

Tisha B'Av (The Fast of the Ninth of Av) Is It Relevant to Humanistic Jews?

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ORIGINS OF TISHA B'AV

Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, is the communal day of mourning in the Jewish calendar. While it's most commonly remembered as the day of destruction for the Temples in Jerusalem, the Mishnah in Taanit recounts a total of five tragic events that occurred on the ninth of Av.

THE THREE WEEKS & THE NINE DAYS

The Three Weeks is an annual mourning period that falls out in the summer to mourn the destruction of the Temple. The period begins on the 17th of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, a minor (sunup to sundown) fast day that marks the day when the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans in 69 CE.

The final Nine Days of the Three Weeks are a time of intensified mourning. Starting on the first of Av, traditional Jews refrain from eating meat or drinking wine, and from wearing freshly laundered clothes. Some men do not shave throughout the Three Weeks or only the Nine Days. Customs vary.

משנה תענית ד':ו'

תְּמִשָּׁה דְּכָרִים אָרְעוּ אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּשִׁבְעָה עָשָׂר בְּתַמּוּז וְחִמְשָׁה בְּתִשְׁבָּעָה בְּאָב... בְּתִשְׁבָּעָה בְּאָב נִגְזַר עַל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שְׁלֹא יִכְנָסוּ לְאֶרֶץ, וְחָרַב הַבַּיִת בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה וּבְשֵׁנִיָּה, וְנִלְכְּדָה בֵּיתֵר, וְנִחְרְשָׁה הָעִיר. מִשְׁנַכְנְסִים אָב, מִמְעַטִּין בְּשִׁמְחָה:

TEXT: Mishnah Taanit 4:6

There were five events that happened to our ancestors on the seventeenth of Tammuz and five on the ninth of Av...On the ninth of Av it was decreed that our ancestors should not enter the land, The Temple was destroyed the first and the second time, Betar was captured, And the city was plowed up. When Av enters, they limit their rejoicing.

TEXT: Interpretive Explanation of Mishnah Taanit 4:6 (Dr. Joshua Kulp)

There were five events that occurred on the ninth of Av, which besides Yom Kippur is the only major fast in the Jewish calendar. 1) After the people of Israel believed the bad report of the ten spies over that of Joshua and Caleb, God decreed that no one over the age of twenty would make it into the land of Canaan (see Numbers 14:29). 2 +3) Both Temples were destroyed, the first by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. and the second by the Romans in 70 C.E. The first Temple was set aflame on the ninth and burnt on the Tenth see Jeremiah 52:12-13. 4) Betar, an important Jewish stronghold during the Bar-Kochba revolt fell to the Romans. 5) After the Bar Kochba rebellion was defeated, the Romans plowed over the city, destroying any remaining buildings and quashing any hopes that the Temple would be rebuilt.

WHAT ARE THE TRADITIONS OF MOURNING ON TISHA B'AV?

The Rabbis of the Talmud discuss Tisha B'Av mourning practices. Most of the customs are the same as those for someone mourning for a relative and the Fast of Yom Kippur. The Babylonian Talmud outlines the proscriptions.

תענית ל' א'-י"ב

ת"ר כל מצות הנוהגות באבל נוהגות בט' באב אסור באכילה ובשתיה ובסיכה ובנעילת הסנדל ובתשמיש המטה ואסור לקרות בתורה ובנביאים ובכתובים ולשנות במשנה בתלמוד ובמדרש ובהלכות ובאגדות

TEXT: B. Talmud Taanit 30a:10-12

The Sages taught: All mitzvot practiced by a mourner are likewise practiced on the Ninth of Av:

It is prohibited to engage in eating, and in drinking,
and in smearing oil on one's body [originally referred to perfumes /
washing]
and in wearing shoes,
and in conjugal relations.

It is prohibited to read from the Torah, from the Prophets, and from the Writings, or to study from the Mishna, from the Talmud, and from midrash, and from collections of *halakhot* (legal material), and from collections of *aggadot* (lore).

II KINGS - OLDEST SOURCE

The oldest source describing the events that led to the fall of Judah and Jerusalem are in the biblical book of II Kings.

מלכים ב כ"ה:ח-י"ג

(ח) ובהחדש החמישי בשבעה לחודש היא שנת תשע-עשרה שנה למלך נבוכדנאצר מלך-בבל בא נבוזראדן רב-טבחים עבד מלך-בבל ירושלים: (ט) וישָׁרף את-בית-יהוה ואת-בית המלך ואת כל-בתי ירושלים ואת-כל-בית גדול שָׁרף באשׁ: (י) ואת-חומת ירושלים סביב גתצו כל-חיל כשדים אשר רב-טבחים: (יא) ואת יתר העם הנשָׂארים בעיר ואת-הנָּפלים אשר נָּפלו על-המלך בבל ואת יתר ההמון הגולה נבוזראדן רב-טבחים: (יב) ומדלת הארץ השָׂאיר רב-טבחים לכרמים וליגבים: (יג) ואת-עמודי הנחשת אשר בית-יהוה ואת-המכּוֹזֹת אשר בבית-יהוה שָׁבְרוּ כשדים וישָׂאוּ את-נחשתם בבלה:

TEXT: II Kings 25:8-13

(8) On the seventh day of the fifth month (i.e., Av)—that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon — Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, an officer of the king of Babylon — came to Jerusalem. (9) He burned the House of the LORD [the Temple], the king’s palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem; he burned down the house of every notable person. (10) The entire Chaldean (Babylonian) force that was with the chief of the guard tore down the walls of Jerusalem on every side. (11) The remnant of the people that was left in the city, the defectors who had gone over to the king of Babylon — and the remnant of the population — were taken into exile by Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards. (12) But some of the poorest in the land were left by the chief of the guards, to be vinedressers and field hands. (13) The Chaldeans broke up the bronze columns of the House of the LORD, the stands, and the bronze tank that was in the House of the LORD; and they carried the bronze away to Babylon.

PSALMS RECORD THE MOURNING

תהילים קל"ז:א-ו

(א) על נהרות ו בבל נשם ישבנו גם-בכינו בְּזַכְרֵנוּ אֶת-צִיּוֹן: (ב) על-עַרְבִים בְּתוֹכָהּ תִּלְיֵנוּ כַּזֹּרְתֵינוּ: (ג) כִּי נָשָׂא לִוְנֵנוּ שׁוֹבֵינֵנוּ דְבַר-יִשְׁעֵיר וְתוֹלְדֵינוּ שְׁמִתָּהּ שִׁירוּ לָנוּ מִשְׁעֵיר צִיּוֹן: (ד) אֵיךְ נָשִׂיר אֶת-שִׁיר-יְהוָה עַל אֲדָמַת נָגַר: (ה) אִם-אֲשַׁפְּתָהּ יְרוּשָׁלַם תִּשְׁפַח יְמִינִי: (ו) תִּדְבַּק-לְשׁוֹנִי וְלַחֲפִי אִם-לֹא אֲזַכְּרֶכֶּי אִם-לֹא אֶעֱלֶה אֶת-יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל רֹאשׁ שְׁמִחָתִי:

TEXT: Psalms 137:1-6

(1) By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we thought of Zion. (2) There on the poplars we hung up our lyres, (3) for our captors asked us there for

songs, our tormentors, for amusement, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." (4) How can we sing a song of the LORD on alien soil? (5) If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; (6) let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour.

THE BIBLICAL BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS (EICHA) READ AT THE SERVICE



As the Book of Esther is read on Purim, the book of Lamentations (Eicha) is read on Tisha B'Av. It describes the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE by the Babylonians.

איכה א' א'-ח'

(א) איכה | ישבה בְּדָד הָעִיר רַבְתִּי עִם הַיְתָה פֶּאֶלְמִנָּה רַבְתִּי בַגּוֹזִים שְׁרָתִי בַמְּדִינֹת הַיְתָה לְמִס: {ס} (ב) בָּכוּ תַבְּפָה בְּלִילָה וְדַמְעָתָה עַל לְחֹזֶה אֵינֶיךָ מִנְחָם מִכָּל־אֲהַבֶּיךָ כְּלִירְעִיךָ בְּגָדוֹ כִּהָּ הָיָה לָהּ לְאִיבִים: {ס} (ג) גָּלְתָה יְהוּדָה מֵעֲנִי וּמַרְבַּע עֲבֹדָה הָיָה יִשְׁבָּה בַגּוֹזִים לֹא מִצָּאָה מְנוּחַס כְּלִירְדָּפְיָהּ הַשִּׁיגִינָה בֵּין הַמִּצָּרִים: {ס} (ד) דָּרְכֵי צִיּוֹן אֲבֵלוֹת מִבְּלִי בָּאֵי מוֹעֵד כְּלִישְׁעֲרִיךָ שׁוֹמְמִין פִּתְחֵיךָ נֶאֱנָחִים בְּתוֹלְתֶיךָ נֹגֶזֶת וְהָיָה מִרְגָּלָה: {ס} (ה) הָיָה צָרִיךָ לְרֹאשׁ אִיבִיךָ שְׁלוֹ כִּי־יִהְיֶה הַוָּגֵה עַל רֶב־פְּשֻׁעֶיךָ עוֹלְלֵיךָ הִלְכּוּ שָׁבִי לִפְנֵי־צָר: {ס} (ו) וַיֵּצֵא (מִן בַּת) [מִבַּת־] צִיּוֹן כְּלִי־הַדְּבָרָה הַיָּהוָה שְׁרִיךָ כָּאֲלִים לֹא־מִצָּאוּ מִרְעָה וַיִּלְכּוּ בְלֹא־כֶסֶם לִפְנֵי רֹדְפֵי: {ס} (ז) זָכַרְתָּ יְרוּשָׁלַם יָמֵי עֲנִיָּה וּמְרוֹדֶיךָ כֹּל מַחְמֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִימֵי קֶדֶם בְּנִפְלַע עִמָּה בְּנִדְצָר וְאֵין עוֹזֵר לָהּ רְאוּתָה צָרִים שָׁחֲקוּ עַל מִשְׁבַּתָּה: {ס} (ח) חָטָא חָטָאָה יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל־כֵּן לִנְדָה הַיְתָה כְּלִי־מִכְבָּדֶיךָ הַזִּילוּךָ כִּי־רָאוּ עֲרוֹתָה גַם־הָיָה נֶאֱנָחָה וַתֵּשֶׁב אַחֲוֹר: {ס}

TEXT: Lamentations 1:1-8

(1) Alas!

Lonely sits the city
Once great with people!
She that was great among nations
Is become like a widow;
The princess among states
Is become a thrall.

(2) Bitterly she weeps in the night,

Her cheek wet with tears.
There is none to comfort her
Of all her friends.
All her allies have betrayed her;
They have become her foes.

(3) Judah has gone into exile

Because of misery and harsh
oppression;
When she settled among the
nations,
She found no rest;
All her pursuers overtook her
In the narrow places.

(4) Zion's roads are in mourning,

Empty of festival pilgrims;
All her gates are deserted.
Her priests sigh,
Her maidens are unhappy—
She is utterly disconsolate!

(5) Her enemies are now the masters,

Her foes are at ease,

Because the LORD has afflicted her
For her many transgressions;
Her infants have gone into captivity
Before the enemy.

(6) Gone from Fair Zion are all

That were her glory;
Her leaders were like stags
That found no pasture;
They could only walk feebly
Before the pursuer.

(7) All the precious things she had

In the days of old
Jerusalem recalled
In her days of woe and sorrow,
When her people fell by enemy
hands
With none to help her;
When enemies looked on and
gloated
Over her downfall.

(8) Jerusalem has greatly sinned,

Therefore she is become a mockery.
All who admired her despise her,
For they have seen her disgraced;
And she can only sigh
And shrink back.

KINOT / ELEGIES (MOURNFUL LITURGICAL POEMS)

Another way that Jews mourn is to recite *kinnot* or poems lamenting the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and other tragedies.

קינות לתשעה באב (אשכנז), קינות לליל תשעה באב א'א'ג'

זכור יי מיה הנה לנו אוי. הביטה וראה את חרפתנו. אוי מה הנה לנו: נחלתנו נהפכה לזרים אוי. פתינו לנכרים. אוי מה הנה לנו: תומים היינו ואין אב אוי. אמותינו מקוננות בחדש אב. אוי מה הנה לנו:

TEXT: Kinot for Tisha B'Av Night 1:1-3 (Ashkenazi)

Remember, LORD, what has occurred to us, Alas! Look and see our disgrace. Alas! what has occurred to us. Our property has been handed over to strangers, Alas! Our homes to foreigners. Alas! what has occurred to us. We have become orphans without a father. Alas! Our mothers mourn in the month of Av. Alas! what has occurred to us.

קינות לתשעה באב (אשכנז), קינות לליל תשעה באב ה'

(א) עד אנה בכנה בציון ומספד בירושלים. תרחם ציון ותבנה חומות ירושלים:
(ב) אז בחטאינו חרב מקדש ובעונותינו נשרף היכל. בארץ חברה לה קשרה מספד. וצבא השמים נשאו קינה: עד אנה:

(ג) תרחם ציון פאשר אמת ותכוננה פאשר דברת. תמהר ישועה ותחיש גאלה ותשוב לירושלים ברחמים רבים:
פכתוב על יד נביאך לכן פה אמר יי שבת ירושלים ברחמים ביתי יבנה בה נאם יי צבאות וקו ינטה על ירושלים:
ונאמר. עוד קרא לאמר פה אמר יי צבאות עוד תפוצנה ערי מטוב ונחם יי עוד את ציון ויבחר עוד בירושלים: ונאמר כי נחם יי ציון נחם כל חרבתייה וישם מדברה כעדן וערבתייה כגן יי ששון ושמחה ימצא בה תודה וקול זמרה:

TEXT: From "Kinot for Tisha B'Av" (Ashkenaz)

(1) How long will there be crying in Zion and eulogies in Jerusalem? Have compassion for Zion and build the walls of Jerusalem.

(2) א. Then, for our sins, the Sanctuary was destroyed, and for our violations, the Temple building was burnt. ב. On Earth, they gathered to her, compiling a eulogy. And the host of the Heavens raised a lament. "How long..."

(13) Have mercy on Zion as you said, and build her as you stated. Hasten salvation, hurry redemption, and return to Jerusalem with great mercy. As was written by your prophet: "Therefore, this is what God says- I will return to Jerusalem mercifully, my house will be built in her, says God of Hosts, and a plumbline will be stretched over Jerusalem." And it is said in another verse: "This

is what God says- My cities will again be exploding with goodness, and God will comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem again." And it is said: "For God has comforted Zion, comforted all her ruins, and has made her deserts like Eden and her wilderness like God's garden. Joy and happiness are to be found there, gratitude and the sound of song."

TISHA B'AV AS A DAY OF UNIVERSAL JEWISH MOURNING

Christians were aware of the importance of Tisha B'Av and chose it (and the month of Av) as a date to further embitter the lives of Jews. Examples include:

- Declaration of First Crusade – 1095 – issued in Av.
- English Edict of Expulsion – 1290 – issued on Tisha B'Av
- French Edict of Expulsion – 1306 – enforced on 10 Av.
- Expulsion of Jews from Spain – 1492 – issued on Tisha B'Av
- Approval of Final Solution by SS – 1941 – issued on Tisha B'Av.
- Warsaw Ghetto Deportation commences – 1941 – on Tisha B'Av.
- Intellectuals of Iwye, Poland (Belarus) slaughtered – 1941 – on Tisha B'Av.

KINOT FOR TRAGEDIES OF MEDIEVAL JEWRY

Later kinot mourn the massacres of the Jewish communities of Speyer, Mainz, and Worms (located near the present-day French-German border) in 1096. Its portrayal of Jewish suffering is graphic:

TEXT: Kinah #25 (מי יתן ראשי, "Who Can Grant That My Head")

"Corpses are strewn about, naked men and naked women, their bodies like carrion for the wild beasts of the land and for the animals, a nursing infant with a man of old age, young men and young maidens."

WHY WERE THE FIRST AND SECOND TEMPLES DESTROYED?

A tremendous national tragedy leads us to ask the question: Why did this happen to us?

This discussion in Babylonian Talmud Tractate Yoma seeks to find reasons for the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and the Second Temple, at the hands of the Romans, in 70 CE.

יומא ט' ב:ג'

מקדש ראשון מפני מה חרב מפני ג' דברים שהיו בו ע"ז וגלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים ע"ז דכתיב (ישעיהו כח, כ) כי קצר המצע מהשתרע אבל מקדש שני שהיו עוסקין בתורה ובמצות וגמילות חסדים מפני מה חרב מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם ללמדך ששקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות ע"ז גלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים

TEXT: B. Talmud Yoma 9b

Due to what reason was the First Temple destroyed? It was destroyed due to the fact that there were three matters that existed in the First Temple: Idol worship, forbidden sexual relations [גילוי עריות], and bloodshed. Idol worship, as it is written: "The bed is too short for stretching, and the cover is too narrow for gathering" (Isaiah 28:20) [Your affliction will be so sore, that you are not able to endure it, or, you made your bed and now you must lie in it].

However, considering that the people during the Second Temple period were engaged in Torah study, observance of mitzvot, and acts of kindness, and that they did not perform the sinful acts that were performed in the First Temple, why was the Second Temple destroyed? It was destroyed due to the fact that there was wanton hatred during that period. This comes to teach you that the sin of wanton hatred is equivalent to the three severe transgressions: Idol worship, forbidden sexual relations and bloodshed.

KAMTZA AND BAR KAMTZA:

A TALMUDIC STORY OF BASELESS HATRED & RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

This story proposes different reasons for the (second) fall of Jerusalem. Does it have relevance for modern Humanistic Jews?

גיטין נ"ה א-נ"ו ב

אקמצא ובר קמצא חרוב ירושלים דההוא גברא דרחמיה קמצא ובעל דבביה בר קמצא עבד סעודתא אמר ליה לשמעיה זיל אייתי לי קמצא אזל אייתי ליה בר קמצא אמר ליה לא אמר ליה יהיבנא לך דמי פלגא דסעודתיך אמר ליה לא אמר ליה יהיבנא לך דמי כולה סעודתיך א"ל לא נקטיה בידיה ואוקמיה ואפקיה אמר הואיל והווי יתבי רבנן ולא מחו ביה ש"מ קא ניחא להו איזיל איכול בהו קורצא בי מלכא אזל אמר ליה לקיסר מרדו בכ יהודאי א"ל מי יימר א"ל שדר להו קורבנא חזית אי מקרבין ליה אזל שדר בידיה עגלא תלתא בהדי דקאתי שדא ביה מומא בניב שפתים ואמרי לה בדוקין שבעין דוכתא דלדידן הוה מומא ולדידהו לאו מומא הוא סבור רבנן לקרוביה משום שלום מלכות אמר להו רבי זכריה בן אבקולס יאמרו בעלי מומין קריבין לגבי מזבח סבור למיקטליה דלא ליזיל ולימא אמר להו רבי זכריה יאמרו מטיל

מום בקדשים יהרג אמר רבי יוחנן ענוותנותו של רבי זכריה בן אבקולס החריבה את ביתנו ושרפה את היכלנו והגליתנו מארצנו

TEXT: B. Talmud Gittin 55a-56b

The Gemara (Talmud) explains: Jerusalem was destroyed on account of Kamtza and bar Kamtza.

There was a certain man whose friend was named Kamtza and whose enemy was named bar Kamtza. He once made a large feast and said to his servant: Go bring me my friend Kamtza.

The servant went and mistakenly brought him his enemy bar Kamtza. The host said to him: No, you must leave. Bar Kamtza said to him: I will give you money for half of the feast; just do not send me away. The host said to him: No, you must leave. Bar Kamtza then said to him: I will give you money for the entire feast; just let me stay. The host said to him: No, you must leave.

Finally, the host took bar Kamtza by his hand, stood him up, and took him out.

After having been cast out from the feast, bar Kamtza said to himself: Since the Sages were sitting there and did not protest the actions of the host, although they saw how he humiliated me, learn from it that they were content with what he did. I will therefore go and inform [*eikhul kurtza*] against them to the king.

He went and said to the emperor: The Jews have rebelled against you. The emperor said to him: Who says that this is the case?

Bar Kamtza said to him: Go and test them; send them an offering to be brought in honor of the government, and see whether they will sacrifice it. The emperor went and sent with him a choice three-year-old calf.

While bar Kamtza was coming with the calf to the Temple, he made a blemish on the calf's upper lip. And some say he made the blemish on its eyelids, a place where according to our laws, i.e., *halakha*, it is a blemish, but according to their laws, i.e., gentile rules for their offerings, it is not a blemish.

Therefore, when bar Kamtza brought the animal to the Temple, the priests would not sacrifice it on the altar since it was blemished, but they also could not explain this satisfactorily to the gentile authorities, who did not consider it to be blemished.

The blemish notwithstanding, the Sages wanted to sacrifice the animal as an offering due to the imperative to maintain peace with the government. But Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolas said to them: If the priests do that, people will say that blemished animals may be sacrificed as offerings on the altar. The Sages said: If we do not sacrifice it, then we must prevent bar Kamtza from reporting this to the emperor. The Sages suggested killing him so that he would not go and speak against them.

Rabbi Zekharya said to them: If you kill him, people will say that one who makes a blemish on sacrificial animals is to be killed.

As a result, they did nothing, bar Kamtza's slander was accepted by the authorities, and consequently the war between the Jews and the Romans began.

Rabbi Yoḥanan says: The excessive humility of Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolas destroyed our Temple, burned our Sanctuary, and exiled us from our land.

DISCUSSION

This is said to illustrate the concept of *Sinat Chinam* - baseless hatred. But it also deals with issues of religious fanaticism particularly on the part of the priests who refused to accept the Emperor's blemished sacrificial offering. Relevance to today's Jewish community?