



DEVARIM

Shabbat Chazon/Tisha B'Av

Damaged Dignity

July 21, 2018

DAMAGED DIGNITY: DESTRUCTION AND RESTORATION

ABSTRACT

A short quiz: What is the most elusive as well as the most vital ingredient in life? You may be blessed with everything in life – wisdom, love, success, wealth – but if you are lacking this invisible element everything else is rendered almost meaningless. When a mother stares into her newborn child's eyes with absolute unconditional love she conveys this mysterious force. In our highly accelerated and depersonalized technological age this commodity is abused on a daily basis What is it?

Today – as we honor Tisha B'Av, the saddest day in the Jewish calendar commemorating the destruction of both Temples – we shall discover that this critical element in life is dignity. And it is hinted to in the number of the day: Nine.

The oldest Kabbalistic text ever composed – attributed to Abraham – offers us a cryptic phrase: “Ten shapeless sefirot, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven.” Tisha B'Av teaches us the profound and personally relevant meaning of these words. Call it our original Nine Eleven.

Each of us has an indispensable soul within, which is the ultimate root of all self-confidence and sense of purpose. Our convictions, hopes and greatest dreams flow from our inner malchus - which is really the profound sense of dignity and majesty that stems from the Divine Image in which we were all created. It is the feeling that “I matter” and that “I have the power to achieve anything I set my mind to.”

In contrast, what is the root of all destruction? The annihilation of malchus - when this innersense of dignity is violated. Once that part of us - our purest element, which feeds our sense of self-worth – is compromised, it's just a matter of time before our life begins to spiral downward out of control, in one form or another.

The deeper meaning of Tisha B'Av is the story of dignity destroyed and dignity restored.

This sermon examines a story of one Jew, Michael, whose compromised self-worth led him on a path of drug addiction. It then analyzes - on this Shabbat Tisha B'Av which is also known as Shabbat Chazon (“Shabbat of Vision”), when the Prophet Isaiah foresaw the destruction but also the restoration – why such problems haunt our communities and what we can do about them. How Tisha B'Av offers us methods of reclaiming at will that pure, loving gaze of your mother (even if your mother didn't offer it) – and making it a viable reality that informs your daily life.

Ahh, dignity... What an elusive but necessary element in life. How is your dignity lately? Do you feel that it has been trampled on, undermined, abused? If yes, join the club. But today we shall create a new club – one that embraces and celebrates each person's individual dignity; the majesty of the human spirit; the sanctity of who you are, the beauty of your individuality. When was the last time that someone celebrated your dignity, for no other reason than it being... your birthright?

1. Today

Today is *Tisha B'Av*, the saddest day on the Jewish calendar, when we commemorate the destruction of both Temples and other tragedies that occurred on this very day. But since Tisha B'Av this year is on Shabbat, we delay the fast and the grieving until this evening (and we sincerely hope that Moshiach comes in between, which will then transform this day into a holiday and celebration¹).

This also means that today we focus on the positive elements hidden within that which was lost and destroyed on *Tisha B'Av*.

As I often emphasize, one of the big questions – and great challenges today – is finding personal relevance in Torah and Jewish tradition. What personal message does *Tisha B'Av* have for each one of us, our children, our friends and everyone we come in contact with? Why should we care about events that happened so long ago, in another part of the world, in another era?

The answer, my dear friends, is that *Tisha B'Av* teaches us and offers us tools to reclaim arguably the most critical thing we need for our personal welfare – a lesson that can radically change our lives.

2. Do You Feel Dignified?

Allow me to begin with a short quiz: What is the most elusive as well as the most vital ingredient in life? You may be blessed with everything in life – wisdom, love, success, wealth – but if you are lacking this invisible element everything else is rendered almost meaningless. When a mother stares into her newborn child's eyes with absolute unconditional love she conveys this mysterious force. In our highly accelerated and depersonalized technological age this commodity is abused on a daily basis What is it?

Today – as we honor *Tisha B'Av* – we shall discover that this critical element in life is dignity. And it is hinted to in the number of the day: Nine.

So I ask you all to think about your state of dignity: How is your dignity lately? Do you feel that it has been trampled on, undermined, abused? If yes, join the club. But today we shall create a new club – one that embraces and celebrates each person's individual dignity; the majesty of the human spirit; the sanctity of who you are, the beauty of your individuality. When was the last time that someone celebrated your dignity, for no other reason than it being... your birth-right? Some of us have had our dignity stripped from us so that we no longer even know what

¹ Zechariah 8:19. Mishneh Torah, Laws of Fasts 5:19.

dignity is, and how vital it is to our lives and well being.

Today we shall dissect a bit the soul and psyche of dignity – that message conveyed from a mother when she stares into her newborn child’s eyes with absolute unconditional love. Where has that dignity gone over the years? We shall discover how *Tisha B’Av* offers us methods of reclaiming at will that pure, loving gaze (even if your mother didn’t offer it) – and making it a viable reality that informs your daily life.

But, as I said, being that on Shabbat we focus on the positive, allow me to begin on a lighter side – on today’s topic of dignity: Dignity destroyed and dignity restored.

3. How Not to Speak to Your Beloved

Two sixty-somethings are getting ready for bed. The man is standing in front of a full-length mirror, taking a look at himself.

“You know, dear,” he laments, “I stare into this mirror and I see an old bag. My face is all wrinkled, my pot belly is sagging, my arms look weak, my legs are like stalks, my hair is almost gone, and whatever is left is all white and shriveling! My body has just gone to waste in a hand basket. My ego is shattered,” he cries.

He turns to face his wife and says, “Please tell me just one positive thing about my body so I can feel better about myself.”

His wife studies her husband carefully for a moment and then says, “Well, at least there’s nothing wrong with your eyesight.”

This is not how to add dignity to your spouse. As they say (the other way around): A gentleman is someone that remembers his wife’s birthday, but not her age...

4. Jokes and Anti-Semitism (optional)

On the topic of dignity, ever since the destruction of the Temple and our long and arduous journey through the Diaspora, we Jews have had to contend with the indignities of Anti-Semitism and oppression, which we have dealt with in one way or another. Obviously, these challenges have had many sad and dire consequences, but the discriminations and indignities we faced have also resulted in us developing resilience and even a sense of humor that has helped us survive.

Anti-Semitism has followed Jews wherever they may roam and sometimes, having no other recourse, they have been known to make up jokes about their oppressors and travails of coping with them. Here is a small sampling from the annals of Eastern Europe²:

Of all the Jews who suffered humiliations at the hands of the anti-Semites of 19th century Eastern Europe, the least self-conscious was Meyer Kopetz.

Kopetz, the aged Chassid of Stanislaw, decided to visit Krakow on a matter of business. In order to look presentable for this momentous journey, the saintly man donned his favorite silk *kapoto* and his most impressive *shtreimel*. He adorned himself with his newest prayer shawl which had the longest fringes, and after combing his gray patriarchal beard, went to the train station, looking for all the world like a prophet who had miraculously stepped forth from the pages of the Torah.

But, upon returning home, the dignified Meyer appeared anything but. His *shtreimel* was missing, his *kapoto* was ripped, his nose was bloody as was his prayer shawl. When he walked through the door, his wife screamed in horror: “What happened Meyer?!”

Well, I transacted my business in Krakow with great success, but coming home on the train, I encountered some anti-Semites.”

“Oh Meyer! Did you say something that provoked them?”

“No, I kept to myself. I tried to act as if I wasn’t Jewish.”

*

What Meyer didn’t tell his wife was that when he boarded the third-class train compartment in Krakow, he found that his fellow passengers were three Polish youths who – seeing his Jewish garb – immediately began to taunt him.

Meyer tried to ignore them, pretending the jibes and jeers were not meant for him, but there came a point when enough is enough, when a man’s dignity cannot take any more.

That point was reached for Meyer when the students began to call him ugly names, while addressing him as “Abraham.”

He finally turned to them and said, “You are mistaken boys. I am not the Patriarch Abraham. I happen to be Saul, the son of Kish, whose father sent him out in search of some lost donkeys. And I am glad to see I have found them, right here in this very train compartment.”

² As compiled by Henry D. Spalding in *Encyclopedia of Jewish Humor*, pp. 180-184.

As you can imagine things went downhill from there ... as they are about to in this sermon. But that I mean that I now must leave the humor behind and concentrate on the topic of the moment, which is *Tisha B'Av*, and its very relevant message about human dignity.

5. *Tisha B'Av*

Tisha B'Av is the saddest date in Jewish history when the Temple – our concrete, earthly connection to G-d – was twice destroyed. The first Temple, built by King Solomon, was destroyed on *Tisha B'Av* in the year 422 B.C.E. The destroyers were the Babylonians who then exiled the Jews from the Land of Israel. Some five hundred years later, on *Tisha B'Av* of 70 C.E. this event repeated itself, when the Romans destroyed the rebuilt second Temple.

Ever since then, Jews have fasted and mourned that horrendous date and the fact that our precious connection with G-d, which the Temple represented, has yet to be restored (this year the fast is delayed till tonight, as mentioned before). Some Jews have typically come to Jerusalem to weep and beg G-d's forgiveness near the ruins of the Temple. And this is how the Western Wall, the retaining wall of the Temple's foundations, came to be known as the Wailing Wall. For many years, it was the only part of the Temple Mount that could be accessed.

But, as I asked earlier, how can we understand in personal terms the destruction of *Tisha B'Av*? How can we apply it to our personal lives? Why should we care today about these events?³

³ This Shabbat *Tisha B'Av* is also known as Shabbat Chazon, the Shabbat of Vision, for on this day we read the opening chapters of the Book of Isaiah, which begins: "This is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem..." Isaiah's vision is at once tragic and hopeful. He describes how the Jews have forsaken G-d and how G-d will forsake them. But he also foretells of the coming reconciliation: Come now, says G-d, and let us reason together. Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be white like snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be [white] like wool ... I will restore your judges as at first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward, you will be called the city of justice, the city of faith. Zion will be redeemed ... (Isaiah 1:18, 1:26-27). Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev explains the name Shabbat Chazon this way: On this Shabbat every Jew is shown the third Temple from afar, in order to evoke a feeling of yearning, to repair and do whatever it takes to have the third Temple built. Thus, on this Shabbat we have the power, after seeing what has been stripped from us, to awaken within us the deep desire and drive to restore that which we are lacking. This of course applies to the message of dignity destroyed and dignity restored discussed in this sermon.

6. A Sad Story

Let me explain it with a sad story related to me by a colleague of mine, a fellow rabbi.

A while ago, my colleague, whom I shall call Jacob, bumped into an old friend, whom I shall call Michael. Jacob was surprised to see Michael, who had been his high school classmate and close friend in those days. But, after high school, they had parted ways. Jacob went on to become a rabbi, while his friend...

The first thing that Jacob noticed about Michael was that he was in a state – he was unnaturally thin and jittery, his skin had a gray pallor and his dilated pupils darted furtively all around. His clothes were rumpled, dirty and smelly. It did not take a rocket scientist to figure out that Michael was a junkie.

Jacob could not control his tears. What had happened to Michael? How could such a bright and promising student, bright and creative, shy and gentle, be brought so low.

Jacob thought back to a long ago Shabbat when Michael's downward slide first began – it was that day when Jacob encountered Michael (a religious kid from a religious family) first smoking cigarettes and trying to convince others to join him in a game of gambling at cards. From there, Michael began smoking marijuana, and then experimenting with drugs. Conversations with him, usually so stimulating, became dull. His usually clarity and sharp wit became an afterthought. He would spend hours in his basement rec room all alone. He was slipping and slipping fast, in a vicious ruinous cycle.

It was the first time that Jacob was ever exposed to the utter wasting of a human being due to drug addiction. He realized that, to an addict, nothing else matters. The addict looks forward to nothing as much as the drug and its effects. "It" becomes his nurturer, his best friend, the one he turns to in times of need, the final recourse when all else fails. Every minute of his waking hours, his every decision and every move, is determined by the next "high."

And then, perhaps worst of all, is the loneliness – a loneliness that we cannot begin to imagine – and one that demonstrates how utterly destructive this "lifestyle" can become. The addict is all alone with his obsession – it's just him and his dark desire. At some point the human psyche must snap into a submission to this "reality," simply to be able to survive and not be overcome by sheer shame and desperation.

Once caught in this mad whirlpool, there seemed no way out for Michael. Some thirty years later when the two friends again encountered each other, Michael was still controlled by the dark demon within. He lived in world of shadows, seemingly always on the run. Escaping what? Himself, above all.

Why they call it “substance abuse” seems odd; it’s not abuse of the substance, but of yourself.

What happened to this young man? And to so many others like him? And in some ways, what has happened to all of us? For seeing a fault in another is like looking in a mirror. It is a reflection of our own shortcomings. Michael for Jacob was a mirror image of the dark obsessions that we all are capable of falling into.

7. Damaged Dignity

So let me ask you:

What happens to each of us when another force takes control of our lives?

I suggest that our inner dignity – what the Kabbalists call *malchus* (literally “nobility”) – is damaged.

And that is why I am telling you Michael’s sad story today – today, on *Tisha B’Av*, as we remember the destruction of the Temple, just a few hours before the mourning of *Tisha B’Av* is set to begin.

For on *Tisha B’Av* we do not just grieve over events of the past, but over all forms of destruction in our lives. For every form of grief and loss evolves from the rupturing of the bond between spirit and matter that occurred that day. That is when the Divine Presence in the Temple no longer found a “home” in our material universe and was compelled to go into “hiding.”

Each of us has an indispensable soul within, which is the ultimate root of all self-confidence and sense of purpose. Our convictions, hopes and greatest dreams flow from our inner *malchus* – which is really the profound sense of dignity and majesty that stems from the Divine Image in which we were all created. It is the feeling that “I matter” and that “I have the power to achieve anything I set my mind to.”

Self respect. Self esteem. Self confidence. Courage.

In contrast, what is the root of all destruction? The annihilation of *malchus* – when this inner sense of dignity is violated.

Once that part of us – our purest element, which feeds our sense of self-worth – is compromised, it's just a matter of time before our life begins to spiral downward out of control, in one form or another.

8. Raw Dysfunctionality

For some (like Michael) it takes on the shape of raw dysfunctionality. Others are creative enough to find ways to remain functional to some extent; they learn how to “cover their tracks,” as they maneuver their way from day to day. Variations are as numerous as people themselves. Seeing someone use their creative juices – not to mention energy, time and money – for such machinations is, of course, one of the saddest things to observe. Often arrogance is one of the mechanisms used (usually unintentionally) to cover up low self-esteem (a weak sense of *malchus*).

This is, obviously, a more extreme and blatant version of damaged dignity. Very often – and far more common – is the subtle indignities we all experience on a daily basis. Every time you are being pitched to purchase something – every piece of marketing and advertising – is essential conveying the message: “For you to be complete, attractive, wholesome, youthful, desirable, well liked, popular (and so on – fill in the blanks)... -- you need to purchase this car, travel here, wear this, look like that, etc. etc.

Not to say that all advertising is bad and all products are worthless, but the subliminal message in all of them is that you are not that precious without these commodities. When was the last time you saw an advertisement that said you matter simply because... you matter? Because you were created in the divine image, and as such, are absolutely indispensable (even if you don't wear makeup or drive a certain automobile)?

The question, however, begs to be answered:

What could bring people to compromise their own sense of self-worth? Who in their right mind would allow their inner dignity to be violated? Human nature is such that we would do anything not to allow ourselves to be humiliated [like Meyer Kopetz of the joke I told earlier], let alone to allow our entire dignity to be undermined.

The answer is obvious from the question: At the outset, no one ever damages their own *malchus*, their own dignity. Any such damage is always initiated by someone outside ourselves: a parent, an educator, an adult – anyone that we trust can hurt us, especially in our most vulnerable and impressionable childhood years.

9. Nine

The loss of dignity associated with *Tisha B'Av* is hinted to in the number of the day: Nine.

The *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Formation), the oldest Kabbalistic text ever composed – attributed to Abraham – offers us a cryptic phrase⁴: “Ten shapeless sefirot, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven.” What does this mean?

The ten sefirot are the basic building blocks – the spiritual DNA – of all of existence. Three intellectual faculties and six emotional ones. Plus the last and final faculty and attribute – *malchus*, dignity. For a round total of exactly ten. Not nine, not eleven. Exactly ten, not more, not less. Precision is critical to all systems. One missing or extra point in a computer program, one deficient or additional cell, can wreak devastating havoc.

One can have an elaborate structure of all nine elements – a complete intellectual and emotional system, but if you are missing the tenth dimension, *malchus*/dignity, everything is compromised – as so glaringly demonstrated in the destruction of dignity (*malchus*) on *Tisha B'Av*, when we have nine (nine days in Av), and not ten – and so vividly captures in Michael's story and in the story of all our own personal indignities.

Tisha B'Av teaches us the profound and personally relevant meaning of the words in *Sefer Yetzirah*⁵,

⁴ Sefer Yetzirah 1:4.

⁵ This is also connected with the High Holiday season – as the Shaloh writes that the *mazal* (sign) of the month of Av, Aryeh (Leo) is an acronym for: Elul, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Hoshana Rabba – because the destruction of dignity in Av gives birth to its restoration during the High Holidays: In Kabbalistic language the ten day period from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur (the Ten Days of Teshuvah) is called ‘binyan ha’malchus,’ the building of dignity. Psychologically in this period we rebuild human dignity – the essential value and sanctity of every person's life derived from the fact that each human being is created in the Divine Image. In the ten days from Rosh Hashana (the birthday of the universe with the human at the center) to Yom Kippur, and especially on Yom Kippur, we days rebuild the structure of existence and reaffirm the indispensable nature and inalienable rights of every human being on Earth, by virtue of our connection to G-d, Who chose each of us to fulfill our unique mission. On Yom Kippur Moses descended from Sinai with the Second Tablets and the promise of hope even after destruction.

Malchus also represents the Divine presence within nature and all of existence. At the pinnacle of Yom Kippur – the conclusion of the Neilah prayer – we declare that G-d is One and we repeat seven times that “Hashem hu ha'Elokim.” G-d that transcends all of existence is one with the G-dliness within all of existence. As the deepest part of each of our souls enters the ‘holy of holies’ on Yom Kippur, may we regain our essential dignity/*malchus* as Divine agents charged with the mission of transforming the universe and creating of it a home for G-d.

“ten and not nine, ten and not eleven.” Call it our original *Nine* Eleven.⁶ That without the tenth dimension – dignity – our entire structure is seriously compromised. This tenth ingredient is the key to our security and future.⁷

On Tisha B'Av we mourn over the loss – concealment is more correct – of our dignity, which stems from our conscious connection to the divine image in which we were created. This day makes us aware of something that we may have forgotten: Our G-d-given right to dignity. That we deserve more than we get – we deserve to respect ourselves and to be respected by others. Half the cure to an illness is awareness. Once you are aware that your dignity has been compromised (or worse), you care enough to do something about it. And this very sense of loss evokes in us the deep desire to heal and restore our deserved dignity.

Thus the loss of *Tisha B'Av* also contains our salvation.

⁶ 9/11 is a day that shook up our entire system, a day that exposed our vulnerabilities and revealed the tenuousness of global stability. What is the single missing ingredient in 9/11 – the tenth dimension – that manifests the events unleashed one year ago on September 11? And it is this Divine ingredient – the dignity of Malchus – that was missing from the demonically distorted religious beliefs of the attackers. Love of G-d is one with love of all people, if for no other reason than them being reflections of the Divine Image. Religion that believes in a G-d in Heaven but forgets about G-d's presence on Earth (ten minus one, nine), or annihilates life on Earth (ten plus one, eleven), will be fundamentally bankrupt. Business that is missing the Divine dimension will ultimately self destruct. 9/11 reminds us that science, politics, economy, every one of our systems, must include the tenth dimension, malchus, for us to survive. This tenth ingredient is the key to our security and future.

⁷ Malchus is also distinguished for its bittul. Malchus is the moon, with no light of its own, reflecting the light of the sun. When you shine your own light, you are only as great as you are. You may be very great, but human greatness is always limited, temporary, mortal. When you become a channel that reflects a light greater than your own, when you are dedicated to something beyond yourself, you become greater than yourself. When you dedicate yourself to eternity – and to eternal values – you become eternal. Don't cut out the tenth dimension, and don't add to it. Don't be too secular and don't be overly religious. Don't overindulge in the material and don't escape into the spiritual. Balance and integrate the two. Don't be less or more religious than G-d. Don't be materially or spiritually arrogant. G-d created a universe and entrusted us with the power to refine and not destroy the material world. Before 9/11 Americans and all the world felt that we had it 'all figured out.' Our unprecedented prosperity, highest standard of living, sophisticated technology, created an illusion of invulnerability. 9/11 reminded us that we need the tenth truth – Malchus, and the bittul it espouses. Religion without the dignity and balance of Malchus – without the basic respect for the G-dliness in others – becomes a destructive force. The same is with business.

10. A Psychologist's View (optional)

A recent psychological study, by Dr. David Rosmarin of Harvard and Dr. David Pelcovitz of Yeshiva University (published in this month's issue of the Child Abuse & Neglect journal), sees a link between abuse and the decision to abandon the strictly observant Jewish life.

The question they dealt with was why some young adults break away from their parents' lifestyle. While none of us are immune to temptations and challenges, if we have a healthy sense of self-worth, we learn to repel destructive vices before they overtake us. Some of us may partly succumb, but we will not break with our family and community. Those, however, that do – those who end up hitting bottom like Michael – are testifying to a greater inner dysfunctionality and greater inner damage.

One psychologist, who specializes in youth at risk focusing primarily on kids in the religious Jewish community, put it this way:

“People are natural social creatures. They gravitate to groups and communities, and in most instances loathe total isolation. They crave peer approval. Even non-conformists (a minority in any group) need social interaction. Most people, even radical individualists, will usually maintain their social identity, identifying with the communities of their upbringing. In most cases, only a great jolt to the psyche will cause someone to explicitly break away from their peer group.

“In my experience I have come to the conclusion that in many of these cases the great jolt began with some form of sexual molestation [or physical or psychological abuse], in which the child's inner dignity was violated. When someone is hurt on that level, the innermost, intimate dimensions of the psyche are defiled. Then the child is driven into silence. Out of shame and fear he or she will not speak about the abuse with parents or teachers. And this silence and loneliness eats away, like a cancer, at the child's inner dignity.

“In many such instances a child has enough resilience to absorb the blow and come out intact. But in sustained abuse, or if it is a particularly sensitive child, the violation – and the related shame, silence and loneliness – will jolt the child into another orbit, making him susceptible to further radical changes. Then, when you add drugs into the equation – which a young adult may take recreationally, or to escape, or to relieve the inner anxiety and shame – a downward spiral begins. Drugs diminish natural inhibitions and thus can actually alter human personality, including the need to remain within one's family and community structure. And so drugs, all the above, can actually cause someone to make the radical jump and abandon his or her past.”

11. What is the Solution?

That is the problem and some of its manifestations. But what then is the solution?

I propose that it is to launch a full out war at preserving – and restoring where necessary – the sacred dignity of our children and of all life!

This includes zero tolerance of any form of abuse in our schools, homes and camps. Absolute and unequivocal action must be taken to not allow any such behavior, and to immediately take action if any such report is made, and not push it under the rug to avoid scandal.

Whether you agree or disagree with me on this, it is definitely food for thought.

Obviously, great care has to be taken not to stereotype anyone and try to over-generalize and develop formulas without regard to the complexities of life. Yet, due to the seriousness of the crisis – and so many beautiful souls adrift – we are obligated to look into these issues and see what preventive medicine can be employed in our homes and schools, and what interventions need to be immediately deployed once there is a violation.

I know that this is a heavy – and terribly sad – topic. But when else to speak about it if not in connection with *Tisha B'Av*?

On a far smaller scale (but also quite significant), this also includes countering the violation against our dignity that is become the norm in our highly accelerated and despersonalized technological world. Just as an example: When you sit in a meeting with your spouse – and for that matter, with any another person – and instead of giving them your full attention you begin checking your iPhone or Android (or whatever other gadget you may have) for messages – is that not a violation of the other person's *malchus* dignity?!...

So there are many ways – from one end of the spectrum to the other – in which dignity (our own or others) is compromised. And we must wage battle at every form of indignity, to restore to each and every person their G-d-given birthright!

12. Repairing the Rupture

The lesson of *Tisha B'Av* teaches us the terrible consequences of dignity violated. But it also teaches us – beyond awareness of the problem which is half the cure – how to repair the rupture.

Just as *malchus* on earth was destroyed/concealed on *Tisha B'Av*, we have the power of the full moon on the 15th of Av to restore that dignity.

The great Kabbalist known as the holy Ari⁸ explains why the 15th day of Av is one of the greatest of holidays, as the Mishne says:⁹ “There were no greater holidays for Israel than the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur.”

Why? Because on the 15th day of Av the moon is full again, and it repairs the “destruction” of the “moon” (the symbol of *malchus*) on *Tisha b'Av*. And the greatness of the ascent is in direct proportion to the depths of the descent that precedes it.¹⁰

13. For the Sake of Our Children

For the sake of our children and their future we need to address these issues head-on, and come up with both preemptive actions as well as appropriate methods to rebuild dignity once it was compromised.

Parents and educators must know that we carry great responsibility and power – with life and death consequences – in cultivating and nurturing the dignity and souls of our children. And this begins not when the child is twenty, ten, or even two years old. It begins at the moment of birth, and even at the moment of conception.

We live in a profoundly insecure world, where dignity is the dimension most lacking. Even if we may have plenty of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, love, discipline, compassion, endurance, humility and bonding (the first nine *sefirot*) – they are only nine, as in the 9th of Av. The tenth, and most important, dimension is missing. And it is the foundation of all life.

Malchus represents the inner security, self-worth and dignity that make all the other nine worth their weight. It is what imbues us with the confidence to use all our nine faculties with conviction and sense of urgency and destiny.

⁸ Rabbi Isaac Luria, 1534-1572

⁹ *Taanis* 26b

¹⁰ *Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Chag HaShavuot* (at the end).

On this Shabbat *Tisha B'Av* – before the day ends and the fast begins – let us remember that.

And let us resolve to restore it – to our communities, families, children ... and, most of all, to our inner selves.

Let us look into each others eyes – like the mother's loving gaze at her newborn child – and give each other the greatest possible gift: absolute recognition of your divine dignity. Amen.

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