

YLJC Judaism 101

**TISHA B'AV
VERSUS
THE SUMMER**

Study pack



GW 13.07.17



PART I: THE DAY

THE BACKGROUND

On Tisha b'Av we commemorate the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonian army in Biblical times and the first exile of the Jewish people. The Book of Lamentations recalls the pain and suffering of that destruction. The destruction of the Second Temple was traditionally understood to have occurred on the same day, as well as other major catastrophes in Jewish history, including the expulsion from Spain.

The day is traditionally commemorated by fasting and the recital of the Book of Lamentations and kinot, dirges composed for the day.

Siddur of the Movement for Reform Judaism

THINGS TO LAMENT

Event	Tisha b'Av in the year...
Moses' 12 spies make the Israelites despair for the future	Ancient
Destruction of the First Temple	587 BCE
Destruction of the Second Temple	70 CE
Quashing of the Bar Kochba Revolt against the Romans	132
The site where the Temple was is ploughed over	133
10,000 Jews killed by the First Crusade	1096
Expulsion of the Jews from England	1290
Expulsion of the Jews from France	1306
Expulsion of the Jews from Spain	1492
False Messiah Shabbatai Zvi born	1626
Declaration of World War 1	1914
The 'Final Solution' approved	1941
Residents of the Warsaw Ghetto taken to concentration camp	1942
Saddam Hussein walks out of peace talks, precipitating the Gulf War	1989
Jewish community centre in Argentina bombed, killing 86	1994

THE TRADITIONS

The Sages taught: all customs practiced by a mourner are likewise practiced on Tisha b'Av: it is prohibited to engage in eating, and in drinking, and in smearing oil on one's body, and in wearing shoes, and in conjugal relations. It is prohibited to read from the Tanach, or to study.

However, one may read from a place in the Bible that they are unaccustomed to reading, as it will be difficult for them and they will not derive pleasure from it. And one may read from the book of Lamentations; from the book of Job; and from the evil matters in Jeremiah, ie his prophecies of doom.

Ta'anit 30a

WHO IS RITUAL REALLY FOR?

[On returning from the Babylonian exile, the Israelites asked me:] "Shall I weep and practice abstinence in the fifth month, as I have been doing all these years?"

Thereupon the word of the God of Hosts came to me: "Say to all the people of the land and to the priests: 'When you fasted and lamented in the fifth and seventh months all these seventy years, did you fast for My benefit? And when you eat and drink, who but you does the eating, and who but you does the drinking?'"

Zechariah 7:3-6

SOME DIRGES

Remember, O God, what has
 befallen us;
Behold, and see our disgrace!
Our heritage has passed to aliens,
Our homes to strangers.
We have become orphans,
 fatherless;
Our mothers are like widows.
We must pay to drink our own
 water,
Obtain our own kindling at a
 price.
We are hotly pursued;
Exhausted, we are given no rest.

We hold out a hand to Egypt;
To Assyria, for our fill of bread.
Our fathers sinned and are no
 more;
And we must bear their guilt.
Slaves are ruling over us,
With none to rescue us from
 them.
We get our bread at the peril of
 our lives,
Because of the sword of the
 wilderness.
Our skin glows like an oven,
With the fever of famine.

Book of Lamentations 5:1-10

Sword, why do you turn in all directions, consuming all around you?
You diminish and make an end of the best among us,
And even to the Isles of the Sea you wend your way.
O Sword of God, for how long will you find rest here?

Silenced are the inhabitants of the Isle; cut off is their delight;
Glory has vanished and is no more! He waved his mighty sword;
His hand dealt calamity, and lo! where are they?
All the princes of the sea have come down from their thrones.

Towards their mothers' bosoms children stretched forth their neck,
While the fathers blessed the sacrifice they were about to offer;
Hurling down from the rock were the nobles among them;
They were stripped of their robes and embroidered garments.

Precious treasures the pure did not desire.
Wherefore their souls are bound up in the bundle of life;
They spurned the vanity of life, as though poor and of low degree,
Thus they gave glory to God and declared God's praise in the Isles.

Rabbi Menachem ben Jacob

Let there be no dew or rain on the land of the Isle, from the day your king
was crowned, woe to you, O land!

They were gathered together to the fortress, and Asher was with us,
indeed the prince oppressed us and the adversary stood at his right
hand; we said, "Plunder our property!" but they replied, "No, we have
come for Rabbi Yom Tov."

He was like Sinai, and one who could move mountains, he made the
crooked straight; whether he taught by mouth or book, he was not
among those that err; may he rest in peace, may his flesh not decay.

O how dear were these friends and how strong were the leaders! They
sought thee in distress when thy chastening was upon them; each one
gave up his soul and poured forth his blood; may this be pleasing to the
great Sovereign, like the offerings in the Temple; indeed, let the land
atone for its people.

Joseph of Chartres

FOR REFORM JEWS

Orthodoxy still looks forward to, and prays for, the day when the Temple will be restored and sacrifices renewed; Reform regards it as neither likely nor desirable.

Mourning the destruction of the Temple does not imply that Reform Jews would wish to see its restoration. Reform considers that the Temple, the sacrificial cult and the priesthood were valid in their time, but are no longer appropriate for today.

The division of Jews into Priests, Levites and Israelites may have had a significance in the past, but today merely resembles a hereditary class system and carries distasteful associations.

Rabbi Jonathan Romain: Faith and Practice: a Guide to Reform Judaism Today, 1991

FOR LIBERAL JEWS

Liberal Jews tend not to take much notice of Tisha b'Av as Liberal Judaism rejects the traditional belief that the Temple should be rebuilt and re-established as the focus of Jewish worship. The fact that this date falls in the summer means that its observance is often limited to young people on summer camp.

The Liberal Judaism website

THE REALITIES OF MODERN JEWISH LIFE

“They tried to kill us; we won; let’s eat.”

It’s the old joke about how to describe every Jewish festival in under 10 words. On Tisha b’Av it’s a little different: they tried to kill us; they often succeeded; let’s not eat.

On Tisha b’Av, by fasting and mourning, we commemorate all the terrible things that have happened to the Jewish people over the centuries. How we Jews love being the victims.

It’s true that we have been victims on countless occasions in history. “They” – the goyim – did try to kill us, and did succeed, and it was tragic, and some of those tragedies are still fresh, and the memories of them still make us weep.

But when we look at the Jewish situation in the world today, in the United States, in Israel, and many other (but not all) Jewish communities, we are no longer victims. Folks, we’re the winners! We have money, we have influence, and in Israel, we have power. We don’t run the world behind the scenes – sorry to disappoint you, anti-Semites – but we’re doing okay, really we are.

For me, the issue is not so much a halachic one as a political one. Fasting a full day on Tisha b’Av simply perpetuates our blinkered sense of victimhood, which is at odds with the reality of the Israel-Palestinian prism of the conflict. Not fasting at all on Tisha b’Av ignores the real Jewish suffering that has happened, and that continues to threaten us through the Israel-Arabs prism of the conflict.

So perhaps we should just fast half a day. Our hunger during the first part of the day will sensitise us to the tragedies that have befallen us. But our return to reality in the latter half of the day might help us, as a people, get over the psychosis of victimhood that warps our identity and our politics.

Alex Sinclair, writing in Ha’aretz in 2014

A DEEPER MEANING?

“Why was the Temple destroyed?” the rabbis of the Talmud asked. Because of *sinat chinam*, gratuitous hatred; because the Jewish people had fallen into factional bickering; because they had broken up into warring cults and were busily engaged in fratricidal religious disputes, each one claiming to be the true Israel and denying the legitimacy of all the others.

On Tisha b’Av, there is invariably a commentator from the Israeli left who appears on television and explains that the Temple was destroyed and Israel was conquered by the Romans because of the intolerance of the religious right of that day. Then a right-wing commentator explains that both the Temple and Israel itself fell to the Romans because of the failure of the Jewish people to unite against the enemy militarily.

Finally, a historian will explain that there was one reason for the fall of the Temple and one reason alone: Rome was absolutely invincible, and its huge armies were marching through the world mowing down everyone in their path, and nothing could have stopped them from taking Jerusalem, no matter how tolerant the religious right nor how unified the armies of Israel might have been.

So what were the rabbis of the Talmud talking about when they said that the Temple was destroyed by gratuitous hatred? What was Moses talking about? Why did they blame the people for what had happened, when the objective evidence of history clearly seems to exonerate them?

The answer is that neither the rabbis nor Moses cared a fig about history. They weren’t historians; they were spiritual leaders, and spiritually, the only question worth asking about any conflict, any recurring catastrophe, is this: What is my responsibility for it? How am I complicit in it? How can I prevent it from happening again?

When things go bad, there is an enormous temptation to blame it on externals, on the evil of others, or on an unlucky turn of events. Spiritually, however, we are called to resist this temptation, no matter how strong it may be and no matter how strongly rooted in fact or reason or history it may seem. Spiritually we are called to responsibility, to ask, “What am I doing to make this recur again and again?”

Rabbi Alan Lew, This is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared: the Days of Awe as a Journey of Transformation, 2008