

Shabbat Chazon/Erev-Erev Tisha B'Av/Shabbat D'varim 5779
Rabbi Michael Adam Latz
Shir Tikvah Congregation
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אֵיכָהּ | יָשְׁבָה בְדוֹד הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עִם הַיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבָּתִי בַגּוֹיִם שְׂרָתִי בַמְּדִינֹת הַיְתָה לְמָס:

Eikhah! How can it be –she sat alone, the city so great / so swelled with people? She was like a widow. The one great among the nations, ministering among the states, became a slave caste. [Translation by Rabbi David Seidenberg]

As the sun sets tomorrow night, we commemorate Tisha B'Av—the 9th of Av—a day of collective and communal mourning for the Jewish people. The custom on Tisha B'Av is to sit low on the floor—it is a day of mourning and grieving, like a Shivah house. The book of Eicha—Lamentations—is chanted in a haunting trope. We fast. And we pour out our tears, our grief, for the tragedies that have befallen our people—our enslavement in Egypt; Pharaoh's brutality and Haman's attempted genocide; the Kings of Ammon and Moab who rejected our refugee ancestors at their borders, treating us brutally; the destruction of the Temples, our expulsion from Spain, the Pogroms of Eastern Europe; the wretched dehumanization and murder of 6,000,000 of our family in the Shoah—the Holocaust; and this year, we add the shootings at synagogues in Pittsburgh and Poway.

בְּכֹו תִבְכֶּה בַלַּיְלָה וְדַמְעָתֶהָ עַל לֶחֶיָהּ אִיוֹ-לָהּ מִכָּל-אַהֲבָיָהּ כָּל-רֵעֵיהָ בְּגָדוּ כֹה הָיָו לָהּ לְאִיבִים

Weeping, she will cry in the night, her tear upon her cheek. There is no one to comfort her.

We weep tears across time and space, from generation to generation fall cascading droplets of anguish, suffering, and despair.

Our tears contain multitudes. “Weeping,” scholar Tom Lutz writes, “often occurs at precisely those times when we are least able to fully verbalize complex, ‘overwhelming’ emotions, least able to fully articulate our manifold, mingled feelings. We recognize in crying a surplus of feeling over thinking, and an overwhelming of our powers of articulation by the gestural language of tears (Crying: The Natural & Cultural History of Tears, Tom Lutz, pg 21).”

We are a people who believes in the power of lament, in the necessity to release the anguish and pain we've experienced from our bodies, to collectively metabolize the suffering we've known. Samuel Beckett once said, "My words are my tears."

Tisha B'Av is the saddest day of the Jewish calendar year. A full day to weep, to wail, to cry out in turmoil and in woe.

Unlike American life—which permits people, if we are lucky, three days of bereavement leave following the death of an immediate family member—and where people are questioned if we cry or grieve in public—Tisha B'Av grief is not relegated to private spaces, nor is there is shame in expressing and professing the tears that fall. Quite the opposite! Tisha B'Av is a day for communal grief, for coming together, a moment when our pain is not shunned but embrace, where lament is our organizing communal practice.

But it would be historically, morally, and theologically irresponsible to weep only for past sufferings. For Jews, the past is never over; it is alive inside the prayers we chant, the Torah we study, the soul work we take to the streets. "The idea of this holiday is a moment to mourn catastrophes that have happened to the Jewish community," Rabbi Salem Pearce, director of organizing at T'ruah [The Rabbinic Call for Human rights], said in an interview. "It would be a missed opportunity not to mourn the catastrophe that's happening before us right now."

[<https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/289007/taking-a-stand-for-immigrants-on-tisha-bav>].

"This is an important moment in the Jewish calendar," Pearce said. "We're looking toward Rosh Hashanah and New Year and the chance for *t'shuvah*. And I'd say because of the historical and personal resonances of what's happening in this country right now, this is a Jewish problem. The way we are treating people trying to come here for sanctuary is morally abominable. And we can't pretend it has nothing to do with us. We have to stand up for Jewish values, especially since Judaism is currently being used as a political football by people claiming affiliation with Jewish values. Two Jews, Jared Kushner and Stephen Miller, are at the forefront of this administration's anti-immigrant policies, and their Jewishness is cited as evidence of 'This is how the Jews really feel.' We need to say as a community, 'No. They don't represent us.'"

Pearce noted that the same rhetoric that was once used about Jews is now being used to demonize other communities: "Words like 'vermin,' 'lack of moral values,'

threats to the ‘native’ population, ‘outsiders ...’ She trailed off. Indeed, a [statement](#) by an anti-immigration spokesman in the 1940s sounds awfully familiar: “Two hundred thousand Communist Jews [are] at the Mexican border waiting to get into this country. If they are admitted, they will rape every woman and child that is left unprotected.”

This Tisha B’Av, T’ruah, Jewish Community Action, the National Council of Jewish Women, Bend the Arc, and other Jewish organizations will join together to lament the horrific, dehumanizing treatment by the Trump administration of immigrants and asylum seekers. We are demanding an immediate close of these camps and the reunion of children with their parents. What happened in El Paso, Texas this past week with 22 people murdered in a Walmart, what happened in Mississippi with the ICE roundup of nearly 700 undocumented people is unconscionable! And it is a direct result of the president and his administration’s words, Tweets, and policies.

Lamenting is not enough! We must transform our tears into action and clarity. So here are three things you can do this Tisha B’Av:

First, join us Sunday night at 7:30pm outside the Sherburne County Jail in Elk River, MN, where the largest number of ICE detainees are held in our state while they await trial. We will pray, chant Eicha, and blow the shofar, calling us in to action, advocacy and solidarity, demonstrating publicly that the Jewish community will not turn its back on refugees arriving in our country and our immigrant neighbors already here. If you have shofar, please bring it and join our communal call. When the sun sets, we will break our Tisha B’Av fast together with light refreshments. There’s a Facebook invitation on the Shir Tikvah page with more information; it’s also in your weekly email.

If you can’t make the vigil on Sunday night, please consider making a contribution to Jewish Community Action, T’ruah, or Shir Tikvah who are deeply engaged in the work of immigrant justice and sanctuary.

And finally, please—share your immigrant stories. There are a million social media platforms and ways to get the word out. It’s important that we who are the descendants of immigrants, share our family stories—and remind everyone who is not a Native American or who wasn’t brought here as an African slave—we’re all the children of immigrants.

We must cry, we must weep, we must lament the tragedies that befell our ancestors! And those tears compel us to address the suffering around us today. Not in private, in public.

I close with a prayer by Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld; a plea for safety for immigrant children and families:

Elohei haruchot l'chol basar

God of the spirits of all flesh

We came here from all over this great country and beyond

To say no.

To say no to those who would tear children from their parents' arms.

To say no to those who are in no rush to reunite them now.

To say no to a policy that deprives people of all ages

of the basic international human right to seek asylum in our country.

To say no to those making our border famous for brutality and heartbreak.

But more than that

Av Harachamim

Father of all fathers

Mother of all mothers

Source of all compassion—

We are here to say yes.

Yes to children and to families.

Yes to the sanctity, to the preciousness, to the dignity of all life, created in Your image. Yes to the truth of Your Oneness, and ours.

Yes to the breathtaking beauty of our world—

And yes to the vital moral fabric of our lives.

To those who would tear that fabric apart,

We are here to say—we will always show up to stitch it back together.

We walk in the footsteps of our ancestor Abraham

Who “stitched worlds together”

Who saw connection everywhere

Who was commanded to be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

We know that it is so much easier—and faster—to tear things apart

Than it is to stitch them together.

But we will keep showing up for as long as it takes.

Because we are parents ourselves

Because we are teachers

Because we are witnesses

Because we are weavers

Because we are threads
in the tapestry of Your creation.
We will stitch together what has been torn apart.
Dear God, please give us strength. Give us wisdom. Give us courage.
Gather us all in the embrace of your unending love.
Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad.
Listen, you who struggle,
And bear witness to the One God who holds us all.

Shabbat Shalom.