



A Walk on Tish'ah Be'Av

Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz

Dear Friends,

The ninth day of the Jewish month of Av is commemorated as the quintessential day of mourning in the Jewish calendar. Above all, we remember the destruction of the First and Second Temples and, more than that, we mark the loss of homeland. Perhaps this is the reason why, today, we feel a profound tension in the observance of Tish'ah Be'Av—especially when we are surrounded by the verve of life in Israel.

As I read through the Scroll of Lamentations on the eve of Tish'ah Be'Av, I found its words to be distant and disconnected from the daily reality I am encountering. This became illustrated vividly as the long fast came to a close. At about 7:00 p.m., I invited my nine-year-old son, Adir, to join me on a walk to the *tiyelet* (Hass Promenade), which offers a spectacular panoramic view of the city. I thought to myself, what could be a better, more comforting experience on Tish'ah Be'Av than to stand at a point overlooking a rebuilt Jerusalem? But it was the twenty-minute walk to that point that touched both heart and soul so deeply.

Neighborhoods in Jerusalem are defined by their streets. The Talbiya neighborhood is known for its streets named after Zionist thinkers; Rehavia is known for the great commentators of Torah; and Nahlaot for the trees and rivers of the land of Israel. And so our walk felt like an amazing journey through Jewish history. We'd taken off from our street, Rechov Uziah, in a part of Jerusalem known as the Greek Colony. Uziah refers to the king of Judah, who reigned from 783–742 BCE. His long reign was “the most prosperous except that of Yehoshafat since the time of Solomon. [He was a powerful ruler whose] name spread abroad, even to Egypt” (II Chronicles 26:8, 14). In the earlier part of his reign, Uziah respected the prophet Zechariah and his message, and was loyal to God, doing “that which was right in the sight of the Lord” (II Kings 15:3).

Adir and I walked a bit up Emek Refaim, literally “The Valley of Ghosts” named for the place where the Philistines took up their position against the forces of King David. Communication between Jerusalem and Bethlehem was cut off. Ultimately, David led his army against the Philistines, and gained a complete victory over them (II Samuel 23). From there, we headed into the neighborhood called Baka, named for the tribes of Israel. We walked up Rehov Dan, which was named for the powerful tribe of Judah. And then we headed up on the last leg of our journey to Daniel Yanovski Street, named for one of

the members of the Jewish underground who helped found and secure a modern Jewish State. We reached the *tiyelet* as the sun was setting. Surrounded by the sweet smell of rosemary and spectacular bougainvilleas illuminated by the golden light of Jerusalem, we looked out to the Old City and Mt. Scopus in the distance.

Over a twenty minute walk, Adir and I had travelled from biblical times to the liberation and founding of the modern State of Israel. We had retraced, by foot and soul, a journey from birth to loss to struggle and to rebirth. I could not help but think of the words of the Prophet Isaiah, which we read in the haftarah this coming Shabbat, as I gazed at this remarkable sight: "Comfort, oh comfort My people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and declare to her that her term of service is over, that her iniquity is expiated . . . Raise your voice with power, O herald of joy to Jerusalem!" (Isaiah 40).

I pray that this city of Jerusalem and the Jewish people as a whole have cried their final tears of pain and suffering. May we truly raise our voices in joy and song, joining a chorus that will herald a new age for the Jewish people.

Thinking of all of you here in Jerusalem,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Matt".