

# Tisha B'av 2013

תשעה באב 5773

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Tisha B'av is not an easy or simple Jewish holy day to observe, practically, emotionally, and ideologically. Here, we've put together various resources to add to your and your community's Tisha B'av experience. We encourage you to find new meaning in your observance and, for many of you, take advantage of the fact that Tisha B'av falls on machaneh by using it as an educational tool for your and machaneh's benefit. Please let us know if there's any way we can help you with this.

Aleh v'hagshem,

The Mazkirut Artzit



*"We are called on to imagine and create a society in which we use our own past experiences of abuse as a compass for doing justice rather than reproducing patterns of domination and subordination."*

- Dr. Judith Plaskow, American Jewish World Service, 2011

→ Though she makes this statement in regards to Passover, how is this statement also applicable to Tisha B'av?

## Educational Resources

Selected from *The Lookstein Center 'Tisha B'av Resources and Activities'* by Daphna Ansel, found at [http://www.lookstein.org/resources/tisha\\_bav.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/resources/tisha_bav.htm)

## Vocabulary:

English Transliteration	Translation	Hebrew
<i>Tisha B'av</i>	Ninth day of the month of Av	תשעה באב (ט' באב)
<i>Yerushalayim</i>	Jerusalem	ירושלים
<i>Beit Hamikdash</i>	Holy Temple	בית המקדש
<i>Churban</i>	Destruction	חורבן
<i>Eicha</i>	The Book of Lamentations	איכה
<i>Kinnot</i>	Elegies	קינות
<i>Aveilut</i>	mourning	אבילות
<i>Bein Hametzarim</i>	Between the straits (period of three weeks preceding <i>Tisha B'av</i> )	בין המצרים
<i>Shloshet Hashavuot</i>	The Three Weeks	שלושת השבועות
<i>Tish'at Hayamim</i>	The Nine Days	תשעת הימים
<i>Bavel</i>	Babylonia	בבל
<i>Seudat Hamafseket</i>	Ending meal	סעודת המפסקת
<i>Sin'at Chinam</i>	Baseless hatred	שנאת חנם

## Educational Themes:

- baseless hatred vs. brotherly love (*ahavat chinam, sin'at chinam*)
- mourning
- anti-Semitism
- national tragedy and dealing with crises
- collective memory
- exile to redemption
- temple times
- identification with events that happened thousands of years ago
- social responsibility

### **Educational Resources, continued: Activities**

- ***Sin'at Chinam*** – Teach the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza (found in the Talmud, Gittin 56a). Read modern day scenarios of people not acting kindly towards others and have kids act out these scenarios. For older groups you can read and discuss the Kitty Genovese case (which can be found [here](#)). Discuss the ideas of kindness and social responsibility, which lack of, ultimately led to the destruction of the second temple.
- **Model Temple** – Challenge kids to build a model of the Beit Hamikdash, which can either be kept or destroyed.
- **“Yosl Rakover Talks to God”** – Divide students into groups and give each group a section of this text to discuss. Discuss Yosel’s reaction to the suffering the Jews experienced in the ghettos of Europe. What feelings are being expressed? Discuss theological questions that arise, attitudes towards God in times of suffering, questions about human nature, etc. Then have one representative from each group read the section to the entire group, in order, to experience the full impact of the text (full text can be found [here](#))
- **Corrupt society** – Bring in newspapers and magazines and have kids cut out headlines that correspond to reasons given by the Talmud for the temples being destroyed. Create a collage and discuss the idea that we still live in a corrupt society and that many of the societal problems that existed then, still exist today. Discuss changes we can make to eliminate these issues.
- **Distorted Image Game** – Have one kid draw a picture and then describe it to the group. Have them attempt to draw the picture based on the description given by the initial drawer. Compare their drawings to the original and discuss the idea of us having a removed and distorted image of what having a Beit Hamikdash was like. We don’t have the full picture, and it is hard for us to mourn for something that we haven’t personally experienced, but nonetheless we have to try our best to understand and identify with it.
- **Shrinking Island Game** – Kids walk around a large sheet or bunch of towels, and on the signal, they have to gather onto the sheet, which each time gets smaller, causing them to crowd together to all fit. Have them imagine what it would be like to live under these kinds of conditions, such as the way the Jews of Jerusalem lived during the time of the siege, or how the Jews of the ghettos lived, with minimal food and water and very little space.
- **Family Roots** – Have kids research their family history and create a short presentation for the group. On a large map of the world have each kid mark the places where their families came from. Discuss the dispersion of the Jews after the destruction of the Second Temple.

### **Another Jewish Camp’s Traditions and Perspective**

*Excerpt from ‘We Must Confront the Darkness of Tisha B’Av to Find its Meaning by Jane Ulman, found on <http://www.jewishfederations.org/page.aspx?id=68752>*

At Camp Ramah of California, located in the Ojai Valley north of Los Angeles, campers and staff gather together on Tisha B’Av eve in the outdoor synagogue, the area illuminated by dim candlelight. They sit on the ground as mourners and listen as Eicha is read.

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**“Another Jewish Camp’s Traditions and Perspective”** *continued from previous page*

Afterwards, before the campers leave for their tents, Rabbi Daniel Greyber, executive director of Camp Ramah of California and the Zimmer Conference Center, urges them not to speak to one another.

"I want to create an awareness for them of how we use words and the ways in which they're hurtful to one another. I want to bring alive what it feels like to hate each other so much that we can't even speak to one another and how destructive this was for the Jewish people."

That evening, staff members watch "Nine Days in November," an Israeli film depicting the years and months leading up to the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

"I believe that there's no time in modern Jewish history that better reflects the dangers of *sinat chinam*, senseless hatred, than that moment," Greyber says.

The following day, the mood progressively lightens. Campers engage in creative projects, such as painting murals of Jerusalem or acting in skits about hurtful speech. They talk about the importance of Israel.

"Tisha B'Av is not the most fun day in camp. The kids learn about some of the dark things that have happened to the Jewish people historically. But they walk away having grown as individuals, with a very deep message about what it means to be part of the Jewish people and to take responsibility for creating the Jewish community they want," Greyber says.

That is the message Tisha B'Av can teach all of us -- to take responsibility. And not only for the Jewish community.

"Tisha B'Av isn't just ancient history; it's also the awful, sad and gruesome reality for many people today. A lot of the horrible images that are depicted in Lamentations are actually happening in the world, in places like Sudan and Haiti," Brous says.

Tisha B'Av teaches us that survival and change are possible. The destruction of the Temple, horrific as it was, revolutionized Judaism, dispersing us in all directions and eventually transforming our communication with God from animal sacrifices and priestly rituals to prayer and good deeds. And we have been able to continue to survive.

We have turned the minor holiday of Chanukah into an extravaganza of light and celebration. Can we now turn the most tragic day in Jewish history into an experience of deep significance and transformation?

"Let there be light," God says in Genesis.

But let us also not forget the darkness.

**Framing our History** by Zoey Green

As Habonim Dror educators, we often talk about avoiding narratives of victimization that make people act out of fear instead of compassion. So then what do we do with a day that is dedicated to looking at all the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people?

Though I think it's a critical approach, I wonder if I and others in Habonim Dror sometimes jump too quickly to the 'learn from the mistakes of the past' viewpoint. While this allows us to look at the injustices of the past and motivate ourselves to shape our present world into one that is ruled by compassion rather than prejudice, it can also mean glossing over real stories of victimization. For some, a certain discomfort arises out of a sense that today Jewish communities, at least as experienced by many North American Jews, are not oppressed, but more often made up of people of privilege. Furthermore, whether in North America or Israel, many of us benefit significantly from systems of oppression and discrimination.

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## **Framing our History, continued from previous page**

The degree to which people see themselves or the Jewish people as passively implicated or active participants in oppression may differ, but the underlying issue is the same: it is not easy to spend a day thinking about how horrible we've had it in the past if our feeling is that we are agents of oppression in the present.

But what is at stake if we deny ourselves the ability to be compassionate for our own ancestors and for those Jews that still face discrimination, violence and oppression today? I believe Berl Katznelson addresses this question, at least in part, in this excerpt of "Our Historical Heritage:"

"...Historical man possesses two faculties – memory and forgetfulness. Were only memory to exist, then we would be crushed under its burden. We would become slaves to our memories, to our ancestors. Our physiognomy would then be mere copy of preceding generations. And were forgetfulness to have exclusive reign over us, would there then be place for culture, science, self-consciousness, spiritual life? Dark conservatism endeavors to deprive us of the faculty of forgetting and pseudo-revolutionism regards each remembrance of the past as its mortal enemy. But if humanity had not preserved the memory of its greatest achievements, noble aspirations, periods of bloom, heroic effort and striving for liberation, then no revolutionary movement would have been possible. The human race would have stagnated in eternal poverty, ignorance and slavery." – Berl Katznelson

We are not simply victims or oppressors. Nor are we allowed to simply remember or forget. Acknowledging the injustice of the past does not negate our responsibility to create a just society today. So how can we harness the educational potential of Tisha B'av to look earnestly at the painful moments in our history and see them not as a series of tragedies that should cause us to live in fear, but as a series of complex events that we can draw upon to understand our current realities and motivate us to work for a better world?

## ***Sinat Chinam* (Baseless hatred) and Jewish Peoplehood** by Elliot Shrinier-Cahn

One of the events that is marked by Tisha b'Av is the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. In the Babylonian Talmud the destruction of the Temple is attributed to *Sinat Chinam*, or baseless hatred (Yoma 9a-b). It is said that *Sinat Chinam* was pervasive within the Jewish community and those divisions the Jewish community were so extreme that it led to the destruction of the Temple by the Romans. Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel and an instrumental figure in the founding of the State, famously said that if *Sinat Chinam* caused the destruction of the Second Temple, then *Ahavat Chinam*, or baseless love, would cause the Temple to be rebuilt and unity amongst the Jewish people. I believe that the Jewish community is currently very far from that place, but also that each and every one of us has the ability to help bring more *Ahavat Chinam* into the community.

My last few times in Israel when I have seen *Haredi* Jews my mind often jumps to a place of "Us vs. Them." We follow Judaism in a way that is meaningful to us; they say we are not really Jewish. We believe in the right for women to observe Judaism as they see fit; they harass women trying to pray at the Western Wall. We wear shorts and a t-shirt when it gets hot out; they still dress like it's the middle of winter in Poland. I hate that this is where my minds jumps to, but it goes there naturally because most of the knowledge I have of *Haredi* Jews comes through negative stories I have heard or read. I have rarely interacted with them in person, which is a really huge part of the problem. I assume that for both the *Haredim* and for myself, our differences are too great for us to see the other one as a member of the same community. However, the more I think about it, the more I want the similarities to matter more than those differences.

When I was at the Limmud NY conference in February, I had the amazing opportunity to be in a pluralistic Jewish space for a whole weekend. While there were certainly difficulties for some people, such as schlepping up and down stairs for all of Shabbat for the more observant and refraining from using a cell phone in public places during Shabbat for the more secular, it was really incredible to see how positive a pluralistic space can actually be. I recognize that those Orthodox Jews who believe that Orthodox Judaism is the only acceptable form of Judaism were not present at the conference and pluralism that includes those types of Jews is significantly more complex. However, it was nice for me to be in a space where I saw Jews of many different levels of observance and feel like everyone there was part of the "Us" of the Jewish people, and that everyone there felt the same way about me. My hope is that we can find ways to communicate with Jews who have different backgrounds than we do and understand that rather than our differences creating *Sinat Chinam* and threatening the Jewish People once again, our commonalities as Jews should lead us to *Ahavat Chinam* and lead to a strong, unified, and diverse, Jewish People.

## Senseless Hatred

שיגאת חנים ול"ו הצדיקים

I have a special connection to Tisha B'Av: when I was 7 years old both of my father's parents passed away on this day. According to Jewish tradition only Tzaddikim pass away on Tisha B'Av. There is another tradition that at any one time for the world to continue to exist there needs to be 36 Tzaddikim in this world.

Now, I have no idea whether my late grandparents, Israel and Rachel Resnick, were Tzaddikim or not. They lived a very modest lifestyle, were very religious and slightly distant, probably because their English was not great and they came from a different world that has since been destroyed in Lithuania, but they clearly cared greatly about their family and about the Jewish People. When I once asked my grandfather why they never went to the theater, out for dinner (I did not think of Kashrut when I asked the question) or out to the cinema, he answered that he had no time because he was always busy in the evenings going to engagement parties (Irusin), Shiva or Sheva Brachot, so who had time to go out! The truth was of course that they were of another world with very different values.

Beyond the personal, Tisha B'Av is of course connected to disaster for the Jewish People. Traditionally it is the day connected to the destruction of both the First and Second Temples and many other Jewish tragedies (for example it was the last day by which Jews had to leave Spain in 1492) and therefore it is of course a day of mourning. Our enemies in modern times have used this day to add to our pain. Two examples of this are the beginning of the deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto to Teblinka and the bombing in Argentina of AMIA the Community Center of the Jewish Community by Iranian agents resulting in 86 deaths.

This leads to a fascinating educational dilemma which I have seen dealt with with varying degrees of success at our Machanot over the past three summers. The only Jewish Holiday we have to work with during our summers is one about destruction, hatred and enemies, all words which progressive people prefer not to deal with. If only it could have been Pesach or Purim (well, both of those have a complicated element too – God's behavior with the plagues is very dubious and the massacre at the end of the Purim story is not easy either) or even Sukkot or Shavuot our educational options would have been much greater.

What do we do in HDNA around the question of enemies? In my experience we run away from dealing with this issue as we cannot imagine the necessary response to those who wish to destroy us (yes, Chaverim there are those who wish to destroy us – and not because we build settlements). In the Torah we are given a way to deal with those who wish to destroy us: קם להורגו . Quite simply, get up earlier than your enemy and kill him before he has the chance. Not an idea which sits easily I am sure with any of us, the idea of pre-emptive violence, however, we have to ask ourselves, what is the alternative to this; to absorb the first blow? To wait until we are hurt and have others see us as victims before we respond? I would suggest that in the light of our history this is minimally a complicated conundrum for us.

Destruction: well, it makes for great arts and crafts, building temples and destroying them, but we try and build Jewish identity via positive moments in our History and via a strong connection to our values and culture.

And what about hatred? Senseless hatred is the special one we focus in on when we look at the destruction of the Second Temple and for us it is a pertinent one too. How do we create coalitions with those with whom we do not necessarily agree on many issues? I believe that the only way forward in our world is to be in conversation, in dialogue with those who disagree with us. It is too easy to dismiss those who do not agree with us as wrong, evil, racists. It is more complicated to accept that there are many ways to understand the world we live in.

These chaverim are the questions we need to deal with, all three of them not just one or two of them, to do good educational work on Tisha B'Av.

Shalom,

Julian

### **Fasting From a Functional Perspective: Recovering the benefits of denial** by Jay Michaelson

*Adapted from God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness, and Embodied Spiritual Practice.*

The practice of fasting evokes many of the worst associations with religion: asceticism, self denial, and fear of the body and its pleasures. Moreover, because most fasts in the Jewish tradition are associated with the destruction of the Temple (Yom Kippur being the most prominent exception), many liberal Jews see them as irrelevant or obsolete. Yet fasting has transformative potential, if we approach the practice from functional, rather than mythic, terms.

#### From Personal Rite to Communal Remembrance

Initially, this perspective was clearly the mainstream view in the Jewish tradition. The Bible generally regards fasting as a practice that works on the heart, usually as an individual expression of grief, prayer, or meditation. Yom Kippur is the most important of these spiritual fasts.

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## **Fasting From a Functional Perspective: Recovering the benefits of denial, continued from previous page**

But fasting also appears as a mourning rite ([II Samuel 1:12, 12:16-23](#)), as part of revelation or prophecy ([Exodus 34:28, I Samuel 28:20](#)), as preparation for an important event ([Judges 20:26, I Samuel 14:24](#)), and as part of petitionary prayer ([I Samuel 7:5-6, II Samuel 12](#)) or repentance ([Jonah 3:5, Jeremiah 36:9](#)). There is also evidence of a little-discussed discipline of women voluntarily fasting ([Numbers 30:14](#) and the apocryphal [Judith 8:6](#)), and many later examples of fasting as a preparation for visions ([Daniel 10:2-3](#), and several apocryphal books). And there are instances of fasting as, essentially, magic ([Judges 20:26, Joel 1:14, Jonah 3:5-10](#)). In all these contexts, fasting is regarded for what it does, not what it signifies or observes.

Later, however, the effects of fasts became secondary to their historical and social significance. In the "Zechariah fasts" that were later made part of Jewish law, that significance is the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

As Eliezer Diamond has shown in his book *Holy Men and Hunger Artists*, *talmudic rabbis often took up fasting as an ongoing discipline, but as Diamond also shows, mourning the destruction of the Temple was almost always provided as a rationale. Perhaps the Temple was but a pretext for an ascetic practice the rabbis wanted to take on; there is certainly evidence for that view, and fasting remains to this day a common practice among the pious.*

But today, if you look at a traditional Jewish explanation of "why we fast," this is what you'll learn about the fasts: not their effects but their historical "reasons." So, we are told, we fast on Tisha B'Av to commemorate the destruction of both the First (in 586 B.C.E.) and the Second (in 70 C.E.) Temples in Jerusalem. We fast on the 17th of Tammuz, three weeks earlier, to commemorate the breaking of the gates of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E.

### Effects Instead of Reasons

Now, however, these historical rationales often cause more harm than good. Personally, I have struggled for decades to connect in a meaningful way with the destruction of the two Temples. True, these catastrophes are the halakhic basis of all the public fast days except Yom Kippur. True, they were massive upheavals that caused widespread suffering and death. And, yes, the Temple was seen as the connecting point between heaven and earth; the earthly dwelling place of the divine presence; and the geographical, political, and spiritual center of the Jewish people. The tears of exile, from the Crusades to the Holocaust, all flow from the wound of its destruction.

But these reasons are also distant--chronologically, theologically, and above all emotionally. In fact, I have found the *effects of fasting on body, heart, mind, and spirit are far more powerful than the reason the fast may have been instituted by rabbis two thousand years ago.*

First, occasional fasting can be good for the body. It is a healthy way to "clean out the system" of toxins that have accumulated. There can be, at the end of a fast, a powerful sense of catharsis. Sometimes I feel like I've sweat out the garbage from the industrialized food I've been eating, and I've cried out the accumulated grime of the emotions I've been ignoring. It is a primal, embodied act, which makes as little sense as does love, passion, or beauty.

Second, on the emotional plane, fasts are like vacations from the pursuit of pleasure. Sometimes the appetites and desires of the physical body really can become our masters, rather than our servants; without getting carried away, it's useful to think about fasting as correctives at such times. As a lifestyle, denying ourselves the pleasures of the world is anti-spiritual and anti-Jewish: God lives in manifestation, and our souls are attuned to wonder. But as an occasional practice--such as the six days a year prescribed by *halakhah*--it's a welcome break.

It's as if I say: This day, I'm not worried about feeling good. In fact, I'm going to let myself not feel good. Supported by my community, I'm going to set aside these six days a year for reflection, introspection, even outright mourning. I don't flip a switch (one day happy, the next sad), but I do invite in whatever emotions might ordinarily be beneath my cognitive radar. The most profound effect of fasting, though, is on the level of the mind. For those who have difficulty meditating, I recommend fasting. Denying the body food reduces the amount of energy available to the brain, and so it becomes increasingly difficult, as the day wears on, to think in the usual, linear ways. You lose track of lists, you get frustrated trying to plan. All the routine activities of the thinking mind get disrupted, which is why it's such a waste to try to have a "normal" day during a fast.

Fasting is an opportunity: the momentum of thought decreases, and you become quite satisfied just to be here now. This, of course, is just what meditation does also: slow down the train of thought so that we can actually see the world (internal and external) more clearly. Fasting makes meditation easier; if meditation is like biking up a steep slope of thought, then meditating while fasting is like biking downhill.

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## **Fasting From a Functional Perspective: Recovering the benefits of denial, continued from previous page**

Try it for yourself: sit for 45 minutes toward the end of a fast day, and see how much easier it is, as the quantity and intensity of distracting thoughts markedly diminishes.

It's no wonder, then, that fasting has been part of contemplative, prophetic, and even magical practices from the Bible to the present day. It's not that the altered state *is enlightenment or devekut*. Rather, *in a concentrated mindstate (known in Sanskrit as samadhi), it's easier to see what you're looking for. None of this is magic; it's simple, and biological. But as long as these provisos are borne in mind, fasting and samadhi can show you the way. Thus fasting leads even to the fourth plane of reality, atzilut (emanation), not because the concentrated mind is itself the ultimate reality, but because, in a concentrated state, the mind can visit territories otherwise beyond our ken.*

### Finding Meaning in Traditional Fasts

Why, then, fast on these six days, rather than whenever the inspiration is present? First, I draw strength from the knowledge that hundreds of thousands of people are also fasting on this communal day--even if my reading of the day's significance is different from theirs. Jews have never agreed on why we do anything; we have four New Year's, and three names for the Passover holiday. Yet community is built by doing.

Second, and related, is the aspect of humility in spiritual practice. Every year, I learn from the tradition, even if my relationship to it is no longer as orthodox as it once was. Perhaps I'll explore the social meaning of fasting--what depriving the body might have meant in a culture where food was not taken for granted. Or I'll ponder what it means that ignoring the needs of the body is, itself, a sign of mourning. Every year, there is something new.

Finally, I approach the five Temple-related fast days in the spirit of spiritual practice, and practice requires form. If we only do something when we feel like doing it, it isn't a practice. If you get up after ten minutes of meditation because you're not feeling like meditating, then, in a way, you're never meditating. The container is meant to be fixed, so that whatever transpires inside it can be as fluid, and open, as possible.

So I fast when the fast days fall. Sometimes, there is a wonderful congruence between observance and life. Other times, as when I recently observed Tisha B'Av while traveling through Norway, there isn't. Allowing the fast to proceed, whatever its shape, allows its effects to be seen in a variety of shapes and colors. It takes religion beyond the ego.

Admittedly, this functional orientation is rarely found today. Orthodox Jews fast because it is part of the halakic system and has the mythic-historical basis. And most non-Orthodox Jews reject fasting for the same reasons. It does also take work; it's not as enjoyable as dancing on Friday nights. But it would be a shame to lose this universal, embodied spiritual practice simply because rationales for it have been lost.

Often I am "led" by fasts to places which are achingly beautiful. I find myself more loving, more accepting, more grateful. Sometimes I'm overwhelmed with humility, as I see how much the "I" that I'm so proud of is dependent on daily nourishment. Just one skipped meal, and look what happens to this supposedly self-sufficient ego!

Usually we encounter the fragility of life in tragic circumstances, but fasting provides us a similar experiential insight in a safer, quieter way. As Isaiah famously says, fasting without heart is no guarantee of piety. But with intention and attention, it can lead to precisely the compassion the prophet demands.

### **About Youth, Eating Disorders, and Fasting:**

*The rabbis involved in the discussion [should someone who is suffering from or in recovery from anorexia be required to fast] agreed that pikuach nefesh (the saving of a life) always comes first. In other words, if fasting (or observing any other halakic commandment) will place a person's life in danger, the safety of the individual must be prioritized, even if it means forgoing an aspect of observance.*

*Fasting is used as a tool for temporarily afflicting our souls for the purpose of the holy day, but in the case of someone striving to overcome an eating disorder, using food in this manner is not a good idea. The 25 hour fast has the potential to bring up hurtful sentiments or even trigger a relapse. Hence, the rabbis [conclude] that it [is] better for such an individual to focus on other aspects of the holiday, such as rituals...and the liturgy. One rabbi suggested that by eating regularly and taking extra care of oneself, anorexics can perform a unique form of teshuva (repentance) by taking care of the body they once neglected.*

For any youth, the decision to fast must be taken seriously. Even if it's not a matter of life or death, there exists social pressures that surrounds weight and control that play into the reasons why youth (*chanichim*) might fast. Beyond that, there is also the pressure to be 'cool' and adults (*madrichim*) should be very mindful of how they are talking about the holy day or presenting it to their *chanichim*. Here, we do not intend to condemn the ritual itself, but acknowledge that we need to think holistically about how to integrate our Jewish ritual into our lives/*machaneh* in a way that always puts health and safety at the forefront.

→What are different ways of integrating traditional Jewish Tisha B'av rituals into the day in a safe and meaningful way?

I just wanted to mention that today is Tisha B'Av- the day that as a Jewish people, we mourn the tragic and painful events that befell us over the course of 2000 years of exile. When the Romans destroyed the Second Temple and later crushed the Bar Kochba rebellion, they exiled Jews from Jerusalem and outlawed all aspects of Jewish communal practices, in order to erase Judaism and prevent a situation of Jews becoming strong and attempting to once again regain sovereignty in Jerusalem - as this would threaten their rule. The Romans enacted this so cruelly, that the Rabbis and Jewish leaders changed what it means to be Jewish by reframing Judaism as a religion based on rites and prayers that almost all include longing for the messiah to come redeem us and bring us back to Jerusalem. As Jews, we were not going to be able to reestablish a sovereign kingdom of Judah with the Temple at its center, since this would be too dangerous and would inflict too much hardship by the Romans - instead, we were doomed to dispersion and persecution amongst nations that would tolerate us for a while but would never fully embrace us. Our sense of hope would be maintained through a belief in redemption by the mashiach.

Tisha B' av is a commemoration of all of the tragedies that occurred to us as a nation in exile, meaning a nation lacking both a physical and a spiritual center to unite us. All subsequent tragedies that befell us following the destruction of the Temple, everywhere in the world and over centuries, are grouped with this primary sense of loss of our freedom to self-govern, our lack of ability to have fully Jewish lives that integrate religious and civil elements, and our lack of ability to build structures that could be of service to our beliefs and ideals.

Zionism came to change all that - to reinvigorate our people with a sense that we can be our own agents for change - we can accept the challenges and moral dilemmas of sovereignty, in order to build a modern State where we can live our Jewish values and live Jewish lives in terms of our culture, our language, and our full being - not just as a series of rites and prayers.

This is why I see the current struggle for social justice in Israel as a Zionist struggle - since we are putting everything we can into demanding that the State of Israel be a moral and just State for all its citizens, and a physical and spiritual place which Jews around the world can feel connected to and responsible for.

Sovereignty isn't easy - it demands setting budgetary priorities, fighting in wars sometimes, struggling to ensure democracy, setting laws and training a police force that can enforce them - this is why many early Zionist thinkers preferred to stay under the British Mandate, so that we could keep the moral high ground as Jews, deal only in education and culture and not have to face all the challenges of sovereignty. However, it is only through having full responsibility over all aspects of statehood that we can fully apply Jewish values to all aspects of life.

The social justice struggle in Israel today, and the reason we choose to be involved as a movement, is about a choice to demand that the Jewish State truly embody Jewish values and to live up to the dreams and expectations that Herzl, Katznelson, Syrkin, etc. had for us and our nation.

And I think that Tisha B'Av is a good reminder of the alternative.

The tent protesters in Israel are also choosing to commemorate this day.

Aleh V'Hagshem,

Sarah Michaels Levy

*Bogeret of Habonim Dror North America, English Desk of Habonim Dror Olami*