

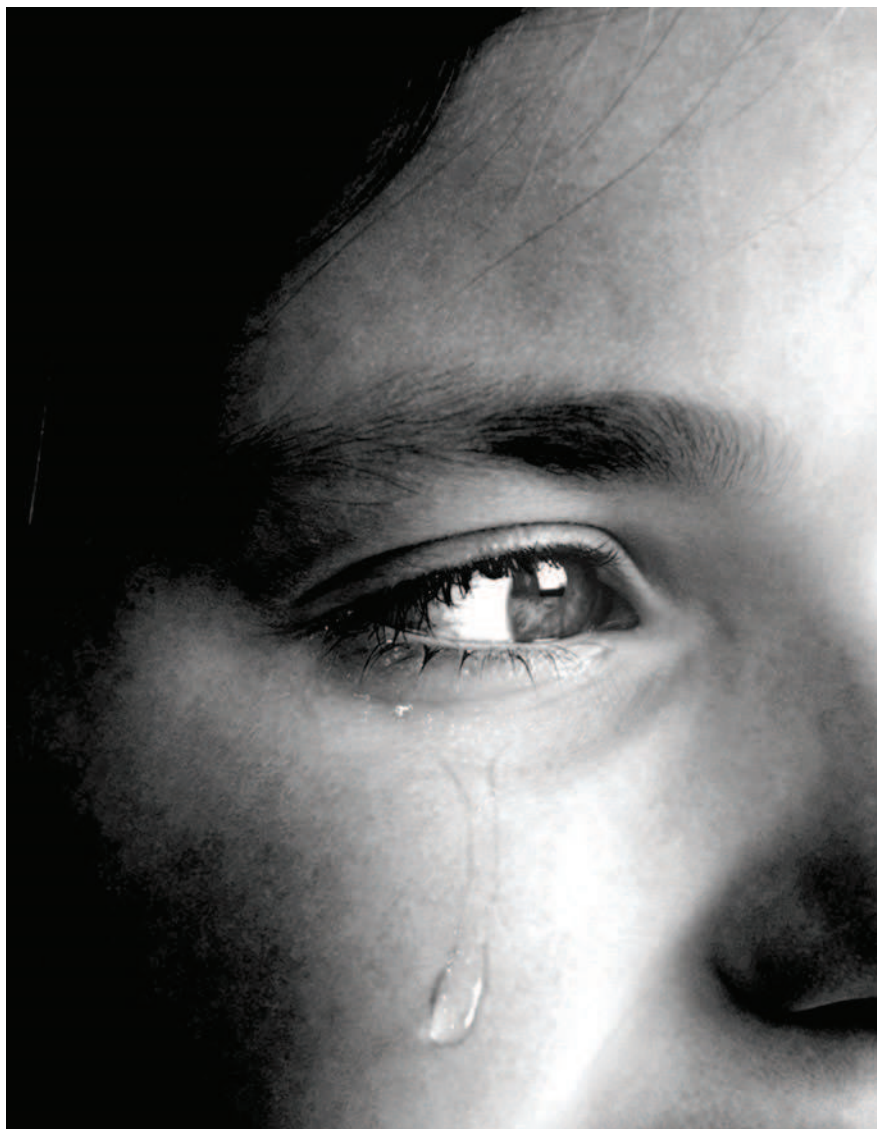


Tisha B'av

Coming to terms with **WHAT WE HAVE LOST**

Trying to understand what normal was, so we can genuinely cry over where we are at

BY ROBERT SUSSMAN



THE SECOND TEMPLE WAS DESTROYED NEARLY 2000 years ago and we have been in exile ever since. How would we feel if our exile ended tomorrow, if we were all suddenly gathered into the land of Israel and witnessed the inauguration of the Third Temple? It is admittedly a bit hard to imagine, so to get an idea let's consider what took place at the inaugurations of the First and Second Temples. The Talmud¹ teaches that the celebration for the inauguration of the First Temple was so great that it not only lasted two full weeks, but that they actually ate on Yom Kippur! Yes, they actually set aside the only Torah mandated fast and ate. And lest we think that they had done something wrong by doing so, a heavenly voice called out and declared that everyone would have a place in Olam HaBah (the world to come).

If we look at what transpired at the inauguration for the Second Temple, however, we will see that it was strikingly different. The prophet Ezra² describes the scene for us:

And when the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of Hashem...the entire nation gave a great shout of praise to Hashem.... And many from the Kohanim and the Levi'im and the heads of the fathers of the elders, who had seen the First Temple on its foundation – (with) this house before their eyes, wept loudly – and many cried out with joy – a sound of cheering. And the nation did not recognise the sound of joyous shouting because of the sound of the nation crying....

This was seventy years after the destruction of the First Temple and the exile of the Jewish people to Babylon; seventy years that the nation cried over the loss of that Temple; seventy years that they prayed for the Temple to be rebuilt; seventy years that they longed to return home

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to Israel and to serve Hashem. If we say a generation at that time was about 20 years, then it was roughly 3.5 generations of parents teaching their children, who in turn taught their children, who in turn taught their children to hope, to dream, to pray that we should be returned to our land and have our Temple rebuilt. And when they finally did return, when they finally found themselves back in the land of Israel, finally back in Jerusalem with their prayers answered and the Temple rebuilt, how did they respond? Ezra tells us that those who had never seen the First Temple rejoiced at seeing the Second Temple, but those from the generation who had been alive to see and experience the First Temple cried so loudly that they actually drowned out the shouts of joy and celebration coming from the younger generations!

So we have to ask: what's going on here? Hashem answered their prayers; He gave

them what they had hoped and prayed for each and every day – what we hope and pray for each and every day! –that they were in exile. How could they possibly find reason to cry at that point? And, make no mistake, these weren't whimpers, these were loud, heart-wrenching sobs. They probably cried more at seeing the Second Temple than we do about not having a Temple at all! This small minority's cries of sorrow – after all, how many could have been alive 70 years later with actual memories of the First Temple, we are talking about people well over 80 years old and older – managed to drown out the cries of simcha from the overwhelming majority. Stunning. Not what we would expect at all.

TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WE HAVE LOST

The gemara³ teaches that the Second Temple was nearly identical to the First Temple

with the exception of five things that were missing, among which were the aron ha-kodesh (the holy ark), the urim v'tumim (the parchments with the names of Hashem that made the breastplate "work"), and the Shechinah (Hashem's divine presence). Without these things, the Second Temple was in a significantly diminished spiritual state in comparison to the First Temple. Those who merited seeing the First Temple and had memories of the Shechinah resting there understood well the implications of the loss of that place, and, not surprisingly, continued to mourn that loss even as they stood at the inauguration of the Second Temple. Those who did not merit seeing the First Temple did not – could not! – understand the crying and the mourning, after all, what was there to cry about? There was a new Temple to celebrate!

And here we find ourselves in the present day trying to mourn the loss of both of



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“IT IS THIS FEELING OF NOT LACKING ANYTHING THAT PREVENTS US FROM BEING ABLE TO PROPERLY MOURN, SINCE WE ARE JUST NOT ABLE TO FEEL AND TO PERCEIVE WHAT WE HAVE REALLY LOST, WHAT NORMAL SHOULD LOOK AND FEEL LIKE.”

these Temples on Tisha B'av. If it is any comfort, our Sages teach that it is very hard for us to cry over these losses and to understand the implications of them. Our problem, similar to those who had no memories of the First Temple, is that we do not appreciate what we have lost. It is akin to someone asking us to mourn over the loss of a distant relative who we never met. Moreover, because we have never seen it or experienced it, we have simply lost the knowledge and understanding of what the ordinary, everyday situation of the Jewish nation is meant to be – to look and feel like – in all of its glory. We somehow manage to carry on despite all of our suffering and all of the suffering that surrounds us on a regular basis, and even to feel “good” despite it. It is as if we do not lack anything either physically or spiritually. And it is this feeling of not lacking anything that prevents us from being able to properly mourn, since we are just not able to feel and to perceive what we have really lost, what normal should look and feel like.

TURNING THE TAP ON – AND OFF

For starters, we need to recognise that Hashem wants to bestow good upon each and every one of us. What Hashem gives to us – and to whatever degree that giving gets held back – is determined by our actions. Just like the tap on a sink, which we can adjust to allow more or less water to come out, so too, we can control how much of what emanates from Hashem actually gets through to us. We are obviously speaking here about a spiritual emanation, but from this spiritual emanation results a physical one, as the spiritual realm influences the physical realm and vice versa.

Each Temple here on earth had a corre-

sponding spiritual mirror in heaven. Our behaviour – our sins – destroyed these spiritual, heavenly Temples, which, in turn, made it possible for our enemies to destroy the corresponding physical, earthly Temples. As a result of the spiritual destruction of the Temples, the entire way in which Hashem conducts the world was drastically changed from one in which His giving to us was done with abundance and ease to this constricted, impeded form of giving to which we have become very accustomed. What emanates from Hashem is constant; we simply blocked the flow, making it very difficult for anything to get through.

A CHANGE IN CONDUCT

Hashem gives us what we need for a reason, in order to serve Him. If we do not use the things that we have been blessed with for the right purpose, then Hashem takes those things away from us. When we began to serve idols (one of our actions which eventually lead to the destruction of the Second Temple), so began, in turn, the constriction of this abundant giving from Hashem, resulting in scarcity and, consequently, a loss of tranquillity. Just imagine: the stereotypical anxious, neurotic Jew, the nebbishy Woody Allen caricature, is all a result of our losing our Temple! We do not know what true Jewish greatness looks like because we have never really seen it. We need to think about this when we are blessed with physical comforts, when we are blessed with the time and clarity that peace provides us – how do we use these blessings, these tools? When the Jewish people served Hashem as we were meant to, the result even influenced the nations of the world, who would absorb the flow that spilled over from us.

So it was, as long as we served Hashem properly. But this spiritual destruction of the Temple changed the way that Hashem conducts things with the Jewish people – and the world.

When we are in exile, the giving and influence of the Shechina is also in exile. The physical world is influenced by the spiritual world. When the flow from Hashem to the spiritual world was damaged as a result of the Temple's destruction, so too the flow to the physical world was blemished. In spite of the spiritual damage, however, the world still runs as normal, Hashem continues to emanate His influence on the physical world, even though it is only a constricted influence.

BRACHA HAS GONE

When the Temples stood, there was the possibility of atonement for the neshama (soul) via the offerings that could be brought there; there was prophecy; there was Torah in all of its glory. Now they are all lacking, even the primary portions of the Torah are lacking. For example, it is well known that there are 613 mitzvot in the Torah, but in the absence of the Temple, in the absence of the Sandhedrin, in the absence of so many things that we have lost, only approximately 60% (roughly 346 mitzvot) even apply nowadays. What remains to us in terms of practical observance – mitzvot we can perform – of the Torah are only remnants. We need to understand how much our Torah has been diminished, that as great as it still is, it is mere crumbs compared to what it once was.

When the Temples stood, there was bracha (blessing) in the world such that everything was satiated. With their destruction, a curse descended upon the world until everything in the world was affected. As the gemara⁴ tells us: From the day that the Temple was destroyed, there is not a day that is not cursed, dew does not descend with bracha, and the taste of fruits has been taken away. The wind up is that we do not feel different from the other nations of the world, as we receive the emanations from Hashem in the same way



that they do, with the result being that we are left with a feeling of inferiority, and we wind up striving to be like them, measuring ourselves against them, using their values, and trying to compete with them.

WHAT DOES NORMAL LOOK LIKE?

They often tell people who have suffered a loss that the new reality that they face each day is their new “normal”. As a nation, we have been experiencing our new “normal” for thousands of years. The reason why we have so much trouble crying over the loss of our Temples is because we have a hard time appreciating what normal is meant to look like. I would like to suggest two ways of connecting with the mourning that we are meant to be actively engaged in:

Firstly, we may not be able to cry over what we have lost, but that does not mean we cannot cry over the fact that we do not

even know what we have lost. In other words, we can cry over our own ignorance, the shame and the sorrow that we should feel over not having received a Jewish education adequate enough to make the loss of our Temples something accessible and real to us, giving us some sense of the majesty, splendour, and miracles that could be seen in these places on a daily basis and which could literally inspire people to greater fear and service of G-d just by watching the Kohanim at work.

Secondly, we need to spend time learning about what normal actually looked like when the Temples stood; what it meant to have that kind of relationship with Hashem; what His house looked like; how and why that house was constructed the way it was; what the service in that house looked like and entailed; what it meant to have the Shechinah there, to have ruach hakodesh (divine inspiration), to have prophets walk-

ing among us and have the ability to consult Hashem via the choshen (breastplate) worn by the Kohen Gadol; to try and get a sense of the greatness that was Am Yisrael and which made the nations of the world literally tremble in our presence.

By doing these things, we create a longing for and a connection to what was, along with a recognition of how far we are from it – and from that kind of close, unimpeded relationship with Hashem. And, hopefully, this will bring us to genuine, heartfelt tears over what we have lost and what our lives, and the entire world, could and should look like. **IL**

Adapted from a sicha by the Sifsei Chaim, Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, ztz”l

¹Moed Katan 9a

²Ezra 3:10-13

³See Yuma 21b

⁴Sotah 58a



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