



THE 3 WEEKS

IN **60** MINUTES (OR LESS)

BY RABBI ELAZAR MEISELS

The Three Weeks

The “Three Weeks” connotes the 21-day time period beginning the 17th day of the Jewish month of Tammuz, the day the walls of Jerusalem were breached during the Second Temple Era, and concluding on the 9th of Av, the anniversary of the destruction of the First and Second Temples. Throughout history, many calamities have befallen the Jewish people between these dates, and we commemorate the season in a progressive fashion. We begin by refraining from cutting hair, making weddings, and listening to music. Then, when the month of Av begins, we add restrictions on bathing, washing clothes, eating meat and drinking wine. On Tishah B’Av itself, we refrain from eating and drinking altogether, and abstain from anointing with oil or perfume, marital relations, and wearing leather shoes.

The goal of these practices is not to inspire a feeling of victimhood or to wallow in self-pity. Nor is our aim to foment an attitude of “us against them,” or “never again!” Such emotions are entirely unconstructive in the long term. Rather, the customs of the Three Weeks are designed to remind us of areas in which we have traditionally been spiritually weak and the steps we must take to remedy our shortcomings. Saddened as we are by the tragic recollections of our past, these customs actually inspire us and offer hope that the damage done to our nation — both by our enemies and by ourselves — is not permanent and that we have good reason to trust in a better future.

Additionally, the sorrow we feel is not only that of our own loss. We mourn, as well, and perhaps primarily, the pain that the Almighty feels over the events that have occurred, and his consequent reluctance to allow His Divine Presence to rest on the earth. We mourn the loss to all of mankind of Divine inspiration. So long as the Holy Temples stood, all of mankind was elevated by the manifestation of His Presence in a tangible and readily accessible manner. Upon its destruction, knowledge of His existence ceased to be universal and the nations of the world slid inexorably into idol

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

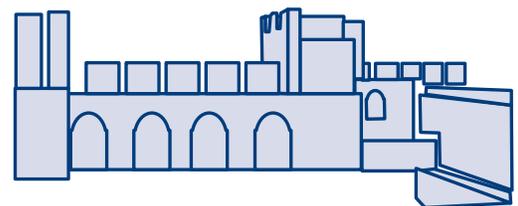
“Rabbi Meir said, ‘When a person is tormented [due to afflictions that are visited upon him by the Almighty,] in what manner does the Divine Presence express itself? ‘My head is very heavy and aching, My arms are heavy and aching.’ If this is the pained response of the Almighty when the blood of wicked is spilt, is it not even more greatly anguished when the blood of the righteous is spilt?’”

Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 46a

The period of the twenty-one days are often referred to as Bein HaMetzoram, “Between-The-Fences,” a reference to the verse [Lamentations 1:3] “All her pursuers seized her between the fences.” Our sages understood these words to refer to the manner in which Israel was trapped. She had no place to run and no nation would come to her aid. It was as if she was trapped between fences with nowhere to run or hide. Alternatively the “fences” refers to the 17th of Tammuz and 9th of Av, which border the most difficult days of summer.

Midrash Rabbah

The month of Av is also called Menachem Av, because the word Av means father, and Menachem means comfort. As tragic as the month has been for us, we are comforted by the knowledge that the source of our difficulty was none other than our “Father in Heaven” who loves us deeply and although He is compelled at times to rebuke us, He will never desert us or allow us to be totally destroyed.



FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

Why is this month referred to as Menachem Av? Av is made up of the letters, Aleph and Beis and symbolizes the idea that the sacred letters of the Aleph Beis, which make up all the mitzvos of the Torah, comfort us and reassure us that so long as we adhere to them, we have nothing to fear. This is also the reason that most of the scroll of Eichah is written in the order of the Aleph Beis, as the first letters of the verses follow the order of the Aleph Beis.

R' Simchah Bunim M'Pschischa

The wicked Babylonian King Nevuchadnezzar instructed his general Nevuzradan, "The G-d of the Jews is always ready to accept penitents. Therefore, when you capture them, do not allow them to pray to Him, so that they should not be able to repent. Otherwise, He will take pity upon them..."

Midrash Eichah

This period of twenty-one days corresponds to the twenty-one day period beginning Rosh Hashanah and culminating in Shmini Atzeret which marks the conclusion of the holiday of Sukkot. One who toils to perfect his soul during these weeks no longer need fear a negative verdict on the Day of Judgment for he has already accomplished all that is necessary.

Toldos Adam

"A Song of Asaph – O' G-d, the heathens came into Your inheritance; they have defiled Your holy Temple; they have made Jerusalem into heaps." [Psalms 79:1] Is the destruction of the Temple really something to sing about? The song is over the fact that the Almighty chose to vent His wrath on the wood and stones of the Temple, instead of upon His children who deserved to be obliterated.

Midrash Eichah

"The world can be compared to a human eyeball - The white of the eye is the ocean surrounding the world - The iris is this continent - The pupil is Jerusalem - And the image in the pupil is the Holy Temple."

Derech Eretz Zuta 9

worship and later atheism. This may be an even greater tragedy than anything experienced by the Jewish people and well worth commemorating, in the hope that we will rectify the unseemly behavior that brought all this into being.

Tishah B'Av in Scripture

Although Tishah B'Av is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah, as it commemorates events that occurred centuries after the Torah was written, there are hints to the day in the words of the Prophets, and it is mentioned a total of 74 times in the Babylonian Talmud. Following is a short sampling of a few Talmudic statements regarding Tishah B'Av:

משנכנס אב ממעטין בשמחה שבת שחל תשעה באב להיות בתוכה אסור מלספר ומלכבס ובחמישי מותרין מפני כבוד השבת ערב תשעה באב לא יאכל אדם שני תבשילין לא יאכל בשר ולא ישתה יין רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר ישנה רבי יהודה מחייב בכפיית המטה ולא הודו לו חכמים...

מסכת תענית דף כו/א

"When Av begins, we must diminish our joy. During the week in which Tishah B'Av falls, it is forbidden to shave, take a haircut or launder clothing... Erev Tishah B'Av one should not eat two cooked foods. He should not eat meat and he should not drink wine. Rabbi Shimon the son of Gamliel said, 'He should deviate [from his normal practice].' Rabbi Yehudah held that it was obligatory to turn over one's bed, but the sages did not agree with him..."

Tractate Taanis 26a

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב כך היה מנהגו של רבי יהודה ברבי אילעאי ערב תשעה באב מביאין לו פת חריבה במלח ויושב בין תנור לכריים ואוכל ושותה עליה קיתון של מים ודומה כמי שמתו מוטל לפניו

מסכת תענית דף ל/א

"Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav, 'This was the practice of Rabbi Yehudah son of Ilai. On Erev Tishah B'Av they would bring him bread dipped in salt and he would sit between the oven and the furnace and eat. He drank a flask of water along with his bread and his appearance was that of one whose deceased relative lies before him.'"

Tractate Taanis 30a

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר כל האוכל ושותה בתשעה באב כאילו אוכל ושותה ביום הכיפורים רבי עקיבא אומר כל העושה מלאכה בתשעה באב אינו רואה סימן ברכה לעולם וחכמים אומרים כל העושה מלאכה בתשעה באב ואינו מתאבל על ירושלים אינו רואה בשמחתה שנאמר שמחו את ירושלים וגילו בה כל אוהביה שישו אתה משוש כל המתאבלים עליה מכאן אמרו כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחתה ושאינו מתאבל על ירושלים אינו רואה בשמחתה

מסכת תענית דף ל/ב



“Rabbi Shimon the son of Gamliel said, ‘One who eats and drinks on Tishah B’Av is akin to one who eats and drinks on Yom Kippur.’ Rabbi Akiva said, ‘One who works on Tishah B’Av will never see any blessing from that work.’ The sages say, ‘One who works on Tishah B’Av and doesn’t mourn over the destruction of Jerusalem will not merit to witness its joy... from here we derive that anyone who mourns over Jerusalem will merit to experience her joy, and one who fails to mourn over Jerusalem will not merit to partake of her joy.’”

Tractate Taanis 30a

ותשא כל העדה ויתנו את קולם ויבכו אמר רבה אמר רבי יוחנן
אותו היום [ערב] תשעה באב היה אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא הן בכי
בכיה של חנם ואני אקבע להם בכיה לדורות

מסכת סוטה דף לה/א

“And the entire congregation raised their voices and they cried...” [Deuteronomy 14:1] Rabbah said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, ‘That day [that the spies returned] was Erev Tishah B’Av. The Almighty said, ‘They cried a meaningless cry, [therefore,] I’ll give them a reason to cry for all generations.’”

Tractate Sotah 35a

The Three Weeks In History

חמשה דברים אירעו את אבותינו בשבעה עשר בתמוז וחמשה
בתשעה באב בשבעה עשר בתמוז נשתברו הלוחות ובטל התמיד
והובקעה העיר ושרף אפוסטמוס את התורה והעמיד צלם בהיכל.

מסכת תענית דף כו/א

“Five tragedies occurred to our ancestors on the 17th day of Tammuz and five on the 9th day of Av. On the 17th of Tammuz the Two Tablets were broken [by Moses,] the Daily Temple Offering ceased to be brought, the walls of the city [of Jerusalem] were breached, Apostomus burnt a Torah scroll, and an idol was erected in the Sanctuary.”

Tractate Taanis 26a

- 1 Two Tablets** — Moses descended from heaven bearing the Two Tablets, a gift from the Almighty that cemented the special relationship forged at Mt. Sinai only 40 days earlier. Impatient and fearful over what they perceived was a delay in his return, the Jews followed the lead of the recent Egyptian converts, who insisted on replacing him with a graven image and created a Golden Calf. Upon witnessing them joyously worshipping the Golden Calf, Moses shattered the Tablets as a sign that their special relationship with G-d had been greatly harmed as a result of their disloyalty.
- 2. Daily Temple Offering** — Leading up to the destruction of the First Temple, the walls of Jerusalem were breached on the 9th of Tammuz. The Kohanim fortified themselves in the Temple and continued to perform the Temple Service. On the 13th of Tammuz, they ran out of unblemished sheep

“Jerusalem was destroyed because they desecrated the Sabbath” [Talmud, Tractate Shabbos 119b] This statement, and many others that echo the same sentiment, underline the centrality of the Sabbath in Jewish life and the prominent role its observance can play in our future redemption.

Rabbeinu Bachya

“Five tragic events occurred on the 17th of Tammuz...five tragic...on 9th of Av... There were no happier days for the Jews than the 10th of Tishrei [Yom Kippur – when we are forgiven for our misdeeds] and the 15th of Av [when the Jews finally were fit to enter the Land of Israel...]”

Mishnah, Tractate Taanit

What connection is there between the tragedies of 17 Tammuz and 9 Av, and the days of celebration, the 10th of Tishrei and 15th of Av? The two days of joy are a counterbalance to the two days of sadness and mourning. They offset the tragedies and help us survive the long exiles wrought by the two days of tragedy.

Kli Yakar

On the 10th of Tammuz, Noah first opened the window of the Ark and sent the Raven forth to determine whether it was safe to emerge. The Raven refused to perform his mission and returned immediately. On the 17th of Tammuz, Noah sent forth the Dove, but as the verse [Genesis 8:9] relates, ‘The Dove did not find a resting place for her foot and she returned to him in the Ark...’ The Jewish people are compared to a Dove [Song of Songs 2:14] and the Dove’s inability to find a place to rest her foot was a symbol of our future inability to find a place of refuge when the tragedies occurred on this difficult day.

Daas Zekeinim

Historically, the 17th of Tammuz has been a difficult day for Jews. In 1391, more than 4,000 Jews were killed in Toledo and Jaen, Spain, and in 1559 (4319) the Jewish Quarter of Prague was burned and looted.



Nevuchadnezzar commanded that Torah Scrolls be sewn into sacks which were then filled with sand and placed on the backs of Jewish captives. The sacks were unbearably heavy and the captives were forced to march while stooped over.

Targum Eichah

On Rosh Chodesh Av, Aharon the High Priest, passed away. Upon his passing, the Clouds of Glory which had accompanied us and protected us from all harm suddenly departed. This symbolized our vulnerability during this critical period; the Divine Presence left us, and we were open to attack from our enemies.

Aharon's passing on Rosh Chodesh Av contained an important message for the Jewish people. Aharon was beloved for his ability to promote peace and unity among the Jewish people [Avos 1:12.] Absent his influence, the Jewish people began to fracture, and harmony was no longer assured. Disunity among the Jewish people is a recipe for disaster and would bear tragic results later in our history, as our sages explained, "Although they studied Torah, performed mitzvos and acts of loving-kindness assiduously, the Second Temple was destroyed because they were guilty of baseless hatred."

Why does the Mishnah mention that there were two sets of five tragedies? Couldn't it just have listed the tragedies without counting them for us? The Mishnah points out these numbers to convey the idea that the reason these tragedies occurred was because the Jewish people failed to obey the 10 Commandments, which were inscribed on two tablets in two sets of five.

Ben Yehoyada

with which to perform the Daily Temple Offering and began bribing the soldiers by lowering a basket of gold coins in return for which they received two sheep. This continued until the 17th of Tammuz when a decree was issued forbidding further Temple Offerings [Rashi, Rambam.] (Others understand this to refer to the Second Temple Era — see Gevuros Ari)

- 3. Walls Of Jerusalem Breached** — The Romans, led by the wicked Titus, breached the walls of the city of Jerusalem on the 17th of Tammuz, which led to the destruction of the Second Temple. In the old days, before the advent of modern armaments, a city could only be conquered by breaking through its walls, hence the significance of this event.
- 4. Apostomus Burnt A Torah Scroll** — For some years prior to the revolt against the Romans, Roman forces had been regularly engaging in harsh provocations against the Jewish people. In one instance they burnt a Torah Scroll in full view of the Jewish people, an emotionally devastating act that was an ominous sign of the impending tragedies.
- 5. An Idol Was Erected In The Sanctuary** — In Talmud Yerushalmi there is a debate as to whether this refers to the idol erected by the wicked Jewish king Menasheh during the times of the First Temple, or the idol erected by the very same Apostomus on the same day that he burnt the Torah scroll. Either way, the offense was grave and indicative of serious problems within our midst.

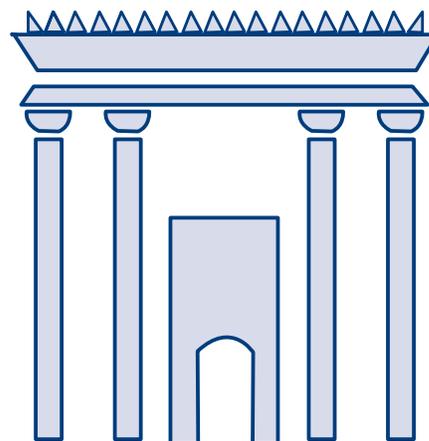
Tishah B'av in History

בתשעה באב נגזר על אבותינו שלא יכנסו לארץ וחרב הבית
בראשונה ובשניה ונלכדה ביתר ונחרשה העיר

- מסכת תענית דף כו/א

"On the 9th of Av it was decreed upon our ancestors that they would not enter the Land [of Israel,] the First and Second Temples were destroyed, the city of Beitar was captured, the city of Jerusalem was plowed over."

Tractate Taanis 26a



1. **Decreed Not To Enter The Land** — The Jewish people were destined to enter the Land of Israel shortly after leaving Egypt and receiving the Torah. Instead, they wandered the desert for forty years until the entire generation that left Egypt perished. What was their sin? Sending the Spies to investigate the Land, wholeheartedly believing their slanderous reports and then refusing to enter the Land. They doubted G-d's ability to vanquish the mighty inhabitants of the Land and thereby demonstrated their unworthiness of the miracles He would perform on behalf of the Jewish people when the time came to capture the Land.
2. **First Temple Destroyed** — On the seventh of Av, the enemy entered the Sanctuary. On the 8th and 9th of Av, they ate and drank in it and desecrated it through immoral behavior. On the 9th day, close to evening, they set it ablaze and it continued to burn through the entire 10th day. The reason we don't fast on the 10th day which is when it was primarily destroyed, is because we prefer to mark the onset of the calamity. Interestingly, Talmud Yerushalmi records the names of pious individuals who fasted on the 9th and 10th of Av, but this is not the accepted practice.
3. **Second Temple Destroyed** — Although it stood longer and was a larger and more magnificent structure than the First Temple, the Second Temple, too, was eventually destroyed at the hand of the Romans. Along with the destruction of the Temple came the destruction of thousands of Yeshivos [academies of higher learning], a near-cessation of the transmission of the Oral Law and the murder of millions of Jews.
4. **Beitar Was Captured** — Tens of thousands of Jews lived in the holy city of Beitar. It was ruled by a powerful Jew known as Bar Kochba who led the Jewish revolt against the Romans and almost succeeded in restoring Jewish sovereignty to Israel. Many great scholars believed him to be the Messiah. Unfortunately, Bar Kochba was killed; the revolt collapsed, and the Romans exacted terrible vengeance upon the Jews. The city of Beitar was decimated, and the corpses of its slaughtered inhabitants were not permitted to be buried for a period of two years. The fall of Bar Kochba effectively ended all Jewish hopes for a return to our homeland for thousands of years.
5. **Jerusalem Plowed Over** — The Prophet Micah prophesied, *"So said the Lord, 'Zion will be plowed under like a field, Jerusalem will be full of furrows, and the Temple Mt. will be piled high with stones."* Turnus Rufus, a Roman general, plowed up the Temple Mount and its environs and left it as a plowed field, piled high with boulders, in fulfillment of the words of the Prophet.

The number ten in Jewish tradition symbolizes sanctity, as seen in the fact that a minyan [prayer quorum] is formed with ten men, and there are many other examples: Abraham was tested through ten trials until he ascended to his lofty rank; the Torah was condensed into Ten Commandments; one separates a tenth of his income for charity, etc. As such, the number ten is heavily associated with the Jewish people who strive to infuse all aspects of life with holiness. The ten tragedies that occurred represent the overpowering of our special rank earned through the fulfillment of our mission, perpetrated by those who sought to destroy us and all that we represent in the world.

Maharal

The fact that these tragedies occurred specifically during the months of Tammuz and Av, the hottest and most uncomfortable months of the year [in Israel,] symbolizes a very encouraging idea.

The period of the greatest oppressiveness of the summer begins at the midpoint of the month of Tammuz and concludes at the first third of the month of Av. This is why the tragedies began on the 17th of Tammuz and concluded on the 9th of Av. In fact, a close look at the two sets of tragedies reveals that those of 17 Tammuz were only the beginnings of greater tragedies, whereas those of Av were conclusive in their nature. Just as the heat begins to wane following the 9th of Av, the pain and suffering we endure will also conclude, and we will one day merit only joy and happiness.

Maharal

The First Temple was built in the merit of the Patriarch Abraham. His progeny included Ishmael, and it was subsequently destroyed by Ishmael's descendants, the Babylonians. The Second Temple was erected in the merit of the Patriarch Isaac whose offspring included Esau. It was later destroyed by the Romans, descendants of Esau. The Third Temple will be constructed in the merit of the Patriarch Jacob. His offspring consisted of 12 righteous sons, none of whom strayed from his path. Just as his legacy bore for eternity, the Temple which will be built in his merit will stand for eternity.

Alshich



There are two reasons offered for the custom not to get married during the Three Weeks. 1) It is not a good omen for the couple 2) It gives the impression of being unconcerned about the tragedy of the destruction of the Temples. *Ba"ch*

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

Although our joy must be diminished during these weeks, that should be limited to areas in which we experience personal pleasure. In areas of Divine service such as prayer, mitzvah observance, and Torah study, we must overcome our inclination to be gloomy and perform them with great joy for during these weeks, the Almighty still seeks our company and delights in our service.

Avodas Yisrael [Maggid of Koznitz]

Pious people have a custom not to eat a "new" fruit or benefit from anything that would require a blessing of "She-hechayanu" in which one blesses the Almighty for having brought him to this time period, because of the sad nature of the time. *Sefer HaChassidim*

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

"Any generation in whose time the Temple is not restored is considered to have destroyed it." [Talmud Yerushalmi, Tractate Yoma 1:1] Is it really true of all the generations in whose time the Temple was not rebuilt that they are guilty of having destroyed it? So many righteous generations have passed since the destruction; surely not all of them are equally guilty?! The rebuilding of the Temple will not occur through the righteousness of one generation alone. Instead, the accumulated merits of multiple generations will generate the rebuilding of the Temple. What the Talmud is really saying is that any generation which failed to generate merits to add to the cumulative total is considered to have destroyed, but certainly those generations who contributed through their mitzvot and Torah study to its future re-establishment are considered righteous and meritorious.

Sfas Emes

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

"Upon the inception of the month of Av, we minimize our joy." [Talmud, Tractate Taanis 26b] The Hebrew word for "our joy" is "b'simchah." This can be translated as, "our joy" or as, "with joy." The Talmud is stressing that although we must diminish our pleasure-inducing activities, it must be done joyously, without resentment. Only through joy will the ultimate redemption finally arrive.

Rav Chaim of Tzanz

Customs of the Three Weeks

During the Three Weeks, a number of customs were instituted to ensure that we would not forget the sad but meaningful events and their attendant lessons. What follows is a short list of common practices:

- Weddings are postponed until after Tishah B'Av.
- We do not play or listen to music.
- Public celebrations, especially those involving singing, dancing and musical accompaniment, are avoided.
- Haircutting and shaving are prohibited.

Laws of the Nine Days

Although various customs designed to inspire us are practiced throughout the Three Weeks, on Rosh Chodesh Av, a more intense period of mourning, known as The Nine Days, begins. The general rule as expressed by the Talmud [Tractate Taanis 26b] is "Upon the inception of the month of Av, we minimize our joy."

FOLLOWING IS AN ABBREVIATED LIST OF THE MOST COMMON LAWS AND CUSTOMS ADDED TO THOSE ALREADY PRACTICED FROM THE 17TH OF TAMMUZ:

1. One should refrain from vacationing in distant places or taking long trips for reasons other than a mitzvah.
2. Certain forms of commerce and construction should be avoided during these days.
3. New clothes may not be purchased.
4. Pleasurable bathing is prohibited. It is permitted for hygienic purposes. However one should use cooler water than he is accustomed to and avoid washing the entire body at one time.
5. Meat and wine, two symbols of joyfulness, are prohibited during the Nine Days, with the exception of Shabbat.
6. Laundering clothes is generally prohibited with certain exceptions. Children's clothes which tend to soil easily are not included in this prohibition.

Laws of Tishah B'av

Although Tishah B'av is not scripturally ordained, its laws mirror those of Yom Kippur, the most stringent of all fast days of the year. Similar to Yom Kippur, beginning sundown of the 9th of Av, all five of the following restrictions are in force:

- 1. Eating & Drinking:** With certain exceptions, no food or drink may be consumed unless a person is ill and under the care of a physician who instructs him to eat or drink.
- 2. Washing:** Washing for pleasure is forbidden with hot or cold water. Removal of dirt is permitted as well as washing one's hand upon arising. However, he should not wash past his knuckles. When preparing food, it is permitted to wash one's hands as needed.
- 3. Leather Shoes:** Footwear [only] made of leather is forbidden to wear. Even if only a small strip of leather is on the shoes, they may not be worn.
- 4. Anointing:** Smearing oneself with anointing oil or perfume is forbidden. Deodorant may be applied.
- 5. Marital Relations:** This is restricted as befits one who is in mourning.

Additionally, one must not sit on a chair and should optimally sit on the floor until midday. The elderly, or people for whom this is difficult, may sit on a low stool the height of which should not exceed 12 inches. One should refrain from engaging in leisure activities and idle gossip and even Torah study must be limited to areas of Torah that discuss the events of the day. One should not greet another person in the customary manner on Tishah B'av. Talis and Tefillin are not donned until Minchah of Tishah B'av.



FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

"And it is fitting for every G-d-fearing individual to feel pained and distraught over the destruction of the Holy Temple." [Shulchan Aruch, O"Ch 1:5] Is one who is not a G-d-fearing individual exempt from this obligation?! A person who lacks fear of G-d must first engage in mourning over his personal destruction before concerning himself with the destruction of the Holy Temple.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

The holy Rabbi Simchah Bunim of Pshischa once exclaimed, "If it were up to me, I'd abolish all fast days with the exception of Yom Kippur and Tishah B'Av. On Yom Kippur, due to the sanctity of the day, who needs to eat, and on Tishah B'Av, who can even think about eating?"

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

"One who mourns over the destruction of Jerusalem merits to see her comfort" [Talmud, Tractate Taanis 30b] Although this conventionally is understood to refer to the rebuilding of the Temple and Jerusalem, this can be understood to mean that he immediately begins to feel comforted over the loss because in his heart he senses that it will be rebuilt and restored to its former glory. For when a righteous person mourns Jerusalem, he inspires the Almighty to hasten the redemption and this thought itself provides him with a measure of comfort.

Tiferes Shlomo of Radomsk

"One who mourns over the destruction of Jerusalem merits to see her comfort" [Talmud, Tractate Taanis 30b] How does mourning over Jerusalem enable one to see her comfort? The Almighty decreed that the memory of a deceased loved one recedes after a period of time. This, however, is only true of a loved one who is actually deceased. By mourning over the Temples, which were destroyed thousands of years ago, one demonstrates that, although the bricks and mortar are no longer extant, their spiritual presence is still very much a reality in his life. All that they represented has not been forgotten, and their past existence still serves to inspire him to greater spiritual heights. In this sense, although the Temple is not yet physically rebuilt, one can still derive a measure of comfort and meaning from the very fact that he still feels the loss.



The Scroll of Eichah is often read from a book or a scroll that is not written on the traditional parchment, as is customary when reading other scrolls such as the Scroll of Esther. This is because the scribes were hesitant to write the Scroll of Eichah on parchment, hoping for the imminent arrival of the Messiah. By inscribing it on parchment, it would appear that we lacked faith in the advent of the Messiah since parchment is a sign of permanence, indicating our intention to use the scroll for a long period of time. The reality is that once the Messiah comes, we will no longer mourn on Tishah B'av nor read the Scroll of Eichah.

Levush

The Almighty said to Jeremiah [upon the destruction of the Holy Temple], "Today I am as one who had an only son and he perished in the middle of his wedding ceremony."

Midrash Eichah

"A sin has Jerusalem sinned, therefore she has become tainted..." [Lamentations 1:8] Why does the verse employ the term "sin" twice to describe the misdeeds that occurred in Jerusalem? A sin performed in Jerusalem is immeasurably worse than one committed elsewhere, for Jerusalem is the palace of the King, where sinning engenders a greater degree of rebelliousness. Thus, the people were taken to task twice for each sin performed in Jerusalem; once for the act and once for the additional treachery it entailed.

Chidah

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

"We have become orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows." [Lamentations 5:3] When the saintly Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev reached this verse he groaned audibly and cried out, "Master of the Universe, you instructed us in Your Torah [Exodus 22:21] not to pain a widow or an orphan. Why then, do You afflict us and torture us, your own widows and orphans? Aren't You too, obligated to observe Your laws?"

The Scroll of Eichah [Book of Lamentations]

Authored by the Prophet Jeremiah who spent years pleading in vain with the Jewish people to repent, the Scroll of Eichah encapsulates the Destruction of the First Temple and contains numerous allusions to the destruction of the Second Temple as well. In four of its five chapters the verses follow the order of the Aleph Beis. The book comprises one of the five Megillot ("Scrolls") [Esther, Song of Songs, Ruth, and Ecclesiastes,] traditionally read at different points throughout the Jewish year. It is read in a mournful tone, reflecting the somber nature of the subject matter on the night of Tishah B'av, by the light of a candle [or lights that have been dimmed.] Some communities have a custom to recite it the morning of Tishah B'av too, after reciting the Kinnot.

Brief Overview of Eichah

In the first chapter, the prophet describes the suffering that befell the Jewish people at the time of the destruction of the Temple and bewails the tragedy of the proud city of Jerusalem lying in ruins. He describes the alienation we felt from our allies and how, although consolation is impossible, we must still accept the will of the Almighty. He blames the cause of the destruction on our failure to see how our degeneration would result in such catastrophe.

In the second chapter, the prophet decries the false prophets who encouraged our erosion by lulling us into a false sense of security with assurances that destruction can never happen. The nations of the world rejoiced over our downfall; the Almighty reminds us that we deserved this because of our misdeeds.

In the third chapter, the prophet laments the fact that he was forced to experience the horrific tragedies about which the earlier prophets had warned. He speaks of his indescribable pain and the faith he maintains in the face of it all. He is inspired and comforted by the knowledge of G-d's ceaseless love and mercy for His people and is certain that the moment we repent salvation will come.

The fourth chapter revisits the horrific tragedies that befell the Jewish people. It describes the hunger, the pillaging and plundering of Jerusalem, and how Jewish mothers actually consumed the flesh of their own children, so great was their hunger. Our allies refused to stand by their commitments, and our enemies were extraordinarily successful. He concludes by foretelling the destruction of the Second Temple and consoles us that one day we will suffer no longer.

The fifth and concluding chapter of Lamentations is essentially a plea to the Almighty to focus on all that has occurred to us over the generations and return us to our former stature. We acknowledge our feebleness and plead with Him, "Return us to You, Oh G-d, and we will return..." Even if we're incapable of taking the first step, if You bring us back, we will certainly return to You and be Yours forever after.



Kinnot

Kinnot are poetic elegies traditionally recited on Tisha B'Av to mourn the wide array of tragedies suffered by the Jews throughout history. A few kinnot are recited on the night of Tishah B'Av after the Eichah reading, while the majority of them are reciting following Shacharis on the morning of Tishah B'av. Traditionally, the congregation recites them in semi-unison, and their recital should last until approximately midday. There were a number of notable authors who composed the kinnot, among them were Rabbi Eliezer Hakalir, Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Gabriel, and Rabbi Judah Halevi.

Ideally said in a slow mournful tone and with a focus on the meaning of their words, the kinnot are designed to inspire heartfelt tears and sadness over our loss, and also to give hope for a better future when we will return to the Land of Israel to a rebuilt Temple where we can once again serve the Almighty. In times not so long ago, it was common for adults to shed copious tears as they read the passages and even young children understood that a carefree attitude was not appropriate on this day. Sadly, many of us are no longer on the level of our ancestors and our recital is more rote in nature. In recent times, a number of kinnot have been composed commemorating the calamities of the Holocaust, and many communities have instituted their recital into the liturgy. "

In the words of Yitzchak Rabin, the fifth Prime Minister of Israel, the capture of the Western Wall by the paratroopers of General Motta Gur's unit was an emotional scene.

"Nobody planned it in advance. Nobody prepared it and nobody was prepared for it; it was as if Providence had directed the whole thing: the paratroopers weeping — loudly and in pain... the words of the Kaddish prayer heard by Western Wall's stones after 19 years of silence, tears of mourning, shouts of joy..."

Legend has it that two secular soldiers stood by the scene and watched it unfold with bewilderment. They had no concept of why this particular wall meant so much to their comrades and these battle-hardened soldiers could hardly share in the emotion that surrounded them. Suddenly one of them began to cry. His shocked comrade asked him, "What are you crying about? You don't even know what this wall is all about?" His teary-eyed friend responded, "I am crying because I don't even know what to cry about!"

"They have heard that I sigh, there is no one to comfort me; all my enemies have heard of my trouble, and rejoice... Let all their wickedness come before You and do to them as You have done to me for all my transgressions..." [Lamentations 1:21] It's one thing if our enemies harmed us and the remaining nations either came to our aid or remained indifferent. It's quite another matter when the other nations actually rejoiced over our misfortune and exulted in our downfall. For that, dear G-d, we ask that they be repaid in full measure.

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

"On the day the Holy Temple was destroyed, King Messiah was born." [Talmud Yerushalmi, Brachos 2:4] This time was an auspicious time for great things to happen to the Jewish people had they only prepared themselves properly. Instead, they took it for granted and failed to live up to their end of the deal. The tragic result was that instead of the Messiah coming, we were driven into exile for thousands of years.

Tzidkas HaTzaddik

FROM OUR CHASSIDIC MASTERS

"A lament over Zion and her cities, like a woman in her birthpangs." [Kinnot of Tishah B'Av] A woman in the throes of labor, although experiencing severe pain, still takes comfort in the knowledge that this excruciating pain will soon give way to great joy once her child is born. Similarly, our lament over the destruction of Zion even during the darkest days of exile is tempered by the knowledge that soon all this pain will give way to everlasting joy and happiness when the Third Temple is rebuilt. Rabbi Levi Yitchak of Berditchev

Judaism demands that we celebrate life and always look to the future with optimism and hope. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we may forget our sufferings or the messages they were meant to inspire. Instead, we dedicate a time to commemorate them and internalize their messages through prayer, fasting, tears, and mourning practices. During this time, we include in our thoughts not only events which occurred during this specific time, but also the array of tragic events that occurred throughout our history.

Some of the tragedies represented in Kinnot are: The destruction of the First and Second Temple, the defeat of Bar Kochbah and his legions, the murderous Crusades that wiped out entire Jewish communities, the suicide pacts in G-d's Name undertaken by Jews captured by our oppressors, and the murder of ten great Talmudic scholars.

"Each time the Jewish people were exiled, the Divine Presence accompanied them." [Talmud, Tractate Megillah 29a] "The Almighty said, 'I shall not enter My Sanctuary, the Heavenly Jerusalem, until I return to the Jerusalem on Earth!'" [Talmud, Tractate Taanis 5a] "In the future, the Jewish people will repent and they will be redeemed."

[Medrash Rabbah, Bamidbar 7:10]

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Points to Ponder

1. What is it about "baseless hatred" that causes the Holy Temple to be destroyed?
2. Can't we just build another Temple? Why must we wait for the Almighty to do so?
3. Is the widespread assimilation that's responsible for the loss of so many Jews related to the events of Tishah B'Av?
4. Which do you mourn more, the loss of the Temple or the terrible loss of Jewish life that occurred at the time? Why?
5. Would you have been more likely to pay attention to the message of Jeremiah or the false prophets who contradicted him?
6. Is it really so hard to reduce our pleasure during this time or refrain from making weddings?
7. Why are Jews so reticent about the idea of Messiah and a Third Temple?
8. What can you do to ensure that your children will never have to mourn the loss of the Holy Temple?

Make it Meaningful

If Tishah B'Av this year is just like all the others in past years, it will not have the impact it can have on your soul. Here are six suggestions for how you can make this Tishah B'Av even more meaningful than all the others:

1. **Book Ahead of Time:** Check out the tremendous selection of books on Tishah B'Av and reserve room in your brain for all the extra information that you want to hold on to. My personal favorites: A Time to Weep The Fall of Jerusalem and Beitar by Rabbi Leibel Resnick and Tishah B'av: Texts, Readings, And Insights by Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer
2. **Take it Slow:** Although it's bookended by two fast days, don't be in a hurry to get through this time of year. It's not much fun, but it's exceedingly meaningful if utilized properly.
3. **Be Above It:** Don't take personal offense to every slight. Try to be forgiving of others and practice "baseless love" instead of baseless hatred.
4. **Floor Yourself:** Take the time to study the laws of Tishah B'Av and their meaning. Sitting on the floor, refraining from washing, no swimming and the other customs were all instituted for a good reason.
5. **Don't Miss the Kinnot Address:** Acquire a copy of the Kinnot translations available from a number of publishers and familiarize yourself with their meaning. Take the time on Tishah B'Av morning while reciting them to read the historical background of each Kinnah even if it means that you lag behind the others. It's well worth it.
6. **Tear Yourself Away:** Sometimes it's good to shed a few tears. Try to envision the suffering of the Jews during the time of the Destruction and really feel their pain. Think of what our parents endured not too long ago at the hands of the Nazis and make their pain yours. In the merit of these efforts, may Hashem grant that we never again experience such suffering.