



### Tears by the Kotel Tisha B'Av Essay

I stood outside the door, full of awe. The time was late, past midnight. I heard the words - "If I forget thee...Jerusalem," I heard weeping - "Jerusalem? Jerusalem!" the voice continued, as if not believing he was there in Jerusalem.

It was Rabbi Haim Abramowitz of Rimnitz who came from the US to spend the Three Weeks of Mourning<sup>1</sup> in Jerusalem, close to the remnants of the Temple. I had the privilege of staying with him.

I had awoken in the middle of the night, from noises which emanated from the Rabbi's room. I ran to his room, and heard his lamenting and weeping. I wished to witness this holy prayer, but the door was locked. I went outside around the house and stood by a window. I will never forget what I saw. The Rabbi was sitting on the floor, looking disheveled. He was a picture of sorrow, and it was as if he was a different person, with his mind in higher realms.

I stood there for a while, until day broke. The Rabbi got off the floor, rearranged himself, laid in his bed for a minute, got up and left the room as if he had awoken from a long night of sleep. I offered the Rabbi something to drink, but he indicated he was preparing for the morning prayers and wished to go to the Kotel. So off we went.

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The sorrow we feel for the destruction of the Temple binds us to Temple, to its destruction and its future rebuilding.

The Shulchan Aruch rules: "It is proper for every G-d fearing person to be aggravated and worried about the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash."<sup>2</sup> This ruling pertains to one's conduct year round, not only during the Three Weeks of Mourning. Some have asked why the ruling is only for the 'G-d fearing'? Isn't everyone obligated to mourn the loss of the Temple?

The issues at hand are very deep. The Yerushalmi Talmud states: "Every generation, in which the Temple is not rebuilt, it is if they have destroyed it themselves." The more the exile is prolonged the more deep our sorrow should be felt. Therefore, anyone who is not G-d fearing and the Temple is not built during his generation should lament the destruction, because if he would conduct himself properly the Temple would have been built.

When the Rambam counts the various calamitous events that occurred on fast days he writes: "On the Ninth of Av,

five tragedies occurred... On that day designated for retribution, the wicked Tineius Rufus plowed the site of the Temple and its surroundings, thereby fulfilling the prophecy [Micah 3:12], "Zion will be plowed like a field."<sup>3</sup>

Why is this seemingly less catastrophic event counted with the worst one – the destruction of the Temple? The answer is that Tineius Rufus wished to separate the Jewish People from their past. It was not enough that the Temple was destroyed; he wished to eradicate the foundations, to erase all memory.

If the Temple's remnants were visible the Jewish Nation would have seen them and it would have served as a constant reminder and they would work to rebuild it. Tineius Rufus plowed the site of the Temple and erased all memory. This is a calamity equal to the destruction itself.

If a person does not remember the Beis Hamikdash and does not pray and yearn each day for its rebuilding - it is if he is one of the destroyers. The G-d fearing righteous have a living memory of the destroyed Temple and desire its rebuilding.

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On the way back from the Kotel I told the Rabbi that the Lelover Rebbe said once that when the mother is sorrowful her sons come to her; when the Kotel is in mourning one should go to it.

The Rabbi slowed his pace and turned to me: "Rabbi Grossman, the Kotel is mourning? I am in mourning. If the Temple is not built in my day it is if I have destroyed it. Do you understand what this means? It's if I have taken an ax to the Temple, then burnt it and all the holy vessels it contained."

The Rabbi began to weep again and recited the Viduy, the confession, while beating his breast: "We have sinned, we have betrayed..." he turned around and began to walk back towards the Kotel. What happened? I asked, but the Rabbi continued to recite the Viduy while berating himself, saying: "How could you have destroyed the Temple?"

He arrived at the Kotel, removed his shoes like a mourner, laid down on the ground, while sobbing: "King of the Universe, forgive me. It is true, I have burnt the Temple, but I am now repenting and promise that when you bring the Messiah I will be the first to come and build the Temple. Just bring him,"

The Rabbi's cry hung between heaven and earth. It was a genuine cry from the depths of a Jewish heart who suffered the destruction of the Temple in all his ways.

<sup>1</sup> The Three Weeks or *Bein ha-Metzarim*, "Between the Straits", is a period of mourning commemorating the destruction of the first and second Temples. The Three Weeks start on the seventeenth day of the Jewish month of Tammuz — the fast of Shiva Asar B'Tammuz — and end on the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av — the fast of Tisha B'Av, which occurs three weeks later. Both of these fasts commemorate events surrounding the destruction of the Jewish Temples and the subsequent exile of the Jews from the land of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> Orach Chaim 1:3.

<sup>3</sup> Taniyot 5:3.