

Lizzie Rubin



Near and Far

Tisha B'Av was always a strange day for me, a daughter of survivors. How could there be just a single day of mourning for all the tragedies that happened to *Am Yisrael* and to my family? The Holocaust was a biggie for me. I had it for breakfast, lunch and dinner, 24/7, 365 days a year. Not that we didn't have great times, but there was always a dark cloud that threatened to appear at any moment. Of course, most of you can't imagine such a thing, but children of survivors probably know exactly what I mean.

So how do we reframe Tisha B'Av and see it in a more productive light? The Gemara (Ta'anit 29a) calls Tisha B'Av a מועד, a "holiday." There is no *tachanun* on that day. We know that in the future, Tisha B'Av will turn into a day of celebration. Rav Wolbe, quoting Rav Yerucham Levovitz from the Mir Yeshiva, says there are מועדים של קרבה – holidays of closeness, such as the *Shalosh Regalim*, and מועדים של רחוק – holidays of distance, such as Tisha B'Av. The Three Weeks and Tisha B'Av are reminders that the connection we have with G-d needs to be worked on. We shouldn't have a smug, comfortable relationship that is taken for granted. And the same is true in our relationships as couples and as family. When we get complacent in our relationships, we begin to feel distant and disconnected. So what can we do about it?

Rav Pinkus tells the story of an artist who went looking for an inspirational view to paint. He went hiking with a friend until they found a beautiful mountaintop. There, he set up his easel and began to paint the most stunning picture. But an artist likes to know how his picture will be seen, both up front and from afar. So when it was done, he took a few steps back, looked at it, took a few more steps back, and then a few more. His friend realized that if the artist took any more steps, he would fall off the cliff! In a flash, the friend pushed the picture off the easel, ruining it. The artist stopped in his tracks and began screaming at his friend for ruining his hard



work. You can imagine his frustration. The friend promptly explained that he had to do it in order to save the artist's life.

When G-d destroyed our *Beit HaMikdash*, He had no choice. *Am Yisrael* was stepping off the cliff. He needed to do something drastic to shake us up. We thought we had a good, comfortable life. But we forgot about בין אדם לחברו. G-d cannot forgive us for those sins. He forgave us for the sins we did against Him, but He could not forgive us for the ones we were doing to each other.

Today, too, we are sometimes given a wake-up call and reminded that we need to work on our relationship with G-d and with our fellow Jews. We must be unified and accept each other with all our differences. Unfortunately, rockets can do that. Covid did it as well. Tragedies like the ones in Meron do the same. The *chesed* we witnessed crossed religious lines and we felt we were all in this together.

If only we didn't need tragedies to make us feel connected...

Sometimes, we are given a wake-up call regarding our relationship with Israel. For

those of us in *chutz laAretz*, safety is not taken for granted anymore. Shuls have been vandalized and people accosted. I am guessing and hoping that many are considering aliyah because of the rising antisemitism outside of Israel. And sometimes, we are given wake-up calls in our own personal relationships with our spouses and family. Can we respond in time?

The Three Weeks, culminating with Tisha B'Av, are a time of distance. G-d wants us to look inside ourselves during this time of רחוק. It's the time to see how we can make our relationships better, not just nationally, but within our families and our marriages. Choose one small thing to work on to make your relationships better. Hopefully, we will take note of the distance and complacency and fix it before we need a wake-up call. Then, we can look forward to this מועד של רחוק becoming a מועד של קרבה.

Lizzie Rubin is an individual, couples and intimacy therapist.