



Torah for Turbulent Times

"Leaning into Lament"

Judaism is a way of life infused with joy and meaning. In its wholeness it also includes a sacred time for sadness and lamentation. One day out of a full year is set aside for reflection and mourning. The 9th of Av, known as Tisha B'av, is by common consensus the saddest day of the Jewish year. Or, in other words, a full day of "Oy!" According to tradition, it was on this very day that the First Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E., as was the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E.

Beyond mourning the loss of these sacred sites, I wonder what else do we lament and mourn for these days? Somehow, this day, like many others, feels different this year because there is just so much to lament in our contemporary situation.

To mark this experience we turn to ritual. Ritual and coming together as a community are the vessels or containers for our emotions of loneliness, sadness, tears, and fears of the uncertainty and fragility of life - way back then and in this very moment. Common customs for Tisha B'av include lighting a candle, sitting on the floor or on low stools in relative darkness, and reading and chanting from the somber book of the Hebrew Bible, literally named, Lamentations. Finally, just like on Yom Kippur, it is customary to fast from sunset to sunset.

As we lean into lament tonight, we explore this dark moment in our history and heritage and seek contemporary consolation and meaning. Built into our sacred rhythm, lament is followed by comfort. For three weeks prior to Tisha B'av our prophetic reading on Shabbat is one of rebuke. Then comes the 9th of Av, which is followed by seven weeks of readings of consolation up until Rosh Hashana. We learn, "Be comforted, be comforted, My people," (Isaiah 40:1) and we say, "Thank G-d!"

What life lessons can we learn from this cycle? Here's one interpretation I find particularly relevant. "It is interesting to note that it takes three weeks to prepare for Tisha B'av, but seven to recover from it. This simply reflects the nature of loss and recovery: bonds that bind us to those we love can be severed in the blink of an eye, but recovery takes time and patience. That this is true on the national level no less than it is on the level of the individual is one of the enduring lessons of Jewish history." (*The Observant Life*, Cohen and Katz).

It's a tough turn to make at the height of our summer, but for just one day our tradition invites us to lean into lamentation and to confront the dark and difficult experiences of our people, both past and present. Whatever it is that we're willing to name - those events of a time long ago and/or what we're living through today - may we keep in mind that it all takes time and patience.

Rabbi Mark