

August Connections Cantor's Corner – Sadness and Joy: The Beauty of Av

August brings us so many things: the last full month of summer, hot days with cooling nights, returns to college campuses and, in the Jewish calendar, the month of Av! And Av brings us two distinctly different observances – Tisha B'Av on the 9th of Av which falls this year on Monday evening 8/12 through sundown on Tuesday 8/13, and Tu B'Av or the 15th of Av, sundown Sunday 8/18 through evening on Monday 8/19. Falling just short of a week apart, at first glance, these two observances seem to be diametrically opposed; Tisha B'Av is understood to be the saddest, heaviest day in the Jewish calendar. Laments are chanted – the book of *Eicha* (Lamentations) is traditionally read on the morning of Tisha B'Av, a fast is observed and joyful celebrations are not allowed as we mourn the great losses the Jewish people have faced throughout our history since the time of the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE which resulted in our exile from the land.

Our Mystics would argue, more importantly, this event represents the “shattering of the vessels” – that is, according to Kabbalistic wisdom, “the loss of awareness of our unification as a single soul which the Holy Temple represents.”¹ They would also teach that Tisha B'Av affords us the rare opportunity, yes to lament, but also to balance our sorrow with the joy in the opening that this ruin brings – an invitation to elevate ourselves to a higher

¹ The Meaning of Tisha B'Av, Dr. Michael Laitman, <https://www.kabbalah.info/bb/tisha-bav-meaning>

and more complete form of connection – to once again work collectively toward the restoration of the unity of humankind. Through this lens, Tisha B’Av might become a catalyst or a prelude to experiencing the Divine love and unification available to us a week later, on Tu B’Av.

Known as the “Jewish Valentine’s Day,” Tu B’Av is all about love. Falling on the full moon, the Kabbalists believe that, on Tu B’Av Divine Light is present and available unhindered for all. It is there for the taking because of the complete unification of the light that flows from all the aspects of God creating a unique and Divine, light-filled energy. This, according to the Mystics happens only on Tu B’Av and offers balanced, cosmic support for every relationship and new beginning – a process of unification that begins a week earlier on Tisha B’Av provided we recognize the need for each of us to actively participate in the process of re-unification with our own selves and with our fellow humans!

So whether you are feeling the heavy sadness of Tisha B’Av or an unexplainable joy like love is in the air, the invitation is to lean into it – breathe it in and know that deep connection is truly available to all of us. I urge you to begin now because before you know it, Elul will be here, and the process of *teshuva* (returning) will be upon us all. Best to begin that filled with Divine light and connected to the source and to greater humankind....