

Tisha B'av Iyyun

Observing Tisha B'av is a bit strange as Reform Jews. It is considered the saddest day on our Jewish calendar, marking the destruction of both the 1st and 2nd temples in Jerusalem. The customary approach to its observance is quite similar to that of other days of mourning such as Yom Kippur—we fast, abstaining from food and drink, we avoid anointing ourselves by applying oils, perfumes, or lotions, we leather, we abstain from our usual hygiene rituals of showering and shaving, we do not celebrate simchas, listen to music, dance, engage in sexual activity or generally in any activity that is joyous. However, I often feel conflicted as a result of our more modern views of the Temple. Unlike more quote “traditional” Jews, the Reform movement does not espouse a desire to rebuild the holy temple or to resume the rituals that occurred there, such as animal sacrifices. Therefore, what is it that we're mourning and commemorating on this day?

It is the loss of our cultural and spiritual epicenter. The temple was a place of pilgrimage for all of the Jewish people. It represented our ability to thrive as a sovereign Jewish nation in our homeland. It was our greatest national landmark—a manmade construction at which we could marvel—much like the Sistine chapel, the roman colosseum, or Mayan temples. The destruction of this structure represented a loss of the richness of Jewish culture, political and religious freedom, and national achievement. Regardless of our current beliefs on the merits of rebuilding a temple or reinstating certain religious rituals, we mourn a loss of culture, of history, of autonomy, and of life.

Much like Passover, I believe the true way to honor this occasion is to tell the story of our people. To keep our historical narrative alive and to pass it down *l'dor vador*, from one

generation to the next. By reading and chanting the book of lamentations, we honor what was lost by ensuring that we will never forget.

In recent times, Tisha B'av has been regarded not just as a commemoration of the destruction of the temples, but also as a cursed day. Over the generations, we have associated numerous tragedies for the Jewish people that have occurred on the 9th day of Av—crusades, expulsions, pogroms, the holocaust etc. Though perhaps this is mere coincidence, we now take this day to honor the lives and memories of so many Jewish people who have been lost to tragedy and violence, and for this reason, I now recite Psalm 23—traditionally done at a Jewish funeral. Amidst all of this sadness, we use our liturgy to remind ourselves that we are never alone.