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*guide*  
to

# TISHA B'AV



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Learning And Leadership

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Reprinted August 1984

# I. Triumph and Tragedy

Much of Jewish tradition and the Jewish religious calendar is an attempt to live in the light of certain great events of our history. Judaism is a religion of redemption promising a final perfection of humankind. Its condition and the primary event model is the Exodus (celebrated on Pesach, Sukkot, Shabbat, Shavuot). The Exodus reveals God's love and saving hand as well as the promise of redemption for humankind in history. We reenact and retell the events on these days so that we experience them, internalize them and live by them. Our trust and hope in ultimate freedom flow naturally from the confidence born of being familiar with and living through the liturgical reenactment of these events.

For this very reason, great historical defeats and catastrophes are crises of faith for Judaism. When evil triumphs, the whole model of trust in final perfection is challenged. Perhaps there will be no ultimate victory and Jewish hope is only illusion. Judaism insisted that the final test of its truth is that this world will be perfected. We can live in a flawed world and work toward its perfection while sustained by our faith. But sooner or later there must be an actual perfection or all our testimony is empty. Decisive defeats throw all this into question. Therefore, despite its optimism and trust, Judaism has been unable to ignore catastrophe. It has had to test its faith, clarify it, reformulate it after every major defeat so that it could once again credibly testify: There is a God, there will be redemption, hope is not lost. The Jewish enterprise - of testimony, modeling and working toward universal liberation is still valid and even more necessary.

Every major Jewish catastrophe has led to falling away as some Jews lose hope - and to revival as other Jews overcome. The record of this struggle is found in the days of mourning of the Jewish calendar. These days are the record of defeats that, thanks to Jewish persistence and eternity, were not final after all. They remind Jews of their unfinished business - that no matter how well off they are, the world is still unredeemed. The days of mourning are incorporated into the religion to strengthen the credibility of Jewish affirmation. The days of mourning remind us that Jewish affirmations are not Pollyanna statements based on an easy fortunate life, untempered by hard reality, but rather are made in the face of tragedy - overcoming defeat much like the Kaddish prayer affirms life as a reaction to the pain of death.

Further, the Jewish tradition asserted that the hope of faith and the joy of living with God does not blot out the reality of tragedy in our time. Even

righteous people suffer defeats and must cope with them. Until a total and final redemption occurs, the awareness of defeat and destruction must be incorporated into any faith or way of life, thereby becoming a learning experience. The paramount expression of this awareness reflected both in Jewish life and in the religious calendar, is in the four historical fast days-- (Tisha B'Av, Shiva Assar B'Tammuz, Assara Betevet and Tzom Gedalia). On these days we relive the destruction of the first and second Temples as well as loss of Jewish sovereignty. [It is interesting, in light of the role food plays in Jewish culture, that intense guilt is expressed by giving up food!]

There are other kinds of fast days in Jewish tradition - fasts of repentance such as Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and the medieval B'Ha'B (Monday-Thursday-Monday fast days after the months of Nissan and Tishrei) and fasts of deliverance such as praying for rain when there is drought in Israel or asking for help when enemies invade.

The mood of Talmudic and especially medieval Jewish culture was to expand such days. The mood of Chassidic and modern Jewish culture has been to reduce them. Even so, the primary historical fast days retain a significant role in the theology and practice of the Jewish people.

Maimonides stresses the repentance function of these fast days "... in order to stir the hearts to open to the ways of repentance...to remind us of our evil deeds and those of our ancestors that caused ...these bad events, that by remembering these things we will turn and do good..." After the Holocaust it is impossible to accept punishment for sins as the explanation of suffering; it is easier to mark these days as calls to action and repentance. But, historically, these days have spurred Jews' longing to return to Zion and to greater Jewish commitment.

The dominant purpose of the fasts is to reenact past tragedies by reliving them. By remembering and by understanding these sorrows, by renewed affirmation and action, these setbacks are overcome. The major religious behavior model in these days is that of mourning. Expressions of grief purge the emotion and free us to go on to a new life. By reenactment, the Jewish people identifies with the suffering of its forebears. The memory of the martyrs is kept alive and their sacrifice gains meaning. By experiencing the tragedy afresh each year, one can never become reconciled to either the destruction of the Temple or to the exile from Israel. The tragedy has 'just occurred' and the shock is still fresh. We taste the dregs of defeat and suffering even as we experience success and peace. Thus we become more sensitive to those who still suffer and who need help. After commemorating these days, we go on.

By commemorating these tragic events, we anticipate redemption and the Messiah. We still integrate these catastrophes into the larger cycle of hope and victory to affirm our ongoing faith in God's plan and in history's goal of redemption. Destruction and tragedy are not final but can be overcome.

This is the Messianic spirit and the secret of Jewish survival. This people was overthrown many times but has rebuilt on top of the ruins and lived on. By reliving tragedies, it never forgot destruction or the taste of ashes. Now, the hope that Jews can avoid becoming drunk with the power of sovereignty and evolving into unfeeling conquerors lies in the retention of the memory and the feel of being victims and losers in the past.

## II. Remembering Defeat

The four Historical Fast Days in the Jewish Calendar are:

The 10th day of the 10th month (Assara B'Tevet)

The 17th day of the 4th month (Shiva Assar B'Tammuz)

The 9th day of the 5th month (Tisha B'Av)

The 3rd day of the 7th month (Tzom Gedalia)

The First Commonwealth of Israel (Judea) came to a final end in 586 B.C.E. when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, crushed the Judean revolt and exiled all but a handful of survivors.

On the tenth day of Tevet, the final siege of Jerusalem began.

On the ninth day of Tammuz, the wall was breached.

On the ninth day of Av, the first Temple was destroyed.

On the third day of Tishrei, Gedalia, the Governor of the remaining Jews in Jerusalem, was assassinated by an adventurer named Ishmael Ben Netaniah, and the Jews fled from Israel.

So shattering was the end of Jewish sovereignty and the loss of the Temple that all four days were established as fast days for mourning.

The Second Commonwealth came to its end in 70 C.E. when the Jewish revolt against Rome was overwhelmed, Jerusalem captured, and the Temple destroyed. (The zealots on Massada held out for three more years). On the 17th day of Tammuz, the wall of Jerusalem was breached and on the 9th day of Av the Second Temple was destroyed.

Although the dimensions and scope of the Second Temple and Commonwealth were not as large as the first, the destruction of the second was considered even more profound a tragedy. The exile following the loss of the Second Commonwealth was much longer and more total. Many more Jews (possibly over a million) were killed in the Roman wars and the redirection of Judaism and the historical developments that followed the Second Destruction were more decisive in the unfolding of Judaism. Therefore, the Rabbis chose to commemorate the 17th of Tammuz (the breach of the wall in the second Destruction) rather than the 9th of Tammuz. The choice of the ninth of Av as the major commemoration of these tragedies may reflect still another historical event. Since most of the burning of the Second Temple took place on the tenth day (though it was set afire on the ninth) Rabbi Yochanan states that he would have preferred the tenth of Av as the primary mourning date. However, the Rabbis and the folk acted in response to yet another major tragedy: the Bar Kochbah rebellion of 132-135 C.E. which was the second desperate effort to regain Jewish independence. The City of Betar, the final major stronghold of the revolt, was captured after initial victories and the short-lived Jewish sovereignty in Israel ended in 135.

Bar Kochbah and thousands of his soldiers died in the siege. Since Rabbi Akiba himself had hailed Bar Kochbah as the Messiah, and the Diaspora had sent strong support (much more so than for the 66-70 war) one can understand the utterly devastating impact of this defeat. Maimonides says that this tragedy was as great as the destruction of the Temple. This loss confirmed Diaspora existence as the fate of most Jews, and was not overcome until 1948, more than 1800 years later.

In light of Betar's fall, the ninth of Av was set as the commemoration day for all three destructions. As time went on and the memories of Jewish temporal sovereignty faded, the Temples and their spiritual realities became the focal point of Jewish culture and religion. In sum, the fixing of the 9th of Av as a major fast day, teaches us that the Rabbis fixed the religious calendar of the past to reflect the living experience of their own generation. As we shall see, how to do this is the primary issue in the present conflict over commemorating the Holocaust through its own day (Yom HaShoah) or through Tisha B'Av.

Jewish legend and tradition added more tragedies to these days. On Shiva Assar B'Tammuz (the 17th day of Tammuz) Moses broke the first set of tablets,

(see Exodus 34) the daily sacrifices in the first Temple ended due to the siege, and Apostomus, a first century Roman governor, burned the Torah after placing an idolatrous statue in the Temple.

On Tisha B'Av, the Jews of the Exodus generation were condemned to die in the desert. (See Numbers 14:35) On the same date in 136 C.E. Tineius Rufus, the Roman procurator, plowed up the Temple area as a sign of its final destruction.

History has treated the Jews cruelly on this day. Tradition lists the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and other tragedies as occurring on this day. The book of Kinot (mourning prayers) recited on Tisha B'Av includes references to communities destroyed during the Crusades, to the burning of the Talmud in Paris in 1242 and other similar events. The deportation from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka in 1942 started on Tisha B'Av. Because of the central nature of the defeats that occurred on Tisha B'Av, it is the most total fast day in the traditional Jewish calendar other than Yom Kippur.

On the other three fast days, the fast begins at dawn, whereas on Tisha B'Av it begins on the previous night (at sundown). On Tisha B'Av, as on Yom Kippur, traditional Jews refrain from washing, anointing the body, having sexual relations, and from wearing regular leather shoes. On the three fast days mentioned above, these activities are permitted. Pregnant or nursing women and sick people are excluded from these proscriptions, whereas on Tisha B'Av they normally are not. However, all four days, if they occur on the Sabbath are postponed to after the Sabbath. Yom Kippur is not postponed in such a case, for its prohibitions are not expressive of mourning but part of the total dedication of the day to existence, trial and forgiveness before God. Since mourning and deprivation are not appropriate for the Sabbath, which is a day of joyous celebration, these four days are carried over to Sunday.

### **III. Tisha B'av (Ninth Day of Av): The Reenactment**

In classic Jewish style, the fundamental model of Tisha B'Av is a reenactment of the tragic event. The process culminates in deep mourning as if we had lost immediate members of our family.

In the case of death in the family (Avelut Chadasha - fresh grief), the shock of death sets in motion the loss and mourning which follow. In the case of reliving historical tragedy, we know how it will end even at the start, thus the sense of grief and doom builds up before the actual day

arrives. The day of destruction is a culmination of the grief, but immediately thereafter the psychological balance shifts to renewing life. There is nothing we can do anymore to prevent the event from happening, now we must live on and overcome.

The calendar builds up to the day of Tisha B'Av (9 Av) as we psychologically reenact the rising crescendo of destruction. The Talmud and later texts reflect the process whereby the Shiva Assar B'Tammuz- Tisha B'Av period was bridged by a series of expansions of mourning or sorrow rituals. Shiva Assar B'Tammuz and Tisha B'Av as fast days antedate the Talmud, but the three weeks between them are not given special mourning rituals until the Talmud. In other words, the area and intensity of grief and mourning were expanded as Jewish suffering in history unfolded.

At present, the ritual of sorrow is dramatized as follows:

Step 1:

On Shiva Assar B'Tammuz (17 Tammuz) - we fast. The siege has begun and we feel the shock of the forthcoming destruction intensely. Then we settle down to the siege.

Step 2:

The siege is reenacted during the three weeks between the two terminal days (17 Tammuz - 9 Av). While the city of Jerusalem is gradually reduced we intensify our grief and anxiety. During this period weddings are prohibited because joy or marriage is incompatible with the mood of grief. Engagements are permitted - for fear that by postponement, they may be lost. However, engagement parties are given up from Rosh Chodesh (1 Av) through Tisha B'Av (9 Av).

There are other grief rituals during the three weeks: no haircuts (in ancient times letting hair grow long was a sign of mourning) and no acts that would inspire a blessing of Shehechyanu (the blessing for something new and joyful) such as buying of new clothes, a new home, a new car, eating of a new fruit for the first time in the year. (If the fruit will no longer be available after Tisha B'Av, we waive this restriction on Shabbat because on the Sabbath our fantasy of a perfect world still operates a bit.)

Throughout the three weeks, we read prophetic portions which proclaim Israel's sin and the forthcoming destruction. The last of these is "Chazon Yeshayahu", the Vision of Isaiah (Isaiah, Ch. 1). It is a devastating critique of the sin and corruption of Israel. In anticipation of sorrow, it is sung in the melody of Eikha the Lamentations of Tisha B'Av.



### Step 3:

In the last 'Nine Days', i.e. from the beginning of the month of Av, the grief intensifies. A Jewish folk saying was - "When Av begins, we cut back joy". Home construction or painting is held off (with destruction and exile imminent who would build or improve his home?) Other grief rituals are invoked. Eating meat and drinking wine - characteristic of festive meals - is omitted for this period. Interestingly these are also rituals of an onen (i.e. one who has lost an immediate family member but has not yet buried him). It is as if we know the Temple is doomed, but have not yet reached the full acceptance symbolized by the act of burial. Incidentally, Seudot Mitzvah (feasts of special merit occasions, reflecting renewed life and vigor) such as circumcision, pidyon haben (redemption of first born), completing a Talmudic tractate etc. override this mourning, as does the Sabbath. Their intrinsic joy override the sense of grief. Laundering and dry cleaning of clothes are postponed. Fresh new clothes are a source of pleasure and joy, the kind of self pampering we give up when we are in mourning. (Diapers and such clothes as are needed daily are exempted). In the same spirit, total bathing is given up except for Shabbat, hence no swimming according to the Orthodox tradition. In the initial Talmudic phase, the most intense mourning rituals were observed during the week in which Tisha B'Av itself occurred. Over the years, however, the nine days have become a unit as far as mourning is concerned.

### Step 4:

The approach of the disaster is particularly felt on the day before Tisha B'Av. The last meal before the fast - the Seudah Mafseket (the meal that separates eating from fasting) is highly restricted. We already feel the grief of the survivor or the loss of appetite felt by a war captive. Since we want to be able to fast well, lunch is generally a heavy meal, but in the late afternoon, we eat a simple meal, no multi-courses. The main course should consist of one, not two or more foods; no meat or wines of course. People even eat separately to avoid the festive aspect of a 'mezumen' (a trio for Grace). Some eat eggs and/or beans (the food of mourners because their circularity evokes the idea of the wheel of fate and of silent mourning). Some eat only bread and water. Some even dip a piece of bread in ashes before eating to fulfill in their own taste, the terrible description in Lamentation 3:16, "He has broken my teeth with rubble and made me wallow in ashes". Shoes are exchanged for sneakers or sandals before sundown (unless this day is Sabbath).

### Step 5:

For the approximate twenty-four hours of Tisha B'Av, we are in total grief. The symbolism draws on the ritual of a mourner sitting shiva.

Through reenactment we experience being a captive or perhaps an overwhelmed defender of Jerusalem. Thus, traditional Jews neither eat nor drink; do not wash or anoint themselves; have no sexual relations and give up the luxury of leather shoes. Necessary washing - as against washing for pleasure - is permitted. On Tisha B'Av (but not Yom Kippur) necessary but not cosmetic anointing is permitted. In effect, the result is looking and feeling like war refugees in a particularly disorganized time of the war or in defeat. We also retell the story vividly by reading the book of Lamentations. Unshaven, unwashed, hungry, we re-experience the tragedy of our people and relive it as if it is happening to ourselves...

## IV. The Liturgy of Tisha B'av

At the night service of Tisha B'Av, the ark curtain is removed. This suggests that on this event, there was a "Hester Panim", (literally the hiding of God's face). In disaster, we experience "the eclipse of God" and live in a void and empty universe. It is as if The Divine Presence had abandoned the physical Temple. Only an empty building remained; there was nothing to be covered and destruction followed. The synagogue is kept in semi-darkness cp. "He has made me dwell in darkness" (Lamentations 3:6). After Maariv, the Book of Lamentations is read followed by a few kinot (mourning prayers).

In some synagogues, the book is read by the light of candles. At night and in the morning, it is customary to sit on the floor, on hard benches or on seats placed on their side so that discomfort is felt. The effect of gloom so created is stunning.

The Book of Lamentations is read softly at first. The volume of the reader's voice builds up to the climax of the last sentence which is sung aloud by the entire congregation. "Turn us to you, O Lord, and we will return. Renew our days as of old." This is our response to the tragic event.

The Kaddish which is recited at night and in the morning omits the standard phrase "tiskabbal" - "may the prayers and requests of all the House of Israel be accepted by our Father in Heaven and say, Amen". This omission is normally made in the house of a mourner. This expresses the Jews' sense of rejection - the feeling that God did not hear the Jews' prayers, since the destruction did take place.

Some mourners sleep on the ground on Tisha B'Av night or with less mattress and padding than usual. (Again: compare the experience of a refugee war prisoner).

At the morning prayer, tefillin and tallit are not put on. These are glorious symbols and all glory is stripped from Jews on this day. And again it is the 'onen' experience; the burial has not yet occurred and we cannot carry out these mitzvot. Only when the 'burial' is over - by afternoon when the finality of the destruction has sunk in - the tefillin are put on. The cantor intones the prayer "Anaynu" - "Answer us, Lord, on our fast day" during the repetition of the Amida. The blessing of the priests is omitted. (At this time we feel no blessing. The Temple, the classic locus of this blessing, is being burnt down at this very moment). Then, in one of these remarkable dialectical moves of the halacha, the traditional service omits tahananun, the penitential sorrow prayer, because at this point, Tisha B'Av is referred to as "moed" an assembly day, hence a holiday. The point is that whenever the balance seems to be tilting to total despair or defeat, we make the countervailing move. In the depths of defeat, we anticipate rebirth and triumph. This also reflects the tradition that some day, when the destruction is overcome, Tisha B'Av will be celebrated as a holiday.

On Tisha B'Av morning a portion of the Torah (Deuteronomy 4:25 ff) is read which refers to exile and despair as well as to the fact that the Jews will return to God and to the land. Three people are called up to the Torah. The third reads the prophetic portion (Jeremiah 8:13 ff), a dirge of sorrow and despondence ending with hope. Then the book of Kinot (mourning elegies) is chanted. This book encompasses a variety of dirges and laments covering many of the tragedies of Jewish history. No one generation's grief - as central as it was - could be the sole focus of this day. The appropriation of past grief becomes more deeply felt and authentic when each generation's sorrow was appropriated by all the other generations.

All during Tisha B'Av, only those portions of the Torah are read which deal with destruction, tragedy and mourning such as sections of Jeremiah, Job, the midrash of Lamentations, the third chapter of the Babylonian Talmud, Moed Katan (dealing with laws of mourning) and the aggadic material on the destruction found in the Babylonian Talmud Gittin, pp. 55 77 and the Palestinian Talmud, Taanit. (All other Torah learning is so pleasurable, it is inappropriate for this day of grief!)

As mourners are too grief stricken to recognize or greet people, so traditional Jews do not greet people with a 'good morning', 'good day' on Tisha B'Av. If someone who is not aware of this custom extends a greeting, one replies softly so as not to embarrass or reject the other person.

In the spirit of mourning, work and business activity are generally restricted, at least until Tisha B'Av afternoon - unless it is something urgent and might be lost (davar ha-avod). Circumcision and such

ceremonies of mitzvah are postponed until after the Kinot are completed. Their associated festive meal is held off until after the fast day.

At mincha, as adjustment to the new reality grows, the tallit and tefillin are put on and the various prayers are said that had been omitted in the morning (such as the prayer for the day). The Torah reading is the same as for all fast days (Exodus 32:11-14, Exodus 34:1-10) as is the Haftorah (Isaiah 55: 6 ff).

During the Shmoneh Esrai, the prayer "Nachem" - "Comfort Lord our God, the mourners of Zion..." is said in the Jerusalem blessing and "Aleynu" in the "Shma Koleynu" blessing. Two amended versions of "Nachem" are circulating, one by the chief rabbinate of the Israeli army and one by Ha Kibbutz HaDati, the Religious Kibbutz Movement. Both take into account the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967. For the first time in 1900 years, Jerusalem is entirely under Jewish rule. Saying the old words of grief as if nothing has changed would seem to make a mockery of the prayers said throughout the period when Jerusalem was in ruins and under foreign domination.

Then the priestly blessing is said and again, no 'tachanun'. A regular maariv section follows and, if the moon is shining, the sanctification of the new moon - which has been held off until this evening - is said. It might be noted that the Kabbalistic meaning of new moon sanctification is the hope for the Messiah and the prayer that all of nature and of history will be restored to wholeness and perfection. The encounter with degradation always unleashes (in the Jewish people) the hope of total redemption.

As is customary in Jewish practice, the reenactment does not end abruptly, but rather tapers off. The mourning practices of the ninth of Av are carried into the night of the tenth. (This is, in part, due to the belief that the Second Temple burned down mostly on the tenth of Av).

## V. To Remember the Destruction

The crisis of the destruction of the Temple, the death of a million Jews, exile and loss of sovereignty was so great that it threatened the religious meaning and physical survival of Jewry. There were those who called for a moratorium on all joy and some who sought to stop all normal life including marriage and child-bearing. The Jewish Christian community apparently became convinced that the Jewish covenant had been repudiated. The fundamental act of faith of the Rabbis of the Jewish people was to teach that God's promises and love are forever. They saw this event as a call

to serve God in new ways and in new circumstances. They responded with faithfulness and hope for restoration built around a renewed national, religious life and they overcame the despair of the moment.

Still, the tragedy was too great to be dismissed. It had to be incorporated into the sacred round of Jewish life. Like the mourner who cannot have a full hearted joy in the first year after the loss of parents, so acts of mourning shadow the joyful occasions of Jews. Inasmuch as the tragedy recurs each year, we are always in the first year of mourning. In this way one never forgets, in fulfillment of the verse, "If I forget thee O'Jerusalem, may my right hand lose its strength". (Psalms 137:5). Through the constantly renewed pain of going into exile, the Jews never fully reconciled themselves to exile existence. This incredible tenacity made possible the Zionist restoration almost two thousand years later!

Among the remembrances established were: to leave every home with an unfinished area (unplastered, unpainted) to show that joy will never be complete until Jerusalem is rebuilt. All parties were restricted, i.e. a feast should always be less than totally lavish. Similarly, a woman should never wear all her jewelry at one time.

The wedding, the idyllic happy moment of human life in Jewish culture, was particularly touched with reminders. The wearing of crowns, once worn by all brides, and public bridal processions were reduced. Grooms put some ashes on their head to remind themselves of this sorrow even in their moment of greatest joy. The entire company was reminded by breaking a glass vessel at the end of the ceremony and by breaking a plate during the writing of the engagement agreement. Breaking a glass, a valuable object, evokes a moment of pain and symbolizes the still broken nature of reality until the exile is overcome and the Temple rebuilt. Another mourning rite was the prohibition of instrumental music in places of worship - a ban which primarily survives in the Orthodox Synagogue's refusal to use musical instruments even at weekday services.

These acts of recollection and sorrow backed by the centrality of remembering in the daily prayers and in the reenactment of history did succeed in keeping alive Jewish ties to the Land of Israel and made possible the remarkable rebirth of Israel in the last century.

Reviewing these observances, one can not help but be struck by the responsibility to do no less for the greatest destruction of our history, the Holocaust. To fail to do so, is to strike at the integrity of all our mourning observances and to create weakness and irrelevance in the halachic process of our time. "The death of one righteous man is equal in weight to the destruction of the Temple", says the Talmud. To what then can we compare the death of six million? How many more must we mourn?

## VI. Tisha B'av After the Restoration of Israel and Jerusalem

The fundamental orientation of Judaism was and is: redemption and freedom. The Rabbis did not remember for the sake of despair but out of the recognition of the reality of evil - and out of the faith to overcome it. "On the day the Temple was destroyed, the Redeemer was (will be) born". (Genesis Rabba 55)

Now, in our lifetime, the period of exile and powerlessness of Jewry is coming to an end. The Holocaust and the rebirth of the State of Israel have ended the period of exilic Judaism. Tisha B'Av cannot be unaffected by the miracle of Israel and the reunification of Jerusalem. The prophet Zachariah told Israel in God's name that after the return Tisha B'Av and the three fasts will become days of celebration and joy. (Zachariah 8:19) While it is too early to claim that the Messianic fulfillment is here, the process of redemption now underway is discernible. It seems then that the sorrow in the three week period must be softened and that the mourning of Tisha B'Av be tempered with awareness of the unfolding of redemption. Time should be spent on Tisha B'Av telling of the redemption begun and of the revival and rebuilding of Jerusalem.

It is ludicrous when people in the Diaspora mourn excessively for Israel. In the past, our fathers wept and prayed for the return because they could not go up to Israel. Today, if someone is depressed over being in exile, that person can get on an El Al Airline and for a few hundred dollars end the state of exilic existence. Simple traditionalism in observance of Tisha B'Av mocks the genuine agony of our ancestors.

What happens to Tisha B'Av in an age of fundamental reorientation when the tide of Jewish history turns from exile to rootedness and from sorrow to increased rejoicing? Is there still meaning to days of remembered grief and defeat?

The bulk of the Jewish people have given up these four fast days in actual practice. Many do not even know of these days; others no longer identify with this tragic aspect of the past, focused on the loss of the Temple. Reform and most Conservative Jews consider sacrifice and the Temple era finished. (Note, however, that the Conservative movement does officially commemorate these days.) The tone of modern culture is pursuit of fun and pleasure; there is little room for deprivation and mourning - especially for events which occurred millenia ago. This pursuit of happiness psychology has also led to evasion of tragedy in

life and history which may be an important factor in both the achievement of and the besetting dissatisfaction with modern life. People expect joy and are much less accepting of disappointment and frustration, let alone tragedy. But Judaism would be emotionally impoverished by the loss of its darker more tragic side. The loss of a powerful sense of the past is a loss to Jewish identity and religion. Therefore, one is tempted to fight for recovery of memory rather than yield to the modernizing trend. The solution of the Orthodox and of more traditional nationalists (such as Prime Minister Menachem Begin) has been to affirm that Tisha B'Av be observed and its emotional relevance be restored by incorporating into the day the great catastrophe of our time, the Holocaust. For two thousand years it has been the purpose to incorporate each generation's sadness into the roster of Tisha B'Av commemorations so that Tisha B'Av has become the record of these millenia of exile. The lesson learned from this experience of exile is that Jews must have their own homeland so they can defend their own dignity. The Holocaust appropriately folds into this day as the most total example of the dependency and helplessness of exilic existence. The moral is to appreciate the incredible preciousness of Israel and never take risks that would endanger its security.

Although the lessons are correct, this well intentioned and plausible approach does not do full justice to the Holocaust or to the dynamics of Tisha B'Av. Survivor groups and others who share their insight have led the movement for a separate and distinct Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Commemoration Day) to express grief and to focus on the lessons of the catastrophe. The Holocaust is a turning point so overwhelming that it must have its own special day and framework in order to be authentically encompassed. Were the Holocaust just another in the long series of disasters which have struck Jews, especially in the Diaspora, it could be assimilated into classical categories and incorporated into Tisha B'Av. Those who see the Holocaust in the classical interpretation as punishment for sins logically wish to fuse its memory onto the memory of other past destructions. However, deeper encounter with the Holocaust makes the notion of it as divine punishment morally and religiously grotesque. Rather, the Holocaust is increasingly revealed as a fundamental watershed in Jewish and human history after which nothing will ever be the same. It is one of those rare reorienting moments of Jewish history and religion when basic conceptions of God, of humanity, and of Jewish destiny shift. Such moments typically lead to new understanding and to the development of new institutions and leadership.

From year to year, the number of Jews who commemorate Yom HaShoah grows by leaps and bounds. Immediately after World War II, there might have been a moment when a serious attempt could have been made to commemorate the Holocaust on Tisha B'Av. However, the Rabbinate did not grasp that moment. Surely, it is providential and a tribute to the inspired sense of history that indwells in Knesset Yisrael (the General Community of

the People Israel) that Yom HaShoah emerged instead. Thirty years later it is clear that a fundamental reorientation of Jewish history and faith is underway. No less than a third great cycle of Jewish destiny is emerging. As the Rabbis memorialized the Destruction with Tisha B'Av, so should our generation incorporate this moment into the calendar in a living way. The goal is not to 'save' Tisha B'Av; it is to encounter, apply and struggle with the implications of the Holocaust.

By the same token, Tisha B'Av and its associated period must be taken seriously in its own right. The Jewish people experienced an historical disaster on this day - the loss of independence and homeland - a tragedy compounded by the special sacred significance of Jerusalem and Israel, the covenanted land. Possession of the land was proof of the Jewish enterprise of divine-human partnership, the promise of total redemption, the dignity of the human. With its loss, and the death and suffering of millions of people, the resulting grief and mourning was overwhelmingly real.

As time went on, the disaster took on ever greater dimensions. It seemed to Jews that everything that went wrong, the repeated expulsions and massacres, all went back to that fatal loss of the land. The universe itself seemed to be out of sorts and the Shechina (Divine Presence) in exile. The whole tone of Judaism became more somber and sorrowful. One simple indicator: Before the exile, all the holidays were days of rejoicing. There are no extended periods of sorrow in the Biblical calendar. Even Yom Kippur, a day of deprivation, is not considered a day of mourning. However, throughout the Rabbinic period following the exile, whole periods of grief and mourning were added to the sacred calendar as if the cosmos was in mourning because the area of non-redemption expanded. As Exodus and the conquest of the land had been an ever expanding beachhead of liberation, so the exile reflected an erosion of the liberated areas. Thus Tisha B'Av became the stepstone of a major mood of grief which colored and darkened - but did not obliterate the peaks of redemption and joy in the Jewish calendar.

In this lifetime, the peak of enslavement and moral chaos was achieved in the Holocaust. Surely this was the climax of the rollback of redemption-threatening to destroy redemption itself. Rubenstein's "death of God" philosophy is a response to Auschwitz as the negation of all hope for perfection. However, at that point, the Jewish people did not yield to the triumph of nihilism and despair. With an incredible lightning strike, they created a new, indeed unparalleled, beachhead of redemption, the reborn State of Israel. Despite all assaults and attempts to crush it, that beachhead has steadily widened in the past thirty years.

With the rebirth of Israel there must be no avoiding the fact that the concrete tragedy which Tisha B'Av commemorates - exile and powerlessness -



is being overcome. While exile is not yet over (Israel remains vulnerable while Jews in Russia, Syria and elsewhere are still too much at the mercy of oppressors), liberation has grown. Incorporating the Holocaust into Tisha B'Av would incorrectly obscure this process of liberation as well as deny the integrity of past sorrow and loss which Tisha B'Av exemplifies. The wound of exile is being healed. As it heals, so the day and period around it must be healed and gradually turned into renewed joy.

But Tisha B'Av must continue to command its own emphasis. Premature abandoning of Tisha B'Av runs the risk of insensitivity to suffering and of becoming unselfconscious sovereigns and conquerors. On the other hand, failure to begin to heal Tisha B'Av is a failure of recognition and gratitude which runs the risk of mocking or stylizing the past deep felt losses and grief of the Jewish people. Now that the Jewish people seeks to recover its memory and create an authentic Jewish life style through the fast days, it behooves those who have not known these fast days to recover them, while those who have kept these days must begin to reshape them.

After two millenia the tide of history has decisively shifted as the sector of joy and redemption expands. It is a mitzvah to liberate even more days in the Jewish calendar from the grip of grief and incorporate them into the zone of redemption. This is the generation that has been privileged to be there at the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah,

Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your Lord. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her: Her time [of mourning] is up [Isaiah 40:2; my translation]. Make Jerusalem happy and rejoice in her all who love her; celebrate celebrations with her all who mourned for her. [Isaiah 46:10]

This is not to claim that the Temple is rebuilt and that all is well with Israel, or the world. Not until mankind and the people of Israel achieve a higher state of peace, freedom and dignity, with respect for humans and closeness to God, will the final fulfillment be at hand. Until that time sorrow of memory must be mixed with exultation as we experience the overcoming of exile and the resurrection of the 'dead loved one' for whom we symbolically mourned for almost two thousand years. With joy one must give and receive the testimony in our times that God is faithful to his promise,

The Lord your God will return your captivity and have mercy on you; He will return and gather you from all the nations among whom the Lord your God scattered you...from the furthest stretch of the horizon...(He)... will gather you and take you to Him . [Deuteronomy 30:3-4]

This recognition will lead to the deeper fulfillment of the classic prayer "Ahavah Rabbah", recited every morning:

And bring us back from the four corners of the earth and lead us upright, in dignity, to our land...and You (will) have brought us close to Your great name (essence) in truth to thank You and to devote ourselves to You uniquely in love .

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## OUR NAME

The rabbinic phrase *clal Yisrael* refers to the indivisibility and sacred collectivity of the Jewish people. It is in this spirit of pluralism and respect for the many forms which Jewish practice may take, that we have chosen the word CLAL for our name. CLAL heralds our belief that only by strengthening each and every constituent part, and by encouraging dialogue between groups, can all of Judaism be strengthened. CLAL symbolizes our commitment to serve as a Center where Learning And Leadership go hand in hand.



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## HOW WE DO IT

### Shamor *Leadership Education*

As the Programming and Educational Division of CLAL, *Shamor* provides lay and professional leaders extraordinary learning and pluralistic religious experiences. It also identifies, nurtures, and motivates talented individuals to assume the obligations and responsibilities of leadership in the Jewish community.

CLAL, in joint sponsorship with local Jewish organizations and national Jewish agencies, annually coordinates over thirty ongoing classes in five cities, sponsors dozens of weekends, seminars and institutes, for more than ten thousand leaders in over 50 Jewish communities in the United States and Canada.

### Chevra *Rabbinic and Academic Dialogue*

Rabbis and scholars from the four Jewish denominations gather to learn and to explore together the sometimes divisive issues of concern to the Jewish community. Chevra currently has chapters in seven cities: Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia and San Francisco, with over one hundred and fifty participating rabbis and academics, and sponsors an annual conference for learning and deliberation on critical religious issues.

*Rabbinic Interns*—Select rabbinical students from the four major denominations come together in an on-going program of study and dialogue at CLAL. Through hands-on experience, CLAL trains these interns to develop programs and curricula in their respective schools and communities, imparting the spirit of *clal Yisrael*.

### Zachor *Holocaust Resource Center*

The first Holocaust Resource Center in the country, Zachor, was founded by CLAL to commemorate and explore the fundamental challenge of the Holocaust. Among its accomplishments are its help in establishing the permanent United States Holocaust Memorial Council, and the development of a service for Yom Hashoah, the Day of Remembrance. Zachor also created "The Fifth Child", a commemorative prayer developed by an inter-denominational group of scholars, authors, and rabbis, designed for use in the Passover seder.

Other resources include the award winning "Witness to the Holocaust" film series and *The Holocaustist: An Annotated Bibliography and Resource Guide*.

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## WHY CLAL

CLAL is dedicated to preparing Jewish leaders to respond to the challenges of a new era in Jewish history; challenges which include the freedom to accept or reject Judaism, the liberty to choose from an abundance of Jewish values and lifestyles, and the exercise of Jewish power after the Holocaust and the rebirth of the state of Israel.

CLAL believes that freedom and pluralism are unparalleled blessings in Jewish history which can stimulate higher standards and more individual participation, strengthen each segment of Judaism, and enrich the totality of Jewish life.

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## WHAT WE DO

CLAL educates Jewish leaders, teaching them the lessons of leadership through the treasures of Jewish history and texts. Our programs strengthen Jewish unity, create a deeper appreciation for Jewish culture and religion, yield insights from our tradition, and offer authentic Jewish responses which can be applied to private behavior and communal policies.

CLAL provides its learning experiences to Jewish leaders through classes, dialogues, study groups, conferences, publications and retreats. Our programs are offered to Jewish groups in their communities throughout North America.

CLAL (formerly the National Jewish Resource Center) was founded in 1974 by Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, Elie Wiesel and Rabbi Steven Shaw. In 1983, the Institute for Jewish Experience, founded by Rabbi Shlome Riskin, merged into CLAL.