

Making Tisha B'Av More Meaningful

The tragedies of Tisha B'Av began in the desert with the episode of the spies who were sent to scout the land of Canaan. When Bnai Yisrael heard the slanderous report of ten of the twelve spies, the Torah records:

וַתִּשָּׂא כָּל הָעֵדָה וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶת קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכוּ הָעָם בְּלַיְלָה הַהוּא.

The whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night.

Bamidbar 14:1

Our rabbis identify this day on the calendar as Tisha B'Av, and teach us that in response, Hashem said:

אתם בכיתם בכיה של חנם ואני קובע לכם בכיה לדורות.

You cried for nothing, I'll give you a reason to cry for generations.

Ta'anis 29a

A story is told that the French leader, Napoleon Bonaparte, was walking in Paris on Tisha B'Av. He passed a synagogue and heard the sounds of people weeping and lamenting in a foreign language. When he inquired why the men inside were sitting on the floor and mourning, he was told that they were Jews grieving for their Temple, which had been destroyed in Jerusalem almost 1,800 years earlier. Napoleon supposedly said, "If the Jews are still crying after so many hundreds of years, then I am certain the Temple will one day be rebuilt!"

It is now a few centuries later and we



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are still mourning and trying to keep Tisha B'Av relevant for our families as we pray for the building of the Bais Hamikdash in our time. When my children were younger, they asked a question that I am sure many other children (and adults) ask: "Why do we need three weeks to mourn the destruction of the Temples? Isn't that a little much?" Perhaps the answer is that we have no firsthand memories of the destruction of the two Temples, and therefore, it is necessary to have a prolonged mourning period to cultivate an emotional response to the ancient tragedies.

Here are some thoughts and suggestions on ways to make Tisha B'Av a meaningful and valuable experience to people of different ages and at different stages.

Making it Real

In my husband's first years as rabbi of the Young Israel of Hollywood, Florida, he did a project with the teenagers (not appropriate for every age group) on Tisha B'Av to create an understanding of the loss our nation incurred. He spent hours with the teens constructing a miniature version

of the Bais Hamikdash, and finished it by spray-painting the whole thing. He then lit a match and the teens watched in disbelief as the project in which they had invested so much time and energy went up in flames. A meaningful discussion ensued about what the Bais Hamikdash represented — and how great its loss was to the Jewish nation.

When one of my daughters was a counselor in camp, she had her campers write down their hopes and dreams and talk about how they would feel if all their hopes and dreams were destroyed. She tried to impress upon her campers that it wasn't just a building that was burned — it was the center of their lives. Homes were destroyed and families were torn apart, buried, and exiled far away. She created characters of similar ages and personalities of the campers and used storylines from some of the midrashim as a means of telling stories that her campers could relate to.

Years later, she is now the mother of four young children, and making Tisha B'Av real for her children takes on a different form. During the Nine Days, she designates a wall in their

home on which to build the Bais Hamikdash. She cuts out rectangles from brown and beige paper that are meant to look like bricks. On these bricks, the family writes various mitzvos that they perform to help bring the Mashiach and rebuild the third Bais Hamikdash.

When we sit in shul and read the kinnos, we can find ways to make the story personal. My husband notes that our family has a personal connection to Kinnah #10 — *Eichah Yashvah Chavatzeles HaSharon*.

A Talmudic passage is codified in the *Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 128:25. In a congregation that is made up entirely of kohanim, if there are only ten present, they all go up to duchar. But who are they blessing? Their fellow Jews, who are all in the fields. Who responds “Amen”? The women and children who are in

shul. Rabbi Elazar HaKalir’s kinnah *Eichah Yashvah Chavatzeles HaSharon* identifies 24 kohanic cities. This is the only place in rabbinic literature where all of these cities are identified. The above mentioned halacha of a minyan of only kohanim is not hypothetical. It played out in these 24 cities.

This kinnah, which some might categorize as “dry,” came alive for my husband through the personal life story of my father, Mr. Erwin Katz, z”l. Opa, as we called him, was

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born in 1915 in Flieden, Germany, a small town close to Fulda. When my husband asked him how many Jews lived there, Opa said that there were only 25 Jewish families in Flieden, and 23 of them were kohanim (Katz, Katzenstein, Katzmann, et al). He became a Bar Mitzvah on Parshas Tzav, 1928, Shabbat HaGadol. He remembered going up to duchar that Pesach with his father and older brothers, and nobody was in the men’s section of the shul. Some women and children were in the balcony women’s section. This kinnah now became alive and real. When we think about the destroyed cities mentioned in the kinnah, we can also reflect on the little towns throughout Europe that were destroyed. Each had their own special character including Flieden, a town that paralleled the cities destroyed in *Eichah Yashvah Chavatzeles HaSharon*.

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Tisha B'Av for Those with Younger Children

For those with young children, it can be challenging to connect emotionally with Tisha B'Av. We aren't supposed to express happy and positive emotions but our children need our warmth and smiles. How do we present a positive attitude toward our children while still feeling the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash on the inside? Another challenge that my daughters (and many others with young children) face is the inability to go to shul because their children are not old enough. When they were younger, the emotions of Tisha B'Av were stirred by hearing the reading of Eichah or by attending the Kinnos. Those opportunities are no longer available for them.

One of my daughters achieves this balance by dedicating some of the night of Tisha B'Av, after the children are sleeping, to listening to a recording of the reading of Eichah to put herself in the right frame of mind. She then avails herself of other books and online resources to take the time without her children around to connect to Tisha B'Av. Some years, if there was a time that all her children were occupied, she would partner up with a friend attending the Tisha B'Av videos. The friend would put her phone near the speaker so my daughter could listen in. Other years, she would plan to be with some friends — the children could play and the adults could talk about Tisha B'Av-related topics to emote and inspire one another.

Tisha B'Av day can also be an opportunity to connect to Tisha B'Av

as a family. When my children were younger, we would spend time in Onset, Massachusetts. My children remember Tisha B'Av as a day when my husband held a small *yom iyun* (day of study) for the family, and we all participated in learning about Tisha B'Av. The older children watched Holocaust-related movies. They remember Tisha B'Av as a family day — not of fun, but of meaning.

Sometimes, a little creativity helps too. One of my daughters pointed out to me that if your children need to watch videos to pass the day, have them watch cooking videos or other food-related videos so that the adults who are supervising them and the older children can have a little more *inui nefesh* (affliction) while they are fasting.

“We knew YU was the place our children could accomplish everything they wanted in a fully Jewish environment.”

“Having attended YU and benefited from its education and religious culture we felt confident that it would provide those same opportunities for our children. With its balance of *Limudei Kodesh* and challenging academics, we knew YU would provide our children with the preparation needed for their careers as professionals, as well as reinforce the religious ideals that they will take with them in all that they do. The same values that permeated the walls of YU when we attended 35 years ago are the very values that we chose to inculcate in our children.

Today, our daughter is a sophomore at Yeshiva University. We are thrilled with the education she is receiving and her growth in Torah. She couldn't be happier.”

Michele & Jody Bardash
YU Parents



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Reflecting on the Galus Experience

Tisha B'Av is not only about contemplating previous tragedies. It is a day to take inventory of our current situation in exile. Whether we live in Eretz Yisrael or in the Diaspora, we all have our own personal galus-related challenges and Tisha B'Av is our opportunity to ponder them. I would like to share a meaningful email that one of my daughters sent out right before Tisha B'Av reflecting on her sister making Aliyah and on the challenge of being single:

I just finished my Seudah Hamafseket of bread and a hard-boiled egg dipped in ashes and salt water. Well, the salt water was from my tears — guess I was in the moment. I decided to take a few moments before I head over to shul to hear Eicha and share a few of my thoughts with you.

I've been dreading Tisha B'Av for a few weeks now, ever since I realized that it is the day I'll say goodbye to my sister and her family before they move to Israel. Of course, this is not a tragedy, chas v'shalom, quite the opposite. Making Aliya, fulfilling the dream of living life in Eretz Yisrael, where just the mere act of living daily life becomes intrinsically more meaningful — this is certainly the opposite of a tragedy. But it is not the same, going from being able to see someone frequently, to just once or twice a year. I'm trying my best not to complain, to lament every time I talk to anyone about this, but my heart is breaking inside me.

This is what Galut is — to feel my family apart with an ocean between us. This is not an oppression of the body, but an oppression of the soul. We are a diverse family, and I am so proud of all that we represent and accomplish. But diversity means we have different goals, different

desires, and different ways to reach and fulfill them.

I live in my own personal Galut. I am alone, and most of the time I am lucky not to be lonely. But where is my husband? Where are my children? I feel barren inside sometimes. מוֹשִׁיבֵי, עֲקָרַת הַבַּיִת אִם-הַבְּנִים שְׂמֵחָה: הַלֵּלָהּ-הָ. He restores the barren woman to the house, into a joyful mother of children. Halleluy-ah (Tehillim 113:9)."

Most days, it may not be appropriate to express such strong feelings freely. But today is the most dramatic day of mourning of the year in the history of the Jewish people. So let me be dramatic today. Let me bare my heart, my pain, and my tears to you. And let me not be ashamed. For maybe this too will help the Geulah come closer.

So why am I baring my soul right now? A verse in Eicha struck me in particular (1:20): רָאָה ה' כִּי צָר-לִי, מַעֲי הַמְרַמְרוּ-: "See, Hashem, how distressed I am, my insides churn; my heart is turned over within me..." I need to say to my family, "See!" I'm burning inside, and my heart is turned over, and you are the people I love most in this world, so I need you to hear me. Just listen, nothing else. שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת: מִמַּעַמְמָקִים. קְרָאתִיד ה'. ה' שָׁמְעָה בְּקוֹלִי: תִּהְיֶינָה אֲזִנֶּיךָ, קִשְׁבוֹת--לְקוֹל, תִּחַנְנֶנִּי. "A Song of Ascents. Out of the depths I cry to You, O Lord. Lord, listen to my voice; let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications (Tehillim 130:1-2)."

Sometimes I feel like Hashem doesn't hear me. How many times have I shed tears on Yom Kippur, praying for myself and for so many others? זְכוֹר תִּזְכּוֹר, וְהִשְׁמוֹחַ. ... עָלֵי נַפְשִׁי זָאת אֲשִׁיב אֶל-לִבִּי, עַל-כֵּן. "My soul remembers well, and makes me despondent." (Eicha 3:20) And yet... יִזְכֹּר ה' אֶת-אֲזִנֵּיךָ, וְיִשְׁמָע. ... "Yet, this I bear in my heart, and I will still hope" (Eicha 3:21). This resonates so strongly within me, and the

same theme runs within Tehillim 130 (my favorite perek): קוֹיֵתִי ה', קוֹתֶה נַפְשִׁי; וְלִדְבָרוֹ הוֹדֵלְתִי. — "I hope for Hashem, my soul hopes, and in His word, I hope (Tehillim 130:5)."

Somehow I hope. Whether it is my inconsistent faith in Hashem, my everlasting love for my family, or some unknown strength within me, I hope. On a day like today, I can think of the words from HaTikvah: עוֹד לֹא אָבְדָה תְּקוּתָנוּ; "Our hope is not yet lost, the hope of two thousand years." I am blessed to see my own family living in Eretz Yisrael, I am blessed that I can be so close to my family, I am blessed, I am blessed, I am blessed. מֵה-אֲשִׁיב לָהּ. ... כִּל תִּגְמוּלוּהִי עָלַי. "How can I repay Hashem for all his kindness toward me? (Tehillim 116:12)"

Even though I cry and mourn, I am thankful.

Concluding Remarks

Now that my children are no longer at home, I don't have the same challenges that younger families face on Tisha B'Av. I am able to watch the broadcast of Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter's Kinno's presentation and go to shul to view inspiring videos. But this year, connecting to Tisha B'Av will present a unique challenge for my husband and me. Erev Tisha B'Av coincides with July 31st, the final day of my husband's 45-year career as a pulpit rabbi and 36 years as rabbi of our shul. For some of our congregants, it may add to the sadness of the day and for others, it may have a different effect. For us, it will be a novel way to spend his first day of retirement while suppressing the good feelings that should accompany it. Be'ezras Hashem, the Mashiach should arrive so we can all rejoice in the building of the Bais Hamikdash as Tisha B'Av becomes transformed into a yom tov.