

HOW WE SUFFER

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Sometimes it happens to us.. And sometimes we do it to others As we all know, the main theme of Tisha B'Av is the fact that our Holy Temple-- our source of inspiration, spiritual fulfillment, and vision-- is destroyed.

All a Jew needed to do to reconnect to a living Presence of G-d Almighty, in the old days, was to trek up the mountain to the Beis HaMikdosh in Jerusalem. And there he'd catch sight of the holy processional of the Kohanim and the Levim in all their splendor; take a deep, deep whiff of the incense burning; listen closely to the music. That's all a Jew had to do to reignite his or Jewish heart.

But now we have to fend for ourselves to fill that gap. We certainly have our holy Torah and our teachers, our inspiring memories, as well as visions of a Jewish future awash with regained holiness and purity. But it's hard-- very hard.

In fact, we're like kids suddenly and tragically orphaned (G-d forbid), who must unexpectedly fight our own battles, explain things to ourselves, and mourn for the dead at one and the same time.

And so we fast on Tisha B'av, go about barefoot, sit in low chairs, and barely greet our neighbors. For two reasons-- because that's how we mourn, and because that's what the Torah's halacha requires of us.

But there's a deeper reason, too. Because we're stunned and utterly dumbfounded that all that glory and solace is gone!

Is it any surprise, then, that we couldn't think of eating on Tisha B'Av, that we'd sit on low chairs, lament, and barely greet each other! After all, we're alone, and deeply, deeply heavyhearted.

But there are other themes that Tisha B'Av touch upon as well, aside from our terrible loss. It's the one our sages referred to as the cause of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh-- ""senseless hatred"". Factions of our people hated other factions of our people, and we were cruel to each other.

Understand me now-- for better or for worse, I'm not about to discuss Jewish in-fighting. How groups of Jews spew hatred toward other groups of Jews. I'd rather discuss smaller ""senseless hatred""-- the kind of meanness we sometimes express to our friends and neighbors when they're suffering and in pain.

""Impossible!"" , you say. ""Who'd hit someone while he's down?"" But that happens all the time. Either actively or passively.

That is, we either go out of our way to hurt those in pain because a mean streak overtakes us. Or-- and this is more common, thankfully-- we simply sit back and don't help them.

The prophet Jeremiah, author of Eicha ("The Book of Lamentations") which we recite on Tisha B'Av, underscored that point when he spoke in the name of those of our people who sat in the ashes of ancient Jerusalem.

As it says there, in verse 1:12, "Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by?" Is my pain nothing to you? How can you simply walk by? "Behold, and see if there is any pain like my pain, which was brought upon me, with which G-d has afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger."

In other words, those suffering sometimes call out to us, Listen to me, and take my pain to heart. I need your help. And there's no one to comfort me. As the text continues, "The comforter that should relieve my soul", that is, loved ones and friends I should have been able to depend on, are "far from me" (1:16).

Don't we find ourselves guilty of such emotional abandonment at times? And isn't that the sort of "senseless hatred" the sages were referring to, also.

I have two prayers for this Tisha B'Av season: May G-d, the Ribbono Shel Olam, inspire us this year to not only mourn for our own losses, but to be there for others in their pain and sorrow.

And may we never know of loss again.