



# MOURNING NATIONAL TRAGEDIES AND INDIVIDUAL LOSSES

**T**he observance of the Three Weeks and Nine Days seem to evoke some of the most unique halachic quandaries throughout the year. The disruption of our generally more relaxed months of summer with the halachic expectation for one to experientially connect to the entire range of national tragedy throughout Jewish history, is one of the most challenging

halachic demands that we encounter. Understandably, many people struggle with this challenge.

The mourning practices of the *Bein Hametzarim* period, which increase in their intensity leading up to Tisha B'Av —Three Weeks, Nine Days, the week of Tisha B'Av and Tisha B'Av itself — are a mirror image of the mourning practices that define our general *aveilus* practices: *shiva*, *shloshim*,

and the 12 months, which decrease in intensity. Rav Soloveitchik would explain that the inverted framework of mourning during this time period, is a manifestation of Chazal's deep understanding of the human experience. An *aveilus chadasha*, a recent loss, follows a halachic progression to help process the loss in a manner that will ultimately facilitate that individual to reintegrate

into the normal experiences of life. By contrast, *aveilus yeshana*, the commemoration of previous losses in our history, yields no such visceral reaction, and therefore, halacha guides our emotions by incrementally increasing the intensity of our mourning observance. It is indeed so challenging to truly feel and experience the pain of our people's loss from centuries ago, and certainly in antiquity.

One of the Kinnos we recite on Tisha B'Av (number 23) depicts the tragic story of the son and daughter of Rabbi Yishmael who were sold into slavery only to discover that their relative masters intended to marry them to each other. Horrified by the prospect of such a profound violation, they each isolated themselves in a corner of a dark room and fervently prayed, only to discover their intended fate the following morning and die of shock in the face of such a terrible reality. Rav Soloveitchik explained that the liturgy of Kinnos, which is predominantly focused on the vast losses of communities, includes this story to accentuate the importance of relating to each individual in the face of national churban. Tragedies of immense magnitude are sometimes internalized in a more abstract manner as it is nearly impossible to emotionally process the loss of each individual. Yet Yahadus asks of us to not only confront the tragedies of our people as broader experiences in the context of our history, but to take

a moment and truly appreciate the profound loss that must have come to each and every family, upon the loss of their loved one.

---

**Yahadus asks of us to not only confront the tragedies of our people as broader experiences in the context of our history, but to take a moment and truly appreciate the profound loss that must have come to each and every family, upon the loss of their loved one.**

---

In this Tisha B'Av issue of *The Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To Go*®, we explore the wisdom of Torah as it relates to supporting those who have experienced loss. We have all found ourselves at a hospital visit or shiva house observing well-meaning individuals who make inappropriate

and unsupportive comments to those who are struggling. The mitzvah of *nichum aveilim* places the entire community in the homes of those who have experienced the loss of their loved ones, but our behavior and attitude within those homes, will ultimately determine if the mourner can emerge from the experience edified with hope, or even further pained by the magnitude of their loss. Tisha B'Av teaches us not to abstract the loss of others and engage them with formal acts of ritual, but rather, to truly internalize their pain and provide the love and support that they so desperately need.

Concluding a shiva visit, we recite the following phrase:

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון  
וירושלים.

*May the Omnipresent comfort you among the mourner of Zion and Jerusalem.*

By referencing those who mourn the destruction of Jerusalem and the two Holy Temples, this declaration acknowledges that while our national losses encompass the demise of individuals, every individual loss also impacts the broader national story of the Jewish people as we yearn for our redemption.



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Yaakov Glasser at <https://www.yutorah.org/rabbi-yaakov-glasser>