

**Tisha B'Av:**  
**A Holiday of Distance**  
**Rabbi Jeffrey Fox**  
*Rosh Yeshiva, Maharat*

There are holidays of closeness - Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot - and there is a holiday of distance - and that is the Ninth of Av

ישנה מועדים של קירוב – שלש רגלים –  
– וישנו מועד של ריחוק, וזהו ט' באב<sup>1</sup>

Rav Shlomo Wolbe, z"l, developed a concept that he heard from his teacher, Rabbeinu Yeruchum Levovitz, z"l, of a "מועד של ריחוק" – *a Holiday of distance.* There are times built into the Jewish calendar that we are meant to feel far away from the presence of *Hashem*. This week, just as we entered the month of Tammuz, many of us feel that distance.

The Gemara<sup>2</sup> teaches, "כל השערים ננעלו, חוץ משערי דמעות" - All the gates are closed, except for the gates of tears." These are understood to be the human tears that are shed in this world. Rav Shimshon Dovid Pinkus<sup>3</sup>, z"l, explained that these tears are the tears of the Ninth of Av. He goes on to elaborate on the power of those deeply felt emotions that come on the Ninth of Av.

Perhaps we can understand that the times when we are feeling distance are the times when not only we are crying but Hashem is shedding tears as well. The Rabbis<sup>4</sup> teach that there comes a time when Hashem becomes so overwhelmed that the Divine presence retreats into a hidden place a is There "מקום יש שאין כל בריה יכולה להכניס ומסתרים שמו, ושם אבכה" - There is a place that no creature can enter. Its name is mistarim (the hidden place), and there I (God) cry."

I suspect that during these past two weeks God has retreated into that hidden place to cry Divine tears. This time of year, in advance of the three weeks between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av, is a time of feeling distance; and that distance was made even greater as a result of this unfathomable tragedy.

What is a response that might move us in a different direction?

On the heels of the Ninth of Av comes שבת נחמו, the Shabbat of comfort. In fact, for seven weeks we read Haftarot that are meant to give comfort for the loss of the Temple. That time leads us into Elul,

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<sup>1</sup> See שמה pages מאמרי ימי הרצון, see also his עלי שור ה"ב שער ג' פרק י"א, עמי תיא n/ז"ח where he develops this concept at length. Rav Moshe Shapira in his recent volume on the three weeks, אפיקי מים, describes a similar concept that he calls מועדים רעים (see ט, ה, ל, ז, ח, ט, לו) he links this to the laughing of R. Akiva at the end of Makot)

<sup>2</sup> בבא מציעא נ"ט ע"ב

<sup>3</sup> ספר גלות ונחמה, עמי צג

<sup>4</sup> See the Gemara במסתרים תכבה נפשי 13:17 in Jeremiah ע"ב חגיגה



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Rosh ha-Shana and Sukkot, “מועדים של קירוב” - *Holidays of closeness.*” Such is the cycle of the Jewish calendar and such is the cycle of Jewish life, indeed all human life.

If only we could all learn to experience the closeness without walking through the darkness of the distance.



*Rabbi Jeffrey S. Fox, Rosh HaYeshiva of Maharat, was the first graduate of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Upon graduation he served as the Rabbi of Kehilat Keshet: The Community Synagogue of Tenafly and Englewood for seven years. In Rabbi Fox's tenure at Keshet, the community grew three-fold from thirty families to nearly one hundred. During that time Rabbi Fox also taught at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah as well as the Florence Melton Adult Education School in Bergen County. He also served on the board of the Synagogue Leadership Initiative of the UJA of NNJ. Rabbi Fox is a Senior Rabbinic Fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute and has also been a member of the faculty of the Drisha Institute, the Florence Melton Adult Education School in Westchester County, and Hadar.*