

# Mourning the destruction in the rebuilt Jerusalem

• By SHIMSHON HAKOHEN NADEL

Shortly after making aliya, I spent my first Tisha Be'av Eve participating in the *sivuv she'arim*, an annual march that circles the Old City of Jerusalem, organized by the Women in Green. The night began with a reading of Lamentations in Independence Park, opposite the US Consulate. Following some criticisms of White House policy, we set off on foot towards the Old City's walls, aglow in the night. We marched, surrounded by a heavy police presence as Arab youth looked on, stopping at several points to listen to speeches from activists and members of Knesset.

But it didn't feel like Tisha Be'av.

Where was the sadness? The mourning? The pain?

Instead, there was a feeling of triumph and victory in the warm Jerusalem air. Some of the participants waved flags; others chanted slogans and sung songs. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced. And it made me uncomfortable. I was used to sitting on the floor in a darkened synagogue, trying to access the pain of the destruction of Jerusalem and our Holy Temples.

The truth is, Jews the world over struggle to relate to a destruction that happened 2,000 years ago. How do we make Tisha Be'av meaningful? How do we feel a real sense of loss for something we never knew?

And in Jerusalem, the challenge is even greater. The opening words of Lamentations, "Alas – she sits in solitude! The city that was great with people has become like a widow," seem almost anachronistic. With a population of over 800,000, Jerusalem today is a vibrant city. It teems with tourism, culture and life. A simple survey of all of the cranes in the sky suggest Jerusalem's continuous growth and expansion.

How do we mourn for the destruction in a rebuilt Jerusalem?

After the Six Day War, the chief rabbi of the IDF, Shlomo Goren, made changes to "Nachem," an additional prayer recited on Tisha Be'av afternoon. The traditional version describes Jerusalem as "the city that is in sorrow, laid waste, scorned and desolate; that grieves for the loss of its children, that is laid waste of its dwellings, robbed of its glory, desolate without inhabitants. She



A WOMAN at the Kotel.  
(Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

sits with her head covered like a barren, childless woman."

In the IDF siddur that he edited and published in 1970, Rabbi Goren wrote that this liturgy is "not appropriate when Jerusalem is free and under Israel's sovereignty." Instead, he chose a text based on the Jerusalem Talmud, the siddur of Amram Gaon, and Maimonides, which limits the description of Jerusalem to "the city that is in sorrow, laid waste, and in ruin." The more subtle language, Rabbi Goren felt, better expressed the new reality of a unified Jerusalem, under Jewish control.

Serving as Ashkenazi chief rabbi of the State of Israel from 1973-1983, Rabbi Goren attempted to formally institute the changes he made to Nachem, but was unsuccessful. While the changes were minor, they were controversial. Rabbis Isser Yehuda Unterman, Ovadiah Yosef, Tzvi Yehudah Kook and Joseph B. Soloveitchik, among others, opposed the changes. How can we change the liturgy, they asked, while Jerusalem is still denigrated without the Holy Temple standing?

This debate over the wording of Nachem reflects the very real tension of mourning the destruction today, in a rebuilt Jerusalem. The Jewish People's 2,000-year-old "Dream of Zion," is no longer. It has become a reality. Like the fiery phoenix,

rising from the ashes of gas chambers and crematoria, the Jewish People returned to their soil. The dry bones in Ezekiel's vision have indeed come to life, and returned to their land. As the prophet Zechariah foretold, "Elderly men and women once again sit in the streets of Jerusalem... and boys and girls play in her streets." The world witnessed the miracle of the birth of the Jewish state.

But while we have returned to our borders, and in the years since seen the unification of Jerusalem, things are still far from perfect. We live with a nuclear threat from Iran looming, enemy states on our borders, and the constant threat of terrorism. Israel is delegitimized and demonized in the media. And we are divided as a people. We suffer from a lack of unity and baseless hatred for one another, which according to the Talmud was the cause for the destruction of the Second Temple.

So there I was marching in the *sivuv shearim*, full of mixed emotions, when I realized that this schizophrenia is the very dialectic of Tisha Be'av itself. In the Talmud, Tisha Be'av is described as a day of crying and mourning for all times, yet it is also the symbolic birthday of the Messiah. It is a day which, over the course of Jewish history, saw many tragic events, yet it is also called a *mo'ed*, an appointed time or holiday, and one day will be transformed into a festival, as is promised.

In one Talmudic account, upon entering the Temple, the Babylonians see the Cherubs entangled in an embrace, expressing God's love for Israel despite the devastating destruction take place all around. Tisha Be'av is a bitter day – but it's also a day of hope.

In the prayer for the welfare of the State of Israel, we describe this young state as the "first flowering of our redemption." We recognize that something profound happened 64 years ago, but we are not there yet – we are witness merely to the first flowering. It's only just the beginning. We live during challenging and confusing times, but also during exciting times. We live at a unique moment history.

To truly experience Tisha Be'av is to appreciate how far we have come, and how far we still are.

The writer, a rabbi, lives in Jerusalem, where he teaches Torah inspired by the Land and her people. His forthcoming book is Return again: The argument for Aliyah.