



# Devarim.

Vitality From Mourning  
on Tisha Ba'Av

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# *Vitality From Mourning on Tisha Ba'Av<sup>1</sup>*

## *A Time To Dread?*

Sometimes our soul inside cringes at the very thought of the Nine Days - and especially when one thinks about *Tisha B'Av*. Our soul might not feel like entering such a place, and even before beginning the Nine Days, a person wishes it would be over already. It's only normal that when you feel sadness in the air around you, when people are walking around depressed, naturally, you can't wait for these days to finally end.

On a superficial level, a person doesn't enjoy the Nine Days simply because we don't like to suffer, and because we would rather be happy instead. But let's examine this a bit deeper.

## *Why People View The Nine Days As "Depressing"*

Man contains contradictory aspects. Sadness and happiness are two opposite aspects of our soul. We cannot live based on either one of these emotions alone. If a person lives too much in one of these extremes, it will lead to a very problematic kind of life. The Rambam says that one must generally take the middle path, not an extreme path. One must make sure to remain centered in between the two extremes.

During the Nine Days, a person feels that the sadness of these times is pushing him away from the little bit of joy and vitality that he does have. He feels rather forced into the *avodah* of the Nine Days. He knows that he is "obligated" according to *Halacha* to mourn, and he does so without question, but deep down, he doesn't really want to do this. The difficulty that people have with the Nine Days is rooted in the fact that there is a misconception about the Nine Days. People think that these days take away our *simcha*, and that these are days in which we must only feel *atzvut* (sadness). But this is a misunderstanding; with *atzvut* alone, we cannot survive. If a person only has *atzvut* during the Nine Days, he surely cannot survive this, because it feels like nothing but suffering. I am not talking about true *atzvut*, but the minimal feeling of *atzvut* that any person with a little bit of fear of G-d can feel during these days.

Firstly, we must understand that in general, people during the rest of the year don't have *simcha* and are living life in a very routine manner. As soon as the Nine Days arrive, the little amount of *simcha* that people do have is removed, and thus a person feels like he is left with nothing. That is why he finds the Nine Days to be so "depressing."

## *How Did Yirmiyahu Write Eichah?*

As is well-known, Yirmiyahu *HaNavi* wrote *sefer Eichah*. There is a famous question asked: The Sages state that all of books of the prophets were composed with *Ruach HaKodesh* (the holy spirit), and in order to receive *Ruach HaKodesh*, the prophet had to be in a state of joy. How then could Yirmiyahu write *Eichah*, the saddest book of our history, which he was surely not happy to write about? How could the *Ruach HaKodesh* have rested upon him amidst his great sadness?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/bein-hamitzarim-004-vitality-mourning-tisha-ba'av>

## *Joy and Sadness At Once*

The depth behind this matter is, because our soul can contain opposite emotions at once: joy and sadness.

The Nine Days are not here to take away all our happiness. If our happiness goes away during these days, it shows that we aren't really happy during the year. If we have true happiness during the rest of the year, even the Nine Days and *Tisha B'Av* cannot take away our happiness. There is more of a focus on sadness during these times, but the joy doesn't have to go away completely. In fact, if a person has true *simcha* during the rest of the year, he can have a degree of *simcha* even on *Tisha B'Av*.

Of course, it does not seem that these are days that can provide us with any joy. But from a deep perspective, we can feel both sadness, and joy, during these days – yet be at peace with the contradicting emotion.

## *Defining Sadness and Joy*

Sadness (*atzvus*) is when we focus on what we are missing, and by contrast, joy (*simcha*) is about what we have. No one has everything, and no one is missing everything. One who feels *connected* to what he has is able to feel *simcha* - and someone who *connects* to that which he doesn't have will feel *atzvus*.

For example, many people have a lot, but they are not happy, because they are not connected to what they have; and conversely, many people have little, yet they are happy. Why? Because they don't allow themselves to become absorbed in the fact that they don't have certain things, and this spares them the pain that comes from agonizing over what they are missing. It essentially saves them from the sadness.

## *Deriving Vitality From Life - and Death*

Both joy and sadness are forms of *chiyus* (vitality). The verse, “*And the living shall take to heart*”<sup>2</sup> shows us that even sadness can provide us with *chiyus*. Of course, when one only know of sadness in his life and this is what he is mainly experiencing, he cannot survive this way. But if one is connected to both joy and sadness in his life, he can gain *chiyus* from each of these emotions.

How can a person gain *chiyus* from sadness? When one has pain and suffering, and he cries, he is calmed. He finds that he gets *chiyus* from this; he feels renewed. How indeed does crying give a person *chiyus*? Simply speaking, it is because he has released the pain, so he feels better now. This is certainly true. But the depth of this is because crying reveals the *chiyus* in the emotion of sadness. Crying can turn the normally debilitating emotion of sadness into a vitality-giving experience. (Tears are a form of water, and water nourishes and provides vitality.)

When we cry on *Tisha B'Av*, it seems that we are simply crying over what we are missing. But the depth is because this crying gives us *chiyus*. One who is not connected to these words simply has a superficial perspective towards the Nine Days. The Nine Days to him are depressing: we can't wear fresh clothing, we can't eat meat, and it seems that all we have during these days is sadness and mourning. It does not feel vitality-giving at all – from a superficial perspective.

But when one lives and experiences the meaning of the destruction, he actually gains *chiyus* from the sadness of this time. The Sages said a rule, “A dead person cannot feel.” One who can “feel” has *chiyus* [and when one does not “feel”, it means that the person has no *chiyus* – he is “dead”]. When one truly *feels* what is missing, he experiences its loss, and along with this feeling of loss and pain comes a certain *chiyus* to him.

It is hard at first to understand this concept, but it is reality.

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<sup>2</sup> *Koheles 1:18*

## ***Experiencing Life Enables One To Experience Mourning***

To give an example, if a child is *niftar* G-d forbid, the parents grieve, because they feel the loss; they are living and experiencing the situation. They are *connected* to what they are missing and thus they feel the sadness of it. But the three-year old child in the home doesn't know what's going on, so he doesn't cry, because he is not *connected* to what is going on.

When one is already living the joy of life, he can also deeply mourn. When one knows what deep joy is – the fact that we can experience life – he can know what mourning is and he experiences it. But if one is not anyways in touch with the joy of life, he is not connected to his own life in the first place, so he will not be able to mourn either.

We are all alive, *Baruch Hashem*. But how many people have *simchas hachaim* (joy of life)? Most people are lacking *simchas chaim* – because they lack *chiyus* in their life. Not everyone is living their life! When one only has superficial joy in his life, he only has joy when he gets various new things, like a new house or a new suit. But true joy is to experience the fact that we are alive; to be happy with our very existence.

The very first time that *simcha*\joy is mentioned is with regards to the joy of Adam and Chavah's bond in Gan Eden; thus the joy between Adam and Chavah in Gan Eden represents the root lesson of the entire concept of *simcha*\joy. Adam said of her, "*This is bone of my bone.*" Chavah is also called "*mother of all living*". The connection is that being "alive" is when we recognize our existence and we are joyous from that alone – as opposed to deriving our main joy from things that we acquire.

Thus, when one is already joyous with his own life – when he appreciates the mere fact that he is alive – he will know how to be sad. Why? Because he experiences what life is, he experiences sadness at the loss of life.

When someone's parents die, understandably, he is sad. But why is he sad? Usually, it is because he misses the pleasant memories of his father or mother. He misses their smile or the jokes they would say, etc. But what about the fact that the life of this person's parent has ended? Does anyone have sadness over this when their parent dies...? The true feeling of sadness and mourning [over a parent's death] is to feel sad at the fact that his\her life has gone [not about how it relates to me personally].

Imagine a case where a little girl's father is *niftar*, G-d forbid, and her little daughter reacts to the news by saying, "Now there will be no one to buy me presents anymore!" The little child isn't feeling the actual loss. She is feeling a loss over something external, which certainly pains her, but she isn't feeling the actual loss of her father's life. Even when someone gets older and supposedly matures, and he\she loses a parent, the reaction is not that much different than a child's. The child is upset about the loss of the dependency in the relationship, not about the actual loss of life.

In order to know what sadness is, one must know what joy is, and in order to experience the sadness of mourning, one must know and appreciate what life is. When one experiences life, he can then have joy in life, and then when he encounters a loss of life, he experiences the sadness of this.

## ***Realizing The Loss of The Beis HaMikdash***

The Gemara says that it is better to go to a house of mourning than to a wedding, for it is written, "*And the living shall take to heart.*" A house of mourning is where they talk about the loss of life - and it is a place that gives a person even more *chiyus* than a joyous occasion. Thus, it is the loss of life which enables us to feel sadness.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was called "*beis chayeinu*", the "house of our life". When we lost the *Beis HaMikdash*, what did we lose? We lost many things, we lost much *siyata d'shamya*, but those were all just the branches of the loss. What we really lost was the essence of our life. We lost our very life itself, for it was the source of all life.

The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* that we mourn about is essentially to mourn the loss of our nation's source of life.

### ***Appreciating Our Life***

When one is happy with life, he can be happy in any situation. If one is not happy in every situation that comes his way, it is a sign that he is not happy with his very life.

In order to truly mourn, one has to be in touch with the depth of his life. Many people only feel this deep part of themselves when they encounter situations in which they feel like their lives are in danger, and then they appreciate what it is to be alive. But to our chagrin, this power in the soul is only accessed by such rare occurrences, and it is often not accessed on a more regular basis as it should be.

There were people in the world who were in a car accident and almost lost their lives, where they came to the point of realizing that nothing else matters as much as simply being alive. They become grateful to just be alive, and they truly felt that everything else in life is futile, for there is so much to be thankful for. Then, three days later, they are back to normal again, unchanged....

The ability to appreciate one's very life is an ability that we really need to be in touch with on a more regular basis, not only on rare occasions of our life. It is the one ability that enables us to experience our own life and to thereby know what true happiness: to be happy with the mere fact that we are alive. When one is in touch with this place in himself, he doesn't need anyone or anything else to make him happy. He gets it all from within himself, with just knowing and appreciating that he is alive.

### ***The Loss of the Beis HaMikdash: The Loss of Life***

When we had the *Beis HaMikdash*, the Sages say that one would feel the Shechinah there and be atoned for his sins. This was the meaning of how it was our "*beis chayeinu*". It put us in touch with our life. Thus, the Torah came forth from the *Beis HaMikdash*, "For from Zion comes forth the Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem", because Torah is called "*Toras Chaim*", "Torah of life". The Torah is the root of our life, thus it fittingly came from the *Beis HaMikdash* - the source of our life.

What did we lose when we lost the *Beis HaMikdash*? We lost the meaning of our life. All other things we lost were but branches of this. The root loss was the fact we lost our source of life. When mourning over the *Beis HaMikdash*, we must know what we are missing. Therefore, we must know what "life" is – so that we can know what an absence of life is. We must know what kind of a life we are missing, now that we are missing the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Rav Hutner said that in order to eulogize someone, he has to be on a higher spiritual level than him, in order to truly recognize whom he is talking about, so that he can feel that that he has a personal loss. How do we mourn the *Beis HaMikdash*, then, if we don't feel like something has gone missing from our own lives? In order to feel that we are missing it, we need to reflect into how it was the source of life to us, and then we will feel it as a personal loss - and then we will be able to mourn over it.

### ***Vitality Through Crying***

Now we can proceed to understand the following.

When one loses something he owned and he is upset over this, even if he cries over it, this act of crying doesn't come from a deep place in himself. It is over something external and that is why his crying is external.

We know that there are different degrees of crying. Sometimes people cry a little and sometimes there are situations where we cry more. When do we cry more intensely? When we lose something that's more connected with our being. When we cry from the source of life in ourselves, it is deep crying, and such crying will give us life, because it is a crying that is connected to our own life, so it is vitality-giving.

The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* meant that our source of *chiyus* left. The *Beis HaMikdash* provided us with *simcha*. If so, we lost our connection to life through *simcha*. But we can still become connected to the meaning of life, because there is another way. Now that the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed, our connection to life is: through crying over its loss! But it is not just a mere superficial act of crying. It is a crying that connects us to life. Just as *simcha* connects us to our life, so can crying connect us to life. This is stated in the verse, “*And the living shall take to heart.*”

This is the depth of the mourning of the Nine Days. It is not merely mourning. If one simply views these days as days of mourning, he has a superficial perspective, and he gains no *chiyus* from these days; he'd prefer not to go through it. But if one connects to the source of the mourning, he can reveal the *chiyus* in it, and then he can really feel the mourning.

To illustrate, when one goes to a pay a *shiva* call, he can get inspired and gain new meaning towards his life. One who can't get *chiyus* from it just sees sad people there and he wishes he could leave. But when one knows how to get *chiyus*, he will deliberately go the *shiva* house. He knows he can get *chiyus* from there.

### ***Getting 'Chiyus' From The Nine Days***

The Nine Days are days that show a person where he can get *chiyus* from. It is a time that shows a person that there can be *chiyus* even from sadness. Without that *chiyus*, a person feels no connection to these days. But in order to be connected to it, as we said, one must be connected to life itself. When one doesn't have *simchas chaim* he doesn't either know how to mourn. He has no *chiyus* in life, so why should he have *chiyus* when he thinks about death and mourning?

### ***The Nine Days: Deriving Vitality From Death and Loss***

The Sages revealed that *Tisha B'Av* is the day where Mashiach is born [after *chatzos*]. Here we will explain the depth behind this matter.

The times we live in today are a full realization of the curse of death upon mankind – there is a deathlike existence in the world today, and there is very little real life to be found amongst people. Most people aren't living life; they are living off various acquisitions of life. But as we explained here, there are two sources of life. There is a vitality-giving life that comes from joy, and there is vitality-giving a life that we can gain from sadness - which the Nine Days can serve to reveal to us.

The *sefarim hakodeshim* revealed that one can “pursue” Hashem during these days just as intensely as Jerusalem was “pursued” by her enemies on this day. There are two ways to search for Hashem and attain closeness with Him: the days of Tishrei are the beginning of Creation and are the root of life in Creation, thus it is the time of “*Seek Hashem where He is found*”; a different path in time that leads us to Hashem is the month of Av. Here we can reach Hashem even when there is no life: even when there is death and mourning. The *Beis HaMikdash* is destroyed, our main source of *chiyus* has gone, but we can still gain *chiyus* from this sadness, as we explained; and thereby become very close to Hashem.

What is this new kind of *chiyus* we can gain from Tisha B'Av? When one is alive, he can be happy from the fact that he's alive. Can a person be happy if he's dead? It is written, “*Serve Hashem with joy*”, which seems to imply that we can only be joyous as we serve Hashem when we are alive. But can a person be happy when he's

about to die, and his soul will be given to Hashem? It would seem that death is not a time at all for any vitality or joy.

Yet, a person can be happy even as he's dying. He can realize that death is simply a removal of his body, where his soul will be going to a different room, as the *sefarim hakedoshim* describe. There is really no such thing as death! Death is merely a removal of garments. A person never really dies.

### ***Death: The Revelation of Our Eternal Life***

“The eternity of Yisrael does not lie.”<sup>3</sup> There can be a *chiyus* (vitality) derived even from death! When there is *death*, there is no joy derived from *life* - but there can be *joy* derived from *death*. How? It is because death reveals to a person his eternal life, his real life, where he is only a soul with no body.

A superficial person lives only his actions alone. A deeper person lives his feelings, and a deeper person lives the reality of the knowledge in his thoughts. A deeper person can feel joy at the very fact that he is alive, and finally there is an even deeper level: a person can feel vitality even from the fact that he will die one day, because he knows that death will mean his eternal life. This deep level is the message behind the Nine Days: even the absence of life can provide us with vitality. Thus, a person can attain great closeness with Hashem during these days, in a palpable way.

### ***‘Serving With Hashem With Joy’ In The Nine Days***

When the Nine Days are viewed simply as sad days which provide us with no vitality, this would mean that it is impossible to serve Hashem with joy during these days. But we know that this can't be true, because the Nine Days are part of our *Avodas Hashem*, and all *Avodas Hashem* must be with *simcha*, for the rule is “*Serve Hashem with joy.*”

If we have no *Beis HaMikdash*, we can get *chiyus* from sadness, as we explained. And on a deeper level, we can get *chiyus* from thinking about the eternal life which awaits us, which is contained in the very idea of death and loss of life.

### ***Connecting To Eternity***

Recently, I was listening to a tape of a certain speaker whom I had a close relationship with, who was *niftar* recently. As I was listening to his words, I thought to myself: he is very much alive. I was thinking to myself: Did he die, or is he alive? He is very, very alive. A part of him has gone, but in essence, he is as alive as ever, as his words continue to talk to me on the tape. He has simply left this world and he has gone to another. But he is alive, not dead.

As a result of sin, where man was told “*On the day you eat from it, you shall surely die*”, and therefore man tends to think that he can have a death. This all comes from the perspective of sin. But the deeper perspective, which was before the sin, was that there is no such thing as death. This deep perspective is still in our soul. The *Beis HaMikdash*'s destruction showed us that there is really no such thing as a death to *Klal Yisrael*; our existence is forever.

Thus, we can now understand with greater depth how Yirmiyahu was thus able to write Eichah with joy, as he thought about destruction. How? Because there is a deep place in the soul which feels the unending joy of our existence. It is the G-dly light deep in the soul which connects man to the place of eternity.

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<sup>3</sup> A statement of Rav Nachman of Breslev

This deep point is especially accessible on *Tisha B'Av*. The deep *chiyus* one can receive is when one realizes the Endlessness in our soul; the fact that we are connected to eternity. This is the deep source of joy that can be accessed on *Tisha B'Av*. This is not an intellectual fact, but a perspective of the soul. When one is connected to that place, he receives the true consolation over Jerusalem.

### ***The Birth of Mashiach***

The Three Weeks come to a climax on *Tisha B'Av*, and after *chatzos* (noon), we rise from the ground, because it is the time of the “birth of *Mashiach*”. The depth of this, in simple words, is that even as the fire of destruction is burning in front of us, we are still connected to our eternal life.

This is the depth of how a person can become close to Hashem during these days. But it can only happen if a person gains *chiyus* from his life, when he lives and experiences his feelings and thoughts, and he is happy with the very fact that he lives.

A person who lives with this perspective doesn't fear death; because there is no such thing as “death” to him. Death is the opposite of life; when a person knows he is always connected to an eternal life, there is no concept of death to him, thus he has no fear of death. He knows that he will always be alive. This is the meaning of what is written, “*May the soul of My Master be bound with the Rock of life.*”

### ***The Depth of Our Consolation***

This is our deep consolation. We say in the prayer of “*Nachem*” in *Shemoneh Esrei*, a prayer of consolation. What is the consolation about? Simply speaking, our consolation comes from the fact that in the future Hashem will rebuild the *Beis HaMikdash*. This is true, but it is deeper than that. The Sages say, “One who mourns over Jerusalem, will merit to see it in its rebuilding.” When one mourns properly over the *Beis HaMikdash*, he sees beyond death and destruction; he is connected to eternity. He gains *chiyus* from the mourning over it. But even more so, he realizes that our life is really endless and that there is no really no such thing as “death”.

It is for one to realize that the loss of the *Beis HaMikdash* didn't make us lose our G-dly spark. Our G-dly spark is eternal. This is the true consolation and merits one to have the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

The third *Beis HaMikdash* will come to the world to the general masses, but there is also a private *Beis HaMikdash* in one's soul.<sup>4</sup> There are those who have built the first and second *Beis HaMikdash* in their souls, but sadly, it has been destroyed within themselves, just as the first and second *Beis HaMikdash* which were built and then destroyed. But there are those who have merited to build the third *Beis HaMikdash* in their souls, and it is a permanent achievement, just as the third *Beis HaMikdash* is eternal. These are the people of the world who have merited to have Hashem's presence dwell in their hearts. Once Hashem's presence is revealed in the heart, He is there forever.

Our deep consolation (which we can experience now already) is when we connect to the endless aspect of ourselves. Hashem is forever, He renews the Creation every moment, and one can be connected to that eternity and derive *chiyus* from this.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed - but what was destroyed? In the words of the Sages, “Hashem poured out His wrath on sticks and stones”. Its structure is gone, but its inner light is forever. The holiness of the *Beis HaMikdash* still stands, according to some opinions in our Sages. The holiness of its stones is gone (and has the status of *chullin*\non-sacred property) because its stones have gone, but the holiness of the site remains intact forever, because its essence can never be destroyed.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Nefesh HaChaim – Shaar Aleph*



The *avodah* of these days is thus two-fold. One part of our *avodah* is that we must connect to the meaning of the destruction, and we can even gain *chiyus* from this, as we explained. But we can also realize that the *Beis HaMikdash* is eternal; because the place of the *Beis HaMikdash* is forever holy. This is the deeper *chiyus* we can derive from these days, and this also connects us to the future redemption.

The words here are describing a place in the soul that one must strive to reach. They are describing an experience of life. There are chambers within our soul (“*chadrei halev*”) where we can go deeper and deeper into ourselves. There is true joy in the soul, and one can derive *chiyus* from there; and a person can even derive *chiyus* from the deep sadness of the soul over our current situation. If a person goes yet deeper, he can reach the point where he understands that even sadness and death are vitality-giving, for death represents our eternal life.

That is the deep point that can be reached through the mourning of *Tisha B’Av*.

### ***What Do We Look Life After Tisha B’Av?***

After *Tisha B’Av* is over, what does a person do? Most people go back to life as usual, just as they were living before the Three Weeks. Once it is *chatzos* on *Tisha B’Av*, it feels like the mourning is over; some people don’t go to a court case until Elul, to wait until the bad *mazal* of Av passes. But for the most part, people return to routine after *Tisha B’Av* ends....

But it is almost the month of *Elul*. The word “*Elul*” is equal in *gematria* (numerical value in the Hebrew language) to the word “*chaim*” (life). What kind of *chaim* do we have in Elul? It is a *chaim* that we can reach through the month of Av. The *chaim* we can receive in Av is to realize our eternal aspect.

In Elul, the books of life and death are open. It is a time of judgment. If we view death as merely the cessation of life, then there is much to fear, because it feels like death is looming over the horizon for us. But if we have realized in Av as we mourned that death is really a revelation of our eternal life, then we evade death, for we realize that our life is really endless. Only a good life awaits us.

This perspective is gained precisely through *Tisha B’Av*: the revelation of our eternal life, contained in the concept of death. For at the very climax of the destruction, *Mashiach* is born – the revelation of an eternal existence.

### ***In Conclusion***

May Hashem help us that these words become actualized in our own life, that our own personal souls should all feel these words, and that all of *Klal Yisrael* merit the rebuilding of the third *Beis HaMikdash*, speedily in our days, *Amen*.