

Shabbat Tisha B'Av – Dialectic Time Bifurcated

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Based on Eli Rubin's analysis of a the Rebbi's Sicha

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Today is Tisha B'Av and yet we eat, drink and rejoice. For three weeks we have been building up our mourning customs, not listening to music, not eating meat and wine, and so on. All this to bring us to a state of mind wherein we can realize just how bad our situation is without the Temple. And, finally, when we get to the actual day of the destruction ... we rejoice!

The Lubavitcher Rebbe has a very interesting discussion on this phenomenon of Tisha B'Av Dachui which allows us to realize a fundamental aspect of our existence: the dialectic nature of our existence. That is, we tend to think of things as either happy or sad, we tend to separate our holidays into mourning or celebrating; but in truth there is a coexistence, a dialectic existence.

To understand Tisha B'Av better, the Rebbi brings the famous Mishna in Taanit:

משנה מסכת תענית פרק ד משנה ו

חמשה דברים אירעו את אבותינו בשבעה עשר בתמוז וחמשה בתשעה באב בשבעה עשר בתמוז נשתברו הלוחות ובטל התמיד והובקעה העיר ושרף אפוסטמוס את התורה והעמיד צלם בהיכל. בתשעה באב נגזר על אבותינו שלא יכנסו לארץ, וחרב הבית בראשונה ובשניה, ונלכדה ביתר, ונחרשה העיר. משנכנס אב ממעטין בשמחה:

All bad, all destructive.

However, the Rebbi goes on to bring 2 other, relatively well known, sources that tell a very different story.

1) A lion arose, that is Nebuchadnezzar, ... in the constellation of the lion ... the fifth month (Av), and ruined "Ariel, the city where David camped" (Isaiah 29:1), in order that ... a lion shall come, that is the Holy One, blessed be He, ... in the constellation of the lion, [as it is written] "and I will turn their mourning into joy" (Jeremiah 31:12), and build Ariel, [as it is written] "the Lord is the builder of Jerusalem; He will gather the outcasts of Israel." (Psalms 147:2)

ילקוט שמעוני ירמיהו רמז רנט

אשר היה דבר ה' אליו בימי יאשיהו בן אמון מלך יהודה וגו' עד תום עשתי עשרה שנה וגו', אמר רב "עלה אריה במזל אריה והחריב את אריאל", "עלה אריה" זה נבוכדנאצר דכתיב עלה אריה מסבכו, "במזל אריה" עד גלות ירושלים בחדש החמישי, "והחריב אריאל" הוי אריאל אריאל קרית חנה דוד, על מנת שיבא אריה במזל אריה ויבנה אריאל. "יבא אריה", זה הקדוש ברוך הוא דכתיב ביה: אריה שאג מי לא יירא, "במזל אריה" והפכתי אבלם לששון, "ויבנה אריאל" בונה ירושלים ה' נדחי ישראל יכנס, ויהי בימי יהויקים ויהי בימי צרה (כתוב ברמז תקצ"ו):

So the month of Av is not all bad. It is a month of destruction (hurban) and a month of rebuilding (banyan).

The Rebbi brings another telling source:

2) It occurred that a Jew was plowing his field: An Arab passed by and heard the ox bellow, he said ... "the Temple has been destroyed." It bellowed a second time and he said ... "the messianic king has been born."

תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת ברכות פרק ב דף יז עמוד א – ב [תורגם לעברית]
מעשה ביהודי אחד שהיה חורש. צעק השור לפניו. עבר ערבי אחד ושמע את הצעקה של השור. אמר לו הערבי, יהודי יהודי, שחרר את השוורים מיתד המחרשה כי חרב בית מקדש שלכם.

MAN: Wow! Do you understand what is being said here? The very fact that there is no Beit Hamikdash is enough to make life not worth living! Stop what you're doing. There is no point to your labor. There is no point to plowing, to preparing the land, to cultivating food, to eating, to life!

But then the Yerushalmi goes on to make an even more amazing statement:

צעק השור פעם שניה. אמר לו הערבי, יהודי יהודי, קשור את השוורים ליתד המחרשה כי משיח שלכם נולד!

MAN: Wow! So the very fact that the Mashiach was born, not that he came, that he was born – is enough to give life meaning. The mere fact that there is hope for a better future – is enough to make life worth living.

[As an aside we must ask why is the information being given by an Ox via an Arab? I would suggest that the Ox, or any animal really, represents nature, being in tune with nature. It is an Ox because the Jew is using nature to conquer nature, as commanded in the first chapter of Genesis (1:28). Now the Ox is simply shouting out what is the nature of our reality. But of course, we can not understand because we are not in tune, we are busy conquering nature. The Arab, on the other hand, represents the simple person, the one who is in tune with the animals. That is, he is not in tune with nature to the level of the animals for he receives the message from the Ox.]

Now, What the Rebbi sees in these sources is that, UNLIKE the Mishna that described all the bad things that occurred on Tisha B'Av, these later two sources teach the DIALECTIC nature of the days of Av and of 9AV in particular.

- "the time of mourning is itself the time of joy".
- "the contradictory duty of living in two time zones, the time of the exilic present and the time of the redemptive future."

However, explains the Rebbi, while normally we don't really sense this dual nature of Tisha B'Av in a regular year, on a year when 9AV is on Shabbat, we can realize the dual nature of the day because we split the day into two. We push off the mourning aspects of the day to Sunday (i.e., tzom, inui, evel), but we maintain all the positive aspects – the aspect that "the messiah was born" (mashiach she'lachem nolad).

We can say that ... only the undesirable things are pushed off — the fast, the laws of affliction and mourning etc. But the positive and desirable things — the fact that on this day “the messianic king has been born” — are not pushed off, and not even weakened due to Shabbat. On the contrary: These good aspects stand with greater revelation and strength ... There cannot be anything in the world, including a calendrical configuration (*kevi'ut b'zman*) ... that can disturb or weaken a disclosure and revelation of holiness for the Jewish people, including and all the more so vis-à-vis so fundamental a phenomena as the birth of the messiah ... To the contrary: The good elements stand with greater revelation and strength on the Shabbat day.

CONCLUSION

So on this Shabbat Tisha B'Av, a time when we can truly realize that even with all the bad around us, the destruction and the hate, there is a goodness underlying nature, there is hope for a better future. The Mashiach has been born. Sheyavo BBY.