

A HOPEFUL MOURNING

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

The Fast of the 17th of Tamuz is almost upon us. We are to recall those events and circumstances that led to our present exile, with no Bais HaMikdash, Holy Temple in Jerusalem to serve as our spiritual center. We are supposed to take the lessons we have learned from our long and painful exile to heart, and better our relationship with our fellow man and G-d.

It is difficult, in these troubled times, to find any silver lining to the cloud in which we are currently enveloped. Yet, our Sages stated explicitly (Ta'anis 30b) "'All who mourn over (the destruction of) Jerusalem merit to see her in her joy.'" We are assured that if we properly appreciate the enormity of our loss, we merit to share in the joy of seeing Jerusalem reestablished in all its glory. Commentators discuss the interesting syntax of this assurance. The Sages did not say that those who mourn will merit seeing her in her joy, in the future tense; they said that they do merit seeing her in her joy, in the present tense. How is it that we can currently see the joy of a reestablished Jerusalem in a time of exile?

The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 84:21) discusses the sale of Yosef into slavery by his brothers. The brothers, not wanting to disclose that they had sold Yosef, implied to their father Yaakov that an animal had killed Yosef. Yaakov was overcome with grief over the loss of his most cherished son. The Torah relates that as much as people tried to console Yaakov over the loss of Yosef, "he refused to be comforted." Regarding this inability to be comforted, the Medrash relates that a matron asked Rav Yosi: It is written, "'For Yehudah prevailed above his brothers'" (meaning that Yehudah was the de facto leader of the brothers, and his actions were to be viewed an example to follow), and yet we read (upon the death of his wife), "'And Yehudah was comforted,'" while this man (Yaakov) was the father of them all, (and would presumably act in a similar fashion to that of his son Yehudah) and yet he refused to be comforted! "'You can be comforted for the dead,'" Rav Yosi answered, "'but not for the living.'"

When someone has truly died, there is a certain despair associated with the absolute finality of the situation felt by the mourner. Because of this despair, all hope evaporates, and there is nothing realistically left for which to long. The person will not return. This finality allows a person to accept consolation and condolences. Comfort over the loss will eventually come. However, as long as a person is alive or the possibility of life exists, it is impossible to totally comfort or console someone over the tragic situation that they mourn. There is still some scintilla of hope that the person will recover, that the person will be found. As long as that tiny bit of hope exists, no finality exists to the

situation, and that bit of hope will be clung to with great strength. There is no consolation. Yaakov, deep down in his heart, somehow sensed that Yosef indeed alive. He therefore was incapable of being consoled. And that is what made Yaakov's mourning different from Yehudah's.

However, Yaakov's mourning is the same as ours over the city of Jerusalem and the Bais HaMikdosh. For so many years we, and our ancestors before us, have been engaged in a process of mourning. Every year at this time, that mourning is highlighted, and we ask G-d for comfort. But that comfort and consolation never seems to erase our ability to mourn. We know that something is still lacking, a piece of our nation is missing. The fact that we can still mourn, that we cannot be comforted over our loss, is indicative of the fact that hope still exists. Jerusalem and the Temple are indeed alive. They will be restored to vibrant health once again. However, until that time comes, we mourn. And when we mourn properly, we appreciate the fact, in the here and now, that Jerusalem is indeed alive. We can share in the joy of knowing that Jerusalem is not totally lost, and a time will come when it and the Holy Temple will be restored to their former glory.

May that time come soon.