

TISHA B'AV 5781
A TIME OF FASTING, MOURNING AND REFLECTION

Tisha B'Av (the Ninth of Av) is a time of mourning the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem and the Exile of the Jewish people. The haunting melody of Eicha (the Book of Lamentations) and the kinot (songs of mourning and loss) that we sing help us “remember” these moments of destruction and loss. This time of fasting and reflection upon the repeated tragedies the Jewish people have overcome in our history is considered the nadir of the Jewish year.

Even though it feels that summer has just begun, Tisha B'Av is almost upon us once again. This year, Tisha **B'Av begins on Motzai Shabbat, Saturday night, July 17th.** **We will gather in the Lower Sanctuary of PSJC and via zoom at 9:00** to mourn and to hear the compelling words and melody of Eicha, the Book of Lamentations.

Because we must wait for Shabbat to end before we begin our communal observance of Tisha B'Av (though our fast begins at sunset), we will not be able to begin earlier than the time for Maariv, but I hope you will join us to make the separation between the peacefulness of Shabbat and the time of mourning and reflection demanded by this day that begins Saturday night and continues through Sunday. Though we are hybrid (with some joining us in person and others on zoom), I am confident that we can create the sense of connection and meaning this time demands. It will be particularly important, for those who are joining us from home, to create a good environment for yourself. Find a quiet space in your home, put on a kippah and take off your shoes, sit on the floor (perhaps with a mat or cushions), perhaps light a yearzeit candle (to help with the mood), join the zoom service and, when it is time for Eicha, dim your lights and listen to this powerful text. We will share the text on the screen, but you might like to close your eyes and just hear the words. Open your hearts to this day. With all of the disruptions from regular life that we have encountered in this last year, I suspect that we will be able to hear the prophet Jeremiah's description of the destruction that he witnessed in ways we do not usually hear.

Tisha B'Av is one of only two days each year when we are asked to fast a full day (from sunset Saturday until 3 stars appear in the sky on Sunday night). While Yom Kippur directs us to use that day of fasting to reflect on our personal actions, choices, and behaviors in the year that has past, Tisha B'Av asks us to think collectively—to focus on our actions as a community, and especially as a people. As on Yom Kippur, we shed our leather shoes, and abstain from food, drink, and frivolous talk, but on Tisha B'Av we act as mourners, sitting low to the ground, physically and spiritually.

It is said that the destruction of **Tisha B'Av occurred because of *Sinat Hinam* (Causeless Hatred)**. And sadly, this corrosive dynamic is no less prevalent in our world today than it was in the Jerusalem of our ancestor's time. *Sinat Hinam* leads to violence and to devaluing people because of the color of their skin, their ethnic background, their immigration status, their education, their financial resources, their religion, their sexual orientation, gender or gender-identity.

May we use the 25 hours of Tisha B'Av in this most challenging of years to reflect upon the Causeless Hatred that is so prevalent within and between nations. And may we commit ourselves afresh to creating a world where we put aside this hatred, look with care and respect at those who are different from us or who hold very different views from ours, and work toward *olam hesed yibaneh* – building the world guided by love, kindness, and mutual respect and understanding – envisioned by the Psalmist.

I will close by reminding you that the night of Tisha B'Av and the next morning are periods of deep mourning. People do not greet one another and the melodies of the day reflect the sadness of the texts we hear. And yet, as the afternoon of Tisha B'Av approaches, the mood begins to lift. For, according to Jewish tradition, the Messiah will be born on Tisha B'Av. Out of the depths of despair, the spark of hope is born. After a year and a half of isolation and struggle during this pandemic and all of the darkness, deep challenges and inequities it has brought to light, may we feel that bit of hope as well. Tisha B'Av reminds us that we, who have known challenges we never imagined, have it within ourselves, as we begin to re-enter the world, encountering people face to face once again, to discover that light, to bring forward those sparks of hope and possibility which will bring us, our families, our community, our nation, our people, and our world closer to the world we have long envisioned, a world in which hatred is replaced by respect and understanding, in which light does indeed push away the darkness. This is the ultimate promise of Tisha B'Av. May we use it well.

Rabbi Carie Carter