

THE NINE DAYS

by Dr. Nosson Chayim Leff

We have begun 'The Nine Days' -- a period of national mourning. These somber days start with the first day of the month of Av -- the day on which Aharon Hakohein was niftar (passed away). They culminate on Tish'a Be'Av, the ninth day of the month. That was the day on which the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed. Which Beis HaMikdash, the First or the Second? Both on the same day! Clearly - Tiish'a Be'Av is not a happy day for our people.

In trying to handle this period of national mourning, it is important to distinguish between "Atzvus" -- depression -- and "Aveilus" -- the sadness of feeling bereft. Atzvus is the dull pain inflicted by the dark forces of self-destruction that lurk within us. But Aveilus is distinct from Atzvus. Aveilus is the unhappiness that a person feels because he or she has lost something dear.

What have we lost? The Beis HaMikdash and the easier access to HaShem that the Mikdash made possible. More generally, we are mourning the fact that "the Shechina is in Golus." That phrase is shorthand for the wide gap that has opened between HaShem and ourselves. That gap, in turn, is shorthand for the many sources of grief that assail us daily throughout the year. These painful features of our lives include: the terrible Hester Panim with which we have to contend; the ensuing Chilul HaShem; people who treat other people in ways incompatible with both being created be'tzelem Elokim; people whose self-satisfaction permits them to make other people unhappy; 'leaders' who do not lead; 'followers' who do not follow.

The list is long, for it includes the many, many things that are wrong in our ruchniyus lives. These conditions cause us pain every day of the year. Tish'a Be'Av can be viewed as the day set aside to focus on and to express our sense of bereavement.

Clearly, we have much for which to mourn. But -- the Seforim tell us -- even during these Nine Days, our Torah and our Davening should be be'simcha (with joy).

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