

The Tisha b'Av Meal

written by Ozer Bergman | July 29, 2009

A piece of hard bread. A hard-boiled egg—dipped in ashes. Eaten on a cold floor; by yourself, alone.

This is the *seudah hamafsekes* (*hamafseket*), the meal that divides the eve of destruction from the day of destruction itself. It is certainly different than the *seudah hamafsekes* of Yom Kippur eve, when it is a mitzvah to eat—to physically fortify ourselves—in preparation for the holiday. What sort of preparation is the meager fare of Tisha b'Av eve?

We are quite familiar with viewing our foods as symbols. Matzah is the bread of poverty; *marror* reminds us of the affliction heaped upon our ancestors. At the Seder we sit regally, sharing Torah, singing praises of God and re-establishing ties with family and community.

The Tisha b'Av Meal is the antithesis of all that. Our dried bread is our tired Torah; we eat it because we don't relate to it with the freshness we should. Our ash-dipped egg is our *tefilah**; a burden, something we wish to swallow quickly and be done with. We sit low because we behave in ways that make us unfit to sit at the table. We sit alone, because in our insecurity we presume to be too good to abide some other Jews.

Yom Kippur eve we must fortify ourselves to spend the day in our prayer, using our strength to reflect and cast away our sins. Tisha b'Av eve we must fortify ourselves to stare the Churban (Destruction of the Holy Temple) in the face. We must recognize and own up to our share of its continued absence, and the wake of pain and suffering that absence fosters.

If we can't do that, then, as the Kotzker Rebbe once famously put it, instead of mourning the Temple's destruction, we should mourn our own.

May you have an easy fast, and may we soon celebrate the arrival of Mashiach. Amen.

*The Aramaic words for “egg” and “prayer” are homophones (a fancy word for saying they sound alike).

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