When the 17th of Tammuz normally comes around, we prepare for a change. For three weeks there will be no wedding parties, no bar mitzvah celebrations and a lessening of our social interaction with the wider world. This year, we hardly feel the change as tragically, this has been the reality for the last few months. Yet we must still strive to connect to the meaning of the Three Weeks within our current Covid-19 situation.

Normally the Three Weeks usher in a period where I will no longer be shaving, getting haircuts, listening to music, etc. However, this year it is different, as my father was niftar on the 27th of Sivan, so I was still in my shloshim when the Three Weeks began.

My personal mourning had now been joined by national mourning. The question is – which is more poignant? Personal or National?

Most people would say the personal – you cannot compare the loss of a loved one now to the loss of the Beit HaMikdash thousands of years ago. However, that is only if we think of the churban as a physical destruction of bricks and mortar.

What are we mourning? We are mourning the loss of opportunity of a connection, a relationship to Hashem. Ever since the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed, Hashem’s presence is no longer visibly and palpably sensed in our lives and in our world. When we had the Beit HaMikdash, we had that connection in Yerushalayim, which inspired the whole world. The Shechina dwelt amongst us, human life was on a different level, we could connect in a way that we do not understand. There was a deep relationship there.

When you lose a loved one – what are you mourning? You are mourning the loss of relationship; you are mourning the fact you can no longer connect with that person in the way you used to. We understand that their soul lives on in the Olam HaEmet (the World of Truth), but the way we relate as human beings of flesh and blood to each other, to our loved ones, to our parents, is through the physical world, so when they are no longer with us physically – we have lost the relationship.

National mourning is the same – we have lost the relationship, not with our father, but our Father in Heaven – Avinu SheBashamayim – our spiritual parent. Therefore, this year, I feel I can relate to this idea more than I used to – to understand what it means to lose the ability to have a relationship with someone you love deeply.

Our prayers at this time, and throughout the year, are for that relationship to be restored. Those are the tears of Tisha B’Av, the tears for the centuries that have seen that relationship damaged and tears for a desire for a relationship with Hashem and a return to those former times.

As we recite at the end of Eicha: מושב ז’ אליער וешבב וושי יומי כבד – “Bring us back to You, Hashem, and we shall return, renew our days of old.”

L’ilui nishmat Reuvain Mattityahu ben Elyakim Getzel

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