

Three Weeks Mourning and Innovation

This month will encompass the Three Weeks, the season of mourning the destruction of Jerusalem 2000 years ago, as well as even older, mythical collective catastrophes and more recent historical traumas.

It is appropriate that we have time to mourn. We do not mire ourselves in grief all year, but we give it a few weeks, including two fast days. But that is not all we do.

We remember our vision of the world as it should be. The metaphor for that vision is Jerusalem built anew. That metaphor exists throughout our rituals and liturgy, from the middle of the daily Amidah, to the glass broken at the end of Jewish weddings. And we evolve our rituals to withstand the challenges of our moment. Some of our most beloved rituals—the Passover seder, Hanukkah candle lighting, and Kabbalat Shabbat—all developed after the destruction of Jerusalem.

As we go into the Three Week season, we are obviously not only mourning historical traumas. We are also mourning lives lost to the violence of white supremacy and lives lost to COVID-19. And we are perhaps mourning the ease and connection of gathering in community in ways that we took for granted only six months ago. Our communal practice is not going to include joyful large gatherings any time soon—though I hope it will not take 2000 years! In any case, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur this year will not involve hundreds of us gathering at TBI. The Three Weeks are an appropriate time for us to acknowledge and mourn that, as well as to begin visioning how our practice can and should evolve to meet the needs of the moment. I hope you will participate in this process by filling out the survey included in this newsletter.

Whatever we wind up doing in the next few months will include longing, vision, and innovation, as does so much of Jewish practice. Ours is a tradition of turning grief into community, disorientation into creativity. Our tradition is built for times like these.

—Rabbi Ruhi Sophia Motzkin Rubenstein

July/August 2020