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## **A Sense of Loss: Tisha B'Av**

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There is so much tragic loss around the world, both personal and global. This week, I am reeling from the senseless death of four New Yorkers, two of whom have deep connections to our community. May the families of Wesley LePatner, Julia Hyman, Officer Didarul Islam, and Aland Etienne find some comfort.

Often, the sense of loss leading up to and including Tisha' B'Av, evades me. Commemorating the destruction of the Second Temple, a building we have no affinity for, can be difficult for us modern Jews to relate to. But all of us, especially this year, can relate to mourning a life we once knew. The Israelites' entire world revolved around temple service and the destruction of the Temple not only robbed them of a physical space, but of a way of being.

It is this experience of loss that we will confront when we open up Eicha, the Book of Lamentations, and read the words of Jeremiah, about how we have been exiled from our land. We tried to adjust, to settle amongst the other nations, but **לֹא מָצָאָה מְנוּחַ**. We could find no rest (1:3).

Jeremiah, in turn, lifted these words from the story of Noah. There too, we confronted a family who was dealing with the loss of life as they knew it. The whole world had been taken from them, washed away by God's flood. When the rain finally stops, Noah sends out a dove to test if there is dry land, and the Torah tells us: **וְלֹא מָצָאָה הַיּוֹנָה מְנוּחַ**.

But the dove could not find a resting place. It is the same words: **לֹא מָצָאָה מְנוּחַ**. Just like the dove could find no rest, the Jewish people wandered in *galut*, in exile, pining for a time and place that they once knew—where they could rest their weary feet, so to speak, and begin the job of rebuilding.

In a small way, I find comfort in this historical reality. That we as a people have felt lost before and somehow have returned, perhaps better and stronger.

Indeed, experts tell us that there is tremendous growth in loss. When we are wandering, unmoored and despondent, it is in these moments that we often seek and find clarity. Viktor E. Frankl, in *Man's Search for Meaning*, famously said, "If there is meaning in life at all, then there must be meaning in suffering.... Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete" (p. 67).

R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905), the Sefat Emet, says it like this: When a person admits and confronts that he or she is lost, whether it be a physical or a spiritual loss, then he

can truly return.... She may truly be redeemed (Sefat Emet, Ki Tetze 1878, English paraphrased).

When you confront loss and truly embrace its inevitability, you can begin to return.

This is how the Book of Eicha ends:

הָשִׁיבֵנוּ ה' אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּב [וְנִשְׁוֶבָה] חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם:

We will return, O LORD, to Yourself, And let us return; Renew our days as of old! (5:21)

Notice that when we return, we don't return to the exact same way we were—we don't return to kedem—but c'kedem, like the days of old. A world without our loved ones in it, will never be the same.

Living through a time of loss and dislocation will ultimately lead to a new day. I pine for the way things should be, but when we return, we return changed, with a deeper understanding of what's truly important, with new guideposts, with a new sense of purpose.

The road ahead might still be one of "*lo matzah manoch*," an inability to find rest. But let it be unrest, not born from external forces beyond our control but an internal unrest, one where we look out into the world and feel agitated, unable to accept injustice. Let this state of unrest rock us out of complacency. We must resist manoch, we must resist rest, until we reach a state of ultimate redemption.