

Tisha B'Av

The name may mean nothing to many of you, in which case you will find this moving compilation that Rabbi Shraga Simmons has put together helpful. It charts the devastating sequence of setbacks that have afflicted Israel through the generations at this time of year.

Tisha B'Av is simply the Hebrew way to say "the 9th of Av." It is a day that is so horrible to Jewish people that we only remember it as a date, without giving it any special name. That day begins at sunset tonight, August 6, 2003, and will be observed until sundown tomorrow. It is one of the two most solemn days to Jewish people everywhere. Yom Kippur, the other major fast day, is known as the "White Fast" because it reminds us of atonement. But this day, Tisha B'Av is known as the "Black Fast" because on it, we remember the destruction of the Temple; not once, but twice! It is the day that the spies returned from their 40 day trek into the Promised Land. But, when only two came back still believing the promise, Israel wept. On the day when all Israel should have been celebrating, they wept! And so, G-d decreed that on this day, throughout history, Jewish people would have something to weep for. The actual intent of such practices are in preparation for coming to grips with Israel's sin which led to the loss of the Holy Places. When the spies returned from the land, there was weeping when there should have been rejoicing. So, throughout history, G-d has given Israel reason to mourn on this day, the ninth day of the month of Av. Consider the events of this one day in the history of Israel.

On Tisha B'Av, in the year of 421 BCE, the First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, under Nebuchadnezzar. About 100,000 Jews were killed during invasion; the remaining tribes of the Southern Kingdom were cast into exile to Babylon and Persia.

On Tisha B'Av, 500 years later, the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans, under Titus. Over 2,500,000 Jews died as a result of war, famine and disease. Over 1,000,000 Jews were exiled to all parts of the Roman Empire. Over 100,000 were sold as slaves by the Romans who later killed and tortured many in gladiatorial "games" and pagan celebrations.

On Tisha B'Av in 132 CE, the Bar Kochba revolt was crushed in the village of Betar where over 100,000 Jews were killed. On Tisha B'Av, one year later, Turnus Rufus ploughed the site of the Temple, allowing the Romans to build the pagan city of Aelia Capitolina on the site of Jerusalem. In 1095, the First Crusade was declared by Pope Urban II. 10,000 Jews were killed in the first month of this Crusade. Crusaders brought death and destruction to thousands of Jews, and totally obliterated many communities in Rhineland and France, beginning on Tisha B'Av.

On Tisha B'Av, in 1290, the expulsion of all of the Jews from England was decreed, accompanied by pogroms and confiscation of books and all property. It was Tisha B'Av when the Spanish Inquisition in Spain and Portugal culminated in the expulsion of the all Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. Families were separated, many died by drowning, massive loss of property.

On Tisha B'Av in 1914, Britain and Russia declared war on Germany, beginning the First World War. The unresolved issues of the First World War, ultimately caused the Second World War and the Holocaust.

On Tisha B'Av in 1942, the deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka death camp began the Holocaust. 75% of all of the world's Jews lived in war zones. Jews served in the armies of all sides - 120,000 Jewish casualties in armies. In addition to these casualties of war, over 400 pogroms immediately followed the war in Hungary, Ukraine, Poland and Russia. Over 6,000,000 Jewish men, women and children were slaughtered, reducing the world Jewish population by two-thirds. In our own generation, the destiny of Israel continues to be entwined with this day.

In 1994, on Tisha B'Av, the deadly bombing of the building of the AMIA (the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina) killed 86 people and wounded some 300 others; all were Jewish. Zechariah 8:19 promises: "Thus says the L-rd of hosts, 'The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah; so love truth and peace.' The fast of the fourth month is Tamuz 17, the beginning of the Three Weeks.

The fast of the fifth month is Tisha B'Av, the day of mourning the destruction of the Temple...twice! The fast of the seventh month is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The fast of the tenth month is the remembrance of the day that Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon established a siege of Jerusalem, leading to the destruction of the city.

Oh, that day is coming. L-rd, may it be soon. But in the meantime, let's consider these days, in "modern" 2003 and look at what faces us on this Tisha B'Av. The world has taken such a powerful stand against terrorism, yet ignores the acts of terror with which we in Israel are faced daily. There is now a "cease-fire" agreement made among the terrorist groups, but not with Israel. Although they have decided to rest for awhile, the world sees it as "peace making" when in reality, a "hudna" as this time is known in Arabic, is only a time for arming and preparing for a greater attack at its end or before. The so-called "Road map to Peace" is endorsed by the world but only Israel is taking any steps toward its implementation. The Road Map does not instruct the PA to deal with the terrorists or to make any deal with them; it clearly states that the PA must destroy the terrorist infrastructure, seize their weapons, and reduce incitement. Not one step in this direction has been made. Rather, summer camps all over the Palestinian territory and even among Arab Israeli villages, teach their children that their highest call is to become a martyr as they kill Jews and establish a Palestinian nation that is all of Israel! As we remember the destruction of the Temple and mourn the sad state of affairs of the Temple Mount, thousands of Jews from all over Israel to march around the walls of the Old City on this night of remembrance.

We will pause between the Mount of Olives and Mount Moriah and declare once again, "Har HaBayit shelanu!" "The Temple Mount is ours!" But no matter how loudly we make this statement and no matter how strong our faith, the reality is that this most holy place

is not ours, but is under occupation by those who deny there was ever a Temple at all. The prophet Zechariah wrote 2500 years ago that the day would come when G-d will make "Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it." Zechariah 12:3. Today, more than any other day of the year, please pray for the peace of Jerusalem. As we see the nations take their stand against this Holy City, Today, Wednesday, August 6th is Tisha B'Av this year. Please be in prayer for the nation and the people of Israel, especially this week. This week will tell much about the future of the city of Jerusalem and about the future of this nation.

by Rabbi Shraga Simmons Aish HaTorah Jerusalem