



Dear Friends,

In the thick of the Three Weeks, approaching the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, Tisha B'Av, I understand those who have difficulty mourning the destruction of the First and Second Temples. It feels like a historic loss that is too remote and a religious ideal that is mentally and emotionally inaccessible. Through prayer, fasting and the rites of mourning, Jews across the globe use three weeks of the calendar year to try and access these feelings and grieve over something they personally have not lost.

Today, however, we know more about generational trauma in psychology and the way that a major historic episode can leave a deep imprint on those not yet born who have never personally experienced the pain but still carry the suffering. This year, having just left Israel with a remarkable encounter, I approach Tisha B'Av differently, with an imprint of generational trauma as an individual and as an inheritor of collective memory, cognizant of the way that pain and redemption are always intertwined in Jewish tradition.

Last week, I was invited for a personal tour to see the latest excavations at the City of David. When there, you pass through the palace of King David from 3,000 years ago and the city that he built at the foot of the Temple Mount. Archeologists recently discovered the actual road that the pilgrims walked on to ascend to Jerusalem during the three major pilgrimage festivals. They have unearthed the road that extends from the Pool of Shiloah to the area near Robinson's Arch, and I *walked* on it. It was discovered when a plumbing crew went to fix a leak in the city of Silwan. In Jerusalem, every modern layer overturned reveals something magical beneath that releases a new picture of ancient Jewish life.

With each step, I was transported back in time. Around me was the footprint of the stores on the side of the road that no longer exist. The pilgrims used to bring the money that they tithed to purchase sacrifices in those very stores that they would bring with them up to the Temple. The road I walked on was the same road that the Mishnah in *Sanhedrin* (1:1) records was repaired by the 15th of Adar in preparation for the tens of thousands who came to Jerusalem for Passover. *I walked that road.*

It is the same road featured in an argument between the first-century sages Hillel and Shammai who argue about what age a child has to be to make the pilgrimage. According to Shammai, the child's father is obliged to bring him on his shoulders.

According to Hillel, he must go up to the Temple only when he can walk up the entire last part of the road himself (*Hagiga* 5b-6a). *I walked that road.*

It is the same road where the artisans of Jerusalem would greet the pilgrims who held ornate baskets of fruit to offer on the Temple's altar as described in the Mishnah in *Bikkurim* (3:3):

*Those who lived near [Jerusalem] would bring fresh figs and grapes, while those who lived far away would bring dried figs and raisins. An ox would go in front of them, his horns bedecked with gold and with an olive-crown on its head. The flute would play before them until they would draw close to Jerusalem. When they drew close to Jerusalem they would send messengers in advance, and they would adorn their bikkurim. The governors and chiefs and treasurers [of the Temple] would go out to greet them, and according to the rank of the entrants they would go forth. All the skilled artisans of Jerusalem would stand up before them and greet them saying, "Our brothers, men of such and such a place, we welcome you in peace."*

*I walked that road.*

At one point, our guide walked up to the excavators and combed through the dirt. He pulled out something black and flaky and put it in my hand. It was ancient ash from the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, our *Beit Ha-Mikdash*. It was the very same ash that was produced when the Romans toppled the stores whose remnants I passed. They lit everything on fire so that Jerusalem would be destroyed and never rebuilt. With the ash, they hoped to destroy the memory of our holy city. They thought that Zion would not be remembered. It would remain a ruin forever.



Suddenly I felt dizzy with the recognition of Jewish history collapsing on itself. The Romans thought they would remove our holy city by burying it in ash, but the greatest proof of their failure was that I was now holding that very ash. I was walking on the road they sought to destroy. Jerusalem is not dead. It is not only alive in my memory, but it is now being rebuilt for the future.

This is not just the story of the Jewish people as a whole, but it is your story, my story. Generational trauma impacts us deeply. Our lives do not begin at birth but carry over the experiences of our pre-lived past. The experiences and narratives of destruction and expulsion that have run throughout Jewish history deeply impact our life decisions and the way in which we see the world. In our tradition, on Tisha B'Av, all of that trauma—from the decree of destruction due to the spies in the desert to the Temples' ruins to the victims of the Crusades to the Holocaust—are all laid out before us. We excavate our consciousness, touch the ashes and walk on the road that carried our parents and grandparents. We do so not to be mired in the past but to transform trauma into creative energy; see in these stories the seeds and inspiration to create a better future. The best way to honor the memory of those who came before us is to build a better tomorrow for our children, their grandchildren and legacy.

On Tisha B'Av, we touch the ashes of the smoldering Temple in our prayers that we may continue to rebuild Zion and honor the endurance of our people. Every Tisha B'Av reminds us to look back, see just how far we have traveled that ancient road and draw the inspiration to continue our march forward towards redemption in honor of our parents and grandparents and for the sake of our children and grandchildren.



Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman  
President, Yeshiva University

Office of the President, Yeshiva University  
2495 Amsterdam Avenue, Belfer Hall 12th Floor  
New York, NY 10033

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