

B"H

"Tisha B'Av has two sides to it!"

"Tisha B'Av" is the darkest day on the Jewish calendar, observed this year on Saturday night and Sunday July 26.

Tisha B'Av commemorates the destruction of the Jerusalem's Holy Temple and almost 2 millennia of Jewish struggle in exile. On the negative side, Tisha Bav also saw forty years of death and wandering in the desert, the fall of Betar, the Spanish expulsion in 1492, & the start of World War I.

Today, the saddest thing about Tisha B'Av is that many people do not know about it or care to observe it. We don't know what we're missing. Unfortunately, we are split and divided, suffering from the same senseless hatred that caused the tragedy of Tisha B'Av.

Tisha B'Av climaxes three weeks of mourning, beginning with the fast of the 17th of Tamuz. During the nine days preceding Tisha B'Av, we abstain from eating meat, drinking wine (except for a Mitzvah dinner), nor take a full bath. We fast on Tisha B'Av, do not wash, wear leather shoes, or have marital relations. The Book of Lamentations is read sitting on a low stool in mourning.

But there is another side to Tisha B'Av.

The Talmud tells the story of Rabbi Akiva and the Sages tearing their garments in mourning upon seeing Jerusalem in ruins. Their anguish increased upon seeing a fox strolling where the Holy Ark once stood. The Sages burst. . .

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into tears, but Rabbi Akiva laughed. The Sages were shocked. "How can you laugh when animals desecrate our Holy of Holies?" Said Rabbi Akiva: "The Torah connects the fall and rise of Jerusalem. Zechariah the prophet predicted that 'Zion will be plowed under,' while Uria the prophet foresaw 'elderly men and women relaxing in the streets of Jerusalem with small children happily playing nearby'... Now that the negative has actually come to pass, the good prophecies will truly be fulfilled!"

The Sages conceded, saying: "Akiva, you have comforted us!"

Tisha B'Av is negative - but once we have the negative, it takes only time and effort to develop it into a positive and see the full picture in the words of Zechariah (8:19): "These very days of sorrow and fasting will turn into days of joy and feasting for the House of Israel."

Tisha B'Av expresses strength rather than weakness. Other nations celebrate only their red-letter days and triumphs, yet we have the strength to dedicate a day to our tragedy, and that is the secret of our long survival that enables Israel to outlive the greatest empires that have long since vanished. Tisha B'Av directs us to positive, constructive action of rebuilding through Torah and charity.

It is customary to rise Tisha B'Av afternoon and clean the house, showing our renewed faith and hope. On the positive side, Tisha B'Av marks the birth and potential of redemption by the righteous Moshiach, a most important Jewish principle: **"I fully believe in the coming of Moshiach, and though he may take time, each day I eagerly anticipate his coming!"** (Maimonides)

Last but not least, we conclude the Lamentations on a high positive note as we loudly declare: **"Return to us, O G-d, and we will return to You; renew our days as once before!"**

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Rabbi Yisroel Rubin recalls back in the '80's; The Lubavitcher Rebbe's secretary Rabbi Groner called to tell me that the Rebbe enjoyed this Tisha B'av message printed on opposite sides of the page in the local "Jewish World".