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Knowing vs. Feeling

We will try a little, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to somewhat reach, perhaps, the essence of this day [*Tisha B'Av*].

We generally know all there is to know [about the Nine Days]. We all know the reasons why we must mourn, and the necessity to mourn. But the distance between what we *know*, and what we *feel* is usually a very far distance.

Sometimes the distance between knowledge and feeling is bigger and sometimes it is smaller, but either way, there is always a big difference between what we *know* with what we *feel*. If we ask any person if we are supposed to mourn over the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, any person will answer, "Yes." If we ask any person if we should cry over this, the answer is also "Yes." If we ask a person if he really feels like doing so, though, we will get different answers.

The minimum pain we are supposed to feel is to at least be pained over the fact that we don't feel the pain we know we are supposed to feel and that we aren't succeeding in getting ourselves to cry. If even this doesn't bother the person, this person is very far from the *avodah* of these days.

We will try here to draw the matters closer to us, so that it should at least be made possible for us to have somewhat of a degree of mourning and weeping.

Some Introductory Points

However, it is right now the 29th day of Tamuz, and we hope Mashiach will come soon. Therefore, the words here are only relevant if Mashiach isn't here before the 9th of Av. Additionally, the words here are not only applicable to *Tisha B'Av* of this year. There is no way for a person to suddenly change in the timespan between the 29th of Tamuz and the 9th of Av. The heart doesn't suddenly get opened so fast. If someone knows of such a way, I will be very happy to hear of it.

If the words we will say here are indeed helpful to you, at best they might help you for next year *Tisha B'Av* [because there is no way to change so fast by the time it comes this year's *Tisha B'Av*]. Hashem should bring Mashiach by then, and hopefully way before that; he should come today, and then today's *derasha* will just be one of the many lectures of history. Our *avodah* is to try to prepare ourselves [for *Tisha B'Av*] - and that is what we will try to do here.

Why Do We Have A Hard Time With the Nine Days?

When a person hears good news, does he need to prepare for it? Usually, if it is very good news, you don't need to prepare for the news in order to enjoy it. You are just happy and excited to hear the good news, whether you expected it or not. The same is true of hearing sad news; it has an intense effect on us even if we didn't prepare for it. If so, why is it that our soul usually doesn't feel an intense sadness over the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*?

Our Sages already addressed this question, and gave several answers.

(1) "Old mourning". The mourning is not new to us. We go through this mourning ever year, therefore we have grown used to it, so we're not as affected by it.

(2) We don't feel it. Another reason given is because a person simply doesn't feel that the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed. We might *know* very well that the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed, but do we *feel* that it was destroyed? It is a whole different question.

(3) We can't recognize it. The *Beis HaMikdash* has been destroyed already for close to 2,000 years. We are only able to know what something is when we know what its opposite is.

For example, we know what light is because we know what darkness is, and we know what the color white is because we know what the color black is. We would be able to relate to the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* if we would have seen it standing. But because none of saw it (in the current lifetime we are in), we do not have an actual recognition of the destruction. Because we never saw the *Beis HaMikdash*, it is hard for us to relate to its destruction.

So there is actually a third reason why it is hard for our soul to relate the destruction, (and on a deeper note, it is really another angle of the second reason, the fact that we don't feel the destruction): we can only recognize something from its opposite, and since we do not know what it means for the *Beis HaMikdash* to be standing, we do not recognize its destruction.

A Closed Heart Vs. An Opened Heart

Yet there is another reason why it is hard for us to relate to the destruction, and it precedes all of the above three reasons.

The feelings of joy, pain, and sadness are not intellectual abilities. They do not stem from the *daas* of our intellect; they stem from the *daas* of our heart [when it combines with the *daas* of the intellect]. When one's heart is alive with spiritual feelings, it is working properly, and it breathes the reality in front of us. When a person isn't sensitive to spiritual feelings, when he never reflects into the spiritual realities in front of us, he is far from what it means to have joy on the festivals, he is far from improving during the Ten Days of Repentance, and he is far from the pain that we are supposed to feel during the Nine Days through *Tisha B'Av*.

Thus, if one doesn't feel the pain over the destruction during the Nine Days, this is only a 'branch' of the problem, a symptom of something deeper. The 'root' of the problem is the fact that he is not in touch with his spiritual heart. It's not because he doesn't know how to feel pain over the Destruction. The problem starts way before that: it is because something is missing from his heart altogether.

By contrast, one whose heart is spiritually alive during the rest of the year doesn't have to exert himself to feel pain during the Nine Days; it is natural for him. He can cry [as he says the *Kinnos*] with almost no effort to do so.

To illustrate what we mean, when a woman has just lost her husband, anything that reminds her of her husband causes her to cry and feel pain over his loss. She doesn't have to think about this all day

in order for this to happen (if she would think about it the entire day, this is extreme behavior). As soon as she remembers her husband, she finds her tears natural, because her heart is already active.

If one has to exert himself in order to be able to cry and mourn, if he has to read a *sefer* that speaks about the tragedies of the destruction, filled with commentaries, and through this he awakens himself and gets himself to feel something, we cannot say that is pointless; it might awaken him a little. But it is like someone whose heart has stopped working and he gets a fake heart placed in him which acts mechanically.

If it needs to be explained to him, if he has to read about it in order to strain his mind and think into it so that he can get himself to shed a tear, this is all proof that his heart isn't activated during the rest of the year. There is something wrong with his heart. It's not that he has a problem with the Nine Days. His lack of emotion during the Nine Days is simply a sign of his general situation throughout the year, which has much left to be desired.

A heart that is spiritually alive is the kind of heart we need to live with during the entire year. Such a life enables a person to feel the joy of the festivals, to feel the closeness to Hashem that can be attained during the Ten Days of Repentance, and to weep during the Nine Days.

It is clear to anyone that when someone has just lost a parent, when it is right before the funeral and he hasn't even started yet the seven days of mourning, he is naturally in pain. Imagine if we have a person who is not the type to feel pain or cry, and it is brought to him a book which explains why he should feel pain over the loss of his parent, and it is told to him that he should study it in-depth, so that he can understand why he needs to feel the pain of the loss. We can all understand that something is very wrong here with this person.

So there is no piece of advice that can help you come to feel pain over the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* and to help you shed tears over it. There *is* a way, however, for you to open your heart during the course of the rest of the year - and if your heart has been opened during the year, then when the Nine Days arrive, you'll naturally feel the pain you are supposed to feel and you will find it natural to cry.

Destruction On The Communal Level and On The Individual Level

Let's go further.

The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* is a very obscure matter from us, something very far from us which we don't understand. It is something that the Jewish people have been mourning about for thousands of years. But there are two dimensions to the destruction. There was destruction on the communal level, and there was also a destruction on an individual level.

The communal destruction was the fact that the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed, for all generations to come. There was also an inner and more private destruction that took place to each person on an individual level: the *Shechinah* [Hashem's presence] is no longer openly revealed in a person's life. This is each person's own private destruction.

If one does not lead a life in which the *Beis HaMikdash* is built in his heart and he does not feel pain over the absence of his own personal *Beis HaMikdash*, he won't be able to suddenly feel the communal destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* when *Tisha B'Av* comes.

If one does not recognize personally in himself what it means to have a *Beis HaMikdash* in oneself, if one doesn't feel bad that it's missing, he can't suddenly feel pain when the Nine Days arrive. Even if one can get himself to feel pain, it might be because he has gotten emotional, but this is usually not a

crying that comes from a deep place in the soul. One of our *Gedolim* said that just as our ears and nose produce excess fluid, so can our eyes produce excess fluid – in the form of tears. This doesn't mean that all tears are useless, *chas v'shalom*; it means that not every tear that a person sheds is truthful.

The deepest place in our heart, its essence, is described in the verse, “*The rock of my heart and my portion, is G-d.*” The essence of our heart is covered over by many external layers. The external layer of our heart includes our various desires. As long as a person's extraneous desires fill his heart, he can't feel Hashem's presence in his heart. And if he doesn't feel Hashem's presence in his heart, he does not know what it means to have a personal *Beis HaMikdash* within, and he will find it most difficult to feel pain and to cry during the Nine Days and *Tisha B'Av*.

If it bothers him that he doesn't feel the pain he knows he should feel, this is a good sign; *Baruch Hashem* that he at least feels this. But how will he ever be able to cry over it? Can someone cry over something he has never really cared about?

A person cries about something he wanted and desired which he has either lost or hasn't attained. The less a person wanted something, the less likely he is to cry over it if he loses it. If a person has a *ratzon* (will) to feel Hashem's presence in his life, if he has a very deep desire to feel Him within himself, then when *Tisha B'Av* comes, at least he will be able to feel what he is personally missing in his life.

(This doesn't yet mean he will feel the communal level of mourning, which is an entirely different matter that we hope to soon explain. But at least he will feel the destruction on a private and inner level.)

One who doesn't feel Hashem in his heart during the rest of the year won't suddenly change during the Nine Days. People do not change so fast. There is no way to suddenly change and become sensitive to spiritual feelings in such a short amount of time. The only way is for one to already have an active heart from during the rest of the year: to desire Hashem's presence. If a person can relate to that during the rest of the year, he is at least connected to the inner world within him, and he will find it natural to feel mourning when the Nine Days arrive.

The Nine Days are a sign of what a person's level is during the rest of the year. If one's heart is already a bit open from the rest of the year, he can burst out in tears when he realizes how much he is missing. This, in and of itself, is already commendable.

Joy and Pain At Once

“When Av enters, joy is lessened.”^[1] It is brought in *Halachah* that we do not build things during the month of Av, and we also do not engage in anything that gives us particular joy; additionally, we should not engage in unnecessary acts (There are exceptions according to *Halacha* when it affects one's livelihood).

Why is it that a person should only do what's necessary during Av? It is understandable if it is something that will bring joy. But why must we refrain from doing things during Av that are simply unnecessary?

The simple understanding is because it causes us to take our mind off mourning. But the deeper reason is as follows. When one removes his mind from mourning during the Nine Days, it really means that he is caught up in various pursuits of life.

The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* must cause us to cry, but we know that we cannot be this way

during the rest of the year. We can't go on with sadness for that long. So how does a person survive the Nine Days? We can simply say that a person can get himself to be sad for the duration of the nine days. If one is more spiritual and purified, he can feel sadness every night through reciting *Tikkun Chatzos*.

But the true perspective is totally different than the above approach.

We are capable of joy, and we are also capable of sadness, pain, and crying. One who has removed his superficial desires is able to feel both joy and sadness at once. We don't mean that one day the person is sad and the next day he can feel joyous. Rather, there is a deep place in our soul which knows how to feel both joy and sadness at once. Sometimes either joy or sadness will dominate, but in essence, they can both be active at the same time.

When the festivals arrive, a person may be able to imagine that he is happy that the festival here. There are external factors which can give a person a superficial feeling of happiness on the festivals – such as meat and wine. After all, the Sages say that “There is no *simcha* (happiness) except in meat and wine.”^[2] He might be able to get himself to be a little happy with such things. But if a person doesn't know how to cry on *Tisha B'Av*, he does not know either how to be happy on Pesach!

The very soul in us which can feel pain is the very same soul in us which can feel joy. They are not separate aspects of our being; they stem from the same place in our soul. This is because each thing is comprised of itself and its opposite (“*dovor v'hipucho*”). Joy and happiness are opposites; in order to appreciate joy, you must know what sadness is, and in order to know what sadness is, you need to experience joy. Without knowing how to feel *simcha*, one does not know how to feel pain; if one does not know of pain, he will not know what it means to be truly happy.

David HaMelech said, “*My heart is empty within me.*” The sefer he wrote, *sefer Tehillim*, was written after he felt the empty space in his heart. In sefer *Tehillim*, many kinds of experiences are described. There were times that Dovid HaMelech felt lowly, times where he felt pain, and times where he felt joyous. It is well-known that sefer *Tehillim* contains all of the experiences that every Jew will ever go through. This was all due to Dovid HaMelech's achievement of emptying out his heart from all desires, where he was left with nothing in his heart except for the desire for Hashem's will. In that deep place in the heart, one can feel both joy and sadness there at once, and the contradicting emotions are both truthful.

During the month of Av, we lessen activities that are unnecessary, and the reason for this is not simply because we must not take our mind off the mourning of the Nine Days. Rather, it is because if a person has desires in his heart that are unnecessary, he cannot be connected to the concept of the Nine Days. His heart is far from where it is supposed to be.

From a superficial level, a person observes the *halachos* of the Nine Days. He opens up the *Shulchan Aruch* and finds out the *halachah* and he doesn't do all the activities he normally does. It is certainly commendable that he follows *halachah*, but if this is his entire idea of mourning during the Nine Days, he has missed the boat. The whole reason why we refrain from certain activities during the Nine Days is because it is supposed to be used as a means to erase the unnecessary desires from our heart and live a truthful life, of “*My heart is empty [from desires] within me.*”

The deep place in our heart, which is removed from all unnecessary desires, is the place in us which can feel contradictory emotions at once. It can feel joy and sadness at once, and it is the place in the soul which enables a person to have true tears.

Getting Back Our Simplicity

Why is it that a child cries easily, whereas an adult doesn't cry so fast? It is because a child lives in a simple reality. He simply has a desire for something, and if he doesn't get it, he cries. An adult, though, has developed layers upon his soul. He has to dig deep into himself in order to bring out his emotions. If one lives in the simple point in his soul which feels like "*an infant in its mother's lap*", he naturally can feel joy and he can naturally feel pain, just as easily as he feels physical sensation.

The *avodah* of a person is not to work hard on himself to bring out his emotions in order to get himself to cry. That is not the way. The *avodah* is for a person to develop his heart in the first place. Once the heart is functioning properly, everything else will follow as a result. There will be natural emotions of joy when appropriate, and there will be natural emotions of sadness where appropriate. He will be a "*ben ish chai*", a "living person".

Thus, as we said in the beginning of the chapter, there is no advice that can guide a person to teach him how to mourn, in the time between the 29th of Tamuz and the 9th of Av. Even if one could teach himself how to cry by the time it comes the 9th of Av, the tears wouldn't be coming from a truthful place in himself.

Nullifying Our Desires

There is only one way, and it is very simple, fundamental, and true. But it takes time, and it is not developed instantly. It is a way to live life, and it is not just for the Nine Days. It is for a person to remove his extra desires, on a constant basis, throughout the course of the year. The Sages said it: "Nullify your will before His will."

A person should get used to keep nullifying his desires, one after one. The Chazon Ish says that every time a person breaks his will, it adds a stone to the courtyard of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

But if a person wants to remain with all of his desires, and he also wants to cry on *Tisha B'Av*, and he also wants to be happy on the festivals, and he also wants a perfect wife and perfect children and perfect health and perfect livelihood, and honor, and an outpouring of blessing in his life, and _____, then when the Nine Days come, he won't be able to find himself at all amidst all of these desires.

The issue is very simple and fundamental: How does a person live during the rest of the year? We all have difficulties. But what is the root of all our difficulties? It is always one single reason: our various unfulfilled desires.

The only desire that we must seek to fulfill is the desire to do Hashem's will! All desires other than this are not desires we need. Sometimes we do need to fulfill a certain desire we have, but even in such situations, it is only a means to a greater end. The only desire we need to have is "Our will is to do Your will." All other desires need to be eliminated, one by one, slowly and in steps.

If one is motivated to do this throughout the course of the year, he should do so with the attitude that this is our life's task. Thus, each year when it comes *Tisha B'Av*, this must cause a person to feel a deeper degree of the destruction. The tears will then flow freely and naturally, as an automatic result. But this will only happen when a person realizes that life is all about giving up our desires for Hashem, and to replace all of our desires with one single desire alone: the desire to do Hashem's will.

Using Suffering To Rid Ourselves of Desires

Now we will try to explain how we can practically work on this.

The Gemara says that when a person puts his hand into his pocket and he doesn't find money there, this is a form of suffering. If he wanted two coins and he only found one coin, this is a degree of

suffering. Let us contemplate what the depth of the suffering is.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed because of sin. The first *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed due to the three cardinal sins of murder, adultery, and idol worship. The second *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed due to baseless hatred.^[3]

The Sages say that suffering takes away the effect of sin. How does this work? Why does suffering take away the effect of a sin? A sin means that a person has actualized a negative desire. How is a sin rectified? If the person has stole, he must return that which he stole. But with other sins, how does a person undo what he did?

Suffering takes away the root of the problem of the sin. The person had a desire to sin, and that was why he sinned. With suffering, the root of the sin can be uprooted, because the person's desire for the sin has been removed, through the suffering. Suffering goes against our will; we don't want it. Accepting suffering with love and with *emunah* helps us get rid of our desire for the sin.

Therefore, suffering only atones for the sin if the person's desire for the sin has been removed. Sometimes people go through physical suffering but he remains unchanged. He still has the same desire to sin, and he might even have stronger desires for the sin, because he is waiting for his suffering to pass so that he can go fulfill his desires. Suffering doesn't always make a person change his desires.

The desires in a person destroy a person's own "personal *Beis HaMikdash*".^[4] They are like a strange god living inside the person. This is not an idea that comes from a *derasha*. It is absolutely a reality. The fact that the *Shechinah* dwells in each person's heart is not an idea - it is reality. The only thing that holds back that revelation from a person is his desires. When a person removes the desires, G-dliness is revealed in the person.

How can a person know if he is going on the right path or not? If he sees that he is succeeded in getting rid of some of his desires and he feels that he is closer to doing Hashem's will, this is a sign that his soul is becoming healthier.

Anything that we seek to acquire needs intention in order to acquire. In order for the heart to be acquired, one must break his desires. But it must be done with the intention that one is trying to reveal his inner will of the soul (the will to do Hashem's will). When a person succeeds in breaking a desire, he can feel purer afterwards; he can feel like something has been cleared from his system.

Inspiration Vs. Building Our Life

We need to change the root of how we view life; to wonder how we are supposed to live to begin with. *Baruch Hashem*, when it comes the night of *Tisha B'Av*, there are lecturers, and sometimes it helps a little. Sometimes the speaker will inspire himself as he is speaking, and then others will be inspired with him, as a result. But it is clear that something is very much missing here. One cannot build his life based upon one *derasha*!

A *derasha* does almost nothing for a person. A *derasha* remains a *derasha*, and the truth remains the truth. A *derasha* can only inspire a person minimally. What more do we need to hear/read in order for us to change our perspective in life? Inspiration is gone as soon as it comes. It has a very fleeting effect.

The issue is how to live to begin with, from the very start! We should not be interested in inspiration. The question is how we should live life to begin with - to wonder how a proper life should look like from the very start. ^[5]

I was once in a place where I spoke to some boys who had become irreligious (may G-d have mercy on them). I said to them whatever it is that I had to say to them, and then one of the boys said to me, "You are giving me solutions that work for me *after* I've fallen. But what is the solution *before* I fall?"

People want to know why kids are 'going off the *derech*'. But nobody 'went off the *derech*'. They were never on the *derech* to begin with! There was never a "*derech*" that they were on to begin with to fall off of it.

We must have a "*derech*" (way) in how to live life to begin with! Speeches and inspiring lectures won't do it for us. What people really need is to make a soul-accounting and get to the root, and wonder: how should we live life from the very start?

Imagine if a man gets married and he finds out that his wife is mentally unstable (G-d forbid). He goes to his Rav and tells him the story. The Rav is in doubt if the marriage was ever valid to begin with. It's not that there was a marriage here and now he will have to get divorced. There was never a marriage here to begin with!

You are all past the age of 30 already. You've all heard many *derashos* in your life; some of them were very true and some were less true, but the issue really is if you can get to the root of how to live life. We must understand that our life is not about gathering knowledge. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that if one is on a path that is not good, he must get himself off the path and take a new path. If something was wrong in a person's life from the start, even living 1000 years and hearing *derashos* and amassing all that much knowledge will be nothing. A person can do many *mitzvos* yet his heart doesn't change inside. We see that people have been davening and putting on *tefillin* for many years yet they don't feel a thing from it.

Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l would say, "People have been listening to me speak for 20 years, but they haven't even begun to understand what I mean." When a person's heart is closed, nothing he hears will change him.

Utilizing Tisha B'Av To Its Fullest

All of the times of the year Hashem gave to us are here as a reminder to ask ourselves if we are living life in the right way to begin with; if we are living a life of building ourselves. The Nine Days are also such a time. It is a time where we need to bring our life to halt and wonder how we can build our soul. It takes time to build the soul, just like it takes time to build the *Beis HaMikdash*. In order for a person to build himself, he must bring his life to a halt and make a self-accounting on how to live life to begin with.

On *Tisha B'Av*, it is forbidden to learn Torah. What does a person do with his free time on *Tisha B'Av*? Baruch Hashem, there's Kol HaLashon, or you can go to the speeches that are in town, which is filled with men and women who are all willing to listen to the speaker. But what is the point of *Tisha B'Av*?? Why was this day given to us? We can't learn Torah, we can't do any labor, so what are we supposed to do with ourselves on this day? Think about the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*? That is true, but the depth of *Tisha B'Av* is to bring our life to a halt and empty ourselves out of all desires.

We can't even learn Torah, which is the most important desire to have (other than the desire to do Hashem's will). We are supposed to just bring our lives to a halt and we begin to think of a new life for ourselves!

Find a quiet place, and reflect, from a silent place within yourself. The Nine Days, and especially *Tisha B'Av*, are a time to reflect and to bring the routine of life to a halt, and ask ourselves how to live life from the start. *Tisha B'Av* is not a time to seek what is 'permissible' to do and which parts of Torah

are 'permissible' to learn. It is a time to bring all of your life to a halt. If one seeks truth, he must wonder, as he reflects, on how he can rebuild his life anew.

Quiet Time Every Day To Reflect

Besides for *Tisha B'Av*, one needs to have set times every day where one can reflect about the purpose of life. People might think they know what the purpose of life is, but a person can keep uncovering deeper meaning to the purpose of life every day, when he reflects quietly on this each day with inner silence. If one "doesn't have any time" to do this, this is an inner destruction.

It is not only on *Tisha B'Av* and the Nine Days that you should do this. Every day, a person needs to have times where he reflects about the purpose of life and to think if he's going in the right direction^[6]. If you come to the conclusion that you are going in the way of Torah and mitzvos, keep going in that direction. But if you discover that this is not the case, you need to wonder how you can come to live a more truthful life.

This is what you need to do, each day, in order to acquire "purity of heart" and rid your heart from desires, which enables you to reach the point of "*My heart is empty within me*" as Dovid HaMelech said; and when your heart is slowly emptied from all of the desires, you can eventually come to the point where you have only one desire alone in your heart - the desire to do Hashem's will.

Of course, our heart is purified from learning Torah and doing the mitzvos. But more specifically, it comes from nullifying our desires, until a person only has one desire left: the desire to do Hashem's will.

Sincere Tears

When a person reaches that inner silence and he is in touch with the inner will of his soul (to do Hashem's will), he can come to a true and inner crying that comes from the depths of his soul, from the pure point in the soul that only feels Hashem's will. In that deep place in himself, he can feel how Hashem is mourning over His children who have been exiled from Him, who have "left their father's table." He won't even have to strain himself to cry, because the tears will flow freely and naturally.

In Conclusion

Hashem gave us all *bechirah* (free will), and the free will was given to us so that we can choose to set aside time every day to reflect on how to live a truthful life. Just like a *baal teshuvah* changes his entire life when he leaves his world behind and he enters the world of Torah, so must an already *frum* person raised in the world of Torah go deeper into himself and enter a new world within him.

It might not always be easy and pleasant to make a self-accounting every day, but this is the only way of how we can live a truthful life and come to rebuild the personal *Beis HaMikdash* within ourselves.

I really hope that these words have been truly understood, not as a *derasha*, not as inspiration, and not even as preparation for the Nine Days; rather, that they be perceived as a way to live our life from the start.

^[1] Taanis 29a

[2] Pesachim 109a

[3] Yoma 9b

[4] See *Nefesh HaChaim - Gate I*

[5] See ***Getting To Know Your Happiness #011 - Raising Happy Children***

[6] Ramchal in sefer Derech Eretz Chaim. See ***Bilvavi_Part_4_Chapter_3***

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