

*Walk through the Parsha*

with **Rabbi David Walk**



## **The Duality of TISH'A B'AV**

A friend who teaches at Hebrew University was bemoaning online protests against the University being closed on Tish'a b'Av. His distress was based upon the anti-Jewish attitude of the protesters. I commiserate. However, personally, I'm more concerned about proud and connected Jews who don't see the necessity of continued observance of this National Day of Mourning. They contentedly point out how far we've come. We have a Medina; Yerushalayim is beautiful. Why mourn?

I believe that a careful reading of the Kinot, the special elegies written for Tish'a b'Av, and their sequence of recitation would help to explain the continued necessity of commemorating this day of tragedies, because there are two aspects of the day. Just before we do that, I must quote the Mishna about the origins of this mournful date: On the Ninth of Av, it was decreed upon our ancestors that they would all die in the wilderness and not enter Eretz Yisrael; and the Temple was destroyed the first time,

in the days of Nevuchadnetzar (586 BCE), and the second time, by the Romans (70 CE); and Beitar was captured (135 CE); and the city of Jerusalem was plowed, as a sign that it would never be rebuilt. Not only does one fast on the Ninth of Av, but from when the month of Av begins, one decreases acts of rejoicing (Ta'anit 4:6).

The first person I ever heard discuss this essential dichotomy in the Kinot service was Rav Soloveitchik. The Rav was truly a maven of the Kinot. He would explicate these esoteric poems for up to 9 hours every year. It was always a masterful presentation and unlike those who have tried to recreate this experience, the Rav just sat there on one of the steps before the ARON KODESH in Maimonides School in Brookline, MA, with a Kinot pamphlet in front of him, no pile of s'forim. It felt spontaneous.

The Rav explained: Our mourning over the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash leads us to think of this day as one of remembrance of something which once was, and is no longer. On this day of grief-stricken sadness, the overarching theme is one of passivity ... Aside from being a day of mourning, Tish'a b'Av is also a public fast day, a TA'ANIT TZIBUR... As on other fasts, the passage

VAYCHAL MOSHE (Sh'mot 32:11) is recited at Mincha, and a typical spirit of T'shuva pervades the day. This spirit is apparent in the Torah portion we read on the morning of Tish'a b'Av, KI TOLID BANIM (D'varim 4:25) where the theme is that of returning to God... In sum, two spirits of the day seem to coincide on Tish'a b'Av. The day of mourning, which invokes passivity, confronts the public fast day, which elicits action.

So, there is that dichotomy, the passive versus active. But another year the Rav pointed out, I believe, a more fundamental bifurcation of the day: The Tziyon Kinot highlight an important aspect of Tish'a b'Av. There are two elements to the observance of Tish'a b'Av and the recitation of the Kinot. One is to remember Tziyon in its state of destruction. The second is to remember Tziyon in its magnificence prior to the destruction... With this Kina, the focus shifts to remembering Jerusalem before the CHURBAN.

That's the essential second part of Tish'a b'Av: the remembrance of Jerusalem's glory. The author of the first of Tziyon Kinot, of course, is Rabi Yehuda HaLevi, the great lover of Zion. He extols: Tziyon, perfectly beautiful, with love and grace you were bound long ago and bound to

you are the souls of your intimates. He concludes: Your God has preferred you as an abode, and fortunate is the person who will choose to draw near and dwell within your courtyards.

The second section of the Kinot is less about the anguish and melancholy, and more about cultivating the longing and yearning for Tziyon, Yerushalayim, and the Mikdash. I feel strongly that this aspect of the day has become for us the crucial theme of the commemoration.

At least for the time being, the Jewish People isn't in a state of constant suffering and oppression, even though we can never forget that we existed in such a situation for most of our history. So, we can feel some satisfaction for that tender mercy, but we must never lose focus on the final prize. We must never become complacent with the strides we've made. Tish'a b'Av must serve as the antidote for that sense of security and pride.

I, personally, believe that there's a crucial turning point in the recitation of the Kinot. It's in a Kina attributed to the Ibn Ezra, which compares the dazzling departure from Egypt at the time of the redemption to the dolorous departure from Yerushalayim at the time of the Destruction.

**But the poem ends with a bait and switch, instead of mentioning again the mourning of the departure from Yerushalayim, we chant: Happiness and joy; departed are sorrow and sighing, When I return to Yerushalayim.**

**From that point on we can loosen the bleak bereavement, and start to dream. That combination of remembering the glory and yearning for its return, makes Tish'a b'Av a necessary component of building that brighter future. It's the reason our Sages inform us that only those who mourn Yerushalayim will merit to see its renewed, rebuilt magnificence. May it happen soon!! 🙏**