

Parsha Ponders

Tisha B'Av | July 15, 2021 | 6 Av 5781

Consolation through mourning¹

והפכתי אבלם לששון ונחמתים ושמחתים מיגונם

I have flipped their mourning to joy, and I have consoled them and made them rejoice from their anguish²

If we examine the way we observe Tisha B'Av carefully, we'll be astounded by what we see. For almost two thousand years, the Jews have had their ups and downs in exile. As time passes, whatever good we've received from Hashem quickly fades from memory. Yet, every year our eyes are filled with tears for the destruction of our Temple, and the exile from our land. This is unlike any other nation. Whenever a nation lost something that was precious to them, they eventually got over it and moved on. What's the secret to the Jewish preservation of their mourning?

Our Sages teach us³ a concept in human psychology. Hashem decreed, as an act of kindness, that the sadness we feel when we lose a loved one fades with the passage of time. However, this is only the case when we actually lose a loved one. If it's a mistaken loss, Hashem makes it that the person will never accept consolation. We see this with Yaakov and Yosef. Yaakov thought his son Yosef had been eaten by a wild animal, and was never consoled for his loss. The reason was because he in fact hadn't lost his son, who was merely sold to Egypt as a slave.

We can apply this concept to our discussion. Every nation that ever lost something realized that they'll never get it back. As such, with the passage of time, they eventually get over their loss. Not so the Jewish people. Deep down, we know Hashem hasn't abandoned us. We constantly look forward to the day that Hashem will redeem us from our exile. It turns out then that our constant mourning is the very source of our consolation⁴. It's testimony to the fact that what we lost isn't gone forever. This is why Tisha B'Av is also known as a festival⁵. It's the day that know with full confidence that we will be redeemed⁶.

May we merit this year to a true consolation, with the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of Jerusalem.

¹ Based on Derashos Chasam Sofer III p. 84 col. 2

² Jeremiah 31:12

³ Bereishis Rabbah 84:21

⁴ This reminds me of a popular story involving Napoleon. The story goes that he was travelling through the town he was in on Tisha B'Av, and heard wailing coming from the local synagogue. He asked what was all the fuss over, and was informed that the Jews were mourning the loss of their Temple. He was surprised to hear this, as he hadn't realized they had a Temple which was recently destroyed. He was informed that it had been 1700 years since the destruction. He responded that a nation that mourns its Temple so much will surely merit to see it rebuilt. For the origins of this story and it's veracity, see <http://onthemainline.blogspot.com/2011/08/on-napoleon-tisha-bav-legend-tracing-it.html>

⁵ Lamentations 1:15. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 559:4

⁶ This is also alluded to in the words of our Sages כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בנחמתה (Ta'anis 30b), meaning immediately