



The Ziegler School  
of Rabbinic Studies

בית המדרש ע"ש זיגלר

# Walking with the Jewish Calendar

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דרכיה דרכי נעם

# TISHA B'AV

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## MEANING AND HISTORY

Ask most people “What is the earliest tragedy in Jewish history commemorated by Tisha B’Av?” and they will tell you the destruction of the First Temple. But Jewish tradition maintains that the sorrows associated with the 9th of Av go back much farther: to the sin of the spies in the desert. While such an attribution is less history than myth – in the deepest sense of the word – it is nonetheless significant that Mishnah Ta’anit (4:6) reads:

Five catastrophes befell our ancestors on the 17th of Tammuz and five on Tisha B’Av... On the 9th of Av, (1) it was decreed against our ancestors that they would not enter the land [of Israel] (2) the first Temple was destroyed (3) and the second (4) Beitar was entrapped and (5) the city [Jerusalem] was ploughed under.

Indeed, calamities continued to befall the Jews on this date throughout history: in 1290, King Edward I signed an edict compelling Jewish subjects to leave England; in 1492, all Jews who had not converted were to leave Spain; and World War I, the conflict that upset the balance of power in Europe with devastating results for the continent’s Jewish communities, began on August 1st, 1914, thus coinciding with Tisha B’Av. So many events coincide with, and are remembered on, the 9th of Av, yet in the rabbinic imagination Tisha B’Av is first and foremost an annual revisitation of the sin of the spies in the desert, a transgression which prevented the generation who left Egypt from ever entering the Promised Land.

The centrality of the incident of the spies in the rabbis’ thinking about Tisha B’Av is illustrated by the decision of the Babylonian sages to set the Torah reading for the week of Tisha B’Av to coincide with Parshat Devarim, the first portion of the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy, known to the rabbis as “*Mishnah Torah*” (“the second Torah”) consists in large part of Moses’ retelling of everything that has been said in the Torah thus far. So, does Moses begin his discourse with the Exodus from Egypt or the giving of the Torah at Sinai? No. Moses begins by recounting the tragic sin of the spies (Deuteronomy 1:20-46),<sup>1</sup> because the generation standing before him is again poised to enter the Land and he does not want them to repeat their ancestors’ mistakes. Moses doesn’t merely re-tell the story the way it is related in Numbers, rather as Rabbi Alan Lew writes:

[I]n Deuteronomy, Moses tells the story very differently. He shifts the blame from the exaggerated and ultimately dishonest story the spies told, to the murmuring of the people who heard the report. The people are no longer innocents, misled into disobedience. Moses subtly alters the narrative in this retelling to place the burden of guilt on them and not their princes.<sup>2</sup>

Lew notes that while it is clear to historians that the Temple was destroyed because Rome’s army was invincible and nothing could have stopped them from conquering Jerusalem, the rabbis of the Talmud nevertheless blame the destruction of the Temple on the Jewish people, and specifically on *sinat chinam*, senseless hatred and bickering.

Why did Moses and the rabbis blame the people for what had happened, when history doesn’t? Lew writes:

[N]either the rabbis nor Moses cared a fig about history. They weren’t historians, they were spiritual leaders, and spiritually, the only question worth asking about any conflict, any recurring catastrophe, is this: What is my responsibility for it? How am I complicit in it? How can I prevent it from happening again?

In a similar vein, our observance of Tisha B’Av should serve as a starting point for personal and national reflection, a reflective process that begins on the ninth of Av and climaxes on Yom Kippur, two months later.

<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 1:20-46.

<sup>2</sup> Lew, Alan, *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared*. P43.



# TISHA B'AV

## THE LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF TISHA B'AV

Tisha B'Av is one of two “major” fasts in the Jewish calendar that begin prior to sunset and last for 25 hours (the other is Yom Kippur). Apart from not eating, other prohibitions associated with the day of Tisha B'Av include: eating, drinking, wearing of leather shoes, showering, anointing oneself (the use of perfumes and deodorants), and sexual activity.

The aim of our ritual observances of Tisha B'Av is less to remember history for the sake of history than to direct our thinking inwards. Thus in his commentary, the *Mishnah Berura*, Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaCohen warns against focusing on the prohibitions of the day rather than their purpose:

All of Israel fasts...in order to awaken the hearts and enlighten the ways of *teshuvah*...Each person must concentrate his heart on these days and sift through her deeds and return upon them because **the essence is not the fast**, as is written about the people of Ninveh, “God saw their deeds,” and the rabbis said: [the book of Jonah] does not say [God saw] “their sackcloth and their fasts,” rather [God saw] “their deeds”. **The fast is only preparation for *teshuvah***. Therefore, those people who, when they fast, go on a trip or do trivial things, they have grasped onto the peripheral thing and set aside what is essential.

In other words, fasting is a means, not an end, to our observance of Tisha B'Av.

To reinforce the message that self-denial is not meant to be an end in itself, the rabbis also mandated that the fasts not be lengthened beyond their prescribed limits. They, in fact, instituted a requirement that the major fasts be preceded by a *se'udat mafseket* or “boundary meal” and extolled its importance, saying even, with respect to the meal preceding Yom Kippur: Whoever eats and drinks on Erev Yom Kippur is considered as if he fasted on Erev Yom Kippur and Yom Kippur itself.<sup>3</sup>

Various traditions developed around the *se'udat mafseket* prior to Tisha B'Av, a meal intended to set the mood for the following day. One particularly powerful tradition is that of skipping the customary *zimmun* (communal invitation) which precedes the recitation of the Grace after Meals on all other occasions. Related to this abstention from habitual courtesies is the custom of avoiding greeting one another throughout the fast period (literally: “one should not ask about the peace of his friend” SA 554:20).<sup>4</sup> Through these practices we re-live the enmity that afflicted Joseph's brothers who “hated him and could not speak a word to him in peace,”<sup>5</sup> and recreate the breakdown of community, the *sinat chinam* that caused God's presence to flee from us prior to the Temple's destruction. We experience, by living for a day in the absence of community, how vital it is to be kind to one another on a daily basis.

Unique to the observance of Tisha B'Av is the prohibition against the study of Torah, except passages related to the themes of Tisha B'Av. Why? Because Torah study gives us joy and is a critical part of our relationship with God, and it is the withdrawing of God's presence from Israel that we mourn on Tisha B'Av. The generation God rescued from Egypt rebelled against God through the sin of the Golden Calf and through murmurings for water and food that expressed a continuing lack of faith in God. Their distancing of themselves from God continued and intensified throughout their time in the wilderness until, with the *chet ha'miraglim* (the sin of the spies), the damage to their relationship with God became irreparable and the entry of the Israelites into the Promised Land was deferred for a generation. A similar distancing occurred with the destruction of the First – then Second – Temples, events that left those generations bereft of their main tool for relating to God. So on Tisha B'Av, we, who experience God's ongoing revelation through the study of Torah, intentionally cut ourselves off from that fountain in order to re-experience the disorientation of losing our relationship with God.

<sup>3</sup> *Bavli, Yoma 81b.*

<sup>4</sup> *Shulchan Aruch 554:20.*

<sup>5</sup> *Genesis 37:4.*



# TISHA B'AV

Emmanuel Levinas once wrote, “On the road that leads to the One God, there is a way station where there is no God.” If, as the Hasidic tradition teaches, Yom Kippur is not only a solemn day, but also a wedding day, a day of intimacy and closeness between God and Israel, Tisha B'Av is the way station of “no God” on the road to Yom Kippur when we experience fully “One God”. Tisha B'Av is the day of spiritual darkness when we remember the conditional nature of the covenant between God and Israel and, having embraced fully the devastation of being cut off from God, we begin the long journey through Elul and Rosh Hashanah towards reuniting with God again.

## TISHA B'AV AND THE MINOR FASTS

While Tisha B'Av is already somewhat peripheral in many people's thinking about the Jewish calendar in comparison to the other “major fast” of the year, Yom Kippur. It is, nevertheless, viewed by the tradition as a central and solemn occasion. Less so the three minor fasts<sup>6</sup> (Tzom Gedaliah, the Tenth of Tevet, and 17 Tammuz) that are linked to events related to the destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of the First Temple. Yet already in the Talmud there is a recognition that the obligations related to the minor fasts are less binding than those associated with Tisha B'Av.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Rav Pappa explained that when Israel is persecuted, all are obligated to fast; when Israel has peace, these days turn to joy; when there is not persecution but not peace, fasting is optional.

His pronouncement raises questions about just how the minor fasts – or for that matter, Tisha B'Av – should be observed by Jews today. Do we understand ourselves to be living in a “time of peace”? Rashi comments on this matter that peace means “when nations do not have sovereignty over Israel.” In keeping with this teaching, some Conservative communities have argued that the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Jewish sovereignty in 1967 obviated the need for the minor fasts. They reason that so long as the liturgy of the Conservative Movement celebrates the modern State of Israel as a religiously significant phenomenon – “the beginning of the flowering of our redemption” – and commemorates the establishment of the state through the recitation of a blessing and chanting *Hallel* on Yom HaAtzmaut, we should consonantly recognize Israel's existence as marking the onset of a time of peace. There are others, however, who point to Israel's continuing state of war with most of the Arab world, including the recent wars with Hamas in Gaza and Hizbollah in Lebanon, and cite these as evidence that Israel does *not* have peace, and as such claim that the minor fasts continue to be obligatory upon all Israel.

If we grant exemptions from the observance of minor fasts, should the same be true of Tisha B'Av? The Talmud itself anticipated this question: If that is the case [that the minor fasts are optional if Israel is not persecuted but not at peace], the ninth of Av also [should be optional since it is included in Zechariah's list along with minor fasts]? Rabbi Pappa replied: The ninth of Av is in a different category because several misfortunes happened on it. Since the time of the Talmud, Tisha B'Av was recognized as a day that mourns not just the Temples, not just for Jerusalem, but for something much deeper in the Jewish soul.

Before moving from this debate about the place of the minor fasts and of Tisha B'Av in modern times it is worth examining the way another contemporary Jewish community has chosen to relate to one of the minor fasts, Tzom Gedalia, which was established to commemorate the assassination of Gedalia ben Ahikam, the first (and only) Jewish governor over Judah under the Babylonians.<sup>8</sup> Gedalia's assassination extinguished the hope that a Jewish state might survive Babylonian domination and so marked the end of Jewish sovereignty for more than two thousand years. Observing the parallels between the internal divisions (*sinat chinam*) which brought down the Jewish state in Gedalia's time and the vicious (internal) propaganda which led to the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin (z"l), some modern Israelis have attempted to integrate the commemoration Rabin's assassination into observance of Tzom Gedalia. They intend for the day to serve as a warning of the dire consequences of intra-Jewish hatred within the modern state of Israel. Others have attempted to incorporate Rabin's assassination into the observance of Tisha B'Av on similar grounds. These efforts raise questions as to how and why we mourn our historic tragedies in modern times.

<sup>6</sup> A “minor fast” is one beginning at sunrise and concluding at sunset as compared to a “major fast” which runs from sunset to sunset.

<sup>7</sup> Bavli, Rosh Hashanah 18a.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah 40:7 – 41:3.



# TISHA B'AV

## WHAT WE MOURN

As modern Jews, it may be hard for us to mourn the destruction of the Temples on Tisha B'Av. Sacrifices are foreign to us. We understand only abstractly the historical significance of the Temple and find it hard to cry over an idea. Few wish for the restoration of sacrifices. In fact, one of the earliest liturgical changes made by the Conservative Movement was to cease praying for the restoration of sacrifices in the Temple. This view is not new with our Movement. In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides explains that the Torah seems to allow for sacrifices *not* because they are an ideal, but because they were the manner in which people related to God in ancient times. He wrote:

God did not command us to give up and to discontinue [sacrifices]...for to obey such a commandment would have been contrary to the nature of man, who generally cleaves to that to which he is used. It would in those days have made the same impression as a prophet would make at present [the 12th Century] if he called us to the service of God and told us in His name, that we should not pray to God nor fast, nor seek His help in time of trouble; that we should serve Him in thought, and not by any action.<sup>9</sup>

While the Temple *was* a real, physical, place in Jerusalem, its destruction is significant to modern Jews less because its stones crumbled and more because its destruction removed the focal point of God's presence amongst the Jewish people. Ask yourself: What it would be like – God forbid – to watch your synagogue go up in flames? What if, one day, *siddurim* just disappeared and all you had were memories of services from the past, but no way to recreate them? What if our community's vast reservoir of knowledge of how to relate to God, and how God relates to us, was destroyed? We would be lost to God, and God to us.

The Temple was the place and the vehicle for our relationship with God. As moderns on Tisha B'Av, we confront the possibility of our being cut off from God. In doing so, we should ask ourselves not “Why has God forsaken us?” but rather, “What things have I done to drive God from the world?” “How am I responsible for destruction and strife that affect our people?” “Where have I done too little to bring God's presence into my life and the life of the Jewish people?” Based in history, ritual, and memory such questions propel us forward. It is not enough to lament God's absence, we must take responsibility for our role and commit to do more, to do better. Tears lead to resolve. Resolve leads to redemption, as it is taught: The day the Temple was destroyed, the redeemer was born.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Guide for the Perplexed*, Book III, Chapter 32.

<sup>10</sup> *Yerushalmi*, Berakot 2:4; *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:16.



## TISHA B'AV – TEXT 1

### איכה רבה (וילנא) פתיחתות

לבכי ולמספד וגו', בשעה שבקש הקב"ה להחריב את בית המקדש אמר כל זמן שאני בתוכו אין אומות העולם נוגעין בו, אלא אכביש את עיני ממנו, ואשבע שלא אזקק לו עד עת קץ, ויבוא האויבים ויחריבו אותו, מיד נשבע הקב"ה בימינו והחזירה אחריו, הה"ד השיב אחר ימינו מפני אויב, באותה שעה נכנסו אויבים להיכל ושרפוהו, וכיון שנשרף אמר הקב"ה שוב אין לי מושב בארץ אסלק שכינתי ממנה ואעלה למכוני הראשון, הה"ד (הושע ה') אלכה ואשובה אל מקומי עד אשר יאשמו ובקשו פני, באותה שעה היה הקב"ה בוכה ואומר אוי לי מה עשיתי השריתי שכינתי למטה בשביל ישראל, ועכשיו שחטאו חזרתי למקומי הראשון, ח"ו שהייתי שחוק לגוים ולעג לבריות, באותה שעה בא מטטרון ונפל על פניו, ואמר לפניו רבש"ע אני אבכה ואתה לא תבכה, אמר לו אם אין אתה מניח לי לבכות עכשיו אכנס למקום שאין לך רשות ליכנס ואבכה, שנאמר (ירמיה י"ג) ואם לא תשמעוה במסתרים תבכה נפשי מפני גוה וגו'

### LAMENTATIONS RABBAH 1:8

“And in that day did the Lord, the God of Hosts call to weeping and to lamentation” (Isaiah 22:12). When the Holy One was about to destroy the Temple He said: So long as I am within it the peoples of the world will be unable to touch it. However, I will shut my eyes from it and swear that I will have nothing to do with it again till the messianic end of time. Meanwhile, let the enemies come and devastate it. Then He swore by His right hand and put it behind Him, as it is said, “He put back His right hand from before His enemy” (Lam, 2:3). At once the enemies entered the Temple Hall and burned it. After it was burned the Holy One said: Once again I have no dwelling place in the Land. So I shall remove my presence from it and go up to my former residence. The Holy One wept and said: Woe is Me! What have I done? For Israel's sake I caused my presence to dwell below. But now that Israel sinned and I am returning to my former place, I have, Heaven forbid, become the laughingstock of the national and an object of derision for mortals. In that instant Metatron came, fell upon his face, and spoke before the Holy One: Master of the Universe, let me weep, but you must not weep. God replied: If you do not let Me weep, I will go into a place where you have no authority to enter and weep there. That such was God's response is intimated in the verse “If you cannot bear to hear it, My spirit will weep in the secret place” (Jer. 13:17).

*(Translation taken from Book of Legends/Sefer HaAggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash. Hayyim Nahman Bialik and Y.H. Rawnitzky. Schocken, 1992, Page 145.)*

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- How does this text describe God's role in the destruction of the Temple?
- Does this make sense in terms of your own conception of God and God's involvement in our world?
- What is the difference between portraying God as the destroyer of the Temple as compared to the one who allows the Temple to be destroyed?
- How does this image of God affect prayer?



## TISHA B'AV – TEXT 2

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ראש השנה דף יח עמוד א + ב

משנה. על ששה חדשים השלוחין יוצאין: על ניסן מפני הפסח, על אב מפני התענית, על אלול מפני ראש השנה, על תשרי מפני תקנת המועדות, על כסליו מפני חנוכה, ועל אדר מפני הפורים. וכשהיה בית המקדש קיים - יוצאין אף על אייר מפני פסח קטן.

גמרא. וליפקו נמי אתמוז וטבת דאמר רב חנא בר ביזנא אמר רב שמעון חסידא: מאי דכתיב כ' ה' אמר ה' צבאות צום הרביעי וצום החמישי וצום השביעי וצום העשירי והנה לבית יהודה לששון ולשמחה. קרי להו צום, וקרי להו ששון ושמחה, בזמן שיש שלום - יהיו לששון ולשמחה, אין שלום - צום. אמר רב פפא: הכי קאמר: בזמן שיש שלום - יהיו לששון ולשמחה, יש גזרת המלכות - צום, אין גזרת המלכות ואין שלום, רצו - מתענין, רצו - אין מתענין. אי הכי, תשעה באב נמי! - אמר רב פפא: שאני תשעה באב, הואיל והוכפלו בו צרות. דאמר מר: בתשעה באב חרב הבית בראשונה ובשנייה, ונלפדה ביתר, ונחרשה העיר.

### TALMUD BAVLI, MASECHET ROSH HASHANAH 18A&B

Mishnah: At the beginning of six months messengers went out – on (the first of) Nissan because of Pesach, on the first of Av because of the Fast, on the first of Elul because of Rosh Hashanah, on the first of Tishrei to correctly fix the festivals, on the first of Kislev because of Chanukkah, and on the first of Adar because of Purim. And when the Temple was standing they even went out in Iyar because of Pesach Sheni.

Gemara: Should it not be that they also went out in Tamuz and Tevet (because of the fasts) as Rav Chana bar Bizna said in the name on Rabbi Shimon Chasida: It is written, “So said the Lord of Hosts, the fast of the fourth, fifth and seventh (months) and the fast of the tenth month will be times of joy and happiness for the House of Judah.” It is written that they are “fasts” and it is written that they are “times of joy and happiness.” [Why?] In times of peace there will be joy and happiness and when there is no peace there will be fasts. Rav Pappa said: This means that when there is peace the days that were (designated as) fasts will be times of joy and happiness, but at times when there are governmental decrees (against Jews) there will be fasts. When there is neither (peace nor a decree) the people will fast if they wish and not if they don't. If this is so, then doesn't it apply also to Tisha B'Av? Rav Pappa said: Tisha B'Av is different because the tragedies were multiplied on this day, as the master said “On Tisha B'Av both the First and Second Temples were destroyed, the city of Betar was conquered and the City (of Jerusalem) was plowed under.”

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- **What is the position given by the sages on the minor fasts related to Jerusalem's destruction? How are they said to differ from Tisha B'Av?**
- **How is our conduct on the minor fast days related to the conditions in our own times? What do you understand to be the rationale for this connection? Do you agree with it?**
- **Why does the text draw such stark contrasts between our attitudes towards the fast days in times of trouble and in times of peace? Why would they become not just normal (non-fast days) but rather “times of joy and happiness”?**



## TISHA B'AV – TEXT 3

### תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא פ:

תנו רבנן פֶּשֶׁתְּרַב הַבַּיִת בְּשָׁנֵיהּ רַבּוּ פְּרוּשִׁין בִּישְׁרָאֵל שֶׁלֹּא לֶאֱכֹל בֶּשָׂר וְשֶׁלֹּא לְשָׁתוֹת יַיִן  
נִטְפֵּל לָהֶן רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אָמַר לָהֶן בְּנֵי מִפְּנֵי מָה אֵי אַתֶּם אוֹכְלִין בֶּשָׂר וְאֵינן אַתֶּם שׁוֹתִין יַיִן? אָמְרוּ  
לוֹ גַּ' אֲכַל בֶּשָׂר שְׂמֵמָנוּ מִקְרִיבִין עַל גְּבִי מִזְבֵּחַ וְעַכְשָׁיו בְּטֵל, נִשְׁתָּה יַיִן שְׂמֵנֶסְכִין עַל גְּבִי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ  
וְעַכְשָׁיו בְּטֵל? אָמַר לָהֶם אִים פֶּן לָחֵם לֹא נֶאֱכַל שְׂכָבֵר בְּטֵלוּ מִנְחֹת! אֶפְשָׁר בְּפִירוֹת. פִּירוֹת  
לֹא נֶאֱכַל שְׂכָבֵר בְּטֵלוּ בְּכוֹרִים. אֶפְשָׁר בְּפִירוֹת אַחֲרִים. מִים לֹא נִשְׁתָּה שְׂכָבֵר בְּטֵל נִסּוּךְ  
הַמֵּים. שְׁתָּקוּ. אָמַר לָהֶן בְּנֵי בּוֹאוּ וְאֹמַר לָכֶם שֶׁלֹּא לְהִתְאַבֵּל כָּל עֵינָר אֵי אֶפְשָׁר, שְׂכָבֵר נִגְזָרָה  
גְּזָרָה, וְלְהִתְאַבֵּל יוֹתֵר מִדָּאֵי אֵי אֶפְשָׁר שְׂאִין גּוֹזְרִין גְּזִירָה עַל הַצְּבוּר אֵלֶּה אִם פֶּן רוֹב צְבוּר  
יְכוּלִין לְעֲמוֹד בָּהּ, דְּכַתִּיב בְּמֵאֲרָה אַתֶּם נֹאֲרִים וְאוֹתֵי אַתֶּם קוֹבְעִים הַגּוֹי. כּוּלוּ אֵלֶּה פֶּךָ אָמְרוּ  
חֲכָמִים סָד אֲדָם אֵת בֵּיתוֹ בְּסִיד וּמְשִׁיר בּוֹ דְּבַר מוֹעֵט. וְכַמָּה? אָמַר רַב יוֹסֵף אֲמָה עַל אֲמָה. אָמַר  
רַב חֲסִידָא כְּנֻגְדַּ הַפֶּתַח. עוֹשֶׂה אֲדָם כָּל צָרְכֵי סְעוּדָה וּמְשִׁיר דְּבַר מוֹעֵט. מֵאֵי הִיא? אָמַר רַב פֶּפְא  
פֶּפְא דְּהֶרְסָנָא.

### BABA BATRA 60B

The Rabbis taught in a beraita: When the Second Temple was destroyed many Jews became ascetics who abstained from eating meat or drinking wine (as an expression of mourning). Rabbi Yehoshua said to them, “My sons, why don’t you eat meat or drink wine?” They said to him, “When the Temple stood they sacrificed meat on the altar, and now it is destroyed! They used to pour wine on the altar, and now it is destroyed! Should we now drink wine?” He said to them, “If that is the case, we shouldn’t eat bread, for they used to offer meal offerings (*minachot*) and they are destroyed.” They replied, “It is possible to subsist on fruit.” “But we should not eat fruit either, for the first fruit offerings (*bikurim*) are no more,” Rabbi Yehoshua countered. “We can eat other types of fruit.” “But,” Rabbi Yehoshua retorted, “We should not drink water, for the water libation (*nisukh mayim*) is no more.” The ascetics were silent.

Rabbi Yehoshua said to them, “Come and let me explain. It is not possible not to mourn the Temple at all for the decree of destruction has been issued; but it is also not possible to mourn excessively, for we are not to issue a decree upon the public if the majority cannot comply with it. As it is written: You are suffering under a curse, yet you go on defrauding Me – the whole nation of you. Thus the sages said [mourn in this way]: When a man is plastering his house, leave a small area unplastered ... [and] when a man prepares a meal, leave our some small part.” How much? Rav Pappa replied, “A piece of fried fish.”

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- What are the rabbis proposing as a response to the Temple’s destruction? What are the thoughts and emotions underlying this response?
- Why is Rav Pappa attempting to place limits on their response?
- What is the underlying message of the text about the way we should handle grief?



## TISHA B'AV – TEXT 4

**LEONARD FEIN. *AGAINST THE DYING OF THE LIGHT: A FATHER'S JOURNEY THROUGH LOSS*, p. 151**

“...I think of my daughter, and of you, her daughter, whom I want so much to comfort. I want for you, my love, flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone, that you will be whole. The emptiness cannot be wished away, nor is there reason to try. All we need guard against is the swelling of the emptiness, its displacement of the other truths of our lives. You are the daughter of a mother who died just 500 days after you were born. But for sure her story did not end in January of 1996. Her death is a sorry fact of your life – but not, I pray, the defining fact. There is much, much more to her story than the tragedy of her death – and all that is yours, too.”

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- **How does Fein see the relationship between his wife's death and his daughter's life? His own life?**
- **What is gained or lost by bounding the tragedy in this way?**
- **What does he see as a reasonable and appropriate set of boundaries for one's grief? Compare this to the Talmudic text (Text 3).**
- **Think about the ways in which Fein's message translates in terms of our relationship to the loss of the Temple and our lives as a people ever since. Do you believe his outlook applies to our own situation? If so, how?**



# TISHA B'AV – TEXT FOR GROUP STUDY

**ISMER SCHORSCH, “TISHA B'AV RECONSIDERED”, *CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM* 39/4 (SUMMER 1987)**

Yom Kippur and Tisha B'av are tandem ... Whereas Yom Kippur is set aside for self-reflection, Tisha B'av is dedicated to pondering the nation's destiny. At the dawn of a new year, we are induced to contract into a state of self-absorption; as the year draws to a close our attention is riveted on the history of our people.. God and Israel are the two reference points which guide the religious behavior of the individual Jew. To remove Tisha B'av from the liturgical structure is to accentuate the pursuit of personal salvation and to disrupt the carefully crafted equilibrium between individual need and group primacy...

## STUDY QUESTIONS

- **What do you think of the idea that Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av in some way mirror or complement one another? In what ways do you believe this to be so? How do they differ?**
- **What is it about the nature of these two holidays and the ways in which they are observed that lends them their distinct individual or collective character?**
- **What do you make of the author's claim that omitting Tisha B'Av from the calendar would disrupt the balance between our focus on the individual and our focus on the collective? What do you make of the fact that for most Conservative Jews today Yom Kippur is so much more central than Tisha B'Av? Is this appropriate? How is it reflective of our times? Our society?**





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