

## “Joy from Sorrow”

**T**isha B’Av, the ninth day of Av, is the saddest day in the Jewish calendar. The rabbis call it “a day set for misfortune.” The Midrash, Jewish commentaries on the Scriptures, says that God, from the beginning, had marked Tisha B’Av as a day of grief because of the Spies-in-the-Desert episode.

In case you don’t remember that part of our history, let me tell the story. We’re in the wilderness, we’ve been there for forty years. Moses sends spies to Canaan. They return on the 9th of Av and they report that the land cannot be conquered because the people who live there are giants!

So the Israelites rebel and cry, “We would have been better off if we stayed in Egypt!”

So God gets really mad. God had been putting up with our complaining for forty years. “You weep now without cause,” God says. “But surely you will have good reason to weep on this day.”

And then—because of cowardice, ingratitude and lack of trust—God condemns the people to die in the desert without seeing the Promised Land and ordains the destruction of the Temple in some future year on Tisha B’Av.

Fast forward... It’s the 9 day of Av, 586 B.C.E., and (just as predicted) Solomon’s Temple is taken by the Babylonians. The Jews are sent into exile and Tisha B’Av becomes a day of tears.

Years later, forty years later, Cyrus the King of Persia conquers the Babylonians and lets the Jews return to Jerusalem and allows them to rebuild the Temple.

Then the prophet Isaiah proclaims “They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations... For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause

righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.” (Isaiah 61:4,11)

Now the week following Tisha B’Av is Tu B’Av, which originally was the day that ended the chopping of wood, gave the men time to seek out wives, get married and begin new life—a festival of joy after a day of sorrow.

Today is the third Sunday of Advent, designated as a day of joy. But like the Jewish festival it is set in sorrow. Although we designate the two previous Sundays as Hope and Peace, the scripture readings point out that we have not had hope in God’s ways, we are not walking the path of peace.

The ways of the world has convinced us that we ought to seek happiness rather than joy. Now you know what happiness is. It is getting a new iPod for Christmas, getting a new car that goes really fast and hardly uses any gas at all, getting that gift that proves your are important. It’s all about getting. It’s all about me.

Now Joy is different. Joy comes from acts of love where you can’t tell the difference between giving and receiving. It is love that is not earned or deserved—it just is. Here is a story by Cynthia Yoder that captures the mysterious relationship between joy and sorrow.

Two sisters, Joy and Sorrow, lived on a grassy hill outside Dublin. They lived on that hill since they were born, which was the beginning of time itself. Joy and Sorrow did not get along very well. Sorrow was always wailing and sitting with her head in her hands, and Joy was always dancing and singing and playing the flute really loud.

They didn’t understand each other. One day, when the rains came, as they always did in the springtime, Sorrow went inside the little hut where they kept their food stores. Joy, on the other hand, stretched out her arms and drank in the raindrops as if they were drops

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