

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Secret of Tisha B'Av

By Yossi Katz

TISHA B'AV IS a day of seemingly contradictions.

On one hand, it is the saddest of all days, and we don't study Torah or wear *tefillin* in the morning. At the same time, we don't say *Tachanun*, since Tisha B'Av is called a *mo'ed* (festival) (Lamentations 1:15), and festivals are considered times of joy.

Our Rabbis draw a parallel between the 21 days it takes for a chicken to lay its egg, and the 21 days it takes for the *luz* tree to produce its nuts (*Bekhorot* 5b). Rebbe Nachman explains that this is why we have the custom of eating an egg right before Tisha B'Av, in commemoration of the Three Weeks – 21 days – of mourning that we are now completing.

Interestingly, *luz* is also the name of the bone at the back of the neck or skull, which remains even after the body has decomposed. We are taught that the body will be recreated from this remaining bone at the time of the future Resurrection.

Why is it that right before such an intense day of mourning we eat something that also symbolizes the zenith of the future Redemption?

Furthermore, the Hebrew word for skull, *kadkod*, has the numerical value of 208, the same as the words "*Nachamu nachamu* – Comfort, comfort [My people]," which begins the prophecy of Isaiah (40:1) read on the Shabbat following Tisha B'Av. Why right before Tisha B'Av are we already hinting to a future consolation?

The highlight of Tisha B'Av is the reading of the Book of Eichah (Lamentations). In Eichah, the prophet Jeremiah laments the enormous tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people. He proclaims: "I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.

He has guided me and made me walk in darkness and not in light (Lamentations 3:1-2).

Rashi explains that while others prophesied regarding the future destruction, Jeremiah was the only one who tragically witnessed it personally. And yet, after lamenting with a bitter heart, a few verses later he writes, "This I answer to my heart; therefore I still have hope. The kindnesses of God are never ending, His compassion is endless. They [the kindnesses] renew every morning; great is His faithfulness (ibid. 3:21-23)."

Much like the above-mentioned ideas, there is incredible contention between these feelings. What is the secret of Tisha B'Av?

Although the Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple) was destroyed long ago, thousands of years later we mourn its loss because our relationship with God continues to suffer as a result.

The Beis HaMikdash was the place that allowed us to elevate the mundane to the spiritual; it was a bridge that allowed God's Presence into our lives.

When life is challenging and we feel uncertain of our purpose, it's because we are missing our link. But by realizing how disconnected we are from God and yearning for clarity and closeness to Him, we demonstrate that we want His Presence in our lives. Our mourning and bitterness create room for what we weren't aware of, or appreciative of, until now.

Therefore our Rabbis taught that specifically those who mourn Zion will merit seeing its joy (*Taanit* 30b). Through the bitter elements of Tisha B'Av, we come to appreciate and yearn for what we didn't realize we were lacking.

These 21 days are a challenge and a gift. They teach us how to take stock of what we are lacking, in order to create the potential to receive the tremendous gifts that God ultimately has in store for us. This is the same idea

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The Secret of Tisha B'Av (Cont'd)

By Yossi Katz

as that in the future, our bodies will be resurrected and recreated through the *luz* bone, because only through this process can we reap our eternal salvation.

Similarly, the kosher egg eaten before the fast has one rounded end and one pointy end. There are moments in life that are round-like. These are mellow times of mourning and loss, when one does not have words and falls silent. The roundness is the life-cycle of cradle to grave.

On the other hand, the egg also has a pointy end. These are the “sharp moments” of joy and excitement in life.

A “kosher Jew” always lives with these states interconnected and never in isolation. Even as he is mourning a loss, he knows that there is a greater purpose, and that this experience is preparing him for a future time of goodness and joy. Each of his tears is laden with hope and longing for the future.

Rebbe Nachman therefore taught, “There is no such thing as despair!” Even in mourning, we are ever hopeful. We know that our loss is a precursor for something great.

It was specifically Jeremiah, who witnessed the brutality of the destruction and saw how far his people had sunk, who was able to distinctly remember where the Jewish people came from and where they truly belong. Thus he was the one who, even in the moment of greatest tragedy, was able to access hope and longing for the future time when great triumph and joy would prevail.

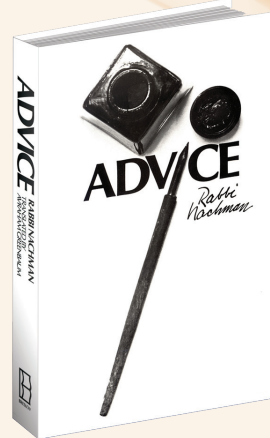
May we also merit this Tisha B'Av to mourn our many losses and lacks, and may we then merit to also witness the prophecy of “*Nachamu nachamu ami* – Comfort, comfort My people.” Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Beitzim 5

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

PRIDE & HUMILITY. 30. We must pray and plead with God to make us worthy of true humility and lowliness. We really have no conception of what humility is. The aim is certainly not to be slovenly and act as if we consider ourselves worthless. Humility is the source of the life which is in every single limb. Humility is the life of the World to Come and the essence of its joy (*Likutey Moharan II, 72*).



31. If things are not going well for a person, he should understand it as a sign that there is still some residue of pride within him. He must repent and lower himself and bring himself to the level of *Mah?* – What? Then things will begin to go well for him (*ibid. II, 82*).

UNDERSTANDING. 1. True understanding is in the heart. Even the heathen nations possess understanding, but not in their heart. The heart must be filled with awe. It is not enough to acknowledge God in the mind alone. It is necessary to draw understanding down into the heart and to be so aware of the Creator that one's heart is filled with awe and fear of the greatness of God, and to be aroused to serve Him with true devotion in the knowledge of His utter exaltedness. The way to achieve this is through meditation, through examining oneself and weighing all one's actions (*ibid. I, 15*).



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The photo on the front is a close-up of Rebbe Nachman's chair, which is displayed in the main Breslov synagogue in Jerusalem.