

Tisha B'Av - Judaism's Blackest Day

BY DVORA WAYSMAN

Tisha b'Av, which falls this year on July 22, is the blackest date of the Hebrew calendar. Seven terrible calamities befell the Jewish people on this date. Five are recorded in the Mishnah:

- (1) The decree that Israel should wander through the wilderness for forty years.
- (2) The destruction of the First Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.E.
- (3) The destruction of the Second Temple by Titus in 70 C.E.
- (4) The fall of the fortress of Betar with the subsequent defeat of Bar Kochba and the massacre of his men.
- (5) The ploughing up of Jerusalem by Hadrian in 135 C.E.

There were two more tragedies for the Jews recorded on this date. In 1290, King Edward I signed an edict expelling Jews from England; and on the same date in 1492, following the terrible Inquisition, 300,000 Jews led by Abarbanel began to leave Spain after Ferdinand and Isabella had signed the decree for their expulsion.

Many people believe that because the State of Israel has been re-established there is no longer a necessity for Jews to observe this day of mourning. However there is an explicit Talmudic statement which decrees continued observance even today: "He who eats and drinks on 9th Av will not live to see rejoicing about Jerusalem, for the Scriptures say: 'Rejoice ye with Jerusalem and be glad for joy with her, and ye that mourn her.'" This means that the value of the Fast of Av lies not only in remembering the past and applying its lessons to the present, but also in recognizing the unity of our people, the continuity of its existence and the destiny still awaiting fulfillment.

To the Kabbalists, the 9th Av represented the nature of the world's incompleteness and the great need for the return of the Holy Presence to Jerusalem with the rebuilding of the Temple. The Midrash (Lam. Rab 1) contains the significant statement that "The Messiah, the Saviour, was born on the day the Temple was destroyed."

The Fast of 9th Av is observed in Israel as it is by religious Jews the world over. The fast begins at sundown. The Book of Lamentations ('Echah') is read in synagogues in the evening by the dim light of candles, with the congregation sitting on the floor or on low benches; and it is read again the next morning. Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah, who witnessed the destruction of the First Temple, and there are five chapters of vivid impressions lamenting over destroyed and desolate Jerusalem, which he blames on the sinfulness of the people and their leaders. Lamentations is read to mournful, dirge-like tunes - Yemenite tunes are slightly different.

Many 'Kinot' connected with events in eastern lands are included in Kinah books of the oriental communities. The Yemenites have Kinot unknown to the Sephardim. In Yemen their mourning was very intensive, and they would spend most of the night and day in weeping while they recited dirges. Particularly heartrending is the moment when they announce the year of their exile.

Sadly, history has proved that Jews cannot afford to stop commemorating the great disasters which have befallen their people. Only by keeping alive the memories is there hope of preventing their recurrence. Not only is the 9th Av the blackest date of the Hebrew calendar, but many people believe that all subsequent calamities which have befallen the Jews have been a direct consequence of the destruction of the First and Second Temples which took place on this day.

LETTERS

Dear Mr. Tell:

I have once again taken the opportunity to bring to my colleagues' attention the appeal made by Edouard Mikhailovich Rynsky and his family for assistance in emigrating from the Soviet Union.

I am enclosing a copy of my statement made on his behalf on June 18, 1980, for your further in-

formation.

It is my earnest hope that this "Spirit of Helsinki, Vigil 1980" maintained by the United States Congress will result in early emigration to Israel for the Rynsky family and all others who desire to leave the Soviet Union.

Sincerely,
James D. Santini
Member of Congress

LEADERS SHOULD PROVIDE EXAMPLE

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- President Yitzhak Navon has called on Israel's political leaders to provide "vision and a better personal example." But unfortunately there are members whose conduct did not serve as a good example.



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DAYAN CALLS FOR EARLY ELECTIONS

TEL AVIV (WNS) -- Former Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan has joined those in Israel calling for an early election. "The time has come for us to send the ball back to the people's court and have them decide whom they want as their leaders and what course they want these leaders to take," he told the graduating class at Haifa University June 25.

Dayan's remarks followed the announcement by two members of the Democratic Movement (DM) that they are leaving the party.

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