִנְגִּד עֵינַי חֲדְלוּ הָרַע. לְמַדּוּ  
 הִיטֵב דְרָשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁרוֹ חֲמוּץ שִׁפְטוֹ יְתוֹם  
 רִיבוֹ אֶלְמָנָה.

**ישעיהו א:יא-יז**

What a powerful rebuke! HaShem is telling the people He doesn't desire their sacrifices and He doesn't want their prayers because they are worthless until there is harmony between His children. Until His children can look out for one another and care about one another's well-being, HaShem can't find His place. He can't find rest within a restless nation and He can't find peace among a peace-less people.

Learning to love another, even those who we disagree with, those whose opinions may differ greatly from our own, and those with different religious backgrounds, can be a daunting and difficult task. But, if we want to see the Beit HaMikdash rebuilt, we must overcome this challenge. As Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, first Chief Rabbi of Israel, famously wrote:

*If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to*

ואם נחרבנו, ונחרב העולם עמנו, על ידי  
 שנאת חנם, נשוב להבנות, והעולם עמנו

*baseless hatred, then we shall rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with baseless love — ahavat chinam.*

**Orot HaKodesh vol. III, p. 324**

יבנה, על ידי אהבת חנם.  
אורות הקודש, חלק ג' עמ' שכד

Rav Kook takes it even one step further saying that there's actually no such thing as "*ahavat chinam*- baseless love." Why should we regard love of another Jew as baseless?! The mere fact that someone is a Jew should be reason enough to love him or her, after all, we refer to ourselves in our *tefillot* as "*acheinu kol beit Yisrael*-our brothers, the entire family of Israel."

But how do we put this into practice? How do we apply this to each of our own communities? Are there not people in our lives whom it is difficult to like, and even more so to love?

While my husband was studying for his *semikha* at Yeshiva University, in one of the classes he was taking, they were discussing how to deal with difficult congregants or community members. Rabbis are human too and may find that certain members of their communities are irritating or bothersome, and a student asked how they were to deal with that. The teacher thought for a moment and replied, "You don't need to like all your congregants, you only need to love them." After the initial confusion at this seemingly backward statement wore off, the point this seasoned shul rabbi was trying to make became clear. Rabbis—and all other people for that matter—don't have the responsibility to like and enjoy the company of each of their congregants or community members but rather, we each have a responsibility to see past the flaws of those around us and love each individual we come into contact with simply because he or she is our Jewish brother or sister.

It would seem that this is the essence of *ahavat Yisrael*-love of Israel. G-d is not asking of us that we like people whose character and behavior we may find distasteful, what He is however demanding and expecting of us is that we love the person nonetheless, just as we would with our own family. When we can each learn to do this—remove baseless hatred from our hearts and mind, and replace it with a love for all Jews—then we will finally have corrected the sin of our ancestors and be worthy of rebuilding the Beit HaMikdash.

There's a beautiful story of a chassid who went to the Rebbe with a question he'd been wanting to ask for a long while, "Rebbe, why does Moshiach not come? I can see that maybe in the past, the world wasn't ready, it wasn't the right time. But now, after the Holocaust and the return of Jews to their land, has the time not come?" The Rebbe continued to gaze at the student and asked him to go on. The student continued, "Doesn't the Talmud teach us that one day a King will rise up against the Jewish people whose decrees will be as evil as Haman's- and did that not happen with Hitler and his wicked decrees? And didn't Moshe teach us that at the end of exile HaShem will gather us in even though we've been banished to the most distant lands? And has this not occurred too, with Jews returning to Israel from more than a hundred different lands? Why then does Moshiach not come?"

"I'll tell you, my son", said the Rebbe. "How could he come? If he was a chassid of one sect, the chassidim of the other sects wouldn't recognize him. If he were orthodox, the Reform Jews wouldn't recognize him. If he was secular, the religious Jews would not recognize him. So how then can he come? But now I will tell you a great secret. It is not we who are waiting for Moshiach. It is Moshiach who is waiting for us. He has been here all the time, and it is we who are

not yet ready for him.” Before the student could reply, the Rebbe continued. “Now let me ask you a question. What would you do if Moshiach did come? Would you greet him as you would a long-lost, long-awaited friend? Would you not invite him and treat him like a royal guest and treat him with the utmost honour and respect?” The student was shocked, “Of course I would. Can the Rebbe doubt that?”

“Well” said the Rebbe, “I’ll tell you then what you must do and teach others. Regard every person you meet- familiar or stranger, young or old, observant or not, learned or unlearned-as if they might be the Moshiach, for Moshiach will arrive in disguise. And if we would do this, we would find that even without maybe realizing it, Moshiach had come”.

On this Tisha B’av—a day on which we continue to mourn the destruction and lack of rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash because of the sin of *sinat chinam*—may we find our own strength and ability to treat each person we meet, and the individuals in our communities, as loved family members, and through this merit the coming of Moshiach and the building of the third Beit HaMikdash.

## Optimism in the Face of Tragedy

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When we think about Tisha B’Av, most often we highlight the sorrow and tragedy experienced by our ancestors when the two *Batei Mikdash* were destroyed. Many of us experience that sorrow and tragedy as our own. When we read through the Book of Eicha we feel firsthand the tragedy and sorrow that befell our nation. When we read through the *Kinot* we see the effort on behalf of our great rabbis and sages to internalize the sorrow of the *Churban haBayit*, the destruction of the Temple. We additionally see the effort to make the tragedy our own in every generation, not merely an echo of a past event that we commemorate.

Similarly, we recite *Kinot* not only about the *Churban haBayit*, but about the tragedies of every generation: the Crusades, the pogroms, the Chelmniski Masacres, and, of course, the Holocaust. In past years, working in summer camps on the *chinuch* (educational) staff, I have always faced the problem of how to make the *Kinot* in particular and Tisha B’Av as a whole more meaningful to our children. I have discovered that the best way for children to gain a better understanding and attachment to the sorrow and tragedy of the *Beit haMikdash* is by relating it to current tragedies happening in our own time such as terrorism in Israel, anti-Semitism in our own communities, or other tragedies with which our children may have more experience. This helps to bring home the message and feeling of Tisha B’Av, so many years removed from the destruction.

However, of all the *Kinot*, the *Kinah* of *Arzei haLevanon*, the *Kinah* describing in horrific detail the death of the *Asarah Harugei Malchut*, the Ten Martyrs, composed by Rabbi Meir ben Yehiel stands out for its timeless power. The main focus of this *Kinah* is on the destruction of the *Gedolei Torah*, the righteous of our nation, as the *Kinah* states: “טהורי לב קדושים מתו במיתה” – “pure of heart and consecrated, they suffered a harsh death”. Listening to the

descriptions of the deaths of these ten great men and leaders can bring anyone to tears. But every year as I read this *Kinah*, I am struck not only by the tragedy but by the optimism. Reading the individual stories, we see that not a single martyr bemoaned his death. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel stretched out his neck and offered himself for sacrifice. Rabbi Yishmael mourned over Rabban Gamliel, not over his own imminent execution. Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua was reciting Kiddush, fulfilling a mitzvah with his final breath. Most evident is Rabbi Akiva who embraces his fate with unparalleled perspective.

Rabbi Akiva was murdered when his body was raked with iron combs. His students witnessed the atrocity. Rabbi Akiva during his punishment was crying out the words of Shema. His students questioned, "Rabbi Akiva, why are you crying Shema and with such joy and gusto?" He responded, "I have never had the opportunity to say Shema with such complete devotion! In Shema we say that we love Hashem with all our hearts and all our souls. Now, finally, I have the opportunity to demonstrate the true meaning of this statement and I can love Hashem with all my heart and all my soul!"

Rabbi Akiva was an optimist even in death, a characteristic that defined him in life as well. In the Gemara, *Makot 24 a - b*, there is a description of a group of rabbis when they witnessed the destruction of Yerushalayim:

*Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah and Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Akiva were walking on the road, and they heard the noise of the crowds at Rome [travelling] from Puteoli, a hundred and twenty miles away. They all fell down crying, but Rabbi Akiva laughed. They said to him: Why are you laughing? He said to them: Why are you crying? They said: These heathens who bow down to images and burn incense to idols live in safety and ease, whereas our Temple, the 'Footstool' of our God is burnt down by fire, and we should not cry? He responded to them: for the same reason I am laughing! If they that offend Him fare this way, how much better shall fare they that do obey Him!*

כבר היה ר"ג ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי יהושע ורבי עקיבא מהלכין בדרך, ושמעו קול המונה של רומי מפלטה [ברחוק] מאה ועשרים מיל, והתחילו בוכין, ורבי עקיבא משחק. אמרו לו: מפני מה אתה משחק? אמר להם: ואתם מפני מה אתם בוכים? אמרו לו: הללו כושיים שמשתחווים לעצבים ומקטרים לעבודת כוכבים יושבין בטח והשקט, ואנו בית הדום רגלי אלהינו שרוף באש ולא נבכה? אמר להן: לכך אני מצחק, ומה לעוברי רצונו כך, לעושי רצונו על אחת כמה וכמה.

Again, in this Gemara, we are witness to Rabbi Akiva's characteristic optimism. The other rabbis, upon hearing the cheers of the Romans are distraught and begin to mourn because the Jewish nation cannot worship Hashem but the Romans are joyous in their defeat. Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, sees the joyful cries of the Romans as a reason to laugh, because if they who do not serve Hashem can be so great, imagine the greatness of those who do serve Hashem!

The Gemara continues on to relate Rabbi Akiva's optimism:

*Once again they were coming up to Jerusalem together. As they approached Har HaTzofim, Mount Scopus they tore their clothes. As they approached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerging from the Holy of Holies. They began to weep. Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They said to him, Why are you laughing?*

שוב פעם אחת היו עולין לירושלים, כיון שהגיעו להר הצופים קרעו בגדיהם. כיון שהגיעו להר הבית, ראו שועל שיצא מבית קדשי הקדשים, התחילו הן בוכין ור"ע מצחק. אמרו



He responded to them, "Why are you crying?" They said to him: A place of which it was once said, "And the stranger who comes near shall surely die" is now a home to foxes, and should we not cry? He responded to them: Therefore I am laughing; for it is written, "And I will take to Me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the cohen, the priest, and Zechariah the Son of Jeberechiah". Now what is the connection between Uriah the cohen and Zechariah, the prophet? Uriah lived during the times of the first Temple, while Zechariah lived during the second Temple; but the Navi linked the [later] prophecy of Zechariah with the [earlier] prophecy of Uriah. In the [earlier] prophecy [in the days] of Uriah it is written, Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field etc. In Zechariah it is written, Thus said the Lord of Hosts, There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Yerushalayim. So long as Uriah's [threatening] prophecy had not yet been fulfilled, I worried that Zechariah's prophecy might, too, not be fulfilled; now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled, it is quite certain that Zechariah's prophecy will also be fulfilled! The others said back to him: Akiva, you have comforted us! Akiva, you have comforted us!

לו: מפני מה אתה מצחק? אמר להם: מפני מה אתם בוכים? אמרו לו, מקום שכתוב בו (במדבר א) והזר הקרב יומת ועכשיו שועלים הלכו בו ולא נבכה? אמר להן: לכך אני מצחק, דכתיב (ישעיהו ח) ואעידה לי עדים נאמנים את אוריה הכהן ואת זכריה בן יברכיהו, וכי מה ענין אוריה אצל זכריה? אוריה במקדש ראשון וזכריה במקדש שני! אלא, תלה הכתוב נבואתו של זכריה נבואתו של אוריה, באוריה כתיב (מיכה ג) לכן בגללכם ציון שדה תחרש [וגו] בזכריה כתיב (זכריה ח) עוד ישבו זקנים וזקנות ברחובות ירושלם, עד שלא נתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה - הייתי מתיירא שלא תתקיים נבואתו של זכריה, עכשיו שנתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה - בידוע שנבואתו של זכריה מתקיימת. בלשון הזה אמרו לו: עקיבא, ניחמתנו! עקיבא, ניחמתנו.

When the other rabbis began crying, they saw, as most people do, the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* as a tragedy, probably, and rightly so, as the ultimate tragedy. They could no longer comprehend life without the Holy Temple. Simultaneously, Rabbi Akiva began laughing. Most probably, the other rabbis saw this as a tremendous insult. Here they were, witnessing the downfall of our people, seeing God's angry hand reigning down upon them and Rabbi Akiva audaciously laughs?

Rabbi Akiva's answer gives an entirely new perspective on Hashem's punishment to us, His own nation. Rabbi Akiva, first questions the other rabbis back, "why are you crying?" To him the obvious response to what they see before them is laughter, not tears. He is baffled as to why the others cry. Only after hearing their answer for crying is Rabbi Akiva able to respond and explain why he laughs. We should not be utterly distressed by this destruction. True it is terrible and heart wrenching, but it is also the fulfillment of *nevuah*, of prophecy! Had the words of the Prophet not come true regarding the destruction of Yerushalayim, then there would be no chance that the words of the Prophet regarding the ultimate redemption would come true. Here we see that they too will now come true! And for this he laughed! He was excited! He sees the good in all things! The other rabbis, in turn, respond that Rabbi Akiva's hopefulness has been a source of comfort to them and they are now consoled.

Many people have learned from the example set by Rabbi Akiva when they confront sorrow and tragedy in their own lives. I have seen firsthand twice this past year where individuals have treated their sorrow and tragedy with the approach of Rabbi Akiva. Rather than becoming paralyzed by life's vicissitudes, they turned their tragedy into an opportunity for improvement.

A woman who experiences a miscarriage feels immense tragedy. For the expectant mother, there exists a sense of ethereal attachment to the unborn child. Many of the women with whom I have spoken are paralyzed by the feelings of guilt and failure in the wake of the loss. Yet, it is the women who are able to view their heinous experience as an opportunity to reach out to God, who are able to transcend the loss. One mother pointed out to me that even in the loss she felt as if God was reaching out to her. She had embraced the perspective of Rabbi Akiva.

A mother who sees her child suffer a personal tragedy is racked by feelings of grief and mourning. A child's heartbreak is often more trying upon the parent than on the child him/herself. One mother cried to me, in the wake of her child's pain, "I want to go back to yesterday. Life was so much easier yesterday". She felt the immense hurt of her young child. Although they have not yet healed and are still working through these very difficult issues, they are moving forward. Recently, the mother said to me that she begins now to see that good that has been born out of this sorrow. She has taken a step back to look at her own life and decided that she needs to refocus her efforts. She is spending more time and energy on her family and less on her busy work life. She has been given this opportunity to see her child as courageous and amazing and does not hesitate to let her little one know this on a daily basis. The mother has also been given the opportunity to grow in her own spiritual commitment, as she realizes how much worse it might have been and thanks Hashem that it is manageable. This mother, like Rabbi Akiva, has taken her own tragedy and turned it into an opportunity to grow as a person and as an *oved Hashem*, a servant of Hashem.

We ourselves have this choice in our approach to life, in particular to sorrow and tragedy. On this Tisha B'Av we should spend our time trying to make the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* our personal and current tragedy. We should do so by incorporating our own sorrows into the mourning of the *Batei haMikdash*. But should we dwell on that sorrow? Should we live in tragedy? Or should we use the tragedy as an opportunity to find redemption, to find the fulfillment of prophecy? Our individual and communal tragedy is at minimum a way of making us stronger and more devoted to Hashem. Although it is difficult, it is often easier to dwell on how bad things are; we all need to take the time on this Tisha B'Av to look around us and find strength in our sorrow. I now, personally, have the inspiration to look to Tisha B'Av with different eyes this year. I do not see it merely as a day of mourning, but I also see Tisha B'Av as a day of opportunity to open my eyes and see what I have before me and to thank Hashem for all of it. I have the opportunity to say that all the trouble and sorrow that we go through is a part of the prophecy and now we are ready and waiting for the fulfillment of the other part of the prophecy, of the redemption. We need to be like Rabbi Akiva, who laughs when seeing foxes emerging from the Holy of Holies because we need to understand that this is a fulfillment of prophecy and therefore Hashem is required to fulfill the ultimate prophecy of *Geula shelema*, the ultimate redemption as well. *B'mehera b'yamenu*, speedily in our days we should witness the fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah.

## **Alignment in Language is our Alignment as a People**

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Experience is how we engage with the world around us; the exchange of verbal, non-verbal, and sensory input are interpreted by each of us, individually, into what we see as our world. No two people have the exact same life experience and those with like experiences may interpret the experience differently. As Jews, we are unique in that our lives revolve around laws, values, and character traits that provide a similar shaped lens of experience. Through our like view, we have similar alignment. Our communal interpretation is how we understand each other; in essence, a form of language that fosters our similarity.

Tisha B'Av offers each of us the opportunity to reflect on our many experiences and these reflections are how we facilitate language within the world around us. The lens by which we look, must align with our values of appreciation for what *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (the Holy One Blessed Be He) has created for us. We must do this because even the complexity of our wisdom, physical and emotional intake of experiences, and our ability to interpret these, must be appreciated as a gift previously given by *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Let us take for a moment our first experience immediately after birth. As infants, we know to use our bodily senses in order to discover and cling onto our mothers so that we may achieve the sustenance of milk that will come to nurture us. In order to do this, we, by nature, use the senses of smell, touch, and taste to discover the kindness that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* has provided in sculpting our method of birth and sustenance. (*Chovos HaLevavos, Shaar HaBechinah* by *OhrAvigdor*, P.116) As for all experiences, appreciating and interpreting the experience occurs later in life. This instinctive response is a pleasantry that can only be appreciated at a distance. Later life experiences, through implementation of our values and traits, will build a lens of similarity to reflect on this service.

Through our *Mesorah* (heritage), *Chazal* (our sages) have laid a foundation to describe our experiences as a people. During the recitation of *tefillah* (prayer), *Tehillim* (Psalms), and other relevant works that are *kodesh* (sanctified), we become engaged with these previous experiences and are able to reflect and align their application to our current experiences. How often do our lives relive the reflection of Dovid HaMelech, (King David) “our mouths will fill with laughter, and our tongues with singing” (*Tehillim*, 126:2), as the foundation of our current experiences of *simcha* (joy) whether great or small. If not for this reflection and positive application of language viewed through observance of Jewish values, how foul would we leave the taste of our current experiences? Was it not precisely this lack of positive application of our language that is noted as the cause for the loss of our precious second *Bais Hamikdash* (Holy Temple)?

On Tisha B'Av, as we mourn our losses, we might ask: how do we find this positive application of language? A question Dovid HaMelech (King David) has asked before: “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember thee not; if I set not Jerusalem above my chief’s joy” (*Tehillim*, 137:4-6). During this time, we are lost. We could sit and cry, and mourn, and we do. Yet, throughout this mourning experience, we are a united people; individually we experience life, united we must continue to support each other in *galus* (Diaspora). Rather than stand as an individual we must cling together to experience our living

*Mesorah. HaKadosh Baruch Hu* has given us the responsibility to find the *simcha* within the mourning, to experience both, in the unison of life.

This simultaneous application can only be fostered with the connection of the *klal* (unification of the People) through the language of our lives, the language of experience. We must remember all the experiences we have had as a people, establishing us as *Klal Yisrael* and connecting us to our home in Eretz Yisrael. We do this by connecting both individually and together as a united community worthy of the title *Klal Yisrael* (the entire Jewish people).

In our reflections on Tisha B'Av, we must create a dialogue, which will facilitate the development of the language we elicit. We seek to bridge our previous and present experiences into the character of the people we are as individuals in order to bring together a united community. We, as a people, recognize that regardless of our application or our ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as Jews, we are one of *Klal Yisrael*. Our spiritual connection is recited using the verbal passage "*HaMakom yenachem otcha b'soch shaar avelei Tzion V'Yerushalayim*" "May you be comforted among the mourners of Tzion and Jerusalem". At a time of loss, we mourn as a nation, not as individuals. No matter where or when one experiences personal loss of family, this verse is recited in the house of the mourner. On Tisha B'Av, we are all mourners. We mourn our loss of connection to our brethren and our *Bayis* (home). Let us all speak, act, and accept the responsibility to hear and support each other to strive for growth as a people. For this, we must develop and make use of our similarities through our language.