

The Month of Tamuz: Between Weeping and Joy

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Completing the Period of Judgment

Baruch Hashem, our midrasha is going strong! Our students are bravely strengthening their *emunah* as we all witness Hashem's love for us and the amazing miracles of his protection. Bat Ayin is really relatively secure, and there was only once when the siren went off and we had to seek shelter in the security room of our neighbor. In other places of Israel this has happened more than tens of times during the last two weeks. I am glad that all our summer program students showed up except for one, and I pray that Hashem will continue to protect us and bring the *geulah* (redemption) soon.

There are 6000 years of Creation in which we have to go through all of the Ten Sefirot with their ten sub-sefirot in all of the Four Worlds of Emanation, Creation, Formation and Action until we reach *Malchut* (Royalty) of *Malchut* in the world of Action. This implies that every 150 years we enter a new sefirah, and that every 15 years we enter a new sub-sefirah. Therefore, in 5700 (1940) we entered the sefirah of *Yesod* (Foundation) in the World of Action. It makes perfectly sense that Israel laid the foundation of the Land of Israel after more than 2000 years of exile during the period of *Yesod*.

During the 60 years between year 5700- 5760 (1940-2000) we went through *Keter* of *Yesod*, *Chachma* of *Yesod*, *Binah* of *Yesod*, and *Chesed* of *Yesod*. I remember clearly during Rosh Hashana of year 5760 (2000) when the intifada began smack in the middle of our holiday celebration. This is because we entered *Gevurah* of *Yesod* precisely at that time. *Gevurah* is the time of harsh judgments and hardships. Therefore, this period also included the harsh expulsion and destructions of the beautiful communities of Gush Katif. Now the 15 year period of *Gevurah* of *Yesod* is drawing to an end Baruch Hashem. There is a principle that a power grows stronger just before it is finished from the world, so this is why at the end of the period of *Gevurah* of *Yesod* we are experiencing serious *Gevurot* in forms of massive missile attacks on Israel. Yet, with Rosh Hashana around the corner we can look forward to entering the time of harmony of *Tiferet* of *Yesod*.

May Hashem empower our brave soldiers to finish off the evil Hamas so that we can finally beat our "swords into plowshares, and spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (*Yeshayahu* 2:4).

Between Weeping and Joy

We have entered the days of mourning *bein hametzarim*, (between the straights of the fast day of the seventeenth of Tamuz and the ninth of Av), when the Temples were destroyed. These two fast days reflect the primordial “breaking of the vessels” at the inception of creation. The vessels of the world were not strong enough to hold all the light, so they broke. At this time, we are especially called to rectify this underlying imperfection of reality, “elevating the fallen sparks,” by watching our tongue even more carefully and beware of anger and jealousy while working on love, compassion and unity. I have played my last songs on my guitar and packed it away for the next three weeks. Although this is a mourning period, there is still an ongoing existential tension between sorrow and joy during these three weeks as it states, “Weeping is wedged in my heart on this side, and joy is wedged in my heart on the other side” (*Zohar* 3 75a).

On the 17th of Tamuz, Moshe was to descend with the two tablets of law and begin the process of fixing the world. This is why Aharon told the people who were pleading with him to make them a god to lead them, “Tomorrow is a holiday to Hashem” (*Shemot* 32:5). Aharon saw in prophetic spirit that in the future the 17th of Tamuz would become a holiday for Israel. Likewise, the return of the spies on the 9th of Av was supposed to be the beginning of the Jews preparing to enter the land from where they would fulfill the mission to be a “light unto the nation.” This is why we always read the *parshiot* of *Matot* and *Masai*, which describe the division of the Land of Israel, during this time when we mourn the exile from the land. We are thus comforted and assured that the promise of inheriting the land will take place in the future at this time (B’nei Yissaschar, *Articles on Tamuz and Av, Between the Straights*, article 2:2).

Goodness Concealed within Mourning

The great paradox of these weeks and the deeper teaching they hold for us is that both fast days were meant for great joy and accomplishment. Soon the 17th of Tamuz will be turned into a holiday celebrating the rebuilding of the Temple. 17 is the numerical value of the word טוב/*tov* – good, reflecting its becoming a יום טוב/*Yom Tov* – holiday (literally Good Day) together with the rest of the minor fast days written in the prophets, as it states, “The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful seasons; therefore love truth and peace” (*Zechariah* 8:19). The remaining 13 days of the month of Tamuz likewise reflect Hashem’s mercy, as these days correspond to the 13 attributes of Mercy that Moshe brought down during these 13 days following the sin of the Golden Calf that took place on the 17th of Tamuz. These attributes are: “Hashem, Hashem, G-d merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin... (*Shemot* 34:6-7). So during these 13 days it seems especially appropriate to work on kindness and forgiveness, reflecting these 13 attributes of mercy within our thoughts, speech and actions.



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Days of Divine Sanctifying

Hashem proclaims וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל / *v'nikdashi b'toch b'nei Yisrael* – “and I will be sanctified within the children of Israel” (*Vayikra* 22:32). Specifically the word בְּתוֹךְ / *b'toch* –within, which has the same numerical value as עֵגֶל מְרַגְלִים / *egel meraglim* – the Calf and the Spies. (The sin that caused the fast day of the 17th of Tamuz and that which caused the fast day of the 9th of Av). The potential of both days was squandered and now it is left for us to restore these months to their original purpose by performing the necessary rectifications. From within our darkness the light will shine. Mashiach is born on Tisha B'Av, (the ninth of Av) and redemption will come out of exile and joy out of sorrow. We must take current events and our own personal trials and see the deeper messages we are being sent. By attuning our inner eye to the unity and oneness of G-d and our inner ear to His constant messages to each one of us, we will know how to contribute what we can to creating a world in which Hashem will be sanctified. The sum of the hours within the 17th of Tamuz and the 9th of Av if you subtract Shabbats, Rosh Chodesh and the last six hours of the Tisha b'Av also equals the numerical value of בְּתוֹךְ / *b'toch*. This is the time for us to enact sanctifications of Hashem, by continuing to build His land with fear of no-one but Hashem.

Times of Protection from Chutzpah and Forgiveness

Our Sages proclaimed, “Every generation in whose times the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple) is not rebuilt is considered as though that generation was the one in which it was destroyed (*Yerushalmi Talmud, Yoma* 1:1). Yet, it is also taught that the day that the Temple was destroyed all the sins of Israel were forgiven, as Hashem poured his wrath on wood and stones in order that the children of Israel would be spared (*Midrash Tanchuma, Parashat Shemini, 9*). In this vein we can explain, “Whoever lives in the times when the *Beit HaMikdash* is not rebuilt is considered as though the Temple was destroyed in his time,” to imply that this person is worthy that Hashem will forgive his or her sins (B'nei Yissaschar, *Articles on Tamuz and Av, Between the Straights*, article 2:15). One of the last songs I played before I packed away my guitar was, אֲתָהּ תִקּוּם תִּרְחַם צִיּוֹן כִּי עֵת לְחַנּוּנָהּ כִּי : *Ata takum, t'rachem tzion ki et l'chenena ki va moed* – “You arise and have mercy on Tzion for it is time to bestow it grace, as the time has come” (*Tehilim* 102:14). Why do we need the word אֲתָהּ / *ata* when in Hebrew the verb תִּקּוּם / *takum* – ‘you arise’ includes the personal pronoun? B'nei Yissaschar explains that the word אֲתָהּ / *ata* has a special power to protect us from chutzpah which is prevalent during the times of Mashiach (*Babylonian Talmud, Sota* 49b). Isn't this what we are experiencing right now in Hashem's mercy? (B'nei Yissaschar, *Articles on Tamuz and Av, Between the Straights*, article 2:13).

The Dangers that Outweigh Coming to Israel Now

We understand the concern about the current political climate. Nevertheless, we believe it is vital to continue to come to Israel as this is our only future as Jews. Perhaps you are familiar with the story about Rabbi Akiva and the fish and the fox? They asked Rabbi Akiva why he was not afraid to learn Torah when the Roman's had forbidden it, and why he risked being caught and executed. He answered with the following parable: The fox asks the fish “how can you not be afraid to swim in the water when there are so many fishermen trying to catch you. Why not escape this danger by



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emerging from the water?" The fish responded, "True, there are dangers lurking in the waters, however, outside of the waters I surely have no chance of survival." The Torah is compared to water. Just like the fish cannot survive outside of the water, so can a Jew not survive without Torah (*Midrash Tanchuma, Parashat Ki Tavo, 2*). I believe we can apply this parable exactly to the situation in the Land of Israel today. True, the political situation is difficult here, but the dangers of being estranged from the closeness with G-d and actualizing our spiritual potential outside of Israel by far outweighs the dangers of coming here.

Becoming Taller than our Sins

During the dark times we need emunah to see beyond the surface of nature. We have to remember who we are and Who Hashem our Redeemer is. The Piasezner says that we should be taller than our sins. We have forgotten that we are princes and princesses. When we look at our land with the love and devotion as a mother looks upon her children, then our power will be infinite. Tanya explains that when two people are wrestling even if one is superior physically, if he is in low spirits and lacking determinism and the other is full of excitement, the one who is inferior in physical strength may win regardless. Let us not be lost in the pain of contraction and lose the vision of the baby who is to be born. Let us have emunah in Hashem Who performs miracles transcending nature and also in ourselves and in our infinite capacity and power when we perform His will.

In this month there are many *dinim* (judgments): The breaking of the tablets, and the breach of the wall around Yerushalayim. However, in this month there is also a lot of possibility for rectification. It all depends on our perspective. Compared to the Hebrew letter ה/*heh*, the shape of the ח/*chet*, which is the letter of this month, can seem like a shape from which there is no escape. Yet, it is possible to view the ח/*chet* as a frame and *Chuppah* (marriage canopy), which protects us. Had the Israelite not been led astray to make the Golden Calf, then Moshe would have brought us down the first tablets, and the 17th of Tamuz would have been a holiday to Hashem. When we prove our steadfast emunah in Hashem and await the Mashiach with patience, we will b"H live to celebrate the transformation of the weeks of mourning as days of "joy and gladness, and cheerful seasons!"