

LEARNING TO LOVE WHAT IS!

by Rabbi Label Lam

Moshiach is born on Tisha B'Av (Talmud)

Any generation in which the Temple was not built in (with) its days is considered as if it was destroyed in (with) its days. (Talmud)

There is no light like the light that emanates from darkness. (Zohar)

The 9th of Av is one of those days in which we allow ourselves to wallow in the misery of a brutal history and indulge in thoughts of the extended exile and our many sufferings. Admittedly, it seems ultra heavy and it is an ominous reality to meet face to face. What benefit do we have from this exercise? Why follow the black and hurtful lines of history when there are so many brighter and rosier points to visit?

I hope the situation never comes your way. It happened to me once and although I was woefully unprepared things happily turned out alright. What do you say to someone who is seriously contemplating ending it all?

Here's a scenario I heard about from a very clever individual: Imagine that you are sitting in a reception area in a fancy office on the 77th floor of the Empire State Building. Suddenly the elevator opens and a gentleman with a disheveled appearance walks over to the window which he throws wide open. He backs up like he's readying himself to take a running leap and before he does so you are able to halt him temporarily.

You ask him, "Why are you about to do such a crazy and foolish thing?" He shows you a piece of paper with a list of 49 items that he begins to recite aloud; 1) Lost my job 2) Wife left me 3) Broke 4) Hungry 5) Dog died 6) Chronic incurable diseases 7) Homeless etc. That's just the beginning of the list and any single item would be enough to drive the average man over the top. He's got the worst situation you ever heard of or imagined. You're ready to agree with his morbid conclusion. What can you say to him?

Of course, you acknowledge his pain but you might challenge him with the following question: What if on top of all the 49 things there was also a 50th and that is that you were also completely blind? Today you tapped your way over, pressed the 77th floor button, before tapping your way to the window and as you are about to leap, lo and behold the lights go on and you are granted vision. You can see! Would you choose to jump at that moment? For sure the fellow will say, "NO!" "Why not?",

you would have to challenge him. He would probably answer, "I'd go around and check it all out!" So then you tell him, "You aren't blind! You can see! Use those eyes to find goodness!"

The ravages of long exile tend to rob us of our sense of purpose and direction. We become easily distracted by the small and silly. Eventually we are living so small, we are at constant risk of losing our very identities. We don't see. The suicide is not dramatic but incremental and accumulative, as moment after moment is deadened, by the activity of killing of time. How true what Warren Buffet had said, "Habits are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to break."

Being in exile is like living at the airport. I was once stuck at JFK for 24 hours due to a snow storm. There was seemingly no way out. Every "courtesy desk" employee was as frustrated, lost and discourteous as we were. One disoriented oriental gent on his cell phone was heard venting, "I don't know where I am! I don't know who I am! I don't know why I am!" I realized I should just make good use of the many Holy Books in my bag. The Chofetz Chaim teaches that we are currently rebuilding the Temple if not "in our days" but at least "with our days." By indulging our imaginations for one day in things oy vay we can build it all back by learning to love what is! Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.