

Rabbi Moshe Walter



Tishah B'Av: Our Awaited Marriage

Our generation's observance of the mourning of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash has drastically changed from what it once was. Tishah B'Av has transformed from a canceled date on the summer vacation calendar into a day of serious mourning.

We greatly benefit from the scholarship of marvelously elucidated and translated Kinnos and grow from their meaningful explanatory presentations on Tishah B'Av morning. We gain from watching inspirational videos on Tishah B'Av afternoon and are uplifted by listening to around-the-clock speeches throughout the entire day. There is no doubt that we are a generation that is taking the words of the Talmud (*Taanis* 30b) quite seriously: "Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will

merit and see her future joy, and whoever does not mourn for Jerusalem will not see her future joy."

On Tishah B'Av, we are encouraged to place another brick in the wall by taking on a new mitzvah with vigor: to stop speaking *lashon hara*; to create more *ahavas chinam*; to not hold a grudge against a neighbor; and to forgive the family member who insulted us. But we are still left wondering: What is the essence of what we are mourning?

LET US ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND what is at the heart of the *avodah* of Tishah B'Av by considering life from the viewpoint of an adolescent man and an adolescent woman. Both live happy, fulfilling, and satisfying lives. They relish their freedom, take advantage of the plethora of opportunities they have been granted, and enjoy the benefits of their formative years. The adolescent is living the words of Shlomo Hamelech (Koheles 11:9): "Youth, enjoy yourself while you are young. Let your heart lead you to enjoyment in the days of your youth. Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes."

The adolescent takes in all the pleasures of life free of significant responsibility while reaping the benefits of these utopian years. The life of the adolescent is complete, whole, and perfect. The adolescent can't imagine living any differently, or what the alternative may look like. The adolescent is missing nothing.

At some point, these two are blessed to marry, and they quickly learn that the wonderful, happy life they were living was sorely missing the most critical and basic component, a spouse. It is at that moment of awakening that the adolescents realize that they really weren't living fully and wholly but were rather missing the second half of their soul; their essence. It is then that they truly find happiness, completion, and ultimate satisfaction.

The blessing of marriage that this couple is privileged to merit serves as a window into one of the only times in life that one can feel, touch, and appreciate the dramatic change in worlds; moving from one reality to another, a reality that one never imagined existed.

While we struggle to understand what the

ancient life of the Beis Hamikdash was all about and can't imagine what the third Beis Hamikdash will look like, the newlywed couple can honestly say, "I lived a previous life that seemed perfect and ideal, but I now recognize a new world and new reality that is actually perfect and complete."

The transition from singlehood to marriage allows the couple and those in their orbit to appreciate a world gone by and a world emerging. The newlywed couple teaches us that we can pine for something more; a new reality, a world with a Beis Hamikdash, with Kohanim serving in the Beis Hamikdash, where we hear the melodious tunes of the Leviim. A world where peace reigns, where disagreement doesn't exist; a world without war, where we cleave to our creator and connect to the glory of the King of Kings. The *avodah* and essence of Tishah B'Av is to let our imagination run wild with this reality.

On Tishah B'Av, we mourn that we are living without our beloved and are missing the ultimate relationship. We are a nation missing our homeland the way it has been promised to us. We are a people who sorely miss our holy temple, the epicenter of our faith and religion. We are unable to offer korbanos, the cornerstone of our service. The Kohanim are unable to do the *avodah* and atone for the sins of the Jewish People. We are unable to be *oleh l'regel* and stand atop of the mountain of G-d. We are missing the heartbeat, soul, and essence of our relationship with Hashem. We are missing out on oh, so much. We are missing almost everything.

THE CALL OF TISHAH B'AV IS TO CRY that things are not the way they are supposed to be. Yes, we have a seder on Pesach, but we are missing the Korban Pesach. Yes, we daven Mussaf on Yom Kippur, but we are missing the core of the Avodah, the service of the Kohein Gadol that atoned for the sins of the Jewish nation. Yes, we sing and dance at a Simchas Beis Hashoeivah on Chol HaMoed Succos, but we are missing the "true joy" of this happiest of all events that ever existed. Yes, we have the Kosel Hamaaravi, but that is only the outer wall of the greatest edifice ever built, which is sorely missing. Yes, we have outstanding Torah

scholars and *gedolei Yisrael*, but we are missing prophets and prophecy. Yes, we are fulfilling many mitzvos, but are unable to fulfill them all, or fulfill them properly.

Let us return to our dear husband and wife. While they enjoy living a happy and joyous life together, the day comes when our young couple is forced to separate for reasons beyond their control; work abroad, family circumstances, or unforeseen conditions. Their dream of their life together at all costs comes crashing down to the ground. How does our couple stay connected during the separation period? What advice can we share with them?

There are three elements that will allow this couple to persevere through this precarious period. One, they must acknowledge the pain of their spouse and listen to the challenges that each face without their better half. Before focusing on one's own pain, each must focus on and acknowledge the spouse's pain. Two, they need to recall and speak about their glorious relationship and the beautiful days they spent together as one. Three, they need to discuss their future and dream about great days ahead. They need to build that reality together.

While this is not the relationship our beloved couple hoped for or expected, they must continue to invest heavily in the marriage, even when it's not what it should be, so that their fragile connection now keeps them united until their reunion. They must remind each other that this situation is only temporary and express how they look forward with anticipation to be close together once again.

These three elements are what the Jew in exile can offer Hashem as we approach Tishah B'Av.

One, we need to acknowledge the pain of the Shechinah in *galus*. Hashem is aching and hurting that His nation has been forced into exile. The Midrash (*pesichah* to *Eichah Rabbasi* 24) records that when the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, Hashem was crying bitterly and said, "My children, where are you? Kohanim, where are you? My beloved, where are you?"

The pain of G-d is so great that the Maggid of Rav Yosef Karo (as recorded by the Shelah HaKadosh, volume 1, 30a) said, "If you understood only an



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ounce of the pain that Hashem feels, you would be unable to be happy and joyous.”

Given all this, Rav Chaim of Volozhin writes (*Nefesh HaChaim* 2:11) that our main prayers should not focus on the pain that we suffer in the exile, but first and foremost on the pain that Hashem is feeling for His exiled nation. Yes, this is a tall order, as our pain naturally hurts more and our automatic reaction is to squelch that discomfort first; however, we mustn’t forget how much Hashem is hurting, even more than we. This requires awareness, attention, and serious contemplation.

Two, we need to recall our glorious past, the days of yore (*piyut*, Yom Kippur Mussaf): “Fortunate is the eyes that that saw all these.” We should learn about the First and Second Temple periods and understand the storied history of our nation during those golden years of Jewish history. For example, study the awesome *piyut* of Yom Kippur Mussaf “*Ashrei ayin*” and be inspired by the nation you are part of. Your ancestors bear witness to the revealed relationship they shared with Hashem. You will walk away from this *piyut* a different person.

Consider learning Mishnayos *Middos* and Maseches *Tamid*, which detail the structure and innermost working of the Beis Hamikdash. This will allow for a deeper understanding of our beloved and His special abode. This helps to actualize the beautiful days we had and reexperience the reality of the relationship that once was.

Three, we must be *metzapeh l’yeshuah*, await the salvation (*Shabbos* 31a). The Chofetz Chaim authored an entire treatise by this title, dedicated to encouraging Klal Yisrael to think forward and contemplate our role in bringing Mashiach. While we can’t imitate the Chofetz Chaim, who had a bag packed in Radin awaiting Mashiach’s arrival to travel to Eretz Yisrael, we can focus more on Shemoneh Esreh, of which the lion’s share of the 19 brachos focus on anticipating the Redemption.

Take a more careful look at the brachos of Shemoneh Esreh and you may be surprised to see that three times a day, we stress the anticipation of the redemption in a variety of different ways. Study, recite, concentrate, and pay attention to the Shemoneh Esreh, which is a lesson in being *metzapeh l’yeshuah*.

Hashem is waiting to see and hear if we really want

the relationship. Hashem is waiting to see if we really desire the Beis Hamikdash. Hashem is pursuing us, and we need to pursue Him (*Sichos HaChofetz Chaim* 14). It’s up to us.

WHILE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HASHEM

in the exile is not what it was when we had the Beis Hamikdash, we are required to remain faithful to our beloved as we steer through this painful exile. We must remain on route until we reach our destination: the great day when Hashem calls us back home, and husband and wife are united once again. (See Sifri, Devarim 43; Ramban, Vayikra 18:25; Rabbeinu Bechaye, Devarim 11:18.)

So, what is the *avodah* of Tishah B’Av? It’s the ability to understand that the world of exile in which we are living is not really living. It is missing the union, the relationship, and the true marriage to Hashem. Tishah B’Av is about recalling what once was, pining for a reality that we never knew but are certain is the ultimate existence. Tishah B’Av is about changing our cognition about what we have now, and what we will ultimately have. Tishah B’Av is about believing that we can see something beyond what our eyes perceive.

In the words of the Rambam (*Hilchos Melachim* 12:5) “In that era, there will be neither famine or war, envy or competition, for good will flow in abundance and all the delights will be freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d. Therefore, the Jews will be great sages and know the hidden matters, grasping the knowledge of their Creator according to the full extent of human potential, as Yeshayahu states: ‘The world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed.’”

This is the marriage we await. This is the union we pine for. This is the reality we must seek. This is what we will think about this Tishah B’Av. May we merit to see and live these days soon in our times. ●

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