

The Book of How: A Tisha B Av Seder

How to prepare:

We begin to prepare for Tisha B Av (The 9th day of the Hebrew month of Av) at the Passover Seder. We open the door for Elijah the prophet and ask God to pour out his wrath on those who lay waste to the world, referencing the end of the third chapter of the book of Lamentations. This Tisha B Av moment at the Passover Seder is a cry for justice and a plea for reconciliation with our Creator.

Only Elijah is able to answer the question of the apparent triumph of tyranny in history and the “why” of suffering. We all know the how all too well. The Psalms of Praise (Hallel) that follow in the Passover Seder sing a message of hope despite the exiles, trials, and tribulations of our history.

We also prepare for the fast of The Ninth of Av with another fast three weeks earlier on the 17th day of the Hebrew month Tammuz. On that day Moses shattered the first set of the Ten Teachings in response to the incident at the golden calf. Tradition records the Ninth day of Av as the date in history when ten of the twelve scouts spoke evil of the Holy Land and the date the Exodus generation was condemned to die in the desert. The First Temple in Jerusalem was set aflame by Nebuzaradan on this date and the Romans destroyed the Second Temple on 9 Av. On Tisha B Av in 1492 the Jews of Spain were exiled from their homes. A new form of Kabballah based on the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria explained this exile in cosmic terms and understood that in the end , as an act of mercy, God will repair our broken world (Tikkun Olam). The origins of World War One and Two are also traced to Tisha B Av.

This year (2006) Tisha B Av begins the evening of the second of August and concludes after sunset on the third of August.

I suggest the following for your Summer reading:

- A.) The Book of Deuteronomy. Read it twice. If you attend synagogue simply follow the Torah reading. Since fewer than one in ten attend services this Seder becomes the alternative.
- B.) The Book of Isaiah. Note that we read Isaiah as we read The Book of Deuteronomy leading up to the high holydays. The Tikkun of Tisha B Av includes the rebuke and consolation and final vision of this great Hebrew prophet. We study Isaiah the entire summer, for seven full weeks, as a preparation for the ascent of the Hebrew month of Ellul and its culmination on The Day of Atonement and the Tikkun of The Second set of Tablets. Consider Isaiah summer reading for iconoclasts.
- C.) The Book of Zechariah
- D.) The Book of Lamentations
- E.) The Book of Job
- F.) www.aish.com. Tisha b Av
- G.) www.Chabad.org.Three weeks
- H.) www.My Jewish learning .com
- I.) www.jewfaq.org
- J.) www.interfaith family.com

The Seder

How to begin:

Cover the mirrors. Take off your shoes. Set out bread, water, hard boiled eggs and a non meat dinner.

Food:

The custom is to eat a large lunch and to have only austere food at the Seder. Some have only bread and water. You may include an egg, beans, rice, and you will not need wine for Kiddush.

The Washing of Hands:

Baruch ata adoneigh elohanu melech haolam asher kiddshanu b mitzvotav v'tzi-va-nu al netealot yadeam.

Blessed art Thou Lord our God ruler over everything, who commands us to uplift our hands by washing.

The Motzi:

Baruch ata adoneigh elohanu melech haolam hamotzi lechem min ha aretz.

Blessed art Thou Lord our God who will bring forth bread from the earth.

Kavannah (Focusing meditation):

We await the day O Lord our God when life triumphs over death and Peace over war.

When you are sovereign each will receive our daily bread, you will bring forth bread from the earth. On this solemn day of the 9th of Av we are reminded that this month is also called Menachem Av, the comforting of the father. You are our Father and our only ruler and King. The world will be perfected under your rule, and all lost souls and even the wicked will turn to Thee.

We pray that our fasting will be atonement.

The Egg:

Kavannah: O Lord, my God, I am as mute as an egg. My eyes do not see, my ears do not hear. I have forgotten your holyday offerings of joy. I pray that I will be satisfied by this Humble meal and understand that suffering has the potential to inspire love and reconciliation.

Read the Book of Lamentations around the table.

Commentary and questions on the Book of Lamentations:

David G. Roskies, in his study that is an essential guide to Tisha B Av, (Against The Apocalypse, Harvard University Press 1984)concludes:

“Thus, the great imitatio Dei of the modern period has been...the ability, in the midst and in the wake of apocalypse, to know the apocalypse, express it, mourn it, and transcend it: for if catastrophe is the presumption of man acting as destroyer, than the fashioning of catastrophe into a new set of tablets is the primal act of creation carried out in the image of God.”

In other words we live in a world we have broken. We are responsible for the catastrophe. Tikkun Olam, repairing our world, is our job. God awaits our receiving of The Second Set of Tablets.

What do you think of this creative view of catastrophe?

Discuss the metaphor of reconstructing the Broken Tablets.

We have documented evidence that Hitler’s war against the Jews was a war against the Ten Commandments. The Nazis said that the only obstacle they had to world domination were the Ten Teachings. Since God is the one who gave the teachings they were warring against God. What do you think?

Chapter One and Two of Lamentations speak of the suffering servants, the people of Judah and Jerusalem, and a community ravaged, as we were during World War Two.

Chapter Three shifts from the suffering of all Israel to the suffering of one individual. Rashi points out that tradition teaches this chapter as the lament of the prophet Jeremiah. Review Chapter Three and Jeremiah’s inner dialogue. Notice the shift in verse twenty one. At the end of the Seder you will find a prayer upon awakening to be said every morning. Jeremiah awakens to the insight that with all our rebellions against God’s teachings, God still has faith in us. This is the key to the book. We think of faith (really Trust, in the original) as something we have for God. The verse declares that God is in search of us, and that God still trusts that we will choose life. Great is God’s faith and trust in us!

Discussion:

Eliezar Berkovits speaks of the moral bankruptcy of Western Civilization. As explained, the broken tablets represent a war against morality. We are free to live by or destroy God’s teachings. Many hold God responsible for the Holocaust. What do you think?

Grace after meals
Recite Psalm 137(1-6):

Longing for Zion in a Foreign Land

**By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept
When we remembered Zion.**

**We hung our harps
Upon the willows in the midst of it.**

**For there those who carried us away
captive asked of us a song,
And those who plundered us
Requested mirth,
*Saying, "Sing us one of the songs
Of Zion!"***

**How shall we sing the Lord's song
In a foreign land?**

**If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget *its skill!***

**If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of
My mouth---
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.**

Now recite a traditional grace, and then add:

**I have eaten and am satisfied with my portion. I thank you Lord of suffering and God of grace.
Give strength to your people, Bless us with peace.**

**This Seder is nearing completion for this Tisha B Av, but continues with the comforting of Isaiah
and the ascent of the Hebrew month of Elul. The ascent is experienced in The Seder for Elul.**

How to Awaken

The following is a prayer of awakening for tomorrow morning, and every day

The moment we awaken, as our eyes open, we daily offer this Tisha b Av prayer:

***Modah ani lefanecha melech Chai v ki-yam sh hachazarta B nishmate bechemla
raba emunatecha***

I thankfully acknowledge your presence, living and sustaining God. You have mercifully restored my soul. Great is your faith in me.

How to understand this prayer:

Our prayer book is a Siddur, same Hebrew root as Seder. Our prayers order our thoughts and emotions. The prayer the moment we awaken is from the third chapter of The Book of Lamentations. Kindly reread this chapter. Notice that at verse twenty one chaos and confusion mature into the realization that every moment of life is a gift of kindness from a compassionate God. While our youth is a dance around the golden calf, we are loved in spite of our failings and transgressions. In verse twenty three we acknowledge that every day is a new creation and a second chance to put the broken pieces of our world back together. Gods' mercy is renewed every morning.

Our eyes open to the truth, as we awaken every day, that God has trust in us! This day is a new beginning. Beyond the idea that we need faith in God we affirm that God has trust in us. With this we approach our new day with the resolve to do better, to turn our lives to the true teaching of our God of truth. Great is God's faith in us.