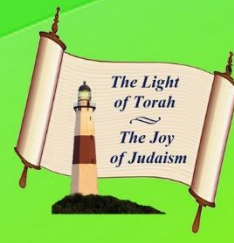


Tisha B'Av



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The fast of Tisha B'av commemorates five events in Jewish history:

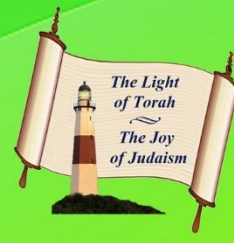
- 1) The Jews should have entered the Promised Land soon after leaving Egypt. However, a negative report from the Ten Spies succeeded in demoralizing the people, and they lost courage and refused to enter the Land. The night that they cried and expressed their lack of faith was the night of Tishah B'av. As a result, that generation lost the chance to enter the land; it was the next generation who would do so, after forty years' wandering in the desert.
- 2) The Temple in Jerusalem, planned by King David and built by his son King Solomon, was destroyed by the Babylonian King Nevuchadnetzar, after standing for 410 years. The Jews endured a seventy-year exile in Babylonia.
- 3) The Second Temple, built by Ezra and returnees from the Babylonian Exile, was destroyed by the Roman Emperor Vespasian and his son Titus, after standing for 420 years.
- 4) The city of Beitar, headquarters of the great leader Bar Kochba, fell to the Romans, who massacred the inhabitants. At one time, as great a scholar as Rabbi Akiva believed Bar Kochba could be the Messiah who would free the Jews from Roman oppression. The ultimate fall of the city of Beitar was considered a tragedy on the scale of the Destruction of the Temple.
- 5) A Roman ruler named Turnus-Rufus plowed the ground where the Temple has once stood, fulfilling the Biblical prophecy, "Zion shall be plowed over like a field."

Two other well-known events took place on this day later in Jewish history:

- 1) In 1492, the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, by decree of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. After a century of persecution, all Jews left Spain forever, leaving behind only those who chose to live as Christians, practicing Judaism in secret and in constant terror of the Inquisition.
- 2) In 1914, the outbreak of World War I - an event which destabilized centuries of Jewish life in Europe, and ultimately set the stage for World War II and the Holocaust.

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On the eve of Tisha B'av, Megillas Eicha (the Scroll of Lamentations) is read. This book was written by the Prophet Jeremiah, who lived through the first Destruction. The morning of Tisha B'av is spent reciting Kinot, mournful poems composed throughout the ages to commemorate the Destruction and other Jewish tragedies, down to and including the Holocaust. This expresses our conviction that all Jewish suffering stems from a common cause and serves a larger purpose.

Tisha B'av is akin to Yom Kippur – i.e. a full-day fast, from sundown until nightfall of the next day, with observance of all Five Afflictions: eating and drinking; washing and bathing; use of skin creams and oils; wearing leather shoes; and marital relations.

We also observe some customs of mourning on Tisha B'av, akin to the observances of the Shivah period. Until midday (about 1:00), we sit on or near the ground. We also refrain from Torah study, an activity which leads to joy. However, we may study material related to Tisha B'av themes: the laws of mourning, narratives of tragedy, and anything that inspires introspection and self-improvement.

A Jewish fast day is meant to inspire reflection and repentance. Our mourning is a positive, constructive act; when we cry, we elevate ourselves from our mundane, daily concerns to connect with the feelings and yearnings of the Jewish People throughout the centuries. We rebuild our inner, spiritual world, and through that we bring Redemption one step closer for everyone.

Jewish Tradition teaches that, "Whoever mourns for Jerusalem merits to witness its consolation." This can mean that one who mourns for Jerusalem earns the reward of the Messianic Redemption. But some see another message: in mourning for Jerusalem, we taste the Redemption *today*. Connecting with our suffering also connects us with our destiny. We understand that we have a mission, that our suffering has a purpose, and that our actions matter. We know there is hope for our future, and that fills us with a deep well of joy, hope and fulfillment.

