

The Shabbat of Parashat Devarim, the Shabbat of the opening of Deuteronomy, is called Shabbat Hazon, because the haftarah, the prophetic reading is from the beginning of Hazon Yeshaya, the prophetic vision of Isaiah. The prophecy of Isaiah foretells the destruction of Jerusalem because of the sins of the people. This is always the Shabbat before the fast of Tisha B'Av. The 9th of Av, which commemorates the destruction of the first and second holy temples in Jerusalem, and other calamities that befell the Jewish people throughout the ages. In the Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Yoma, we are taught: Why was the first Sanctuary destroyed? Because of three [evil] things which prevailed there: idolatry, immorality, bloodshed. . .

But why was the second Sanctuary destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, [observance of] precepts, and the practice of charity? Because therein prevailed hatred without cause.

We often talk about baseless hatred, *sinat chinam*, but this year, I have been more pre-occupied with the cause of destruction that, on the one hand is an extremely ubiquitous prohibition in Torah, and other hand, is much harder to define than baseless hatred: the prohibition against idolatry.

What is idolatry, this act that destroys Temples? The moral charge of that word is so strong, so loaded. To accuse someone or something of idolatry is a huge accusation. In the Torah, it is used to refer to the worship of inanimate objects, that are not themselves enlivened and cannot give life. And yet, when I think about our Hindus making offerings to statues of Ganesha, or Catholics praying to icons of the Virgin, none of the moral weight and judgment that I associate with the charge of idolatry comes to mind.

This is not just me - throughout the generations, our Jewish sages have come up with reasoning to explain how their local gentiles' practices were not really idolatry, even when devotees were bowing down to objects.

So what then is idolatry? Perhaps it's like Justice Potter Stewart's famous definition of pornography: "I know it when I see it."

Okay, so let us put the definition on hold for a few minutes. Idolatry, among other causes, destroyed the first Temple, way back in 586 bce, on the 9th of Av.

And this year, this Shabbat actually falls on the 9th of Av. This evening, the Hebrew date is Tisha B'Av, but because we do not observe fasts of mourning on Shabbat, we do not observe Tisha B'Av until beginning tomorrow evening. But the reality stands: Tisha B'Av, our most mournful day, is technically today. And today is Shabbat, the taste of the world to come, the day when we are instructed to live into gratitude, to live as if we are utterly free from want.

I had the pleasure of learning in Dolfy Freinquel's class about Tisha B'Av this past Monday evening, and he brought a wonderful teaching from the contemporary Kabbalist Sarah Yehudit Schneider, about the tension of Tisha B'Av on Shabbat. Apparently there is an age-old controversy in our tradition about how this Shabbat should be marked. Are we to embrace the mourning aspects of Tisha B'Av, forgoing music and socializing, sticking to simple food? Or are we to embrace Shabbat, treating it as a day of joy, waiting until sundown to enter the day of mourning. This controversy has played out even in our own community, as the Tefila U'Minhag Committee, the ritual practices committee, has gone back and forth on the question of whether to use live instruments when Tisha B'Av and Shabbat converge.

We know something about what Shabbat is. We know something about what Tisha B'Av is. We cannot be in two places at once. And yet, the falling out of the calendar demands that we negotiate two different energetic spaces.

Schneider writes that it is possible to hold both the anguish of Tisha B'Av and the joy of Shabbat, the anguish of global injustice, a spiraling ecological catastrophe, our culture of painfully isolating consumerism - and deep gratitude for a ripe fig or plum, a beautiful walk in the company of a friend, the sound of voices raised in song.

Can we learn to live with both truths, understanding that they do not negate the other? As Schneider writes, "You must decide, in each circumstance, how best to apply the (paradoxical) factors at hand. The temptation is to relieve the uncertainty (along with its anxiety) by picking one side and rejecting the other. When one of the "truths" gets labelled *false*, the insecurity disappears. You always know the right choice, and you're backed by a who gang of supporters who also dropped the paradox and proclaim the same **half-truth** as you."

To operate like that is so much more comfortable than it is to operate in paradox. But we live in a world of incomplete truths. Perhaps complete devotion to an incomplete truth is a better definition of idolatry than the definitions I discussed at the beginning.

So here is the truth: I am terrified and grieved at the state of the world, at the discourse in our political system, at the strange weather patterns that we must now admit are normal. To fail to name the anguish would be a failure of truth. We need the mourning. We need the catharsis that shakes us out of our acquiescence to what should never have become a tolerable status quo. As Dolfy taught last week, sometimes the Temple needs to burn and we need to cry, in order to have the awakening.

And here is the truth: I am so glad to have my parents here with us today. I am so glad that Deni has joined our people. I am so glad we have the simple joy of singing together this evening. We need Shabbat, the taste of the world to come, the taste of the world as it should be - to understand what a healthy world looks like: how we are supposed to live, how we are supposed to relate to each other. We need the full joy, and the full mourning. Anything less than both would be a failure of truth. And we owe this broken world nothing less than whole truths. Holding these paradoxes in their entirety: this is what our human hearts were made to do.