

Column from Rabbi Larry Moldo

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A few notes related to Tisha B'Av

Today is Tisha B'Av.

On this day, both Temples were destroyed, in different years, by different nations.

On Tisha B'Av Jews remember, mourn and fast.

Unless, as happens this year, Tisha B'Av coincides with Shabbat. The joy of memorializing God's completing creation trumps the sadness of memorializing the loss of religious independence. So the sadness is delayed until Sunday.

There is still sadness, although it is mitigated by several factors. 1) Israel exists as an independent entity. 2) Jerusalem is reunited, at least geographically. 3) We have gotten used to expressing our gratitude to God in other ways that don't involve bringing the raw ingredients for a festive meal to the Temple. 4) In some places, things are better than they were. 5) Locally, it is hard to remain depressed during Cheyenne Frontier Days.

If the sadness is mitigated, why keep remembering?

Partly because remembering is one thing Jews have gotten quite good at over the centuries. Not that we don't forget things as individuals – but as a people, we have tended to remember the most essential items.

Partly because the world is not yet perfected. Honestly, it is not even pretty good (as a whole) despite pockets of tolerability here and there.

Partly because we are not yet perfect.

When we remember these days (which include every holiday, as well as modern memorials such as Krystallnacht, Yom HaShoah v'HaG'vurah, Yom Ha'Atzmaut and Yom Y'rushalayim), we basically focus on three things: what happened, what our part was in the events, and who the bad guys were. Remembering what happened helps retain the relevance of the memory. Remembering what our part was often helps us become better people and a better nation. Remembering who the bad guys were helps to function as an early warning system for future bad guys as well as clarifying the limitations of power.

How does that all work for us as individuals?

For me, knowing the implication of a given historical event is extremely important. Nobody I know ever brought any animals, grains, oil or wine to the Temple. Very few people I know have ever had any of these items which they did not purchase from the store. So for all of us currently alive, there is no difference between a Temple existing and a Temple which does not exist. Yet I know that there once was a difference, and I also know that the loss of the Temple was not caused by normal atrophy, but by abnormal oppression and occupation. This helps make the loss important, and renders equally important any other such losses.

The Rabbis of the Talmudic era indicate that the reason the First Temple was destroyed was due to idolatry, and the reason the Second Temple was destroyed was due to the inability of Jews who disagreed politically to play nicely with each other. I need to try and make sure that I am not engaged in substituting something else for God, even if it is momentarily effective, while at the same time I need to make sure that I am not disrespecting somebody else merely because of one disagreement or another.

When we feel less secure, we remember the bad things that have been done, so we can try and avoid similar damage in the future. When we feel more secure, we remember the good things that we have helped accomplish. We have a deeply ingrained awareness that "this too shall pass" so we hope that the situation changes for the better. It can always change for the better.

Which is a good place to end – with the hope that for all of us, with the aid of our memorializing, things change for the better.