

תִּשְׁחָה בְּאָב

Tishah b'Av - the Ninth of Av



Tishah b'Av means "the ninth day of the month of Av." Av is the fifth month of the Hebrew religious calendar (Nisan being the first month), or the 11th month of the Hebrew civil calendar (Tishri being the first month). The Ninth of Av is an anniversary of a number of events in the life of Israel that we would rather not remember, but it's important that we do. The reason we would rather not remember the things that happened on this day is because they were all bad. Here's a list: 1) the spies brought back their evil report and persuaded the people of Israel not to go up into the Land as God had commanded them to do; 2) on this very day Nebuchadnezzar and his troops destroyed Solomon's Temple (the 1st Temple); 3) on this very day Titus destroyed the 2nd Temple; 4) in 135 CE, on this very day, Bar Kochba and his troops were slaughtered, ending the 2nd Jewish revolt, and 5) on this very day the Roman Emperor Hadrian ordered Jerusalem to be plowed under and a new, pagan city built on its place (Aelia Capitolina).

In modern times other bad things happened on this day as well. According to some traditions, the 1st Crusade began in 1095 CE on this day. It was a war of the Christians against the Turks who had captured Jerusalem. Eventually the European armies captured Jerusalem, killing the entire population, and claimed the entire region now known as Israel as a Christian state. In 1290 CE, on Tishah b'Av, King Edward I expelled all the Jews from England. Incredibly, on this same day, in 1492 CE, all the Jews were expelled from Spain. In 1555 CE, Pope Paul IV decreed that all Jews should be moved into a ghetto. In 1914, on August 1 which was Tishah b'Av in the Hebrew calendar, the German ambassador to Russia formally declared war, and World War I began. Incredibly, on July 22, 1942 (which also was the beginning of Tishah b'Av), the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto were ordered deported to the death camps, a move that marked a significant beginning of Hitler's "Final Solution."

Because of all of the bad things that have happened to our people on this day, it was decreed by the Sages that it become a day of fasting and prayer. In Orthodox communities, the first 9 days of Av are treated as a period of mourning. On the ninth of Av itself, the fast resembles the fast of Yom Kippur, beginning and ending at sunset, abstaining from all foods and drink (thus, a full fast).

The tradition of fasting on a number of days in the year as a reminder of the fall of the Temple was already extant in Zechariah's day: "Thus says Adonai of hosts, 'The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah; so love truth and peace.' Zech. 8:19 This means that while we look back at the time when the Temple was destroyed, and are mournful, we may also look forward to the time of the Temple's rebuilding, and be joyful. Thus, the ninth of Av, while a day of fasting and prayer, is not entirely without joy, for we look forward to the coming of Yeshua, the rebuilding of the Temple, and His reign in Jerusalem.

For the present, however, the Temple Mount is still controlled by those who do not worship the One true God, and a pagan temple stands there. This is an ever-present reminder that because of our disobedience to HaShem, we were exiled from the Land and our enemies possessed the Land which the Almighty has promised to us as an eternal inheritance. It is our duty to do *teshuvah* (returning or repentance) and to "Seek Adonai while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near." Isaiah 55:6