



**NECHAMA**  
JEWISH RESPONSE  
TO DISASTER

# From Lament to Light: A NECHAMA Tisha B'Av Companion

## I. Introduction: From Ancient Lament to Our Modern Mission of Comfort

Tisha B'Av, observed on the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, stands as the darkest day in the Jewish calendar. It is a profound day of communal mourning, primarily commemorating the destruction of both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, which occurred centuries apart on this very date. The First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E., and the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E., both traditionally assigned to the 9th of Av.

Beyond these seminal events, Tisha B'Av has evolved into a symbolic day for remembering a multitude of other profound tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people throughout history. These include calamities such as:

- God's decree against the Israelites in the wilderness
- The fall of Betar
- The expulsion from Spain in 1492
- Massacres during the Crusades in the summer months

This day functions as a powerful repository for collective Jewish suffering across millennia, transcending a mere historical anniversary. It signifies a continuous thread of brokenness in the world, allowing for a profound connection to contemporary efforts to address suffering, regardless of its origin. It is a day when we collectively reflect on immense suffering and loss, and it calls us to reflect deeply on loss and, crucially, to consider our role in healing a broken world.

Tisha B'Av has increasingly become a day for all Jews to remember various tragedies and reflect on the suffering that persists in our world today. This modern understanding deeply resonates with our mission at NECHAMA. Our very name, *NECHAMA*, means "comfort" in Hebrew, and our work is a direct response to the brokenness Tisha B'Av calls us to acknowledge. We transform historical sorrow into contemporary purpose, turning lament into light through action.



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## II. Tisha B'Av Traditions: Echoes of Our Shared Humanity

The observance of Tisha B'Av involves a full 24-hour fast, abstaining from food and drink from sunset on the eve of the 9th of Av until nightfall the following day. This fast is one of two full-day fasts in the Jewish year, the other being Yom Kippur.

Beyond the physical fast, traditional mourning practices are observed, mirroring those for a lost family member:

- Sitting on low stools or the floor
- Refraining from wearing leather shoes
- Avoiding bathing, perfumes, or ointments
- Avoiding joyous activities such as listening to music or studying Torah (except sorrowful texts like *Lamentations*)
- Dimmed synagogue lighting and removal of the ark covering

The central prayer service includes:

- Chanting *Megillat Eicha* (Book of Lamentations)
- Reciting *Kinot* (dirges or elegies recounting Jewish tragedies)

These rituals are not merely performative; they are meticulously designed to focus our thoughts and feelings towards national sadness and loss. The act of “sitting on low stools as a sign that our hearts have been brought low” embodies a profound humility and empathy. This mourning is a **spiritual preparation for action**, conveying that true comfort and repair can only begin after fully confronting and empathizing with suffering.

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## **A Prayer for Healing and Comfort**

*(Adapted from the closing prayer of the Amidah)*

### **Place upon all beings**

Peace, goodness, blessing,  
Grace, loving-kindness and compassion.  
Bring us to our knees in the face of brokenness.  
Let us feel the pain, the suffering of each other.  
Let us know it as our own.  
Bless us all.  
Help us rise again and again  
Into the light of possibilities,  
Into the light of sacred presence.  
Open us to the ways of love,  
Generosity and justice,  
To the ways of life,  
Compassion, kindness and peace.  
Help us see with humility  
And meet each moment with blessing.  
In the face of all that is,  
Call us present  
To stand together as one.  
May our lives be for healing.  
May our lives be for peace.

While Tisha B'Av is a day of profound grief, it also holds the seeds of hope and transformation. Modern interpretations emphasize moving beyond mourning to acknowledging resilience and renewing commitment to heritage. This shift directly aligns with our core mission—transforming sorrow into purpose.

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### III. Connecting NECHAMA's Work to Tisha B'Av

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#### A. Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World)

We are explicitly "rooted in the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam, repairing the world." The mourning on Tisha B'Av for a broken world—the destruction of the Temples and subsequent tragedies—serves as a powerful catalyst for this action. *Eicha* (Lamentations), central to the observance, is a dirge for destruction. Yet our mission is fundamentally about repair.

- **Narrative arc:** Brokenness → Restoration
- Rebuilding a home = bringing divine presence into the world through acts of kindness
- Emotional and spiritual context of Tisha B'Av = why our work matters

"The blackest, most sorrowful day" becomes the beginning of active repair.

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#### B. Rachamim (Compassion) & Lo Ta'Amod (Don't Stand Idly By)

The collective sorrow of Tisha B'Av deepens our human capacity for **Rachamim** (compassion) and reinforces the imperative of **Lo Ta'Amod**—do not stand idly by.

- We respond to disasters rapidly and compassionately
- We help all people, regardless of background
- We fulfill Jewish commandments to care for the poor, widow, and stranger

Even as Tisha B'Av is a day of Jewish mourning, we emphasize inclusivity:

"Volunteers of all faiths"

"Assistance to disaster survivors regardless of religious affiliation"

This universalizes the Jewish call to compassion and action.

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### C. Spreading Hope

Tisha B'Av reminds us that the Jewish people have endured and thrived despite trauma. Our name—**NECHAMA**—means "comfort," a direct answer to a day born of mourning.

- Rabbinic teaching: "You have wept without cause... a weeping throughout the generations"
- Our response: "**comfort with purpose**"
- We rebuild and offer hope to communities shattered by disaster

"Our existence today is a triumph of our people's spirit."  
Our work is a **manifestation of hope** in action.

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### IV. Conclusion: A Call to Comfort and Repair

Observing Tisha B'Av with us means channeling historical remembrance into active engagement. It is a day to:

- Acknowledge brokenness of the past and present
- Act with **Rachamim** (compassion)
- Live **Lo Ta'Amod** (don't stand idly by)
- Embrace **Tikkun Olam** (repairing the world)

By doing so, we provide comfort and hope to those in need—regardless of background—and contribute to healing the world, one act of restoration at a time.