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## Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

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# Today's Torah

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**Tisha B'av**  
**July 30, 2020 - 9 Av 5780**



**By: Rabbi Dr. Michael Berenbaum**  
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## The 10th of Av or What Happens Next

The Jewish Calendar does not change, we do.

As we observe Tisha B'av with fasting and lamentations this Thursday, I am flooded with the memories of other places that I have been when this summer sacred fast day occurred, memories of Camp where, as the lone summer sacred day – we cannot say holiday – the whole camp was Tisha B'av.

I was in Jerusalem for Tisha B'av in 1967 where we could go down to the Western Wall and see firsthand the remnant of what had survived surrounded by exuberant Jews who had only weeks before experienced the reunification of Jerusalem, the seeming salvation of the Six Day War. As we recited lamentations we wondered, perhaps Jewish history has been transformed. How does one mourn a Jerusalem lost in the midst of a Jerusalem rebuilt?

Nine years later, I was in Kiev sitting seemingly anonymously among Soviet Jews but a fortnight after the Israeli raid on Entebbe which rescued the Jewish hostages. I was asked to chant the great poem of Yehuda Halevi, "Zion will you not ask after the welfare of your prisoners," precisely as I was in the Soviet Union, a representative of Zion asking for the fate of refuseniks, those being persecuted for their desire to join the Jewish people in Zion.

And this year we observe Tisha B'av in the midst of four crises here at home: *the pandemic*, which threatens our very lives and imprisons us at home or in public behind masks; *an economic crisis*, threatening our future and our children's ability to provide for our future; *a leadership crisis* that demoralizes us and threatens the global future; and *a crisis of freedom*, whether indeed we can live up to our aspirational value, "with liberty and justice for all."

No lives matter unless, Black lives matter!

So there is much to lament this Tisha B'av – too much!

Yet Tisha B'av is a turning point in the Jewish calendar as three weeks of admonition are followed by seven weeks of consolation that conclude with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New year.

Let me focus on what I have come to regard as a most important day on the Jewish calendar, the 10th of Av. The miracle of Jewish life is that defeat has never been final. We have time and again rebuilt in its aftermath.

Jeremiah, the prophet of admonition, warning Judah of their impending destruction, became the prophet of consolation when his dark vision came true. Instead of saying how right he was, he consoled the defeated people. He gave them a strategy of survival even in exile.

(29:5) Build houses and dwell in them and plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands and let them bear sons and daughters, and multiply there and do not dwindle. And seek the welfare of the city to which you are exiled... through its welfare, you shall have welfare.

Jeremiah assured the defeated Israelites. "There is hope in your future!"

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, the great Rabbinic leader left Jerusalem on the eve of its destruction in 70 CE with a plan for how the Jewish people would live in exile. He took a land centered, Temple centered religious life and made it portable. "Give me Yavneh and her wise men." Sacred space would be found wherever ten Jews were found, wherever the Torah and its teaching could be found. Every synagogue would be a mini-*mikdash*, a miniature sacred space. Thus, a defeated people could endure, not just survive but even thrive in exile for almost two millennia.

And we are living in the era of the 10th of Av.

We are living in a time of Jewish restoration after the great destruction of the Shoah. We have rebuilt, collectively in Israel and individually in the lives of survivors who answered death with the creation of new life, families, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, and who have responded to suffering by bearing witness, seeking to enhance human dignity and decency, to strengthen human rights and enlarge human responsibility, to warn against indifference and call upon all of us to be Upstanders not Bystanders.

We will need the strength of Jews ancient and current to rebuild on the 10th of Av, after the destruction and desolation of this moment in history.

It will take time, much time for it is harder to rebuild than to destroy, harder but more essential!

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