



A FLAMING FIRE, CONSUMING EVERYTHING
– *LAMENTATIONS 2:3*

TISHA B'AV IN A TIME OF CLIMATE CRISIS

**A PROJECT OF THE COALITION ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND
JEWISH LIFE AND THE SHALOM CENTER**

Tisha B'Av has traditionally been observed as a day of collective mourning for the Jewish people. This mourning recalls the destruction of the First (586 BCE) and Second (70 CE) Temple and consequent exiles, as well as disasters from later periods, such as the expulsion of Jews from England (1290) and Spain (1492). It has been observed as a day of fasting, along with reading *kinot*, poems of lamentation, along with chanting some or all of the five chapters of the Book of Lamentations.

But for many Jews today, these observances of Tisha B'Av have become problematic for a variety of reasons. For example, why mourn the end of a system of animal sacrifices and a hereditary religious hierarchy open only to males? What does exile and sovereignty mean to us today in light of the modern state of Israel and the state of the Jewish community in the U.S. and Canada? And perhaps most importantly of all, what do we do with the traditional understanding that the various disasters commemorated on Tisha B'Av were caused by the sins of the Jewish people and that we should quietly accept our responsibility and punishment? Isn't that blaming the victim?

Since at least the 1980's, however, a number of Jewish thinkers have proposed viewing Tisha B'Av through social justice lenses that shift the idea of responsibility. For example, Rabbi Lew Barth proposed that instead of victim-blaming, we think of Tisha B'Av as a sort of societal Yom Kippur, a time for looking at how we have collectively missed the mark and what we need to do to bend the arc more toward justice. Rabbi Arthur Waskow and the Shalom Center connected the flames of destruction from the Temple to the atomic fires of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Based on conversations with Lew, Arthur and others, in 1990 Rabbi Daniel Swartz of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) began devising Tisha B'Av liturgies imagining our whole world as the Temple, beginning to burn up from global climate change. Since then, many others have also related the commemoration of Tisha B'Av to one or another of the destructive tendencies of modern society.

This set of materials, compiled and distributed by the Shalom Center and COEJL, with assistance from the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, contains:

- Selections from each chapter of the Book of Lamentations, along with responsive readings linking the readings to climate justice – pp. 4-10
- Three English language *Kinot*, two developed by the Shalom Center, written by Rabbi Tamara Cohen and Rabbi Arthur Waskow, and one by COEJL, written by Rabbi Daniel Swartz – pp. 11-17
- Several texts for study and discussion, including an essay reprinted from Pennsylvania Interfaith Power and Light that can be used as sermonic material – pp. 18-20
- Suggestions for action, including how congregations and individuals can declare “We Are Still In,” pledging their commitment to the Paris Climate Accords – pp. 21-22
- Links for further resources, p. 23

Selections from Lamentations and Responsive Readings

On Tisha B'Av, we recall destructions past

And through our recollections, we hope for insight.

Insight into how we have responded and how we might respond today

And how our response may, if wise and passionate and strong, stave off further destruction.

We are caught up in snare of isolation; struggle through waves of deception and denial

Sink into the depths of depression; strive against blame and anger.

And yet, in the midst of mourning, we also may remember hope:

*“One may lay down at night weeping, yet in the morning, joyous song.”
(Psalm 30:6)*

If, with clear eye and strong heart, we face disaster unflinching,

Strengthened by each other, inspired by the Breath of Life

It may yet come to pass that we will again stand mountain-strong

Our dirge turned into dance, sackcloth undone and bound instead with joy (Psalm 30:12)

I. Isolation and Disconnection – Chapter 1:1-3

Alas! How lonely sits the city once great with people! She that was great among nations is become like a widow; the princess among states is become a thrall. Bitterly she weeps in the night, her cheek wet with tears. There is none to comfort her of all her friends. All her allies have betrayed her; they have become her foes. Judah has gone into exile Because of misery and harsh oppression; when she settled among the nations, she found no rest; all her pursuers overtook her in the narrow places.

Lamentations begins with a cry, a threnody of anguish:

How lonely sits the city once great with people!

Tragedy looms, disasters strike, and they become multiplied by isolation.

We feel disconnected, abandoned, powerless.

The Temple, when it stood, was the center of our people's world.

There, we gathered. There we felt God's presence. There, life was given meaning.

Through the Temple, we felt connected to the Most High.

A connection we thought severed when the Temple was burned.

But, as we have learned in ages since, our whole world is our Temple.

The dwelling-place of holiness, the gateway to the sacred.

The Earth and all in it, our mystics saw as garments of the *Shekhinah*, the indwelling presence of the divine.

And so we can reconnect with our Creator through our connection to all creation.

And yet today, this most basic of connections may be severed, as we stand on the brink of the burning of not just the Temple, but also our world.

Too many have become disconnected from the consequences of their fossil fuel addictions, isolated from those even now facing fires and floods, droughts and disease fanned by the flames of climate change.

Today, Breath of Life, help us to reconnect to you, to all life on this planet, to our responsibility to care for others and to the consequences of our actions and inactions.

Help us to see that we are not alone, powerless against a global problem.

May we realize that our cries, though they come from the depths, will be heard.

Our lives, rewoven together, can make a difference.

II. Denial and Deception: Lamentations 2:3,13-14

Alas! In blazing anger God has cut down all the might of Israel and has withdrawn the Divine right hand in the presence of the foe; God has ravaged Jacob like flaming fire, consuming everything. What can I take as

witness, what liken to you, O Daughter Jerusalem? What can I compare with you so as to console you, O Fair Maiden Zion? For your ruin is vast as the sea: Who can heal you? Your prophets spoke visions of folly, mere cover-ups and delusion. They did not reveal your iniquity so that you might change course, but instead prophesied to you oracles of empty speech and deception.

When tragedy strikes, or even when a crisis looms,

It is natural to look the other way, to deny, to disbelieve, to pretend that life can go on as before.

Alas! This cannot be happening – must be but a nightmare.

When the mind does not want to grasp, the heart too often closes, denies.

Denial is natural – but futile, even dangerous. Actions taken today that could save lives may be as empty speech if put off till tomorrow.

The carbon curve climbs, the waters rise, the fires rage – there is such a thing as too late.

To this personal denial, those who profit from the status quo add deception.

They lull us with the poppy-milk of false prophecies

It's not happening; humans aren't causing it; and anyway it won't be so bad.

Or if it is, we can trust in technology to find a painless solution.

With deception and delusion, we are distracted from justice

But justice delayed and justice denied bring the sword into the world.

This day, we recommit to the pursuit of justice, as we remember:

Zion will be save by justice, her repentant ones by righteousness. (Isaiah 1:27)

Too often, we, afraid of changing course, hesitant to undertake sacrifice,

Become half-willing accomplices, bargaining away our children's futures for the convenience of the moment.

How do we help each other see that turning off a light can be a moral act?
What would it take for driving alone to be seen as a sin or public transit a mitzvah?

How can we wake from our slumber, see the cost of our bargains, move from what is convenient to what is required?

Help us, Breath of Life, to hear the cries of those already in peril, to be moved to act for those yet to come.

III. Overwhelming Depression – Lamentations 3:52-56

My foes have snared me like a bird, without any cause. They have ended my life in a pit and cast stones at me. Waters flowed over my head; I said: I am lost! I have called on Your name, O Eternal, from the depths of the Pit. Hear my plea; do not shut Your ear to my groan, to my cry!

Surely, ours is not the first age to feel sunk in the depths of sorrow, tragedy, disaster and depression.

The Psalmist wrote (69:3-4) I have sunk in the slime of the deep, and there is no place to stand. I have entered the watery depths, and the current has swept me away. I am exhausted from my calling out. My throat is hoarse.

We are far from the first age to ask, as did the author of Lamentations,
Why have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time?

And yet, it seems only recently depression has become pandemic, the “new normal.”

So we must ask, what about our age is uniquely overwhelming?

Is it what we face externally – a climate spinning out of control, forests burned, species driven to extinction?

Perhaps it is what is between us, deepening divisions and splintering societies, or an internal void, a loss of meaning coupled to our loss of connection

Isolated and alone, facing global crises, paralysis and depression feel almost inevitable

There is no place to stand, the current has swept us away, our throats are hoarse.

But we must not be content to sink into the slime of the deep, for the task is great

And the Master of the global house is insistent

And we are, truly, not alone, but called to be partners in creation

To take part in Tikkun Olam, the world's healing

We, created in the image of the Divine, have the ability –

Which path shall we choose?

Will we shut our ears to the pleas of the earth, the cries of climate refugees?

Or will we grasp hands across divides, climb from depths of despair, and help shape a better future for the planet and all people?

IV. Blame and Responsibility – Lamentations 4:13-15

It was for the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests, who had shed in her midst the blood of the just. They wandered blindly through the streets, defiled with blood, so that no one was able to touch their garments. “Away! Unclean!” people shouted at them, “Away! Away! Touch not!” So they wandered and wandered again; for the nations had resolved: “They shall stay here no longer.”

On Yom Kippur, we each search our souls,

Examining our personal faults, striving for self-improvement.

Tisha B'Av too, could be a time for soul-searching

Not just of selves, but also of society, a time to take account of sins of social injustice

What is the moral state of our community? How have we fallen short?

How have we failed to pursue climate justice? What is the nature of our responsibility?

In ancient days, our people knew,
Even with great learning, there can be great evil
 Unless people of learning bind themselves to the community,
Unless we all become responsible for each other.

On Tisha B'Av, through the ages, our people confronted tragedy by asking:
What did we do wrong? How have we sinned?
 Was that blaming the victim? Doesn't tragedy often strike without cause –
 or caused by those least affected by the tragedy?
*But perhaps there is another way to hear their question – perhaps they
 also were asking, what can we do now to improve our world?*

As we face the fires of climate change today, there are those more to blame,
 those who have through action and inaction shed the blood of the just.

*For the sins of the profits, the iniquities and inequities of politicians, who
 seem blind to the needs of the streets, for their sins our whole planet pays.*

But Tisha B'Av calls for more than cries of blame – it is a call as well to
 reflection and renewed responsibility by all

A call to sensitize our society's soul, for turning anger into action.

Even against the flooding of coasts and the loss of species, we cannot take
 refuge in blame or powerlessness.

*It is time to accept our call, to shoulder responsibility to undertake the
 healing of the world.*

We may not live to see the completion of the task,

*But we are not free to abstain from the work. May we be blessed with the
 strength and wisdom to do it well.*

V. Mourning and Hope – Lamentations 5: 15,20-21

Gone is the joy of our hearts; our dancing is turned into mourning. Why
 have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time? Take us back, O
 Eternal, to Yourself, And let us come back; Renew our days as of old!

Ours is a time when, in equal measure, we are devoted to happiness and avoidant, even afraid, of mourning.

But much is already lost, and only those with closed hearts and narrow minds can look at the world and not shed tears.

On Tisha B'Av, we remember, for we are a remembering people.

We recall the pain and destruction of long ago.

And as we remember, as the flames of ancient fires rise in our collective memory, pouring out our hearts like water in the presence of the Eternal,

We also recall – mourning is different from despair, from giving up. To the contrary, only when we fully understand how broken our hearts are can we begin to find a path toward healing.

When we remember, when our eyes have been washed by true tears, when we let the light in through the cracks in our hearts,

We can find a path forward, no longer condemned to flames arising yet again.

In our scroll of laments, we cry out, “Why have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time?”

Only after our cry, can we truly move to a plea of hope: Renew our days as of old.

Ecclesiastes Rabbah tells a tale of God endlessly creating and destroying world. Finally, God created this one. The Divine Breath led Adam, earthling, and Eve, Life-giver, through the green and growing garden, and the Voice called to them:

See my works, how fine and excellent they are. Now all that I have created, you see arrayed before you. Think upon this and do not corrupt and destroy my world, for if you do, there is no else to restore it.

That Voice calls to us still, more urgently than ever.

This is our sacred task. Now, let us work for healing, together.

*Kinot**1. Eichah / Lament for the Earth: Tisha B'Av by Rabbi Tamara Cohen
(While serving as the Barbara Bick Memorial Fellow of The Shalom Center)*

Eichah: Alas, she sits in danger.
Earth, home to multitudes,
like a beloved, deep in distress.
Blue ocean, source of life --
Endangered and imprisoned.
Bitterly she weeps in the night
Her shorelines wet with tears.
Of all her friends, none to comfort her;
All her allies have betrayed her.
Checkerspot butterflies
flee their homes;
Polar bears
can find no rest.
Because our greed has heated Earth.
Whole communities destroyed
To pursue off-shore oil.
Lives and dreams have been narrowed.
Coastlines mourn for families,
lost homes and livelihoods.
Barrier islands lament, desolate.
Wetlands sigh without their song birds.
Estuaries grieve; the sea is embittered.
Earth's children – now her enemies;
Despite destruction, we sleep at ease.
The Breath of Life grieves
our abundant transgressions.
Infants of every species,
captive to our conceit.

*Hashivenu Yah elecha v'nashuva, hadesh yameinu kekedem.
 Let us return, help us repent,
 You Who Breathe all Life;
 Breathe us, Breathe us,
 Breathe us into a new path--
 Help us, Help us, ,
 Help us Turn to a new way of living
 Make–new, Make -new,
 Our world of life intertwining –
 Splendor, beauty, joy in our love for each life-form.*

Gone from Appalachia -
 her mountaintop glory;
 mined by Massey Energy
 without compassion.
 Children sick from air and water,
 stumble weak before King Coal.
 All that was precious in the days of our youth,
 Earth recalls in woe and sorrow.
 Her creatures die with none to help them,
 at the hands of Exxon, now BP.
 World leaders shrug
 and look on helpless.
 We have sinned greatly,
 and so are ailing.
 Our people who respected life,
 have come to defile it.
 We have stripped Earth naked,
 she shrinks back.
 Oily waves slap the sand like a soiled hem;
 we were heedless of the cost of our appetite.
 We have sunk appallingly, there is no comfort.
 See, Breath of Life, this misery; how our avarice jeers!

Greed has laid hands on all dear to us.
 Your sanctuary plundered by multinationals
 full of contempt for Your holy community.
 The Earth's poor cry out as they search for nourishment;
 indigenous communities trade resources for food,
 to keep themselves alive.

Hashivenu Yah elecha v'nashuva, hadesh yameinu kekedem.

Let us return, help us repent,

You Who Breathe all Life;

Breathe us, Breathe us,

Breathe us into a new path--

Help us, Help us, ,

Help us Turn to a new way of living

Make--new, Make -new,

Our world of life intertwining –

Splendor, beauty, joy in our love for each life-form.

Look, O Breath of Life, and behold,
 what gluttons we have become.
 Will we heed this warning, we who live as if unscathed –
 Will we truly look and know this agony as ours own?
 We are afflicted by angry consequence,
 The elements push back against their abuse.
 Forest fires reach down and spread like fury,
 Sprawl and refuse trap our spirits.
 Great storms hurl lives backwards, upside down
 survivors are left forlorn, in constant misery.
 For these things do we weep
 Our eyes flow with tears.
 How far from us is any comfort,
 the possibility of change that might revive our Earth?
 The children are forlorn for their future is bleak
 unless we act with speed and wisdom.
 Alas, humanity in our reckless living

have brought shame over all.
 Can we remember the holiness of your creation,
 Your footstool, green and fertile?
 We have razed woodlands to the ground,
 profaned the Kingdom of Earth and all its creatures.
 In arrogance we slashed the mighty Redwoods,
 will we cease hiding our power from ourselves and befriend our Earth?
 How can we wrestle with God and bring justice to others
 If we don't quench the flaming fires,
 and turn back from endless consumption?
 Egrets and brown pelicans languish in salt marshes
 From the depths, corals cry out.
 "Where are the fish? Where are the clean waters?"
 Languishing battle-wounded in the wetlands,
 life runs out in ocean's bosom.

Hashivenu Yah elecha v'nashuva, hadesh yameinu kekedem.

Let us return, help us repent,

You Who Breathe all Life;

Breathe us, Breathe us,

Breathe us into a new path--

Help us, Help us, ,

Help us Turn to a new way of living

Make--new, Make -new,

Our world of life intertwining –

Splendor, beauty, joy in our love for each life-form.

Lead us, lead us, on a new path to Eden,
 Teach us self-restraint in the very midst of abundance.
 To "Ayeka/Where are you?"
 We will answer Hineni.
 We are here to honor boundaries, not to devour all.
 Open, open -- Our eyes to see in each creature,
 Tree, Ocean , Mountain --
 the Presence of the One.

2. *Between the Fires, By Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Shalom Center*

We are the generation that stands
between the fires:

Behind us the flame and smoke
that rose from Auschwitz and from Hiroshima
And from the burning of the Amazon forest;
Before us the nightmare of a Flood of Fire,
The flame and smoke that could consume all earth.

It is our task to make from fire not an all-consuming blaze
But the light in which we see each other fully.

All of us different, All of us bearing
One Spark.

[Light a candle, or a torch, or clump of sage]

We light these fires to see more clearly
That the earth and all who live as part of it
Are not for burning.

We light these fires to see more clearly
The rainbow in our many-colored faces.

Blessed is the One within the many.

Blessed are the many who make One.

*Here! I will send you
Elijah the Prophet
Before the coming
of the great and terrible day
of YAHH, the Breath of Life.
And he shall turn the heart
Of parents to children
And the heart of children to their parents.
Lest I come and
Smite the earth
With utter destruction.
(From Malachi 3)*

Here! we ourselves are coming
 Before the great and terrible day
 of smiting Earth —
 For we shall turn the hearts
 Of parents to children
 And the hearts of children to their parents
 So that this day of smiting
 Does not fall upon us.

3. How-1 by Rabbi Daniel Swartz, COEJL

How lonely sits our world,
 This island of life.
 She becomes as a widow,
 weeping in the night.
 Weeping for rainforests burnt,
 for shorelines befouled
 for oceans turned to deserts,
 for mountaintops brought low
 to fuel fires of greed and waste.
 All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; none did help her.

How
 The old anger rises again
 My only companion in the rubble of the streets
 Past the tatters of once familiar buildings my footsteps echo
 Across desert-dry courtyards
 How

Forward to the east my eyes look
 Hoping to see, feel, hear the stirrings of a breeze
 But midsummer heat
 A stranger made resident
 Lies full on my back

Makes blackened stones shimmer
As I howl to the desiccated shell
That was once my Land
No water for tears

As I walk
My anger at my side
Past limestone valleys
Once smoking with sacrifice
Past tree dry-bones
Where once lived cool forest
Through sooty stone once golden
Into where a garden once blooms where
Next to the wall that somehow remains
Lies a broken doll.
And I kneel beside her and my anger kneels with me
Wrapping its fringes around me
For we know, my anger and I
That howling is of no use
Where no ears remain.

There is no one left to answer the question
How
But if I should awaken
From this vision of flaming fire
Consuming everything
A fatal embrace of heat
If I should awaken
I know I will never stop
Lest the nightmare vision returns
Lest all my anger by for naught
Asking
How

Texts for Study and Discussion

I. Tosefta Menachot 13:4

R. Yochanan ben Turta said: why was Shiloh destroyed? Because there they treated holy offerings disgracefully. Why was the First Temple of Jerusalem destroyed? Because of the idolatry, sexual immorality and spilling of blood that was in its midst. But we know that in the later one (Second Temple period) they labored in Torah and were careful with tithes, so why were they exiled? Because they loved money and each one hated his fellow. This comes to teach you that hating one's fellow is wrong in God's eyes, and the Torah considered it equivalent to idolatry, sexual immorality and the spilling of blood.

II. Isaiah 24:4-5

The earth withers, sears
 The world languishes and sears;
 Even the powerful people languish miserably.
 The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants;
 For they have transgressed laws,
 Violated the statutes,
 Broken the everlasting covenant.

III. Ezekiel 34:18-19

Is it not enough for you to graze on choice grazing ground, but you must also trample with your feet what is left from your grazing? And is it not enough for you to drink clear water, but you must also muddy with your feet what is left? And must My flock graze on what your feet have trampled and drink what your feet have muddied?

Possible questions for discussion: what connections do these texts make between justice and environmental well-being? Between injustice and destruction? What does exile mean in an age of climate refugees? What do you think is behind environmental destruction today? Who are the environmental prophets of our time and what are they calling us to do?

Eichah: The urgency of “How?!”

By Rabbis Marjorie Berman and Daniel Swartz

(Originally appeared in the Pennsylvania Interfaith Power and Light blog)

Judaism marks a number of minor fasts, but only two major fasts that run from one sunset to the next: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and Tisha B’Av, the 9th day of the month of Av, which commemorates the destruction of both the first and second Temples in Jerusalem, as well as later catastrophes. Yom Kippur gives individuals the opportunity to reflect on their actions over the past year so that they can do “*t’shuvah*,” that is, turning to their better selves in the coming year.

Because Tisha B’Av seems on the surface to be centered on mourning ancient losses, many people fail to recognize that it too is about *t’shuvah*. But in the case of Tisha B’Av, the turning we need to accomplish is not individual but societal. The Book of Lamentations, traditionally read on Tisha B’Av, begins with a question, “*Eichah?*” How? “How can it be that she sits alone, the city that was once great with people?” (Lamentations 1:1) And this question implies others: How did this come about? In what ways are we responsible? What can we do differently to prevent such tragedies from recurring?

According to traditional Jewish understanding, one of the root causes of the destruction of the First Temple was that people turned from worshipping the God of all creation and instead worshipped gold and silver, power and wealth. By the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, the problem was no longer idolatry but *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred.

But the early sages do not stop there. They take the Jewish historical experience of the destruction of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem and universalize it in both time and scope. For them, the holy Temple in Jerusalem also served as a reflection of the broader holiness of the whole earth. And as for that cry of *eichah*, we read in *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 19:9 (a homiletical commentary on the Book of Genesis) that the first *eichah* was actually addressed to Adam and Eve, when they violated the Garden of Eden: “You transgressed My commands. I decreed exile and I lamented: ‘*Eichah?*’ How?” (The sages are using wordplay here - the text in Genesis literally says that God calls out *Ayeka?* – where are you? – but the spelling in biblical consonantal Hebrew is identical to *Eichah*)

The sages of *Bereishit Rabbah* are using this pun to make a point: the experience of destruction and exile is not just about the Temple in Jerusalem. It has been with us since the Garden, that is, since the beginning of civilization. And, just as in the days of the Temple, we too cause destruction through the worship of riches and power and through baseless hatred.

What is more, the story of Eden can itself be seen as a parable in which the human race, offered great abundance, is told that it must not gobble up all of the abundance but must restrain itself – by not eating from one delicious tree. Yet the human race refuses to restrain itself, and in consequence, the abundance vanishes and we must work with the sweat pouring down our faces “all the days” of our lives to barely feed ourselves as the Earth brings forth chiefly thorns and thistles. This parable becomes reality in many moments of human history -- as in the story of the BP oil blow-out in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. BP’s unwillingness to restrain itself brought on the deaths of eleven of its own workers and poisoned many waters and creatures of the Gulf. So the punning Midrash of the ancient rabbis addresses precisely the danger that faces our Temple Earth, our Garden Earth.

Today, humanity as a whole is violating the Garden that is our beautiful, blessed world. We are quite literally giving rise to fires of destruction through greed and casual disregard of others. Through the wasteful and unsustainable burning of fossil fuels, we threaten the very future of civilization and of countless species all across the global Garden. And if we do not turn away from this behavior, the havoc that climate change will wreak will give rise to howls of *eichah* far more desolate than any that have ever been uttered.

But Tisha B’Av teaches us that when we remember and listen to the lessons of history, when we mourn that reality, we can be inspired to change. The second to last sentence in the Book of Lamentations reads: “Return us to You, Eternal, and we will turn. Renew our days as of yore.” In other words, if we really take in the urgency of “how,” if we truly face up to what we have done, we can change. We can shape a future with justice for everyone and sustainability for countless generations to come. We can make our world into a new Eden, a sacred Temple once again.

(Note: many thanks to Rabbi Arthur Waskow for inspiring this essay. We are deeply indebted to his teachings.)

Suggestions for Action

On Tisha B'Av, we repeatedly refer to the penultimate line in the Book of Lamentations: "Return us to, Eternal, and we shall return; renew our days as of old." What might it mean to renew our days? It goes beyond "renewable energy," though that surely should be a part of it. It is a vision of society that is investing in a sustainable future, not binding itself further to fossil fuels that harm our world and its inhabitants. Calls to exploit resources and open previously protected lands to oil drilling and gas fracking – off the Atlantic coast, in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and in Grand Staircase/Escalante and Bear Ears National Monuments – take our country in the wrong direction, trampling on indigenous peoples' rights, exposing us to short term risks from spills and toxic chemicals, and worsening the climate change crisis. They tie us to outdated, harmful technologies, sinking hundreds of millions of dollars into the infrastructure of the past instead of promoting investments in a more sustainable, healthier, and more equitable future for all. There are a wide variety of actions individuals, congregations, and other Jewish institutions can take to promote the future we want and prevent the sorts of tragedies catalogued on Tisha B'Av – fires, famine, wars over resources, destruction and death. Here is a brief summary of some possible actions you and your community can take before, during or after Tisha B'Av to "renew our days":

- 1) Support national legislation that moves our country toward a sustainable future, such as the 100 by '50 Act ([H.R.3314](#), [S.987](#)). The 100 by '50 Act would transition America to 100% clean, renewable energy by 2050. The bill outlines a timeline for converting the U.S. vehicle fleet to electric, shuttering coal- and gas-burning power plants, and making energy efficiency policies more widespread. It also details plans to retrain workers in dirty energy sectors for new jobs and support low-income communities of color who have suffered disproportionately from the effects of pollution. The 100 by '50 Act may not become law in this Congress, but it sends a much-needed message. Moving off fossil fuels is a fight we can – and must – win if we are to protect the planet and its inhabitants from the very worst effects of global warming. Urge your lawmakers to take global warming

seriously, support the transition to renewable energy, and co-sponsor the 100 by '50 Act or to support similar bills that invest in green infrastructure and move away from fossil fuels.

2) Sign the “We Are Still In” pledge to help commit yourself, your institution, and/or community to support climate action to fulfill the Paris Agreement. You can sign here: <https://www.wearestillin.com> and post your pledge on the COEJL Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/COEJL/>

3) Work with your congregational leadership to publicly announce just before or after Tisha B'Av, explicitly as a way to honor that sacred day, congregational opposition to policies that contribute to climate change, perhaps focusing on national policies such as allowing fossil fuel exploitation in national parks or other public lands, rolling back fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks, or local or regional policies such as permits for pipelines to carry oil or fracked gas through your region and neighborhood. Make sure to publicize your announcement in social media and your local secular and Jewish press and to send copies to your elected officials.

4) Announce that the synagogue, JCC, or other Jewish communal building will solarize and will urge its members to do the same. Check out <http://gwipl.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/IPL-DMV-Going-Solar-for-Congregations.pdf> for some suggestions of how to start solarization.

5) Transfer synagogue or other Jewish communal bank accounts from banks that invest in fossil fuel corporations to credit unions or community banks that meet neighborhood needs.

6) Gather a multireligious group to sit with candles on the sidewalk at a governmental center near you (such as state capitol; a city hall; or a regional office of the Environmental Protection Agency) or a corporate center (e.g. offices of an oil corporation or branches of a bank that is investing in fossil fuels, etc). Chant or read one of the laments provided above. Alert local media ahead of time.

Links to Additional Resources –

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC), the Shalom Center, and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) all have extensive online resources on Judaism and the environment. See:

<http://www.coejl.org>

<https://rac.org/environment>

At <https://theshalomcenter.org/node/1733> see sections 3, 4, and 5 of the handbook for “Eicha for the Earth,” with additional suggestions for the use of these liturgies and additional passages from the Song of Songs and the Psalms that celebrate the Earth.

At <https://theshalomcenter.org/RabbinicLetterClimate> see “Rabbinic Letter on Climate-Torah” signed by 425 rabbis in 2015.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, “From the Third Day to the Song of Songs: The Eco-Torah of an Indigenous People” in *Seven Days, Many Voices: Insights into the Biblical Story of Creation* (CCAR Press, 2017), ed. by Rabbi Benjamin David

Rabbi David Seidenberg has compiled Tisha B’Av resources, including his own translation of the *Scroll of Lamentations* here:

http://neohasid.org/zman/tisha_bav/

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