
TJJ

TISHA BA'AV
GUIDE

NCSY TISHA BA'AV GUIDE

One of the most important parts of this time of year is developing an atmosphere appropriate to the day. While an appropriate atmosphere might be difficult, don't skip Tisha Ba'av. Done right, this can be one of the most moving days of the year and a formative part of one's Jewish identity¹.

Every section in this guide is to be used in conjunction with the others. Using videos, articles with each other or during Eichah or Kinot and tying in major themes and sources is part of your responsibility to make a program. I have included suggestions for ways to integrate different sections into each other but ultimately, the responsibility is yours to create a program that is meaningful to you, in order to create a meaningful program for your NCSYers.



¹ Sources for many of the ideas quoted in the guide can be found in the themes section.

CONTENTS

Logistics/ Structure of the day	6
Erev Tisha Ba'av	6
Tisha Ba'av Night	6
Tisha Ba'av Shachrit	6
Tisha Ba'av afternoon	6
Megilat Eichah	7
Introduction to Eichah	7
Chapter 1	8
Chapter 2	9
Chapter 3	11
Chapter 4	12
Chapter 5	12
Kinot	14
Themes of Tish'ah be-Av	14
Discussion points on Kinot	18
Presentation of Kinot	20
Video Clips	21
Persecution / Meaning of Tisha Bi-av	21
The Bystander Effect/Bullying	21
Jewish Identity	22
Israel	23
Holocaust	23
Miscellaneous	24
Movies	24
Stories	26
Napoleon and Tish'ah be-Av	26
Yirmiyahu and Plato	27
Rabbi Yisrael Salanter and the Tailor	27
The Glass of Tears	27
Sea of Tears	28
The Munkatcher Passport 23	29

Activities	30
Letter Writing.....	30
Write your own Kinah	30
Tisha Ba'av Kumtitz.....	30
Sin'at Chinam.....	30
"Yosl Rakover Talks to God"	31
What are we mourning?.....	31
Mourning Stories	31
Holocaust Lesson Plan	31
Rationale.....	32
Introduction	32
Lesson Development.....	33
The Tree in the Poster – The Family Tree	33
Suggestion for Analyzing the Poster.....	34
Articles	37
Why I Still Fast on Tisha B'Av	37
Thirty-Eight Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police.....	38
Yosl Rakover Talks to God.....	41
The Hangman	50
A Love Story.....	52
'To this Day'	55
Tish'ah be-Av Themes and Sources	59
The Spies / The first Tish'ah be-Av.....	59
Why?	60
It is our responsibility.....	61
Not being Totally happy.....	61
Where are you?.....	61
Tefilah / The Gate of Tears	62
Mashiach	63
Ahavas Chinam	63
Rabbi Akiva's Attitude	64
Talmud Torah on Tish'ah be-Av.....	65
Unanswered Questions.....	65

Living Al Kiddush Hashem	66
Aftermath.....	66
Al Naharot Bavel	67
Divrei Torah	74
Halacha	76
17 th Tammuz.....	76
Rosh Chodesh Av	76
Erev Tisha Ba'av.....	76
The Seudat Mafseket	77
Tisha Ba'av	77
Mincha.....	78
Maariv	78
Further Reading	79

LOGISTICS/ STRUCTURE OF THE DAY

EREV TISHA BA'AV

- Make sure everyone drinks a lot. Even those who tell you now they are not fasting, often they switch their minds back and forth.
- Go over whatever Halachot you want them to know about the day.
 - Even those who will not fast, they probably should not be eating too much in public. Remind them that the food will purposely not be extravagant.
- Frame the day that is coming. Help them realize the seriousness of the day.
 - Certain Halachot, even if not kept perfectly help pronounce this: not greeting each other, sleeping with less comfort, making an extra effort to watch your speech and actions, overall creating a somber attitude.

TISHA BA'AV NIGHT

- The davening on Tisha Ba'av is done in darker settings.
- Eichah should be read in a dark room. Depending how dark or where you are reading remind everyone to bring flashlights or have candles.
- Allow the staff to be involved by preparing introductions to the Perekiim of Eichah and the Kinot of the night.
 - Try to get NCSYers involved in any parts of the speaking. They can summarize a Perek of Eicha or Kinot, they can share personal stories; they are often very meaningful presenters.
- Teach vocabulary that will be necessary for the upcoming days.



TISHA BA'AV SHACHRIT

- Let the NCSYers know how long they will be in this setting. Be transparent. Realize that there might have to be advisors doing different types of programs deepening on how long and in-depth the programming for the rest of the bus is going to be.

TISHA BA'AV AFTERNOON

- Assign advisors to NCSYers to make sure that everyone seems ok.

MEGILAT EICHAH

The goal of reading Eichah is to set a mood for the day. It is the book of Tanach where we don't give answers, but ask a lot of questions. This is one of the main attitudes of Tisha Ba'av. It's a today to express our emotions to God, especially ones of pain and agony. It's a day we re-live our trauma, because we are still feeling the ramifications of the evil that has transpired on Tisha Ba'av and throughout Jewish history. Tisha Ba'av is a day on which we experience and talk about all Jewish tragedy, personal and communal, since every Jew is important and integral; we are only as strong as each individual.



Eichah has 5 chapters. One method of going through Eichah is to give a short intro to the Megilah and an intro or summary of each chapter as you lein. Encourage the NCSYers to read along in the English. Point out pesukim that are vivid for them to think about the messages in the text and how they can apply to the day and to their lives.

Additionally, for each perek, the messages should be related to everyday examples. Personal examples from your own life, or stories and analogies help bring the messages home. You can also allow for NCSYers to share experiences here too, but watch your timing, some NCSYers get restless.

INTRODUCTION TO EICHAH

This is the one of the most difficult Jewish books to read. The book is often just giving us the state of mind that Yirmiyahu was in upon seeing the destruction actually coming to fruition. No one believed that it was going to happen, and when it did, it was worse than anyone could have imagined.

The book of Eichah and Tish'ah ba'av are very question focused. How could this have happened? This is our attitude, to ask all our questions, to put them out there, to speak honestly with God about how we feel.

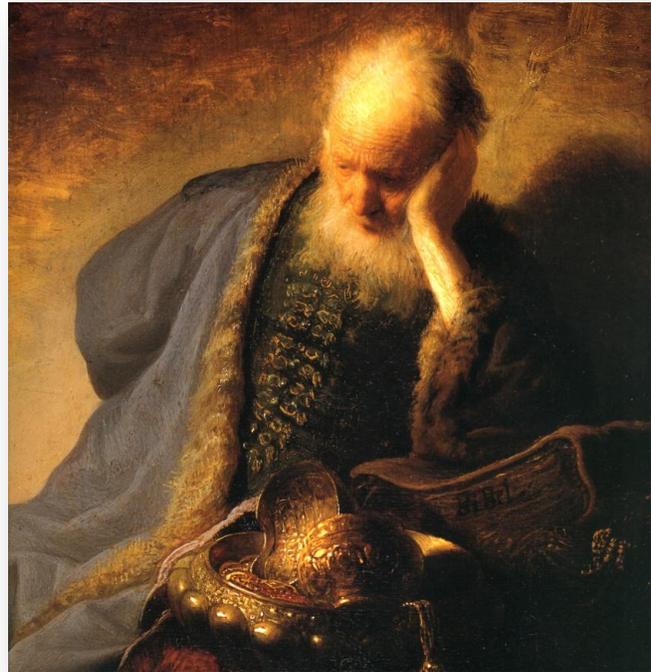
Understanding Eichah is almost contingent on the fact that you know something about how great it was before we lost it. If you do not know how good it was, then you can't understand how bad the aftermath was. This is a good time to reflect on everywhere you have been up until this point (and possibly where you will be going) and to realize that as great as everything is now, and how amazing a place Israel has become, it is all recent.

We still are suffering from the impact caused by the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and the exile that followed.

Some note the order of the Hebrew alphabet used in Eichah and Kinot and explain that there is really no limit to the things that we can say on this day. It is so bad. We can't really find the right words, so we use the whole alphabet to signify out yearning to cry out more².

Rabbi Raymond Apple³ quotes about the structure of Eichah: "The theme is repeated in each of the five distinct elegies which make up the Book; for each of the chapters is to be considered a poem complete in itself and it is fruitless to attempt to find logical coherence or development between one chapter and the next. Even within each of the separate poems there is an absence of plan or structure; instead the thought moves this way and that, as indeed might be expected in poems which are the spontaneous outpourings of a grief-stricken heart."

These are notes and ideas from the chapters which can be used as a springboard. Each heading is a theme that is in the Perek followed by the Pasuk and an explanation.



Rembrandt - *Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem*. 1630

CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 contains 22 verses, each beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It describes the distress of the city and of its people contrasted with the arrogance of the enemy: "For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water; because the comforter is far from me, He that will refresh my soul; my children are desolate, because the enemy has prevailed" (verse 16). The chapter concludes with a plea that the enemy, the willing instrument of evil, should not escape its own punishment.

No matter how bad it looks, we can never give up hope.

² This idea can be extended to other intense emotional places in Jewish texts: Eiseis Chayil, Ashrei, Tehilim 119 and others.

³ Rabbi Emeritus of the Great Synagogue of Sydney - <http://www.oztorah.com/2007/06/eichah-the-book-of-lamentations/>

- 1 - She has become like a widow!
 - Rashi says that she has not actually become a widow. She is more like a woman whose husband went abroad and is bound to return to her. We need to recognize that things are bad, but that there is always hope⁴.

Realizing what was Lost / Relationship with God

- 7 - Jerusalem recalls the days of her poverty and her miseries, [and] all her precious things that were from days of old; when her people fell into the hand of the adversary, and there was none to help her; the enemies gazed, gloating on her desolation.
 - Jerusalem recalls - When we recognize all that was great, the pain of what we are missing is so much greater.
 - Gloating - The Midrash Aggadah (Eichah Rabbah) interprets it as a different expression, that they rested in exile on the Sabbaths and festivals and observed the seventh year, and the heathens ridiculed them and said, "Fools! In your land you did not keep the Sabbatical Year, and now in exile you keep it? In your land, you did not keep the Sabbath, and now in exile you keep it?" Often when things are going well we don't remember God, but when things are bad, we often turn to Him. God wants to form a relationship with us, when things are good and bad. Sometimes God brings misfortune upon someone to allow them to rekindle their relationship with Him so that they don't stray too far. We need to remember that we can wait till we are in the fox hole to turn to God.



CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 also has 22 verses and is alphabetical. It elaborates on the theme of the desolation: "The youth and the old man lie on the ground in the streets; my young women and young men have fallen by the sword; You slew them in the day of Your anger; You slaughtered unsparingly" (verse 21).

Pain by Comparison/ Taking the Hint

- 13 - What shall I testify for you? What shall I compare to you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What can I liken to you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin is as vast as the sea-who can heal you?
 - The Zohar comments: "what instance can I cite of any other nation that suffered a calamity equal to yours?" The Lechem Dimah (Rav Shmuel D'Uzida

⁴ See Makot 24b; Yerushalmi Brachos 2:4

student of the Arizal, 16th century) elaborates: “whose suffering and circumstances can be likened to yours, so that you can be comforted by the comparison? Rashi notes that human nature is such that we find comfort in knowing that we are not the only ones who suffered pain, there are others who have made it through similar experiences. However, the pain of Tish’ah ba’av, has no comparison. There is no comfort to be attained by comparison.

- The Midrash comments on the word ‘testify’: [God said:] How many prophets did I send to warn you [of the consequences of your evil ways]? - What more could I have done for you? Often things happen which are supposed to serve as a reminder or a sign to do something, but are we paying attention to the signs? Are we allowing ourselves to take advantage of our surroundings? God wants to help us, we have to be willing to take help, and believe that we can succeed no matter what happens.

Prioritizing the Land of Israel

- 18 - Their heart cried out to the Lord: "O wall of the daughter of Zion! Let tears stream down like a torrent day and night, give yourself no respite, let the pupil of your eye not rest!
 - Rav Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) wrote: The greatest sin of all is that we, in our time, stopped mourning properly for Jerusalem. I am convinced that, in punishment for this, our exile has lasted so long, we have never been able to find rest, and we are always being persecuted. Historically, whenever we found some security in any of the lands of our exile, we forgot Jerusalem and did not place it at the foremost place in our minds⁵.

Prayer and Crying out to God

- 19 - Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord; lift up your hands to Him [and pray] for the lives of your infants, who faint because of hunger at the head of every street."
 - The Lechem Dimah writes: “pour out your heart like water in the Presence of the Lord, and if that is ineffective because your merits are insufficient, then lift up your hand to Him as if you were praying for the life of your innocent infants who are fainting.” Tish’ah be-Av is a day of intense prayer. We recognize that God has not brought the Mashiach yet, but we can’t stop praying. Real prayer, prayer with tears, is always accepted before God⁶. We



⁵ See Tehilim 137:5-6

⁶ See Brachot 32b

need to realize that God listens to our prayers, and will wonder stop our crying, but until then, we need to cry.

Tehilim 56:9 - You counted my wanderings; place my tears in Your flask. Is it not in Your accounting?

Yeshayahu 25:8 - He has concealed death forever, and the Lord God shall wipe the tears off every face, and the shame of His people He shall remove from upon the entire earth, for the Lord has spoken.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3, with 66 verses constructed according to a triple alphabet, gives expression to the deep sorrow in the author's heart. Yet: "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Surely the Lord's mercies are not consumed: Surely His compassions fail not" (verses 21-22)

Maintaining Trust and Faith in God

- 25 - The Lord is good to those who trust in Him, to the soul that seeks Him.
 - The Midrash notes what seems to be a contradiction from Tehilim 145:9: "The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are on all His works." From Tehilim it seems like God is good to all. The Midrash answers with a parable: When one waters his garden, he waters all of it. When one rakes, however, he only rakes the better plants. So too, in normal times, God provides for everyone equally, but in times of punishment and destruction, only those who hope in Him are worthy of individual intervention. We need to take an active role and trust in God. When things look bad, we feel upset with God. We feel even angry at times. However, despite our negative feelings, ultimately, we also need to pray to God that it get better. We need to have trust and faith that in the end, God will take care of us.

The Uniqueness of the Jewish People

- 46 - All our enemies have opened their mouth wide against us.
 - Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Yachya (1430 - 1490) writes: "Instead of completely ignoring us – as one would normally ignore filth and refuse – our enemies taunted and jeered at us, giving us no peace; not even allowing us to wallow, undisturbed, in our misery." Our suffering is looked on by the entire world. No matter how small the Jewish people are, it seems that our affairs are as important, if not more, than everything else that is going on in the world. Why? There is something unique to our people. There is something which binds us. Our enemies label us as one nation, however, we often divide ourselves with labels. Our enemies not only taunt us, and hurt us, they celebrate our suffering, to this day.

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4, with 22 verses, is again alphabetical. It stresses that the city has suffered not only by reason of external but internal factors. The Rabbis declared (Yoma 9b) that the first Temple fell because of idolatry, immorality and bloodshed, and the second because of groundless hatred amongst the people. National weakness and internal social disintegration were the unseen allies of the enemy.

Moral Depravity

- 3,10,14-15- There is much discussion of the moral depravity that was going on during the famine of the Siege. The people acted before immorally and didn't change their ways. Now, when times were at their worst, these people were so desensitized by their previous immorality they lost all sense for right and reason. They suffered in their own immorality that they created.

Misplaced Role Models

- 16 - The anger of the Lord divided them; He will regard them no longer; they respected not the presence of the priests; they favored not the elders.
 - Rashi says: "The angry face of the Holy One, blessed be He, divided them and dispersed them among the heathens, because they did not respect the presence of the priests when they were in their [state of] tranquility." The people lost all sense of respect for those who represented good. They chose incorrect role model. They got lost in what was right and wrong.



CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 is not alphabetical but contains 22 verses. It concludes with an appeal to God to become reconciled with Israel and to "renew our days as of old".

Taking the First Step towards our Relationship with God

- 1- Recall, O Lord, what has befallen us; behold and see our disgrace
 - We want God to remember us. We know that He can see us, hear us, and knows our pain. Often God waits for us to cry out seriously before He redeems us; He wants to see that we really want it.

Shemos 2:23-25- Now it came to pass in those many days that the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed from the labor, and they cried out, and their cry ascended to God from the labor. God heard their cry, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham,

with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the children of Israel, and God knew.

Do we really want exile to be over? What are we doing about it. What actions do we take to ensure that it does?

Returning to God

- 6- We have stretched out our hands to Egypt [and to] Assyria to get enough food.
 - We only have God to turn to in times of crisis. We got so desperate that we reached out to our enemies for help. Sometimes we are so embarrassed to turn back to God that we are willing to turn anywhere else. We should never be embarrassed to face God; God takes back even the worst sinner. Rebbe Nachman teaches (Likutey Moharan II, 112): "If you believe that you can break it, then believe that you can fix." We are the ones who believe that our relationship with God is shattered, so we too must believe that we can also fix that which we believe is broken.

Remembering the Past, while taking steps towards the Future

- 21- Restore us to You, O Lord, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old.
 - We want to return to how great things were. Most importantly, our relationship with God. It was our sins that caused this destruction, and it is our actions again that can redeem us.
 - Rashi mentions the minhag that we follow to repeat this verse and not end on a bad note. Even when things seem bad, we always need to have hope.

KINOT

The goal is to spend as much time doing Kinot as will be productive for your NCSYers. Each group is different.

However, don't skip this entirely. It's important for all Jews to be able to connect to their heritage, and unfortunately, part of Jewish heritage is the suffering that we have and continue to endure with.

Each Advisor should prepare something to say on the Kinot. The staff should discuss beforehand their general ideas to make sure certain major themes are addressed and there is not too much repetition. It is crucial to relate to the ideas and the themes in a personal way to help the NCSYers connect as well.



THEMES OF TISH'AH BE-AV

Personal tragedy / Communal tragedy

- As Jews we aspire to feel each other's pain⁷ because we are all interconnected⁸.

Still mourning

- Why is this relevant- why is it important to us, today?
 - We are still responsible. We commit the same crimes. There is still baseless hatred among the Jewish people. If we don't see the Beit Hamikdash being built we are partially responsible⁹.

Where are you?

- Eichah can is often linked to the word Ayekah¹⁰ – Where are you? We ask on this day: "Where are you spiritually that you allowed yourself to decline so quickly?" Ayekah can also be How?- "How did you do this to Me?," or "How did you make Me do this to You?," or "How do you keep repeating the same mistakes over and over



⁷ Avos 6:6 - Torah is acquired with forty-eight qualities...participating in the burden of one's fellow...

⁸ See Tanya Chapter 32

⁹ See Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1

¹⁰ A reference to Adam being asked by God, 'Where are you' after eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

again?” “How do you disappoint Me and make Me dwell alone?”

Baseless hatred vs. brotherly love / Sinas Chinam vs Ahavas Chinam

- The Second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of Sinas Chinam. It makes sense that the way to fix that is to behave in a way of Ahavas Chinam¹¹. Put our differences aside, and unite on those things that all Jews believe in. To love every Jew.

Mourning / We are all mourners

- We all act like mourners on Tisha Baav. We suffer as individuals, because each one of us suffers on an individual level from these tragedies. The mourning has been getting more and more intense since the beginning of the 3 weeks. On Tisha Ba'av, we don't know what else we can do. As the day goes on we notice other individuals, and we remember that each individual is part of a while we are connected too.

Anti-Semitism

- This day we remember all that has transpired to our people. Our enemies hate us for reasons often we can't understand. They see us the same, we do not.

Exile to redemption

- At some point at the end of Kinot it's important to explain that Tisha Ba'av is one day on the calendar. We do not wallow in our pain. We must move on. We remember everything that happened to us, we take the time during Tisha Ba'av (the whole 3 weeks also) to live differently to let us not forget.
- We are supposed to do things during the year to remember all that we don't have: Al Naharos Bavel, brachot in Shemonei Esrei (veyerushalim, eit tzemach david, retzei), we still have restrictions on music even during the year¹², we break a glass at weddings, we tear kriah¹³ when we see certain places, we leave a part of our homes unfinished¹⁴, we still aren't supposed to be completely happy¹⁵, but we are supposed to live our lives. God wants us to go on living. Our goal is to go on living, representing the Jewish people today.
- This is one reason Tisha Ba'av is still referred to as a Moed by Chazal¹⁶. It is a future festival. The Mashiach is said to be born on Tisha Ba'av¹⁷. This idea shows us that from the darkness, we must be able to also see the light at the end of the tunnel.

¹¹ See Orot HaKodesh¹¹ vol. III, p. 324

¹² Gitin 7a, Shulchan Aruch 560:3

¹³ S"A O"C 561:2

¹⁴ S"A 560:1

¹⁵ Brachos 31a

¹⁶ See Rambam Hilchot Taanit 5:19

¹⁷ See Yerushalmi Brachos 2:4

Here is a list of Kinot with their major themes. You can choose to do any Kinot which speak to you:

Kinah 11 (182) - The death of Yoshiyahu

Kinah 16 (226) - the atrocities of Titus

Kinah 17 (232) - the loss of morals

Kinah 21 (248) - the ten martyrs

Kinah 23 (260) - the trial of the children of Rabbi Yishmael

Kinah 25 (270) - the first crusades

Kinah 31 (304) - comparing leaving Egypt to leaving Yerushalayim

Kinah 41 (360) - loss of Torah; Seforim

Kinot for Holocaust (384, 386)

Kinah 45 (390) - *keli tzion*- moving forward, not forgetting



Here is a division of the Kinot by theme (Pages based on the Artscroll edition).

1. Impressions of the catastrophes which occurred in Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. when the first Temple was destroyed and in 70 C.E. upon the destruction of the second Temple. Both tragedies are mourned on the very same day, the Ninth of Av.

"B'layl Zeh" (54)

"A'adeh Ad Chug Shamayim" (162)

"Aychah Tifarti" (166)

"Ohali Asher To'avta" (188)

"Aychah Ashpato..." (210)

"Im Tochalnah..." (232)

"Al Churban Bais Hamikdash" (264)

"Aysh Tukad" (306)

"Etzv'osi Shofolu..." (310)

"Sh'churas V'lo Miyayin" (324)

2. The atrocities resulting from the Roman legions crushing defeat of the Bar Kochba armies in 135 C.E.

"Z'chor Asher Osoh..." (226)

"Hatay Elokai Ozn'cha" (246)

"Arzay HaL'vanon" [The Ten Martyrs] (248)

3. The heinous crimes of the Crusades, a series of mass riots and religious wars starting in 1096 and effecting directly the destruction of countless thousands of Jews and entire Jewish communities in Europe during a period over three hundred years. While general history texts focus on the Crusades as a period of political and economic progress for Western European countries, almost nothing is mentioned of the brutality that was meted

out in the name of religion and Christian love. Accordingly, these Kinot desire very special considerations.

"Mi Yiten ..." (270)

"Ayvel A'orayr..." (316)

"Sha'ali S'rufah b'Aysh"(360)

4. The centrality of the land of Israel to the existence of the Jew. Always can there be heard the yearning for the restoration of a Jewish homeland in Israel as the rejoinder to the Christian theological position which taught that the destruction of the Jewish state twice, ipso facto, implies that the Jew is corrupt and cursed people, punished by their G-d with eternal banishment and displacement from the Holy Land, and forever judged to bear suffering for its sins.



"Z'chor Hashem" (48)

"Ata Amarta" (236)

"Tzion, Halo Tishali ..." (328)

"Tzion, K'chi kol Tzori..." (334)

"Tzion Ateres Tzvi ..." (340)

"Tzion T'koneni ..." (346)

"Tzion Y'didus ..." (352)

"Tzion, Tz'firas p'ayr" (368)

"Tzion, B'mishpot L'chi" (374)

"Tzion, G'veret ..." (380)

5. The yearning for forgiveness for the individual and collective shortcomings of past generations resulting in these catastrophes. This theme is further highlighted in the S'lichot service of other fast days throughout the year. Within these Kinot, the questions constantly asked are, "Haven't we suffered enough?" "Why, G-d do You persist in hiding Your grace from us?" This is known in Jewish philosophy as the theology of Hester Panim (hiding of His countenance). It is noteworthy that Judaism does not proscribe its faithful from blurting out in pain the age - old challenge unto G-d, "Why the tragedy? Where are You, God Why have You forsaken us?"

"Shomron Kol" (58)

"Ad Ono B'chayah" (62)

"Aychah Atzto B'Ap'cha" (158)

"Aychah Eli" (182)

"Aychah Es Asher" (198)

"Ay Koh ..." (192)

"Z'chor Asher Asah ..." (228)

"L'cho Hashem HaTz'dakak" (242)

"M'onay Shamayim" (300)

"Yom Achpi ..." (320)

"Eli Tzion V'oreha ..." (390)

6. The suicide pacts and self-immolation undertaken by Jews throughout the ages in the name of Kiddush Hashem rather than having to fall prey to the hands of the advancing plundering oppressors, be they the Greeks, Romans, or Christian rulers, often were undertaken by Jews rather than take the leap of faith into the waters of eternal salvation, the waters of the baptismal font, and abandon their Judaism. Entire groups at times chose suicide in the name of God rather than be defiled by their oppressors, viewing such suicide as a supreme mitzvah. So frequent were these incidents that Rabbis of the Middle Ages pondered whether a bracha over such an act was in place.

"Hacharishu Mimeni ..." (254)
"V'Es Novi ..." (260)

"Amarti Sh'u Mini ..." (292)

7. The Talmud (Ta'anis 29a) ascribes to Tisha b'Av five pivotal calamities which befell the Jewish people in different periods of Jewish history. The earliest event occurred in the year 2449 according to the Hebrew calendar (about 3200 years ago) when it was decreed that the "Dor haMidbar", the adult generation leaving Egypt, would not reach Israel except for Joshua and Caleb. The last of these events was the fall of Betar, a fortress south of Jerusalem, which in 135 C.E. (about 1800 years ago) was the site of Bar Kochba's final defeat in his revolt against Roman occupation. This was the last time that Jewish rule in Israel was to be seen until the mid - 20th century.

"B'Layl Zeh" (54)

8. The plea that we speedily see divine justice meted out to those who have senselessly oppressed the Jewish people throughout history whereupon the Messianic age would be ushered in.

"Shovas, Suru Meni" (152)

"Aychah Ashpato ..." (210)

9. "Z'chus Avos", the abounding spiritual merits of our forefathers in the eyes of G-d, are recounted. For if we cannot yet merit divine redemption for our deeds, let the deeds of our forefathers be remembered as the factor to bring about our premised redemption.

"Oz Bahaloch ..." (278)

"Amarti Sh'u Mini ..." (292)

"Oz Bimlos Sayfek" (282)

10. The Kinot about more recent tragedies

"Zichru No ..." (384)

"HaZocher Mazkirav" (386)



DISCUSSION POINTS ON KINOT

Mi Yiten Roshi Mayim: This *kinnah* was written to commemorate the events of the First Crusade in 1096.

- Why don't we add a special day of mourning for each individual tragedy?
- Why has *Tisha B'av* become the all-encompassing day of mourning?
- What connects all of the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people?

Arzei Halevanon: This *kinnah* focuses on the *Aseret Harugei Malchut*, religious leaders of the Jewish people who were martyred by the Romans.

- Tell individual stories of some of the martyrs.
- Why was it important for the Romans to rid the Jews of their leadership?
- Discuss the idea of heroism:
 - Were these Rabbis heroes?
 - Who is your hero?
 - How do you decide?

Sha'ali Serufa Ba'esh: This *kinnah* was written in reference to the burning of the Talmud manuscripts that took place in Paris in 1242. This was part of the Church's attempt to eradicate Judaism and force conversion onto the Jews of Europe.

- What is the most important object of a Jew?
- Why did the church feel that getting rid of the Talmud was the key to getting rid of Judaism?
- Some Jews converted to Christianity or outwardly converted while continuing to practice Judaism in secret. Was this ideal?
- Give out the text of the *kinnah* with its English translation and have kids highlight all of the sad words in the first paragraph. Have them circle all of the words related to fire and burning throughout the whole text. In a different color have them highlight the positive words in the last paragraph, showing the progression which starts on a negative note and ending on a positive one.

Esh Tukad: This *kinnah* compares the great joy that the Jews experienced when they left Egypt to the terrible pain they felt when they left Jerusalem. It describes the reversal of events which started out with great potential only to end tragically.

- What was the happiest moment in your life? The saddest?
- Why did the author choose to connect these two events in our history?

Tzion Kechi: This *kinnah* describes the beauty and uniqueness of the Land of Israel, which was lost when the destruction occurred and its people were exiled.

- What were your first impressions when you went to Israel?
- What role does/should Israel play in our lives as Diaspora Jews?
- Do you see Israel as being essential to your Jewish identity?

Eli Tzion: This *kinnah* details what was lost as a result of the destruction, and why it is so tragic. It compares cries of mourning to the cries of a woman in childbirth.

- How have we as a people been forced to change as a result of the destruction? (changes in how we worship, changes in judicial and religious leadership etc.)
- How are we still feeling the effects of the destruction?

- The kinnah uses two analogies to compare the pain of the destruction to, one of a woman mourning her dead husband and the other of a woman in childbirth.
 - What is the difference between these analogies?
 - They both describe pain, but one has a positive outcome which is dependent on the initial pain.
 - How can we take these ideas and ensure a positive outcome for the destruction?

PRESENTATION OF KINOT

These are various ideas/methods for making Kinot a little more interactive and involving the NCSYers. They are not mutually exclusive of each other. The different methods can be combined. Discuss with the staff beforehand how it will be done, and what they will be responsible to do. Kinot do not have to be read straight, they can be broken up with clips, videos, articles, stories.

- Advisors can give an introduction or frame and each NCSYer can read silently.
- NCSYers can read the Kinah first to themselves and then you can go around and have someone explain it in their own words to the group. Advisors can follow.
- An NCSYer can read the Kinah out loud for the whole group and then they (or someone else) can summarize in their own words. Advisors can follow.
- Advisors can read the Kinot out loud and explain to the group as they read.
- Assign specific Kinot to advisors. Break NCSYers into groups and have them go around to different round robin explanations/discussions about the Kinot with the advisors. Have the Advisors switch every few minutes. You can do 2-3 rounds with each advisor.

VIDEO CLIPS

Clips should be followed by short discussions. Each clip provoked different imagery and thoughts. Here are general examples of questions that can be asked after the clips for reflection:

- What is your reaction after seeing this film?
- What scene stands out most vividly?
- What are you thinking about now that you were not before?
- Did you learn anything as a result of this film? What?
- Is there any action that you are motivated to do as a result of watching this?

PERSECUTION / MEANING OF TISHA BI-AV

The Root of Destruction – The meaning behind the Tears, Charlie Harary

Charlie Harari – Tisha Baav <http://www.aish.com/h/9av/mm/98394544.html>

This clip takes you through some of the themes of Tisha Baav including the original story of the meraglim. Some excellent take home points.

Persecution of the Jewish People Throughout History

Persecution throughout history - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvy5V0Y0A90>

This clip takes you through persecutions of the Jewish people- it then suggest the 6 main reasons why people are anti-Semitic. (This is based on the Aish presentation) could be useful to open up a discussion about “reasons” for anti-Semitism.

THE BYSTANDER EFFECT/BULLYING

What would you do?

What would you do if you see a crime? Features people’s reaction to a crime and the difference between white and black vandals.

Bystander Effect Part 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCQU0jt4cs>

Bystander Effect Part 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLXCCcqnY-I>

Notes: this is not necessarily a Jewish themed video, but touches upon people getting involved to help others. The Bystander Effect.

Bystander sick man- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSsPfbup0ac>

another video which shows less danger- people walking past someone sick on the street. Can discuss the difference between these 2 examples of bystander apathy.

Connect to tisha baav- ahavat chinam to counter balance sinat chinam.

Anti Semitism in a Bakery <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRX31HOikws>

This video is about Jewish Anti-Semitism and how people do or do not defend the Jewish people. Use this clip to start a discussion on how you would feel, would you defend another religion or race if it happened to them?

The Hangman – Poem by Maurice Ogden¹⁸

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEPSIAkmzAE>

This is another clip to use for bystander effect.

To This Day - Porkchop

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltun92DfnPY>

Notes: This clip can be very intense if someone has a past where they have been bullied. A warning should be given beforehand¹⁹.

- At 1:20, he reminds us all what we heard growing up.
- At 2:07, we meet another girl who was bruised by words.
- At 2:57, we learn why she's awesome.
- At 3:12, we meet a kid who was pummeled by pills.
- At 4:28, we learn how many kids have to deal with this to this day.
- At 5:23, if you've been bullied, you REALLY need to hear these words.
- At 6:00, seriously, listen to these damn beautiful words.
- And at 6:49, we get to the point that everyone should take to heart.

JEWISH IDENTITY

Billy and Rashida Jones play whistle blow that Jew

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcD3oPVMMhA>

A funny clip game show asking which famous celebrities changed their names.

Can start a discussion about why these celebrities changed their names. Why do you think they want to sound less Jewish?

2009 Funny People Ira Wright aka Weiner

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwlyiF0jlQE>

¹⁸ See Article section for text

¹⁹ The full lyrics can be found in the articles section.

Do we hide our Jewish Identity? How so? When are we proud and when are we afraid to be called a Jew?

Tickle and The Wailing Wall - From the movie Garden State

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WavSYq6c2vg&feature=youtu.be>

What do we hold on to?

ISRAEL

Save the city of Sderot

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ5CtzTQXP>

HOLOCAUST

The connection to Tisha Baav with all these clips is that Tisha Baav is the day to commemorate persecution. You can use any of these clips which might speak to your teens.

American Nazi Movement

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=fgq03ZDapLI&feature=endscreen>

Notes: Can the Holocaust happen again? Look how regular most of the people look. How much hatred there still is in America.

Throw the Jew down the well

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vb3IMTJjzfo>

Notes: they are getting a little too into it; a little scary. There are many places in America that there are no Jews and Jewish hatred is more rampant. There are many who don't know anything about Jews, and are exposed to people who hate Jews and because of ignorance hate Jews.

The persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpdJhA5aJkA>

Video looking at persecution of Jews in the holocaust. Use the persecution of the holocaust to tap into pain of Tisha Ba'av.

Holocaust on Trial

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GttBZF8ceY>

Looking at David Irving (holocaust Denier)'s trial. Can be used to ask questions about what our job might be to combat views like this.

Holocaust Testimonials

http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/testimony_films/index.asp#!prettyPhoto

Multiple options to look at and identify with their pain.

Yad Vashem Youtube Channel

<http://www.youtube.com/user/YadVashem>

Multiple options to look at and identify with their pain.

MISCELLANEOUS

TED talk – Freedom Writers Foundation

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDq9o9j3-CU>

This is the real story of Erin Gruwell (the film Freedom Writers story) who taught the unteachable students and changed their perceptions. She taught them about prejudice and tolerance.

J-DOV Talks – The Five Legged Table – Linking to Collective Memory

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOXIQi_a-rc

This lecture looks at the importance of memory in Jewish History.

We have questions, but the only thing we can do is wait to ask Mashiach

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKugx6txj0c>

Lubavitcher Rebbe talking to couple about losing their son. We have a lot of questions, but we don't always have answers. Questions should not stop us from believing.

MOVIES

During the long afternoon of Tisha Ba'av many watch full length movies. Here are some suggestions:

- Jacob the Liar - <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120716/>
 - In 1944 Poland, a Jewish shop keeper named Jakob is summoned to ghetto headquarters after being caught out near curfew. While waiting for the German Kommandant, Jakob overhears a German radio broadcast about Russian troop movements. Returned to the ghetto, the shopkeeper shares his information with a friend and then rumors fly that there is a secret radio within the ghetto. Jakob uses the chance to spread hope throughout the ghetto by continuing to tell favorable tales of information from "his secret radio." Jakob, however, has a real secret in that he is hiding a young Jewish girl who escaped from a camp transport train. A rather uplifting and slightly humorous film about World War II Jewish Ghetto life. Full Movie: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrETjiLpKIA>

- God on Trial - http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1173494/?ref=sr_1
 - In a quest for Mindfulness Based - Reality Centered Living, the question of God (or lack thereof) often cannot be avoided. To what extent does mankind as a whole and as individuals control its own destiny? Are we ourselves "Creative" or are we all mere pawns in God's "Master Plan"? Why is there so much suffering in the world and what kind of God would allow it to happen? Universal questions about faith and philosophy are at the heart of this full featured film which was inspired by the legend that a group of concentration camp prisoners conducted a mock trial against the Almighty God. From all walks of life, a physicist, a glove maker, rabbis, a law professor and at least one criminal weigh the evidence and offer thoughtful arguments taken from history, science, theology and personal experience. Spoiler – They find Him guilty at 1:20:00, however at 1:22:00 when the time comes that they might die, they start to pray to Him. Sometimes we don't understand God, or the way He works, we may even put blame on Him, but in the end, we still pray to God, He is the only one we can turn too, even if we don't understand the world. Full Movie: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-oNYd23pQk>
- Freedom writers²⁰
 - A young teacher inspires her class of at-risk students to learn tolerance, apply themselves, and pursue education beyond high school. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0463998/?ref=sr_1
<http://viooz.eu/movies/2313-freedom-writers-2007.html>
- Masterpiece Classic: The Diary of Anne Frank
- Schindlers List²¹
 - In Poland during World War II, Oskar Schindler gradually becomes concerned for his Jewish workforce after witnessing their persecution by the Nazis. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108052/>

Note: This movie can be particularly difficult to watch. Let everyone know beforehand. If someone says they want to leave you should have an alternate idea for them.
- Defiance
 - Jewish brothers in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe escape into the Belarusian forests, where they join Russian resistance fighters and endeavor to build a village in order to protect themselves and about 1,000 Jewish non-combatants. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1034303/?ref=sr_2

²⁰ There is a clip above which talks about the organization which took off to help at risk youth through writing and learning about the Holocaust

²¹ You need to get a clean version. The regular version is more graphic and there is nudity.

- Pay It Forward
 - A young boy attempts to make the world a better place after his teacher gives him that chance. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0223897/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Note: This can be a good way to start a post Tisha ba'av project of being nice to each other.

STORIES

Artsroll's book Touched by their Tears is a book of stories organized by Kina and are overall very helpful.

NAPOLEON AND TISH'AH BE-AV

The following story is told of the great French leader, Napoleon Bonaparte. He once was traveling through a small Jewish town in Europe. He entered a synagogue. There he saw an incredible sight. Men and women weeping. They were sitting on the floor on small stools holding candles while reading from books. The synagogue had an elaborate chandelier but only a few candles were lit. If not for the small candle lights the magnificent synagogue would have been in complete darkness. It was a gloomy and sad sight to behold.



Napoleon asked why the people were weeping and wanted to know what misfortune had happened here. An enlightened Jewish French officer told him that nothing new and terrible had happened. The Jewish people had a custom to gather once a year on a day called the ninth day of Av, the day that marks the destruction of the Jewish people's Temple. Twice they built a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem and both were destroyed. After their second Temple was destroyed the people were scattered all over the world and sold as slaves. Some escaped and built their homes world over. Somehow the Jewish people exist without their country and their Temple.

In order to commemorate these sad events they gather once a year in synagogue. There they fast, pray, and read sad prophetic writings concerning the destruction of their Temple and land. What we see in this town is happening in all Jewish communities.

Napoleon inquired as to how many years have they been doing this and was over 2000 years. Upon hearing this Napoleon exclaimed, "A nation that cries and fasts for over 2,000 years for their land and Temple will surely be rewarded with their Temple."

YIRMIYAHU AND PLATO

It is brought in the sefer Galus V'Nechama of Rav Shimshon Pincus that the Rema writes in the Sefer Toras HaOlah that after the Churban, Plato the Greek philosopher, met Yirmiyahu and Yirmiyahu was crying. Plato asked Yirmiyahu two questions. First, why was the great wise man of the Jews crying over a building made of bricks and stones? Secondly, why was he crying over the past? What happened cannot be changed.

Yirmiyahu told Plato the wisest man among the nations to ask him any questions he had in philosophy that he did not have any answer to. Plato asked many hard questions and Yirmiyahu answered all of them to Plato's great satisfaction. The Rema writes that at this point Plato did not know if he speaking with a human being or a Malach. Yirmiyahu then explained to Plato that all his wisdom came from the "bricks and stones" called the Bais HaMikdash and therefore he cries. Regarding his second question of why he cries over something that already happened, Yirmiyahu said that this question he won't answer, because even if he did Plato would not understand.

That the divine Hashem and almighty creator of the universe can have a meaningful and intimate relationship with a mere mortal is not something that even Plato can understand. That He yearns for our tears is something not even worthwhile to try and explain, even to the wisest of all men.

RABBI YISRAEL SALANTER AND THE TAILOR

Traveling one night on a deserted country road, Rav Yisroel Salanter came upon a small farmhouse with a light burning in the window, and decided to stop for the night. Upon seeing the homeowner – a poor tailor – working late into the night, Reb Yisroel questioned the man's unusual diligence. The tailor pointed to his low burning, flickering candle and responded "kol zman she'haneir dolek, efshar l'saken, as long as the candle burns, one can still mend".

Rav Yisroel shuddered as the profound – albeit unintended – message contained in the man's response dawned upon him. "How true are these words" he thought to himself, "as long as a person is alive, and the flame of his neshama continues to burn, he is able to mend his ways, repent, and do mitzvos. How precious and valuable is every moment of life that we can use to study torah and perform mitzvos."



THE GLASS OF TEARS²²

²² The Yerushalmi (Taanis 4:6) says that on erev Tish'ah be-Av used to dip his bread into ashes and say: This is the essence of the Erev Tish'ah be-Av meal, in fulfillment of the pasuk: He made me cower in ashes (Eichah 3:16).

One afternoon before Tisha B'Av, the Chasam Sofer, a great 19th century European sage, would neither study Torah nor write responsa. He simply closed himself in a room.

One of his disciples could not restrain his curiosity and quietly opened the door of the room. He saw the Chasam Sofer weeping bitterly over the destruction of the Temple, his tears falling into a glass in front of him.

At the meal before the fast, the Chasam Sofer drank from the tears collected in the glass, in fulfillment of the verse (Tehilim 80:6): "You fed them with the bread of tears, and gave them tears to drink in great measure."

SEA OF TEARS

Rebbe Yitzhak, better known as the Vorker Rebbe, believed foremost in looking out for the well-being of all people, and he was known as a goodly and kindly teacher. Meanwhile The Kotsker Rebbe, Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, was most concerned with the pursuit of truth and he sought it out at the expense of all else, even if it meant berating his students. Though their paths were different, they were nonetheless the closest of friends. So much so that even death would not keep them apart.

Tzaddikim were known to have the ability to send their presence between Olam HaZeh, this world, and Olam HaBa, The World to Come.

So, when the Vorker Rebbe passed away, and a full month went by and his son, Reb Mendele, hadn't heard from, nor received a vision, a message, a sign or a dream from his father he began to grow concerned. So, he went to visit his father's closest friend, The Kotsker Rebbe. And the Kotsker told him that he had also been concerned since he too had not received a message from his friend since his passing; so he had decided instead to ascend to the upper world to go and look for him. In a dream the Kotsker rebbe ascended to heaven where he searched for his friend in all the palaces of Torah study. Moshe Rabbeinu's palace, Rashi's palace, Rambam's palace and so on. At every place he stopped they told him that his beloved friend, the Vorker, had been there but he had gone away.

In growing despair The Kotsker Rebbe asked the angels, "Where is my dear friend Rebbe Yitzchak?" And the angels sent him in the direction of a dark, dark forest. It was the most fearsome and foreboding forest he had ever been to, but he pushed on, anxious to discover the whereabouts of his friend. As he travelled deeper into the forest he started to hear the sound of gentle waves lapping upon the shore. He reached the edge of the forest and before him lay a great and endless sea, stretching in every direction. But then the Kotsker Rebbe noticed a strange sound. Every wave as it swelled high would cry out a soft, but heart-breaking sob. The sound was terrifying and he turned to run away, but just then he saw, there standing at the edge of this wailing sea, staring at its melancholy waters, was his holy friend Rebbe Yitzchak.

"I've been looking for you," said the Kotzker, "why have you not come back to visit me?" Instead of answering his friend, Rebbe Yitzchak asked him a question, "Do you know what sea this is?" The Kotsker replied that he did not, and so Rebbe Yitzchak explained, "It is the sea of tears. It is the sea which collects all the tears of God's holy people," he said, "and when I saw it I swore in God's name that I would not leave its side until God dried up all these tears."

THE MUNKATCHER PASSPORT 23

Once a faithful but frightened hasid came to the Holy Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. He was in trouble with the government and he needed to leave the country in order to return to his family; but he knew the only way out of the country was to produce a valid passport, something he could only get by going to the authorities and therefore risking his life. He was terrified that he would surely perish at the hands of the Cossacks, so he came to the great Rabbi Levi Yitzhak and asked him for help in procuring a valid passport so that he could avoid a certain death. The Rebbe, who himself was not welcomed among the ruling class, knew that he could not fulfill the hasid's request. So instead he went into his private study for a few moments and he came out with a blank piece of paper. The hasid was understandably confused and dismayed, but the Rebbe assured him that he had beseeched God for help in this matter, and that God promised him that all would be fine. It surely took a great deal of emunah, of faith, to walk up to the border and hand the Cossack guard a blank piece of paper, but that is exactly what the hasid did. And in accordance with Rebbe Levi Yitzhak's great level of holiness, all went well – the guard looked at the "passport" and treated the man like a king and helped him throughout his journey. The hasid returned home and lived a long and happy life.

Word of this great miracle spread and spread in the Hasidic world as an example of what wonders a great rebbe could perform. Finally, some 150 years later, in 1935, a Munkatcher hasid went to his rebbe, the Rebbe of Munkatch, Rabbi Chaim Eleazar Shapira, and asked him for help with an impossible task. He explained to the rebbe that he had to enter Nazi Germany in order to save his wife and children from the evil grasp of the impending Holocaust. He was certain he could save them, if only he had one thing. The hasid asked The Munkatcher Rebber for a passport, just like the one the holy Rebbe Levi Yitzhak had given his hasid so many years ago.

The Munkatcher Rebbe went into his private study and remained there for three hours. He eventually emerged, his face red, his cheeks wet, and his eyes filled with the pain of a thousand sorrows. He also handed his hasid a blank piece of paper but the paper was soaked through with tears. The Rebbe explained that he was not on the same level of holiness of the great Rebbe Levi Yitzhak of Berditchiv. That he had prayed, and cried for advice from God as to how to help this hasid, and all that came in return were his tears. So he cried and he cried until this worthless, blank piece of paper was wet with his tears.

In another act of great faith, this hasid came to the Nazi border and when the guard asked for his passport, the hasid handed him the blank piece of paper that the Munkatcher

rebbe had cried his tears upon. The guard began to shout in a great loud voice - that it was a supreme honor to have such an important individual come to town, and that he would surely personally escort such a distinguished person to his family so that he would be safe and protected; and he was. And this man and his family lived long and happy lives.

The Munkatcher Rebbe died the following year; but the story of the Munkatcher passport lives on.

ACTIVITIES

LETTER WRITING

Right now we are on the saddest day of the year. The Gemara teaches that while this is the saddest day of the year, Yom Kippur is one of the happiest days of the year. Where do you want to be Yom Kippur? How do you want to be different by then? The 3 weeks started with the 17th of Tammuz, on which the Luchot were destroyed, and only on Yom Kippur did we receive the Torah again. Tish'ah be-Av is a day we can reflect on those events and make a plan for how we can prepare for that day.

WRITE YOUR OWN KINAH

Have each NCSYer write about a tragedy they have experienced. An event in their lives they connect too. Something they have questions about, and don't know how to comprehend it. This can be about a personal tragedy or a communal tragedy (or both). Tell them they will not have to share if they don't want too.

TISHA BA'AV KUMTZITZ

Room has candles each for person on trip. Each candle has paper underneath. They are in order chronologically of events of tragedies of Jewish history. After each event is read, blow out the candle. Every few events stop and sing a song (could be the same song again and again one time; e.g. acheinu) or tell a story. This can serve as a paradigm for post Eichah, the Kinot, or Tisha Ba'av afternoon.



SIN'AT CHINAM

Teach the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza (found in Gittin 56a). Read modern day scenarios of people not acting kindly towards others and have kids act out these scenarios.

You can read and discuss the Kitty Genovese case²³. Discuss the ideas of kindness and social responsibility, which lack of, ultimately led to the destruction of the second temple.

“YOSL RAKOVER TALKS TO GOD”

Divide students into groups and give each group a section of this text²⁴ to discuss. Discuss Yosel’s reaction to the suffering the Jews experienced in the ghettos of Europe. What feelings are being expressed? Discuss theological questions that arise, attitudes towards God in times of suffering, questions about human nature, etc. Then have one representative from each group read the section to the entire group, in order, to experience the full impact of the text.

WHAT ARE WE MOURNING?

In order for students to truly identify with this day, they must understand and appreciate what we lost when the temples were destroyed. This can be approached by discussing what the Beit Hamikdash did for us. Have kids decorate a map of Israel, highlighting important cities and marking Jerusalem at the centre. Discuss the importance of having a national centre which united the people, and place where the entire nation could come to pray and celebrate holidays together. Read Shlomo Hamelech’s prayer at the inauguration of the first temple which highlights this point (1 Kings, 8: 12-53). Discuss the lack of an intimate relationship with God which came about as a result of the destruction.

MOURNING STORIES

Have kids share stories of loved ones whom they have lost and how they and their families have kept alive the memory of their loved one. Read the section from the Talmud (Bava Batra 60b) about how the rabbis wanted to excessively mourn for the temples and raise the question of how much is too much mourning? Discuss customs that we have today in order to remember the temple (*zecher la’mikdash*) (ex: eating the Hillel sandwich at the Passover seder, shaking the lulav for seven days on Sukkot etc.) and in order to remember the destruction (*zecher la’churban*) (ex: breaking a glass at a wedding, leaving part of a wall unpainted etc.).

HOLOCAUST LESSON PLAN

²³ Found in the Articles section

²⁴ Found in the Articles section

Opening

This lesson plan focuses on the winning design²⁵ of the 2013 National Holocaust Remembrance Day Poster Competition, "Designing Memory," held by Yad Vashem and Israel's Ministry for Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs.

The poster was chosen from more than 100 submissions. It was designed by Dea Giladi, a graduate of graphic design courses at Jerusalem's "Lomda" Institute. The judges explained that Dea's design was chosen for its original and unique idea that demands no explanation. Furthermore, "the inverted family tree creates an individual and collective void, thus expressing the great difficulty in speaking of what is not."



RATIONALE

The winning Holocaust Remembrance Day poster will be distributed to every high school in Israel, IDF bases, youth movements and Jewish organizations in Israel and abroad. This lesson plan is aimed at educators wishing to build a class or gathering based on the poster, on Holocaust Remembrance Day or at any other time.

At the core of the lesson plan is the way we cope, as individuals and as a society, with the dreadful loss caused by the Shoah, as well as our obligation to remember – stemming from the understanding that for as long as we do not deal with the memory of the Holocaust and the voids it created, we will always be lacking as a people.

The upside-down family tree, which grows into the earth and not out of it, expresses the terrible reversal created by the mass murders during the Holocaust. Whole families that were wiped out and whose prospects were therefore cut short are found beneath the ground and not developing, as would be natural, upwards – towards the future.

The aim of distributing the poster and this lesson plan is our struggle with those "inverted trees" on the national, familial and personal plane; the recognition of the loss; and the learning process that flows from that very recognition.

INTRODUCTION

Close to seventy years have passed since the end of WWII, and the Shoah continues to stand at the center of Jewish and universal discourse – through the various hues of history, humanity, identity and values. Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day is the

²⁵ First Prize Winner, designed by Dea Giladi

day when the State of Israel unites with the memory of the Six Million, murdered by the German Nazis and their accomplices during the Holocaust. It is a day of both personal and communal remembrance, a day to commemorate the victims, a day to identify with the survivors, and a warning beacon to humanity. Each year, we mark Holocaust Remembrance Day with official state events, via the educational system, through the media, and in local and nationwide ceremonies in a wide variety of ways.

One of the most important and productive ways to engage with the memory of the Holocaust is through art. Works of art have the power to present us with a reality while broadening our horizons of understanding. As such, the encounter with art allows us to deal with universal issues that lie beyond our own internal lives.

LESSON DEVELOPMENT

Opening

At the beginning of the activity, before the official poster has even been presented to the students, ask each member of the group to draw a tree. Naturally, each tree drawn will grow, as nature intends, towards the sky, with its roots sitting under the ground.

Now ask the students:

- What does a tree symbolize? Why? Make sure you that somewhere during the discussions you relate to the comparison of trees to human beings: "For Man is a Tree of the Field" (Deut. 20:19)
- What is the path of a person's development in the world, in parallel to how a tree grows? What about a family? A nation? What do blossoms and branches that reach upwards symbolize?
- It is worthwhile to emphasize the development of the tree: roots, trunk, branches, leaves, sky (in the background, above the tree)

THE TREE IN THE POSTER – THE FAMILY TREE

Display the poster to the students and ask them for their initial reactions, especially given the previous discussion about trees.

Now ask the students:

- What kind of tree do you see here? It is a family tree that represents the growth and development of a family unit. Its shape is not entirely clear. Is it a tree? Does it have any roots?
- What meaning is there to the tree being upside-down? The whole tree is buried under the ground. It represents a dead reality – not one of life and growth.
- What do the empty rectangles on the tree represent? The names of the members on the family tree who are missing. This tree could correspond to any family murdered

during the Holocaust. The tree tells the story of the private and universal family both at the same time.

SUGGESTION FOR ANALYZING THE POSTER

The poster stirs a number of questions that touch a change in the order of things as we know them.

The tree in the poster has a trunk, branches and leaves – from this point of view it is a regular tree – but it does not stem from any roots. It is therefore illogical to try to water it, as it cannot continue to develop. Its growth downwards, into the earth, goes against the world's usual way, as if there is a challenge to the natural order of things. The break in this order was expressed by the Holocaust, as entire families, entire generations, were severed and thus began to grow in the opposite direction – from living on top of the ground to being dead beneath it.

- Why do we use a "family tree" when talking about the history of a family?

In our consciousness, we compare the development of a person and his or her descendants to a tree. The growth of a tree symbolizes both life and its continuance; the roots symbolize the base from which the tree grows – the grandparents and parents, the first generations; the fruit and the leaves are the children, the next generations. The comparison of a human being to a tree is best expressed by the well-known Biblical verse: "And he shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season; his leaves also shall not wither..." (Psalms 1:3).

And indeed, in line with the idea given by the poster, during the Shoah an enormous number of families were destroyed, and most of them left nobody to continue their family line. We feel that they are inverted trees. The future, which is expressed in the original meanings of the branched tree and its leaves, is brought down and buried.

The poster has no indication of the survivors or their descendants. It does not deal with life after the Holocaust or with revival, but focuses exclusively on loss. There is a kind of message in this, too: it is impossible to heal so quickly and reach complete renewal. Holocaust survivor and author Aharon Appelfeld expressed this idea when he spoke of the reduction of the Jewish nation after the Holocaust: "By the end of the Shoah, a full third of the collective body of the Jewish people were no longer alive. It was a biological wound within the family..." – a biological wound, that cannot heal, and accompanies its carrier wherever he goes.

Inverted family trees still split the earth in every place we step. They do not appear for those who do not seek them under the earth. The poster demands that we, who gaze upon it, look around our world and see the trees buried around us; that we investigate them and maybe even fill in the empty place names – each person in his or her own surroundings.

This is the duty of remembrance; this is our duty. Through this cooperation between the poster and the viewer is the poster completed.

יום הזיכרון
לשואה ולגבורה
תשע"ג



יד ושם



משרד החינוך והשכלה

ARTICLES

WHY I STILL FAST ON TISHA B'AV

By Rabbi Micah Peltz August 8th, 2011 (HAARETZ)

Tisha B'Av reminds us of the terrible consequences of not working together for the good of all of our people - a lesson both Jews in Israel and abroad could stand to remember.

Last year, in Haaretz, Anshel Pfeffer began an opinion piece about Tisha B'Av with an apocryphal story about Napoleon Bonaparte. The legendary French leader went for a walk one summer night and heard voices lamenting in a strange language. They may have come from a grand synagogue or a miserable hovel.

Upon asking why the men inside were sitting on the floor and mourning, he was told these were Jews grieving for their destroyed temple in Jerusalem. "How long ago did this happen?" asked Bonaparte. "Eighteen-hundred years" was the answer.

"A nation that can mourn for so long the loss of its land and temple," the emperor is supposed to have said prophetically, "will return one day to their land and see it rebuilt."

This is a moving story about the power of Tisha B'Av to evoke a historical memory for the Jewish people. Pfeffer acknowledges this, and then goes on to argue that the Ninth of Av has "lost any relevance beyond the historical."

Pfeffer's argument has been heard before. Many have wondered, after the founding of Israel, if there really is a need for a day of fasting and mourning the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish people. This claim was strengthened after the Six Day War, when Israel captured the Jordanian-held Jerusalem and the Temple Mount itself.

It's a good argument, and even has support in our tradition. The prophet Zechariah says that, when the Jewish people return to Israel, the four fast days of mourning will become days of a rejoicing. So why still fast?

Despite this arguably logical line of reasoning, the observance of Tisha B'Av connects the Jewish people to its history, to Israel, and to fellow Jews in a powerful way. As study after study shows the fraying of these relationships, marking Tisha B'Av can reinforce these ties.

Though the Mishna states that five tragedies occurred on Tisha B'Av, the list has grown. In addition to the sin of the spies, the destruction of the temples, the putting down of Bar Kochba's revolt, and the plowing under of the Temple Mount by the Romans, lists of the calamities that have befallen our people on Tisha B'Av now include the expulsion of the

Jews from Spain in 1492, the outbreak of World War I in 1914, and the mass liquidation of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942.

Tisha B'Av is a day, like many practices in Judaism, which has taken on additional meaning as the centuries have unfolded to this day. The Masorti movement in Israel has declared Tisha B'Av this year as a day of solidarity with the "tent protest" movement. It is imploring people to remember the lesson of sinat hinam, of senseless hatred, that led to the destruction of the second Temple.

Tisha B'Av provides a framework to address issues that are availing society today. Tisha B'Av serves not only as a reminder of the tragedies that have befallen us, but also how we made it through as a people. The notion of peoplehood is waning today. Our personalized cultural celebrates the individual over the community, while Judaism teaches the opposite.

This is why the mourning period is canceled out for holidays, we can only pray a full service with a minyan, and most of our prayers are written in the plural. Judaism, which has always been counter-cultural, is even more so today. While on Yom Kippur we fast and atone for ourselves as individuals, on Tisha B'Av we do these things for the community.

Our diversity of opinions in Jewish life does not preclude our unity as a people. We have rarely had strength in numbers, but we have always had strength in purpose. At times it feels like we are losing that today. Tisha B'Av reminds us of the terrible consequences of not working together for the good of all of our people - a lesson both Jews in Israel and abroad could stand to remember.

As we learn in Ta'anit, the section of the Talmud about fasting, "All who mourn for Jerusalem will see her in her joy..." Napoleon was right - we have returned to our land and seen it rebuilt. But that does not mean that Tisha B'Av has lost its meaning. On the contrary, its lessons deeply resonate in the face of the challenges that confront us today in both Israel and the greater Jewish world.

THIRTY-EIGHT WHO SAW MURDER DIDN'T CALL THE POLICE

The New York Times, Martin Gansberg, March 27, 1964

For more than half an hour 38 respectable, law-abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks in Kew Gardens.

Twice their chatter and the sudden glow of their bedroom lights interrupted him and frightened him off. Each time he returned, sought her out, and stabbed her again. Not one person telephoned the police during the assault; one witness called after the woman was dead.

That was two weeks ago today.

Still shocked is Assistant Chief Inspector Frederick M. Lussen, in charge of the borough's detectives and a veteran of 25 years of homicide investigations. He can give a matter-of-fact recitation on many murders. But the Kew Gardens slaying baffles him--not because it is a murder, but because the "good people" failed to call the police.

"As we have reconstructed the crime," he said, "the assailant had three chances to kill this woman during a 35-minute period. He returned twice to complete the job. If we had been called when he first attacked, the woman might not be dead now."

This is what the police say happened at 3:20 A.M. in the staid, middle-class, tree-lined Austin Street area:

Twenty-eight-year-old Catherine Genovese, who was called Kitty by almost everyone in the neighborhood, was returning home from her job as manager of a bar in Hollis. She parked her red Fiat in a lot adjacent to the Kew Gardens Long Island Railroad Station, facing Mowbray Place. Like many residents of the neighborhood, she had parked there day after day since her arrival from Connecticut a year ago, although the railroad frowns on the practice.

She turned off the lights of her car, locked the door, and started to walk the 100 feet to the entrance of her apartment at 82-70 Austin Street, which is in a Tudor building, with stores in the first floor and apartments on the second.

The entrance to the apartment is in the rear of the building because the front is rented to retail stores. At night the quiet neighborhood is shrouded in the slumbering darkness that marks most residential areas.

Miss Genovese noticed a man at the far end of the lot, near a seven-story apartment house at 82-40 Austin Street. She halted. Then, nervously, she headed up Austin Street toward Lefferts Boulevard, where there is a call box to the 102nd Police Precinct in nearby Richmond Hill.

She got as far as a street light in front of a bookstore before the man grabbed her. She screamed. Lights went on in the 10-story apartment house at 82-67 Austin Street, which faces the bookstore. Windows slid open and voices punctuated the early-morning stillness.

Miss Genovese screamed: "Oh, my God, he stabbed me! Please help me! Please help me!"

From one of the upper windows in the apartment house, a man called down: "Let that girl alone!"

The assailant looked up at him, shrugged, and walked down Austin Street toward a white sedan parked a short distance away. Miss Genovese struggled to her feet.

Lights went out. The killer returned to Miss Genovese, now trying to make her way around the side of the building by the parking lot to get to her apartment. The assailant stabbed her again.

"I'm dying!" she shrieked. "I'm dying!"

Windows were opened again, and lights went on in many apartments. The assailant got into his car and drove away. Miss Genovese staggered to her feet. A city bus, 0-10, the Lefferts Boulevard line to Kennedy International Airport, passed. It was 3:35 A.M.

The assailant returned. By then, Miss Genovese had crawled to the back of the building, where the freshly painted brown doors to the apartment house held out hope for safety. The killer tried the first door; she wasn't there. At the second door, 82-62 Austin Street, he saw her slumped on the floor at the foot of the stairs. He stabbed her a third time--fatally.

It was 3:50 by the time the police received their first call, from a man who was a neighbor of Miss Genovese. In two minutes they were at the scene. The neighbor, a 70-year-old woman, and another woman were the only persons on the street. Nobody else came forward.

The man explained that he had called the police after much deliberation. He had phoned a friend in Nassau County for advice and then he had crossed the roof of the building to the apartment of the elderly woman to get her to make the call.

"I didn't want to get involved," he sheepishly told police.

Six days later, the police arrested Winston Moseley, a 29-year-old business machine operator, and charged him with homicide. Moseley had no previous record. He is married, has two children and owns a home at 133-19 Sutter Avenue, South Ozone Park, Queens. On Wednesday, a court committed him to Kings County Hospital for psychiatric observation.

When questioned by the police, Moseley also said he had slain Mrs. Annie May Johnson, 24, of 146-12 133d Avenue, Jamaica, on Feb. 29 and Barbara Kralik, 15, of 174-17 140th Avenue, Springfield Gardens, last July. In the Kralik case, the police are holding Alvin L. Mitchell, who is said to have confessed to that slaying.

The police stressed how simple it would have been to have gotten in touch with them. "A phone call," said one of the detectives, "would have done it." The police may be reached by dialing "0" for operator or Spring 7-3100.

Today witnesses from the neighborhood, which is made up of one-family homes in the \$35,000 to \$60,000 range with the exception of the two apartment houses near the railroad station, find it difficult to explain why they didn't call the police.

A housewife, knowingly if quite casually, said, "We thought it was a lovers' quarrel." A husband and wife both said, "Frankly, we were afraid." They seemed aware of the fact that events might have been different. A distraught woman, wiping her hands in her apron, said, "I didn't want my husband to get involved."

One couple, now willing to talk about that night, said they heard the first screams. The husband looked thoughtfully at the bookstore where the killer first grabbed Miss Genovese.

"We went to the window to see what was happening," he said, "but the light from our bedroom made it difficult to see the street." The wife, still apprehensive, added: "I put out the light and we were able to see better."

Asked why they hadn't called the police, she shrugged and replied: "I don't know."

A man peeked out from a slight opening in the doorway to his apartment and rattled off an account of the killer's second attack. Why hadn't he called the police at the time? "I was tired," he said without emotion. "I went back to bed."

It was 4:25 A.M. when the ambulance arrived to take the body of Miss Genovese. It drove off. "Then," a solemn police detective said, "the people came out."

The above reported events are true and took place on March 14, 1964.

The brutal murder of Kitty Genovese and the disturbing lack of action by her neighbors became emblematic in what many perceived as an evolving culture of violence and apathy in the United States. In fact, social scientists still debate the causes of what is now known as "the Genovese Syndrome."

YOSL RAKOVER TALKS TO GOD

By Zvi Kolitz

In one of the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, preserved in a little bottle and concealed amongst heaps of charred stone and human bones, the following testament was found, written in the last hours of the ghetto by a Jew named Yosl Rakover.

Warsaw, 28 April 1943

I, Yosl, son of David Rakover of Tarnopol, a follower of the Rabbi of Ger and descendant of the righteous, learned, and holy ones of the families Rakover and Maysels, am writing these lines as the houses of the Warsaw Ghetto are in flames, and the house I am in is one of the last that has not yet caught fire. For several hours now we have been under raging artillery fire and all around me walls are exploding and shattering in the hail of shells. It will not be long before this house I'm in, like almost all the houses in the ghetto, will become the grave of its inhabitants and defenders.

Fiery red bolts of sunlight piercing through the little half-walled-up window in my room, out of which we've been shooting at the enemy day and night, tell me that it must be almost evening, just before sundown. The sun probably has no idea how little I regret that I shall never see it again.

A strange thing has happened to us: all our ideas and feelings have changed. Death, quick death that comes in an instant, is to us a deliverer, a liberator who breaks our chains. The animals of the forest seem so dear and precious to me that it pains my heart to hear the criminals who are now masters of Europe likened to them. It is not true that there is something of the animal in Hitler. He is — I am utterly convinced of it — a typical child of modern man. Mankind has borne him and raised him and he is the direct, unfeigned expression of mankind's innermost, deepest-hidden urges.

In a forest where I was hiding, I met a dog one night, a sick, starving, crazed dog, his tail between his legs. Immediately we felt our common situation, for no dog's situation is a whit better than our own. He rubbed up against me, buried his head in my lap, and licked my hands. I don't know if I have ever wept the way I wept that night; I wrapped myself around his neck and cried like a child. If I stress the fact that I envied the animals then, no one should be surprised. But what I felt back then was more than envy; it was shame. I was ashamed before the dog, for being not a dog but a man. That is how it is, and such is the spiritual condition we have reached: life is a calamity — death, a liberator — man, a plague — beast, an ideal — day, an abomination — night, a comfort.

Millions of people in the great, wide world, in love with the day, the sun, and the light, neither know nor have the slightest intimation of the darkness and calamity the sun brings us. The criminals have made of it an instrument in their hands; they have used the sun as a searchlight to reveal the footprints of the fugitives trying to escape them. When I hid myself in the forests with my wife and my children — there were six of them then — it was the night, only the night, that concealed us in her heart. The day delivered us to our pursuers, who were hunting our souls. How can I ever forget the day of that German firestorm that raged over thousands of refugees on the road from Grodno to Warsaw? Their planes rose in the early dawn with the sun, and all day long they slaughtered us unceasingly. In this massacre that came down from the skies my wife died with our youngest child, seven months old, in her arms, and two of my surviving five children vanished that same day without a trace. David and Jehuda were their names, the one was four years old, the other six.

When the sun went down the handful of survivors moved on again toward Warsaw. But I combed through the woods and fields with my three remaining children, searching for the other two on the slaughter ground. "David! — Jehuda!" — all night long our cries slashed like knives through the deadly silence that surrounded us, and all that answered us from the woods was an echo, helpless, heartrending, suffering as we suffered, a distant voice of lamentation. I never saw the two boys again, and I was told in a dream not to worry over them any more: they were in the hands of the Lord of Heaven and Earth. My other three children died in the Warsaw Ghetto within a year.

Rachel, my little daughter, ten years old, had heard that there were scraps of bread to be found in the city garbage cans on the other side of the walls of the ghetto. The ghetto was starving, and the starving lay like rags in the streets. People were prepared to die any death, but not death by starvation. This is probably because in a time when systematic persecution gradually destroys every other human need, the will to eat is the last one that endures, even in the presence of a longing for death. I was told of a Jew, half-starved, who said to someone, "Ah, how happy I would be to die if one last time I could sit down to a meal like a mentsh!"

Rachel had said nothing to me about her plan to steal out of the ghetto — a crime that carried the death penalty. She went off on her dangerous journey with a friend, another girl of the same age.

In the dark of night she left home and at dawn she was discovered with her little friend outside the gates of the ghetto. The Nazi sentries and dozens of their Polish helpers immediately went in pursuit of the Jewish children who had dared to hunt in the garbage for a lump of bread so as not to die of hunger. People who had experienced this human hunt at first hand could not believe what they were seeing. Even for the ghetto this was new. You might have thought that dangerous escaped criminals were being chased as this terrifying pack ran amok after the two half-starved ten-year-old children. They couldn't keep up this race for long before one of them, my daughter, having expended the last of her strength, collapsed on the ground in exhaustion. The Nazis drove holes through her skull. The other girl escaped their clutches, but she died two weeks later. She had lost her mind.

Jacob, our fifth child, a boy of thirteen, died of tuberculosis on the day of his bar mitzvah. His death was a release for him. The last child, my daughter Eva, lost her life at the age of fifteen in a "roundup of children" that began at sunrise on the final Rosh Hashanah and lasted till sundown.

On that first day of the New Year, hundreds of Jewish families lost their children before evening came.

Now my hour has come, and like Job I can say of myself — naked shall I return unto the earth, naked as the day I was born. My years are forty-three, and when I look back on the years that have gone by, I can say with certainty — insofar as any man may be certain of himself — that I have lived an honorable life. My heart has been filled with the love of God. I have been blessed with success, but the success never went to my head. My portion was ample. But though it was mine, I treated it not as mine: following the counsel of my rabbi, I considered my possessions to have no possessor. Should they lure someone to take some part of them, this should not be counted as theft, but as though that person had taken unclaimed goods. My house stood open for all who were needy, and I was happy when I was given the opportunity to perform a good deed for others. I served God with devotion, and my only petition of Him was that He allow me to serve Him "with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my strength."

I cannot say, after all I have lived through, that my relation to God is unchanged. But with absolute certainty I can say that my faith in Him has not altered by a hairsbreadth. In earlier times, when my life was good, my relation to Him was as if to one who gave me gifts without end, and to whom I was therefore always somewhat in debt. Now my relation to Him is as to one who is also in my debt — greatly in my debt. And because I feel that He too is in my debt, I consider that I have the right to admonish Him. I do not say, like Job, that God should lay His finger on my sins so that I may know how I have earned this. For greater and better men than I are convinced that it is no longer a question of punishment for sins and transgressions. On the contrary, something unique is happening in the world: *hastoras ponim*— God has hidden His face.

God has hidden His face from the world and delivered mankind over to its own savage urges and instincts. This is why I believe that when the forces of evil dominate the world, it is, alas, completely natural that the first victims will be those who represent the holy and the pure. To each of us as individuals, perhaps this brings no comfort. Yet as the destiny of our people is determined not by worldly but by otherworldly laws, not material and physical but spiritual and godly, so must the true believer see in these events a part of God's great leveling of the scales, in which even human tragedies weigh little. But this does not mean that the devout among my people must simply approve what is ordained and say, "The Lord is just and His decrees are just." To say that we have earned the blows we have received is to slander ourselves. It is a defamation of the Shem Hameforash, a profanation of His Holy Name — a desecration of the name "Jew," a desecration of the name "God." It is one and the same. God is blasphemed when we blaspheme ourselves.

In such a circumstance I have, naturally, no expectation of a miracle and do not beg of Him, my Lord, that He should take pity on me. Let Him veil His face in indifference to me as He has veiled it to millions of others of His people. I am no exception to the rule. I expect no preference. I will no longer try to save myself, and I will not flee again from here. I will lighten the work of the fire and pour gasoline over my clothes. I still have three bottles of gasoline in reserve, after pouring several dozen over the heads of the murderers.

That was a great moment in my life, and I was convulsed with laughter. I could never have imagined that the death of people, even enemies — even enemies such as these — could fill me with such joy. Foolish humanists may say what they will, revenge and the longing for retribution have always fueled the resistance of the oppressed to the very last, and will always do so. Nothing else brings such solace to their souls. Until now I had never really understood the passage in the Talmud that says, "Vengeance is holy, for it is mentioned between two names of God, as it is written: A God of vengeance is the Lord!" Now I understand it. Now I feel it, and now I know why my heart rejoices when I remember how for thousands of years we have called upon our God: "God of Vengeance!" *El Nekamot Adonoi*.

And now, when I am in a position to view life and the world from this clearest of perspectives, such as is rarely granted a man before death, I realize that there is this exclusive and characteristic difference between our God and the God in whom the peoples of Europe believe: while our God is the God of vengeance and our Torah threatens death for

the smallest of transgressions, it is also told in the Talmud how in ancient times, when the Sanhedrin was our people's highest court — when we were still a free people in our own land — a single death sentence from the High Council in seventy years was enough to make people call "You murderers" after the judges. The God of the other peoples, however, whom they call "the God of Love," has offered to love every creature created in His image, and yet they have been murdering us without pity in His name day in, day out, for almost two thousand years.

Yes, I speak of vengeance. Only rarely have we seen true vengeance, but when we have experienced it, it was so comforting, and so sweet, such deep solace and intense happiness, that to me it was as if a new life had opened up. A tank suddenly broke through into our alley and was bombarded from every fortified house around it with bottles of burning gasoline. But not one of them found its mark the way it was supposed to. The tank continued to advance undamaged. I waited with my friends until the tank was rumbling past, literally right under our noses, then we all attacked it at the same moment through the half-walled-up windows. The tank immediately burst into flames and six burning Nazis leapt out of it. Yes, they burned! They burned like the Jews whom they burned, but they screamed more than the Jews. The Jews do not scream. They embrace death as their deliverer. The Warsaw Ghetto is dying in battle, it is going down in gunfire, in fighting, and in flames — but there is no screaming.

I still have three bottles of gasoline left, and they are as precious to me as wine to a drinker. When not long from now I empty one of them over me, I will put the sheets of paper on which I am writing these lines into the empty bottle and hide it here between the bricks in the wall beneath the window. If anyone should ever find them and read them, he will perhaps understand the feeling of a Jew — one of millions — who died abandoned by God, in Whom he so deeply believes. I will explode the two other bottles over the heads of the thugs when my last moment is come.

We were twelve people in this room when the uprising began, and we have fought the enemy for nine days. All of my eleven comrades have fallen. They died silently. Even the little boy — God only knows where he came from, he was all of five years old — now lies dead beside me. His beautiful face is smiling, the way children smile when they are peacefully dreaming. Even this little boy died as calmly as his older comrades. It was early this morning. Most of us were already no longer alive. The boy clambered up the pile of corpses to catch a glimpse through the window slit of the world outside. He stood beside me that way for several minutes. Then he suddenly fell backwards, rolled down over the bodies of the dead, and lay there like a stone. A drop of blood appeared between two locks of black hair on his small, pale forehead. A bullet in the head.

Our house is one of the last bastions of the ghetto. Until early yesterday morning, when the enemy opened concentrated fire on this building with the first light of dawn, everyone here was still alive. Five had been wounded, but they kept fighting. Yesterday and today, one after the other, they all fell. One after the other, one on top of the other, each standing guard for the other and shooting until they themselves were shot.

Apart from the three bottles of gasoline, I have no more ammunition. There is still heavy gunfire coming from the three floors above me, but it seems they cannot send me help any more. The staircase appears to have been destroyed by shells, and I think the whole house may soon collapse. I am lying on the floor as I write these lines. All around me, my dead friends. I look into their faces and it is as if irony had washed over them, peaceful and gently mocking. As if they wanted to say: "Have a little patience, you foolish man, another minute or two and everything will become clear to you, too." The same expression hovers about the lips of the child, who is stretched out as if asleep by my right hand. His little mouth is smiling, as if he were laughing to himself. And to me — still breathing and feeling and thinking like a living creature made of flesh and blood — to me it seems as if he's laughing at me. As if he sees through me. He's laughing at me, with the quiet, meaningful laugh of one who knows much yet must endure talking with people who know nothing but think they know it all. He knows it all now, this little boy, it's all clear to him now. He even knows why he was born if he had to die so soon, and why he had to die now — and this in just five years. And even if he doesn't know why, he knows that knowing why or not knowing why is utterly irrelevant and unimportant in the light of the revelation of God's majesty in that better world where he is now — perhaps in the arms of his murdered parents, to whom he has found his way back.

In an hour or two I shall know it, too. And if the fire does not consume my face, perhaps there will be a similar smile on it when I am dead. But I am still alive. And before I die I want to speak to my God once more as a living man, an ordinary living man who had the great but terrible honor of being a Jew.

I am proud to be a Jew — not despite of the world's relation to us, but precisely because of it.

I would be ashamed to belong to the peoples who have borne and raised the criminals responsible for the deeds that have been perpetrated against us.

I am proud of my Jewishness. Because being a Jew is an art. Being a Jew is hard. There is no art in being an Englishman, an American, or a Frenchman. It is perhaps easier and more comfortable to be one of them, but it is not more honorable. Yes, it is an honor to be a Jew.

I believe that to be a Jew is to be a fighter, an eternal swimmer against the roiling, evil current of humanity. The Jew is a hero, a martyr, a saint. You, our enemies, say that we are bad? I believe we are better than you, finer. But even if we were worse — I'd like to have seen how you would have looked in our place.

I am happy to belong to the unhappiest of all peoples in the world, whose Torah embodies the highest law and the most beautiful morality. Now this Torah is the more sanctified and immortalized by the manner of its rape and violation by the enemies of God.

Being a Jew is an inborn virtue, I believe. One is born a Jew as one is born an artist. One cannot free oneself of being a Jew. That is God's mark upon us, which sets us apart as His chosen people. Those who do not understand this will never grasp the higher meaning of

our martyrdom. "There is nothing more whole than a broken heart," a great rabbi once said; and there is also no people more chosen than a permanently maligned one. If I were unable to believe that God had marked us for His chosen people, I would still believe that we were chosen to be so by our sufferings.

I believe in the God of Israel, even when He has done everything to make me cease to believe in Him. I believe in His laws even when I cannot justify His deeds. My relationship to Him is no longer that of a servant to his master, but of a student to his rabbi. I bow my head before His greatness, but I will not kiss the rod with which He chastises me.

I love Him. But I love His Torah more. Even if I were disappointed in Him, I would still cherish His Torah. God commands religion, but His Torah commands a way of life — and the more we die for this way of life, the more immortal it is!

And so, my God, before I die, freed from all fear, beyond terror, in a state of absolute inner peace and trust, I will allow myself to call You to account one last time in my life.

You say that we have sinned? We surely have! And for this shall we be punished? This, too, I understand. But I want You to tell me if there is any sin in the world that deserves the punishment we have received.

You say that You will yet take revenge on our enemies? I am convinced that you will revenge yourself on them without mercy, of this I have no doubt either. But I want You to tell me if there is any punishment in the world sufficient to atone for the crimes that have been perpetrated against us.

Perhaps You are saying that it is not a question of sin and punishment now, but that it is always so when You veil Your face and leave mankind to its inner drives? But then, God, I wish to ask You, and this question burns in me like a consuming fire: What more, O tell us, what more must happen before You reveal Your face to the world again?

I wish to speak to You clearly and frankly, to say that now, more than at any previous stage on our endless road of suffering — we, the tormented, the reviled, the suffocated, the buried alive and burned alive, we, the humiliated, the mocked, the ridiculed, the slaughtered in our millions — now more than ever do we have the right to know: Where are the limits of Your patience?

And I wish to say something more to You: You should not pull the rope too tight, because it might, heaven forbid, yet snap. The temptation into which You have led us is so grievous, so unbearably grievous, that You should, You must, forgive those of Your people who in their misery and anger have turned away from You.

Forgive those who have turned away from You in their misery, but also those of Your people who have turned away from You for their own comfort. You have made our life such an unending and unbearable struggle that the weaklings among us were compelled to try to elude it. To flee wherever they saw a line of escape. Do not strike them down for this!

Weaklings are not to be struck down, weaklings call forth mercy. Lord, have mercy on them — more than on us!

Forgive also those who have taken Your name in vain, who have followed other gods, who have become indifferent to You. You have tested them so severely that they no longer believe You are their father, that they have any father at all.

I am saying all this to You in plain words because I believe in You, because I believe in You more than ever before, because I know now that You are my God. For You are not, You cannot be the God of those whose deeds are the most horrific proof of their militant godlessness.

For if You are not my God — whose God are You? The God of the murderers?

If those who hate me, who murder me, are so dark, so evil, who, then, am I if not one who embodies some spark of Your light and Your goodness?

I cannot praise You for the deeds You tolerate. But I bless and praise Your very existence, Your terrible majesty. How mighty it must be if even what is taking place now makes no impression on You!

But because You are so great and I so small, I beg You — I warn You — for Your name's sake: Stop crowning Your greatness by veiling Your face from the scourging of the wretched!

Nor do I beg You to scourge the guilty. It is part of the terrible logic of the inexorable decrees that they will come face to face with themselves at the end, because in our death dies the conscience of the world, because a world has been murdered in the murder of Israel.

The world will consume itself in its own evil, it will drown in its own blood.

The murderers have already pronounced judgment on themselves, and they will not escape it. But You, I beg You, pronounce Your guilty verdict, a doubly harsh verdict, on those who witness murder and remain silent!

On those who condemn murder with their lips while they rejoice over it in their hearts.

On those who say in their wicked hearts: Yes, it is true that the tyrant is evil, but he is also doing a job for which we will always be grateful to Him.

It is written in Your Torah that the thief must be punished more severely than the robber, although the thief does not attack his victim and threaten him, life and limb, but merely tries to deprive him of his property by stealth.

The robber attacks his victim in the broad light of day. He has as little fear of men as he does of God.

The thief, on the other hand, fears men, but not God. This is why his punishment should be more severe than the punishment of the robber.

So I do not mind if You treat the murderers as robbers, because their behavior to You and to us is the same. They make no secret of their murders and of their hatred of You and us.

Those, however, who remain silent in the face of murder, those who do not fear You but fear what people will say (Idiots! They don't know that people will say nothing!), those who express their sympathy for the drowning man but refuse to save him, those — oh, those, I swear to You, my God, are the ones You should punish like the thief!

Death cannot wait any longer, and I must finish what I am writing. The gunfire from the floors above me is diminishing by the minute. The last defenders of our fortress are falling, and with them Warsaw, the great, the beautiful, the God-fearing Jewish Warsaw, falls and dies. The sun is going down now, and thanks be to God I shall never see it again. The glow of the inferno flickers through the window, and the little piece of sky I can see is flooded in flaming red like a waterfall of blood. Another hour at most and I will be with my family, and with the millions of the dead among my people in that better world where there is no more doubt and God's hand rules supreme.

I die at peace, but not pacified, conquered and beaten but not enslaved, bitter but not disappointed, a believer but not a supplicant, a lover of God but not His blind Amen-sayer.

I have followed Him, even when He pushed me away. I have obeyed His commandments, even when He scourged me for it. I have loved Him, I have been in love with Him and remained so, even when He made me lower than the dust, tormented me to death, abandoned me to shame and mockery.

My rabbi used to tell me, again and again, the story of a Jew who escaped the Spanish Inquisition with his wife and child and made his way in a small boat across the stormy sea to a stony island. A flash of lightning exploded and killed his wife. A whirlwind arose and hurled his child into the sea. Alone, wretched, discarded like a stone, naked and barefoot, lashed by the storm, terrified by thunder and lightning, his hair disheveled and his hands raised to God, the Jew made his way up onto the rocky desert island and turned thus to God:

"God of Israel," he said, "I have fled to this place so that I may serve You in peace, to follow Your commandments and glorify Your name. You, however, are doing everything to make me cease believing in You. But if You think that You will succeed with these trials in deflecting me from the true path, then I cry to You, my God and the God of my parents, that none of it will help You. You may insult me, You may chastise me, You may take from me the dearest and the best that I have in the world, You may torture me to death — I will always believe in You. I will love You always and forever — even despite You."

Here, then, are my last words to You, my angry God: None of this will avail You in the least! You have done everything to make me lose my faith in You, to make me cease to believe in You. But I die exactly as I have lived, an unshakeable believer in You.

Praised be forever the God of the dead, the God of vengeance, of truth and judgment, who will soon unveil His face to the world again and shake its foundations with His almighty voice.

"Sh'ma Yisroel! Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Into Your hands, O Lord, I commend my soul."

THE HANGMAN

By: Maurice Ogden

1. Into our town the Hangman came,
Smelling of gold and blood and flame--
And he paced our bricks with a diffident air
And built his frame on the courthouse square.

The scaffold stood by the courthouse side,
Only as wide as the door was wide;
A frame as tall, or little more,
Than the capping sill of the courthouse door.

And we wondered, whenever we had the
time,
Who the criminal, what the crime,
That Hangman judged with the yellow twist
Of knotted hemp in his busy fist.

And innocent though we were, with dread
We passed those eyes of buckshot lead;
Till one cried: "Hangman, who is he
For whom you raise the gallows-tree?"

Then a twinkle grew in the buckshot eye,
And he gave us a riddle instead of reply:
"He who serves me best," said he,
"Shall earn the rope on the gallows-tree."

And he stepped down, and laid his hand
On a man who came from another land.
And we breathed again, for another's grief
At the Hangman's hand was our relief.

And the gallows-frame on the courthouse
lawn

By tomorrow's sun would be struck and gone.
So we gave him way, and no one spoke,
Out of respect for his hangman's cloak.

2. The next day's sun looked mildly down
On roof and street in our quiet town
And, stark and black in the morning air,
The gallows-tree on the courthouse square.

And the Hangman stood at his usual stand
With the yellow hemp in his busy hand;
With his buckshot eye and his jaw like a pike
And his air so knowing and businesslike.

And we cried: "Hangman, have you not done,
Yesterday, with the alien one?"
Then we fell silent, and stood amazed:
"Oh, not for him was the gallows raised..."

He laughed a laugh as he looked at us:
"...Did you think I'd gone to all this fuss
To hang one man? That's a thing I do
To stretch the rope when the rope is new."

Then one cried "Murderer!" One cried
"Shame!"
And into our midst the Hangman came
To that man's place. "Do you hold," said he,
"With him that's meant for the gallows-tree?"

And he laid his hand on that one's arm,
And we shrank back in quick alarm,

And we gave him way, and no one spoke
Out of fear of his hangman's cloak.

That night we saw with dread surprise
The Hangman's scaffold had grown in size.
Fed by the blood beneath the chute

The gallows-tree had taken root;
Now as wide, or a little more,
Than the steps that led to the courthouse
door,
As tall as the writing, or nearly as tall,
Halfway up on the courthouse wall.

3. The third he took – and we had all heard
tell –
Was a usurer and infidel, And:
“What,” said the Hangman, “have you to do
With the gallows-bound, and he a Jew?”

And we cried out: “Is this one he
Who has served you well and faithfully?”
The Hangman smiled: “It's a clever scheme
To try the strength of the gallows-beam.”

The fourth man's dark, accusing song
Had scratched out comfort hard and long;
And “What concern,” he gave us back,
“Have you for the doomed – the doomed and
black?”

The fifth. The sixth. And we cried again:
“Hangman, Hangman, is this the man?”
“It's a trick,” he said, “that we hangmen know
For easing the trap when the trap springs
slow.”

And so we ceased and asked no more,
As the Hangman tallied his bloody score;
And sun by sun, and night by night,
The gallows grew to monstrous height.

The wings of the scaffold opened wide
Till they covered the square from side to side;
And the monster cross-beam, looking down,
Cast its shadow across the town.

4. Then through the town the Hangman came
And called in the empty streets my name.
And I looked at the gallows soaring tall
And thought: “There is no left at all
For hanging, and so he calls to me
To help him pull down the gallows-tree.”
And I went out with right good hope
To the Hangman's tree and the Hangman's
rope.

He smiled at me as I came down
To the courthouse square through the silent
town,
And supple and stretched in his busy hand
Was the yellow twist of them hempen strand.

And he whistled his tune as he tried the trap
And it sprang down with a ready snap –
And then with a smile of awful command
He laid his hand upon my hand.

“You tricked me, Hangman!” I shouted then,
“That your scaffold was built for other men....
And I no henchman of yours,” I cried.
“You lied to me, Hangman, foully lied!”

Then a twinkle grew in the buckshot eye:
“Lied to you? Tricked you?” he said, “Not I
For I answered straight and I told you true:
The scaffold was raised for none but you.

“For who has served me more faithfully
Than you with your coward's hope?” said he,
“And where are the others that might have
stood
Side by your side in the common good?”

“Dead,” I whispered; and amiably
“Murdered,” the Hangman corrected me;
“First the alien, then the Jew...
I did no more than you let me do.”

Beneath the beam that blocked the sky,
None had stood so alone as I –
And the Hangman strapped me, and no voice
there
Cried “Stay!” for me in the empty square.

A LOVE STORY

By Samantha Barnett

I grew up dreaming about my Prince Charming, besotted with the idea of “love” as I understood it. I knew my grandmother had been married by the age of nineteen to a man who absolutely adored her, and their love was a lasting one.

On Sundays, my grandfather used to take my grandmother and me out for ice cream. The two of them would share a cone and smile at each other. I remember the way he looked at her and the way she returned his gaze. To him, she was clearly the most beautiful woman alive, and I could tell by his expression that he felt lucky to be married to her. As they passed the ice cream cone back and forth, I knew my grandmother felt cherished and protected by my grandfather. Even after so many years of marriage, their love seemed fresh and new.

From watching my grandparents interact, love seemed easy. I developed the conviction that love was easily attainable, and I became consumed with the idea of romance. I read romantic novels, watched romantic movies and dreamed romantic dreams. One thing was certain: if love was involved, I was hooked.

But as I grew up, I began to see problems in the world of love. I watched people compromising themselves for romances that were obviously temporary. I saw momentary pleasure taking the place of true intimacy. I met children and adults who had been thoroughly hurt by their parents’ bad marriages. I watched couples separate after years of dating because they knew they could never marry each other, and that left me perplexed because I had always assumed that marriage was the goal of dating. I found it ironic that in a world obsessed with analyzing and discussing others’ relationships, it has become tough to find good relationship role models.

And I wondered: is the romance of my grandparents’ generation already an ancient phenomenon? Does my generation, witnessing skyrocketing divorce rates and illicit affairs plastered across the media, even believe that true love is possible? Do we realize what we are missing?

A Divine Relationship

The Jewish nation is likened to a bride. We found “Mr. Right” in G-d, but through our actions we grew apart from Him. Consequently, we lost the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, our strongest connection to Him. We have become used to life without a Temple, and to us it seems normal, but it is not. We are missing out on a deep, soulful relationship with G-d, and that is something to cry about.

In fact, we have a designated day to grieve over this loss: Tisha B'Av—the ninth day of the month of Av. Perhaps, if we take a closer look at this day of fasting and commemoration, we'll better understand how to fix and maintain the important relationships in our lives.

Night of Sadness

After the Jewish people escaped from Egypt, we needed a homeland. G-d promised us the land of Israel, and we began to journey through the desert in the direction of the Holy Land. But before we were to enter the land, the people approached Moses and requested he send ahead a group of men to scout out the layout of the land and its inhabitants, so that they could strategize how to conquer this new and foreign country.

Moses agreed, and assigned spiritual leaders from each of the twelve tribes to act as spies. When they returned, the entire nation assembled to hear their reports. Ten of the leaders publicly pointed out why the Jewish people would not be successful in acquiring the Land. Their words planted seeds of doubt in the minds of the Jewish people, and some began to wonder if they might have done better to remain in slavery in Egypt. That night the Jewish people cried, afraid of the land and afraid of its inhabitants.

This night of sadness took place on the ninth of Av, a day which has become synonymous with tragedy and mourning. The sin of the spies is considered the source of all the other tragedies which would occur on Tisha B'Av in later years.

Lack of Trust

The reason the sin of the spies was considered so grave was because the Jewish people lost faith in G-d so quickly, when they had just been privy to open revelations of G-dliness. He performed miracle after miracle: He bombarded the evil Egyptians with plagues, split the Red Sea, and revealed Himself at Mount Sinai. But still, we lost faith in Him.

The cornerstone of any relationship is trust. Without trust in G-d, we ultimately permanently damaged our relationship with Him.

Physicality Versus Spirituality

The deeper reason the Jews in the desert cried upon hearing the spies' report was a desire to remain close to G-d. Life was good in the desert. Miracles happened on a daily basis. The Jewish people knew that entering Israel would involve returning to reality, toiling on the land instead of receiving manna from Heaven, thus having less time to spend studying the Torah.

But what we failed to understand is that entering the Land would enable us to live in the ultimate reality. G-d wants us to live in this physical world and use its very physicality for spiritual purposes. Our mission in the world is to infuse our surroundings with spirituality

and G-dliness. The spiritual vortex of the world is Israel, Jerusalem in particular, and specifically the Holy Temple. The ultimate relationship connects the physical and spiritual worlds, enhancing each of them. Unfortunately, the Jews in the desert didn't realize that entering the Land of Israel would have accomplished that, creating a better reality than they had in the desert.

I once asked a rabbi why the Western Wall is so important to the Jewish people. Shouldn't our holiest site be Mount Sinai? After all, Mount Sinai is the mountain where G-d spoke to Moses and gave him the Torah. It is there that each and every Jew heard firsthand the voice of the Almighty. Yet this mountain is not considered the holiest place for a Jew. That title is reserved for the place where the Holy Temple stood.

The mission of a Jewish person is to take physical matter and make it holy. In the desert and at Mount Sinai, G-d spoke to us, and that was incredible! But we were like infants being fed by our mother; we were not yet partners with the Almighty. The Temple site is so holy because there we built a home for G-d out of our own blood, sweat and raw materials. It is the place where we worked together with the Almighty to bring His presence down to earth, thus infusing the physical matter with holiness. Holiness with G-d is a more mature relationship than we had at Mount Sinai. It is a love affair. It takes two to make it work. Where Did We Go Wrong?

The Jews in the desert were being noncommittal. They had the ultimate romance with G-d, who granted them constant miracles. We had found our perfect match, and yet we were scared to move on to the next stage of the relationship. Our greatest flaw was that we did not want to grow. We wanted the overwhelming passion of new love, and were afraid to move into an unknown future.

The romantic stage of a relationship is indeed wonderful, but it doesn't last, because romance is not true love. True love is based in reality. It is when we share the mundane experiences of life with our partner that we learn to truly love. Our shared moments and growth are our most intimate, and our partnership makes the world a better place.

A good relationship is not about lust, attraction or "me." A strong relationship is borne when both partners focus on giving, and exploring what's special about "us." The ultimate partnership is between two people who can "build" with each other. G-d, too, wants to partner with us in building. The Temple can stand only as long as we keep building it through nurturing our relationship to the divine.

Relationship breakups are tough. Whenever a relationship dissolves in books or movies, the woman ends up sitting on a couch and eating ice cream to "get over" her partner. But, we observe Tisha B'Av because we can never "get over" the relationship we have lost with G-d. This relationship is not disposable. It is irreplaceable.

And yet, we cry. We cry because we know He wants a relationship with us, but we messed up. We cry because the home that we built with G-d is destroyed, and we want to build it with Him again. We cry because, even 2,000 years after our falling out, we still crave His love and yearn to be as in love with Him as He is with us.

Rectifying the Divine Relationship

Most importantly, we don't cry because we feel hopeless. We cry to change ourselves. We cry because through tears we hope to grow. This world was created for us to connect with G-d, and we must cultivate our inner longing to unite with Him. Our relationships with each other are a taste of this divine relationship. With that in mind, how could we not direct every effort into developing and cultivating them? How can we settle for anything less? Sometimes it can be difficult for us to relate to the loss of a Temple we never knew and a relationship with G-d we never experienced. We don't even know anyone who has known it!

But if we recognize the loss of the Temple as the loss of our greatest relationship, perhaps we can relate a bit more deeply. We've missed 2,000 years of anniversaries.

We have the chance to be the couple who emanates love. The pair whom people stop to ask: "What's your secret?" We have the chance to be the light unto the nations—but we can't do it without partnering with the ultimate source of the light.

'TO THIS DAY'

By Shane Koyczan

To This Day
When I was a kid
I used to think that pork chops and karate
chops
were the same thing
I thought they were both pork chops
and because my grandmother thought it
was cute
and because they were my favourite
she let me keep doing it

not really a big deal

one day
before I realized fat kids are not designed
to climb trees

I fell out of a tree
and bruised the right side of my body

I didn't want to tell my grandmother
about it
because I was afraid I'd get in trouble
for playing somewhere that I shouldn't
have been

a few days later the gym teacher noticed
the bruise
and I got sent to the principal's office
from there I was sent to another small
room
with a really nice lady

who asked me all kinds of questions
about my life at home

I saw no reason to lie
as far as I was concerned
life was pretty good
I told her “whenever I’m sad
my grandmother gives me karate chops”

this led to a full scale investigation
and I was removed from the house for
three days
until they finally decided to ask how I got
the bruises

news of this silly little story quickly
spread through the school
and I earned my first nickname

pork chop

to this day
I hate pork chops

I’m not the only kid
who grew up this way
surrounded by people who used to say
that rhyme about sticks and stones
as if broken bones
hurt more than the names we got called
and we got called them all
so we grew up believing no one
would ever fall in love with us
that we’d be lonely forever
that we’d never meet someone
to make us feel like the sun
was something they built for us
in their tool shed
so broken heart strings bled the blues
as we tried to empty ourselves
so we would feel nothing
don’t tell me that hurts less than a broken
bone
that an ingrown life
is something surgeons can cut away
that there’s no way for it to metastasize

it does

she was eight years old
our first day of grade three
when she got called ugly
we both got moved to the back of the
class
so we would stop get bombarded by spit
balls
but the school halls were a battleground
where we found ourselves outnumbered
day after wretched day
we used to stay inside for recess
because outside was worse
outside we’d have to rehearse running
away
or learn to stay still like statues giving no
clues that we were there
in grade five they taped a sign to her desk
that read beware of dog

to this day
despite a loving husband
she doesn’t think she’s beautiful
because of a birthmark
that takes up a little less than half of her
face
kids used to say she looks like a wrong
answer
that someone tried to erase
but couldn’t quite get the job done
and they’ll never understand
that she’s raising two kids
whose definition of beauty
begins with the word mom
because they see her heart
before they see her skin
that she’s only ever always been amazing

he
was a broken branch
grafted onto a different family tree
adopted
but not because his parents opted for a
different destiny
he was three when he became a mixed

drink
of one part left alone
and two parts tragedy
started therapy in 8th grade
had a personality made up of tests and pills
lived like the uphill were mountains
and the downhill were cliffs
four fifths suicidal
a tidal wave of anti depressants
and an adolescence of being called popper
one part because of the pills
and ninety nine parts because of the cruelty
he tried to kill himself in grade ten
when a kid who still had his mom and dad
had the audacity to tell him "get over it"
as if depression
is something that can be remedied
by any of the contents found in a first aid kit

to this day
he is a stick of TNT lit from both ends
could describe to you in detail the way the sky bends
in the moments before it's about to fall
and despite an army of friends
who all call him an inspiration
he remains a conversation piece between people
who can't understand
sometimes becoming drug free
has less to do with addiction
and more to do with sanity

we weren't the only kids who grew up
this way
to this day
kids are still being called names
the classics were
hey stupid
hey spaz
seems like each school has an arsenal of names
getting updated every year

and if a kid breaks in a school
and no one around chooses to hear
do they make a sound?
are they just the background noise
of a soundtrack stuck on repeat
when people say things like
kids can be cruel?
every school was a big top circus tent
and the pecking order went
from acrobats to lion tamers
from clowns to carnies
all of these were miles ahead of who we were
we were freaks
lobster claw boys and bearded ladies
oddities
juggling depression and loneliness
playing solitaire spin the bottle
trying to kiss the wounded parts of ourselves and heal
but at night
while the others slept
we kept walking the tightrope
it was practice
and yeah
some of us fell

but I want to tell them
that all of this shit
is just debris
leftover when we finally decide to smash
all the things we thought
we used to be
and if you can't see anything beautiful
about yourself
get a better mirror
look a little closer
stare a little longer
because there's something inside you
that made you keep trying
despite everyone who told you to quit
you built a cast around your broken heart
and signed it yourself
you signed it
"they were wrong"
because maybe you didn't belong to a

group or a click
maybe they decided to pick you last for
basketball or everything
maybe you used to bring bruises and
broken teeth
to show and tell but never told
because how can you hold your ground
if everyone around you wants to bury you
beneath it
you have to believe that they were wrong

they have to be wrong

why else would we still be here?
we grew up learning to cheer on the
underdog
because we see ourselves in them
we stem from a root planted in the belief
that we are not what we were called we

are not abandoned cars stalled out and
sitting empty on a highway
and if in some way we are
don't worry
we only got out to walk and get gas
we are graduating members from the
class of
fuck off we made it
not the faded echoes of voices crying out
names will never hurt me

of course
they did

but our lives will only ever always
continue to be
a balancing act
that has less to do with pain
and more to do with beauty.

TISH'AH BE-AV THEMES AND SOURCES

These can be used to prepare for a dvar Torah or speech or to be learned together and discuss with NCSYers.

THE SPIES / THE FIRST TISH'AH BE-AV

Sanhedrin 104b

For it is written [in the episode of the *meraglim*], And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried, and the people wept that night (Bamidbar 14:1). Rava observed in Rav Yochanan's name: It was the night of the ninth of Av, and the Almighty said to Israel, 'You have wept without cause: therefore will I appoint a weeping to you for future generations.

Why was the Beit Hamikdash Destroyed?

Yoma 9b

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three things that occurred in it: idolatry, immorality, bloodshed... But why was the second Sanctuary destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, [observance of] precepts, and the practice of charity? Because therein prevailed hatred without cause.

That teaches you that groundless hatred is considered as of even gravity with the three sins of idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed together.



Nedarim 81a/Baba Metzia 85a

Rav Yehudah said in Rav's name: What is meant by, Who is the wise man, that he may understand this [... for what purpose is the land of Israel destroyed etc.] (Yirmiyahu 9:11)? Now, this question was put to the Sages, Prophets, and Ministering Angels, but they could not answer it, until the Almighty Himself did so, as it is written, And the Lord said, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein (Ibid. 10): but is not 'have not obeyed my voice' identical with, 'neither walked therein'? — Rav Yehudah said in Rav's name: [It means] that they did not first recite a benediction over the Torah²⁶.

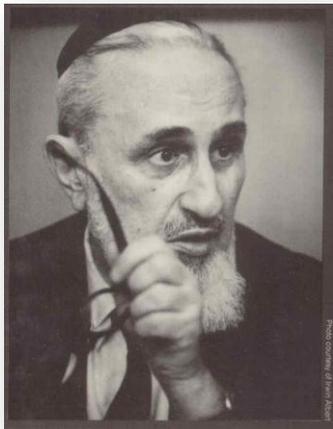
²⁶ Ran (Nedarim 81a) explains that it is assumed that the Torah was studied; for otherwise, the question would easily have been answered by the Sages and Prophets. Yet it was studied not for its own sake but only for the preferment it might give. This is expressed by saying that they recited no benediction before studying it, i.e., it was not in itself dear to them. The selfish motive could be known to none but God.

Baba Metzia 30b

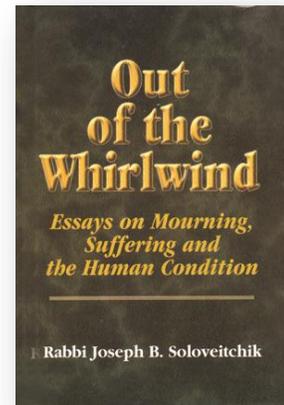
Rav Yochanan said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they gave judgments there in accordance with Biblical law. Were they then to have judged in accordance with untrained arbitrators? No, because they based their judgments [strictly] upon Biblical law, and did not go beyond the requirements of the law.

WHY?

The Rav, Introduction to Out of the whirlwind



“The gist of my discourse was that Judaism did not approach the problem of evil under the speculative-metaphysical aspect. For such an inquiry would be a futile undertaking. As long as the human mind is unable to embrace creation in its entirety and to gain an insight into the very essence and purposiveness of being as such, it would not succeed in its attempt to resolve the dilemma



of evil. The latter is interwoven into the very fabric of reality and cannot be understood outside its total ontological configuration. Job was in error because he tried to grasp the nature of evil. Therefore, Judaism has recommended that the metaphysical inquiry be replaced by the halakhic ethical gesture. Man should not ask: “Why evil? He should rather raise the question: What am I supposed to do if confronted with evil; how should I behave vis-a-vis evil? The latter is a powerful challenge to man and it is the duty of man to meet this challenge boldly and courageously. Suffering, in the opinion of Judaism, must not be purposeless, wasted. Out of suffering must emerge the ethical norm, the call for repentance, for self-elevation. Judaism wants to convert the passionless frustrating experience into an integrating, cleansing and redeeming factor.

Rabbi Haskel Lookstein on The Rav’s Approach

1. No one has a right to explain God’s ways. We do not understand creation or destruction. God’s ways are inscrutable just as God Himself is unfathomable. Job thought he could understand God’s ways - and he was rebuked for that. The Psalmist knew better (59:4): *Ki hiney orvu l’nafshi* “For behold my soul was ambushed - *yaguru alai azim* - powerful forces surrounded me - *lo fishi v’lo chatati*, Ha-Shem - God; it was not because of my sins or my mistakes.”

2. So if the response is not to ask why, what should be the response? The Rav answers: Not “why” but “what now?” “What should I do?” “How should I respond?”

And the answer is twofold:

A. Fight suffering and tragedy with every weapon we possess. We discussed this response on Rosh Hashanah 2001, one year after the outbreak of the Intifada and ten days after 9/11. ... Fight evil with all the weapons available, said the Rav, whether that evil is human evil or illness. As my great-grandfather the RaMaZ used to say: when you get sick you should say a lot of Tehilim - and find a good doctor - that is: use all the weapons available.

B. But the experience of suffering requires an additional response besides fighting. Suffering, says the Rav, must not be purposeless; wasted. It must be redeemed by feeling and action. Listen to his words: (Out of the Whirlwind (pp.202-3) "Grief must not enhance one's self-regard and self-care and render him completely oblivious to the suffering of others. The grieving person must also be disturbed by the pain sustained by his fellow man. He should share the other's burden, even though he seems completely preoccupied with his agonizing private burden."



IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1/ Midrash Tehilim 137:10

Each generation that the *bais hamikdosh* is not rebuilt is as if we destroyed it.

NOT BEING TOTALLY HAPPY

Brachos 31a

One may not fill his mouth with laughter in this world -- "Az Yemalei Sechok Pinu u'Leshonenu Rinah." Only *then* will laughter fill our mouths;

WHERE ARE YOU?

Eichah Rabba - Pesichta IV

Rav Abbahu opened his discourse with the text, "But they, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant" (Hoshea 6:7). This alludes to the first man, of whom the Holy One, said, 'I brought him into the Garden of Eden and imposed a command upon him, but he transgressed it; so I punished him by driving him out and sending him forth, and lamented over him, Ayekah.'



I brought him into the Garden of Eden,' as it is said, "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden" (Bereishis

2:15). 'I imposed a command upon him,' as it is said, "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying" (ib. 16). 'But he transgressed My command,' as it is said, "Have you eaten of the tree, which I commanded you not to eat?" (ib. 3:11). 'So I punished him by driving him out,' as it is said, "So He drove out the man" (ib. 24), and 'by sending him forth', as it is said, "Therefore the Lord God sent him forth" (ib. 23), and 'lamented over him, Ayekah', as it is said, "Where are you?" -- (-Ayekah') (ib. 9), this being written with the same letters as Ayekah'.

Similarly with his descendants: 'I brought them into the land of Israel,' as it is said, "And I brought you into a land of fruitful fields" (Yirmiyahu 2:7). 'I gave them commandments,' as it is said, "Command the children of Israel" (Vayikra 24:2). 'They transgressed My ordinances,' as it is said, "Yea, all Israel have transgressed Your law" (Daniel 9:11).

'So I punished them by driving them out,' as it is said, "I will drive them out of My house" (Hoshea 9:15), 'and by sending them forth,' as it is said, "Cast them out of My sight and let them go forth" (Yirmiyahu 15,); and I lamented over them, 'Ayekah', How sitteth solitary?'

TEFILAH / THE GATE OF TEARS

Brachot 32b

Rabbi Eleazar said: prayer is more effective even than good deeds, for there was no-one greater in good deeds than Moshe our Master, and yet he was answered only after prayer, as it says, Speak no more unto Me (Devarim 3:26)²⁷, and immediately afterwards, Get thee up into the top of Pisgah (Devarim 3:27).



Rabbi Eleazar also said: Fasting is more efficacious than charity. What is the reason? One is performed with a man's money, the other with his body.

Rabbi Eleazar also said: Prayer is more effective than offerings, as it says, To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me (Yeshayahu 1:11), and this is followed by, And when you spread forth your hands (Yeshayahu 1:15)²⁸. Rabbi Yochanan said: A priest who has committed manslaughter should not lift up his hands [to say the priestly benediction], since it says [in this context], 'Your hands are full of blood'.

Rabbi Eleazar also said: From the day on which the Temple was destroyed the gates of prayer have been closed, as it says, Yea, when I cry and call for help He shuts out my prayer (Eichah 3:8). But though the gates of prayer are closed, the gates of weeping are not closed,

²⁷ The meaning is apparently that his good deeds did not avail to procure him permission to enter the land, but his prayer procured for him the vision of Pisgah.

²⁸ Since spreading of hands is mentioned after sacrifice, it must be regarded as more efficacious.

as it says, Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; keep not silence at my tears (Tehilim 39:13).²⁹

MASHIACH

Yerushalmi Brachos 2:4 / Eicha Rabba 1:57

On the day the Holy Temple was destroyed, the Moshiach of Israel was born. What is his name? Menachem³⁰

AHAVAS CHINAM

Orot HaKodesh³¹ vol. III, p. 324

If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to baseless hatred, then we shall rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with baseless love — ahavat chinam.

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, Pichu Shaarei Halev, p. 227

The Baal Shem Tov Hakodesh says in order for the Mashiach to come, every person needs to become a small mashiach. Meaning, if you are prepared to do everything for another person, if you are ready to be a small mashiach, then the big Mashiach will come. If you don't have the strength to be a small mashiach, this brings me pain, as you are holding back the coming of the mashiach. As you do for another, you should do so as a small mashiach, with all your heart and with all your soul *neshama*....If you see someone who is upset, and you make him happy, you are a small mashiach. Rebbe Nachman says, in order to make someone happy it is allowed to speak more frivolously, the main thing is to get them to laugh.... When you do good for another person, you are not just doing them a favor, you are really bringing redemption to the entire world.



Rabbi Jonathon Sacks

Don't just thank God; thank people. There is almost nothing you can do to bring warmth into someone else's life than simple, honest recognition for something they have done, especially if it's the kind of thing most people take for granted. Do it for your parents, your teachers, your friends, your coaches, the person at the checkout counter, anyone who does the kind of work we often call "thankless."

Taanis 22b

²⁹ Hagahos Maymoniyos Hilchos Taaniyos Minhagei Tisha Biav- Not saying Tiskabel on Tish'ah be-Av because prayers are not accepted (Shut Betzeil Hachachma 4:68:2- Tiskabel resembles greeting someone)

³⁰ In every generation there is a person who can be Moshiach if that generation so merits. (See Rav Ovadiah of Bartenura, Commentary on Ruth)

³¹ Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (The first Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel), 1865-1935

Rabbi Beruka Chaza'a would frequently be joined by Eliyahu ha'Navi. One day in the market he asked him if there was anyone present who was a Ben Olam ha'Ba and was told that there was not....Meanwhile, two other people came into the market, and Eliyahu said that they were Bnei Olam ha'Ba. Rabbi Beruka asked them their profession. They replied that they were jesters who would cheer up unhappy people and smooth over disputes between people.

Vayikra 19:18

And you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself for I am Hashem

Sefer Yereim (Rebbe Eliezer Mi'mitz, 1100's)

The mitzvah [of Vahavtah L'reyacha Kamocha] is to be aware of and do things to your neighbor that he will appreciate and to avoid doing things that he will be pained by. It seems that the main reason to live this way and treat others this way is because of the end of the verse "...for I am Hashem". And if you will ask how can I know what my neighbor appreciates and what causes my neighbor pain, am I some kind of prophet? To that the verse says "Kamocha" by you looking in to yourself and knowing what you appreciate and what causes you pain you can discover the answer and project to others.

Tanya³² Chapter 32

"When a person works on overcoming the lowness and frailty of the body and the lower soul he has direct access to personal joy and especially to the mitzvah of "Vahavtah L'reyacha Kamocha" with every Jew regardless of their position. For once a person sees the lowness and frailty of the body he gains access to the soul and its loftiness and broad vision. He can see then how all souls come from the same source and how we all have one father. This is why the Jewish people are called brothers – because of their spiritual connection and unity. It is clear in this approach and this level that it is only the bodies that separate us and divide us. And therefore anyone who makes their body the main aspect of their lives will never be able to properly perform the mitzvah of loving one's fellow Jew.

RABBI AKIVA'S ATTITUDE

Makot 24b

Again it happened that Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Akiva went up to Jerusalem. When they reached Mt. Scopus, they tore their garments. When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerging from the place of the Holy of Holies. The others started weeping; Rabbi Akiva laughed.

Said they to him: "Why are you laughing?" Said he to



³² Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, 1700's

them: "Why are you weeping?"

Said they to him: "A place [so holy] that it is said of it, 'the stranger that approaches it shall die,' (Bamidbar 1:51) and now foxes traverse it, and we shouldn't weep?"

Said he to them: "That is why I laugh. For it is written, 'I shall have bear witness for Me faithful witnesses--Uriah the Priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.' (Yeshayahu 8:2) Now what is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah? Uriah was [in the time of] the First Temple, and Zechariah was [in the time of] the Second Temple! But the Torah makes Zachariah's prophecy dependent upon Uriah's prophecy. With Uriah, it is written: 'Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field; [Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the Temple Mount like the high places of a forest.]' (Micha 3:12) With Zachariah it is written, 'Old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem.' (Zechariah 8:4)

"As long as Uriah's prophecy had not been fulfilled, I feared that Zechariah's prophecy may not be fulfilled either. But now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled, it is certain that Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled."

With these words they replied to him: "Akiva, you have consoled us! Akiva, you have consoled us!"

TALMUD TORAH ON TISH'AH BE-AV

Tehilim 19:9

The orders of the Lord are upright, causing the heart to rejoice; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes

Taanis 30a

All laws that apply to a mourner apply to Tish'ah b'Av: Aside from eating and drinking, it is forbidden to wash, anoint oneself, wear leather shoes, engage in marital relations, read from Tanach, learn Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, Halachos, and Agados (as Torah gladdens the heart)...One is also permitted to read Kinnos, Iyov, and the sad parts of Yirmiyah.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

The Rav (The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik, Vol.1, 172)

With all his broken heart and unanswered questions, the mortal man must yet exclaim, 'who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the mighty!'

Vayikra 18:5

You shall observe My statutes and My ordinances, which a man shall do and live by them. I am the Lord.

Rav Elazar Menachem Mann Shach ztz"l

On the surface, Chazal are teaching us that it's permissible to violate the Torah's commandments when one's life is in danger. But this *pasuk* may also be conveying the mitzvah of *mesirus nefesh* — to live *al kiddush Hashem* in all circumstances.

Dying *al kiddush Hashem* is a tremendous test, but living and withstanding the trials of life also requires *mesirus nefesh*.

AFTERMATH

Bava Batra 60b

Our Rabbis taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the second time, large numbers in Israel became ascetics³³, binding themselves neither to eat meat nor to drink wine. Rabbi Yehoshua got into conversation with them and said to them: My sons, why do you not eat meat nor drink wine? They replied: Shall we eat flesh which used to be brought as an offering on the altar, now that this altar is not being used? Shall we drink wine which used to be poured as a libation on the altar, but now no longer? He said to them: If that is so, we should not eat bread either, because the meal offerings have ceased. They said: [That is so, and] we can manage with fruit. We should not eat fruit either, [he said,] because there is no longer an offering of firstfruits. Then we can manage with other fruits [they said]. But, [he said,] we should not drink water, because there is no longer any ceremony of the pouring of water³⁴. To this they could find no answer, so he said to them: My sons, come and listen to me. Not to mourn at all is impossible, because the blow has fallen. To mourn overmuch is also impossible, because we do not impose on the community a hardship which the majority cannot endure, as it is written, *Ye are cursed with a curse³⁵, yet ye rob me* [of the tithe], *even this whole nation (Malachi 3:9)³⁶*. The Sages therefore have ordained thus. A man may build his house, but he should leave a little bare. (How much should this be? R. Joseph says, A cubit square; to which R. Hisda adds that it must be by the door.) A man can prepare a full-course banquet, but he should leave out an item or two. (What should this be? R. Papa says: The hors d'oeuvre of salted fish.) A woman can put on all her ornaments, but leave off one or two. (What should this be? Rav said: [Not to remove] the hair on the temple.)³⁷ For so it says, If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I remember thee not, if I prefer not Jerusalem

³³ practicing strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline

³⁴ On Sukkot; See Sukkah Chapter 4

³⁵ This is taken to mean: 'You have laid on yourselves an adjuration (to bring the tithe).

³⁶ It is assumed that the adjuration would not have been effective unless the *whole nation* had taken part in it; which is taken to show that we do not impose a hardship unless we are sure that the majority can stand it.

³⁷ Which was usually removed as a mark of elegance.

above my chief joy. (Tehilim 137: 5-6) What is meant by 'my chief joy'? Rabbi Yitzchak said: This is symbolized by the burnt ashes which we place on the head of a bridegroom. Rav Papa asked Abaye: Where should they be placed? [He replied]: Just where the tefilin is worn, as it says, To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them a garland [pe'er] for ashes [epher]. (Yeshayau 51:3)³⁸ Whoever mourns for Zion will be privileged to behold her joy, as it says, Rejoice ye with Jerusalem etc. (Yeshayau 51:10) It has been taught: R. Ishmael ben Elisha said: Since the day of the destruction of the Temple we should by rights bind ourselves not to eat meat nor drink wine, only we do not lay a hardship on the community unless the majority can endure it. And from the day that a Government has come into power which issues cruel decrees against us and forbids to us the observance of the Torah and the precepts³⁹ and does not allow us to enter into the 'week of the son'⁴⁰ we ought by rights to bind ourselves not to marry and beget children, and the seed of Abraham our father would come to an end of itself. However, let Israel go their way: it is better that they should err in ignorance than presumptuously.

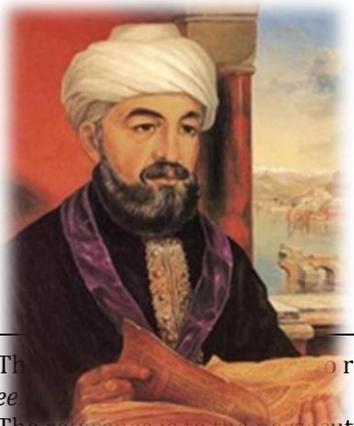
The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik; compiled by Rabbi J.J. Shachter) pp. 32

There is something very paradoxical about Tish'ah be-Av and the event of the hurban Beit ha-Mikdash. On the one hand, Tish'ah be-Av is a day of bitterness and misfortune. On the other hand, it also has an element of mo'ed because Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu rendered a decision on that day that the Keneset Yisrael would be an eternal people and will continue to exist no matter how grave the situation may become. Indeed, as strange as it seems, from a certain perspective, the hurban was a benefit to the Jewish people.

AL NAHAROT BAVEL

Tehilim 137:5-6

If I forget you Jerusalem, May I forget my right hand, May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, If I ever don't think of you, If I don't raise up Jerusalem above my highest joy



Rambam Hilchot Taanit

5:1 - There are days when the entire Jewish people fast because of the calamities that occurred to them then, to arouse [their] hearts and initiate [them in] the paths of repentance⁴¹. This will serve as a reminder of our wicked

³⁸ The reference is to the Tefilin on the basis of the verse, *Bind thy headtire (pe'erka) upon thee*

³⁹ The reference is to the persecution instituted by the Emperor Hadrian after the revolt of Bar Kochba, 135 C.E.

⁴⁰ Brit Milah

⁴¹ This is the intent of the fasts, and not merely refraining from eating. For this reason, the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 121:1 harshly reproves those who fast, but spend their days taking pleasure strolls and being involved in other forms of leisure activity.

conduct and that of our ancestors, which resembles our present conduct and therefore brought these calamities upon them and upon us⁴². By reminding ourselves of these matters, we will repent⁴³ and improve [our conduct], as [Vayikra 26:40] states: "And they will confess their sin and the sin of their ancestors."

5:2 - These days are the following: The Third of Tishrei. This is the day on which Gedaliah ben Achikam was slain and the ember of Israel that remained was extinguished, causing their exile to become complete⁴⁴. The Tenth of Tevet. This is the day Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked, the King of Babylon, camped against Jerusalem and placed the city under siege⁴⁵. The Seventeenth of Tammuz. Five tragedies took place on this day⁴⁶: a) The Tablets were broken; b) In the First Temple, the offering of the daily sacrifices⁴⁷ was nullified; c) [The walls of] Jerusalem were breached in [the war leading to] the destruction of the Second Temple⁴⁸; d) Apostomos⁴⁹, the wicked, burned a Torah scroll⁵⁰; and e) He erected an idol in the Temple⁵¹.

5:3- On the Ninth of Av, five tragedies occurred: It was decreed that the Jews in the desert would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*; The First and the Second Temples were destroyed; A large city named Betar was captured. Thousands and myriads of Jews inhabited it. They were ruled by a great king whom the entire Jewish people and the leading Sages considered to be

⁴² Although these tragedies took place in previous generations, we share the responsibility for them. The Yerushalmi (*Yoma* 1:1) states, "Every generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt should consider it as if it was destroyed in its days."

⁴³ The word *נשׁוּב*, translated as "we will repent," literally means, "We will return." *Teshuvah* involves a return to one's fundamental self, becoming aware of the fundamental Divine nature one possesses. Such a process relates to these commemorative fasts, which on the surface are associated with undesirable elements, but possess a positive core, as reflected in the Rambam's statements at the conclusion of this chapter that in the era of the Redemption, all these fast days will be transformed into days of rejoicing and celebration.

⁴⁴ After Gedaliah's murder, the Jews remaining in *Eretz Yisrael* feared the wrath of the Babylonians and fled to Egypt, leaving *Eretz Yisrael* devoid of Jewish leadership and possessing very few Jewish inhabitants. (See Yirmiyahu, Chapters 41-43.)

⁴⁵ Our commemoration of this fast also marks two other undesirable events which occurred in the preceding days: the death of Ezra, the scribe, and the translation of the Torah into Greek at the demand of King Ptolemy (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 580).

⁴⁶ *Ta'anit* 29a states: Undesirable events are gathered together on a day appropriate for them. The spiritual nature of the day is such, that the potential for such tragedies to occur is greater.

⁴⁷ The *korban tamid* (*Bamidbar* 28:1-8)

⁴⁸ Yirmiyahu 39:2 states that in the destruction of the First Temple, Jerusalem's walls fell to the Babylonian conquerors on the ninth of Tammuz. Nevertheless, it is the destruction of the city by the Romans that we commemorate by fasting, because the effects of that destruction are more severe (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 549:2). The Rabbis did not institute a fast for the Ninth of Tammuz as well, for it was felt that this would be an excessive burden for the people (*Mishnah Berurah* 549:4). Furthermore, according to the Jerusalem Talmud, *Ta'anit* 4:8, because of the many difficulties suffered by the Jewish people, they miscalculated the date, and, even during the destruction of the First Temple, it was on the Seventeenth of Tammuz that Jerusalem's walls were breached.

⁴⁹ A Greek official in the Second Temple era

⁵⁰ The Meiri identifies this as the Torah scroll written by Ezra the Scribe. This scroll was kept in the Temple Courtyard and was used to check the precision of the other scrolls. In this manner, he attempted to undermine the entire Torah tradition.

⁵¹ Others interpret this as a reference to the idol erected by King Menasheh in the First Temple. (See the Yerushalmi *Ta'anit* 4:6.)

the Messianic king. The city fell to the Romans and they were all slain, causing a national catastrophe equivalent to that of the Temple's destruction. On that day designated for retribution, the wicked Tineius Rufus plowed the site of the Temple and its surroundings, thereby fulfilling the prophecy [Michah 3:12], "Zion will be plowed like a field."

5:4- These four fasts are explicitly mentioned in the prophetic tradition [Zechariah 8:19]: "The fast of the fourth [month], the fast of the fifth [month]...." "The fast of the fourth [month]" refers to the Seventeenth of Tammuz, which is in the fourth month; "the fast of the fifth [month]," to Tish'ah B'Av, which is in the fifth month; "the fast of the seventh [month]," to the Third of Tishrei which is in the seventh month; "the fast of the tenth [month]," to the Tenth of Tevet, which is in the tenth month.

5:5- And the entire Jewish people follow the custom⁵² of fasting at these times and on the Thirteenth of Adar, in commemoration of the fasts that [the people] took upon themselves in the time of Haman, as mentioned [in Esther 9:31]: "the matter of the fasts and the outcries." If the Thirteenth of Adar falls on the Sabbath, the fast is pushed forward and held on Thursday, which is the eleventh of Adar. If, however, any of the [dates of] other fasts fall on the Sabbath, the fasts are postponed until after the Sabbath. If [the dates of] these fasts fall on Friday, we should fast on Friday. On all these fasts, the trumpets are not sounded, nor is the Ne'ilah service recited. The passage Vay'chal⁵³ is read from the Torah, however, in both the morning and the afternoon services. On all these [fasts], with the exception of Tish'ah B'Av, we may eat and drink at night.

5:6 - When the month of Av enters, we reduce our joy. During the week of Tish'ah B'Av⁵⁴, it is forbidden to cut one's hair, to do laundry, or to wear a pressed garment - even one of linen - until after the fast. It has already been accepted as a Jewish custom not to eat meat⁵⁵ or enter a bathhouse⁵⁶ during this week until after the fast. There are places that follow the custom of refraining from slaughtering from Rosh Chodesh Av until after the fast.

5:7- All [the restrictions of] Tish'ah B'Av apply at night as well as during the day. One may not eat after sunset [of the previous day]; [it is forbidden to eat] between sunset and the appearance of the stars, as on Yom Kippur. One should not eat meat or drink wine at the meal before the fast⁵⁷. One may, however, drink grape juice that has not been left [to

⁵² The *Maggid Mishneh* interprets this phrase to mean that our obligation to fast on these days is a custom accepted by the Jewish people after the destruction of the Second Temple. See Rosh Hashanah 18b

⁵³ Shemos 32:11

⁵⁴ According to Ashkenazic custom, all the activities mentioned by the Rambam are forbidden from Rosh Chodesh Av onward.

⁵⁵ Or fowl. *Bava Batra* 60b states that it would have been proper for the Jews to refrain from eating meat and drinking wine at all times in mourning over the loss of the opportunity to partake of the sacrificial meat and the loss of the wine libations. The Sages felt, however, that such a decree would be too stringent for the people to observe and hence, did not institute it.

⁵⁶ The prohibition applies only to washing for pleasure.

⁵⁷ This is in reference to those who did not have the custom to refrain from meat and wine beforehand. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 554:25) associates Yechezkel 32:27: "And their sins will be upon their bones" with eating meat and drinking wine at this meal.

ferment] for three days. One may eat salted meat that was slaughtered more than three days previously. One should not eat two cooked dishes.

5:8- When does the above apply? When one ate [this meal] in the afternoon on the day preceding Tish'ah B'Av. If, however, one eats a meal before noon, although this is the last meal one eats before the fast, one may eat all that one desires. When the day before Tish'ah B'Av falls on the Sabbath, one may eat and drink to the full extent of one's needs, and one may serve even a meal resembling Solomon's feasts at one's table. Similarly, when Tish'ah B'Av falls on the Sabbath, one need not withhold anything at all.

5:9- This is the rite observed by the people as a whole who cannot endure more. In contrast, the rite observed by the pious of the earlier generations was as follows: A person would sit alone between the oven and the cooking range. Others would bring him dried bread and salt. He would dip it in water and drink a pitcher of water while worried, forlorn, and in tears, as one whose dead was lying before him. The scholars should act in this or a similar manner⁵⁸. We never ate cooked food, even lentils, on the day before Tish'ah B'Av, except on the Sabbath.

5:10 - Pregnant women and those who are nursing must complete their fasts on Tish'ah B'Av⁵⁹. [On this day,] it is forbidden to wash in either hot or cold water⁶⁰; it is even forbidden to place one's finger in water. Similarly, anointing oneself for the sake of pleasure, wearing shoes, and sexual relations are forbidden, as on Yom Kippur. In places where it is customary to do work⁶¹, one may work. In places where it is not customary to work, one should not. Torah scholars everywhere should remain idle on this day. Our Sages said, "Whoever performs work on this day will never see a sign of blessing forever."

5:11- Torah scholars⁶² should not exchange greetings on Tish'ah B'Av. Instead, they should sit in agony and frustration like mourners⁶³. If a common person greets them, they should reply to him weakly⁶⁴, in a somber tone⁶⁵.

⁵⁸ At present, our custom is to eat a filling meal in the late afternoon. Afterwards, shortly before the fast, one eats a slight meal with bread and eggs dipped in ashes. Nevertheless, anyone who feels able to endure the fast when eating less is encouraged to do so. Three people should not sit together, so as not to become obligated in a *zimun*. (See Ramah, *Orach Chayim* 552:9; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 123:3.)

⁵⁹ Needless to say, they or any other person who feels that fasting will threaten their health may eat and drink. (See Ramah, *Orach Chayim* 554:6.)

⁶⁰ For the sake of pleasure. One may, however, wash one's hands to remove filth or for ritual purposes. (See the *Shulchan Aruch* and commentaries, *Orach Chayim* 544:9-10.)

⁶¹ The word "work" in this context does not refer to the thirty-nine labors prohibited on the Sabbath, but rather to concentrated activity that would distract one's attention from mourning (*Mishnah Berurah* 554:43).

⁶² Indeed, this applies also to the people as a whole. Torah scholars are mentioned because they are expected to be more sensitive to the tragedy of our loss on Tish'ah B'Av. The Rambam's choice of wording is based on his interpretation of the *Tosefta*, *Ta'anit* 3:11, "*Chaverim* should not exchange greetings on Tish'ah B'Av," for the term *chaverim* is often used as a reference to Torah scholars. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 554:20), however, interprets *chaverim* in its literal sense, that it means "friends." Gifts or other social amenities should not be exchanged either (*Mishnah Berurah* 554:41).

⁶³ Nothing should be done to distract one's attention from the loss. With the above expression, the Rambam also explains the rationale for these laws. When the Sages ordained the commemoration of Tish'ah B'Av, they

On Tish'ah B'Av, it is forbidden to read from the Torah, the Prophets, or the Sacred Writings [or to study] the Mishnah, Torah law, the Talmud, or the Aggadic works⁶⁶. One may study only Job, Eichah, and the prophecies of retribution in Jeremiah⁶⁷. Children should not study in school on this day. There are some sages who do not wear the head tefillin.

5:12 - After the Temple was destroyed, the Sages of that generation ordained⁶ that one should never build a building whose walls are decorated with ornate designs like the palaces of kings. Instead, one should cover the walls of one's home with mortar and paint over them with lime, leaving a space one cubit square opposite the doorway that is unpainted. If, however, a person buys a dwelling whose walls have been decorated, it may remain as is; he is not obligated to scrape [the designs] from the walls.

5:13-Similarly, they ordained that a person who sets a table for guests should serve slightly less [than usual] and should leave a place empty, [so that it obviously] lacks one of the dishes that would ordinarily be placed there. When a woman has a set of jewelry made for her, she should refrain from having one of the pieces appropriate for the set made, so that her jewelry is not perfect. Similarly, when a groom marries, he should place ashes on his forehead on the place where one wears tefillin. All of these practices were instituted to recall Jerusalem, as [Tehilim 137:5-6] states: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand lose its dexterity. Let my tongue cleave to my palate if I do not remember you, if I do not recall Jerusalem during my greatest joy."

5:14- Similarly, they ordained that one should not play melodies with any sort of musical instrument. It is forbidden to celebrate with such instruments or to listen to them being played⁶⁸ [as an expression of mourning] for the destruction. Even songs [without musical accompaniment] that are recited over wine are forbidden, as [Isaiah 24:9] states: "Do not drink wine with song." It has, however, become accepted custom among the entire Jewish people to recite words of praise, songs of thanksgiving, and the like to God over wine.

structured its observance to resemble Yom Kippur in certain contexts, and to resemble the laws of mourning in others.

64 lest he become upset, but this should be done

65 So that he also appreciates the nature of the day

66 Because "the precepts of God... make the heart glad" (Tehilim 19:9). Even this joy is inappropriate on Tish'ah B'Av (Ta'anit 30a).

67 In addition, one may study the Talmudic passages describing the Temple's destruction (from the chapter Hanezikin, Gittin, Chapter 5, in the Babylonian Talmud, and the last chapter of Ta'anit in the Jerusalem Talmud), the Midrashim on Eichah, the laws of Tish'ah B'Av, the laws of mourning, and other similar texts. One should, however, recite all the passages from the Bible and the Talmud that are included in the daily prayer service.

⁶⁸ Thus, according to this opinion (which is quoted by the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 560:3), listening to any music is forbidden. The Ramah, however, quotes several more lenient views. He concludes that "for the sake of a mitzvah - e.g., at a wedding feast - everything is permitted." The meaning of "for the sake of a mitzvah" has been extended by contemporary authorities to include many different situations.

5:15- Afterwards, they ordained that grooms⁶⁹ should not wear crowns at all, nor should they wear any diadems at all, as [implied by Yechezkel 21:31]: "Remove the miter and lift up the crown." Similarly, they ordained that brides should not wear crowns of silver or gold; a garland made from twisted cords is, however, permitted for a bride.

5:16- When a person sees the cities of Judah in a state of destruction, he should recite [Isaiah 64:9]: "Your holy cities have become like the desert," and rend his garments. When one sees Jerusalem in a state of destruction, one should recite [the continuation of the verse,] "Zion is a desert..." When one sees the Temple in a state of destruction, one should recite [ibid.:10]: "Our holy and beautiful House [...has been burned with fire]" and rend one's garments.

From which point is one obligated to rend one's garments? From Tzofim. Afterwards, when one reaches the Temple, one should rend them a second time. If one encountered the Temple first, because one came from the desert, one should rend one's garments because of the Temple, and add to the tear because of Jerusalem.

5:17- In all these situations, one must rend one's garments with one's hands and not with a utensil. While standing, the person should rend all the garments he is wearing until he reveals his heart. He should never mend these tears at all. He may, however, have them stitched, hemmed, gathered closed, or sewn with a ladder pattern.

5:18- [The following rules apply when a person] comes to Jerusalem frequently in his travels: If he comes within thirty days of his last visit, he is not required to rend his garments. If he comes after thirty days, he is.

5:19- All these [commemorative] fasts will be nullified in the Messianic era⁷⁰ and, indeed ultimately, they will be transformed⁷¹ into holidays and days of rejoicing and celebration⁷², as [Zechariah 8:19] states: "Thus declares the Lord of Hosts, 'The fast of the fourth [month], the fast of the fifth [month], the fast of the seventh [month], and the fast of the tenth

⁶⁹ The Maggid Mishneh emphasizes that this prohibition applies to brides and grooms, who must be reminded to minimize their rejoicing at this time of celebration, but not to other individuals at ordinary times.

⁷⁰ With the conclusion of the exile, there will be no need to mark the dates that led to it with mourning and fasting. Thus the Rambam writes at the conclusion of Hilchot Megillah: "All memories of the difficulties [endured by our people] will be nullified as [Yeshayahu 65:16] states: 'For the former difficulties will be forgotten.' As mentioned previously, fasting is not an end in its own right, but a means to motivate the Jews to return to God and correct the faults in their behavior. The coming of the redemption will be a sign that the service of repentance is complete, and thus there will be no further need for fasting.

⁷¹ Through repentance, sins are transformed into merits (*Yoma* 86a). And in this process, these fasts, which came as a result of the exile that stems from sin, will be transformed.

⁷² There is no possibility for the existence of an entity that is genuinely negative in nature. All those factors that appear negative represent hidden good, and furthermore, a good so powerful that the only way it can be revealed in this world is through qualities that outwardly appear negative. Their inner nature, however, is good, and in the era of the redemption when the world will be refined to the extent that it can accept this great good, this nature will be revealed.

[month] will be [times of] happiness and celebration and festivals for the House of Judah. And they shall love truth and peace.'⁷³

⁷³ Note the interpretation of this verse in the Rambam's Commentary on the Mishnah, and the introduction to the tractate of Avot (Shemonah Perakim), Chapter 4. There the Rambam elaborates on how, instead of asceticism and fasting, God desires intellectual development ("truth") and emotional harmony ("peace"). From a different perspective, it can be understood that by quoting the conclusion of the verse, the prophet was also alluding to the means by which the Messianic redemption - and thus the transformation of these fasts - could be brought closer. Yoma 9b relates that the Temple was destroyed because of unwarranted hatred among the Jewish people. By spreading peace and truth, we will nullify the cause for the exile, and this will cause the effect, the exile itself, also to cease (Likkutei Sichot, Vol. 15, pp. 415ff.).

DIVREI TORAH

Dvar Torah⁷⁴

The fast of Tisha B'Av, the 9th of Av, is called a "moed," a festival, in the Book of Lamentations. Indeed, for this reason, the daily "tachanun" prayer, the penitential prayer is omitted, as it is on all joyous days. Is this to imply that Tisha B'Av, the day that commemorates the destruction of both Temples, the exile of the people, the sin of the spies, the massacre at York, the Expulsion from Spain and countless other tragedies is a festival?

Well, actually, yes. That is the secret of Jewish survival. Let me explain.

A few years back, I was visiting the most notorious spot on Earth, the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. I was with a friend, who was having an especially difficult time coming to grips with the magnitude of the experience. He said, in effect, that it feels wrong to be able to come here on a sunny day, visit a few hours and leave. Half a century before, people came there in cattle cars to be murdered. By what merit are we not subject to the same fate?

Immediately I saw how the perspective had been turned upside down. He felt that the experience of those holy martyrs was the normal one, and our freedom was a special dispensation by God. How much we must treasure it!

But, in fact, the Maharal of Prague, that great sage and mystic of the 16th century, shows us the exact opposite. The normal state of the world, he says, is for there to be a Temple in Jerusalem and the people of Israel dwelling securely in their land. That is the natural state of affairs that God desires. Exile is a suspension of normalcy. The fact that so many calamities all befell us on the 9th of Av is a sure indication that God's Providence is indeed active. That, alone, is the greatest proof that the Temple will be rebuilt and the exile will come to an end. Similarly, Rabbi Akiva of the second century laughed when he saw the Temple in ruins, because he saw in those ruins the promise of an even greater future rebuilding.



Rabbi Sinai Adler of Mevaseret Zion, Israel, is a Holocaust survivor. He said that his faith in God was strengthened by his experiences, because it was so obvious to him that the Holocaust was a suspension of the course of nature. In his words, "When you are being hit repeatedly, you know that someone is hitting you. It's not random objects raining blows on you." Thus, ironically, at a time when God, as it were, hid His Face, He was directly showing His existence. And since

74 From: <http://www.greatjewishmusic.com/Midfiles/Av/Av.html>

Talmudic tradition states that God's kindness is greater than his strict justice, we can only imagine how great the future that awaits us truly will be.

Thus, despite the magnitude of our national suffering and mourning, or, rather, in inverse proportion to it, we have the hints of a glorious festival on Tisha B'Av. Let the day be soon when we shall all rejoice in the Messianic era of peace, brotherhood, song and prayer!

HALACHA⁷⁵

The Gemara in Tamid (32a) says: Who is wise? One who can see what will be [foresight]” Tisha Ba’av is not going to spring up on you. It’s preceded by the nine days which is preceded by the 3 weeks. If you prepare appropriately many of the issues that can often come up can be avoided.

17TH TAMMUZ

- No hair cuts⁷⁶
- Music can be listened to on the bus⁷⁷

ROSH CHODESH AV

- No meat or wine (grape juice) without a siyum
 - Food that is meat equipment may be eaten
 - Motzei Shabbos during the nine days, havdalah should be said on grape juice. If there is a katan available, then they should drink the wine, if not the one who said havdalah can drink it.
- Buying new clothing
 - You can buy Tish’ah be-Av items
- Laundry should not be done
- You should not wear new or freshly laundered items
 - On Shabbos one may wear freshly laundered items
- You should not bathe or swim for pleasure.
- One may shower to remove dirt and sweat.
- **Plan your schedule appropriately** – Don’t plan a crazy hike for the 7th of Av. Make sure NCSYers are not skipping meals and are hydrated.

EREV TISHA BA’AV

Everyone should drink a lot of water today. People often dehydrate on Tisha Ba’av because they were not properly hydrated on Erev Tisha Ba’av. Make sure that each NCSY drinks more than their two bottles they normally drink. Assign advisors to NCSYers to make sure.

Ask your NCSYers who plans on fasting the whole time and prep them accordingly. You should encourage as many NCSYers to fast as possible, for as long as they can. To those

⁷⁵ The Halacha section has been written under the guidance of Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky.

⁷⁶ There are different opinions about shaving. For NCSYers there is no need to be machmir.

⁷⁷ Whatever guidelines the director feels are appropriate in terms of the music for their bus may be followed.

who will not fast or plan on breaking their fast at some point, you might want to make a policy determining how they should act in public with food. If anyone has any preexisting medical issues they should speak with the medic about whether it is safe to fast.

Make sure everyone eats throughout the day as well. This is especially important at the meal before the fast.

- There is no Tachanun at Mincha⁷⁸ or on Tisha be-av

THE SEUDAT MAFSEKET

- This meal is eaten while sitting on the floor. The mood is somber.
- Many have the minhag to eat an egg⁷⁹ with ash⁸⁰ with their bread. If you want to do this with your NCSYers and explain the symbolisms, it can be a good way to go into the fast.
- We eat this meal alone. There is no Zimmun done

TISHA BA'AV

- The Paroches is removed⁸¹ until after chatzot during the day.
- Davening/Eichah is done in dim lighting⁸²
- No eating or drinking
 - Brushing teeth can be done with a dry toothbrush
- No bathing or washing
 - One can wash netilat yadiim until the second knuckle in the morning and after the bathroom.
 - If one has dirt on them they can wash it off
- No anointing of creams
 - Deodorant can be used
- No wearing leather shoes
- No studying of Torah, except those portions which are designated⁸³ as sad.

⁷⁸ Tisha Be-av has the status of a moed (Shulchan Aruch 552:12); Eichah 1:15; Rambam Taanit 5:19

⁷⁹ We eat an egg because it is a round food and Jewish history, along with our lives, have ups and downs. Sometimes we feel on top and other times at the bottom, but we have to remember that God is always there. This is pronounced by the fact that the egg is the only food that gets harder as it gets cooked. The Jewish people, the more we have been oppressed the harder we have fought back, and the stronger we have become (Shemot 1:12- But as much as they would afflict them, so did they multiply and so did they gain strength).

⁸⁰ We eat ash because it reminds us of the fires that burnt down our temple and our city. At the eve of this event, the emotions should overpower us. Even the food that we eat, should really have no taste, except the taste of ash.

⁸¹ Rema 559:2; The Midrash (Eichah 2:17) says that because Titus tore the Paroches, we symbolize the destruction by removing the Paroches. If it cannot be removed it should be pushed to the side.

⁸² Eichah 3:6 - He placed me in darkness. This is to represent the darkness we are supposed to feel in mourning; the fact we want to feel alone. (see Mishna Berura 559:14)

- No extending a greeting
- No sitting on a chair that is higher than one foot
 - This applies till Chatzot during the day.
 - Some have the minhag to make themselves less comfortable during the night when they sleep (e.g one pillow instead of two, no pillows)
- If one is putting their tzitzit on in the morning they may make a bracha.
- No taalis or tefilin at Shachris

MINCHA

- Tefilin are put on at Mincha⁸⁴.
- Any prayers omitted at Shachris are recited at Mincha (Shir Shel Yom)
- At Mincha, Nachem is recited during the Bracha of Veyerushalayim, Anenu is added, and Sim Shalom is said.

MAARIV

- The minhag is to say Kiddush Levana after Tisha Be-av. It is preferable to put on leather shoes and to break ones fast before recital.
- The restrictions of the nine days extend to chatzot on the 10th of Av⁸⁵.

⁸³ See Rambam Hilchot Taanis 5:11; Tanach: (even with commentaries and Midrash): Iyov, Yirmiyahu sections of destruction, and Eichah. Tehilim can be said for the sick. Leining can be practiced. Gemara: Gittin 55b-58a (some are attached), Sanhedrin 96a and 104b, the third perek of Moed Katan, and the end of Yerushalmi Taanis about Churban. Kinnot can be studied. Mussar seforim used to bring one to Teshuvah can be learned.

⁸⁴ Shema should not be recited again

⁸⁵ Most of the destruction happened on the 10th of Av, but since the worst part was the fires being set we fast on the 9th but extend some of the restrictions (Shulchan Aruch 558 and Mishna Berura 1).

FURTHER READING

What Mourning Means: Reflections of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l on Tisha B'Av

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg⁸⁶, July 19, 2007

The customs we observe on the day of Tisha B'Av are strikingly similar to those of an avel (mourner), one whose close relative has recently passed away. We abstain from washing ourselves and putting on perfume, from wearing leather shoes and talking frivolously. We even refrain from studying parts of Torah which are unrelated to the events and the mood of the day. Instead we sit on the floor or a low chair and solemnly contemplate the loss of the Beit HaMikdash, the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem.

On Tisha B'Av the sense of mourning and sadness is palpable. But, in truth, the observances of mourning begin long before Tisha B'Av itself. Already from the Seventeenth of Tamuz, at the start of the "Three Weeks" period, Ashkenazic communities minimize their involvement in pleasurable activities like getting married, taking haircuts and buying new clothing. From the beginning of the month of Av through Tisha B'Av, a period commonly referred to as the "Nine Days," we refrain as well from doing laundry and from wearing freshly laundered clothing. Many men refrain from shaving. Tisha B'Av itself is certainly the most restrictive of the entire Three Weeks period, but the observances of aveylut (mourning) are not limited to that day alone.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l, (1903-1993) known to his many talmidim as the Rav, used to say that these three periods of time mirror the three periods of mourning that a child observes when losing a parent. Tisha B'Av is like the seven-day period of shiva when the sense of mourning is most intense. The "Nine Days" beginning with Rosh Chodesh Av are similar to the period of shloshim (30 days of mourning), and from the Seventeenth of Tamuz until the month of Av we observe laws of mourning similar to the twelve-month period of aveylut that a child observes after losing a parent.

What's interesting, though, is that the order of observances is reversed. The child who loses a parent observesshiva first, then shloshim and then the twelve-month period of aveylut, while during the "Three Weeks" we first observe the aveylut of the twelve-month period, then shloshim, and only on Tisha B'Av do we keep to the restrictions of shiva. Why is the order changed when we mourn the loss of the Beit HaMikdash?

⁸⁶ Rabbi Koenigsberg is a Rosh Yeshiva at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University, and the editor of two volumes of the Shiurei HaRav series, an annotated collection of Rav Soloveitchik's lectures published by the Mesorah Commission of the Orthodox Union. One of his volumes deals with mourning and Tisha B'Av.

Differences in Mourning

The Rav explained that there is a fundamental difference between aveylut chadasha (newly occurring, personal mourning), as the Rabbis refer to it (Yevamot 43b), and aveylut yeshana (ancient, annual mourning for the Beit HaMikdash). When a close relative passes away, the grief, the pain, the sense of loss come naturally and easily. It is therefore most appropriate to begin the observances of aveylut with shiva, the most intense expression of mourning. But after seven days, the avel is ready to take a step back. Although his loss is still very much on his mind, nevertheless his emotions have tempered; his feelings of sorrow have lessened. For him, the observances of shloshim are more fitting. By the end of thirty days, the avel has gained perspective on his loss. For most relatives, he is now able to conclude the observances of aveylut. Even for a parent, while he continues to mourn, he still reduces his aveylut once again.

In the case of aveylut yeshana, on the other hand, this progression is out of place. We have become so used to living in a world without the Beit HaMikdash, that it would be unfair to expect anyone to begin the “Three Weeks” with the observances of shiva. It simply would be unnatural for anyone to suddenly break down and cry over the loss of the Beit HaMikdash. The sense of mourning for the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash can be internalized only through gradual increments. Only by slowly increasing our observances of aveylut from the Seventeenth of Tamuz through the Nine Days, while at the same time reflecting on the significance of this Three-Week period, can we hope to approach the day of Tisha B’Av with the right frame of mind. By engaging in this three-week learning experience, we prepare ourselves mentally so that when the day of Tisha B’Av finally arrives, we are ready to grieve appropriately.

Crying on Tisha B'Av

The Rav added that in certain ways aveylut yeshana for the Beit HaMikdash is even more stringent than aveylut chadasha. Although the Talmud (Moed Katan 27b) mentions that the first three days of shiva are days of crying, there is no obligation for a mourner to cry. The Talmud simply says that during the first three days of shiva it is natural for a mourner to want to cry. But on Tisha B’Av, crying is one of the motifs of the day.

As the prophet Jeremiah (9:16-17) says, in the Haftarah we read the morning of Tisha B’Av, “Call the dirge women...let our eyes run with tears and our eyelids flow with water.” Mourning for the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash requires an expression of raw emotion; it obligates us to show how overcome we are with our longing for the Beit HaMikdash. That is why we spend much of the morning of Tisha B’Av reciting kinot (lamentations) which bemoan the loss of the Beit HaMikdash and describe the pain and suffering the Jewish people has endured as a result. The kinot are designed to awaken our emotions until we cry out uncontrollably because only by crying can we properly mourn the loss of the Beit HaMikdash.

How Much Should One Mourn

There is another important difference between the observances of aveylut yeshana and those of aveylut chadasha. The rabbis never placed any limitation on how much a person is allowed to mourn for the Beit HaMikdash. To the contrary, one who mourns the loss of the Beit HaMikdash incessantly is praised. In fact, the very last kina we recite on Tisha B'Av is Eli Tzion V'areha, in which we ask Jerusalem and her surrounding cities to continue to cry for the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Ta'anit 4:6) records that some Amoraim (sages of the Talmud) fasted on both the ninth and the tenth days of Av because the Beit HaMikdash was set on fire on the ninth day of Av but it continued to burn on the tenth. How was it permissible for these rabbis to add an extra fast day; aren't we prohibited from adding to any mitzvot?

The Ramban (Torat Ha'adam, p. 242) answers that mourning for the Beit HaMikdash is different. Not only is one allowed to add to the mourning, but such behavior is praiseworthy. An avel who cries or mourns too much for his relative is criticized. As the Talmud says (Moed Katan 27b), "Anyone who grieves excessively over his dead will ultimately weep over another deceased." But one who weeps bitterly for the Beit HaMikdash is rewarded. What is the difference between these two types of aveylut?

An Unnatural Event

The Rav explained that an avel is enjoined from crying too much for his relative because, as the Rambam writes (Hilchot Avel 13:11), death is minhago shel olam; it is part of the natural course of events in this world. But the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash was an unnatural event. The Beit HaMikdash was much more than a physical structure. It symbolized the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. It was the focal point of spirituality in the world. When we mourn the loss of the Beit HaMikdash, we are not crying for the wood and the stones. We mourn the fact that we no longer see Hashem's presence as clearly in the world and that our relationship with Him is strained. We long for the day when the Jewish people will reunite with Hashem and feel his closeness once again. In other words, we hope for the day when the world will return to its natural state. That is why we are obligated to cry on Tisha B'Av and there is no limit to our mourning because the loss of the Beit HaMikdash is a reality we can never come to terms with.

Consolation on Tisha B'Av

And yet, after chatzot (midday) on Tisha B'Av, we get up from the floor, put on our tefillin and recite the bracha of Nachem, asking Hashem to console Jerusalem and us. Where is there room for consolation on such a dark day? The Rav explained that our comfort lies in the fact that Hashem took out his wrath on the Beit HaMikdash and not on the Jewish

people (see Tosafot, Kiddushin 31a). Paradoxically, it is precisely at the time of the mincha prayer, when the Beit HaMikdash started to burn (Ta'anit 29a), that we feel comforted because that act of destruction was really a demonstration of love. It showed that Hashem wants the Jewish people to survive; he wants them to flourish and ultimately to reunite with Him. If Hashem punishes us only out of love, like a father disciplines his child, then there is hope for the future. We can look forward to the day of reconciliation when Hashem will return to us and reveal His glory to the entire world.