The Power of Hope

Tisha B’Av is not just a day of mourning. It's a day of yearning.

The Gemara relates that when we leave this world, we stand before our Creator and are asked a number of questions about the way we lived our life. One of them is: צפינו לישועה – “Did you long for redemption?”

We are not asked simply whether we believed in the final Redemption, but whether we longed for it. The Chafetz Chaim explains that the word צפנות is from the root of צפת, which means to look and to hope; like when you are waiting for someone to arrive and you keep looking down the road, wondering when they are coming. This is what צפינו לישועה is asking: did we want the final Redemption? Did we look out towards the horizon waiting for it to happen? Did we yearn for it? Did we keep looking down the road, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Mashiach?

What are we yearning for? The Rambam says the great sages and prophets throughout the generations longed for the days of Mashiach and anticipated the time of the ultimate redemption not because they wanted us to be raised above the other nations, and certainly not in order to indulge in material prosperity and ease. Rather, they looked forward, fervently, to a world filled with the awareness and presence of G-d – a time of unimaginable clarity in which all the secrets of the Torah would be revealed. The Rambam says it will be a time in which G-d’s presence is manifest, and because of this, there will be no war or jealousy or hatred or competition, and there will be incredible abundance and joy and prosperity and peace.

This is the redemption we long for. A time when, due to the miraculous abundance and peace and universal goodwill, we will be able to devote ourselves fully to spiritual pursuits and especially the learning of Torah. A time when “the whole world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters that cover the sea.”

This is what we are yearning for.

We look around the world now and G-d’s presence is hidden; many people even deny G-d’s existence altogether. There is a sense that things should be better. There is a lack of appreciation for faith and truth. What we long for is a time when G-d’s presence is manifest, when there’s no more pain or suffering, no more conflict, confusion or disease. We long for a better world. This is what Tisha B’Av is about: being able to sit down on the floor and mourn; being able to feel the pain and long for things to be different, for the world to be better. But this yearning is not just about mourning. It is about hope.

Three times a day, we say in Aleinu: על מים י媾ו כל ה – “Therefore, we place our hope in You, G-d.” The Chafetz Chaim comments on these words that believing in redemption gives a person hope, which is the most powerful motivation to do good in the world – to do the right thing. To build a better today, we need to hope for a better tomorrow.

We are living through difficult times. Our world has been upended by an invisible virus. Livelihoods have been compromised, shuls and schools have been shuttered, lives have been lost. These are times that cry out for hope. It's not easy – but it is especially during times like these that we need to be hopeful and optimistic; to long for an end to suffering and for the dawn of something better and brighter.

Even Tisha B’Av – our time of mourning – is also our time of yearning, our time of hope. It is a day we don’t say the supplication of the Tachanun prayer, as a sign of the hope within our sorrow. We yearn for redemption, we wait in eager anticipation and expectation for a better tomorrow – we pray to G-d that our pain and sorrow be transformed into blessing and celebration. We yearn for a time when the entire world will be filled with G-d’s presence and suffering will come to an end – “and G-d will wipe away tears from all faces.”

---

1 Shabbat 31a.
2 Enumerated by the Rambam as one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith in his commentary to Mishna, Sanhedrin 10:1 (Principle 12); Hilchot Melachim 11:1.
3 Tzipita LiYeshuah, Chapter 3.
4 Hilchot Melachim 12:4.
5 Ibid 12:5.
7 Tzipita LiYeshuah, Chapter 3.
8 Isaiah 25:8; Moed Katan 28b; Sanhedrin 91b.

Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein is the Chief Rabbi of South Africa