

WHAT ARE WE MISSING ON TISHA B'AV?

by Rabbi Label Lam

Woe to them, the children that have been exiled from the table of their father. (Talmud Brochos 3A)

Amongst the things we refrain from on the 9th of Av are; food, friendship, learning Torah, music and more. What are we meant to get out this exercise of fasting and looking forlorn?

Yitzchok Blazer ztl., was invited by a group of young scholars to their town to deliver a lecture. He ascended the platform wrapped in his talis and began; "A Jew once lost his way in a forest. The harder he tried to get out of it the more it closed in on him. After wandering for about two days, he almost gave up hope of finding his way out when he found another Jew coming toward him. Joyfully he ran over to the other Jew and asked him to show him the way out of the forest. The second Jew asked him, "How long have you been lost in the forest?" "Two days!" answered the first. "I have been blundering here for a few weeks already" exclaimed the second Jew, "and I have not yet found the way. You who have been lost for only two days are asking me?"

Yitzchok Blazer raised his voice and cried, "Gentlemen! You are young men who have been lost in life for just a short time, but I am already old and have been lost for years. I am still looking for a way out of the forest of tangled character and you ask me to show you the way? With that Reb Itzele broke into loud sobbing and the congregation cried with him.

Was Reb Itzele really more lost than they? Was it then all futility the lifetime he dedicated to self improvement? Was he just being dramatic or overly modest? No!

On Erev Rosh HaShana a number of years ago I made haste to head to the local Mikvah-ritual bath-to beat the rush. There was only one other person there and he was just entering the "pool". He shouted repeatedly, "OHHHH! The fires of Gehinom (Hell)", as he inched into the extra hot waters of the Mikvah. A little scared but still determined I prepared for my entry and found out that he had been right. It was hot but there was no turning back. I crept continually forward until I was almost entirely immersed and lo and behold there was the other fellow, his head bobbing like a beach ball. Steam rising all around and he had this serene grimace on his face. I couldn't resist. I said to him, "We get used to Gehinom, don't we!"

On the 9th of Av we are like little children sent away from the table. The child sent to his room can

artfully distract himself. His parents wait for the breaking point. He might then even be willing to admit his faults like fighting with his siblings etc. That time never comes. Why? He's found some candies, there's a cell phone, a computer and a treasure of other goodies. He's forgotten that he's being punished.

The father realizing that the child is too busily engaged in his "things" forbids him for a time to play with these toys and those. Suddenly, he feels alone and isolated from the family. Tears begin to stream. He cries out longingly to his father and is invited to the table again with a pleasant mixture of joy and humility.

On the 9th of Av we are to realize that we are lost, lost in exile. In so doing and to that extent we become candidates to be found. Therefore for a day we are removed from those things that give us either comfort or consolation in our present station. And so while we find ourselves deprived of Torah, the company of good friends, music, and food, we might begin to wonder profoundly: "What are we missing on Tisha B'Av?" Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.