

## **Tish'a B'Av**

### **Rabbi Joseph Radinsky**

Tish'a B'Av commemorates, among other things, the destruction of the First Temple. In the Tanach, we learn how Isaiah remonstrated with King Hezekiah to not give up, even though the situation looked hopeless (they had absolutely no food left). He told King Hezekiah to keep fighting, and that night a mysterious event hit the Assyrian army, and they all fled. Some people said it was a meteor that exploded nearby, or they were plagued by a huge swarm of rats, but whatever it was, Jerusalem was saved.

In the time of Jeremiah, Jeremiah told King Zedekiah to give up and allow the Babylonians to take over Jerusalem. Maybe they would spare the temple. The King was aghast at such a suggestion. His situation was not perilous and his Egyptian allies told him that they were going to come and help him. He even persecuted Jeremiah very harshly because of his words.

What was the difference between these two prophets that one said fight and the other said surrender? If we look at the services and readings of Tisha B'Av we can perhaps understand why. In the Torah portion right before Tisha B'Av, we learn that Moshe said, "Eicha, how can I continue to bear the burden of this people?" Moshe always defended the Jewish people when G-d said that He was going to destroy them and start a new people from Moshe. The reason Moshe was successful was because he reminded G-d, Who, of course, knew this all along, that the people former slaves, were ignorant. When they sinned by creating the golden calf and when they sinned by listening to the spies evil report they did it out of ignorance. They had been slaves, but he, Moshe, with the help of his new 70 member council could turn things around.

In the time of Isaiah, the people were doing the wrong thing, but they knew they were doing the wrong thing. They did not try to justify their ways. "Eicha, how has she (Jerusalem) has become a harlot," are Isaiah's words. The people felt they were weak and could not do anything, but Isaiah knew that with the proper teaching they could turn things around.

In the time of Jeremiah, the people were doing the wrong thing, but they said they were doing the right thing, and they even persecuted anybody who criticized them by saying that they were doing the wrong thing and not the right thing. There was now no hope. Jeremiah says, "Eicha, how this city has become solitary" (bereft of people). The people had to be taught a terrible lesson. Ignorance and human weakness can be overcome, but when a person fools himself and does not want to ever admit that he is doing wrong, how can he ever correct himself?

This is the lesson of Tisha B'Av. Tisha B'Av is called a Moed, or semi-holiday. How can this be? It is a terrible fast day on which we lament the terrible destruction of the First Temple and Second Temple, etc. It's a holiday because all it requires for us to remedy our situation is to face the truth. Only if we are willing to say what is right is right and what is wrong is wrong can we ever hope to mend our society and to mend ourselves. So many societies have fallen because their ruling class has said, "Oh, we need to enslave our people, to have many, many poor people for there to be culture and a high standard of living for us." Many people enslave themselves because they do not want to admit the truth, admit they have caused many of their own problems. Let us hope and pray that we will never try to rationalize away our problems or our faults, but realize that if we face them, even if we have been ignorant and even if we have been weak, we can, with G-d's help, overcome them.

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