



## The Jewish Response

**W**e remember Tisha B'Av because we cannot forget. We cannot forget what happened in 586 BCE or in 70 CE, the dates of the destruction of both *Batei HaMikdash*. And Tisha B'Av also mourns many other tragedies in Jewish history and even today.

But that is not the main message of Tisha B'Av. Although we are obligated to mourn, to fast and to remember, that is only part of our obligation.

The Rabbis state: בְּיוֹם שִׁחְרַב בַּיִת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ נוֹלַד הַגּוֹאֵל, “On the day that the *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed, the *Mashiach* (redeemer) was born.”

In the ashes of the destruction are the sparks of redemption.

Simply stated, the Jewish response to destruction is to rebuild. After the destruction of the second *Beit HaMikdash*, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai asked the Roman authorities to give him “Yavne and its scholars.” No one can imagine the pain, the devastation Rabbi Yochanan must have felt. He saw the burning of the *Beit HaMikdash*. And yet, in the midst of mourning, he is already beginning to rebuild.

Throughout history, following the Crusades, the Chmielnicki massacres as well as countless other tragedies, what was the Jewish response? To mourn, and – at the same time – to rebuild.

Following the nearly total annihilation of European Jewry during the Shoah, what was the survivors' response? They rebuilt their homes and built the most beautiful families; they rebuilt their communities and even, after 2,000 years, succeeded in rebuilding Israel.

The response to destruction is to build anew.

And this also applies even to our small, vibrant Jewish community of Poland. Here in Poland, our Jewish response to the *Shoah*, followed by 45 years of Soviet

oppression, is to rebuild. Our response is to find the sparks of redemption hidden in the ashes of destruction. As the prophet Zechariah (3:2) states: אֵשׁ מִצֶּלֶת מֵאֵשׁ, “for this is an ember plucked from the fire.”

After all the destruction in Poland, after all the tragedies, our Jewish response is to rebuild our community and support our beloved Israel.

Many of the Jews in our community did not know they had Jewish roots when Communism collapsed in 1989. Their parents or grandparents were too traumatized by the Shoah to be able to pass on this information to their children during the Soviet oppression. Since 1989 though, thousands – and perhaps tens of thousands – of Poles have uncovered their Jewish roots.

Now, once again, they have a chance to be part of the Jewish people. Not all of them want to connect to Judaism but many do. The Jewish response is to welcome these newly discovered Jews back into *Am Yisrael*, to encourage them to be part of our global Jewish rebuilding.

We cannot change the number of Jews murdered during the *Shoah*. We can change the number of Jews disconnected and lost. And that is what we are doing today in Poland.

On Tisha B'Av, we remember the horrors and the destruction that pushes us to regroup and build even more intensely. No matter where you live, no matter how you observe your Judaism or what your Jewish identity is – from Chassidism to secular Yiddishists, from Zionists to humanists, and everything in between – all of these forms of Judaism grew and thrived in Poland 100 years

ago. Today we have the historic opportunity to give back to the grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren of those Jews who proudly lived their Judaism back then.

We are today's אֵשׁ מִצֶּלֶת מֵאֵשׁ, the “ember plucked from the fire.” The Jewish response to destruction, the meaning of Tisha B'Av, is to ignite and inspire every Jew to be part of the Jewish people once more.

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