



REBUILDING EACH OTHER

Tisha B'Av — the ninth day of the month of Av — is a major day of mourning in Judaism, as we remember the destruction in Jerusalem of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. and the Second Temple in 70 C.E. While we focus on these epic tragedies, this day has evolved into one commemorating a number of other catastrophes for the global Jewish community throughout history, including the Holocaust and various other anti-Semitic incidents. We commemorate these events through the recitation of a collection of poems called [kinot](#). These poems span several centuries, with some being written as early as the 8th century C.E. and others as recently as the 1950s. They consist of retellings of the various tragedies, cries calling for justice and above all for remembering those we, and other members of the Jewish people, have lost.

Excerpt from kinot about the Holocaust:

**G-d, mindful of those who are mindful of G-d,
Each generation and its sainted martyrs,
Ever since first G-d chose us;
May He remember the fate that befell the last generation.
Woe! What has befallen us!
All who were swept away in the deluge,
Whose lives were lost, drowned in the valley of tears -
May G-d remember them in the lands of eternal life.
May their memory be a blessing.**



This holiday is a challenging one. We can get lost easily in the sorrow of these memories and fail to see the mental health benefits that lie beneath the poems and practices that have been established to commemorate this admittedly depressing day.



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As we recount the destruction of the Temple as well as the other tragic events in Jewish history, we are reminded of the challenges we have faced and of our capacity to confront them as a community, embodied in the middah (Jewish value) of [kol Yisrael arevim zeh la zeh](#) (all Jews are responsible for each other).

An article by Emily Bulthuis, MSW, LCSW, about confronting and recovering from tragedy-related trauma highlights the importance of community. Ms. Bulthuis says that among the top five actions one can take to begin their road to recovery, a crucial element is talking about it in a loving and supportive environment. [“Open up to a professional, loved one or support group about how you are feeling. Getting meaningful support from others and feeling heard is a critical aspect of recovery. It can also be helpful to connect with others who have shared a similar experience.”](#) Through our emphasis on sharing the Jewish people’s burdens and defeats in the way we mourn the losses of communities separate from our own, we are able to garner the necessary support from one another to move forward, exemplifying kol Yisrael arevim zeh la zeh through our act of self-care, or self-focused chesed u’gevurah.



Perhaps that is why Jewish tradition predicts that Tisha B'av, among other fast days, will transform into a day of joy. [When we come together in prayer, supporting one another, listening to one another and being present with one another, we recognize we aren't alone, and in that sense of community, we can finally rejoice and rebuild EACH OTHER.](#)

“Thus says the Lord of Hosts: The fast of the fourth month (i.e., 17 Tammuz), the fast of the fifth month (Tisha B'Av), the fast of the seventh month (Tzom Gedaliah) and the fast of the tenth month (10 Teves) will be joy, celebration and holidays for the house of Judah, and they will love truth and peace.”
(Zechariah 8:19)



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Activity - Writing Kinot

A crucial piece of forming mentally healthy and sensitive communities is developing the ability to listen and empathize with others embodied in the mental health middah kol Yisrael arevim zeh la zeh. In that vein, try writing a letter, [or kinot](#), to someone you know or a community you are connected with that is going through a difficult period. Make them feel heard, show you are there, and try to be with them in their pain. You never know who might need it. And even if you choose not to send it, this activity offers a great opportunity to practice feeling for others.

For some help formulating your letter:

Things to Say to Someone in Grief*:

1. I am so sorry for your loss.
2. I wish I had the right words. Just know I care.
3. I don't know how you feel, but I am here to help in any way I can.
4. You and your loved one will be in my thoughts and prayers.
5. My favorite memory of your loved one is...
6. I am always just a phone call away
7. Give a hug instead of saying something
8. We all need help at times like this. I am here for you.
9. I am usually up early or late, if you need anything.

*Grief.com



