

Tisha B'Av: Hope in the Face of Sorrow¹

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Tisha B'Av Musings of a Young Holocaust Victim

On Tisha B'Av, 5703 (1943), 16-year-old Moshe Flinker penned the following words in his personal diary:

On this day we recall all our people, from the defenders of the walls of Jerusalem to the victims of the Gestapo, who have fallen in the name of their people and their Lord. On this day our thoughts go to all our people, wherever they may be, and especially to that part of our precious few who bear the greatest and heaviest load of the burden of exile. ... On this Tisha B'Av of the year 5703 our eyes shall fill with tears but we shall not cast down our heads. Our troubles and our plight shall replace our prayers, and they shall come before the throne of the Lord to intercede for His people. On this memorial day we shall lift our heads and straighten our backs, for we most assuredly know that the blood of our people which has run like water, will not remain unavenged; vengeance shall certainly be exacted. On Tisha B'Av 5703 the only prayer which we lay at the feet of the Lord is that the magnitude of His mercy will equal the immensity of the troubles which have assailed and continue to assail our unfortunate people.

Moshe Flinker, an Orthodox Jewish teenager, composed these words while residing with his family in a Belgian suburb. Sadly, he, along with his parents, perished in Auschwitz. But his diary, discovered after the war, reveals a sensitive, contemplative youth, imbued with immense love for his people and enormous spiritual anguish over their plight. The diary was published by Yad Vashem in 1958 in the original Hebrew under the title *Hana'ar Moshe: Hayoman shel Moshe Flinker*, and an English translation appeared in 1965 as *Young Moshe's Diary*.

The sentiment captured by young Moshe Flinker—that the commemoration of Tisha B'Av encompasses the collective suffering of Jews throughout the millennia—is particularly relevant to our times, when Holocaust studies have assumed a universal-humanistic tone in many quarters, and the unique spiritual and religious components of the Shoah are either ignored or played down. Moreover, the link between Tisha B'Av and Jewish suffering takes on a special poignancy in light of the ongoing Palestinian terror campaign against our people, along with the larger trend of escalating anti-Semitism in Europe and across the globe. Though Moshe Flinker's Tisha B'Av entry was

¹ This article was adapted from a lecture delivered on Tisha B'Av 5762 (2002) at the Holocaust Resource Center of the JCC in Clifton, NJ.

penned some 70 years ago, words not too different might well be written today by some other “young Moshe” trying to come to grips with recent events in Eretz Yisroel and the world at large.

This article is entitled “Tisha B’Av: Hope in the Face of Sorrow.” But in order to understand how Tisha B’Av inspires hope—and to experience this hope in its fullest sense—it is first necessary to embrace the sorrow. To do so, we must explore the implications of the relationship between Tisha B’Av and Jewish suffering.

Jewish Suffering and Martyrdom: A Trans-generational Holistic Perspective

From a strictly historical perspective, the events of world history in general—and Jewish history in particular—are seen as proceeding in linear fashion. Each period—each event—is analyzed discretely in terms of its own unique set of historical forces and circumstances. However, on a religious and metaphysical plane, events separated from each other by vast spans of time and place may be viewed as joined together and as echoing one another.

This concept is perhaps captured in a phrase that appears in the prayer known as “*Av Harachamim*.” The prayer was composed during the Middle Ages in memory of the *kedoshim*, the martyrs, individuals and communities who perished *al kiddush Hashem*, for the sanctification of G-d’s name. In referring to these martyrs, the prayer utilizes an expression that, at first glance, poses some grammatical difficulty—“*shemasru nafsham al kedushas Hashem*”—“who surrendered their souls for the sanctification of G-d’s name.” The problem is that the term “*nafsham*,” taken literally, means “their soul”—in the singular form. A more precise phrase would have employed the plural form—“*shemasru nafshoseihem*,” “who surrendered their souls.” Apparently, the author of this prayer wished to convey the idea that each individual act of martyrdom should be viewed as part of a greater whole. In a metaphysical sense, all of these martyrs, wherever and in whatever generation they perished, were somehow united on a spiritual level as they surrendered their collective soul to their Maker.

The same can be said about the bitter saga of Jewish suffering over the course of the millennia. All expressions of Jewish suffering transcend their immediate context—and not just because history may repeat itself—but because theologically, they are all inextricably linked. This sublime notion was also grasped by young Moshe Flinker, who expressed it most profoundly in his diary entry of Dec. 12, 1942:

All our troubles, from our first to this most terrible one, are multiple and endless, and from all of them rises one gigantic scream. From wherever it emanates, the cry that rises is identical to the cries in other places or at other times.

Tisha B’Av as the Quintessential Framework for Viewing Jewish Suffering

The Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 18b) speaks of Tisha B’Av as “*yom shehuchpelu bo tzaros*,” a day in which tragedies were compounded. The Mishna in *Ta’anis* (26b) enumerates five calamities that occurred on Tisha B’Av. The first was the Divine decree to deny the Jews in the wilderness

entry into the land of Israel in the wake of the disheartening report brought by 10 of the spies who had been sent to scout out the land. Next, the Mishna lists the destruction of the two *batei mikdash*—the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. Fourth, the Jewish stronghold of Beitar fell to the Romans approximately 52 years after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. Fifth, the city of Jerusalem was ploughed over like a field—down to its foundations.

But the list does not end here. Historically, many more Jewish—and world—tragedies have occurred on or around Tisha B'Av—most notably, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. In addition, the outbreak of World War I—the aftermath of which sowed the seeds of German instability that set the stage for World War II and its tragic consequences for our people—took place on August 1, 1914, which, in that year, coincided with Tisha B'Av.

In light of the repeated calamities that occurred on Tisha B'Av, little wonder that this day has become synonymous with Jewish tragedy as a whole and is associated even with tragic events that have taken place on other days, since all expressions of Jewish suffering are interrelated. Thus, the traditional kinos recited on Tisha B'Av include accounts of the pillaging of Jewish communities and the massacre of Jews during the First and Second Crusades as well as the public burning of Torah scrolls and Jewish manuscripts in France in 1242. And in recent years, special kinos have been composed to mourn the Shoah, and some of these have been incorporated in the Tisha B'Av liturgy.

To view all manifestations of Jewish tragedy as interrelated and to link the history of Jewish suffering with Tisha B'Av should certainly not lead us to lose sight of the uniqueness of the individual episodes or to blur the distinctions between them. To properly mourn or empathize with any loss, it is obviously necessary to be acquainted with the specific circumstances of each situation. To overlook context is, to some degree, to trivialize, *chas veshalom*, the nature of the suffering. There is no doubt that the scope of the horrors that were experienced 70 years ago must stand out as unique. In our own time, the emergence of the suicide bomber who inflicts instant death and injury of ghastly proportions on unsuspecting, defenseless victims is also a phenomenon that is unprecedented.

Yet as we view each tragedy, we are impelled to focus not only on its manifest uniqueness but also on its rootedness in Tisha B'Av, the archetypal day commemorating Jewish suffering over the millennia.

Echoes of Yirmiyahu's Laments in Modern Times

If we listen intently to the voice of Yirmiyahu Hanavi bemoaning the destruction of Jerusalem—with the haunting words “*Eicha yashva vadad*,” “Alas, she sits in solitude”—we can also hear that “*Eicha*” reverberate throughout the ages. One of the first documented eye-witness accounts of Nazi atrocities during World War II appeared in a letter written by my maternal grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Meir Pomerance *zatzal*, a disciple of the saintly Chofetz Chayim, who served in 1939 as the Rav of a small town near the Polish-German border called Brok. The letter, which was sent to the *Broker Landsleit* residing in the United States, was printed in the Yiddish daily *Morgen Journal* on November 30, 1939, and was appropriately entitled “*Der ‘Eicha’ oif dem churban fun a Yiddishe shtetl in Poilin*”—“The ‘*Eicha*’ on the destruction of a Jewish town in

Poland.” Indeed, there have been countless bastions of Torah—“miniature Jerusalems,” repositories of long and proud legacies of Jewish tradition—that have been laid waste throughout the ages by the enemies of Klal Yisroel, upon which this same lament might be uttered: “*Eicha yashva vadad*,” “Alas! She dwells in solitude!”

In another lament beginning with the word “*Eicha*”—“*Eicha yu’am zahav*,” “Alas, the gold is dimmed!,” Yirmiyahu eulogizes the righteous King Yoshiyahu. He had been an extraordinary king who had sparked a spiritual revolution among masses of Jews. Yet he met an untimely and tortured end, having been pierced by 300 enemy arrows. Indeed, there were countless other “Yoshiyahu personalities” throughout the ages for whom such a lament might also be uttered—“*Eicha yu’am zahav*”—“Alas, the gold is dimmed!”

Yirmiyahu bitterly describes the image of little children who turn pathetically to their mothers for solace that never comes. This portrait of grief may readily apply not only to the young victims in Jerusalem during the time of Yirmiyahu but to all the uncomforted children throughout our history who were orphaned—including those in the Shoah—and more recently in Israel’s battles for survival and in the recurrent waves of terrorism.

Yirmiyahu describes Israel’s enemy taking sadistic pleasure at Israel’s misfortune—“*vayesamach alayich oyev*” (Eicha 2:17). These words, too, echo through the ages. Suffice it to recall the arch that Titus erected in Rome depicting his military triumph over the Jewish nation, the Nazi plan to establish a museum in Prague as a cruel testament to the Jewish race that they hoped to extinguish, and recent Palestinian exhibits and glorification of the terrorists who perpetrated the murder and maiming of so many Jewish men, women and children.

When Yirmiyahu cries out “*Sechi u’ma’os tesimeinu bekerev ha’amim*”—“You made us as filth and refuse among the nations” (Eicha 3:45)—we think of the long, unbroken chain of anti-Semitism culminating in the Shoah, along with its modern-day manifestations as displayed, for example, in the Durban conferences and other UN-sponsored initiatives.

Yirmiyahu’s voice continues to ring for us today, loud and clear. While the circumstances may differ, the lessons are timeless.

Churban Beis Hamikdash and its Cataclysmic Fallout

All that we mourn on Tisha B’Av is, of course, intertwined with one overarching loss—the loss experienced as a result of *churban Beis Hamikdash*, the destruction of the Temple. In essence, the totality of Jewish suffering can be subsumed under *churban Beis Hamikdash*. This is because *churban Beis Hamikdash* entailed far more than the mere destruction of a majestic building. *Churban Beis Hamikdash* represented the loss of spiritual innocence. It represented the degradation of the Jewish nation—the tainting of *kevod ha’uma hayisre’eilis*, of our national dignity.² Moreover, it represented *chilul Hashem*, a desecration of G-d’s name of staggering proportions—“*Lama yomru ha-goyim ayei eloheihem*,” “Why should the nations say: Where is their G-d?” (Tehillim 79:10). Even on a purely physical level, our Sages teach us that *churban*

² On Rosh Hashana, we pray for its restoration when we say “*uvechein tein kavod Hashem le’amecha*, Grant, O Lord, honor to your people.”

Beis Hamikdash caused a blockage in the natural channel through which blessing is said to flow into the universe.

Thus, the root of all Jewish suffering—and to a large extent, all human suffering— can be traced to *churban Beis Hamikdash*. It was that event, more than any other, that made possible all subsequent travail. Only when the void created by *churban Beis Hamikdash* is filled will the Jewish people, and the world at large, experience healing.

This is why we continue to mourn the loss of the *Beis Hamikdash* every year. For in mourning *churban Beis Hamikdash*, we thereby also mourn its tragic fallout that continues to affect us to the present.

We cry over our loss of spiritual innocence—for the dearth of true Torah personalities whose absence the Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 18b) equates with the destruction of the Temple:

The death of the righteous is equivalent to the destruction of the Temple.

שקולה מיתתן של צדיקים כשריפת בית אלקינו.

We cry for the continuing and intensifying degradation of the Jew in the eyes of the world.

We cry for the terrible *chilul Hashem* that results from the vandalizing, in Europe and elsewhere, of shuls and Jewish cemeteries and the desecration of sifrei Torah.

And we cry for the precarious state of the world since 9/11 and through the "Arab Spring" and beyond.

True, we have been privileged to experience tremendous Divine grace in the aftermath of the Shoah. We have been privileged to witness the renewal of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel, and the return of so many of our brethren to our ancient homeland—a measure of *kibbutz goluyos* that could scarcely have been dreamed of in earlier years. We have witnessed the reunification of Yerushalyim, access to our holy sites, and a burgeoning of yeshivos and Torah institutions unparalleled in many centuries. But despite all this, we recognize how vulnerable we still are. Our hold over our land—over the Me'aras Hamachpeila in Chevron, Kever Rachel in Beis Lechem, even Yerushalayim and Har Habayis—is far from secure. Jewish blood continues to flow. And in the Diaspora, assimilation among the vast majority of our brothers and sisters is as rampant as ever. And so we continue to mourn each year, aware that our sorrow is somehow inextricably linked to the long trail of Jewish suffering that is rooted in *churban Beis Hamikdash*.

Zoche Veroeh Besimchasa:

Mourning the *Churban* and its Cathartic Epiphany

And then something dramatic happens, something cathartic. Out of the midst of the intense grief engendered by Tisha B'Av, a ray of light emerges that allows us to experience a small taste of consolation. Our Rabbis (*Ta'anis* 30b) allude to this phenomenon in the following teaching:

One who mourns for Jerusalem merits to see its rejoicing. | כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחתה.

On a simple level, this statement holds out a guarantee that one who mourns for Jerusalem will eventually merit to see it rebuilt—whether in one's lifetime or after the resurrection of the dead.

However, the choice of words employed by our Sages is most revealing—“*zoche veroeh besimchasa*”—literally, “he merits and sees in her rejoicing.” The Gemara employs the present tense—“*zoche vero’eh*”—literally, “merits and sees,” rather than the future tense “*yizke veyir’eh*,” he will merit to see.” Apparently our Rabbis wished to convey a very profound idea: that the process of mourning for Jerusalem can, in and of itself, produce a therapeutic effect through which one begins to experience a glimpse of Jerusalem’s ultimate joy—not at some future time but in the present moment. If the colloquial expression affirms that “seeing is believing,” our Rabbis wish to teach us that the converse may be even more valid: “believing is seeing.” One who truly mourns for Jerusalem and holds out a constant vision of its former glory is blessed with a premonition of that blissful state for which he so passionately yearns.

Nechama: A Shifting of Perspective

This cathartic experience of “*zoche vero’eh besimchasa*”—in the present tense—is closely associated with a phenomenon known as “*nechama*,” commonly translated as “consolation.” The motif of *nechama* is embedded within Tisha B’Av ritual and liturgy but only emerges after midday of Tisha B’Av. This is why after *chatzos* (midday), some of the Tisha B’Av restrictions are lifted. Also, the Mincha *Amida* includes the prayer of *Nachem*, which asks for consolation; a theme that is omitted during Shacharis. Let us understand the message of *nechama* that is inherent in Tisha B’Av.

In truth, there is something very puzzling about associating *nechama* with Tisha B’Av afternoon. The Gemara (*Ta’anis* 29a) tells us that it was on the eve of the ninth of Av that the Beis Hamikdash was set aflame and it was over the course of the next two days—the ninth day of Av through the tenth—that it was completely consumed by the flames. Based on this, Rabbi Yochanan observed that had he been present at that time, he would have ordained that the day of mourning be the tenth of Av rather than the ninth. The Rabbis, however, who selected the ninth of Av, did so because it was on the eve of the ninth that the process of destruction had begun. Even so, in view of the fact that much of the Beis Hamikdash continued to burn throughout the afternoon of the ninth, does it not seem incongruous that precisely this period should be designated as *nechama*?

The answer may lie in the etymology of the word *nechama*, which, apart from its common meaning, “consolation,” also implies “reconsideration.” For example, in the aftermath of the sin of the golden calf we read (Shemos 32:14) “*vayinachem Hashem al hara’ah asher diber la’asos l’amo*,” “Hashem *reconsidered*—changed His mind, as it were—concerning the evil that he had originally sought to do to his nation.”

Why is the Hebrew word for “consolation” identical with that of “reconsideration?” The answer is because the essence of consolation is the ability to shift perspective—to look at the same reality and to “reconsider,” to see it in a different light. While from an earlier perspective, a tragedy might be viewed in stark “black and white” terms—as senseless and meaningless—*nechama* allows for shades of gray, leading one to perceive a silver lining within the depth of the suffering. While a painful void and gnawing questions still remain, the spirit of *nechama* begins to uncover Divine grace, permitting people to discern the hidden hand of Providence underlying

the apparent madness, and encouraging them to use the painful experience as an impetus to move forward creatively. In short, *nechama* connotes the ability to reconsider. Although externally nothing may have changed, and things may, on occasion, even seem worse, internally, a transformation has taken place in the meaning that one assigns to this harsh reality.

Shafach Chamaso Al Eitzim Va'avanim:

Discovering the Silver Lining

Chazal (Eicha Rabbah 4:14) identify what is perhaps the quintessential element in the process of *nechama* for *churban Beis Hamikdash*—namely, the fact that while the physical structure of the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, the Jewish people, as a whole, survive. G-d poured out his wrath on the wood and stones that comprised the physical structure of the Temple—but it could have been far worse. The awareness that the Temple was the target of the punishment while the people were spared is the theme that lies at the heart of *nechama*. It represents the shift in perspective that brings with it a measure of consolation as we come to grips with the tragedy of *churban Beis Hamikdash*.

It is precisely for this reason, the Gaon of Vilna explains (OC 555:1), that the period after midday on the ninth of Av was designated as a time for *nechama*. It was then, while the Temple burnt to a crisp, that the “silver lining” of “*shafach chamaso al eitzim va'avanim*,” “He poured out his wrath on the wood and stones,” became apparent. As tragic and painful as things were, a renewed perspective allows for some consolation—in the knowledge that at the height of tragedy, Hashem made sure to spare the nation. On Tisha B'Av night and earlier on in the day, we do not allow ourselves to take such comfort. We feel devastated as we engage in tearful mourning and recite the kinos. But somehow, as a result of this process, we are suddenly left with a ray of hope—“*zoche ve'ro'eh besimchasa*.” We begin to detect the *chasdei Hashem*, the Divine grace, within the throes of the *churban* itself—“*shafach chamaso al eitzim va'avanim*.” This sense of *nechama* gives us the ability to move on.

Post-Shoah Aspects of Nechama

The inner transformation that occurs on Tisha B'Av with respect to *churban Beis Hamikdash*—the ability to find cause for hope in the face of sorrow—must naturally spill over into all of those tragedies for which we mourn on Tisha B'av. At first glance, the concept of “*shafach chamaso al eitzim va'avanim*” offers virtually no comfort when it comes to the Shoah. After all, in this case, the victims were, indeed, the people themselves—a staggering six million, if not more. Nevertheless, the very fact that we, as a people, did survive, the fact that we managed to rebuild out of the ashes of the Shoah, is, in itself, a measure of *nechama*. While we are still limping—and we dare not forget what was lost—we have somehow managed to survive and to thrive. We are called upon to stop and consider the truly remarkable myriad accomplishments of the State of Israel since its inception, all performed under a taxing burden of non-stop hostilities. And the rebirth of Torah institutions both in Israel and in America surely illustrates the resilience of Am Yisroel and the special *siyata dishmaya*, Divine assistance, that has guided us.

The spirit of *nechama*, of consolation and reconsideration, impels us to seek out stories of inspiration that emerged from of the Shoah—not just stories of *kiddush Hashem*, but also of *kiddush Hachayim*—of those who maintained their dignity and their faith in the face of the horrors with which they were confronted.

Nechama impels us to continue to search for the silver lining—to seek out stories of Divine Providence—in the tales of survivors who managed to escape. On a personal level, my maternal grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Meir Pomerance, who served as the last Rav in Brok, Poland, was fortunate enough to escape along with his wife and four children to America in the early part of the war. Like so many other survivors, his path was paved with miracles, from the hand grenade that was thrown into his home that was then filled with numerous families, which landed miraculously in a pail of water and did not explode, to the flight from Brok by foot where he was nearly shot, to the few days when the family was separated into two with each group unaware of the others' whereabouts, to the families' managing to miraculously obtain the visas necessary to emigrate—including the famous Sugihara transit visa. Were it not for *chasdei Hashem* that somehow protected my mother and her family, I know that I would not be here today. And the stories go on and on. Stories of this nature provide some measure of consolation and give us hope in the face of sorrow.

When we contemplate the terrible toll that Arab hostility has wrought on our brothers and sisters in Israel—and reflect on the stories of the victims and their families—those who were killed as well as those that were maimed—children left fatherless and motherless, children taken from their parents, young men and women taken from their spouses—we are left feeling numb and paralyzed, and appropriately so. But from this mourning must also emerge an element of *nechama*. *Nechama* allows us to persevere and use the pain as an impetus to grow and to inspire others and ourselves.

Timeless Words of *Chizuk* for a Grieving Child

Several years ago, I had occasion to hear Chief Rabbi Lau of Israel speak during a brief visit to the United States. He told the tragic story of the Schijveschuurder family³, who had emigrated from Holland to Israel some 22 years earlier; how the father, Mordechai (Moti) had given up his business to build a cheder in Talmon, how the mother, Tzira, would commute each day to Yerushalayim for an hour and a quarter to teach in a special school for deaf children (called *Shema Koleinu*). The Schijveschuurders had eight children. On August 9, 2001, on a Thursday afternoon, the parents, together with their five youngest children, went out to dine in the Sbarro Pizzeria in Yerushalayim. A Palestinian terrorist, strapped with explosives, walked in and detonated a bomb, killing fifteen and wounding over one hundred. Among those killed were the parents, Moti and Tzira, as well as three of the children—Ra'aya, Avraham Yitzchak and Chemda—ages 14, 4 and 2. The other two children—10-year-old Layela and 8-year-old Chayela—were badly burned and rushed to nearby Bikur Cholim hospital.

Rabbi Lau related how that evening he received a call from Tzira's sister with the heart-wrenching news—asking him to officiate the next morning at the funeral of the parents and

³ This story was later published with other details in Rabbi Lau's autobiography, *Out of the Depths*, p. 266 ff.

three children. The request was made of Rabbi Lau not in his capacity as Chief Rabbi but because of his personal relationship with the family going back many years. Rabbi Lau had, in fact, acted as *mesader kiddushin* at the parents' wedding 25 years earlier. At the *levaya* (funeral) the following morning, as Rabbi Lau was about to speak, an ambulance pulled up, and 10-year-old Layela, seriously burned and covered with bandages, was brought out on a stretcher accompanied by doctors and nurses. Layele had insisted on being present at the *levaya* of her parents and three siblings. Rabbi Lau's emotional *hesped* (eulogy) consisted of a string of biblical citations beseeching G-d to eradicate evil and to have compassion on his people.

The following Monday, Rabbi Lau visited the family's home where the three older siblings were sitting shiva. Again, an ambulance arrived carrying 10-year-old Layela who wished to join her brothers for the duration of the shiva. Before leaving, Rabbi Lau approached Layela and inquired about her younger sister, Chayela, who had not yet left the hospital. Layela tearfully told Rabbi Lau that she had last seen Chayela two hours earlier to let her know that she was going to the shiva house, how they had both cried, and that she was hopeful that Chayela would recover. Then she added: "It's good that you asked about Chayela. Because when I told her that I was coming here, she said: 'I'm sure Rav Lau will be there since he was very close to Abba and Ima. Please tell him when you see him that just as there is a mitzvah of *nichum aveilim*—consoling the bereaved—there is also a mitzvah of *bikur cholim*—visiting the sick. I hope that he will visit me too.'"

The next morning, Rabbi Lau appeared at the hospital and witnessed the sad sight of 8-year old Chayela lying in severe pain with bandages covering most of her body. Sitting at her bedside silently, Rabbi Lau noticed the child's eyes well up in tears. He turned to her and said: "Chayela, there is something that I want to tell you. I know someone who also lost his Abba and Ima suddenly when he was only 8 years old. But he was even less fortunate than you are. You have two Savtot and a Saba—two grandmothers and a grandfather—and three remaining brothers. You have people who love you and will comfort you when you leave the hospital. Even the prime minister of Israel, Arik Sharon, has come to visit you here and has brought you a *dubi* (teddy bear). But that little boy had no Saba or Savta, no friends, no one to hug him, kiss him or love him. He knew of only one surviving brother. Chayela, that little boy is now..."

But before Rabbi Lau could complete his sentence, little Chayela, with the slightest of smiles, interjected: "*Kein, ani yoda'at. Zeh ata*"—"Yes, I know, it was you."

Rabbi Lau concluded his remarks: "You see, Chayele, it is all up to you. Hakadosh Baruch Hu helps those who help themselves—as it says, "*uveirachecha bechol asher ta'aseh*"—He shall bless you in all that you do." If you wish to live and be healthy, He will help you recover and be healthy... If you wish to be happy, He will help you to be happy. If you wish to succeed in life, He will help you to succeed. Always remember my example."

This powerful vignette speaks for itself. Rabbi Lau's touching words to Chayela truly capture the essence of *nechama*.

The Challenge of Tisha B'Av: Nurturing a Vision and Maintaining Hope

Tisha B'Av offers us a powerful taste of sorrow—the sorrow of Klal Yisroel—the Jewish people throughout the ages. The river of sorrow seems endless and never ending—as Yirmiyahu Hanavi says, “*ki gadol kayam shivreich mi yirpa lach*” — “Your ruin is as vast as the sea; who can heal you?” (Eicha 2:13). But paradoxically, as we allow ourselves to feel the plight of our people, as we mourn the loss of the Beis Hamikdash and all that it entailed, we begin to taste *nechama*. Through our mourning we hold out a vision of a better future—of an Israel at peace, of a world at peace, of the coming of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the third Temple. We begin to “see” these visions as living realities—“*zoche vero'eh besimchasa*.” This, in turn, allows us to “reconsider” those same tragedies and use them as vehicles for growth as characterized by the spirit of *nechama*. These positive steps may, in turn, be instrumental in helping to bring the ultimate redemption that much closer and making our pure vision a physical reality.

How ironic—that latent within Tisha B'Av is the potential to bring Moshiach! No wonder that Moshiach, according to our Sages, will be born on Tisha B'Av!

May we be privileged to properly mourn for Yerushalayim—to genuinely anticipate the *yeshu'as Hashem*, G-d's ultimate salvation, to yearn for it passionately—and to experience a taste of the *nechama* that makes living in an imperfect world that much easier. May this Tisha B'Av be our last as a day of sorrow with the arrival of Moshiach speedily in our days, Amen.