

Tisha B'Av How It Relates to Our Lives Today

Dear Rabbi Fried,

I joined a service for the first time on Tisha B'Av last year, where everyone sat on the floor and recited special prayers in a state of mourning over the destruction of the Temple. Although I participated, I had trouble feeling so much sorrow over a building that was destroyed almost 2000 years ago, as I don't see how it relates to our lives. I would appreciate your insights and giving meaning to this ritual.

Kathy B.

Dear Kathy,

This coming Saturday night and Sunday is Tisha B'av, the 9th day of the Jewish month of Av, the day we commemorate the destruction of the two Temples of yore and subsequent exiles, which we endure today.

The *Code of Jewish Law* states: "It is befitting for anyone with the awe of Heaven to be pained by the destruction of the Temple," (*Shulchan Aruch* O"C 1:3). Since the *Code of Jewish Law* was written for all Jews, regardless of their spiritual taste, how could this obligation be predicated upon a level of the "awe of Heaven"?

A great Chassidic master once answered that "only one who has the awe of Heaven can truly feel the loss of the Temple." My late mentor explained that the purpose of the Temple was to bring the Jewish people to an profound level of closeness to the Al-mighty. The Temple was a spiritual conduit through which flowed awesome levels of spiritual energy, from the heavens to every Jewish home and heart.

The Talmud says that when the Temple was destroyed, a "wall of lead" was erected between the Jewish people and their Father in heaven. This means that the destruction caused a disconnect between the *mind* and the *heart*. Although belief in G-d could be strong intellectually, the emotional level of closeness and love was greatly diminished. This was due to the loss of the tangible experience of the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence, from our midst.

This is the meaning of the *Code*, that only one who is exerting great effort in forging a strong connection to G-d can truly feel the lack of that connection - caused by the loss of the Temple.

When King Nebuchadnezzar came to destroy the first Temple, a renowned Greek philosopher, Appleton, accompanied him, to see for his own eyes this renowned edifice before it was destroyed. After the destruction, the philosopher encountered Jeremiah the prophet near the Temple mount, prostrated on a large rock, weeping and wailing over the Temple ruins.

The philosopher asked the prophet, "Jeremiah, you are a man of spirit! Is it befitting a man of your intellectual stature to cry over a building, which is really nothing more than sticks and stones?"

Jeremiah responded, "As a world-renowned philosopher, you must have many perplexing questions." The Greek recited a long list of complicated problems he was bothered by. Humbly and quietly, Jeremiah resolved all of them in a few brief sentences. The Greek was dumbfounded, proclaiming, "I didn't know any mortal could be so wise! From where did you receive this wisdom and clarity?!" Jeremiah pointed to the Temple ruins and said, "All of this profound wisdom I derived from these 'sticks and stones,' and that is why I am crying!"

On Tisha B'Av we mourn not only the destruction of the two Temples, we mourn the lack of connection to our spiritual Source, our lack of clarity.

We also mourn and commemorate the millions of Jews lost and murdered in all the subsequent destructions: the pogroms, inquisitions, the Holocaust, the suicide bombings and more.

We further mourn the loss of some 100,000 Jews a year to assimilation in America and throughout the world.

We mourn the loss of our direct connection and love relationship with the Al-mighty which was realized in His Temple - that loss being the source of all of the above tragedies.

Especially in the world we live in today, when all held dear is being challenged and ripped asunder, confusion reigns in nearly every area of life with such an unclear future. Antisemitism has reared its ugly head with a vengeance not seen since pre-war times. All this stems from the loss of the Temple and the connection it provided, serving as a benchmark for the morals of all mankind.

When Napoleon was conquering Europe, he passed a synagogue and noticed the Jews inside were sitting on the floor and weeping. He called aside his religious advisor and asked him why these Jews were crying; had they just suffered some great loss? The advisor answered that they the loss of their Temple and today is called "Tisha B'Av", the ninth of the Jewish month of Av, when they commemorate that loss." Napoleon asked him if their Temple was destroyed recently, to which the adviser replied that, in fact, it was not recent, it was some 1700 years ago.

To that Napoleon exclaimed, "So many hundreds of years and they're still mourning over it - then I'm sure that one day they'll have it back!!"

This story calls to mind the words of the *Code of Jewish Law*, echoed so succinctly by none other than Napoleon: "Anyone who mourns the destruction of the Temple will surely see its rebuilding."

An easy and meaningful fast for all the readers, may it be the last one!