

# CEREMONY & CELEBRATION FAMILY EDITION

Based on the teachings and writings of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks זצ"ל



## THE THREE WEEKS & TISHA B'AV

### The Three Weeks in a Nutshell

The period known as the Three Weeks (also known in Hebrew as *Bein ha-Met-zarim* – “Between the Straits/days of distress”) is the saddest period in the Jewish calendar. Customs of mourning are observed during this time to commemorate the destruction of the First and Second Temples. This three-week period of mourning begins on the seventeenth day of Tammuz, with the fast of Shiva Asar B'Tammuz, and concludes on the ninth day of Av which is the fast of Tisha B'Av.

#### SHIVA ASAR B'TAMMUZ

On this day we commemorate the breach of the walls of Jerusalem before the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE. According to the Mishnah (Ta'anit 4:6) there were four other historical calamities that occurred on this day:

1. Moshe broke the Tablets of Stone upon descending Sinai and seeing the

Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf.

2. The daily *Tamid* offering ceased to be brought in the Temple (during the First Temple period).
3. An idol was erected inside the Temple (during the First Temple period).
4. Prior to the Bar Kochba revolt, the Roman military leader Apostomus burned a Sefer Torah.

Fasting on the 17th Tammuz begins at dawn and ends at nightfall.

#### LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF THE THREE WEEKS

Different communities have different customs of mourning during this period, including prohibitions on: haircuts and shaving; listening to live music; weddings and other celebrations; and the buying/wearing of new clothes. The intensity of mourning increases from 1st Av until





midday on the 10th Av (the period called the Nine Days), when in addition, no freshly laundered clothes may be worn, and meat and wine are not consumed (except on Shabbat). Many Sephardim only observe these extra stringencies from the Sunday before Tisha B'Av. The Three Weeks are also considered to be a time of misfortune, and therefore some are careful to avoid all dangerous situations including swimming, undergoing a major operation or engaging in a court case that could be postponed until after Tisha B'Av.

### TISHA B'AV

This is the saddest day in the Jewish calendar, when the destruction of both the First and Second Temples is commemorated. According to the Mishnah (Ta'anit 4:6) the following tragic events occurred on this day in Jewish history:

The twelve spies sent by Moshe to scout the Land of Israel returned, with ten of them bringing a damaging report that led to forty years of Bnei Yisrael wandering in the desert until the entire generation had died out.

1. The First Temple, built by King Shlomo, was destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE, and the population of the Kingdom of Judah was sent into exile.
2. The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, scattering the people of Judea and signifying the beginning of a two-thousand-year exile.
3. The subsequent defeat of the Bar Kochba revolt and destruction of the

city of Beitar, killing over 500,000 Jewish civilians in 135 CE.

4. Also in 135 CE, following the Bar Kochba revolt, Roman commander Turnus Rufus ploughed the site of the Temple and the surrounding area of Jerusalem.

The fast observed on Tisha B'Av begins at sundown at the end of 8th Av, and lasts for 25 hours until nightfall on the 9th Av. As well as all the customs of the Nine Days, Tisha B'Av shares the five prohibitions of Yom Kippur, which are:

1. No eating or drinking;
2. No washing or bathing;
3. No application of creams or oils;
4. No wearing of leather shoes;
5. No marital relations.

Additionally, there are several customs of mourning associated with Tisha B'Av. These include: the eating of a hardboiled egg dipped in ashes, and a piece of bread dipped into ashes, during the pre-fast *seuda mafseket* meal; refraining from studying Torah (apart from sad portions) until midday on 9th Av (because of the enjoyment it provides); the removal of the *parochet* (curtain of the Ark) and the dimming of the lights in the synagogue; and the sitting on low stools or on the floor, (as is done during *shiva*) until midday. Megillat Eichah (Lamentations) and special *kinnot* (sad poems) are read during the synagogue service, and the custom is to not put on *tefillin* or a *tallit* at the Shacharit morning services of Tisha B'Av, but rather at Minchah instead.

### Points to Ponder

**1** What do all the historical events that occurred on 17th of Tammuz and 9th of Av have in common?

**2** What do you think is the reason for all the laws and customs of the Three Weeks?

**3** Why do you think Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur share the same five prohibitions?

## The Three Weeks in Our Time

### REMEMBER THE PAST, BUT DO NOT BE HELD CAPTIVE BY IT

Judaism is a religion of memory. The verb *zachor* appears no fewer than 169 times in the Hebrew Bible. “Remember that you were strangers in Egypt”; “Remember the days of old”; “Remember the seventh day to keep it holy”. Memory, for Jews, is a religious obligation. This is particularly so at this time of the year. We call it the “Three Weeks” leading up to the saddest day in the Jewish calendar, Tisha B’Av, the anniversary of the destruction of the two Temples, the first by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon in 586 BCE, the second by Titus in 70 CE.

Jews never forgot those tragedies. To this day, at every wedding we break a glass in their memory. During the Three Weeks, we have no celebrations. On Tisha B’Av itself, we spend the day fasting and sitting on the floor or low stools like mourners, reading the Book of Lamentations. It is a day of profound collective grief.

Two and a half thousand years is a long time to remember. Often I am asked – usually in connection with the Holocaust – is it really right to remember? Should there not be a limit on grief? Are not most of the ethnic conflicts in the world fuelled by memories of perceived injustices long ago? Would not the world be more peaceable if once in a while we forgot? My answer is both yes and no, for it depends on how we remember.

Though the two are often confused, memory is different from history. History is someone else’s story. It’s about events

that occurred long ago to someone else. Memory is my story. It’s about where I come from and of what narrative I am a part. History answers the question, “What happened?” Memory answers the question, “Who, then, am I?” It is about identity and the connection between the generations.

In the case of collective memory, it all depends on how we tell the story. We don’t remember for the sake of revenge. “Do not hate the Egyptians,” said Moshe, “for you were strangers in their land.” To be free, you have to let go of hate. Remember the past, says Moshe, but do not be held captive by it. Turn it into a blessing, not a curse; a source of hope, not humiliation.

To this day, the Holocaust survivors I know spend their time sharing their memories with young people, not for the sake of revenge, but its opposite: to teach tolerance and the value of life. Mindful of the lessons of Genesis, we too try to remember for the future and for life.

In today’s fast-moving culture, we undervalue acts of remembering. Computer memories have grown, while ours have become foreshortened. Our children no longer memorise chunks of poetry. Their knowledge of history is often all too vague. Our sense of space has expanded. Our sense of time has shrunk.

That cannot be right. One of the greatest gifts we can give to our children is the knowledge of where we have come from, the things for which we fought, and why. None of the things we value – freedom, human dignity, justice – were achieved without a struggle. None can be sustained without conscious vigilance. A society without memory is like a journey without a map. It’s all too easy to get lost.

I, for one, cherish the richness of knowing that my life is a chapter in a book begun by my ancestors long ago, to which I will add my contribution before handing it on to my children. Life has meaning when it is part of a story, and the larger the story, the more our imaginative horizons grow. Besides, things remembered do not die. That’s as close as we get to immortality on earth.

An excerpt from an article first published by *The Times* (UK) in July 2004.

### Points to Ponder

- 1 What is the danger in obsessing about historical periods of grief?
- 2 Why then is it important to remember?
- 3 How can we learn this lesson from Holocaust survivors?



## Tisha B'Av in Our Time

### WE ARE THE PEOPLE THAT BUILD

The great Prophets of doom were also the supreme Prophets of hope. For example, let us look at Yeshayahu, whose words we say on Shabbat Chazon immediately prior to Tisha B'Av. He delivers a devastating critique of Jerusalem: "As you spread your hands out toward Me (in prayer) I will close My eyes", says God, "the more you pray the less I will listen." (Yeshayahu 1:15)

Yet in the very next chapter, Yeshayahu delivers some of the most famous words of hope, of vision, of peace, that the world has ever known. These same words are engraved opposite the United Nations building in New York: "Many nations will come and say 'let us ascend the mountain of the Lord' ... and the world will come... because the word of Torah will go forth from Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem... and they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation anymore, and they will no longer study warfare." (Yeshayahu 2:3-4)

Yeshayahu, of all the Prophets in the Bible, is the poet laureate of hope. So somehow the man who announced the doom of the city also announced the new age that would someday be greater in its blessings than the destruction.

Likewise Yirmiyahu gives us two of the three *haftarot* leading up to Tisha B'Av, and of all the Prophets he was the one who most vividly foresaw the terrible events that would soon happen. In chapter three of Eichah, he says 'I actually saw it, I didn't just foresee it the way other people did, I actually lived through it.'

But it was Yirmiyahu who also said in the name of God, "There is hope for your future." (See Yirmiyahu 31:16) And, 'Just as I threw Myself into destruction, I will take that same energy and use it to build and to plant.' (Yirmiyahu 31:27) And Yirmiyahu says something else in Chapter 31 that nobody else says in all of Tanach: "Thus says the Lord who gives the sun to give light by day and the moon and the stars by night...only if these things cease to be, will

the Children of Israel cease to be.' (Yirmiyahu 31:34-35) Yirmiyahu is the person who says the Jewish people will be the eternal people.

How is it that these supreme Prophets of doom also became supreme Prophets of hope? Because they relied on God's promise in *Parshat Bechukotai* that "even when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not so despise them as to destroy them, thus invalidating My covenant with them." (Vayikra 26:44) God says 'I will keep My promise. I will never let them be destroyed.' The Prophets had God's word, and that gave them hope.

We have here a unique phenomenon. The Jews gave to the world this idea of time as a narrative of hope, which meant that what is lost can be regained, what is destroyed can be rebuilt, and what disappears may one day return. Our Prophets were able to see beyond the horizon of history, so that where everyone else saw doom, they also saw the hope that lay just over that horizon, and they understood that there was a route from here to there. That really is a remarkable vision.

We are the people who gave the concept of hope to the world. We kept faith, we never gave up, and we honestly observed for 26 centuries without a single pause, the line in Tehillim 137, "I will never forget you, O Jerusalem". And because we never gave up hope, we finally came back to Jerusalem.

Hope rebuilds the ruins of Jerusalem. The Jewish people kept hope alive, and hope kept the Jewish people alive.



*The Jews gave to the world this idea of time as a narrative of hope, which meant that what is lost can be regained, what is destroyed can be rebuilt, and what disappears may one day return.*

### Points to Ponder

**1** How can we learn hope from the Prophets of doom?

**2** Wow have Jews taught the world the art of hope?

**3** Since we have the modern State of Israel, do you think we should still be mourning on Tisha B'Av?



## From the Thought of Rabbi Sacks

Jews are the people who refused to be comforted because they never gave up hope. Yaacov did eventually see Yosef again. Rachel's children did return to the land. Jerusalem is once again the Jewish home. All the evidence may suggest otherwise: it may seem to signify irretrievable loss, a decree of history that cannot be overturned, a fate that must be accepted. Jews never believed the evidence because they had something else to set against it – a faith, a trust, an unbreakable hope that proved stronger than historical inevitability. It is not too much to say that Jewish survival was sustained in that hope. And that hope came from a simple – or perhaps not so simple – phrase in the life of Yaacov. He refused to be comforted. And so – while we live in a world still scarred by violence, poverty and injustice – must we.

From “Refusing Comfort, Keeping Hope,” in *Covenant & Conversation: Genesis*, Vayeshev, p. 257.

**REFLECT:** How would Jewish history have been different if Jews had found comfort in their history instead of hope?

As at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, so here – at the two supreme moments of the Jewish year – we pray *Leshana haba'a biYerushalayim habenuya*, “Next year in Jerusalem rebuilt.” Nothing in the imaginative life of peoples throughout the world quite compares to the Jewish love for, and attachment to, Jerusalem. A Psalm records, in unforgettable words, the feelings of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia two and a half thousand years ago:



“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept as we remembered Zion... How can we sing the Lord's song on foreign soil? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.” (Tehillim, 137:1–6)

Wherever Jews were, they preserved the memory of Jerusalem. They prayed toward it. They spoke of it continually. At weddings they broke a glass in its memory. On Tisha B'Av they sat and mourned its destruction as if it were a recent tragedy. They longed for it with an everlasting love.

The French historian Chateaubriand, visiting Jerusalem in the early nineteenth century, was overcome with emotion as he saw for the first time the small Jewish community there, waiting patiently for Mashiach. “This people,” he wrote, “has seen Jerusalem destroyed seventeen times, yet there exists nothing in the world which can discourage it or prevent it from raising its eyes to Zion. He who beholds the Jews dispersed over the face of the earth, in keeping with the Word of God, lingers and marvels. But he will be struck with amazement, as at a miracle, who finds them still in Jerusalem and perceives even, who in law and justice are the masters of Judea, to exist as slaves and strangers in their own land; how despite all abuses they await the King who is to deliver them.” Noting how this “small nation” had survived while the great empires who sought its destruction had vanished, he added, “If there is anything among the nations of the world marked with the stamp of the miraculous, this, in our opinion, is that miracle.”

From *The Jonathan Sacks Haggada*, pp. 150–151.

**REFLECT:** How did Jews remember Jerusalem every day of their history, and what did this achieve?

ours is the only civilisation I know whose canonical texts are anthologies of argu-



Wherever Jews were, they preserved the memory of Jerusalem. They prayed toward it. They spoke of it continually.

ments. The Prophets argued with God; the Rabbis argued with one another. We are a people with strong views – it is part of who we are. Our ability to argue, our sheer diversity, culturally, religiously and in every other way, is not a weakness but a strength. However, when it causes us to split apart, it becomes terribly dangerous because whilst no empire on earth has ever been able to defeat us, we have, on occasions, been able to defeat ourselves.

It happened three times. The first was in the days of Yosef and his brothers when the Torah says, “They could no longer speak peaceably together.” The brothers sold Yosef as a slave and yet eventually they all, as well as their grandchildren, ended up in slavery. The second followed the completion of the First Temple. Shlomo HaMelech died, his son took over, and the kingdom split in two. That was the beginning of the end of both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms. The third was during the Roman siege of Jerusalem when the Jewish men and women besieged inside were more focused on fighting one another than the enemy outside. Those three splits within the Jewish people caused the three great exiles of the Jewish people.

How then do we contain that diversity within a single people, bound together in fate and in destiny? I think there are seven principles that can help:

1. Keep talking.
2. Listen to one another.
3. Work to understand those with whom you disagree.
4. Do not think in terms of victory or defeat. Think in terms of the good of the Jewish people.
5. If you seek respect, give respect.
6. You can disagree, but still care.
7. Remember that God chose us as a people.

God chose us as a people, and it is as a people that we stand before God and before the world. The Sages said a very striking thing. They said, “Great is peace, because even if Israel is worshipping idols, as long as there is peace among them, God will never allow harm to happen to them.” That is a powerful idea to reflect upon. So the next time you are tempted to walk away from some group of Jews that you think have offended you, make that extra effort, that gesture to stay together, to forgive, to listen, to try and unite. Because if God loves each of us, can we justify failing to strive to do this too?

*From Seven Principles for Maintaining Jewish Peoplehood.*

**REFLECT:** Why do Jews argue so much?  
How then have we kept united as one people?

## The Three Weeks for the Young (and Young at Heart!)

### It once happened on Tisha B'Av...

#### WHY THE TEMPLE WAS DESTROYED

The Talmud tells us that Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans because of the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. There once was a man who had a friend called Kamtza and an enemy named Bar Kamtza. He was planning a big party, so he gave his servant a list of all the people he wanted to invite, including his good friend Kamtza. The servant mistakenly delivered the invitation to Bar Kamtza instead.

When the host of the party saw that Bar Kamtza had arrived at his party he was

furious. In front of all the other guests he confronted him, asking “What are you doing here? We are enemies! Get out!” Bar Kamtza said to him, “I now realise you didn’t mean to invite me. But since I am already here, please don’t embarrass me by throwing me out. Let me stay and I will pay for whatever I eat.” But the host refused, and again insisted that he leave immediately. Bar Kamtza said “Let me stay and I will pay for half of the party!” But the host continued to demand that he leave his house. Bar Kamtza pleaded with him one more time, “Let me stay and I will pay for the entire party!” The host



refused again, and this time dragged him out onto the street.

Bar Kamtza could not forgive this harsh treatment. He thought to himself: The Sages were at the party too, and they didn't say a thing to the host about the way he spoke to me and humiliated me, so I can only assume they supported his actions. I am going to get my revenge on them and convince the Emperor they are rebelling against the Roman Empire.

He travelled to Rome and met with the Emperor where he told him that the Jews had rebelled against him. The Emperor asked him, "How do I know what you are telling me is the truth?" Bar Kamtza replied, "Let's set a test to see if I am right. Send them an animal offering to be brought in their Temple in honour of the government and see whether they will sacrifice it." The Emperor agreed and sent him off with a perfect three-year-old calf as an offering, but on the journey back to Jerusalem Bar Kamtza made a small cut on the calf's upper lip, knowing that this would render the animal invalid as an offering in the Temple. When Bar Kamtza brought the animal to the Temple, the Priests noticed the blemish and could not accept the calf.

When word got back to the Emperor, he was furious and this is how the war between the Jews and the Romans began,

ultimately leading to the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jews from Jerusalem.

*Based on Talmud Bavli, Gittin, 55a–b.*

### THE LEGEND OF NAPOLEON

A legend is told of Napoleon Bonaparte, the French Emperor in the early nineteenth century, who took a stroll through the streets of Paris with his advisors one Tisha B'Av during his reign. As his entourage passed a small synagogue they heard wailing and crying coming from within. Puzzled by the commotion, Napoleon sent an aide inside to inquire as to what had happened.

The aide returned after a few minutes and told Napoleon that the Temple of the Jews had been destroyed and they were in mourning over its loss.

Napoleon was outraged! "How can it be that I have no knowledge of this event? Where in the Empire did this occur? When did this befall the Jews of that community and who were the perpetrators?"

The aide responded, "Sir, the Temple was lost in Jerusalem on this date more than 1,700 years ago."

Napoleon stood in silence and shock for a moment, and then said, "A people who can mourn for Jerusalem so long will one day have it restored to them!"

### Points to Ponder

**1** According to this story from the Talmud, why was the Temple destroyed?

**2** How will it ever be rebuilt?

**3** What is the message of the legend of Napoleon and what can we learn from it?



## Educational Companion to the Questions

### THE THREE WEEKS IN A NUTSHELL

1. All these events were national calamities that significantly impacted the Jewish people. Some were more symbolic (e.g. the idol in the Temple, and the burning of a Sefer Torah) and some were tragic events that caused a catastrophic shift in Jewish history (e.g. the story of the twelve spies, or the destruction of the Temples). It is tempting to describe each event as a negative destructive force in Jewish history, and this is certainly how these were all experienced at the time. However, Jews also believe in God's involvement in our history, and His Divine plan, and with the hindsight of thousands of years of Jewish history we can see that these events led us to this point, today.
2. These laws are connected to the laws of mourning, designed to focus our thoughts and feelings towards our national sadness for what has been lost. They take the focus away from our individual concerns and joy, allowing us to focus on the bigger themes of national mourning.
3. Both of these days are deeply serious, and both encourage introspection. However, there are also significant differences between the two days. Yom Kippur is not a sad day, but rather one of prayer and personal reflection and growth. Tisha B'Av is the saddest day in the Jewish calendar, where we consider tragic events that have befallen the Jewish people. The prohibitions of these days are designed to help with the process of introspection and reflection by taking our focus away from our personal needs and desires (e.g. our appearance and physical needs) allowing us to focus on spiritual and national needs and growth.

### THE THREE WEEKS IN OUR TIME

1. One can become obsessed with the past, and the injustices that have occurred to our people. This can lead to a victim mentality, or to thoughts of revenge. Too much grief can be paralysing and prevent us from moving forward and fully living life. These are not healthy emotions or a positive outlook on life.
2. But on the other hand, remembering the past is vital to understanding national identity. Rabbi Sacks draws a distinction between *memory* and *history*. History happened long ago to someone else. Memory is my story. It's about where I come from and who I am. Remembering our national collective past connects us to previous generations and is critical to understanding who we are and what we hope our future to be.
3. The Holocaust survivors Rabbi Sacks met in his life taught him how experiences of tragedy and trauma can be used for healing. The survivors ensured that we remember their story by sharing their memories with young people, not for the sake of revenge, but to teach tolerance and the value of life,

to build a life for our people and for the world in which they hope to live in.

### TISHA B'AV IN OUR TIME

1. Although the biblical Prophets prophesied doom, they also predicted a future of hope, because they had faith that God would keep His promises and never abandon His people. So while they believed in their shared visions of destruction and catastrophe, they also reminded the people of a brighter future, and that, if we keep faith with God, this future can be achieved.
2. Jewish history is one of terrible trauma, enough to justify any nation giving up all hope. But the Jewish people never ceased to hope and dream of a brighter future, as promised by God through the Prophets. They never gave up their hope of returning to their land and rebuilding their nation there. The Jewish story is an inspiration to millions.
3. While we live in a generation that has been privileged to return to our land and rebuild there, the story is not complete. We are still fighting for our existence in Israel, and we have still not fulfilled our national destiny. The lessons of Tisha B'Av are as relevant today as they ever were, if not more so.

### IT ONCE HAPPENED ON TISHA B'AV...

1. The unnecessary hatred between two Jews, and perhaps more importantly the leadership of the time who turned a blind eye to it, led to this tragic, destructive end. Jewish society as described in the story of Bar Kamtza was not a society of unity. The people were unkind and acted in hatred. We often use this story to learn about *Sinat Chinam* (baseless hatred) and the Rabbis tell us that this was the underlying reason why we were punished with exile, and why the Temple was destroyed.
2. The antidote to *Sinat Chinam* is *Ahavat Chinam* (unconditional love) and if and when we achieve this as a nation, and spread this message to the world, we will be able usher in the messianic period, which will in turn bring a rebuilt Third Temple.
3. The message of this story is the impressive emotional connection that these (and all) Jews had to their history. So much so that they mourned the 1700th anniversary of the destruction of their Temple as if it had just happened. A nation that remembers its past as if it was recent history, experiences its national pain, and continues to yearn for a brighter future, will one day achieve that future. Our takeaway from this is the importance of remembering our past as if we are reliving and re-experiencing it, learning from our mistakes, and yet never giving up hope in our future.

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