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### In Preparation for the Three Weeks

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There is a majestic *aggada* that sets a tone for the coming three weeks and reflects the way that I have been feeling of late. This short *sugya* deals with the question of God’s tears. Where, if anywhere, is the Master of the World able to cry? These past few months I have been asking that question of myself. Where, with in my *avodat hashem*, is there room for tears? Am I able to bring my full self into my *davening*?

Come and join me on journey through just a few Talmudic lines that carry me at this time of the year. Perhaps they can carry you as well.

The *Gemara* in *Masechet Chagiga* 5b says the following:

#### Talmud Bavli, Masechet Chagiga. 5b:

מסכת חגיגה ה:

*But if you will not hear her, My soul will weep in secret for the pride (gayva)* (Jeremiah 13:17). Rav Shmuel bar Inya said in the name of Rav, “The Holy Blessed One has a place and its name is *Secret (mistarim)*...”

וְאִם לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּהָ בְּמִסְתָּרִים תִּבְכֶּה נַפְשִׁי מִפְּנֵי גְוָה (ירמיהו יג:יז) אָמַר רַב שְׁמוּאֵל בְּרַ אִינְיָ מִשְׁמִיָּה דְרַב מְקוּם יֵשׁ לוֹ לְהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וּמִסְתָּרִים שְׁמוּ...

Apparently God has a hidden place. A place where humans, and even angels, may not enter. What does God do when alone? God expresses sadness through tears, God weeps. The Rabbis are bothered by the application of sadness to the Creator of the World. They do not appear to be bothered by the anthropopathism in general, rather the emotion of sadness is incongruous with God.

But is there weeping in the presence of the Holy Blessed One? For behold Rav Papa said, “There is no grief in the presence of the Holy One; for it is said (1 Chronicles 16:27) *Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and joy are His sanctuary.*”

וּמִי אֵיכָא בְכִיָּה קְמִיָּה הַקַּב"ה ? וְהָאֵמַר רַב פַּפָּא אֵין עֲצִיבוּת לְפָנֵי הַקַּב"ה שְׁנָאֵמַר (דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים א טז:כז) הוּד וְהִדְרָ לְפָנָיו עַז וְחִדְוָה בְּמִקְמוֹ?

There is another Biblical verse that claims that there is only joy before the Creator. In Chronicles 1 (16:27) we read הוּד וְהִדְרָ לְפָנָיו עַז וְחִדְוָה בְּמִקְמוֹ *Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and joy are His sanctuary*. This verse again talks of divine emotion explicitly, but speaks of overflowing joy (חִדְוָה). The Rabbis of the Talmud now have two Biblical references that appear to be in conflict – one that describes divine tears and sadness and a second that describes divine joy and majesty.

There is no contradiction; the one case [refers to] the inner chambers, the other case [refers to] the outer chambers.

לֹא קָשִׁיָּא הָא בְּבִתֵּי גּוּאֵי [פְּנִים] הָא בְּבִתֵּי בְרָאֵי [חוּץ].

The Talmud resolves this apparent Biblical contradiction by limiting God’s tears to a specific place. Divine crying only happens in one of these chambers and not the other, each verse is meant to describe a different chamber. The “inner chamber” represents the hidden workings of God. A place of

such depth that human beings do not truly understand its ultimate meaning. The “outer chamber” represents the way in which God interacts with humanity. We experience God through God’s characteristics as they are felt in this world. And so the question remains from this passage in *Chagiga*, where are the divine tears, inside or outside?

Rashi on this text reads the Gemara in its simple sense. Generally speaking, God only cries in the inner chambers, in a place that we cannot access. This place is known as *מִסְתָּרִים*, secret. However, when the Temple was destroyed the disaster was of such a magnitude that God even cried on the outside. On *Tisha b’Av* we experience divine sadness and tears; and we are meant to be moved so deeply that we shed tears as well.

The Gemara concludes:

And are there really no tears in the external chamber? But behold it is written *And in that day did the Lord, the God of Hosts, call to weeping and to lamentation, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth* (Isaiah 22:12)? The destruction of the Temple is different, for even the angels of peace wept [over it]; for it is said *Behold for their altar they cried without; the angels of peace wept bitterly* (Isaiah 33:7).

בבתי בראי לא והא כתיב (ישעיהו, כב:יב)  
 וְיִקְרָה אֲדָנִי יְיָ וְהוּא צְבָאוֹת בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לְבָכִי  
 וּלְמִסְפָּד וּלְקִרְחָה וּלְחִגְרָה שָׁק. שאני חרבן  
 בית המקדש דאפילו מלאכי שלום בכו  
 שנאמר (ישעיהו לג:ז) הֲנִי אֲרָאֶלֶם צָעֲקוּ חֲצָה  
 מִלְאֲכֵי שְׁלוֹם מֵרַ יִבְכּוּן

It is difficult for me to muster enough emotional energy on *Tisha b’Av* to actually cry for the loss of the Temple. It feels so distant and represents a fundamentally different method of worship. I am sad at the loss of what must have been an extraordinary portal of connection between God and human kind. And yet, when I become aware of human tragedies around the world, I am moved to tears. Hearing of a tragic death or about the sickness of a young child, I imagine that God has retreated to the “secret” place and left humanity to our devices. Sadly, without God’s intervention there are too many tears in the world.

There is another way to read this passage. Rabbeinu Chananel (lived and taught in Kairouan, Tunisia, and died in 1053, just a few years after Rashi was born) offers a radical approach to this Gemara that presents us with a very different way to experience the presence of the Divine in our lives. He inverts the paradigm that Rashi set up. For Rashi, God only expresses sadness in the inner or secret chamber, however the destruction of the Temple was different and divine tears were shed in public.

Rabbeinu Chananel claims that the chambers are reversed. In the secret, inner, chamber God is always joyous; while in the outer chamber God expresses sadness. The outer chamber represents the natural unfolding of human history – it is only from our limited human perspective that God cries. In truth, the essence of the Creator of the World is joy.

Rabbi Moshe Shapira, in his *חרבן ונחמה* on אפיקי מים developed this approach in two separate essays, ענינים ז ו-ט. He explained that according to the conclusion of the *Gemara* there is something unique that happened(s) on *Tisha b’Av*. On that one day, even in the inner divine sanctum there are tears. The tragedy of that day is so great, that even in the secret place God expresses sadness through tears.

Rabbi Shapira Wrote:

And we find that in general that regarding the inner essence that guides creation to its essence, there is no weeping. And even though from the perspective of the fixed order of the world we see sadness and weeping, none the less since the inner essence of the [divine] desire for all is only for the good in any case there is only “*strength and joy are His sanctuary.*” For since “a world of love I will build” (Psalm 89:3), behold in the inner sanctum has only the influence of love and goodness and no sense of strict judgement...But *Tisha b’Av* is different for it is an exception and there is a model of weeping also in the inner sanctum.

ונמצה שבדרך כלל הרי בפנימיות ההנהגה שמוביל את הבריאה לתכליתה הא לא שייך בכיה, ועל אף שמצד סדר העולם הקבוע רואים הנהגה של עצב ובכי, מ"מ כיון שפנימיות הרצון בכל זה אינה אלא לתכלית טוב, ממילא כי אם "עז וְחִדְוָה בְּמִקְמוֹ" דכיון ד"עולם חֶסֶד יִבְנֶה" (תה' פט:ג) הרי לפני ולפנים אין כאן כי אם השפעת חסד והטבה בלי מהלך של דין...אלא דשאני ט"ב שיוצא מן הכלל הזה ואמנם יש הנהגה של בכי גם לפני-ולפנים

We live in a world with many tears. This text, together with Rabbeinu Chananel’s approach, teaches us that sometimes even God in God’s essence weeps. For that Rabbis, perhaps those divine tears are limited to *Tisha b’Av*. I submit that maybe God has been crying in some deep place that we do not quite yet understand.

As we prepare for the three weeks, a time of communal sadness, I offer the prayer that the gates of tears remain open (ב"מ נט., ברכות לב:) and that we - as individuals and as a community - merit a divine smile.



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