

The Month of Av: Moving from Hearing to Seeing

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Overcoming the Sickness of our Nation during the Month of Av

We are entering the month of Av in trepidation, Israel is at war, Israelis are staying home, refraining from vacationing while our brave soldiers are fighting on the front line. Almost everyone I know here in Israel either have sons who were called to the war in Gaza or know people who do.

War is scary, nerve-wracking and painful. Every time we hear of a loss of one of our soldiers, we realize that it is one of our sons, and perhaps also a father, husband or brother of one of us. As much as we wanted to avoid this war – any war and bloodshed, we are finally with Hashem's help working on removing the evil which has been pestering our people since the beginning of the State of Israel, and more intensively since the expulsion from Gush Katif. Just as we need to fight the bacteria in order to heal a person, likewise, our people and our nation needs serious healing. Our nation has been sick ever since our temple – the heart of the word – was destroyed and we went into exile. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi wrote almost 1000 years ago, "The Jewish people today is like a body without either head or heart. It is more correct to say that Jewry today is not even a body, because in reality we are only scattered limbs, such as the "dry bones" which Yechezkiel saw in his vision (*Yechezkiel 37*), (*Kuzari 2:333*). We have experienced the revival of the dead, our nation coming to life out of the dry bones of the Holocaust furnace. Yet, it is not enough to take Israel out of exile, now we need to take exile out of Israel. This includes the exile mentality of the 'wishywashyness' of tolerating evil. It is not by chance that the current war is taking place during the period 'between the straights' when we mourn the destruction of our temples.

The name AV is an acronym for the two nations that destroyed our Temple; Alef- Edom (Rome), who destroyed the second Temple and tormented us ever since, and Beit- Babylon, who destroyed the first Temple. The month of Av is both the month of our disease and the month in which we have the power to overcome it. "The day that the Temple was destroyed Mashiach was born" (*Eichah Rabbah 1:51*). Now is the time to pray for the healing of our nation, that all our limbs will be connected, so Hashem's light can fill us with His presence, and that everything that threaten our existence will be eradicated speedily.

The name AV also means 'father.' Our Father is standing with outstretched arms waiting to hear our prayers. Let us cry out to our Father in Heaven from the deepest place of our heart; and implore him to end the war speedily with all of Hamas running away and Hashem's name being sanctified!

Moving from Seeing to Hearing

We feel the sadness creeping in on us, when the month of Av approaches. This is the most depressing month of the year, for in this month our dear Temple was destroyed, and our glory with it. This year we are also adding the mourning for our dear soldiers, whose death may have been avoided if we waged war according to the laws of the Torah. The month of Av is a time of exploring the causes of losses in our lives, both our personal and communal losses. When we cry for Hashem during the month of Av it becomes a gateway to the heart, for through loss we learn what is true, what is essential. When our glorious Temple stood, we had prophecy because in the time of the Holy Temple everything was about seeing... "Three times in a year shall all your males be seen before Hashem your G-d in the place which He shall choose..." (*Devarim* 16:16). At the *Beit HaMikdash* we were not only seen, but we also could see. Rav Shlomo taught that even today our eyes are rectified at the Holy Wall. The Temple was destroyed because we didn't love each other. The lack of love was a result of the judgment of seeing. After the destruction of the Temple we, therefore, lost the power of seeing; now, the only thing left is hearing. 'Hearing' is greater in some ways than 'Seeing.' Through seeing you can only see the outside, the skin but not the inside. Even if seeing may be the deepest outside, the holiest outside, it still remains the outside. There are things that are so close that you have to close your eyes completely. When you kiss somebody you love very much, you close your eyes. Babies are born with their eyes closed, as if they are telling their parents, "You are so close to me, I can't even see you." When we cry, one split second before the tear comes out, we have to close our eyes. This is because we only cry over something so close to us, that we can't even see it. You don't have to be that close, in order to see somebody. But to really hear somebody, you need to be a good friend. The closer you are to that person, the more you hear what he is saying. In this month, what you see, is terrible, its so terrible you can't even bear it. The only way to bear this month is if you have good ears. The misuse of our faculty of hearing is at the root of all of the tribulations that we have suffered during the month of Av. According to the midrash, "the children of Israel wept that night" (*Bamidbar* 14:1) refers to the night of the ninth of Av when the spies of Moshe returned with the evil report concerning the Land of Israel. The unnecessary weeping of the Jews after **hearing** the evil report brought about that they had to weep in earnest, during that same time in generations to come. Therefore, the month of Av is about rectifying hearing.

The Goodness of Mourning

"He made the letter *tet* king over hearing, and He bound a crown to it and He combined one with another, and with them He formed Leo in the universe, Av in the year and the left kidney in the soul male and female" (*Sefer Yetzirah* 5:8). The shape of the letter ט/*tet* is very much like an ear, alluding to the rectification of the inner sense of hearing. The first time the letter *tet* appears in the Torah is in "G-d saw the light, that it was טוב/*tov* – good..." (*Bereishit* 1:4). From this the Talmud learns that "He who sees the letter *tet* in his dream, it is a good sign for him... Since Scripture began with it [the letter *tet*] for goodness" (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Kama* 55a). When Hashem "saw the light," G-d also saw the Mashiach coming on Tisha b'Av. "And he was there when Yerushalayim was taken" (*Yirmeyahu* 38:28). He said to him, even this is not sorrow, but happiness for in the selfsame day their consoler is born, and in the selfsame day Israel repented from their sins. Rabbi Shmuel son of Nachman said Israel performed complete repentance for their sins on the day

that the Temple was destroyed, as it states: “The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; he will no more carry you away into exile” (*Eichah* 4:22), (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:5). The midrash is teaching us that even in the time when our Temple was destroyed, we should not be overtaken with sorrow and despair because within the destruction, the sprout of hope for redemption is born. It is through refining the sense of hearing that we will be able to hear the heralding of the forthcoming redemption even if what we can see on the surface is only destruction. This teaches us that even the days of mourning during the month of Av are beneficial for us. Most of the year we may be repressing all the losses and sadness of our lives, not wanting to truly deal with the traumas and pain that still taint our souls. However, the left kidney, the organ of this month, tells us about the negative, which needs to be rectified. During the cleansing period of the nine first days of the month of Av, we allow all our hidden hardships to surface and be released through our heartfelt tears. There is nothing more cleansing for the heart than tears of true mourning. The restrictive laws of the nine days help us process our pain, both personal and cosmic. When we go through mourning together, and share the pain, we grow closer together. We learn to once again to love each other unconditionally. When this happens the reason for our sadness will be lifted.

The Lion Came in the Month of Leo

The month of Av corresponds to the astrological fire sign of Leo. Fire destroys, but fire also gives strength, passion and life energy. In this month we experienced both the destructive fire of Tisha b’Av and the beneficial fire of Tu B’Av. The lion is the most royal of beasts, so is this month when kingdom will be restored to Israel. Both the destroyer of the first temple, Nevudchanetzar (*Yermiyahu* 4:7), and the rebuilder, Hashem (*Amos* 3:8) are referred to in the Bible as a “lion.” “The lion came in the month of the lion [Av] and destroyed the lion [the Temple especially with regard to the altar], in order that the lion [G-d] come in the month of the lion and rebuild the lion” (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yermiyahu*, 259). The Hebrew word for lion אַרְיָה/aryeh has the numerical value of 216 which also equals *gevurah* (“might”). *Gevurah* is about judgment, contraction and destruction through the diminution of Divine light and energy. Therefore, it states, “When Av enters we diminish in joy” (*Mishnah Ta’anit* 4:6). Yet, 216 also equals three times 72 which is the numerical values of *chesed* (“loving/kindness”). *Chesed* corresponds to the Divine power that “builds” all of reality, as it states, “the world is built by means of *chesed*” (*Tehillim* 89:3). Three times *chesed* also corresponds to the building of all three Temples, which find their eternal consummation in the third Temple, to be built speedily in our days! (Rav Yitzchak Ginsburgh, *Gal Enai*). Someone born in the astrological sign of Leo has a strong personality, full of fire and leadership. The Arizal was an example of such a person with true presence. Not only does “Ari” mean Leo, the holy Kabbalist was born on the fifth of Av during the astrological sign of Leo.

Being Called Back Home through Elevating Sparks

“Yehuda is a lions whelp; from the prey, my son, you are gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as a lioness; who shall raise him up?” (*Bereishit* 49:9). From this verse *Kedushat HaLevi* learns that the main reason for exile is to raise up the sparks that fell from the husks through the sin of the first man. Israel suffers the suffering of exile until the time arrives when all evil is completed

and when all the sparks will be elevated. Then surely there will be immediate redemption... We find that in this exile he is, so to speak, called a whelp, but at the redemption he will be called a lion. This is the meaning of "Yehuda is a whelp of the lion," first he is a whelp and in the end a lion. When will he be called a lion? When all the sparks have been elevated this is the meaning of "from the prey my son you have risen." May Hashem allow these sparks be elevated speedily so our righteous Mashiach can come amen! (*Kedushat Halevi, Parashat Vayechi*). Meanwhile we are still elevating sparks, but we have also begun to rise. What gave us the strength to hold out 2000 years until we finally were able to return to *Eretz Yisrael*? Rav Shlomo explains that it was not because of what we saw when we left. What we saw was the destruction. If we would only see, we would never have returned. You know why we came back? Because of what we heard when we left the Temple, didn't we hear G-d's voice telling us to come back??!