

# YEARNING FOR ERETZ YIRSROEL

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

Parashas VaEschanan always has an upbeat feel to it since it always falls on Shabbos Nachamu, the first of seven Shabbosim of consolation after Tisha B'Av. All the pent up simchah from the Three Weeks usually explodes to the surface on this Shabbos, especially as people head for their favorite vacation spots and get ready for three weeks of R & R.

It seems somewhat hypocritical. It's not like the Bais HaMikdosh came back all of a sudden. All of the things that we mourned for during the Three Weeks remain things to mourn about, especially given how quickly we can snap out of our mourning on a dime. Was all of it so superficial?

That is what I had thought in previous years, at least with respect to myself. However, after having spent a year in personal mourning myself, which ended literally one week before the Three Weeks began, I have a whole different take on what it means to mourn for anything that is dear and missing from life.

For example, I cannot say that I was not relieved to reach the end of the 12 months of mourning. I did not miss my father any less at the end of the 12 months than I did at the beginning, which was an awful lot. Even from 6,000 miles, thanks to Skype, we still shared a tremendous amount, and his presence never stopped being an important part of my daily life.

But the period of mourning is intentionally restricting, which every mourner accepts upon himself or herself without question. It is one of the last real acts of love one can perform for the lost relative, and an important way to concretize what can only become a eternal spiritual connection now that the physical one is no more. Nevertheless, and especially if you are a male, your life begins to revolve around the mourning. Even after the Shivah is over and all the obvious signs of mourning have been removed, there are still the restricted activities, like not shaving or getting a haircut, being unable to buy new clothing, and not being able to listen to joyous music and to attend smachos, such as weddings. Even eating at a siyum is not a simple matter during the time of aveilus—mourning.

And, of course, there is the daily need to be in shul for every minyan to lead the dovening or to at least say Kaddish. All of a sudden, you find your life becoming a daily trek from Shacharis to Minchah, and then to Ma'ariv, and then to Shacharis all over again. No sooner would I come home from Ma'ariv than I would start thinking about Shacharis the next morning.

Even though most of the praying obligations usually stop after 11 months, it wasn't until the end of

the 12 months that I finally felt I had permission to disappear from the public eye once again. It was so nice to be just another person in the minyan, and to be able to doven at my own pace without having to race to finish so that I would be ready to say Kaddish on time. It was back to just Me-and-God once again.

On the other hand, part of me didn't want to let go either. Ending the 12 months was like saying good-bye for good to my father, and letting my father drift off to another level of reality to which I have no access. The picture on the wall helps, but it lacks the life that was my father. I cannot make the picture smile any more than it already does, or make my father laugh, as I so enjoyed doing.

So, like most people who lose a loved one, you find a middle path. You find a way to hold on to the sense of loss while moving forward with what you still have and can still physically and emotionally enjoy. You leave a part of your heart available for the sadness of the loss while using the majority of it to get joy from life, without which serving God becomes almost impossible. The Talmud records the following discussion:

Our Rabbis taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the second time, large numbers of Jews became ascetics, obligating themselves neither to eat meat nor to drink wine. Rebi Yehoshua got into conversation with them and asked them, *"My sons, why do you not eat meat nor drink wine?"*

They replied: *"Shall we eat meat which used to be brought as an offering on the altar, now that this altar is missing? Shall we drink wine which used to be poured as a libation on the altar, but no longer?"* He answered them: *"If that is so, we should not eat bread either, because the Meal Offerings have ceased."*

They said: *"We will manage with fruit."*

*"We should not eat fruit either,"* [he pressed,] *"because there is no longer an offering of First Fruits."* *"Then we will manage with other fruits,"* [they countered].

*"But,"* [he continued,] *"we should not drink water, because there is no longer any ceremony of the pouring of water."*

For this they could find no answer, so he told them: *"My sons, listen to me. To not mourn at all is impossible because the blow has occurred. To mourn too much is also not possible, because we do not impose on the community a hardship which the majority cannot endure . . . The rabbis therefore have ordained that a man may stucco his house, but he should leave a little bare . . . A man can prepare a full-course banquet, but he should leave out an item or two . . . A woman can put on all her ornaments, but leave off one or two . . . As it says, 'If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I fail to recall you, if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my greatest joy' (Tehillim 137:5-6)."* (Bava Basra 60b)

There is another level to this discussion, which takes the negative energy of mourning for the loss of the Temple and transforms it into a positive yearning for redemption. And, along the way, it also provides a nice segue to this week's parshah as well.

Dovid HaMelech wrote:

*You will arise and show mercy to Tzion, for the time to favor her, the appointed time will have come. For, your servants have wanted her stones, and have cherished her dust. (Tehillim 102:14-15)*

There is another way to mourn for something from the past, and that is to yearn for it to happen again in the future. The moment we cease to yearn for something to happen again in the future is the moment that we cease to mourn for something that was lost in the past, and we lose the merit to be a part of it, as the Malbim explained on the following verses from Yirmiyahu:

*So said God: "Sing, O Ya'akov, with gladness, exult on the peaks of the nations; announce, laud [God], and say, "O God, save Your people, the remnant of Yisroel!" Behold, I will bring them from the land of the North and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, the pregnant and birthing together; a great congregation will return here. With weeping they will come and through supplications I will bring them; I will guide them on streams of water, on a direct path in which they will not stumble; for I have been a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn." (Yirmiyahu 31:6-8)*

At the end of their exile, the oppression will be removed from them, and they will be joyous because they will be on the peak of the nations. The gentiles will give them honor and they will be their heads, instead of being disgraced and lowered amongst them as they were at first. Ya'akov will be the masses of the people, and the lesser amongst them; Yisroel are the great ones. The joyousness from being at the peak of the nations will be Ya'akov's only, and not Yisroel's, because they will want to return His Presence to Tzion. However, at that time they will "announce" and publicly proclaim, and "praise" God when they say, "O God, save Your [righteous] people, the remnant of Yisroel," because they will want the true salvation of the ingathering of the exile and return to Tzion. Then it will be like that, that God will return them: Behold, I will bring them . . . (Malbim)

It is with an example of such yearning that this week's parshah begins, with Moshe Rabbeinu pleading with God to allow him to enter Eretz Yisroel. Moshe Rabbeinu was about to go to the World-to-Come, which, no matter Paradise-like Eretz Yisroel was going to become, had to be a better place, certainly for enjoying the light of God. Why, then, did Moshe Rabbeinu prefer to push off eternal life a little longer for a temporal in the Holy Land?

The answer is in the Talmud, but not where most people think. The Talmud states:

Three wonderful gifts were given by The Holy One, Blessed is He, to the Jewish people, and all of them were given through hardship. They are Torah, Eretz Yisroel, and, The World-to-Come. (Brochos 5a)

You see, Moshe Rabbeinu had Torah, and he was about to get the World-to-Come. However, he was going to leave the world without the third one: Eretz Yisroel, and nothing, he figured, could replace that experience in the World-to-Come.

For Moshe Rabbeinu, that may not have been true. But for the rest of us, it is a package deal: We need the first to appreciate the second, but we need the second to implement the first in order to get to the third. Yearning for Eretz Yisroel, as Moshe Rabbeinu did in this week's parshah, validates our mourning for what once was, and our desire for what is meant to be, and allows for the transition to happen mercifully.

Text

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Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! [www.thirtysix.org](http://www.thirtysix.org)