



Grief – Comfort – Change
The Economic Downturn/ UJA-Federation of New York's Connect to Care
Some Thoughts on July, August and September 2010
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The Three Weeks between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av are indisputably the saddest block of time in the Jewish religious-spiritual calendar, and today (July 12, 2010), Rosh Hodesh Av, we enter the intensely depressed period of the final nine days of this poignant 21-day 'sweep.'

Grieving for such profound losses – centering on, but not limited to, the Destruction of our First and Second Temples – we must, indeed, take time and devote energy to naming and knowing them. Our people had a center, a focal point in Jerusalem, and a coherent structure and direction for its service of God, for drawing near both to the Almighty and to our collective. The devastation of our Heart, and our people's shattering and scattering Exile, reverberate to this day.

Stunningly, every year we move from this intense mourning and bereavement through Seven Weeks of Comfort, that lead, in turn, to the month+ of deepened *T'shuvah*, Return, to positive personal and interpersonal Accountability and Change. That is, after giving full expression to our losses, we join in reaching for comfort as a bridge to self-improvement and the ultimate betterment of the communal whole.

This annual process has much to offer those among us who have been out of work for many months. Firstly, it is the community's responsibility to acknowledge what has been lost and enable those who are out of work to grieve as they need. We must provide a supportive container, an attentive ear, and stay with those whose lives have been so dramatically impacted by the economic crisis.

But then we must facilitate comfort and a reassurance that though much has been lost, the core remains strong. The community must find a variety of ways of holding those who are hurting and despairing, connecting them to resources of spirit along with practical assistance. After all, when the Temple was destroyed and the Jews were dispersed abroad, Torah became the portable "state" of the nation; through the narrative, law, poetry, and ethics of Torah, our people not only survived but thrived on foreign soils. Synagogues can play a, if not the, major role, in sustaining Jews' spirits through troubled times.

Having grieved our losses and received comfort in community, we can then embark on the next leg of the journey – *T'shuvah*. We look at our relationships – to God, to community and family, to ourselves -- and as best we can, we acknowledge where we have fallen short and commit/begin to do better. Perhaps those who have struggled with unemployment can both reach for needed self-change *and* be there in special ways for others who face the often-daunting task of self-scrutiny and self-change, directing their hard-won wisdom to the *T'shuvah* project.

This, after all, is the kind of New Year we pray for – that we need and deserve – one of inter-relatedness, mutuality, and kinship.