

## Shabbat Shalom with A Side Of Torah & Tisha B'Av - Ve-etkhanan

Roughly 2600 years ago, the Temple in Jerusalem fell and the people of Judea either fled to Africa or were carried off into captivity. Another siege in Jerusalem ended in the burning of the rebuilt Temple roughly 1950 years ago. Both events happened on the same day 600 plus years apart -- the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the Hebrew calendar month of Av. *Tisha B'Av* (*Tisha* is the Hebrew word for 9<sup>th</sup>) is the holiday commemorating these events. For many this is remembered as a day of mourning. The lives that were lost and the destruction that resulted are blights, not only on our own Jewish history, but on the history of a world whose life span has seen devastating wars rip it apart, taking with it the lives of its inhabitants apart.

Several years back, I was in Jerusalem and snuck into a newly excavated space by the Western Retaining Wall of the Temple Mount. In a crevice I found some newly exposed ash that remained there since the Temple's destruction - almost two millennia ago! As I held the ash in my hand, my mind raced to recall the pages from the history books I read in school. Immediately, I became conflicted. In my hands were the destroyed lives of thousands of people. The onslaught of the Roman Empire was horrendous. The histories of this period demonstrate that the Roman soldiers were nothing short of barbarous in the slaughter of men, women, children, livestock, and the environment. *Tisha B'Av* is a day of mourning. As my heart breaks, I recall my lessons from those history books. The life span of the Roman Empire is finite. It no longer exists. I think of the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the horrific pogroms, Nazi Germany, Stalin Russia, and the list of peoples bent on the destruction of our people. How do I know about all of these people? I read about them ... in history books, for they no longer exist. The survival power that our tradition instills within us provides us with the perennial hope that keeps us present and relevant generation after generation. I don't believe in God's providence -- Jews as God's chosen favorites. I refuse to believe that anyone of us is singled out as more or less loved than anyone else; this is not the real intent of Scripture. All people of faith share God equally. I believe that we are here because we accept responsibility for each other. I believe that the only real threat to our existence comes from the Bernie Madoffs, the Syrian Rabbis in New Jersey, and the many who abuse our tradition -- and God for personal gain and power.

*Tisha B'Av* falls on my birthday this year - today. I am 49 and celebrate surviving a great many "iffy" choices in my life and as we can all claim, have lived through many painful losses. I hope to continue to have even more to celebrate as I move forward. Our tradition teaches us the same lesson about *Tisha B'Av*. The Messiah will become part of the covenant on this holiday. *Tisha B'Av* is a holiday that reminds us that there is no end. This journey is fraught with painful challenges, but that our commitment to each other and to helping the whole world heal can withstand most any onslaught (except the ones from within). I hope that this birthday leads me to being a better parent, a better son and brother, a better friend, a better listener, a better Rabbi, and a better person committed to the work of healing our world - *Tikkun Olam*. I hope I have learned to pay attention better.

This week's Torah portion includes the most sacred words in our liturgical tradition. *Shema Yisrael, Adonai Elohaenu, Adonai Ekhad*. Listen Israel, God is all of ours and there is only one God. I find it poignant that on the very week we remember the destruction of our ancestral house of worship and

ancestors that we commit to still paying attention. These words remind us that all of salvation is rooted in paying attention and acting with the knowledge that we all serve the same source of creation, the same God. There is not a Jewish God, a Muslim God, a Christian God, a Hindu God or any other sectarian God -- there is God. Each tradition teaches that this God requires us all to pay attention and act upon the universal truths of justice, respect, and love. When we all decide to pay attention, Messiah will come and the world will heal. What a great birthday gift it is to know that salvation really is within our power. What an even greater blessing to know that we can understand this ... and act accordingly. Shabbat Shalom.