

Sparks

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Tisha B'Av: Does G-d Cry?

On Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av (which this year begins at nightfall July 22), Jews mourn over the loss of the Holy Temple, *Beis HaMikdash* in Hebrew, that stood in Jerusalem. On this day, the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple in 586 B.C.E., and the Romans demolished the Second Temple in 70 C.E..

Each Tisha B'Av, we have a custom to read *Eicha*, or the Book of Lamentations, a painful account of the prophet Jeremiah's intense sorrow over the destruction of the First Temple. In addition to reading the *Eicha*, we abstain from any physical pleasures the entire day. We are not allowed to eat, drink, wash our bodies for enjoyment or wear leather shoes. A little less-known *Halacha*, or Jewish law, is that we are not allowed to say hello to each other.

This law is perhaps the most difficult for me and yet the most meaningful. In Jerusalem in the summertime, when there are many new faces to meet and old friends to greet, not saying hello to people saddens me deeply.

If only we felt the simple pain of not saying hello to each other and internalized the meaning of this mournful act, perhaps we would then be more careful to warmly and lovingly greet each other and not hurt each other.

With no Temple, we have lost touch with the presence of G-d within the world and within each other. This is the real tragedy for which we mourn. The more we understand this spiritual loss the more we appreciate the enormous significance of the Temple to the Jewish people and the intense pain of living without it.

We did not simply lose a great work of architecture. The Temple reminded us that we are the living sanctuary for the presence of G-d on earth— G-d is manifest within us and within the world. When we lost touch with this fundamental truth about ourselves, each other and G-d, we lost the Temple. Therefore, on Tisha B'Av, we do not cry over real estate but over the real and sad state of the world. The Oral tradition teaches that when the enemies destroyed the Temple, G-d told them that they only destroyed a building already in ruins. The Temple was really the externalization of our inner awareness; our spiritual orientation to our selves, each other and G- d. When we spiritually destroyed our selves and denied the presence of G-d within our selves and within each other, the external manifestation—the building— had no meaning. Therefore, since what the Temple represented was no longer a true reflection of the spiritual level of the people, it had to be destroyed. The Temple could not remain standing once it lost the meaning for what it stood.

On Tisha B'Av we celebrate our pain by transforming it into spiritual cravings and yearnings for the restoration of the Temple and everything it stands for.

THE TEARS OF G-D

There is a phenomenal Midrash (Jewish Oral Tradition) on Eichha that describes G-d in a state of agony. "Woe, what have I done?" G-d wails. "I have destroyed the Temple; I have cast out my children! What have I done?"

An angel comes to G-d and says, "Do not cry, G-d. Let me cry your tears into the world."

"No, I will go into My inner chamber and I will cry there," G-d tells the angel. And He does just that. The Midrash is telling us that G-d is in His inner chamber, locked in His room, so to speak, crying. G-d is crying because He misses and wants the Temple.

But if G-d really missed the Temple, you may be wondering, what would stop Him from building it? If G-d really wanted to redeem the Jewish people, why does He not bring the redemption and return us to the Land of Israel? This is similar to the question, if G-d really cares about the Jewish people where was He during the Holocaust?

According to this Midrash, G-d was in His inner chamber crying; concealing His tears.

One Tisha B'Av several years ago I shared this Midrash with a group of students at Isralight. One of the participants was a fellow named Tom. The son of two holocaust survivors, Tom was very involved with holocaust studies and an extremely angry fellow. He was so angry at Judaism that it was amazing he even participated in the program. For some reason something drew him to it.

During the program, I asked the men in the group to please put on a kippa (skull cap) because we were about to study sacred Jewish text. Tom, who was sitting in the back of the room, suddenly ran up to me — in front of everyone — and whispered to me intently, "I never agreed to do that."

"It's okay, Tom," I told him. "It's cool."

Satisfied, Tom quickly returned to the back of the room, while everyone else put on their yarmulke.

At the time, Tom was passionately angry with G-d and Judaism. But after Tisha B'Av he approached me and said, "You know, Rabbi, I've been waiting so long for a rabbi to tell me that G-d is crying. Now I can cry with G-d, rather than be angry at Him."

If Jews knew just how much G-d is still crying, there would be many more, like Tom, joining G-d in His tears. Most people imagine G-d having "endless power," without emotion, stoically looking at us from heaven above. Rabbi Kalymous Kalman Shapira — who was the rabbi of the Warsaw ghetto and eventually perished in a concentration camp described G-d as having "endless pain." Our pain is limited because we are limited beings. But in His infinitude, G-d's pain is endless.

UNDERSTANDING G-D'S PAIN

It is very difficult for us to understand why G-d is in pain and what He is doing crying in His room. Further, why would the angel of the Midrash want to cry G-d's tears into the world?

According to Rabbi Shapira the angel knew that if one of G-d's tears entered this world, then the whole world would be destroyed. If we were to hear G-d crying, knew how pained G-d was over the state of

this world, we would be filled with torturous shame about ourselves, so much so, that we could not go on living. Our inability to handle G-d's pain is, therefore, why G-d is compassionately hiding it from us.

Now we can begin to fathom that when we experience a lack of intervention from G-d it is not a sign of insensitive abandonment; it is actually a sign of compassionate Divine repression. Sometimes humanity stoops to such a low level of ethical behavior that should G-d respond and do justice the world would necessarily be completely destroyed. Therefore, G-d so to speak, hides in His room. And if G-d were to allow His pain to become manifest in this world, we could not take it and the whole world would be destroyed. Therefore, G-d does not allow the angel to reveal the divine pain to the world. In other words, because we are in such denial of G-d's pain over the cruel acts of humanity, experiencing it would so devastate us that we would die on the spot. We are not ready or willing to acknowledge and feel G-d's pain.

Now, you may wonder, if having a Temple would stop G-d from crying, then it would seem logical for G-d simply to build another Temple.

But He can't.

G-d cannot build the Temple without something from us: We have to want the Temple and of-course, the spiritual meaning it represents. Practically speaking, there is no point in building a Temple unless we want to embody the presence of G-d in our lives and acknowledge the Godliness within each other. There is no point in bringing the Jewish people back to the land of Israel unless they acknowledge it as a Holy land; where they can fulfill their universal mission to be a light to the rest of mankind inspiring others to also embody the presence of G-d.

What we are not doing is crying, and this is why G-d is crying. If we really understood what we were missing, we would be bawling our eyes out over the loss of the Temple — yearning for it to be rebuilt. What is missing, however, is not the building. It is the awareness that a greater presence is absent from our lives. A consciousness of G-d, a desire for G-d in our every day, is gone.

G-d cannot rebuild the Temple until we want G-d in our lives and need a Temple to express that holy desire. The Temple remains in ruins because we do not yet want G-d in our lives enough to warrant a Temple.

And for this we must mourn.

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