

OLAMI MENTORSHIP



TISHA B'AV UNPACKED

WEDNESDAY NIGHT, JULY 22 THROUGH THURSDAY NIGHT, JULY 23

INTRODUCTION

Jewish life is built around joy. From our holidays to our daily blessings, we emphasize gratitude, celebration, and hope for the future. Yet Jewish history carries chapters that are difficult, even painful. For three weeks each summer, without losing our focus on the positive, we take time to reflect on the loss, the tragedy, the persecution, and the strange, recurring antisemitism that has followed our people across centuries and continents. This is not dwelling on the past. It is understanding our history, because that history, painful chapters and all, is part of our story as a people.

One of the central themes of Tisha B'Av is mourning the destruction of the First and Second Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temples). It is difficult for us to appreciate what was lost because none of us has ever experienced life with the Beit HaMikdash. The Beit HaMikdash was far more than a magnificent building. It was the spiritual heart of the Jewish people, uniting Jews from every tribe, background, and perspective around a shared connection to God and a common sense of purpose. Those who visited experienced a powerful awareness of God's presence that inspired them to become better people. The very existence of the Beit HaMikdash elevated the entire nation, encouraging greater kindness, stronger unity, deeper faith, and a society guided by Torah values. Today, without the Beit HaMikdash, it is difficult to imagine just how transformative that reality was. Yet Jewish tradition teaches that many of the divisions, confusion, and spiritual struggles we experience today are, in part, a consequence of its absence. The rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash is not merely about restoring a building. It is about restoring the spiritual center that has the power to unite and elevate the Jewish people once again.

THE THREE WEEKS AND THE NINE DAYS

The mourning period builds gradually, in stages, over three weeks. It starts on the seventeenth of Tammuz, a fast day marking the moment Jerusalem's walls were first breached before the Second Temple fell. From that point, we do not make weddings, listen to music, and haircuts and shaving are typically avoided.



Once the month of Av begins, nine days before Tisha B'Av, the mourning intensifies. Meat and wine are set aside except for Shabbat, new and fresh clothing is not worn, new purchases are held off, and swimming or bathing for pleasure is paused. Each stage adds a little more weight, building toward the day itself.

TISHA B'AV

Tisha B'Av is a 25 hour fast, without food or drink from sunset to nightfall the next day. Along with the fast, a few other comforts are set aside for the day: washing or bathing, applying lotions, and wearing leather shoes are all avoided.

The tone of the day matches the history behind it. In the evening, the Book of Eichah/Lamentations is read aloud, it is a firsthand account of Jerusalem's destruction. We sit on low stools, the way a mourner would in the first days after losing someone close. The following day includes Kinnos, elegies of mourning, recalling not only the Temple's destruction but later tragedies as well, including the Crusades and the Holocaust.



A PATTERN ACROSS HISTORY

Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, is when all of this comes together. According to Jewish tradition, that's not a coincidence. Some of the darkest moments in Jewish history all happened on this exact same date.

The Spies (roughly 1300 BCE). Soon after the Exodus from Egypt, Moshe sent twelve scouts to explore the land of Canaan. Ten came back and convinced the nation the land could not be conquered. The people panicked and cried through the night in despair. That night was the ninth of Av. The Almighty's response was that this date would become a real day of mourning for generations to come.

Destruction of the First Temple (423 BCE). Built by King Solomon, the First Temple stood in Jerusalem for over three centuries before the Babylonian empire destroyed it on Tisha B'Av, exiling the Jewish people to Babylon.

Destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE). Rebuilt after the Babylonian exile ended, the Second Temple stood for roughly four hundred years until Rome destroyed it, again on Tisha B'Av. The exile that followed has, in many ways, never fully ended.

The Fall of Beitar (135 CE). Decades later, a rebellion against Rome led by Bar Kochva made its last stand in the fortress city of Beitar. It fell on Tisha B'Av, and the Roman forces killed its residents in devastating numbers, ending organized Jewish resistance to Rome for good.

The Expulsion from Spain (1492). Over a thousand years later, Spain's final deadline for Jews to leave the country after centuries of life there fell on Tisha B'Av.

World War One (1914). The outbreak of the war that helped set the stage for the Holocaust a generation later is tied to this day on the calendar, one more entry in a long pattern.

CLOSING THOUGHT

Our tradition offers a reason behind these losses, and it is not a comfortable one. The First Temple, our sages teach, was destroyed because the Jewish people had fallen into idol worship, immorality, and bloodshed. The Second Temple, by contrast, was destroyed at a time when the Jewish people were largely observant and devoted to Torah study. What brought it down instead was *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred between Jew and Jew.

This distinction matters, because it points forward as much as it points back. Our sages teach that the path to rebuilding, to meriting a Third Temple, runs through correcting exactly these failures: turning away from the kind of moral and spiritual corruption that brought down the First Temple, and replacing the baseless hatred that brought down the Second with its opposite, *ahavat chinam*, baseless love between one Jew and another. **Tisha B'Av asks us to feel the weight of what was lost. But it also hands us the blueprint for what it will take to see it rebuilt, one that depends less on history and more on how we treat the person standing next to us today.**



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