

## Delaying Mourning: *Tishah B'Av* and the Shabbat

This Shabbat coincides with *Tishah B'Av*, the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, the saddest day of the Jewish year. And because it is Shabbat, we'll delay the observance of *Tishah B'Av* until Saturday night. I think that there is something quite revealing about the Jewish spirit in this "delayed mourning" phenomenon. But first, let us recall what it is, exactly, what this day of sadness and mourning is all about.

*Tishah B'Av* is a day of mourning and fasting in remembrance of many terrible calamities and disasters. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av the Jewish people experienced the tremendous loss of life and freedom that came to our people with the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians (586 BCE). And on that very same day, the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, we witnessed the destruction of the second Temple by the Romans (70 CE). In addition to the destruction of the Temples, many other catastrophes have fallen on this very same date. For instance, in 1492, Jews had until the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av to flee Spain. Also, on August 1, 1914, the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, the formal order of mobilization was ordered by the Germans and World War I began.

In anticipation of this day, we reflect on the causes and the lessons of all of those terrible events. And the great sages of our people came up with one very significant cause and lesson: namely, that our family and our people were made vulnerable to these calamities because of *sinat chinam*, "baseless hatred." Now that is not to put all the blame on the outsider, the anti-Semite, the bigots and the thugs who came to plague our people. Rather, *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, is an apt description of our reaction to one another when times became tough and severe challenges arose. Instead of rallying together to support one another, we all too often turned against one another. We divided into rival camps---not just into two or three camps. Rather, we divided into a slew of cliques and factions, all self-righteously proclaiming that they had the right answers, that the others were ruining everything, that the glory and cherished culture of our ancestral heritage would only be safe if all joined my party and faction and rejected the pretenders. *Tishah B'Av* is a time for an unfiltered, hard look into the mirror and spotting all the blemishes of cruelty, impatience, and harshness that break up friendships, families and communities. As Walt Kelly, the late-great cartoonist of *Pogo* wrote in his 1970 Earth Day strip, "We have met the enemy and he is us!"

But it is also noteworthy that we delay mourning until after Shabbat. Even *Tisha B'Av*, a day codified thousands of years ago as a time of fasting, is preempted by the sanctity of Shabbat. This Shabbat before *Tisha B'Av* begins a new chapter, a new book. It begins the Book of Deuteronomy which starts with a retelling of the journey and adventures of our people. It is a Shabbat of vision. The *Haftarah* portion from the first chapter of the prophet Isaiah begins with the word *Chazon*, "the vision" of Isaiah. His vision starts with harsh judgement of our ancestors and concludes with the promise that God will "Restore your magistrates as of old, and your counselors as of yore. After that you shall be called a City of Righteousness, a Faithful City. Zion shall be saved in the judgment; Her repentant ones, in the retribution" (Isaiah 1:26-27).

We delay mourning for a time of reflection, rest and renewal. And that day our mourning is tempered by the promise of redemption. As it was for our ancestors, so may it be for each of us.

Temple Sinai's observance of Tisha b'Av begins at 7:00 pm on Saturday, July 21 and will include a service and readings from the book of Lamentations. The prophet Jeremiah was said to have written Lamentations as he witnessed the fall of Jerusalem some 2,500 years ago. Together we will read and discuss his words and have a service that reflects the meaning of this ancient day of mourning.

Please consider joining us for this moving service.