Tisha BeAv and October 7th

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With every passing year, Tisha BeAv mourning for the lost *beit hamikdash* becomes more challenging. The disastrous fall of Yerushalayim and the derailment of Jewish history occurred thousands of years ago. Authentic mourning requires actual sadness, and it is difficult to experience genuine woe about events so far in the rear-view mirror.

Additionally, not only have thousands of years passed, but our society has dramatically advanced, bearing little resemblance to the ancient world of the *beit hamikdash*. We are governed by enlightened democracies, operate in progressive free-market economies, are privileged to widespread education, and enjoy advanced medical care. The world of Judea and Jerusalem, of Romans and of Persians appears yellowed and dated. It sometimes feels as if these catastrophic events occurred, not only in a different era, but on a different planet.

On top of all this, many Jews view our return to Israel as the inception of a broader redemptive process. Facing a future of optimism and opportunity, we feel gratified to live in an era of historical reawakening. Despite the reality that many of our dreams have yet to materialize, our collective happiness over this historical awakening dulls our grief and dries our tears.

In a modern, enlightened world of Jewish sovereignty Tisha BeAv to some, is less compelling, and for some feels outdated. In *galut*, when we endured unending violence and hatred Tisha BeAv felt contemporary and pertinent. Jewish persecution in *galut* echoed the despair of past tragedies. Our bleak existence felt like an unending nightmare, permeated with the same sorrow and mourning of Tisha BeAv itself.

Having arrived home in Israel we assumed that our suffering was a relic of the past. No longer facing violence and aggression, it became harder for us to feel the pain of Jewish history and more difficult to grieve over lost destiny.

October 7th changed all that.

After October 7th everything changed, and suddenly Tisha BeAv feels more real and more relevant than ever. Darkness has once again cast its shadow over Jewish history. We are waging a relentless struggle for survival against fanatical murderers, intent on erasing us from the map. Fierce antisemitism rages across the globe, as furious mobs hunt down Jews with unchecked hatred. In the post-October 7th world Tisha BeAv resonates with relevance and urgency like never before.

How should Tisha BeAv be observed in the aftermath of the horrific tragedy which befell us just 10 months ago. How can we connect 2023 to 70 CE?

Focus upon Mourning

In the past, in an effort to imbue the day with deeper meaning and spirituality, some rerouted Tisha BeAv from its original purpose. Facing the daunting task of mourning over a tragedy which occurred 2000 years ago many redirected the day toward introspection, improvement and teshuva, effectively converting Tisha BeAv into a mini-Yom Kippur. Others stressed Jewish nationhood, by visiting sites related to the fall of Jerusalem such as the Kotel, the Old City, or Herodian. Still others held *kumsitz* gatherings suffused with soulful, sorrowful songs to capture the melancholy mood of the day.

In truth, none of these perspectives capture the ideal of mourning on Tisha BeAv. These substitute Tisha BeAv experiences may have been necessary or even enriching, but at its core the day is earmarked for pure aveilut, mourning and sadness without any external distractions or public gatherings. An avel silently absorbs and bears the profound pain and trauma of loss, each moment steeped in sorrow. Mourners don’t ponder personal improvement or penitence but languish in sadness.

In sefer Eicha, Yirmiyahu depicts the mourner as sitting on the ground, alone, with dirt in one's mouth. Immersed in grief, a mourner sits silent, helpless, and lonely. According to the gemara mourners are, and should be so preoccupied with loss, that during the initial intense period known as *aninut* they are excused from mitzvot. Their sorrow should not be interrupted by mitzvot or by thoughts of recovery. Despair, sadness, and loneliness.

Ideally, Tisha BeAv should simulate actual mourning and should not be oriented to teshuva or other important values. It should be a day of frustration and despair over the tragedy of Jewish history.

This year's Tisha BeAv we have so much to mourn over: the loss of thousands of innocent lives. The horrific pogrom we faced in our own land. The hostages who still live underground in excruciating conditions. The immense number of injured soldiers whose lives have been forever altered. And of course, the horrific desecration of Hashem's name. This year it is imperative to dedicate Tisha BeAv, as much as possible, toward pure mourning and sadness without rerouting it to other important, but less Tisha BeAv -relevant experiences.

It Could have been Different

However, our anguish over October 7th cannot be severed from the tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem or from the sadness of our prolonged exile. There is a real danger that our continued agony over October 7th will obscure the broader story that Tisha BeAv is meant to lament. How can we incorporate the suffering of October 7th with past Jewish tragedies? How can October 7th be integrated with the past?

Firstly, acknowledge and lament our own role in the rupturing of history. Jewish history wasn’t mean to evolve this way. There was a different arc and a different trajectory to our history and, by extension, to history in general. We were meant to enter the land of Israel, establish Jewish monarchy, erect a model society and model the dignity of a godlike lifestyle. Tragically, after centuries of betrayal and religious failure, we were expelled from the land of Hashem.

Ever since that bleak moment, history has not been the same. If history feels broken it is because we broke it. Our broken world gave rise to centuries of antisemitism and the atrocities of the past 10 months. Of course, we don’t take blame for the crimes and violence of others. But on Tisha BeAv, we mourn for the potential we lost and for the turmoil that ensued. Our rupturing of history destroyed two temples, provoked terrible Jewish persecution and produced the tragedy of October 7th. The day we left Yerushalayim the world broke, and it has remained shattered for the past two thousand years. That shattered world is still, in many ways, morally and spiritually broken. Mourn for the world we broke, the potential we lost, and the consequences we continue to bear.

Jewish History is Imbalanced

On Tisha BeAv we read about the ten martyrs or "asara harugei malchut" who were brutally massacred by the Romans. Rome subjugated many cultures but there was only one nation whose leadership they hunted down and sadistically tortured and murdered. The brutal death of our ten martyrs underscored the disproportion of Jewish history. We are Hashem's people, tasked with calling the world to higher moral and religious ground. The children of Hashem living in the land of Hashem will always elicit ferocious opposition.

We were reminded of this harsh reality on October 7th when we faced similar sadism and brutality. There is no logic to explain the hatred and animosity our enemies feel to us. It is obvious that we are unlike other nations and just as obvious that Jewish history is disproportionate. This asymmetry reflects our chosen status and our lofty mission. There has to be higher meaning to the hatred and anger.

We outlived the hate and violence for thousands of years and we will outlive the current attack upon our people. October 7th reminds us that the great struggle of Jewish destiny continues. On Tisha BeAv we mourn the steep price of that mission. October 7th showed us that we are still paying that price.