

Dear Chavraya,

Tisha B'Av has ended. We have come through the day of fasting, of mourning and lament that seems impenetrable, blocking the way of summer's unfolding. At the end of three weeks of warning and reproach, we have come through the time that is called by its mood, the *beyn ham'tzarim/between the straits*. Caught in the swirl of memory that brings tragedy into focus, images suspended in tearful emulsion, cries echoing in the haunting melody of liturgical chant. And then it is over. We have emerged, not unscathed but whole, encouraged, exhorted to go on, wiser, if but for a time, in the knowledge of resilience. Words of comfort are whispered now, seeds of hope carried on wings of song.

Tisha B'Av recalls tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people. In its dynamics of moving from despair to repair, the day also offers powerful metaphor for all people. It is about the world itself and every person. The central tragedy, starting point of exile and alienation from God and land, self and each other, is the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem. For the rabbis, the *beis ha'mikdosh* that stood on God's holy mountain represented the entire world. Its destruction was a portent of Creation undone, the world itself in ruins. The root cause of destruction, punishment that comes as natural consequence, was *sinat chinam/wanton hatred* of one for another. The holy house that was the world in microcosm could not stand for the shattered state of its human foundation.

The world itself is the *beis ha'mikdosh*, its foundation threatened still and again by people divided from each other. In memory there is warning and the possibility of redemption, if we listen. Every person is the world in microcosm, each one a holy sanctuary. So many temples destroyed. The words of the rabbis echo among the ruins, "Whoever destroys a single person, it is as though having destroyed an entire world." And within every person are all the dynamics of history, each of us with our own days of mourning for pain and loss and dreams denied. We wander at times, yet emerging from the exile of despair.

Planted in the "weeper's field" where mourners stopped to eulogize is a seed of hope. The *Mashiach/Messiah* is to be born on Tisha B'Av. In the midst of sorrow we look ahead. So the psalmist sings, "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy." Drawing on the holy Baal Shem Tov, Rebbe Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl teaches, "every person needs to nurture that aspect of the Mashiach that inheres within their own soul." In our own renewal, the world is renewed. The Messiah is born within each of us on Tisha B'Av, redemption stirring even on those days in our own lives that are as Tisha B'Av.

On the evening of Tisha B'Av, *Eicha*, the Book of Lamentations, rises from its own grief and ours to a crescendo of hope, *hashivenu Hashem eilecha v'nashuva, chadesh yameinu k'kedem/return us to You, God, and we will return; renew our days as of old*. Central theme of the *Days of Awe*, the journey to renewal begins. The Shabbat immediately following Tisha B'Av, always the week of Torah portion *V'etchanan*, this is *Shabbos Nachamu/Shabbat of Comfort*. From the root *chanan*, "to supplicate, to beseech," *V'etchanan* marks the first Shabbat in a seven week period of comfort that brings us home to Rosh Hashannah, season of return and renewal. Beginning with *Shabbos Nachamu*, on the *Shabbos* of each of the seven

weeks we chant the *haftarah* from the prophet Isaiah. As though words of supplication from God to us, seeking, searching, reaching, there is a welling up of hope, becoming a steady stream of living waters to comfort and soothe, to encourage. The first words of the *haftarah* for Shabbos Nachamu are addressed to each of us, *nachamu, nachamu ami/comfort, comfort My people....* Receivers of comfort, we are also to be givers of comfort. The Messiah is born on Tisha B'Av. Hope is born within each of us, watered with tears, tendrils of comfort bravely rising toward the sunlit path that begins with Shabbos Nachamu.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor