

Tisha B'Av 2016

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 8/13/16

How do we relate to Tisha B'Av; to a holiday that commemorates Temples we have never seen, and cannot really expect to ever be rebuilt? How do we relate to a holiday that commemorates suffering instead of celebrating victory? How can we find relevance in this day of mourning, sadness and suffering that begins at sundown tonight?

I was listening recently to a talk by the author, Andrew Solomon, who researches and writes about, among other topics, trauma. During his research he met a woman who was raped at the age of 15. She subsequently had a child from that rape and that caused her life to be forever altered. It threw away her career plans and damaged all of her emotional relationships. When Mr. Solomon met her she was already 50. And he asked her, "Do you ever think about the man who raped you?" And she said, "I used to think about him with anger, but now only with pity." And he thought she meant pity at the fact that he was so unevolved to have done this terrible thing. "Pity?" he asked. And she said, "Yes, because he has a beautiful daughter and two lovely granddaughters, and he does not know that, and I do. So, as it turns out, I am the lucky one."

Those of us who have visited Jerusalem can only begin to imagine what it was like for our ancient ancestors to behold The Temple in all its glory. It was like nothing they had ever seen; overwhelming to all the senses. Music and incense, and magnificent architecture it was a masterpiece in sacred space. It would have been hard, I suspect, to not feel a heightened sense of spirituality and a closeness to Gd standing there with throngs of other Jews. And then it was gone, reduced to rubble. The very essence of Judaism, what it meant to practice our faith, was upended. There was literally nowhere else to go. And I suspect that the vast majority of Jews who lived through that national trauma were, well, traumatized, unable to see a way forward now that the way they always knew was obliterated. Most people, I believe were filled with a sense of hopelessness and despair. Where I there, I may well have been among those who felt that way.

And yet there were others, a few for sure, who felt compelled to move forward in faith. They imagined a new expression of Judaism; one that was not based on a caste - the Kohanim, or on sacrifices, or even on the Holy of Holies. I want to emphasize that they did not see the destruction of the Temple as an opportunity. It was not seen as a blessing in disguise. It was a trauma. But through the sheer force of their will they experimented with a new form of Jewish practice. And we know that they stumbled at first; that they argued and debated, and struggled to define what Jewish life would look like now. But years later they could, as we can, look back and realize that this was the birth of a vibrant form of portable, global Judaism that we still practice today.

Judaism not only survived, it thrived in this new reality. But more importantly, the image of a faith that could withstand trauma and loss became part of the story of our people. The loss of the Temple forced a new mindset, a new direction, and a new concept of what it meant to be Jewish. The destruction of the Temple and the rebirth of Judaism was what defined us as an "Ever Resilient People." And since that time, the hope that we can find meaning and direction, even, and perhaps especially in suffering, has been in the DNA of the Jewish soul. That does not mean that every Jew realizes it, or feels that way. In that generation long ago, most people I suspect

were overwhelmed with despair. But what this story tells us is that in the process of forging a future there is the potential to find meaning as our ancestors did long ago. That resiliency is in our collective conscious. It may not always be the card I choose to play, but it is good to know that it is in the deck.

In this sense, the story of Tisha B'Av IS the story of the Jewish People - of YOUR People. Time and again throughout our history, blundering, stumbling forward, our People have forged a new future when the plan that was for long so obvious was torn to shreds. Thumb through any book of Jewish history and you will find accounts of this phenomenon. Slowly, often ploddingly, great men and women of our faith have found meaning, and yes even blessing in the suffering they have endured and in the process, like the woman who was raped, have taken pride in what they have made for themselves. We cannot bear pointless suffering, but we can endure great pain if we believe it is purposeful. The story of Tisha B'Av, of suffering and recreation is in our DNA. It is in each of us. And we may not at any given moment have the courage or even the desire to access it, but to know that others have done so can give us hope that we too can someday tap into it as well.