

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 7:57 pm

Services Sat. July 18 9:30 AM Shabbat Hazon

Tisha B'Av – Evening services for Tisha B'Av will take place Wed. July 22 at 7:30 pm. This is the saddest day of the Jewish year, where we commemorate the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem and the other tragedies that have occurred throughout history. It is a full fast day (some Conservative Jews fast only through the early afternoon, recognizing that the tragedies have been mitigated by the founding of Israel.) In the evening we pray in a somber tone, read the book of Lamentations, and chant sad poems known as *kinot*. In terms of its mood and melodies, I find the evening of Tisha B'Av to be one of the most beautiful services of the year.

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TISHA B'AV AND YOM HASHOAH

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Here is my message for this week.

PARSHAT DEVARIM

TISHA B'AV AND YOM HASHOAH

“Not one of those involved, this evil generation, shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers.” (Deuteronomy 1:35)

This week we begin reading the book of Deuteronomy, the final of the Five Books of Moses. This reading always falls immediately before the saddest day of the Jewish year, Tisha B'Av (this year Wednesday night and Thursday). It is a full fast day where we recall the destruction of the two great Temples in Jerusalem and multiple other tragedies. In fact, this Sabbath is known as *Shabbat Hazon*, the Sabbath of vision, based on the tragic vision of Isaiah we read in our prophetic portion. It is mostly read to the mournful melody of Lamentation rather than the usual haftarah melody.

This hint of sadness is part of this week's Torah reading. The Torah repeats the story of the spies. Twelve spies were sent to the Promised Land to scout it out before the Israelites could enter the land. Ten of the spies brought an evil report. The people wept and begged Moses to turn around and return to Egypt. As a result, the Israelites would have to wander forty years in the wilderness before entering the land, until that generation died out. Only the new generation was permitted to enter the land.

According to Rabbinic tradition (*Taanit* 4:6), when the Israelites began weeping, God grew angry and said, I will give you a good reason to weep on this day. This will become a day of weeping and mourning. As a result, both Temples were destroyed on this day, the first by the Babylonians and the second by the Romans. Numerous other tragedies took place including the expulsion of Jews from Spain and even the beginning of World War I. The key issue is that, according to Jewish theology, these tragedies were a punishment for the behavior of the Jewish people. As we say in our Musaf prayers, “Because of our sins were we exiled from our land.”

That brings me to the Holocaust and *Yom HaShoah v'HaGevura*, the day of remembering the Holocaust and the Heroism. Should it not be commemorated on Tisha B'Av, a day already on the calendar to remember our tragedies? Some Jews wanted to combine both commemorations. But the Israeli government chose a different day, the 27th of Nissan, shortly after Passover, the time when the Warsaw Ghetto fell. There is a deep feeling among many traditional Jews, myself included, that the Holocaust should not be commemorated on Tisha B'Av. Why?

Tisha B'Av sees Jewish suffering as the result of our sins. It is a call to change our behavior. I cannot accept the idea that the Holocaust happened because of our sins. I am aware that this is the approach of some ultra-Orthodox rabbis. For example, Rabbi Elazar Schach (1899–2001) of Bnai Brak, an ultra-Orthodox city outside Tel Aviv, wrote, “God kept count of each and every sin, in a running count over hundreds of years, until the count amounted to six million Jews, and that is how the Holocaust occurred.” For these rabbis, the sins were secularization, modernization, and sad to admit, Zionism.

I find the idea that we Jews brought on the Holocaust by our own behavior to be

outrageous. A huge percentage of those killed by the Nazis in Europe were the most pious, who had created communities built on learning, faith, and good works. They are all gone now. To say that it was Jewish sins that brought on Jewish suffering is an outrage. It was Nazi evil that brought on Jewish suffering.

The theology behind Yom HaShoah is totally different from the theology behind Tisha B'Av. That is why the two commemorations should not be combined. We ask Holocaust survivors (while there are still some left) to light six large candles for the six million on Yom HaShoah, not because of our sins but because of the evil and hate of the Nazis. Today as antisemitism grows around the world, there are many who blame the Jews. It is our own action that has brought about our suffering. It is vital that we fight this outrageous idea. The current attacks of Jews were not because of our sins, but because of the virus that will not go away, antisemitism.

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