

## Torah Tidbits from Rabbi Larry Moldo

The prophetic portion for this week, which is always the prophetic portion before Tisha B'Av, begins our Isaiah marathon. Most of the selections from Isaiah which we read are comforting descriptions of how good things will eventually be.

This week is a little bit different. Many threads are woven through this first chapter. Summarizing them: the customs involved in public expressions of piety are not important by themselves - presuming that they are sufficient is aggravating; those who are in need are worthy of your aid, which is more important than those public expressions of piety; eventually things will return to the way that they should be, which involves righteousness, and not public piety.

The problem with public piety (which is certainly not a new problem) is that the impetus for the actions may be more to be seen than to reconnect with God. When that is the case, the actions may look the same, but the results will not. Faking piety is actually disrespectful towards God. Which is why Isaiah (and several other prophets) keep reminding the people that bringing critters at specific times is not the point. God already owns the critters, as well as the land, and even us.

This first chapter does contain the word "eicha" which is the same word that begins the book of Lamentations, which is read on Tisha B'Av. The verse in Isaiah laments that the faithful wife (Jerusalem, possibly) now spreads her legs for anyone and everyone, with similar degradation for all areas of life, summarized by the earlier references to the inhabitants as being the equals of those who used to live in Sodom and Gomorrah. The process is the same - people forget what God's intent was in stating the rules for ritual and use ritual as a way to absolve themselves from any guilt for acting obnoxiously the rest of the time; God enables the fulfillment of devastating punishment so the land can get a small break from rotten people; the land waits to be productive until enough time has passed and Israel returns.

Let us all hope that righteousness wins out over self-righteousness; may we willingly share what we have with those who have less.