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COMPACT
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COMPACT

Enriching the Lives of Conservative Jews

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DVAR TORAH

TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

Dr. Irving (Yitz) Greenberg

(Excerpted from *A Guide to Tisha B'Av* - 1978)

Much of Jewish tradition and the Jewish religious calendar is an attempt to live in the light of certain great events of our history. Judaism is a religion of redemption promising a final perfection of humankind. Its condition and the primary event model is the Exodus (celebrated on Pesach, Sukkot, Shabbat, Shavuot). The Exodus reveals God's love and saving hand as well as the promise of redemption for humankind in history. We reenact and retell events on these days so that we experience them, internalize them and live by them. Our trust and hope in ultimate freedom flow naturally from the confidence born of being familiar with and living through the liturgical reenactment of these events.

For this very reason, great historical defeats and catastrophes are crises of faith for Judaism. When evil triumphs, the whole model of trust in final perfection is challenged. Perhaps there will be no ultimate victory and Jewish hope is only illusion. Judaism insisted that the final test of its truth is that this world will be perfected. We can live in a flawed world and work toward its perfection while sustained by our faith. But sooner or later there must be an actual perfection or all our testimony is empty. Decisive defeats throw all this into question. Therefore, despite its optimism and trust, Judaism has been unable to ignore catastrophe. It has had to test its faith, clarify it, and reformulate it after every major defeat so that it could once again credibly testify: there is a God, there will be redemption, and hope is not lost. The Jewish enterprise – to testimony, modeling and working toward universal liberation -- is still valid and even more necessary.

Every major Jewish catastrophe has led to falling away as some Jews lost hope, and to revival as other Jews overcame. The record of this struggle is found in the days of mourning of the Jewish calendar. These days are the record of defeats that, thanks to Jewish persistence and eternity, were not final after all. They remind Jews of their unfinished business – that no matter how well off they are, the world is still unredeemed. The days of mourning are incorporated into the religion to strengthen the credibility of Jewish affirmation. The days of mourning remind us that Jewish affirmations are not Pollyanna statements based on an easy fortunate life, untempered by hard reality, but rather are made in the face of tragedy – overcoming defeat much like the Kaddish prayer affirms life as a reaction to the pain of death.

Further, the Jewish tradition asserted that the hope of faith and the joy of living with God do not blot out the reality of tragedy in our time. Even righteous people suffer defeats and must cope with them. Until a total and final redemption occurs, the awareness of defeat and destruction must be incorporated into any faith or way of life, thereby becoming a learning experience. The paramount expression of this awareness reflected both in Jewish life and in the religious calendar, is in the four historical fast days – Tisha B'Av, Shiva Assar B'Tammuz, Assara BeTevet and Tzom Gedalia. On these days we relive the destruction of the first and second Temples as well as loss of Jewish sovereignty.

There are other kinds of fast days in Jewish tradition – fasts of repentance such as Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and the medieval B'Ha'B (Monday-Thursday-Monday fast days after the months of Nissan and Tishrei) and fasts of deliverance such as praying for rain when there is drought in Israel or asking for help when enemies invade.



The mood of Talmudic and especially medieval Jewish culture was to expand such days. The mood of Hassadic and modern Jewish culture has been to reduce them. Even so, the primary historical fast days retain a significant role in the theology and practice of the Jewish people.

Maimonides stresses the repentance function of these fast days "...in order to stir the hearts to open to the ways of repentance...to remind us of our evil deeds and those of our ancestors that caused...these bad events, that by remembering these things we will turn and do good..." After the Holocaust it is impossible to accept punishment for sins as the explanation of suffering; it is easier to mark these days as calls to action and repentance. But, historically, these days have spurred Jews' longing to return to Zion and to greater Jewish commitment.

The dominant purpose of the fasts is to reenact past tragedies by reliving them. By remembering and by understanding these sorrows, by renewed affirmation and action, these setbacks are overcome. The major religious behavior model in these days is that of mourning. Expressions of grief purge the emotion and free us to go on to a new life. By reenactment, the Jewish people identify with the suffering of its forebears. The memory of the martyrs is kept alive and their sacrifice gains meaning. By experiencing the tragedy afresh each year, one can never become reconciled to either the destruction of the Temple or to the exile from Israel. The tragedy has "just occurred" and the shock is still fresh. We taste the dregs of defeat and suffering even as we experience success and peace. Thus we become more sensitive to those who still suffer and who need help. After commemorating these days, we go on.

By commemorating these tragic events, we anticipate redemption and the Messiah. We still integrate these catastrophes into the larger cycle of hope and victory to affirm our ongoing faith in God's plan and in history's goal of redemption. Destruction and tragedy are not final but can be overcome.

This is the Messianic spirit and the secret of Jewish survival. This people was overthrown many times but has rebuilt on top of the ruins and lived. By reliving tragedies, it never forgot destruction or the taste of ashes. Now, the hope that Jews can avoid becoming drunk with the power of sovereignty and evolving into unfeeling conquerors lies in the retention of the memory and the feel of being victims and losers in the past.



OR LA YEHUDIM AV 5768

(A Light to Our Fellow Jews in the Month of Av)

SADNESS AND SONG

Rabbi Menachem Creditor, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA
(Originally published July 2007 on Shefa Network)

This morning at minyan, it struck me during Hallel that we were singing songs of joy and praise, all the while marking the beginning of the 'Nine Days' period leading to Tisha B'Av, one of the saddest days on the Jewish calendar. How is it possible to both sing and be sad? I'm reminded of the quote by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel z"l, taught to me by my dear friend and teacher Rabbi David Paskin: "there are three ways to mourn. The first is to cry. The second is to grow silent. The third is to transform sorrow into song."

The very transformation of our tears into music is what might have been present during Hallel this morning. Which leads me to the following reflection on Tisha B'Av and the spiritual journey our communities might consider engaging in the coming days.

The ancient Jerusalem Temple was destroyed because of "Sinat Chinam", free-flowing hatred. Sinat Chinam makes people use phrases like "us and them." It creates other-ness between brothers and sisters. People were slandering each other, and, in the name of what they held to be true, betrayed the integrity of their holy community. What they were doing is an example of what Jewish tradition calls " Motzi Shem Ra", or giving a bad name. That was the downfall of Jerusalem, our spiritual center, and the cause of deep pain for the entire Jewish community, especially those who called it home. The message of Tisha B'Av is to heal rupture caused by Sinat Chinam, and in so doing rebuild the world.

How can we overcome Sinat Chinam? How might we again sing together? There is only one way I know. We must begin to practice "Ahavat Chinam", free-flowing love. This must be the way we transform the pain of the past into the healing of the future, how we as a Jewish community will journey from Tisha B'Av to the very next Shabbat, in which the words of the Haftarah evoke the very need we have: " Nachamu, Nachamu Ami - be Comforted My People. (Isaiah, Ch. 40)"

God's Comfort is possible only when we recognize the humanity in each other.

How can we practice Ahavat Chinam? It is selfless love, a love that sometimes even calls for self-sacrifice. It allows us to see the benefit to others at least as crucially as the benefit to ourselves. But beyond that, Ahavat Chinam is the love we show to someone who might seem otherwise invisible to us: like the fellow traveler on a plane trip whom destiny has put in the next seat next to you. That trip lasts only so long: the journey's beginning is welcome perhaps with the hope that the conversation might deepen and because its



ending is openly accepted if the interaction turns out not to be so wonderful, at least we enter the relationship with a ready acceptance of its possible end.

As Tisha B'av is wrapped up in the concept of hatred, I encourage us all to consider reflecting on the question of one hateful practice: Lashon Hara. Lashon Hara literally means "evil speech", but that definition lets most people (including me) think that simple gossip and other types of typical conversational "talking about" don't qualify. Both people and institutions suffer when we allow ourselves to think the worst of the other. But Godly conversation is about letting the Love flow, letting Ahavat Chinam become our mindful practice. Only through Ahavat Chinam does the Tisha B'av Journey lead to Shabbat Nachamu.

If we are to succeed in creating Holy Communities, it will be because we work to internalize the Jewish values we hope to teach our children and each other. I can't stress enough how important this mindful Jewish practice can be when exercised as an infusion into daily living.

The way we express ourselves could and should bring out the best of our spirits, and allow us to believe the best about each other.

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ACT AS A JEW TO IMPROVE THE WORLD

HECHSHER TZEDEK: A CERTIFICATION THAT WOULD REFLECT A COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE ON BEHALF OF KOSHER FOOD COMPANIES RATHER THAN SOLELY THEIR ADHERENCE TO *KASHRUT*

Samuel G. Friedman

(Originally published in International Jerusalem Post, December 7-13, 2007)

Midway through his now-famous letter from the city jail in Birmingham, Alabama, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. defended the ongoing protest marches against segregation by quoting the prophet Amos: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream". At another point in the letter, he referred to the passage in the Book of Daniel in which Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, under threat of death, refused to bow before the gods of their Babylonian conquerors.

King meant his letter primarily to chastise the moderate clergymen of Birmingham, most of them Christian, who considered the movement's direct action too radical. And in doing so, he cited many religious figures in the Christian sphere, from Jesus and St. Thomas to Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich.

Even so, then and now, King's words carry an unexpected, unintended rebuke for Jews committed to social justice. One of the whopping paradoxes of the civil rights movement was that the Jews, who comprised a disproportionate share of white activists and volunteers, were largely ignorant of the theological roots of their idealism. With some rare rabbinic exceptions like Abraham Joshua Heschel and Jack Rothschild, they had to learn their own Bible from the black Christians in the campaign.

The divide between religious knowledge and social action persists in American Jewish life. In the parts of the Jewish spectrum with the strongest involvement in *tikkun olam*, particularly among the secular and unaffiliated, there is the least awareness of the Judaic foundations of that concept. (In fact, there is often an antipathy to religion itself as mere superstition.) In the parts with the deepest knowledge of text and tradition, particularly the Orthodox sector, a formidable apparatus of charities exists almost entirely to serve internal needs.

One of the reasons that American Jewish World Service under the leadership of Ruth Messinger has become such a phenomenon is that it has overtly connected activism (in the form of Peace Corps-like projects in developing nations) to a disciplined, ongoing study of Jewish texts.

Occupying the center of American Jewish life, a place defined more by what it isn't than what it is, the Conservative Movement has struggled over the years to reconcile contemporary Jewish political impulses with traditional Judaic religious injunctions. Now at least a partial reconciliation is at hand, and it is one with relevance and resonance far beyond the Conservative movement alone.

Rabbi Morris Allen has led the movement to create a new form of kosher certification, *hechsher tzedek*. This certification would reflect a commitment to justice on behalf of kosher food companies rather than solely their adherence to the laws of *kashrut* in food preparation. The *hechsher tzedek* puts the treatment of human beings at least on a par with the treatment of an animal.



Many of the humans in question here are Latino immigrants who have filled the labor vacuum in slaughterhouses across the United States and been the victims of both exploitative bosses and nativist bigots. The plant that first caught Rabbi Allen's attention several years ago is Agriprocessors in eastern Iowa. The facility, which is owned by a Lubavitcher family and produces the most kosher meat of any plant in the United States, has been controversial for nearly a decade.

First the journalist and author, Stephen Bloom, in his book *Postville*, depicted the Hassidic owners and managers not as the rescuers of a depleted local economy but as harsh, rigid outsiders. While one can attribute at least some of that portrait to Bloom's *mishegass* about his Jewish identity, *Postville* put Agriprocessors on the national map. A protracted and frustrated effort by the United Commercial and Food Workers to organize the slaughterhouse workers kept it there. A series of articles by Nathaniel Popper in the Forward detailed the below-market wages and dangerous conditions in the plant.

While Agriprocessors "inspired" the *hechsher tzedek*, the certification plan would cover the entire \$11.5 billion-a-year industry. To earn the *hechsher tzedek*, an employer, meaning in most cases a large corporation, would have to pay wages consistent with regional rates, provide employees with health care and vacation benefits, and offer safety training to workers in a language they understand, among other requirements. The *hechsher tzedek* would augment, not replace, existing certifications, most of them issued by Orthodox *va'ads*.

The plan is moving gradually yet steadily closer to becoming a reality. The Rabbinical Assembly, the organization of Conservative rabbis, has formally endorsed it. The Nathan Cummings Foundation, a respected institution in Jewish philanthropy, has given a \$50,000 grant. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the movement's congregational arm, prepared a detailed paper citing the textual bases for the *hechsher tzedek* in the Tanakh, the Talmud and *Shulhan Aruch*.

Those citations make a sensible unforced link between Judaism and this particular form of social justice. As a theological treatise for labor rights, it reminds me of the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, a cornerstone of trade unionism in the 20th century West. It helps, too, that Rabbi Allen was a prominent advocate for increasing kosher observance in Conservative circles before taking up this cause. No one can accuse him of discovering *kashrut* just in time to change the rules.

I have a hard time imagining that more Jews would become kosher as a result of *hechsher tzedek*, but the size of the kosher food market suggests that many Jewish consumers, while indifferent to most of the dietary laws, still buy kosher meat for reasons of sentiment, solidarity and perceived quality. How many naively think that *glatt* – a concept, indeed a social construction that barely existed in the United States before World War II – connotes some higher kosher status, when it's more like higher price?

So just as idealism and commerce have fruitfully commingled in the booming sales of hybrid cars and the campus protests against sweatshop labor, this kind of cross-pollination finds its Jewish expression in *hechsher tzedek*. It could provide an objective, living lesson in the relevance of tradition to modernity and of the inextricable interplay of Judaism and what we like to think of as Jewish set of values. And, for once, we wouldn't need a Talmud Torah lesson from a Baptist preacher to get the point.



LIVE THE JEWISH CALENDAR

TISHA B'AV

The ninth day of Av, mentioned in Zechariah 8:19 as the "Fast of the Fifth" month, commemorates such national calamities as the destruction of both Temples, the fall of Bar Kokhba's fortress, Betar, and the expulsion from Spain in 1492. According to tradition, both the First and Second Temples were destroyed on the ninth of Av, the day referred to as predestined to misfortune. Tisha B'Av resembles Yom Kippur in its restrictions upon eating and bathing, maintained from sunset to sunset.

The three weeks between the 17th of Tammuz and the ninth of Av are observed by abstaining from all festivities and joyous celebrations. But when the month of Av has begun, all enjoyment should be reduced. It has long been the custom not to eat meat (except on Shabbat) from the first day of Av until after the fast.

On the ninth of Av, when the Book of Lamentations and other dirges (*kinot*) are recited, before congregations seated on low stools as a sign of mourning, the curtain (*parokhet*) is removed from the Ark (*Aron Ha-Kodesh*), and visits are made to cemeteries, in order to stress the sense of mourning. The morning service is recited without *tallit* or *tefillin*; these are worn during the Mincha service. The elegies known as *kinot* are descriptive, not only of the calamities connected with the destruction of Jerusalem, but also of the Jewish catastrophes that occurred in various lands of persecution.

This year, the Ninth of Av observance/fast begins on the evening of Saturday, August 9th as Shabbat concludes; and continues through Sunday, August 10th 2008 with the MaAriv service.



EATING AS A JEW

HOW TO GET STARTED KEEPING KOSHER

Rabbi Howard R. Buechler, Dix Hill Jewish Center, Dix Hills, NY

(Originally published in the pamphlet "Meat, Milk and METNY: Your Guide to Kashrut")

Keeping kosher begins with a vision of how to become more engaged as a Jew. The dietary laws link us as individuals and as families to the living tree of Jewish history, and plant the seeds for the future as well. As we observe, or begin to observe, the laws of *kashrut*, we strengthen our connection to other Jews and express our Jewish commitments in a real and tangible fashion.

Engaging in keeping kosher creates magical moments as we elevate the ordinary act of eating to extraordinary *mitzvah* moments. As we buy and prepare food in accordance with the kosher laws, a simple shopping trip to the supermarket with our children or grandchildren can become a fun expedition of finding the kosher symbols on packages. Worldwide travel is transformed as you easily seek out and find local Jewish communities and kosher facilities from Hong Kong to Florence and every imaginable destination. And the biological imperative of eating is transformed into a profoundly Jewish experience, as each meal or snack becomes a reminder of our heritage and daily loyalty to God, the Torah, and the Jewish people.

Entering the world of keeping kosher has never been easier in Jewish history than now. As our tradition teaches us, a journey around the world begins with a single step. The portal into keeping kosher is predicated upon your desire to make this *mitzvah* a part of your life. As Conservative Jews, the observance of *kashrut* is an integral part of our identity and an awareness that growth is a part of life – and adding kosher observances at once, or in stages, is a natural evolution of crafting our souls and creating significant meaning in life.

Precisely as you read this, you are making a commitment to adjust your life with new traditions and a kosher vocabulary as well. Changing your kitchen into a kosher kitchen may necessitate changes, but the dividends are Divine. Your local rabbi, *hazzan* or kosher-observant friend would be delighted to help guide you.

The key vocabulary words are:

Fleishig – any food product that contains kosher meat in any amount

Milchig – any food product that contains anything dairy. Even the smallest ingredient that is dairy will create a dairy product.

Pareve -- Neutral food items such as eggs, fruits, and vegetables which contain no meat or dairy at all; yet once you mix them with either meat or dairy, they then assume that status. For example, eggs mixed into a kosher dairy brownie mix then assume the status of dairy.

Kosher consumers learn quite well how to read product labels. But in these times of advanced food technology, reading the label is not an assurance of *kashrut*. It is remarkable how many items are used in



food production, and what the federal government may allow as “natural additives” or “natural food coloring” may in fact be a non-kosher ingredient. Also, foods marked on the label as “non-dairy” may in fact be dairy according to the laws of *kashrut*, since federal labeling laws permit foods with a finite percentage of dairy included to be considered “non dairy,” but Jewish law is much clearer: any amount of dairy renders a food dairy. Therefore -- with the exception of eggs, fresh fruits, and fresh vegetables -- almost all other products, when possible, should have a recognized *heksher*, a kosher seal of approval that indicates that a food is prepared under rabbinic supervision and is our seal of trust that the item truly is kosher. The *heksher* is often followed by the letter D if the product is dairy. So buy only meat that is prepared under rabbinic supervision at your local kosher butcher. (Increasingly around the country, kosher meat is also sold, fresh or frozen, in your local supermarket.) And buy only foods that are marked with a *heksher*.

The portal into keeping kosher is predicated upon your desire to make this mitzvah a part of your life.

Organize your kitchen so that meat and dairy are separated. Even have a “Going Kosher” party and encourage family and friends to bring you gifts you will be needing, such as a set of kosher dairy dishes, pots, pans, and flatware, and a separate and recognizably different set for meat. (Glassware may be used interchangeably for meat and dairy with the proviso that the glasses are not used for baking or cooking. Therefore, drinking glasses may be used for either meat or dairy and glass serving bowls for salad, for example, may be used for either meat or dairy meals.)

With the exception of eggs, fresh fruits, and fresh vegetables, almost all other products, when possible, should have a recognized heksher, a kosher seal of approval.

Set a date for turning your home into a kosher paradise. On that day, invite some family and friends to help you make the transformation.

Simply clean and wipe out the refrigerator and freezer and discard any non-kosher foods. Your sink becomes kosher by first washing and scouring and then carefully pouring boiling water over the sink surface. (Check with your rabbi for exceptions, as some countertops may not tolerate boiling water being splashed upon the surface.) Your oven and range top are made kosher by cleaning (self-cleaning one cycle) and then turning on the over and burners to the highest temperature possible for a short while in order to burn off any non-kosher residue. (Care should be taken at all times. Check your oven manuals for any precautions.) Microwave ovens can usually be kashered (check with your rabbi regarding units made with a browning element) by wiping the surfaces and then placing a Pyrex-like glass with a cup or two of water in it and letting the unit operate at maximum setting for 15 minutes. Dishwashers are thoroughly cleaned by hand-scouring and then running empty through one heavy usage cycle.

Help comes from your rabbi in determining if some of your current kitchen wares can become kosher. Metal utensils (clean and undented pots, flatware, and silverware) are placed in a pot of boiling water after a piece of metal has been gently immersed in the boiling water, and then all other pieces are boiled for a few minutes. This renders the metal neutral and you can then determine to use them in your newly minted kosher home as *fleishig* or *milchig*. Items made of wood or plastic cannot be made kosher and need to be replaced. Dishes with a glaze (except earthenware) which have not been used for over a year may be simply cleaned and are then perfectly acceptable in your kosher home. All other dishes do need to be replaced.



Excitement accompanies the energetic process of creating your kosher home (or dormitory room). Aside from creating a list of the new utensils and dishes needed in your kosher home, and thinking through the designation of your kitchen cabinets as dairy and meat (and *pareve* baking dishes and utensils), shopping kosher is elegantly simple. Almost any food product on the market can be found with a kosher symbol, and if you are hard pressed to find a kosher equivalent for a unique product, either ask your local supermarket manager or kosher butcher or surf the web. The results will astound you how kosher the world has become.

Keeping kosher is not what you give up. It is what you gain for yourself, your family and community.

Revel in the possibilities of transforming your home into one where the traditions of *kashrut* are observed. This most meaningful *mitzvah* is an eloquent and powerful statement of our Jewish heritage and future. Seize the moment and capture the enthusiasm of kosher literacy and kosher lifestyle.

Keeping kosher is *not* what you give up. It is what you *gain* for yourself, your family and community. *Mazel tov* as you affirm by deed and observance the *mitzvah* of becoming kosher. *B'tayavon* – a hearty kosher appetite!



LEARNING AS A JEW

REMEMBERING DEFEAT

Dr. Irving (Yitz) Greenberg

(A second excerpt from *A Guide to Tisha B'Av*)

The four historical fast days in the Jewish calendar are:

The 10th day of the 10th month (*Assara B'Tevet*)

The 17th day of the 4th month (*Shiva Assar B'Tammuz*)

The 9th day of the 5th month (*Tisha B'Av*)

The 3rd day of the 7th month (*Tzom Gedalia*)

The First Commonwealth of Israel (Judea) came to a final end in 586 B.C.E. when Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, crushed the Judean revolt and exiled all but a handful of survivors.

On the tenth day of Tevet, the final siege of Jerusalem began.

On the ninth day of Tammuz, the wall was breached.

On the ninth day of Av, the first Temple was destroyed.

On the third day of Tishrei, Gedalia, the Governor of the remaining Jews in Jerusalem, was assassinated by an adventurer named Ishmael Ben Netaniah, and the Jews fled from Israel.

So shattering was the end of Jewish sovereignty and the loss of the Temple that all four days were established as fast days for mourning.

The Second Commonwealth came to its end in 70 C.E. when the Jewish revolt against Rome was overwhelmed, Jerusalem captured, and the Temple destroyed. (The zealots on Massada held out for three more years.) On the 17th day of Tammuz, the wall of Jerusalem was breached and on the 9th day of Av the Second Temple was destroyed.

Although the dimensions and scope of the Second Temple and Commonwealth were not as large as the first, the destruction of the second was considered even more profound a tragedy. The exile following the loss of the Second Commonwealth was much longer and more total. Many more Jews (possibly over a million) were killed in the Roman wars and the redirection of Judaism and the historical developments that followed the Second Destruction were more decisive in the unfolding of Judaism. Therefore, the rabbis chose to commemorate the 17th of Tammuz (the breach of the wall in the second Destruction) rather than the 9th of Tammuz. The choice of the ninth of Av as the major commemoration of these tragedies may reflect still another historical event. Since most of the burning of the Second Temple took place on the tenth day (though it was set afire on the ninth), Rabbi Yochanan states that he would have preferred the tenth of Av as the primary mourning date. However, the rabbis and the folk acted in response to yet another major tragedy: the Bar Kochbah rebellion of 132-135 C.E. which was the second desperate effort to regain Jewish independence. The City of Betar, the final major stronghold of the revolt, was captured after initial victories and the short-lived Jewish sovereignty in Israel ended in 135.



Bar Kochbah and thousands of his soldiers died in the siege. Since Rabbi Akiba himself had hailed Bar Kochbah as the Messiah, and the Diaspora had sent strong support (much more so than for the 66-70 war), one can understand the utterly devastating impact of this defeat. Maimonides says that this tragedy was as great as the destruction of the Temple. This loss confirmed Diaspora existence as the fate of most Jews, and was not overcome until 1948, more than 1800 years later.

In light of Betar's fall, the ninth of Av was set as the commemoration day for all three destructions. As time went on and the memories of Jewish temporal sovereignty faded, the Temples and their spiritual realities became the focal point of Jewish culture and religion. In sum, the fixing of the 9th of Av as a major fast day, teaches us that the rabbis fixed the religious calendar of the past to reflect the living experience of their own generation. As we shall see, how to do this is the primary issue in the present conflict over commemorating the Holocaust through its own day (Yom HaShoah) or through Tisha B'Av.

Jewish legend and tradition added more tragedies to these days. On Shiva Assar B'Tammuz (the 17th day of Tammuz), Moses broke the first set of tablets (see Exodus 34), the daily sacrifices in the first Temple ended due to the siege, and Apostomus (a first century Roman governor) burned the Torah after placing an idolatrous statue in the Temple.

On Tisha B'Av, the Jews of the Exodus generation were condemned to die in the desert (See Numbers 14:35). On the same date in 136 C.E., Tineius Rufus, the Roman procurator, plowed up the Temple area as a sign of its final destruction.

History has treated the Jews cruelly on this day. Tradition lists the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and other tragedies as occurring on this day. The book of *Kinot* (mourning prayers) recited on Tisha B'Av includes references to communities destroyed during the Crusades, to the burning of the Talmud in Paris in 1242 and other similar events. The deportation from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka in 1942 started on Tisha B'Av. Because of the central nature of the defeats that occurred on Tisha B'Av, it is the most total fast day in the traditional Jewish calendar other than Yom Kippur.



PERPETUATING JEWISH LIFE

TISHA B'AV: SEEING JERUSALEM IN ITS JOY

"One who mourns Jerusalem will merit to see it in its joy." [Ta'anit 30b]

At first glance, it seems strange that our Sages said that he will merit to see Jerusalem 'in its joy,' not 'in its rebuilding.' Is not the rebuilding primary and the joy secondary?

However, Rav Kook explained, our Sages knew that when the time would come to rebuild Jerusalem, everyone then alive - even those who did not mourn the destruction - would merit to see the reconstruction. The joy, on the other hand, would be felt only by those who mourned and grieved over the destruction, who yearned and ached for its renewal.

In the giddy days following the Balfour Declaration (1917) Rav Kook remarked:

"There are some Jews for whom the international recognition of the Jewish people's right to its land does not inspire joy. This is because the primary focus of their mourning is the spiritual destruction of Jerusalem and *Eretz Yisrael*, while the utter humiliation of the Land being subjected to foreign rule does not grieve them.

"But those who always felt deep sorrow, not only for the destruction of Jerusalem and *Eretz Yisrael*, but for the absence of Jewish sovereignty in our land, the international declaration that Land of Israel must return to the Jewish people is a source of happiness. They merit "*to see Jerusalem in its joy.*"

[from "*Celebration of the Soul*" by Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neriya (translated by R. Pesach Jaffe), p. 266]



PARSHAT VA'ETCHANAN: WITH ALL YOUR SOUL
(To be read on Shabbat, August 14, 2008)

Rabbi Akiva's Martyrdom

When the Romans decreed that teaching Torah is a crime punishable by death, Rabbi Akiva's reaction was not surprising. The pre-eminent scholar, who had supported Bar Kochba in his revolt against Rome, gathered people together and gave public Torah lectures.

Before long, Rabbi Akiva was charged and convicted. When the rabbi was taken out for public execution, it was the hour for reciting the *Shema* prayer. As the executioners flayed his skin with iron combs, Rabbi Akiva recited the *Shema*, concentrating on fulfilling its words: to love God "*with all your heart, soul, and might.*"

The Talmud [*Berachot* 61b] records Rabbi Akiva's final conversation before his death. His students questioned him, "*Our master! Even to this extent?*"

The scholar responded:

"All my life I have been troubled by this verse, "You shall love God... with all your soul." As I have explained its meaning: "*all your soul,*" even if they take your life. I have always wondered: will I ever have the privilege of fulfilling this *mitzvah*? And now that the opportunity has finally arrived - shall I not seize it?"

This exchange between Rabbi Akiva and his students requires clarification. What exactly did his disciples mean when they asked, "*Even to this extent?*"

The Purpose of *Shema*

One might think that the daily recitation of *Shema* is a preparatory act. Each day we accept upon ourselves the reign of Heaven, and prepare ourselves to love God, even at the cost of our lives. This daily declaration ensures that we will have the necessary reserves of courage and commitment should there arise a need for the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom.

Therefore, the students were surprised. Their teacher had already withstood the test. He had accepted martyrdom with a noble and resolute love of God. Even the cruelest instruments of torture had not deterred him. What need, then, was there for Rabbi Akiva to recite this final *Shema*? Why prepare for that which he was now already fulfilling?

Rabbi Akiva, however, understood the intrinsic value of *Shema*. This declaration of love for God and acceptance of His rule is not just a tool to train the spirit. Each recitation of *Shema* is in itself a wonderful act. Every time we whole-heartedly declare God's unity, our souls are uplifted in holiness and closeness to God. The *Shema* is not just a means by which we prepare ourselves; its very recitation brings a spiritual elevation.



Until his final declaration of *Shema*, Rabbi Akiva had recited the *Shema* with the thought that he was willing to sacrifice his life – “*with all your soul*” – for the love of God. His entire life he had wondered whether he would be able to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Shema* in its most extreme, most demanding, form. “*Will I ever have the privilege of fulfilling this mitzvah to its utmost?*” At the hands of the Romans, he was able to accept the reign of Heaven while sacrificing his life - not just as a mental vision, but in real life.

His Soul Departed With *Echad*

The Talmud relates that as Rabbi Akiva concentrated on the last word of *Shema*, his soul departed.

Rabbi Akiva breathed his last with the word *Echad* - “*God is one.*” A master of Jewish law, the scholar was able to infer legal rulings from the smallest markings in the text of the Torah [Menachot 29b]. In the final analysis, however, all the detailed laws and myriad explanations that he had propounded during his lifetime were all part of a single harmonious system. Everything Rabbi Akiva had taught shared the same underlying theme: how to live life according to the supreme principle of God oneness. It was thus fitting that his final word should be *Echad*.

[adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. II, pp. 344-345]



BUILDING A BRIDGE TO ISRAEL

ISRAEL HAS A NATIONAL BIRD!

The voters have spoken, and the winner is ... the hoopoe! If hoopoe or *duchefat* in Hebrew doesn't ring a bell, you are not alone.

Neither Israelis nor most Jews are familiar with the flamboyant looking bird which sports a rust colored, Mohawk like crest. This is a bird of noble lineage. If you consult with your rabbi, he/she will tell you to remember that King Solomon chose the hoopoe as a confidant. The King trusted the bird's advice concerning the queen when her purity and motives were in question. Your rabbi will also inform you that the hoopoe appears in two parts of the Torah as one of the non-kosher birds. It is listed in Vayikra, Chapter 11 and coming soon when we read Devarim, Chapter 14 on Parshat Re'eh, August 30/29 Av.

The bird is also the lead player in a classic poem. In "The Conference of the Birds", the hoopoe is selected by the birds of the world to lead their quest for spiritual meaning.

The election of a national bird has been part of Israel's 60th anniversary celebration. It has raised the public's awareness of Israel's critical role for millions of birds that cross over the country during their semi-annual migrations. When President Shimon Peres announced the winner after 155,000 votes, he expressed regrets that the *yonah*/dove of peace was not elected. So after googling hoopoe and hearing from your rabbi, take some time to celebrate by hanging a bird feeder or some other social action project.

THE HOOPOE! Observant, wise, "*tref*" and now Israel's national bird. www.blogsofzion.com.

No better way to see the hoopoe/*duchefat* than a visit to Israel. We saw the hoopoe on Kibbutz Yavneh!



TIME TO GO

This is the 80th COMPACT, Av 5768. Enrich your life as a Jew. Transformation is a step- by-step process of learning and questioning, of doing and inquiring, of participating and asking.

Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein, the USCJ Executive Vice President, welcomes your comments about COMPACT (epstein@uscj.org)

Rabbi Moshe Edelman, the USCJ Director of Congregational Programming, prepares and edits COMPACT (edelman@uscj.org).

Have a meaningful Tisha B'Av.

Attend services on Saturday evening, August 9th, hear the reading of Jeremiah's Lamentations/Aycha; Shacharit on August 10th, but without talit and tefillin. Study, rest, fast.

