



Table Talk: Quotes and Questions for Family Discussions

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Please enjoy this collection of sources, quotes, and discussion questions to enhance your Tisha B'Av experience. They are ideally meant to inspire family and other group discussion.

Finding Joy within Destruction

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. Take wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that you may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city into which I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray to the Lord for it: for in its peace shall you have peace.

Yirmiyahu 29:4-7

- **What type of message was Yirmiyahu imparting to the exile in Babylon?**
- **How is the tone of this message different from the one imparted in Eikha?**
- **When was the last time you were able to find joy in the midst of suffering?**

Personalizing Tisha B'Av

Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: This was the custom of Rabbi Yehuda, son of Rabbi Ilai. On the eve of the Ninth of Av, near the evening, they would bring him stale bread with salt, and he would sit between the oven and the stove and eat. He drank a flask with it, and in doing so he would resemble one whose deceased relative is laid out unburied before him.

Ta'anit 30a-30b

- **How did Rabbi Yehuda, son of Rabbi Illai, prepare for Tisha B'Av?**
- **Why do you think he sat between the oven and the stove? What do they symbolize?**
- **How can you personalize your Tisha B'Av experience to make it more meaningful?**

The Charismatization of Routine

There was always halakha. But after the Temple's destruction, it became the vehicle through which the priestly task was spread throughout the people. Halakha invested, and invests, every detail of daily life with the charisma of holiness. No longer did anyone need a special uniform to single them out as priests or holy people, because the Jewish people as a whole had become, individually and collectively, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). If the kohen represented the routinization of charisma, Judaism — through its halakhic sanctification of everyday life — eventually became the charismatization of routine.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: Exodus* (Maggid Books, 2010): 248

- **According to Rabbi Sacks, how did Halakha's role shift after the destruction of the Temple?**
- **What areas of life are most intensely governed by Halakha? Why do you think these areas need the most halakhic governance?**
- **How has Halakha invested the details of your life with more meaning?**

Understanding Eikha

Eikha's seemingly inconsistent and rapidly changing attitudes toward God may be explained by the fact that emotions lie at its core. Is God just or not? An intellectual consideration of the matter approaches the question systemically, offering coherent, logical arguments. However, when humans address the same events through an emotional lens, contradictions abound. God is both just and unjust. Humans are simultaneously baffled, abashed, angered, and comforted by God. The ebb and flow of human emotions and the way they shift and converge, collide and contradict, can account for the rapid swing between different perspectives in Eikha. This represents the emotional condition of humans, offering a realistic and multifaceted portrait of how humans cope with God's role in their tragedy.

Dr. Yael Ziegler, *Lamentations: Faith in a Turbulent World*, (Maggid Books, 2021): 35-36

- **How does Dr. Ziegler understand the seeming incoherence of the structure of Eikha?**
- **Can you think of other texts of Tanakh that may be explained in a similar manner?**
- **How do you cope with contradictory emotions?**

Mourning the Unknown

Thus, the loss of this ultimate House, Hurban HaBayit, can only be understood through the loss of its microcosm, our own homes. Imagine a fire sweeping through every room of your house, taking with it in its destructive path the family portraits, the dinner table that served up so many intimate memories, the stores of souvenirs, objects and furniture that make up a life. In our sentimental moments, each nook and corner holds reservoirs of meaning. Who am I if I no longer have a home? Often when people are moving and look at the contents of their homes boxed up in cartons, their houses stripped of personal identifying markers, they experience the existential dizziness of dislocation. Imagine now that we undergo this as an entire people. We don't know who we are when our center is removed.

Dr. Erica Brown, *In the Narrow Places*, (Maggid Books and OU Press, 2011):18

- **How does the destruction of one's home rupture their sense of identity?**
- **Before the Temple was built we had temporary Tabernacles. How may a Tabernacle represent our relationship with God differently than the way a Temple does?**
- **Do you have any memories associated with your home that may help you personalize the destruction of the Temple?**

The Power of Hope

The Jews gave to the world this idea of time as a narrative of hope, which meant that what is lost can be regained, what is destroyed can be rebuilt, and what disappears may one day return. Our Prophets were able to see beyond the horizon of history, so that where everyone else saw doom, they also saw the hope that lay just over that horizon, and they understood that there was a route from here to there. That really is a remarkable vision. We are the people who gave the concept of hope to the world. We kept faith, we never gave up, and we honestly observed for 26 centuries without a single pause, the line in Tehillim 137, "I will never forget you, O Jerusalem". And because we never gave up hope, we finally came back to Jerusalem. Hope rebuilds the ruins of Jerusalem. The Jewish people kept hope alive, and hope kept the Jewish people alive.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition: The Three Weeks & Tisha B'Av 5781*

- **According to Rabbi Sacks, how did Jews redefine the concept of time?**
- **How do you think the rituals of Tisha B'Av help us maintain hope for the future?**
- **How can you work on having more hope in your life?**

Exiled, but not Alienated

True and devoted friends never forget each other — even if anger and offense have caused them to separate from one another. Of genuine friends it may never be said that "out of sight, out of mind." Where there was once deep and profound love between husband and wife, some spark of it will always remain no matter how sorely their marriage has been tried. Absence, indeed, may make the heart grow fonder and the old love may well be reawakened... Such indeed is the hester panim that separates us from our Father in heaven. We are exiled from Him — but not alienated. We are so far — yet so close. We are separated -- but not divorced. God's face is hidden — but His heart is awake.

Rabbi Norman Lamm, *The Veil of God*, 1965

The word "bat" — daughter — appears in the megillah more than 20 times, most often as bat Zion, bat Yerushalayim or bat ami (the daughter of My nation). The message is clear: Knesset Yisrael is the daughter of G-d, and the father-daughter relationship is a metaphor that describes the relationship between G-d and His nation. This word bat is the most powerful way to describe our relationship: the parent-child contract is permanent. It is impossible to break up, impossible

to divorce, impossible to quit. There is no get or contract to end the relationship. It lasts forever.

Sivan Rahav Meir, "Framing the Destruction," Torah To-Go, Tisha B'Av 5780

- **To which types of relationships do these thinkers compare our relationship with God?**
- **What other words appear frequently in Eikha? How may those words help us better understand the nature of Tisha B'Av?**
- **Is there anyone in your life with whom you would like to reunite?**

The Temple Within our Souls

Our yearnings to be connected to the Temple — to God's House on the mountain summit, to the service of the kohanim, the song of the Levites, and the ma'amad (deputation) of the Israelites, to share all of the nation's soul-ties to its holy abode — these yearnings awaken the "beauty of the universe" in the hearts of Israel each day. They establish an elevated Temple inside the soul of each individual, as we begin the day by reciting the order of offerings and incense in our morning prayers.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, Shemonah Kevatzim vol. I, sec. 606

- **How does Rav Kook view the importance of yearning for the Temple?**
- **What Biblical verse implies that our actions towards the building of a sanctuary will cause God's presence to dwell within us?**
- **How may this relate to Chazal's (Ta'anit 30b) statement, "Whoever mourns for Jerusalem merits to see it in its joy?"**

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