

Tisha B'av, Our Holiday of National Failure: Why Mourning is Essential for Success by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch (2021)

1. On the ninth of Av It was decreed that our ancestors should not enter the land, The Temple was destroyed the first And the second time, Betar was captured, And the city was plowed up. When Av enters, they limit their rejoicing. (Mishna Taanit 4:6)
2. Adam was created on the sixth day, and He informed him in a roundabout way that He had brought death into the world, as it is said: For in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:12). To what may this be compared? It may be compared to a man who wished to divorce his wife. Before he enters his home, he writes out the divorce document and then enters the house with the divorce document in his hand. He then seeks a circuitous way to hand it to her. He says to her: "Give me some water that I may drink." She does so, and when he takes the glass from her hand, he tells her: "Here is your divorce." She asks: "What sin have I committed?" "Leave my house," he retorts, "you have served me a warm drink." "Apparently you already knew," she replies, "that I would serve you a warm drink when you prepared the bill of divorce you brought with you." And that is what Adam told the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the Universe, two thousand years before You created the world, You had the Torah as an artisan...Within it is written: This is the law; that a man dieth in his tent (Num. 19:14). If You had not previously decreed death for mankind, You would not have so stated in it (the Torah). The fact is, You introduced the threat of death against me in a roundabout way. Hence He acts circuitously in His doings toward the children of men (Ps. 66:5).
3. And the man said, "The woman whom You gave [to be] with me she gave me of the tree; so I ate." "So I ate" – (*vaochal*) - and I would eat it again! (Zohar)
4. "and they departed the mountain of God" (Bamidbar 10:33) As the midrash states, they left joyously like a child fleeing from school saying 'let's get out of here before He gives us more mitzvot!' (Ramban ibid)
5. But once Adam sinned, a great change happened to things. And that is that deficiencies were added; and they grew in the essence of man and in all of the entire creation... with his sin... it would no longer be as easy for him to return and to go away from deficiency and acquire perfection... the striving required of him now to reach perfection would perforce be doubled. (Derech Hashem 1:3:8)
6. They told him and said, "We came to the land to which you sent us, and it is flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit...They spread an [evil] report about the land which they had

scouted, telling the children of Israel, "The land we passed through to explore is a land that consumes its inhabitants..." (Bamidbar 13:27,32)

7. Any lie in which a little truth is not stated in the beginning cannot be maintained in the end.
— [Sotah 35a]

8. The entire community raised their voices and shouted, and the people wept on that night. All the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the entire congregation said, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this desert! Why does the Lord bring us to this land to fall by the sword; our wives and children will be as spoils. Is it not better for us to return to Egypt? They said to each other, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt!" (Bamidbar 14:1-4)

9. You cried for nothing (chinam), I'm going to issue you to cry for generations (Taanit 29a)

10. We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge (chinam), the cucumbers, the watermelons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic... (Bamidbar 11:3)

11. ...Rather their evil was with the word, "however" (efes, which also means nothing or nonexistent or impossible), which indicates a thing's nothingness and inaccessibility to a person in that it is impossible in any way. So behold, what they said to him was, "It is fertile 'and it indeed flows with milk and honey,' and the fruits are good; however it is impossible to get to them, because 'the people [...] are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large; moreover, we saw the Anakites (giants) there.'" (Ramban Bamidbar 13:27)

12. It is apparent, therefore, that the sequence of the Jewish calendar is deliberate and meaningful: We observe 3 weeks of mourning, followed by 7 weeks of consolation, culminating with 10 days of Teshuva. This chronological progression in the Jewish calendar is undeniably teaching us that aveilut/mourning (which culminates with Tisha B'Av), and nechama/consolation (which follows Tisha B'Av), are prerequisites for Teshuva (which culminates with Yom Kippur). The sequence further strengthens the meaningful link between Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur. The essence of this connection is that failure puts us on the path of change, and through the process of mourning, regret, and Teshuva, we can become different people. Aveilut/mourning is the first step of this process because it is the foundation for nechama/consolation. The word aveilut derives from the Hebrew word aval, which has a double meaning: definitive acceptance, and but/however (used to transition from one idea to another, as in "point A, but/however, point B"). When we go through the mourning process, we have both objectives in mind: first, to definitively accept the loss of our family member,

with the purpose of beginning to put the loss behind, and second, to transition (but/however) into moving on with our lives. (The Book of Life, Yom Kippur, chapter 1)