



TISHA B'AV
RECALLING DESTRUCTION

compiled by Rabbi Mark Blazer

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RECALLING DESTRUCTION

The Land of Israel, its location between continents has always been a dubious advantage, wonderful for commerce, but an open invitation to conquest. Just after 600 B.C.E., the Babylonians won control over Assyria, and many influential residents of the Kingdom of Judah were taken to Babylon. Under Judah's last king, Zedekiah, whom the Babylonians had installed to be a puppet, those allowed to remain revolted. On the tenth of Tevet, 587 B.C.E., King Nebuchadnezzar moved his army against the capital. On the ninth of Tammuz, six months later, the Babylonians breached the walls of the city weakened by famine and disease. One month later, in Av, Nebuchadnezzar's armies set the Temple and every significant building in Jerusalem on fire.

Seven decades later the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem, where the Temple was rebuilt. After approximately six hundred years of residence on the Land there was a reprisal of the events of 586, almost to the day. This time it was orchestrated by the Romans, who had been in Israel for 180 years since being invited to intercede in a battle within the House of Hasmoneans. After four years of armed combat in Israel, they were able to break through Jerusalem's walls on Tammuz 17, 70 C.E. Once again the inhabitants were trapped, reduced to a starving, disease-ridden community imperiled by their own factions warring with each other over the best approach to take against the enemy. On the ninth of Av (Tisha b'Av), the Romans set the Temple and much of the city ablaze. Outside and within Israel, the Jews continued their armed struggle against Rome, first in Alexandria (117), then in Betar (135), where they were decisively defeated—both times on the ninth of Av. To emphasize their complete victory, the Romans plowed over Jerusalem, changed its name to Aelia Capitolina, and rebuilt it with pagan temples and heathen gods. They renamed Eretz Yisrael-Palestina.

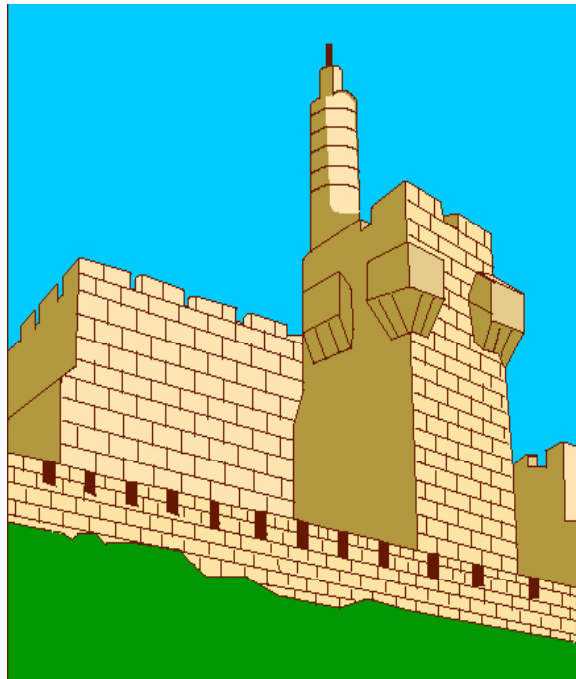
History has treated the Jews cruelly on Tisha b'Av, each generation adding its dirges to the chronicles

of suffering. On this day, communities were destroyed during the Crusades. The Jews of York, England, were slaughtered in 1190, and in 1290 King Edward decreed that all Jews be expelled from the country. The Talmud was burned in Paris Av 9, 1242, and the Jews of France were imprisoned on Av 9, 1305, and informed they had to leave that country within a month. In 1492, they were expelled from Spain and in 1555 forced into a Roman ghetto. In 1571, the Jews were ghettoized in Florence, in 1630 expelled from Mantua, and in 1670 forced out of Vienna. A two-week pogrom erupted against the Jews of Padua in 1684 because they observed Tisha b'Av rather than a Christian festival.

Devastation on Tisha b'Av continued into the modern age, beginning with Russia's Av 9 mobilization for World War I, which a year later led to the expulsion of all Jews from the border provinces. Arab attacks against Jews over access to the Western Wall erupted on Tisha b'Av 1929, and deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka began on this day in 1942.

Once a central day in the Jewish calendar, Tisha b'Av seems to have been relegated today to obscurity. All but the

most observant American Jews ignore this holy day. A few factors in particular seem to work against Tisha b'Av, which primarily commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. It falls in the summertime when religious schools are closed, leaving the decision to observe this holy day up to families or individuals. The establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day and Israel's founding also may have lessened the American significance of Tisha b'Av. We turn to Holocaust Memorial Day each spring to voice our grief over the 20th century genocide of 6 million Jews. It may feel redundant to mourn again so soon, especially when Yom Kippur is less than two months away. And with the birth of modern Israel, does it really seem necessary to grieve over the Second Temple's destruction, which forced our ancestors out of our land for nearly 2,000 years?



MAKING SENSE OF MADNESS

The classic Jewish response to catastrophe is to renew life. Every major Jewish catastrophe has led to the falling away of some Jews as they lost faith, but every major tragedy has also led to revival, as other Jews strove harder to match tragedy with hope.

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai tried to dampen apocalyptic expectations by shifting the Judaeen community's efforts to a realistic rebuilding of life. Said Rabbi Yochanan: "If you are planting a tree and they tell you that the Redeemer is coming, first plant the tree, then go to greet the Messiah."

Rabbi Yochanan and his colleagues provided a theological key to interpreting the destruction as a further stage on the Jewish covenantal path.

The average Jew was still devastated by the catastrophe. The immediate dangers lay in a sorrow so overwhelming that it might destroy life's livability, in a continuing religious dependency on the Temple, in a community unable to function without it, and in the blatant contradiction between the hope of redemption and the present triumph of the evil Romans.

Here, the rabbis made another of their brilliant moves. The best way to diffuse grief is to express it, so special prayers of mourning were inserted in various liturgies. Petitions for the restoration of the Temple were added in the daily services. And the order of the Temple sacrifices was recounted daily.

But, while grief and mourning prayers were being added, the message was: thus far and no further. To a group of grieving Jews who proposed to stop normal life, Rabbi Joshua said: "Not to mourn at all is impossible, because the evil decree [the destruction] has fallen. But to mourn too much is also impossible, because the majority of the community cannot live this way."

The rabbis created a string of mourning rituals. They ordained that a glass be broken at every

wedding, in empathetic grief with the catastrophe. But weddings were not to be stopped: life, family, children must go on. They instructed that a portion of every newly built home be left unfinished; that every feast or party be less than complete; that every full-course banquet omit a food item or two.

Rabbi Yochanan placed the restoration of the Temple at the heart of the prayers in the synagogue, but in so doing enabled the Jews to go on living without the Temple. Similarly, by placing mourning rituals at the heart of Jewish life, the rabbis enabled the Jews to go on living with exile.

The very depth of the defeat made it necessary

to project a counter-statement of hope. The prophet Zechariah had promised that the four days of fasting and weeping established after the destruction of the First Temple would be turned into happy holy-days.

Similarly, the rabbis asserted that the day of the destruction of the Temple would be the birthday of the Messiah. The inherited four fast days became the vehicles of a dialectical move—release of grief and reaffirmation of hope as one.

The Talmud tells us the reason why the Jewish people deserved such a destruction and exile was different for each of the Temples. The first was due to rampant violation of the three cardinal sins of the Torah: murder, idolatry, and immorality. The reason for the second destruction, however, was that even though the people of that generation observed Judaism properly, they were guilty of harboring baseless hatred towards one another. Today we are still afflicted with the destructive problem of harboring baseless hatred towards our fellow Jew, and this serves to prolong the exile we are presently experiencing. When we strive to better ourselves and cultivate feelings of love for all we will merit to see this day of sorrow and mourning transformed into a day of rejoicing.



TISHA B'AV CUSTOMS

The restrictions established for Tisha b'Av and the weeks preceding it are intended to eliminate anything that would detract from mourning or lead to levity. In reenacting the response to the destruction of Jerusalem and other tragedies of Jewish history, every Jew becomes a mourner. That is why many of the things we do on Tisha b'Av are borrowed from the customs and rituals we follow to express grief when we lose members of our immediate families. We restrict our physical comfort and express humility by not wearing leather shoes. Likewise, the clothes we put on should

be simple and already worn, not fresh from the laundry or dry cleaner. For the same reasons, we sit on low stools or on the floor. We do not eat or drink. When we go to sleep this night, we change our habits in a way that will lessen comfort—for example, using fewer pillows than normal, taking the mattress off the boxspring, or using a sleeping bag on the floor. We refrain from sexual relations. When the ninth

of Av falls on the Sabbath, observance of the day of mourning is postponed until the tenth. We are prohibited from expressing grief, or from fasting, on the Sabbath, a day of peace and joy. The fast of Yom Kippur, whose nature is different, is the only exception.

Contrary to what we would expect, the further away in time the Jews got from the initial cause of their grief, the more stringent their mourning practices grew. In the medieval period, it became customary to read other grief inducing texts in addition to Lamentations, such

as Job and the passages describing destruction in Jeremiah. Later, meat and wine were banned during the nine days before Tisha b'Av, then abstention was made optional for the entire three weeks beginning Tammuz 17. Eating new fruits during the three weeks was banned, and by the sixteenth century, marriages were prohibited during this period.

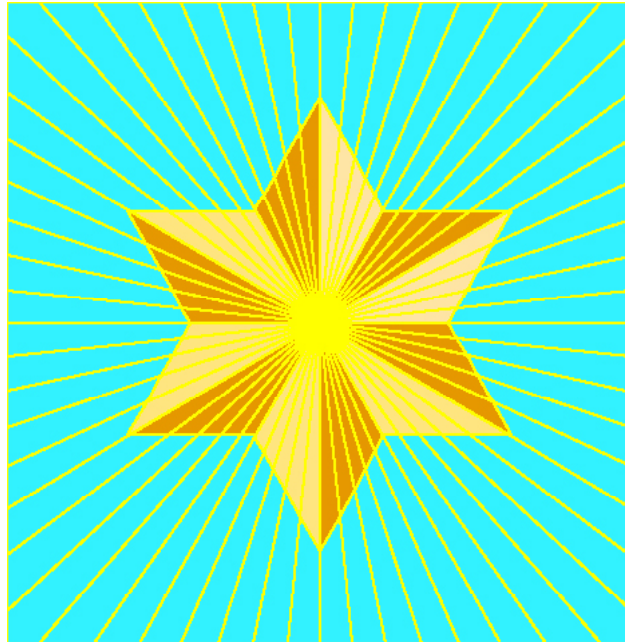
The Fast of Tammuz 17 lasts only from seventy two minutes before dawn until fifty minutes after sunset. Males of thirteen years and over and females of twelve years and older are obligated to fast. While other personal

comforts and pleasures are permitted, taking a hot bath or shower and having a haircut or shaving is also customarily prohibited. If no other date is feasible, a wedding may be held on the eve of Tammuz 17 but not after that during the rest of the three weeks.

The Sabbath immediately preceding Av 9 is known as the Sabbath of Chazon/Vision for the prophetic reading Isaiah 1:1-27. After recount-

ing heinous transgressions, it offers the hope of reconciliation, which will come when the people "cease to do evil, learn to do good."

The Sabbath following Tisha b'Av is called Shabbat Nakhamu/Consolation after the first line of the day's prophetic reading "Console, console my people..." (Isaiah 40:1-26). It is also the first of seven haftarot of consolation, all drawn from the Book of Isaiah, that deliver a message of comfort in the seven weeks following Tisha b'Av and leads to the period of repentance and Rosh Hashanah.



FASTING

The fast of the 9th of Av is second-most in importance and in severity of restrictions, coming behind only Yom Kippur. The first mention that we find of this fast day appears in the Bible itself. Zecharia 8:19 which mentions "the fast on the fifth", and as the fifth month counting from Nisan is Av, this is the fast of the 9th of Av. The Mishnah explains that we fast because of the five tragedies that occurred on this day. The five are: The decree that our ancestors in the desert would not enter the land of Israel was issued; the first Temple was destroyed; the second Temple was destroyed; the city of Betar was conquered; the city of Jerusalem was plowed over.

Everyone of religious majority is required to observe the fast that begins, along with the other restrictions of the day, at sunset. The restriction against wearing leather shoes begins at twilight. In former times, people often went bare foot; now when people go without shoes, it is usually in synagogue only.

The meal before the fast, seudah mafseket, is supposed to be limited to one dish. An egg or lentils are preferred. Both are served for the initial repast in a house of mourning because, as items that are completely enclosed within their outer coverings, without any openings, they are like mourners who in their grief hold to themselves. Being round, they also suggest the complete cycle of life. In some communities, it was customary to sprinkle ashes on the egg or to eat with it a piece of bread dipped in ashes. The seudah mafseket is also customarily eaten while seated on the floor or on a low stool.

In addition to being an ancient means of expressing remorse and sorrow, fasting on Tisha b'Av is also a reflection of the famine, repeatedly referred to in Lamentations, which wracked the defenders of Jerusalem. Among the most horrendous details of the siege are those pertaining to the mothers who, in the throes of starvation, cooked and ate their own children.

KINOT

Instead of the regular siddur, we use a special prayer book for the holiday, Kinot/Elegies, which contains the prayer services the text of Lamentations, a selection of additional elegies, and the scriptural readings for the day. Most of the Kinot chanted after Eikhah were composed during the disasters of the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. The most

popular ones were written by Elazar Hakallir, Judah Halevi and Solomon ibn Gabirol. Embodying a timeless quality that has given them lasting impact in the liturgy, they express the prayers and dreams of a persecuted people who look to God for hope. Often in acrostic form they draw on imagery from Talmud and Midrash.

TU B'AV

The Talmud says, "There are no days as festive to Israel as those of Yom Kippur and the fifteenth of Av (Tu b'Av). The daughters of Israel used to dress in white and go out to the fields to dance and young men would follow after them". This strange statement has been interpreted in various ways. One opinion is that the afternoons of Yom Kippur and Tu b'Av are periods of forgiveness. There is a traditional belief that on Tu b'Av, in the fortieth year of wandering in the desert, the Israelites were forgiven for the sins of the spies and the people.

Another important tradition concerning Tu b'Av stems from the defeat of the Bar Kochba revolt. After the fall of Betar, the Romans, as a punishment for the revolt and as a warning for the future, would not allow the Jews to bury their dead. This was a terrible desecration of the thousands of dead. The next Roman emperor rescinded this decree three years later on Tu b'Av and allowed the burial of the remains. The fifteenth of Av also marked the last day for bringing wood offerings to the temple altar for that year, and the prohibition against planting crops during the sabbatical year began with the fifteenth of Av.

Tu b'Av provides a contrast of joyous celebration following the ever deepening gloom and mourning of the Three Weeks. Coming seven days after Tisha b'Av, Tu b'Av

symbolically serves as the end of the shiv'ah--the seven days of mourning for the dead. Just as the mourner ends shiv'ah on the morning of the seventh day, so may we cast off the blackness of despair and go out of our house wearing white and dancing and courting in the fields.

For contemporary Jews Tu b'Av is an important reminder that Judaism is a religion of love. This day can be personalized in many ways, with an emphasis on spending time with our loved ones in activities that enhance and excite our lives. Going on picnics, hiking, swimming and enjoying the summer season are all appropriate ways to celebrate life and love on Tu b'Av. Beginning with Tu b'Av, some people end their letters "May you be inscribed for a good year!". From Tu b'Av we are ready to move on to Elul, a prelude to the High Holiday season with its themes of renewal and return. The period of Elul embodies a process of courtship between us and God. This theme of courtship is captured in the traditional belief that the Hebrew letters of the word Elul are an abbreviation for the phrase Ani le-dodi ve-dodi li--"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine," referring to God and Israel. Estranged from each other during the Three Weeks, Israel and God rediscover each other beginning with Tu b'Av and initiate the slow and at times painful process of becoming

TISHA B'AV THROUGHOUT THE AGES AND COMMUNITIES

Libya

The Libyan Jews so strongly believed that the three weeks augured danger that they would not allow children born at that time to be seen outside during daylight hours. While the congregation was engaged in chanting kinot, the young boys would ride around the fields on donkeys, hopeful of meeting up with the messiah, who, according to folklore, would arrive as a poor man also riding on a donkey.

Algeria

The shofar was blown, as it was in ancient fast-day ceremonies at the time of the Temple, when the priests sounded horns and declared the fast in times of distress and a procession of wailing mourners in sackcloth would prostrate themselves in front of the altar.

Jerusalem

Women of the city whitewashed their walls and scrubbed their floors in anticipation of the Messiah's impending arrival and in other communities it was customary to sweep out the house on the afternoon of Av 9. For the same reason, many women put on jewelry or perfume in the afternoon of the fast day.

Yemen

In synagogues, just before the chanting of Eikhah, a community leader proclaimed the number of years since the destruction of the Second Temple and announced that redemption had not yet arrived. Grief was encouraged by the statement that anyone who did not witness the building of the Temple was regarded as having experienced its destruction in his own lifetime.

Eastern Europe

Shabbat Nakhamu was a joyous occasion in many shtetls. After the hiatus for celebrations, a succession of weddings took place, often beginning on Friday night and continuing for several days.

Israel

On Erev Tisha b'Av restaurants and places of entertainment are closed and broadcast music programs are replaced with the chanting of Eikhah. The Western Wall is a popular place for Tisha b' Av prayers. During the day, people also walk along the Old City walls, visit archaeological dig sites that have uncovered approaches to the Temple Mount or visit Yad Vashem, Holocaust memorial.

*By the waters of Babylon
We lay down and wept for Thee Zion.
Psalm 137*



SELECTIONS FROM LAMENTATIONS

How lonely sits the city, once so full of people! She has become like a widow! She who was great among the nations, she who was a princess among the provinces, has become a bondswoman!

She weeps through the night, and the tears flow down her cheeks. Among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have betrayed her, they have become her enemies.

Judah has gone into captivity to endure affliction, to dwell among the heathen and find no rest. All her persecutors have overtaken her in her distress.

Even the roads of Zion mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts. All her gates are desolate, her priests sigh, and she herself is in bitterness.

In the hour of her affliction, Jerusalem recalls all the pleasant things she had in the days of old—now that her people have fallen to the enemy and none come to her aid, now that her oppressors gaze upon her and mock her. She sighs, she turns away, she has none to console her.

"For these things I weep; my eyes run down with tears. The comforter who should console me is far from me, he who should refresh my soul.

How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with the cloud of his anger! He has hurled to the ground the glory of Israel. He has allowed the habitations of Jacob to be consumed without mercy; in his wrath he has thrown down the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; in his fierce anger he has cut off the horn of Israel; his fury has burned like a fire that devoured Jacob.

Now the gates of Zion have sunk into the ground; her bars are broken. Her kings and princes are among the Gentiles, and the Lord appears no more in visions to her prophets.

The elders of Zion sit upon the ground in silence. They have cast dust upon their heads, and girded themselves in sackcloth. The maidens of Jerusalem hang their heads. And the life of the infant ebbs away in the arms of its mother.

Arise, cry out in the night at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water; lift up your hands to the Lord for the life of your children who faint from hunger.

See, O Lord, and consider to whom you have done this! The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets. The maidens and young men have fallen by the sword. You have slain them in your anger, O Lord; you have killed unsparingly.

I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He has led me into darkness, not into light. He has turned his hand against me. He has set me in dark

places, like those long dead. He has hedged me about so that I cannot get out; he has made my chain heavy. And when I cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has turned against me like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in a secret place. He has bent his bow and made me the target of his arrow. He has filled me with bitterness and sated me with wormwood. And I cry out, "My strength and my hope, they have perished!"

Let us search our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts to God in the heavens, and confess that we have transgressed and rebelled. Therefore has he not forgiven us.

My enemies have hunted me like a bird, without cause. They have thrown me into a dungeon and cast stones upon me. And out of the low dungeon I called upon the Lord. You drew near in the day that I called upon you; you said: "Fear not."

How the gold has dimmed! The holy stones of the sanctuary lie scattered in every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, are esteemed like earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!

Even the jackals bare their breast to suckle their young; but the daughters of my people have become cruel, like the ostriches of the desert. The tongue of the nursing infant clings to the roof of his mouth; the young children beg for food, and none gives it to them.

The Lord has accomplished his fury; he has kindled a fire in Zion that has devoured it to its foundation. No king on earth believed, nor any of the inhabitants of the world, that the enemy would enter the gates of Jerusalem.

Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us! Consider, and behold our disgrace! Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless; our mothers are like widows.

We must pay for the water we drink; our own wood is sold to us. Our necks are in the yoke, and our labor unceasing. We have stretched out our hand to the Egyptians and to the Assyrians to get enough bread.

The joy of the heart is gone, and the dance has turned into mourning. The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, that we have sinned!

For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim: the Mountain of Zion is desolate; the foxes walk upon it.

You, O Lord, are enthroned forever. Why have you forsaken us so long? Turn us toward you, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. Surely you have not utterly rejected us, though your anger against us is great!



Eve Of Destruction

Barry McGuire

The eastern world it is explodin',
violence flarin', bullets loadin',
you're old enough to kill but not for votin',
you don't believe in war, what's that gun you're totin',
and even the Jordan river has bodies floatin',
but you tell me over and over and over again my friend,
ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.

Don't you understand, what I'm trying to say?
Can't you feel the fear that I'm feeling today?
If the button is pushed, there's no running away,
There'll be no one to save with the world in a grave,
take a look around you, boy, it's bound to scare you boy,
but you tell me over and over and over again my friend,
ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.

Yeah, my blood's so mad, feels like coagulatin',
I'm sittin' here, just contemplatin',
I can't twist the truth, it knows no regulation,
handful of Senators don't pass legislation,
and marches alone can't bring integration,
when human respect is disintegratin',
this whole crazy world is just too frustratin',
and you tell me over and over and over again my friend,
ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.

Think of all the hate there is in Red China!
Then take a look around to Selma, Alabama!
Ah, you may leave here, for four days in space,
but when you return, it's the same old place,
the poundin' of the drums, the pride and disgrace,
you can bury your dead, but don't leave a trace,
hate your next-door-neighbor, but don't forget to say grace,
and you tell me over and over and over and over again my friend,
ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.