



Torah Reflections: Tisha B'Av *Finding Hope Among the Ruins*

Tisha B'Av, the 9th day of the Jewish month of Av, is generally understood to be the saddest day of the Jewish year. It is on this date that both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed. Our tradition links many other tragic moments to this day, reminding us of the dark side of Jewish history, which is filled with times of violence and displacement.

The destruction of the Second Temple could have been the end of Judaism and the Jewish people. The Temple – the center of all religious life – was gone, many of the leaders had been killed, and those who remained were enslaved and sent in to exile. It is hard to imagine today the scope of the suffering – the physical ruins, the emotional trauma, and the political chaos.

For many of us living with illness, caring for a loved one struggling with illness, or grieving a loved one's death, the images of destruction and dislocation may feel all too familiar. Many people who have spent time in hospitals and nursing homes, living in an unfamiliar world with alien routines, describe feeling like "strangers in a strange land." The physical pain and emotional anguish of illness can leave us feeling exiled from our previous life, from the people around us, and even from our own bodies. For those among us struggling with mental illness, we may feel alienated from our family and community who do not understand what we are going through. For many who have lost a loved one, it is as if our world has been destroyed.

As we move through hospital corridors in search of treatment for our bodies and minds, our hearts may be filled with echoes of the Book of Lamentation:

"Behold, and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow over that which has been done to me?"

"For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me."

"Surely God has turned against me... My flesh and my skin have been made old; my bones are broken. I am in a dark place. "

"Listen God; for I am in distress. My stomach is in knots and my heart is turned within me."

Our tradition shows great wisdom by including a book of laments among our sacred texts. For the opportunity to express our sorrow, doubt, and fear can bring great relief. Furthermore, the chance to share stories with someone in a similar situation may help us feel less alone. The recitation of the Book of Lamentations on Tisha B'Av reminds us that expressing sadness is not only psychologically useful, but an essential part of our sacred journey.

After the destruction of the Second Temple, Judaism might have disappeared. The Temple which had served as the spiritual and political center of the nation was destroyed. And yet, the Jewish people continued. In the face of this tragedy new leadership arose and began to reshape Judaism. Rabbis took over from priests, prayer replaced Temple sacrifice, and study and *mitzvot* (sanctified deeds) became the new focus of Jewish practice. Judaism was radically reshaped and the Jewish people survived.

Even in the midst of suffering and loss, there exists the possibility of rebuilding and creating something new. Many who have experienced destruction in their own lives through the loss of health or family, find renewed purpose and hope. The old world, old ways of being, may no longer be possible, but new worlds open in their place. Tisha B'Av reminds us of the power of human resiliency. The ability of people to accept support, heal their wounds, and rebuild their lives.

May Tisha B'av serve as a reminder for us – not only of the fragility of life – but also of the power of the human spirit to create anew out the ashes. And may we all be blessed to find within our hearts sanctuaries of peace, healing and hope.

© Rabbi Elisa Goldberg, Bay Area Jewish Healing Center



This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Elisa Goldberg, Director of the Office of Rabbinic Career Development for the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, and a member of Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains. The Torah Reflections series is published by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties. More information and healing-oriented resources can be found at www.JewishHealingCenter.org.

