

NINTH OF AV

TEACHERS' GUIDE

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Our mourning on Tisha B'Av is not primarily sadness for what we have lost, but an awakening to *teshuvah* so that we can rectify the sins of the earlier generations that led to the destruction. If the Beis Hamikdosh has not been rebuilt yet, we are also guilty. Our remembering is not commemoration of the past, but learning for the present and future.

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These are the five things that occurred on this day. We know that certain days in the calendar are set aside for happiness, and others set aside for sadness. The fact that so many tragedies occurred on this day gives us reason indeed to mourn.

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The midrash presents us with the paradox of Tisha B'Av. We think that we cry because we are mourning, but in reality we are mourning because we cried. Had we accepted G-d's authority unquestioningly while we were in the Sinai wilderness, we would never have needed to experience the destruction and suffering of exile. Today we are still paying the price for that rebellion against G-d and our unwillingness to enter into the Land of Israel.

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Tzidkiyahu was the last King of Yehuda. The Northern Kingdom had been destroyed many years earlier, and the two and a half tribes on the east bank of the Jordan had been exiled centuries before. The only Jewish leadership was centered in the Beis Hamikdosh in Yerushalayim. Tzidkiyahu was the last of the House of David to have independent rule in Yerushalayim. Slaughtering his children showed the symbolic end of the line, and blinding him showed the blackness of the future.

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The First Beis Hamikdosh was destroyed because the Jewish people had transgressed the three cardinal sins. These are sins that a Jew is required to give up his life rather than transgress, yet they became commonplace by the end of the Beis Hamikdosh. Zechariah Ben Yehoyada was the son of Yehoyada, the Cohen Gadol in the times of Achaziah and Yoash. After the death of Yehoyada, Zechariah boldly condemned both king Yoash and the people for their rebellion against G-d, so they killed him: "He stood above the people and said tot hem, 'Thus said G-d: Why are you transgressing the commandments of G-d? You will not succeed, for you have forsaken G-d, so He has forsaken you!' But they conspired against him and stoned him with

rocks, by the command of the king, in the courtyard of the Beis Hamikdosh of G-d" (Divrei Hayamim 2 24: 20).

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We cannot even begin to imagine the numbers of people killed when the Beis Hamikdosh was destroyed. This is after months of famine caused by the siege of the city. During this time the starvation was so great that women would cook their children and eat them.

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This apocryphal story of Yirmiyahu meeting Plato is unlikely to be historically accurate, since Plato lived approximately 200 years after Yirmiyahu. Although it is quoted in the name of the Rama (in Toras Haolah), it doesn't seem to appear there. The origin of this story may even be Christian. Nevertheless, it presents a vivid image of the loss of the Beis Hamikdosh, and shows that the non-Jewish world (to this day) did not understand what they were destroying. If only we would appreciate the enormity of our loss, in order to truly pray for its rebuilding.

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The Romans actually set fire to the Second Beis Hamikdosh just before sunset on the Ninth of Av, and most of the building burned on the Tenth of Av. Rabbi Yochanan gives us an important message that the tragedies that occurred are a result of earlier actions. The beginning of the tragedy is what must be commemorated. We should not wait until tragedy strikes to start improving ourselves but should look for the origins and beginnings of tragedy.

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The reason we are still mourning the destruction to this day is that we are still guilty of the same sins. Baseless hatred does not mean disagreeing with someone else, but attacking them personally for their views and invalidating them in ways that are disrespectful of them and their values.

Josephus describes another kind of baseless hatred that led to the destruction. The *sicarii* were the zealots who controlled Yerushalayim and antagonized the Romans until they attacked and destroyed Yerushalayim. Rabbi Yochanan famously escaped from the city, which was controlled by the *sicarii*, only because his nephew, Ben Sikra, was one of their leaders.

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Betar was the stronghold of Bar Kochba and his army. Bar Kochba was the 'last hope' of the Jewish people, the leader of an uprising against the Romans some 65 years after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh. Rabbi Akiva even declared that Bar Kochba may be the Moshiach. Bar Kochba minted coins and established an independent Jewish

state in Israel. Eventually, however, the Romans destroyed him and his army, with enormous casualties and causing even greater depression to the nation. To prevent further insurgence and create a reminder of the defeat, the Romans refused to allow the burial of the bodies for 7 years. The corpses were used by the Romans to build fences for their fields and the blood was used as fertilizer. Miraculously the bodies remained intact for the entire time, until finally they were permitted to be buried.

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There is a well known story on the last page of Tractate Makkos which describes the Sages approaching the ruined Yerushalayim and Beis Hamikdosh. While the others cried, Rabbi Akiva laughed, for in the destruction he also saw the beginning of the final redemption and the rebuilding.

May this be the last year that we much mourn on Tisha B'Av, and may we merit to greet the Moshiach very soon. And may we see the fulfillment of the following midrash:

Yalkut Shimoni Eicha 5.

עתיד הקב"ה להפוך תשעה ברב לששון ולשמח ולמועדים טובים ולבנות הוא בעצמו את ירושלים ולקב. גלויות, שנאמר
 "בונה ירושלים ה' נדחי יראל יכנס"

In the future, G-d will turn the Ninth of Av into a day of happiness, rejoicing and festivities. He Himself will rebuild Yerushalayim and gather the exiles, as the verse states "G-d who builds Yerushalayim, He will gather the exiles" (Tehillim 147: 3)