



TISHA B'AV FROM THE GROUND UP: PIECING OUR WORLD BACK TOGETHER

On the holy day of Tisha B'Av, the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, tradition has us sitting on the ground as a way to simulate grief and mourning. But the practice can also bring healing to people reeling in the lingering effects of trauma.

When Jews across the globe mourn the loss of the Temple in Jerusalem on Tisha B'Av, many engage in a plethora of traditional practices to mark the solemn day. Some (who are able or interested in doing so) refrain from eating and drinking, showering and wearing leather shoes, and they sit low to the ground until midday, when the sense of grief is partially alleviated and they symbolically sit up as a demonstration of hope. While a moving interpretation, settling on the ground only to rise up to the sky resembles something else in our world to compare ourselves to. Namely, a tree.

The Torah affirms humankind's connection to the Earth. In Deuteronomy 20:19 the Torah reads, "For a person is a tree of the field." Commenting on this verse, 16th century Polish



rabbi, Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi wrote

"The Torah compares humans to trees, because "like humans, trees have the power to grow. And as humans have children, so trees bear fruit. And when a human is hurt, cries of pain are heard throughout the world. So when a tree is chopped down, its cries are heard throughout the world." - Rabbi Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi

At the very beginning of the Torah, the first human was created out of earth and named after the Hebrew word for earth, "Adam." The Earth is God's conduit for providing care and life-sustaining materials that all people need to grow like the trees we are, growing and producing "fruits" of our own. In that way, we are all connected by the ground we stand on and the God who sustains us.



TISHA B'AV FROM THE GROUND UP: PIECING OUR WORLD BACK TOGETHER

Tragedy has different effects on everyone. Like the dispersion of the Jewish people in the aftermath of the events of Tisha B'Av, when the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed, those of us who experience personal tragedy can feel alone and distance ourselves from others. Sitting on the ground can be an opportunity to center ourselves, internalizing the connection to the Earth we share with others. Firmly grounding our bodies to the earth beneath us and considering our shared life experience with the other “trees” in our lives uproots us from the past — alone and traumatized — and plants us in the moment among friends, family and community. That is where we need to be in order to truly heal from the tragedies commemorated on Tisha B'Av, both personal and communal. We also need it to produce fruits of our own again like the healthy “trees” we strive to become — and need to become — in order to usher in the redemption we pray for on Tisha B'Av in a safe and beneficial way. The Talmud in tractate Sanhedrin presents a number of suggestions for signs the redemptive age of peace is approaching. One position states the trees will bear fruit and grow in abundance in preparation for the Jewish people's return to the land in the Messianic era:



As it is stated: “But you, mountains of Israel, you shall give your branches, and yield your fruit to My people of Israel, for they will soon be coming” (Ezekiel 36:8). When produce will grow in abundance in the Land of Israel, it is an indication that the Messiah will be coming soon. (Sanhedrin 98a)



TISHA B'AV FROM THE GROUND UP: PIECING OUR WORLD BACK TOGETHER

However, we need more than the trees of the land to grow and produce the fruits necessary to nurture and sustain our physical health. Like the healthy “trees” the Torah encourages us to become, we need to be healthy enough to produce “fruits” of our own to nurture and support the mental wellbeing of ourselves and others in order to usher in redemption and peace. Our fruits can be anything from emotional intelligence and empathy to kindness or gratitude — all qualities that allow for communal love and support. But they can only be grown in connection with others.

The kind of togetherness Tisha B'Av and this perspective highlights — that formation of a cohesive and firm foundation to live on and live in community with others — is the only way we will heal and bear the “fruits” we need to rebuild the Temple and ourselves and bring redemption to our world.



Nothing in this resource is to be construed as medical advice or treatment. For all medical questions, please consult a medical professional or treatment facility. ©2023 The Blue Dove Foundation All Rights Reserved



TISHA B'AV FROM THE GROUND UP: PIECING OUR WORLD BACK TOGETHER

As you sit on the ground during the early morning hours of Tisha B'Av, consider the following steps to make it a healing experience.

1. Find a comfortable place to sit and ground yourself on the Earth.
2. Close your eyes or soften your gaze.
3. Find a position on the ground so your body feels fully supported.
4. Once you're comfortable, brush your hands across the ground, be it grass, sand, dirt, carpet or flooring, and press your palms down on the ground.
5. Breathe in and out slowly five times. In through your nose, hold for five seconds and exhale through your mouth for five seconds.
6. As you breathe, meditate on everything in the natural world you need to sustain you, and how everything that is sustaining you is simultaneously sustaining everybody in your life.
7. Everyone is breathing the same air, feeling the same sunlight, walking on the same planet. While they may not all have the exact same experiences, at the end of the day we are all in this together, connected by our shared caretaker.
8. Ponder this point for a few minutes, really internalizing the existence of the other people in your lives.
9. Recite out loud "I am not alone" three times.
10. Breathe in and out five times. In through your nose, hold for five seconds and exhale through your mouth for five seconds. Slowly open your eyes and refocus your gaze with each breath.
11. As you stand up, think about someone you love who you can connect with, whether by phone, text or in person.