



Readers' Compendium for

Tisha B'Av

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TISHA B'AV: WAKING UP TO A WORLD WITHOUT GOD'S PRESENCE

by Sara Yoheved Rigler

How to bring God's palpable presence back into our world.

I remember with perfect clarity the sensation of waking up on the morning of March 9, 1990. In those first few fuzzy moments of consciousness, I oriented myself to where I was – in the spare bedroom of my parents' New Jersey apartment, and what day it was – two days after my father's death. As soon as I realized that I had woken up into a world without my father, my heart plunged into a fathomless grief, like waking up into a nightmare that will never end.

The world without my father was not simply the same world minus one; it was a totally different world. This altered, diminished world lacked the stability and goodness that was my father. This world wobbled on its axis; its gravitational pull was heavier.

It took me a year to adapt to this new world, to learn to navigate its emotional byways. Now, more than fifteen years later, I've become proficient at maneuvering in this World-Without-My-Father, but it is not and will never be the same world in which he was so benevolently and lovingly present. The ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av – called Tisha B'Av – is to the Jewish people what March 9 was to me. We misrepresent the tragedy of the day by describing it as the destruction of the two Holy Temples, as if the catastrophe is the loss of a building. The American people do not mourn on 9/11 because of the destruction of the Twin Towers; they mourn the thousands of lives lost in the conflagration. Contrast a person who mourns the absence of the majestic towers to the New York skyline with a person who mourns the loss of his/her parents caught on the 98th floor.

Tisha B'Av is more like a death than a destruction, because on that day the world changed irrevocably.

The world without the Holy Temple is not the same world minus one magnificent structure. The world without the Holy Temple is a totally different world. The Holy Temple was the mystical vortex between the higher, spiritual worlds and this gross, physical world. The Temple service was an elaborate mystical procedure that kept the aperture between the worlds open and functioning. The Divine Presence manifested itself in the Temple and through the Temple. When the Temple was destroyed, that palpable Divine Presence removed itself from our world. It was a loss as real and as searing as death.

My son was born into a world without my father. He will never know how the room lit up when my father entered, how secure and supported dozens of people felt because of the bedrock that was my father.

In the same way, we who were born into a world without the Divine Presence have never experienced the spiritual luminosity that radiated through the aperture of the Holy Temple. We live in a dimmer, coarser world, where physical reality seems like ultimate truth while spiritual reality seems like a vague phantasm. We navigate in the nightmare without even knowing we're in it.

Divine Immanence

In the first Holy Temple, ten miracles were constant for all to see. Among them were that no matter how the wind was blowing, the smoke from the altar always went straight up and that no matter how packed the crowds of people were, at the point of the service that required everyone to prostrate, there was always sufficient room. Anyone who visited the Temple could see these miracles,

these deviations in the laws of physics, simply by entering the Temple precincts.

While the First Temple (and the Tabernacle before it) stood, prophecy (hearing the voice of God within oneself) was commonplace. The Talmud testifies that in ancient Israel, some 3,000,000 Jews were privy to the highest spiritual level possible. Schools of prophets abounded. So rampant was Divine revelation that the Talmud could assert that all Jews were either prophets or the children of prophets.

The immanence of the Divine Presence during Temple times did not mean that everyone chose spiritual elevation. Even when God is present, humans can – and did – choose to go against Him. The Talmud recounts the story of Yerovoam ben Navat, who, after the death of King Solomon, split the Kingdom, usurped the throne of the northern half, and set up two golden calves for worship. God appeared to Yerovoam and said, "Repent, and I and you and Ben Yishai [King David] will walk together in Paradise." Yerovoam had the gall to respond: "Who will go first?" When he heard that David would precede him, Yerovoam rejected the Divine offer. The most remarkable aspect of this conversation is that God appeared even to someone as wicked as Yerovoam. The Divine Presence during the Temple era was so pervasive and apparent that anyone who bothered to open his eyes could perceive it.

How different is the world we live in! When the Temple was destroyed, the dogged illusion of Divine absence settled over our world like a perpetual fog. In this world where Divine hiddenness has replaced Divine revelation, we grope for proofs of God's existence, like fish debating about the existence of water. We are relegated to "believing" when once we simply knew. We struggle, through prayer and meditation, to experience a momentary inkling of the Divine Presence when once we simply basked in it. We are like amnesiacs who experience

vague and fleeting memories of a different life, a truer identity, but the actual grasping of it eludes us.

Tisha B'Av made orphans of us all.

Achieving the Impossible

In one essential way Tisha B'Av differs from death: the catastrophe is reversible. As Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook declared: "The Temple was destroyed because of causeless hatred [among Jews]; it can be rebuilt only by causeless love."

"Causeless love" means loving every single Jew, no matter how much s/he differs in political or religious persuasion. It means loving Jews at the other end of the ideological spectrum. It means abortion-rights activists loving Hasidic Jews and vice versa. It means Zionists loving anti-Zionists and post-Zionists and vice versa. It means Gush Katif settlers loving the security forces who are going to evict them from their homes and vice versa. Given that the Talmud characterizes the Jews as "the most fractious of peoples" and the daily news corroborates that description, causeless love seems like an impossible achievement.

But if someone had told me on March 9, 1990, or any day thereafter, that I could bring my father back to life by doing X, is there anything, anything, I would not have done?

If we yearn enough to bring the Divine Presence back into our world, is there anything beyond our capacity to achieve it?

A few years ago I learned how to harness the seemingly impossible to the power of yearning, and fly. It was during the peak of the Arab war of terror against Israel. I had undertaken to visit terror victims in hospital and to distribute teddy bears on behalf of Kids for Kids. A couple days after a lethal bus bombing in Haifa, my 14-year-old

daughter and I visited the Mt. Carmel hospital where most of the injured – teenagers on their way home from school – were hospitalized.

I had never been to that hospital before. Clutching my list of terror victims in one hand and my bulging bag of teddy bears in the other, I accidentally stumbled into the intensive care unit. I asked a nurse, "Where is Daniel K.?" She pointed to the bed beside me. Lying prone on the bed was a thin, unmoving figure. I grabbed my daughter's hand and quickly exited, but the specter of that boy, the only patient I had ever seen lying face-down, haunted me.

In the waiting room, I sat with Daniel's desperate parents. They had made aliyah from Uzbekistan a few years before. They explained that 17-year-old Daniel's lungs had been punctured in the terror attack. The doctors were not hopeful.

I promised them I would pray for "Daniel Chai" (when a person's life is in danger, a name expressing life or recovery is often added), but it was clear to all of us that nothing less than a miracle would save the boy.

There is a spiritual law in Judaism called, "mida k'neged mida," measure for measure. This means that whatever humans do, God responds to them in kind. When we want God to go beyond the laws of nature, we must go beyond our own nature. Therefore, tapping into this spiritual law, I suggested to Daniel's mother that she take on a mitzvah she had not previously done to help save her son's life, and I left the hospital planning to do similarly.

When my children started to bicker in the car on the long ride home, I told them that they could contribute to saving Daniel's life by overcoming their urge to fight. To my amazement, they acted like angels all the way home.

The next day, I had an argument with my husband. I walked away from him feeling hurt and rejected. I fled to

my room, wanting only to distance myself from him. As I sat on the edge of my bed, I rehearsed to myself everything I had learned about life's essential choice: choosing between estrangement and oneness. I knew that the higher road would be to reconcile with my husband, or at least be open to whatever conciliatory steps he took, but my whole nature wanted to withdraw. I sat there for some ten minutes warring with myself. I knew exactly what I should do, but was as incapable of doing it as a paraplegic trying to pole-vault. Suddenly I was startled to hear myself say out loud: "I can't do it."

I answered my own voice, "Can you do it for Daniel Chai? Can you do it for that boy's life?"

"Yes!" came my resounding reply. "To save Daniel's life, I can overcome my own nature."

When my husband came in a few minutes later, I battled my instinct to push him away, and lovingly accepted his apology. I felt like a heroine. I knew that I couldn't do it, but for Daniel's life, I did it.

[Postscript: Daniel's mother took on lighting Shabbat candles. Despite a dangerous infection that beset him that week, Daniel had a miraculous recovery.]

When I consider the prospect of all Jews truly loving each other, I hear the voice of realism saying, "We can't do it." Then I ask: Can we do it to bring the Divine Presence back into the world? Can we do it to dispel the choking fog of Divine absence? Can we do it to end all the national and personal catastrophes that ensue in a world where God is not evident?

To reverse the cataclysm of Tisha B'Av, is there anything we can't do?

THE HEART-RENDING CRY

by Keren Gottlieb

How is it possible to mourn something that happened 2000 years ago?

Every year when Tisha B'Av came around, I would have a certain dilemma. This is supposed to be a day on which we mourn the destruction of our Temple. It is a day when we do not eat, drink or wear leather shoes and follow varied and unique mourning customs.

Every year I would arrive at the synagogue to hear the Book of Lamentations, which bemoans the destruction of Jerusalem. However, every year I would end up daydreaming about totally unrelated things. As the cantor would be reading about the Temple, I would completely disconnect, planning my summer vacation, celebrating the end of my exams, or just hoping that the fast will go well this year.

It's difficult to be truly mournful over something that took place 2000 years ago – something that we've never seen and don't really feel lacking in our daily life. But all that was about to change.

The Turning Point

As part of my army service in the Israeli army I was placed, to my delight, in a teachers' unit. I served at the Bat Hatzor caravan site located near Gedera. The site held 700 caravans, which housed thousands of new Ethiopian immigrants. In the mornings I taught immigrants at the Yad Shabtai School in Ashdod. In the afternoon and evening hours I served as a counselor on the site.

This was shortly after Operation Solomon in 1993, during which roughly 14,500 Jews from Ethiopia were airlifted to

Israel. It was a special and moving operation, and the entire Israeli population was surprised to see that suddenly there were Jews walking around here who had, in fact, been severed from our nation many generations ago.

They observed Shabbat, were familiar with most of the holidays and kept Jewish tradition in a devout and traditional manner. But it was clear that they didn't know everything; the separation they had undergone throughout all those years had influenced their system of traditions.

They had never heard of Independence Day or Yom Yerushalayim, or even about Purim or Chanukah – none of the latter historical events that took place subsequent to their break-off from the Jewish nation.

I realized that unless I concentrate on filling these gaps of knowledge, their adjustment in Israel would never be complete. I decided to allot a considerable amount of time each day to teach them about Judaism.

Passover and Ascending to the Temple

The month of Nissan had arrived and I started teaching about the holiday of Passover. My class consisted of 20 students, grades 3–6. (They were placed according to their reading level rather than chronological age). These children had come to Israel only a few months beforehand and more than anything else, they loved to hear stories, mainly because they didn't have to read or write in Hebrew which was still quite a difficult task for some of them.

My plan was to first connect Passover to the other holidays by very briefly reviewing the three major festivals during the year when the Jewish nation would ascend to Jerusalem.

"Today is the first day of Nissan and Passover is celebrated on this month," I began. "Passover is one of the three festivals when the entire Jewish people used to go to Jerusalem to the Temple."

At this point, a student jumped up, cutting me off in mid-sentence. "Teacher, have you ever been to the Temple?"

I smiled at him, realizing that he was somewhat confused. "No, of course not. That was a very long time ago!"

My student was insistent, and a few more pairs of eyes joined him. "Fine, it was a long time ago. But were you there? Were you at the Temple a long time ago?"

I smiled again, this time slightly confused myself. "Doesn't he understand? Perhaps my Hebrew is too difficult for him," I thought.

"No, of course not. That was a very long time ago!"

Now the rest of the students joined him in an uproar. "You've never been there?" "Teacher, what's it like being in the Temple?"

"What does the Temple look like?"

"Quiet!" I tried calming everyone down. "Listen everyone – there is no Temple! There used to be a Temple many years ago but today we don't have a Temple. It was destroyed, burned down. I have never been to it, my father's never been to it, and my grandfather has never been to it! We haven't had a Temple for 2000 years!"

I said these words over and over, having a very hard time believing that this was so strange for them to hear. What's the big deal? This is the reality with which we've all grown up. Why are they so bothered by it?

The tumult in the class was steadily increasing. They began talking amongst themselves in Amharic, arguing, translating, explaining, shouting, as I lost total control over the class. When the bell rang, they collected their things and ran home. I left the school exhausted and utterly confused.

Next Day's Surprise

The next morning I was hardly bothered by the previous day's events. In fact, I had nearly forgotten all about the incident. That day I had planned to just teach math, geometry and other secular subjects.

I got off the bus and leisurely made my way toward the school. As I neared the gate the guard approached me, seeming a bit alarmed. "Tell me," he said, "do you have any idea what's going on here today?"

I tried recalling a special activity that was supposed to be going on, or some ceremony that I had forgotten about, but nothing exceptional came to mind.

"Why do you ask?" I asked him. "What happened?"

He didn't answer. He only pointed towards the entrance to the school.

I raised my head and saw a sizeable gathering of Ethiopian adult immigrants – apparently, my students' parents. What are they doing here? And what are they yelling about?

I went over to them, attempting to understand what was the matter from the little Amharic that I knew.

As I came closer, everyone quieted down. One of the adults whose Hebrew was on a higher level, asked me, "Are you our children's teacher?"

"Yes," I answered. "What is the matter, sir?"

"Our children came home yesterday and told us that their teacher taught them that the Temple in Jerusalem no longer exists. Who would tell them such a thing?" He looked at me in anger.

"I told them that. We were discussing the Temple and I felt that they were a bit confused. So I explained to them that the Temple had been burned down thousands of years ago and that today, we no longer have a Temple. That's all. What's all the fuss about?"

He was incredulous. "What? What are you talking about?"

I was more confused than ever. "I don't understand. What are you all so angry about? I simply reminded them of the fact that the Temple was destroyed and that it no longer exists today."

Another uproar – this one even louder than before.

The representative quieted the others down, and again turned to me. "Are you sure?"

"Am I sure that the Temple was destroyed? Of course I'm sure!" I couldn't hide my smile. What a strange scene.

The man turned to his friends and in a dramatic tone translated what I had told him. At this point, things seemed to be finally sinking in.

Now, however, a different scene commenced: one woman fell to the ground, a second broke down in tears. A man standing by them just stared at me in disbelief. A group of men began quietly talking amongst themselves, very fast, in confusion and disbelief. The children stood on the side, looking on in great puzzlement. Another woman suddenly broke into a heart-rending cry. Her husband came over to her to hug her.

I stood there in utter shock.

I felt as if I had just brought them the worst news possible. It was as if I had just told them about the death of a loved one. I stood there across from a group of Jews who were genuinely mourning the destruction of the Temple.

Tisha B'Av

A few months later it was Tisha B'Av. I had already been discharged from the army, on my way to college, and my military service seemed as if it had been such a very long time ago.

As I did every year, I went to synagogue. Everyone was already seated on the floor (as is customary for mourners), and I was waiting to hear the Book of Lamentations. I had expected, as in previous years, for this to be a time for some daydreaming and hoped I wouldn't get too hungry.

The megillah reading began, and I started reading the first two verses.

"Alas, she sits in solitude...like a widow...She weeps bitterly in the night and her tear is on her cheek. She has no comforter from all her paramours; all her friends have betrayed her, they have become her enemies."

Suddenly that first day of Nissan began replaying in my mind. The angry looks of those children. The parents' screams. The mothers' crying. The men's pitiful silence. The shock they were overcome with as they received the terrible news as if I had just told them about the death of a loved one.

At that moment, I understood.

I understood that this was exactly how we are supposed to mourn the Temple on Tisha B'Av. We are supposed to cry over the loss of the unity and peace throughout the entire world. We are supposed to lament the disappearance of the Divine Presence and holiness from our lives in Israel. We are supposed to be pained by the destruction of our spiritual center, which served to unify the entire Jewish nation.

We're supposed to feel as if something very precious has been taken away from us forever. We are meant to cry, to be shocked and angry, to break down. We are supposed to mourn over the destruction of the Temple, to cry over a magnificent era that has been uprooted from the face of the earth. The incredible closeness that we had with God – that feeling that He is truly within us – has evaporated and disappeared into thin air.

Now when Tisha B'Av rolls around, I go back to that incident with my students and their parents and try to reconnect to the meaningful lesson that they taught me – what it truly means to mourn for the loss of our holy Temple.

ON THE SAME TEAM

by Dov Moshe Lipman

A timely Tisha B'Av message from the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team.

I settled in to watch the movie "Miracle" with the campers of Sportstar Academy where I work in the summers, expecting to see a typical sports movie.

One scene in this movie, which tells the true story about the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team, grabbed my attention.

Herb Brooks was charged with coaching this team. He faces the daunting task of preparing college-aged players to play against experienced, professional teams from other countries.

Throughout the early practices with his team, Brooks asks players to introduce themselves to the rest of the team. The dialogue always follows the same pattern of the first introduction sequence.

The coach turns to a player and says, "What's your name?"

"Mark Johnson."

"Where you from, Mark?"

"Madison, Wisconsin"

"Who do you play for?"

"University of Wisconsin, Coach."

Every player introduces himself the same way. Name, hometown, and in response to the question of what team they play for, they answer with their college name.

Five months before the Olympics, the team plays a practice game against Norway. The final score is 3-3 and Coach Brooks feels his team has not put forth their maximum effort.

As the team skates off the ice, Coach Brooks makes them stay on the ice to skate "suicides" – skating from the goal line to 1/4 of the rink and then back, to 1/2 and then back, 3/4 and then back, and then the full rink and then back. This continues over and over again, with the coach

repeating, "Again," dashing their hopes that this would be their last sequence.

The drill continues even after the arena manager turns off the arena lights and the medical trainer issues his warning. But the coach again barks out, "Again."

Hours pass with the team being forced to skate back and forth, over and over again. Players collapse, coughing and spitting up, but the coach insists, "Again!"

Suddenly, a voice from the line of players near the goal line calls out:

"Mike Eruzione!"

The hockey player is gasping for breaths and barely gathers the strength to continue.... "Winthrop, Massachusetts!"

Coach Brooks immediately asks: "Who do you play for?"

The player, eventual team captain, Mike Eruzione, struggles and says: "I play for... the United States of America!"

Coach Brooks softly replies, "That's all gentlemen." They could go back to the locker room.

He succeeded in making them identify as a unified team and not as individuals coming from their separate backgrounds and universities.

This sets them on their way to eventually beat the unbeatable Soviets in the Olympic semi-finals and ultimately win the gold medal.

This conveys a critical message to us as Jews, especially during this time of year as we lead up to Tisha B'Av.

The Jewish people have been persecuted for thousands of years. After each round of murder and torture, all we have wanted is a respite and the knowledge that it is over. But then, just like the coach barking out "Again!" we are forced to go through our next round of suffering. We survive, assume it is over, and then we hear the pounding "Again."

The ninth of Av is a date in the Jewish calendar in which we reflect on all of our suffering through the past 2,000 years. We attempt to correct our flaws and pray for salvation. In our time, this includes a respite for our brothers and sisters in bombarded Sderot and other Negev towns, for people who live daily with the threat of terrorist attacks, for soldiers who risk their lives for us daily, and for Jews around the world who live with the fear of anti-Semitism and what could come next.

As we experience Tisha B'Av and reflect on what it will take to get us out of this cycle of persecution called "exile," perhaps we should take Mike Eruzione's insight to heart.

Our Sages of the Talmud teach us that we are in exile because of the hatred of one Jew to another. The only way to correct that flaw is to repair ourselves in that realm.

Perhaps each time God puts us through another round of suffering, His proclamation of "Again," He is waiting for us to stop identifying ourselves as an individual Jew coming from his separate background and upbringing. "I'm modern Orthodox." "I'm Reform." "I'm a Hasid." "I'm secular." "I'm Conservative." "I'm yeshivish." "I'm yeshivish."

Those characterizations polarize the nation and make it impossible for us to function together as one team. As individual groups, we cannot accomplish what we can accomplish as one team. We are held back by that same

baseless hatred which creeps in when we are not one unit.

Perhaps God is waiting for all of us to proclaim in unison, "I am a Jew." Plain and simple.

Even more importantly, perhaps God is waiting for us to stop seeing others as "He's modern Orthodox." "He's Reform." "He's a Hasid." "He's secular." "He's Conservative." "He's yeshivishe."

Perhaps the answer to our suffering and long exile is reaching the point where we see other Jews as members of the same team and family. Jews and nothing else.

HOLOCAUST LAMENTATIONS

by Mirish Kiszner

With survivors in mind, the Book of Lamentations comes hauntingly alive.

I grew up surrounded by survivors – my grandparents, heroes from the books I read, elderly neighbors. You could say that I was a third generation Holocaust victim. I remember waking up from nightmares, darting out of bed, my teeth chattering as I rushed into the safety zone of the light bulb hanging from the closet ceiling. The Nazis that chased me through the streets, their long rifle aimed at my back, their vicious sneers taunting me, were all as visible in my dreams as if I'd actually be reliving something I'd experienced.

While other kids my age feared a nuclear war, the PLO, or the Evil Empire, my mind was preoccupied with strategizing escape routes, conjuring up hiding places, and deciding which gentile could be entrusted to hide us

and not betray us, should the necessity arise with the return of the Nazis.

Mrs. Weinreb lived on our block. An elderly widow, the sole survivor of a large family, she lived in abject, harsh loneliness. My parents welcomed her into our home and made her feel that she was part of our family. She would try to find vegetables to peel, dishes to wash, or she'd resort to her own creative tactics, always to reassure herself that she was needed and useful.

Occasionally, when she was ill or simply feeling forlorn, my mother would send us children to visit with her. We'd play table games and listen to her reminiscence about the good old days. Her walls were plastered with pictures of an era gone by. Portraits of her mother and father, her grandparents, uncles and aunts, her sisters and brothers, all stared down at us, silent testimony to a world that once was. But the photos I found most difficult to look at were those of her beautiful twins charmingly dressed in sailor outfits, huge white bows pinned to their hair. Children who were snatched out of her arms and tossed into the fires of Auschwitz.

When Mrs. Weinreb would unburden her painful memories to my mother, I'd look on with wide eyes and a lump in my throat. Once she turned to me, her palm spread over her forehead, her eyes filled with anguish, "You will never know what went on there," she said. "No one will really know. I myself find it hard. I ask myself 'How did I go through this war and remain alive, with my wits intact?' No," she said shaking her head wisely, "you will never understand it."

As I grew older, I learned to put aside the Holocaust. There was a happier side to life as well. Life was too short to allow oneself to be pulled into an abyss of dismal stories of tragedy and sorrow.

But come Tisha B'Av, the day set aside for us to mourn the destruction of the Temple, the ultimate destruction which inevitably led to all future tragedies, I allow myself to contemplate the tragic stories of the Holocaust. Although this day primarily commemorates the destruction of the Temple, it is a day that's fitting to reflect on the many other tragedies of the Jewish people.

And the Book of Lamentations that we read on the Eve of Tisha B'Av is as appropriate today as it was in the time of the Holocaust and the Spanish Inquisition and no less true then during time of Destruction of the Temple when Prophet Jeremiah penned those words.

On this day I think about victims such as Mrs. Weinreb and cry for them, the survivors who emerged from the ashes with nothing but their aching losses, excruciating memories, and, often painful guilt feelings, to accompany them for the rest of her life. With them in mind, the Book of Lamentations comes alive:

Alas – she sits in solitude! The city that was great with people has become like a widow...She weeps bitterly in the night and her tear is on her cheek...Those who I cherished and brought up, my enemy has wiped out. (Lamentations, 1:1,2, 2:22)

"We were set to work packaging bananas to be shipped for the front," Mrs. Weinreb related to me. "You have no idea how the sight of those bananas tormented us. Could you imagine the tantalizing smell they emitted? The Nazi guard stood over us, menacingly fingering his whip with one hand, his rifle with the other. Our hunger tore at our innards, the temptation was humanly impossible to withstand."

The Lord has delivered me into the hands of those I cannot withstand...Pour out your heart like water in the Presence of the Lord; lift up your hands to Him for the life

of your young children, who swoon from hunger...(1:14, 2:19)

"One young girl standing at my side succumbed. For a moment, it appeared as if the Nazi turned aside and she hurriedly slipped the banana into her mouth, banana peel and all. We all froze, our fingers continued working on auto pilot.

"'It tastes good, doesn't it,' the guard sneered superciliously. 'Here, I'll give you another one, open your mouth.' He aimed his rifle. The bullet shot straight into her mouth."

...Her enemies saw her and gloated at her downfall...From on high He sent a fire into my bones and it crushed them...Oh bring the day You proclaimed and let them be like me! Let all their wickedness come before You and inflict them as You inflicted me for all my transgressions... (1:7,13, 21,22)

On Tisha B'Av I think about the unfathomable hunger. Human beings were, at times, reduced to crawling on their legs in pursuit of a morsel of bread and I remember the chronicles of desperation that I heard spoken:

A train from France arrived to Auschwitz. This elite group of prisoners descended, still wearing their silk high hats, fur coats, and carrying designer luggage – bankers, businessmen, wealthy citizens – Jews brought to Auschwitz.

Two weeks later, one of them, a former world-famous banker stood trembling at the far corner of the barracks. The striped prisoners garb now replacing his fur coat, hung over his emaciated body facing an S.S. officer leaning calmly against a wall, smoking a cigar. The banker reached into his pocket, removed a black velvet pouch and emptied it into the Nazi's outstretched palm. A bag

full of diamonds fell into his hands. In exchange for that, he received a loaf of bread.

This was a loaf of bread in Auschwitz.

The enemy spread out his hand on all her treasures...All her people are sighing searching for bread. (1:10,11)

On Tisha B'Av, I mourn the loss of those who died al Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying God's Name, and I do not forget those who lived their lives al Kiddush Hashem.

One day, while all others were marched to their labor sites, two concentration camp prisoners were ordered to remain behind to clean the barracks. While sweeping the damp floors, one of them discovered, under a loose floorboard, a loaf of bread and eagerly called out to his friend to come and share this spectacular sight.

A loaf of bread in Auschwitz!

"I know who this belongs to," said one. The bread belonged to a Polish prisoner, a vicious anti-Semite, also an inmate in that barracks. For one long moment they eyed each other, their hunger pangs entreating them, until the decision was made, "Let us return the bread. Let the Gentiles say that Jews don't steal!"

Here leaders were like deer that found no pasture, but walked on without strength before the pursuer (1:6).

Throughout the long exile, the Jewish Nation has been targeted again and again by hatred and persecution. Yet the indomitable spirit of the Jew has lasted throughout the generations.

Today, so many years after the destruction of our Holy Temple, it's difficult to comprehend, let alone mourn the enormity of the loss. We've never seen its splendor, nor experienced the feeling of closeness to God it

engendered. Yet Tisha B'Av has remained a day of tragedy throughout the generations, a potent reminder of where we are and where we belong, a time of communal mourning in memory of the Jewish past, both recent and ancient, throughout the years of exile.

On this day the destruction of the First and Second Temple occurred, the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290, and from France in 1306. In 1492, the Inquisition edicts were signed in Spain. Pogroms and World War One which culminated in Germany's "Final Solution" have all occurred on this momentous day. And let's not forget the tragedy of our times. Today, we live in an era of spiritual darkness, an epoch where mass annihilation of Jewish souls is happening around us.

My eyes shed streams of water at the shattering of my people. My eyes will flow and will not cease – without relief – until God looks down and takes notice from heaven...Remember, Lord, what has befallen us, look and see our disgrace... Bring us back to You, God, and we shall return, renew our days as of old. (3:48, 49, 5:1)

The tears we shed on Tisha B'Av, year after year, is testimony to the fervor of our longing and hope. In the future, this day of mourning will transcend all suffering, and become a day of indescribable joy. Tisha B'Av is the birthday of Mashiach who will bring us back to Jerusalem of old.

May the tears we shed this Tisha B'Av be the last tears for all time, and may we rejoice with the fulfillment of the blessing, "Those who mourn over Jerusalem will witness her joy!"

WHEN GOD MOVED OUT by Sara Yoheved Rigler

Tisha B'Av and the truth of consequences.

Joan, a once-beautiful, recovering alcoholic, stood up at an AA meeting and told her story:

I married Jeff, my high school sweetheart, and we had two kids. I started drinking when our kids were little, but Jeff had no idea. I used to hide the bottles in very clever hiding places, and I drank vodka, so he never smelled it on my breath.

But then my drinking got worse. Often I couldn't get up in the morning to get the kids off to school because of a hangover, so Jeff found out. He warned me that if I didn't stop, I'd destroy our family. I thought he was just threatening and I didn't listen to him.

My drinking got worse. Jeff told me, over and over again, that he would divorce me if I didn't go on the wagon. But you have to understand that he was crazy about me and always had been, so I knew he'd never do it.

Then, in the middle of the night one night, I woke up from a drunken stupor. I must have been out for a long time, maybe the whole previous day. I looked around and discovered that Jeff and the kids were gone. I mean really gone. They had moved out and taken all their stuff with them. I couldn't believe it. Jeff was always crazy about me. I was sure he'd come back. I was sure until the day the divorce papers arrived by registered mail. Then I knew that I had ruined my life. That's when I started to come to AA.

Unheeded Warnings

Tisha B'Av marks the day when God walked out on us, and took His house with Him. Like the husband in this true story, He had warned us, the Jewish people, over and over again. Like the wife in this story, we were convinced that His love for us would keep Him with us forever. We continued to indulge in destructive actions, heedless of their effect on us and on our union with the Almighty.

And then one day – the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av – God did exactly what He had said He would do. He permitted our enemies to destroy the Holy Temple, which had been the resting place for the Divine Presence in this physical world, and He removed Himself from our lives.

The Jews of ancient Judea had never known life without God in their midst. The Temple of Solomon had dominated their existence for almost 400 years. Daily life in Jerusalem revolved around the Temple service, and even those who resided far away were obligated to make the pilgrimage to the Temple three times a year. Life without the Temple and the Divine immanence it represented was as inconceivable as ... the New York skyline without the World Trade Center.

The terrible day the Temple went up in flames was a day of defeat and death, of calamity and consternation. Yet the prevailing emotion, more than horror or grief, was disbelief. Just as Joan could not believe that her husband had really left her, so too the Jewish people – even after 150 years of Prophetic warnings – could not believe that God had really left them.

If we, the Jews of today, cannot muster grief over the calamity of Tisha B'Av, then we can find our point of connection elsewhere: in our same propensity to ignore consequences.

Consequences

Is it possible to be both smart and foolish?

God created an orderly universe, one of whose principles is that actions produce consequences. Yet the human capacity to ignore consequences is astounding. Witness the person who pays his hard-earned money to buy a packet of cigarettes emblazoned with the warning, in inch-high, bold letters: SMOKING KILLS.

Most smokers are not masochists nurturing a death wish. If you ask them, "Aren't you afraid of getting lung cancer?" they will answer: "Smoking won't kill me. Why, I know a guy who smoked a pack a day and lived to be ninety."

The same denial of consequences pertains when we:

- Eat a second helping of ice cream, not believing that we won't be able to button our clothes tomorrow.
- Flirt with a member of the opposite sex, not believing that it will negatively impact our marriage.
- Cheat in business, not believing we'll ever get caught.
- Hit or yell at our children, not believing that it will undermine the relationship a decade later.
- Devote the best years of our lives to our careers, not believing that we may be forfeiting our chance to have a family.

How can Intelligent People Live In Such A Fantasy World, Where No Object Casts A Shadow?

False Prophets

God sent a steady succession of Prophets to ancient Israel to warn them that the consequences of their sins would be defeat, destruction, and exile. Why didn't they listen?

For every true Prophet, there were many false prophets. The Bible repeatedly exhorts the people not to listen to "false prophets." Thus, while Jeremiah was warning the people that if they did not change their ways, Jerusalem

and the Temple would be destroyed, the false prophets were reassuring the people that everything would be okay.

The voice of the inner false prophet proclaims: "You can do whatever you want, and it'll be okay." The voice of the inner true prophet proclaims: "Beware of the consequences of your actions!"

Ethics of the Fathers teaches that a wise person always asks the question: "If I do this, what will happen next?"

- If I criticize my neighbor, what will happen next?
- If I invite my pretty secretary out for a drink after work, what will happen next?
- If I cheat on just this one exam, what will happen next?
- If I yell at my mother, what will happen next?

Asking this question can save one from much folly and disastrous results.

Failure to contemplate consequences can lead to outcomes as insignificant as gaining a pound, or as significant as a divorce, or as cosmically catastrophic as the destruction of the Holy Temple and the departure of the Divine Presence from our midst.

The metaphor of Joan and Jeff does not totally apply here. On Tisha B'Av God "moved out," but he never divorced the Jewish people. God's Covenant with the Patriarchs promises that, no matter what we do, we will be His people eternally. God will never marry another people.

But even without a divorce, separation is a painful state. Being separated from one's beloved spouse, not living together, not sharing companionship, not enjoying an intimate bond – is that a consequence any wise person would choose?

By the time Joan woke up and went to AA, it was too late to save her marriage. For us Jews, it's never too late to reconcile with our God.

HER NAME WAS PATIENCE

by Malka Winner

She was unusual. The time has finally come to ask her forgiveness.

Her name was Patience, and that was enough to do her in. But there was more: Patience lived in the poorer part of town where there were broken-down cars and other junk in her yard, and her house was the last stop for the school bus, so everyone on the bus saw the undesirable conditions in which she lived. She was doomed.

Maybe there would have been more hope if her name had been normal – like Katie or Anna. But Patience was unusual – in name and life – and the kids knew it.

Every morning went like this: all of the kids would get on the bus from the various developments in which they lived. They would sit together, chatting away, looking out the window, doing what kids do. And then the bus would turn onto the main road of our small Massachusetts town and head for school, making one last stop – at Patience's house.

As the bus door creaked open, there would be silence as the kids watched Patience climb in. She didn't really stand out in a crowd, but the kids had decided that she did. Her clothes weren't as nice, her hair was limper and, like dogs that smell fear, my classmates sensed her terror.

As she made her way down the aisle looking for a seat, someone would inevitably yell, "Patience have patience!" and then the kids would all scream, "Patience, Patience, Patience!" And she would walk up and down the aisle of the bus to cries of "Patience! Patience!" looking for a seat,

only to be repeatedly refused with, "Can't sit here" and "Seat's taken."

The kids would even spread themselves out in their seats, manipulating their belongings to take up as much room as possible, because no one, absolutely no one, wanted to be the one to sit with Patience. And if Patience would sit beside you, you'd have "the cooties" for at least a day, possibly even two or three.

And so it went, day in and day out. Patience would get on the bus, the kids would scream her name, tease her, and refuse to let her sit with them. Patience would inevitably force her way into a seat as the bus driver yelled at her to sit down already, always oblivious to her situation, and the unlucky seat partner would cringe and scoot as close to the window as possible, to avoid contamination.

Patience never cried. She never attempted to defend herself. She never made eye contact. She just looked straight ahead and walked from seat to seat, back and forth, until she had a place to sit and then got off the bus at school and disappeared into the building, knowing that she would have to face the same thing in the morning. It had to be excruciating.

And every morning when I would get on the bus, I would try to figure out how I could avoid being the one with whom Patience decided to sit. I would scan the seats for one with somebody already in it, and if none were available, I'd sit in an empty one, hunker down, and begin to pray. I'd pray that Patience wouldn't sit with me. I'd pray that she'd sit somewhere else. I'd pray that if she did sit with me, that I wouldn't become the object of teasing and torment. These things worked by association, you know.

And when she did sit with me, which to my dismay, happened with a certain degree of frequency, I would turn, face the window, and pretend to be very interested in the passing scenery. But every so often, when I was sure she wasn't looking, I would cast a furtive glance at her, peeking at the face that had endured so much. And like always, she would be staring straight ahead, with a blank, unreadable, and distant expression on her face. And I would find myself flooded with guilt.

I am ashamed to admit that this teasing went on for years. And the most I could do was feel guilty. Quite simply: I was a coward, and I was terrified that if it wouldn't be her, it would be me.

It has been something like 15 years since I rode that bus every morning, avoiding Patience, secretly feeling terribly guilty and sorry, and trying to glimpse the personality inside the abused shell. And I have thought of her almost every morning since.

I can't help but wonder what would have happened if I'd invited her to sit with me, or if I'd made room for her in my seat as soon as she came on the bus.

Looking back, I don't blame myself for my cowardice. Children can be the cruelest of tormentors. Their actions and words toward one another can cause serious damage. I was terrified of being the next victim. But now I can't help but wonder what would have happened if I'd invited her to sit with me, or if I'd made room for her in my seat as soon as she came on the bus. I never screamed her name, I never told her she couldn't sit with me, but I passively participated by not extending myself. I never did anything, but then again, I never did anything.

Sometimes I wonder what happened to Patience. What kind of person did she become, what kind of person could

she become, after so many years of torment? What happens to a child who daily has her every vestige of self-esteem and dignity torn from her? These thoughts turn my stomach. And I realize that I have never forgiven myself.

In the days of mourning for the Beit Hamikdash, the Holy Temple which was destroyed because of sinat chinam, baseless hatred, I think of Patience even more.

And I wonder why I never prayed for her those mornings on the bus. At least if I wasn't going to defend her or invite her to sit with me, I could have prayed that the teasing would stop. Instead, I prayed only for myself.

I did not pray for her then, but I can pray now. I pray that no person, anywhere, in any circumstances should ever be the object of baseless hatred. I pray that children will be nice to each other. And I pray that I can teach my children that "the cooties" aren't real, that passively sitting by only perpetrates the problem, and that treating others with dignity, no matter how difficult, is what counts. And I pray that I can give them the confidence to do this.

The time has finally come to ask Patience for forgiveness. I don't know where she is or what she looks like now, but I sense that there is some of her in all of us, a little part of us that has faced some abuse, suffered some injustice, that is holding some grudge. Please let go, move on. Please don't let there be any more victims. Don't let there be any more perpetrators. Give respect and honor where it's due. And... please forgive me.

WHY JERUSALEM MATTERS

by Rabbi Shraga Simmons

For millennium, Jews turned toward Jerusalem. What memory did they preserve?

Jerusalem has no strategic significance. It has no commercial or industrial importance, and it is not a cultural center.

How has this ancient city, unimportant as it appears, crept to the heart of contention between Israel and the Palestinians over the future of the land of Israel? Why should we care what happens to Jerusalem?

We need to begin by understanding the importance of memory. Memory isn't history or dead memorabilia. By defining the past memory creates the present. Repression of memory creates mental disease. Health comes from memory's recovery. Dictators consolidate power by altering memory. Stalin airbrushed Trotsky and Bukharin out of photographs. Revisionists deny the Holocaust ever happened. Why does it matter?

In Hebrew, the word for man is "zachar." The word for memory is "zecher." Man is memory. People who suffer memory loss through illness or accident don't just misplace their keys. They lose their selves. They become lost and adrift in time, because without memory, the current moment has no context, and no meaning.

When the Jews were first exiled from Jerusalem, King David said, "If I forget you Jerusalem, let my right hand lose its strength. Let my tongue cling to my palate if I fail to recall you, if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my highest joy." The memory of Jerusalem somehow is linked to our current vigor as a people. But how? What is the

memory of Jerusalem, and what does it contribute to who we are?

London comes from a Celtic word which means "a wild and wooded town." Cairo is an anglicized version of the Arab name for Mars, the Roman god of war. Paris is named for the Paris of Greek myth, who was asked by the gods to choose between love, wisdom, and power. He chose love – the love of Helen of Troy.

The Talmud says Jerusalem was named by God. The name has two parts: Yira, which means "to see," and shalem, which means "peace."

Jerusalem was the place of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and Abraham said of Jerusalem, "This is the place where God is seen."

Elsewhere, God is a theory, but in Jerusalem, God is seen, and felt, as a tangible presence. In Jerusalem we reach beyond the frailty and vulnerability of our lives, and we sense and strive for transcendence. Elsewhere we grope for insight. In Jerusalem we anticipate clarity. Paris may be for lovers, but Jerusalem is for visionaries.

Jerusalem is a metaphor for a perfected world, and it gives us perspective on our lives. When Aldous Huxley said, "we have each of us our Jerusalem," he meant much more than a temporal city of taxi cabs and traffic jams. He meant a vision of what life might be.

The vision of life's promise is one we surrender at our peril, because it gives us the will to live. In exile for two thousand years Jews said "Next year in Jerusalem," and amidst poverty and oppression they preserved the dream of a world in which love and justice, not power and self-interest, would be the currency men live by.

Part of the name Jerusalem is "vision." The other part of the name is peace, but the peace of Jerusalem is not the

absence of strife. Jerusalem has rarely known anything but strife. The peace of Jerusalem is the peace at the center of the spokes of a wheel, where opposing forces may be delicately balanced and reconciled.

The Talmud says that creation began in Jerusalem, and the world radiated outward from this place. Medieval maps show Jerusalem at the epicenter of Asia, Europe, and Africa. The world flows into this spot, and all life's forces resonate here. From this place, the whole world is cast into perspective.

Jerusalem, the center, which gives perspective to the rest of the world. Jerusalem where God is seen. Jerusalem the perfected world. Humanity has long understood that he who controls Jerusalem controls the world's memory. He controls the way God is seen. He controls the way life's forces are cast into perspective. He controls the way we collectively see our future.

Once the Temple Mount was the highest point in the city of Jerusalem, but in the year 135, Roman slaves carried away the dirt of the mountain, and turned it into the valley we now look down on from the Old City. The Romans expelled Jews from Jerusalem and barred them from reentering on pain of death. Jewish life, they proclaimed, has now ended.

The Crusaders rewrote Jerusalem's importance, the center no longer of Jewish national drama, but the site of the passion and death of Jesus. Like the Romans they expelled Jews, and destroyed synagogues.

The Muslims came after, and as those before them rewrote the memory of Jerusalem, expelling Jews and Christian. They systematically built mosques on every Jewish holy site. They airbrushed the past.

In rewriting the history of Jerusalem each of these cultures rewrote our place, the Jewish place, in history.

They consigned us, they believed, to the dust bin of history – a once great people, now abandoned by God; bypassed by time.

But Jews preserved Jerusalem as a memory. When we built our houses we left a square unplastered, and we broke a glass at weddings in memory of Jerusalem. From all over the world we turned and prayed toward Jerusalem, and because memory was kept alive, the Jewish people lived.

When Jerusalem was liberated, time was conflated. The past became present. What we had longed for became ours. What we had dreamed of became real, and soldiers wept because an adolescent Mediterranean country suddenly recovered a memory lost for 2000 years. The past was instantly present, incredibly, transcendently, transforming who we knew ourselves to be.

Who are we? We are not despised and impoverished itinerants, surviving on the fickle goodwill of other nations. We are not a nation of farmers recovering swamps, nor of warriors – though when we need to be we are all these things.

We are a nation of priests and of prophets, a light unto mankind. We taught the world "to beat their swords into plowshares," "to love your neighbor as yourself," equality before justice, and that admiration belongs not to the rich and powerful, but to the good, the wise, and the kind. Hitler said, "The Jews have inflicted two wounds on humanity: Circumcision on the body and conscience on the soul." How right he was and how much more we have to do. How tragic when we fail ourselves.

Already divided by language, by geography, and even by religion, our people is bound only by threads of memory and of hope. These threads are exquisitely fragile. If they sever we will fragment, and the long and bitter exile of our people – not yet fully ended, is consequence, says the

Talmud, of the dissensions which sunder us from one another.

To this threat, Jerusalem provides counterpoint, for Jerusalem embodies our memories and hopes. Jerusalem is a living memory, a vision of God in our lives, an image of a perfected world. Jerusalem gives us the strength to achieve what we as a people must do, to unite ourselves, and to sanctify this world.

This is why Jerusalem matters.

MOURNFUL **by Naomi Cohn**

A bereaved mother's perspective on the Three Weeks.

I had a family. Four beautiful children, two boys, two girls. An open home filled with guests all the time. A wonderful relationship with my parents and siblings. A hard working husband. Enough money to pay the bills. Health. My life felt so perfect. So complete.

Then my world suddenly caved in.

My talented husband was being transferred down to Florida and I looked forward to building a new, fun life for our family and being closer to my father and grandmother. We were knee deep in packing tape and boxes as the school year was coming to an end. The Sunday before our big move we took a break from the packing and traveled to Chicago for a close friend's wedding.

The baby got a little fever and started crying on Sunday afternoon as I shopped for a dress for my older daughter to wear that night. I was worried that he might have an ear infection. Some baby Motrin took care of his pain and he fell asleep. He was resting so deeply and comfortably that I left him at my sisters house while we went to the wedding instead of dressing him up and taking him along. We came home well past midnight. He was asleep in the pack n play. I couldn't sleep very well; he was making noises that sounded as if he was having a bad dream.

Early in the morning I went to take him out of bed. It was dark in our room, so I couldn't be sure but he didn't look right. He was definitely sick, I decided, but something seemed more alarming. I woke up my husband. "Does he look funny to you?" I asked.

"This boy needs to get to a hospital," my usually under reactive husband said. We ran upstairs, leaving our two oldest kids sleeping in the basement.

The next few minutes, hours and days seem like slow motion...Asking my niece for the keys to the car. Deciding that we couldn't drive with him in this condition. Calling 911. Waiting what seemed like a very long time before hearing sirens as the ambulance approached the house. Sitting outside the house with paramedics. His blood sugar was too low. His head was turned to the side and he was staring to the left. My uncle, a doctor, running up the block in response to my frantic phone call minutes earlier. The ambulance finally heading to the closest ER. The ER doctor was quite worried. Blood tests. IV's. MRI's. Sepsis? Meningitis? Infection? Holding him on the stark white stretcher and just waiting. He seemed to be calming down a little, closing his eyes to rest, but then startling himself awake. His tired body was giving in and giving up. But at least he was startling himself awake to breathe, a good sign to me.

Transferring to the Children's hospital. I realized that we might not be going home that day, that something might be very wrong. I called my mother in Israel. Please pray for him. I reminded myself that God doesn't give us what we can't handle and I knew I couldn't handle losing my son. So it would be okay, right? But that gnawing feeling that this was the beginning of his end. I couldn't ask God for anything. I just knew that He'd do what was right and just and deserved.

Waiting and waiting for the pediatric ICU doctor to talk to us. Another brain scan. No activity. "We'll know more tomorrow." Still no activity in the brain and stem. "It's a matter of time. Say your goodbyes," he said.

Just a virus that got into his spinal fluid they said. No cause, no reason. We couldn't have done anything different. It was no one's fault...but I knew that it must be mine. I must not have valued the lives that I created, and so now He was taking one away. I knew that he'd never wake up again. All those wires and tubes and the beeping. Holding him after waiting all that time, being careful not to move his breathing tube. He didn't feel like mine anymore....

And nine days later, he was gone. We were still in Chicago, in unfamiliar apartments and houses. Our home was packed up and sent along to Florida without us. Our cars were driven to us by friends. Following his casket. Sitting in a velvet covered chair. Shocked. Listening to my husband read the eulogy we'd written the night before. Hearing people crying behind me. Watching me watching them bury my son, thinking of their own healthy children. Mine was gone.

My once full, happy, satisfying life was empty and sad. The constant yearning inside of me for the familiarity of being complete threatened to turn the most basic daily motions into tears of desperate sadness. Like picking out vegetables at the store or switching a load of laundry. I

was overwhelmed with despair. I was forever incomplete. My purpose of life snatched away from me as I sat in my house for eight hours a day waiting for my other three children to come home from camp and school so I could reclaim my role of Mommy that was gone all day long.

It's been a year now since my toddler died. A year that was mostly spent remembering only that he was gone and not so much on thinking about his amazing personality. I let myself remember him two weeks ago on his first Yahrzeit. I remember holding him and how he'd pat my shoulder the way we do to our babies. I remember his chubby hands taking hold of my cheeks and planting a big messy kiss on my lips. I remember him dropping food off his tray and saying "Uh-oh." I remember him signing for more food or a drink. I remember the almost boastful pride that I felt pushing him and his older sister in the double stroller to shul. Or down the aisle at the grocery store. I remember spoiling him, giving him a taste of whatever I was eating. Letting him stay up past everyone else's bedtime so I could spend some time playing with just him. Nursing him. He was gorgeous, with his blond hair and blue eyes peeking over the side of his car seat when I walked around to his door playing his own version of peek-a-boo.

I was very strong when he was in a coma. I was even stronger when God took back his precious soul. After the shloshim, the 30-day period of mourning, it got harder to feel positive. After we moved to Florida I was too sad to function. I'd cry to relieve the painful pressure that I felt in my chest but no relief would come. I was too sad to continue my life. I felt like I was just going through the motions every day. I reminded myself to be a good mother to the other kids. I didn't want them to lose their brother and their mother, even if I was still here physically. I played the role of "coping" well. I seemed to be doing fine. Talking or thinking about how I really felt was just too hard, too painful, too lonely.

Somehow I got through the year. Taking trips without buying him a ticket. Taking carpool without having to count his seat as occupied. Buying three Shabbos treats instead of four. Thinking in "fives" instead of "sixes" for making reservations and setting the table. His birthday. His yahrtzeit. And somehow the strength worked its way back in. I am functioning. I love being a mother to my older three. I pray better. I turn to God more often. And He has helped me make it through.

Feeling the Loss

For as many years as I can remember, the Three Weeks were always a strange time for me. I observed all the customs or mourning – I didn't take a haircut or go shopping for clothes. I didn't listen to music. But it seemed rather rote and not as meaningful as it should. I tried to imagine what we are missing with not having the Temple so I'd be mournful that we were still in exile, but it was hard to do with my perfect family, my lovely home and my nice clothes.

This year is different. No more perfect family, no more lovely home. And my nice clothes are meaningless to me without my son here to complete the picture. I now realize that this is what it must have felt like 2000 years ago to lose the Temple. We had a home in Jerusalem – a place of security, safety and comfort. Walking down the street as a Jew brought pride, the same way strolling down the street with my kids filled me with pride. And now the home is gone. Chained up and burned to the ground. We can go to the Kotel and feel a hint of the closeness of what used to be there, the same way I can hold his blankie and remember my son. But what we really need and yearn for is the real thing.

I know that with the coming of Moshiach and the rebuilding of our Temple, I will also get back my completeness. My son and so many other beautiful souls will return to us. We will all be whole. We will all feel the

comfort and familiar and the security that we need. So this year, I feel it. I feel the raw pain of being stripped of what makes me complete. The raw pain of being a Jew without a home. I no longer struggle to yearn for something I never knew, to mourn for something that I never loved or held dear. Because I've suffered the unimaginable, unbearable loss of my son I understand a little bit of how I should feel as a Jew during this time. I yearn so much more for the final redemption. I only wish I didn't learn to yearn by losing my son.

TISHA B'AV – THE NINTH OF AV **by Rabbi Shraga Simmons**

Overview and laws of the Jewish national day of mourning.

On Tisha B'Av, five national calamities occurred:

1. During the time of Moses, Jews in the desert accepted the slanderous report of the 12 Spies, and the decree was issued forbidding them from entering the Land of Israel. (1312 BCE)
2. The First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar. 100,000 Jews were slaughtered and millions more exiled. (586 BCE)
3. The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans, led by Titus. Some two million Jews died, and another one million were exiled. (70 CE)
4. The Bar Kochba revolt was crushed by Roman Emperor Hadrian. The city of Betar – the Jews' last stand against the Romans – was captured and liquidated. Over 100,000 Jews were slaughtered. (135 CE)
5. The Temple area and its surroundings were plowed under by the Roman general Turnus Rufus. Jerusalem was

rebuilt as a pagan city – renamed Aelia Capitolina – and access was forbidden to Jews.

Other grave misfortunes throughout Jewish history occurred on the Ninth of Av, including:

1. The Spanish Inquisition culminated with the expulsion of Jews from Spain on Tisha B'Av in 1492.
2. World War One broke out on the eve of Tisha B'Av in 1914 when Germany declared war on Russia. German resentment from the war set the stage for the Holocaust.
3. On the eve of Tisha B'Av 1942, the mass deportation began of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto, en route to Treblinka.

Aspects of Mourning: The Afternoon Before Tisha B'Av

During the afternoon prior to Tisha B'Av, it is customary to eat a full meal in preparation for the fast.

At the end of the afternoon, we eat the Seudah Hamaf-seket – a meal consisting only of bread, water, and a hard-boiled egg.

The egg has two symbols: The round shape reminds us of a sign of the cycle of life. Also, the egg is the only food which gets harder the more it is cooked – a symbol of the Jewish people's ability to withstand persecution.

Food eaten at the Seudah Hamaf-seket is dipped in ashes, symbolic of mourning. The meal should preferably be eaten alone, while seated on the ground in mourner's fashion.

When the afternoon prior to Tisha B'Av occurs on Shabbat, there is no Seudah Hamaf-seket with eggs and ashes. Rather, the regular Shabbat "third meal" is eaten, albeit without guests and fanfare.

Restrictions on Tisha B'Av

Upon sundown, the laws of Tisha B'Av commence – consisting of the following expressions of mourning:

1. No eating or drinking until nightfall the following evening.

a. Pregnant and nursing women are also required to fast. If one suspects it could be harmful to the baby or mother, a rabbi should be consulted.

b. A woman within 30 days after birth need not fast.

c. Others who are old, weak, or ill should consult with a rabbi. (MB 554:11)

d. Medicine may be taken on Tisha B'Av, preferably without water.

e. In case of great discomfort, the mouth may be rinsed with water. Great care should be taken not to swallow anything. (MB 567:11)

2. Other prohibitions include:

a. Any bathing or washing, except for removing specific dirt – e.g. gook in the eyes (OC 554:9, 11). (Upon rising in the morning, before prayers, or after using the bathroom, one washes only the fingers. See OC 554:10, OC 613:3, MB 554:26)

b. Anointing oneself for pleasure. (Deodorant is permitted.)

c. Having marital relations.

d. Wearing leather shoes. (Leather belts may be worn.)

e. Learning Torah, since this is a joyful activity. It is permitted to learn texts relevant to Tisha B'Av and mourning – e.g. the Book of Lamentations, Book of Job, parts of Tractate Moed Katan, Gittin 56-58, Sanhedrin 104, Yerushalmi end of Ta'anis, and the Laws of Mourning. In-depth study should be avoided. (MB 554:4)

3. Other mourning practices include:

- a. Sitting no higher than a foot off the ground. After midday, one may sit on a chair. (OC 559:3)
- b. Not engaging in business or other distracting labors, unless it will result in a substantial loss. (OC 554:24)
- c. Refraining from greeting others or offering gifts. (OC 554:20)
- d. Avoiding idle chatter or leisure activities.

4. Following Tisha B'Av, all normal activities may be resumed, except for the following which are delayed until midday of the 10th of Av, because the burning of the Temple continued through the 10th of Av:

- a. Haircuts and washing clothes. (When Tisha B'Av falls out on Thursday, these are permitted immediately following Tisha B'Av, in honor of the coming Shabbat.)
- b. Bathing. (When Tisha B'Av falls out on Thursday, bathing is permitted on Friday morning.)
- c. Eating meat and wine.
- d. Music and swimming.

Prayer on Tisha B'Av

- 1. Lights in the synagogue are dimmed, candles are lit, and the curtain is removed from the Ark. The cantor leads the prayers in a low, mournful voice. This reminds us of the Divine Presence which departed from the Holy Temple.
- 2. The Book of Eicha (Lamentations), Jeremiah's poetic lament over the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple, is read both at night and during the day.
- 3. Following both the night and day service, special "Kinot" (elegies) are recited.

4. In the morning, the Torah portion of Deuteronomy 4:25-40 is read, containing the prophecy regarding Israel's future iniquity and exile. This is followed by the Haftarah from Jeremiah (8:13, 9:1-23) describing the desolation of Zion.

5. In the afternoon, Exodus 32:11-14 is read. This is followed by the Haftarah from Isaiah 55-56.

6. Since Tallis and Tefillin represent glory and decoration, they are not worn at Shacharit. Rather, they are worn at Mincha, as certain mourning restrictions are lifted.

7. Birkat Kohanim is said only at Mincha, not at Shacharit.

8. Prayers for comforting Zion and "Aneinu" are inserted into the Amidah prayer at Mincha.

9. Shortly after the fast is broken, it is customary to say Kiddush Lavana.

When Tisha B'Av Falls on Shabbat

Here is a brief overview of the special conditions that apply:

- 1. The fast is pushed off until Saturday night/Sunday.
- 2. All other prohibitions of Tisha B'Av (washing, learning Torah, leather shoes, etc.) are permitted on Shabbat itself, except for marital relations.
- 3. Seudah Shlishit has none of the restrictions of Seudah Hamaf-seket, and may include meat and wine. However, the mood should be somber, should not include invited guests, and eating must stop before sundown.
- 4. Ma'ariv on Saturday night is delayed, so that everyone can say "Boruch Hamavdil bein kodesh li'chol," then remove their leather shoes and come to synagogue.
- 5. Havdallah on Saturday night is recited only over a candle, without wine or spices. On Sunday night, Havdalah is then said over wine.