

Tisha b'Av 5780

Ritual Toolkit from Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, July 29-30, 2020

Introduction to Tisha b'Av

Tisha b'Av (the 9th day of the Hebrew month of Av) is a day of Jewish collective mourning and fasting. It is known as the saddest day of the Jewish year. The day historically marks the destruction of the two temples (in 586 BCE and 70 CE), but has become a day commemorating many of the tragedies faced by the Jewish people. Many Jews commemorate the day by partaking in a 25-hour fast and reading the Book of Lamentations.

Lamentations is a collection of five poetic laments related to the destruction of the Temple: one is of a city weeping as a widow overcome with misery, the other is a description of the miseries in connection with national sins and acts of God, the third speaks of hope for God's people. The fourth laments the destruction of the city and the temple in a way that is connected to the people's sins and the final poetic chapter is a prayer that Jerusalem may lead to repentance and recovery of the people.

Tisha b'Av in our time and this year

Summer is often when uprisings take hold. This marking of collective mourning is during the summer, season of heat and intensity. Although America is continuously reckoning with its past and current legacy of oppression, Tisha b'Av falls this year in a moment of deep collective reckoning. With the backdrop of a global pandemic that is disproportionately impacting communities of color, we are witnessing an uprising sparked by the death of George Floyd, Brianna Taylor, and countless more Black people murdered at the hands of police violence.

It is clear that police violence is a part and parcel of 400 years of oppression of Black people in America caused by white supremacy. As we as Jews engage with a day that recounts and commemorates the horrors inflicted on the Israelites throughout their history and when the Babylonians destroyed the temple, we too mourn the ways that systemic oppression leads to the destruction of sacred life.

The Talmud teaches that the sin that caused the destruction of the Temple was *sinat hinam*, baseless hatred among Jews. One of the elements of Tisha b'av is concerned with the ways that we treat those around us in words and actions. The rabbis made Tisha b'Av an occasion to engage with mitzvot between individuals and those around them.¹ This Tisha b'Av we are mourning the overwhelming violence against Black people in this country and committing to working to transform the systems and institutions that uphold and

¹ <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/pondering-meaning-tisha-bav>

perpetuate this violence. This year, we commit to the personal work to transform ourselves, and the collective work to remove from power those who seek to perpetrate and continue baseless hatred.

Local Action

For the last few years, many Jews have taken to marking Tisha b'Av in the streets: in front of detention centers and prisons, calling out against the systemic racialized violence.

To publicly mark Tisha b'Av this year, decide:

When

Tisha b'Av begins on the night of the 8th of Av, sundown on Wednesday, July 29th, and continues all day Thursday July 30th.

→ *Bend the Arc will be hosting a national call discussing defunding the police at 8pm on Thursday, July 30th! More information to come.*

What

Tisha b'Av observance traditionally includes the reading of *Kinot*, elegies, the chanting of Lamentations, and recitation of Mourner's Kaddish. Public Tisha b'Av observances focused on anti-Black violence can include lifting up local stories, in ways that respect and honor struggles and lives of people and their families.

In addition to sharing ritual poetry, stories and prayers, Tisha b'Av as a public call to action should include naming white supremacy as the source of baseless hatred in our time, and calling out the purveyors of white supremacist violence.

Where

In person: If you are able to gather safely in person, decide on a location where the impacts of baseless hatred and white supremacy are visible, or at a location that makes sense for ongoing campaign work. Check out: [How to More Safely Protest in a Pandemic](#).

Integrating into existing Tisha b'Av observances: If you are connected to a synagogue or Jewish community that you're aligned or in relationship with, you can inquire about if they are planning a Tisha b'Av event and want support in integrating contemporary political themes and racial justice frames into the day.

Online: This year, some of our Tisha b'Av events will be online. Running an online ritual is similar to running an online meeting, with some additional considerations and opportunities.

A few reminders:

- *Screen share:* Think about when to screen share so that any program you're sharing is displayed, and when to let people connect with each other's faces and presence.
- *Singing:* unfortunately, Zoom can't handle group singing or even reading in unison. If you keep everyone muted and have a song leader, people can join in from home, they'll just be able to hear the song leader and themselves. It can be helpful to acknowledge that this might feel like a loss, and then to confidently go for it.
- *Tech person:* Have someone assigned to manage the waiting room, mute and unmute people, and handle screen share so that the people facilitating the gathering don't have to do that and can focus on ritual leading.
- *Get creative:* Invite people to bring a candle to light, to sit on the floor in their homes if they are able and comfortable, to share images, make signs or art and share them, use the chat. We've never done Tisha b'Av online in a global pandemic before, so anything you come up with will be amazing and a creative gift to our movements.

Taking action together

Tisha b'Av traditionally moves us into the season of preparation for the High Holidays and the new year — a time of personal reflection, growth, change, and action. This year, our Tisha b'Av mourning must serve to catalyze deeper and sustained engagement in campaigns and action to transform our systems of safety, healthcare, and beyond.

Think about what campaigns and actions you are directing people towards and use that to decide what stories, poetry, and readings you share in your ritual..

Sample invitation text

"In observance of Tisha b'Av, a day of mourning, we will be protesting unjust policing, violence against people of color in our communities. Join us for a morning of prayer, contemplation, and activism."

Observances and Practices

Kinot (Elegies): The traditional liturgy for Tisha b'Av is made up of *kinot*, elegies or dirges, mournful poetic storytelling of tragedies that have befallen Jews over the centuries. In our Tisha b'Av observances this year, we can share elegies that mourn the deaths and celebrate the lives of Black people who've been murdered by police and vigilante violence.

Resources:

- [A Small Needful Fact by Ross Gay](#)
- [Elegy by Aracelis Girmay](#)

Eicha (Lamentations): The traditional Torah Tisha b'Av is the book of Lamentations. It is a poetic book of laments, on the suffering and displacement caused by the destruction of the Temple and the exile from Jerusalem. This year, we read lamentations for the systems and culture of ongoing destruction and harm of racist policing and white supremacy.

Resources:

- [When people say, "we have made it through worse before", by Clint Smith](#)
- [A Litany for Survival by Audre Lorde](#)

Kaddish:

Resources:

- [Kaddish for Black Lives](#) from Jewish Multiracial Network
- [Interpretive Mourner's Kaddish](#) from Fringes Havurah
- [Mourning Black Lives and Police Violence](#) from Jews for Racial and Economic Justice

Dress: Tisha b'Av is a day of mourning on par with Yom Kippur. It's traditional to fast, not bathe, and sit on the ground, and some people don't wear shoes. Invite participants to dress humbly, possibly in torn or dirty clothing. Some Jews avoid leather as a symbol of comfort.

Physical orientation: It is traditional to sit on the ground as a sign of both mourning and being without a home. Vigils sitting on the ground are appropriate, and plan to have chairs on hand for accessibility

After Tisha b'Av: Coming into the Yamim Nora'im (Days of Awe) and election season

Tisha b'Av is one early step in our journey through the High Holiday season. After collective mourning on Tisha b'Av, we head into the month of Elul, a time marked by self reflection and spiritual preparation for the new year. After Elul, we journey through Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the season of individual and collective repentance and renewal.

The wisdom of the Jewish calendar teaches us that mourning and grieving must happen in order to enter into honest accounting of what changes we need to make. We must be with the destruction and losses we face, individually and collectively, before we can engage in spiritual growth.

This year, our Jewish sacred season coincides with a time of national political upheaval and engagement. This year, as we grieve the overwhelming lives lost from white supremacy and anti-Black racism, in the forms of police violence, white vigilante terrorism and the unjust

racialized impact of COVID-19, we are in a place to ask: what is the personal and collective transformation that must come next?

Our rituals are only as powerful as the transformation and action that they create in us.

How will your collective mourning of Tisha b'Av move you into reflection and action?

Readings to move towards action

- [A Prayer for Reparation and Restoration](#) by Rabbi Brant Rosen
- [A Sikh Prayer for America on November 9th, 2016](#) by Valarie Kaur
- [Life Chant by Diane DiPrima](#)

5780 calendar

- Elul: August 21st-Sept 18th
- Rosh Hashana: Sept 18-20th
- Yom Kippur: Sept 27th-28th
- Sukkot: Oct 2nd-9th
- Election Day: Nov. 3rd

Thank you to: JFREJ's 40 [Days of Teshuvah](#) for inspiration and leadership.

Contributors: Jenna Shaw, Molly Kleinman, Rabbi Jessica Rosenberg

More Resources:

- [Tisha B'Av Albuquerque 2019 Powerpoint Slides](#)
- [Tisha B'Av Albuquerque 5779 Program](#)
- [17th of Tammuz – July 9, 2020: A Different Type of Grief and Mourning from Truah](#)