A n interesting pattern in the Jewish calendar leads to Seder Night always falling out on the same weekday as another profound evening: Tisha B’Av.\(^1\) Sure enough, this year’s first Seder is on Wednesday night (April 8) and Tisha B’Av falls out on a Wednesday night (July 29) as well.

It’s strange because these two nights are so different! On Tisha B’Av we refrain from all food and drink while at the Seder we enjoy a huge meal and four cups of wine. On Tisha B’Av, we sit on the floor in mourning, chanting Eicha and Kinnor in hushed tones, and at the Seder we recline in luxury, singing Hallel with great joy.

While for the most part, Tisha B’Av and Leil HaSeder are polar opposites, there is one moment at the Seder where the connection makes perfect sense. When we eat maror, we recall the pain and torture of our slavery in Egypt. “What is the significance of maror?” we ask in the Haggadah. “Because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt.” Maror connects Pesach with the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash.

However, as Jews, and especially on Pesach, we cannot remain depressed for long. History has taught us that when we are at the lowest of the low, the seeds for our eventual ascent are planted. We dip the bitter maror into the sweet charoset in affirmation of our belief that G-d has, and always will, rescue us from the grief of galut and bring us to the gaiety of geulah.

One of the key personalities of the Seder is Rabbi Akiva, who lived through the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Imagine the bitter tears he must have shed while eating the maror in Be’er Sheva just years after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash!

However, Rabbi Akiva didn’t let the bitterness he experienced prevent him from inspiring his generation. He famously\(^2\) comforted the grieving mourners at the site of the ruins of the Temple, and taught the Jewish people an eternal lesson - our deliverance would come through the destruction. When everyone cried, Rabbi Akiva laughed, for he understood the connection between Tisha B’Av and Pesach.

The Yerushalmi\(^3\) teaches that the Mashiach will be born on the 9th of Av. He will then have to grow up and experience life’s difficulties and challenges. He will taste bitter herbs and cry painful tears, yet his universal mission will not go unfulfilled. He will lead the Jewish people and the entire world towards the final redemption, which will take place during the month of Pesach. As it says,\(^4\) “in Nissan we were redeemed and in Nissan we will be redeemed again.”

This year, so many of us are not celebrating the Seder as we had originally planned. Trips to Israel were cancelled, Pesach programs closed, families prevented from coming together and many of our fellow Jews are eating the Seder all alone due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Therefore, when we eat the maror on Wednesday night, let us think of the connection to Tisha B’Av and Rabbi Akiva’s laughter. Let us taste the sweetness of the charoset and sing “LeShana Haba BiYerushalayim HaBenuya” and let us look forward to Mashiach, who was born on the 9th of Av and whose imminent arrival will surely come soon!

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1. See Orach Chaim 428:3, Rama 476:3.
4. Rosh Hashanah 11a.

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