

REEH (DEUTERONOMY 11:26-16:17)**You!**

2006 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

There are a number of correlations between Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur. They are the only full-day fasts; the others run from dawn to night. Bathing and other comforts are prohibited. Both days are spent in serious contemplation. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is a day during which one reflects upon his sins of the past, begs G-d for forgiveness, and makes new commitments for the future. Tisha B'Av, a day that has produced countless calamities for our Nation, is a day of sorrow.

(It has been said that although the practices of both days are similar, the reasons are very different. On the highly spiritual day of Yom Kippur, we rise to the level of angels, and on Tisha B'Av we descend to the level of grieving mourners. "On Yom Kippur," the saying goes, "who needs to eat? On Tisha B'Av, who CAN eat?")

The anguish of Tisha B'Av is so all-encompassing that it seems to affect the entire month. Our Sages tell us that "From the time the month of Av begins, we curtail expressions of joy." The month of Av is considered an inauspicious time. We are even supposed to try to postpone lawsuits until the end of the month if possible.

Yet, once we hit mid-month, things seem to change. "There were no greater days of celebration in Israel than the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur." (Mishnah, Taanis, 4:8) The Talmud describes how the available bachelorettes borrowed dresses (so as not to embarrass one who had none) and went down to the vineyards to meet eligible bachelors. These two days, Yom Kippur and the Fifteenth of Av, were the two main days for arranging marriages.

Doesn't that seem a bit odd? Yom Kippur, a day of serious spiritual yearning, a time of forgiveness of sins! Is that the right time to arrange a date?! The month of Av, a time during which we have shed oceans of tears! Is that an appropriate time for a singles event?!

Absolutely! One of the reasons for wearing white on Yom Kippur, rather than sackcloth, is that we demonstrate our faith that G-d WILL forgive us and grant us a good year. Yes, on Tisha B'Av we mourn and cry over our collective sorrows. But, the Shabbos after Tisha B'Av is the time that we read Isaiah's exhortation of comfort and consolation. The future WILL be bright! We WILL marry and bring new families into the world! Things WILL be good!

Israel is a very scary place to live right now. Our enemies are emboldened. There is little doubt that there will be more rocket attacks; it's just a question of time. It is hard to see a positive side.

Against that backdrop, isn't it beautiful to see that Aliyah is up? These "crazy" Jews are leaving the relative safety of the Diaspora to move to a war zone! I heard one immigrant quoted as saying, "Israel is our motherland, and our mother needs us!" (Wipe your eyes, and read on.)

Such optimism! Such courage! Such faith! Aren't our brothers and sisters wonderful? Like a young single woman on Yom Kippur who has just made a commitment to be more righteous, they trust that there is a good year coming. Like a young single man during the month of Av that has seen such devastation, they shake off the dust and ashes and build a new future.

Yes, these are wonderful people, who are doing wonderful things for their People (and themselves!) But what about us? What about you and me?

No, this is not (necessarily) a call for mass Aliyah. But there are things we can do.

See, I am placing before you a blessing and a curse. (Deuteronomy. 11:26)

In this way, Moses introduces blessings to those who follow G-d's ways, and avoid idol worship and immorality.

Kli Yakar points out an interesting nuance that is not readily visible in the English translation. "*See, I am placing before you a blessing and a curse.*" The word "see" is written in singular, ("Re'eh", not "Re'u") while "you" is written in plural. ("Lifneichem", not "Lifanecha")

"**SEE**," says Moses. "I'm talking to all of you. Each and every one of you. Every Jew is responsible for every other Jew."

You can't move to Israel right now? Okay, work for Israel now. Pray for Israel now. Learn Torah for Israel now. Write to your elected officials for Israel now. Vote for our supporters for Israel. Vote out our detractors for Israel. Commit yourself to do more Mitzvahs for Israel.

YOU do it now. Don't assume that someone else will do it for you. Don't assume that everyone else's collective efforts will suffice. Elections can be won or lost on one vote. Fourteen million Jews learning Torah and doing Mitzvahs aren't anywhere near as powerful as fourteen million and one.

Do it now. Next year, with G-d's help, will be a great year. So will the rest of this year!

Have a great Shabbos.

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