



## MIDEI CHODESH B'CHODSHO

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# The Resilience of Hope

The rabbis issue a strikingly strange ruling concerning the prayer services of Tisha B'Av.

The solemn prayer of Tachanun, they declare, a prayer omitted on joyous occasions throughout the year, is to be omitted on the mournful occasion of Tisha B'Av, as well.

By way of explanation for this ruling, the authorities cite a passage from Megillat Eicha in which the prophet Yirmiyahu refers to the day of the Temple's destruction as a *mo'ed*, "an appointed time."

As the term *mo'ed* is generally associated with celebratory occasions, the rabbis argue, Tisha B'Av must possess an element of "celebration," as well. Tachanun is, therefore, to be omitted.

Astonishingly, the reason cited by the rabbis for their decision to omit Tachanun on Tisha B'Av seems to totally ignore the context of Yirmiyahu's declaration.

The prophet declares: "The Lord, in my midst, has rejected all my heroes; *He has proclaimed a mo'ed*, an appointed time, against

me to crush my young men..."

Clearly, the "appointed time" referred to by the prophet is a moment of distress and grief, the antithesis of a celebratory moment. How, then, can the rabbis cite Yirmiyahu's declaration as the source for the omission of the somber prayer of Tachanun on Tisha B'Av?

Is our tradition so arbitrary that the simple use of one discordant word in an overwhelmingly mournful context is powerful enough to inject a festive note into the saddest day of the Jewish year?

Perhaps because of the difficulties surrounding the usually suggested source for Tachanun's omission on Tisha B'Av, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik offers an alternate explanation for the phenomenon.

Citing a Talmudic passage that underscores the unique power of the Tachanun prayer Rabbi Soloveitchik suggests that our omission of Tachanun on Tisha B'Av reflects an awareness of the *diminished efficacy of prayer on this day*. As the Talmud testifies, "From the time the Temple was destroyed, the gates of prayer were closed."

For this reason, Rabbi Soloveitchik notes, the passage "May our prayers and supplications be accepted" is also omitted from the Tisha B'Av recitation of the Kaddish prayer.

Our prayers must always be responsive to changes in the world around us (e.g., the season of the year, a specific calendar occasion, a personal event). In the case of Tisha B'Av,

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therefore, our prayers must mirror the character of a day on which the power of prayer is sorely limited.

From time immemorial, Tisha B'Av has been a day reserved for tragedy, a time when our prayers have "not been answered" to our apparent benefit. To be complete, Rabbi Soloveitchik maintains, even our prayers themselves must reflect this tragic fact, thereby increasing the sadness of the day.

Numerous other authorities, however, counterintuitively suggest that the very tragedies associated with Tisha B'Av can give rise to a hope of eventual rejoicing. It is this hope, they maintain, woven into the very fabric of the day, that powers the omission of tachanun.

To illustrate this point, allow me to turn to one of my favorite sermon/lecture topics...

I have often observed that unfortunately, in our day, many parents do not want to parent. Eager for their children's love and acceptance, they set out, consciously or unconsciously, to be their children's friends.

These parents eschew disciplinary actions, fail to set limits, automatically take their children's side in disputes with authority, and often perform tasks for their children that the children were meant to perform themselves.

*Our children have enough friends. What they really need are parents...*

If we truly love our children, we will be strong enough to discipline them when appropriate, wise enough to let them stumble and fall, and tough enough to insist that they fulfill the responsibilities that are theirs.

Tisha B'Av is proof that, thank God, God is not an "absentee parent."

The very fact that Hashem has visited challenge after challenge upon us on one specific date of the calendar year is clear evidence of His continued presence in our lives. That

involvement is, in and of itself, a source of solace.

As a loving parent would, God insists that we reap the results of past failures, in order that we may learn the necessary correctives for the future. In doing so, He challenges us to ultimately turn Tisha B'Av into the *mo'ed* that it is meant to be.

The omission of Tachanun on Tisha B'Av thus carries a message that is, at once, both hopeful and challenging. *The final character of this day is in our hands.* ■

Rabbi Goldin is the author of the OU Press volumes "Unlocking the Torah Text," and "Unlocking the Haggada."

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