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Beyond Holocaust Time: A new book shows how Jews used calendars to resist the Nazis, charting spiritual freedom in the face of tragedy

Eli Rubin, a contributing editor at Chabad.org, is the author of Kabbalah and the Rupture of Modernity: An Existential History of Chabad Hasidism (forthcoming from Stanford University Press).

On a Monday evening in the spring of 1943 Sophie Loewenstein was en route to Auschwitz. On the Gregorian calendar it was the 19th of April, and the following day would mark the birthday of Adolf Hitler. According to the Jewish calendar, however, the year was 5703 (*taf-shin-gimel*), and that evening marked the onset of Passover, a holiday designated in the prayer liturgy as "the time of our freedom."

Remarkably, Loewenstein and her friends had been able to bake matzah before they were transported, and they refused to let their present incarceration prevent them from celebrating the eternal freedom that was their birthright. In his newly published study, *The Holocaust's Jewish Calenders*,[1] Alan Rosen frames the episode as illustrating a phenomenon that might be labled "calenderical resistance":

> The Germans timed the actual deportation to Auschwitz to coincide with their leader's birthday on April 20. But Sophie and the other deportees … lived according to a different calendar, conducting a Passover seder in the railway car—"an animal wagon," as she called it, "without

[1] Alan Rosen, *The Holocaust's Jewish Calendars: Keeping Time Sacred, Making Time Holy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019).

windows."[2]

Rosen's invocation of the calendar in this passage is not merely a poetic device. His central concern in this book is with concrete artifacts, with actual calendars, painstakingly produced by Jews who audaciously and concretely insisted that the Nazis could not expunge Judaism's future.

Sophie Loewenstein, born in 1923 and raised in Munich, was one of those Jews. Having received an excellent Jewish education, she possessed both the knowledge and the tenacious bravery to chart a comprehensive Jewish calendar (a *lu'ah* in Hebrew) while a prisoner in the most notorious of Nazi concentration camps.

For Loewenstein, the celebration of Passover in the cattle car was not simply a last attempt to cling to the vistages of a Jewish life that she was leaving behind. Rather it heralded her commitment to the continued forecasting of Jewish life in the future, even under the most adverse of conditions.

As Rosh Hashanah approached, Loewenstein drew on school tutorials she had received nearly a decade prior to make a calendar for the new Jewish year, 5704. This calendar was lost, but the calendar that she made for the following year, 5705, survives. Though she had no access to the usual resources relied upon for so challenging a task, Rosen finds that her calendar was accurate in almost all of its details.

[2] Rosen, 133.

Composed in a camp where even the possession of a watch was prohibited, and carried by Loewenstein on a death march from Auschwitz into Germany, this *lu'ah* preemptively noted the day of its author's eventual deliverance; alongside the inscription marking the 18th of Iyar, designated as the festive day of Lag ba-Omer, she later added these understated words: "day of liberation."[3]

Rupture, Continuity, and Jewish Logos

Many writers and scholars have taken note of the ways that Holocaust victims experienced an assult on their fundamental sense of time. Among the examples noted by Rosen is a trio of temporal distortions delineated by the polish sociologist and Holocaust scholar Barbara Engelking: 1) an exagerated experience of the present, 2) an exclusion of the future, and 3) a foreshorterning of the past.

For Rosen, however, a mere description of the debilitating impositions of Holocaust time is insuficiant. His purpose is not to describe the victimization of the Jews, but rather to describe the ways in which Jews used time as a tool of resistance, as a tool by which to transcend the diabolical tyrannies of the present.

In the epilogue to his book, Rosen finds the source of his insight in the archetypal story of Jewish redemption:

> The commandment to make a

[3] Rosen, 139.

> calendar came at a pivotal moment in history. The Jews had been enslaved in Egypt for several hundred years. The oppressor's grip had been steadily loosened and the people were told how to prepare for their departure. The first step was to fashion a calendar.[4]

Moving beyond the reduction of time and its significance that is emphasized by so many, Rosen recalls Viktor E. Frankl's insistence that the ability to imagine a future is an existential human imperative, and that without it none of the Nazi's victims could be inoculated from deathly despair. In Frankl's words:

> Any attempt at fighting the camp's psychopathological influence on the prisoner by psychotherapeutic or psychohygienic methods had to aim at giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which he could look forward … It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future … And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force himself to the task.[5]

Rosen persuasively argues that the craft of calendar making served to inscribe this existential aspiration, this optimistic orientation towards the future, in a form that is not only tangible, but which was also of immediate practical use. Access to a Jewish calendar, he writes, "maintained a continuity with the near and distant past and, more audaciously, projected a seamless future wherein Sabbaths and festivals would predictably arrive at their appointed times."[6]

This is the fundamental insight that undergirds Rosen's meticulous examination of some forty Holocaust era calendars: By keeping track of as many particulars of the *lu'ah* as circumstances allowed, Jews were able to endow these dark days with sacred prescience.

It is not simply that these calendars attest to the resilience of the human spirit in a general way. Rosen repeatedly emphasizes that these are *Jewish* calendars, and that it was by marking time *Jewishly* that the authors of these artifacts empowered themselves not merely to resist the foreclosure of time, but also to realize their enduring spiritual freedom.

To chart a Jewish calendar was to resist the shattering rupture that the Holocaust inflicted, anticipating a future that lay beyond it and independent of it. With a *lu'ah* at hand, rather

[4] Rosen, 227.

[5] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 1985), 93-94. See Rosen, 92-96.

[6] Rosen, 226.

than a Gregorian calendar, even the worst of times could be rendered as sacred time. Against the erasure of time, Jews marked the Sabbaths and festivals in ways that were small but far from insignificant. Faith in a future, accordingly, was firmly anchored in these faithful inscriptions of the covenantal calenderical bonds between the Jewish people and G-d.

Through Rosen's eyes, this point of departure can be discerned in what Viktor Frankl himself described as "perhaps the deepest experience I had in the concentration camp." On arrival in Auschwitz he was forced to surrender his clothing, swapping them for "the worn-out rags of an inmate who had already been sent to the gas chamber." At that moment, Frankl later recalled:

> It did not even seem possible, let alone probable, that the manuscript of my first book, which I had hidden in my coat when I arrived at Auschwitz, would ever be rescued … I found myself confronted with the question whether under such circumstances my life was ultimately void of any meaning. Not yet did I notice that an answer to this question with which I was wrestling so passionately was already in store for me, and that soon thereafter this answer would be given to me…
>
> …
>
> Instead of the many pages of my manuscript, I found in a pocket of the newly acquired coat one single page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book, containing the most important Jewish prayer, Shema Yisrael. How should I have interpreted such a "coincidence" other than as a challenge to live my thoughts instead of merely putting them on paper?[7]

Frankl himself interprets this rediscovery of meaning and purpose in universalistic terms. But the explicit inspiration for this rediscovery, he admits, is the particular affirmation of the Shema: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one." This affirmation anchors the universal divinity that unites the entire world in the particular bond that allows the people of Israel to lay claim to the divine, to say "*our* G-d."

While Frankl elsewhere places Chrisitian and Jewish forms of prayer on an equal footing,[8] Rosen underscores the exceptionalism of this anecdote. Here, he writes, Frankl recognized that "the Christian idiom did not and could not serve as the idiom of the Jews (himself included) and for Jewish prayer." Nevertheless, "when it came to time and tracking its import in the concentration camp, he thought along the lines of a universal idiom," only referencing the Gregorian calendar. As Rosen himself would be the first to point out,

[7] Frankl, 137-8.

[8] E.g., *ibid.*, 147.

while we often think of the Gregorian calendar as universal it is actually distinctly Christian, and its general adoption in Jewish contexts is a subtle form of assimilation and erasure.

Frankl was not alone in ommiting Jewish time from his account of the Holocaust. As Rosen tells us, even scholars who have tried to think about Holocaust time from a Jewish perspective have always fallen back on the Gregorian calendar. Only passing attention has been paid to the Jewish dating system whose distinct contours continued to imprint each day, week, and month with special spiritual significance, even as the Nazis executed their soul-crushing program of extermination.

It is the particularism of Jewish time, and its meaning for the Nazi's Jewish victims, that Rosen's scholarship seeks to salvage. Through his keen documentary and interpretive analysis, the inscription of these Holocaust era calendars emerges as a form of logotherapy (defined by Frankl as "a meaning centered psychotherapy") distinguished both by its embodied concreteness and its deep Jewishness.

Tragic Times in Historiography and Hermeneutics

The Holocaust's Jewish Calendars is comprehensive in its scope, and scrupulous in its attention to detail. Not content to describe these calendars only in terms of their general features, Rosen painstakingly notes each nuance, each idiosyncrasy, anomaly and defect.

But perhaps the boldest facet of this work is that Rosen does not register these calendars only as significant Jewish artifacts, rich in detail. He also reads them as significant Jewish texts. As texts, Rosen engages them in a continuing dialogue with the traditional corpus of Torah scholarship, commentary, and meaning-making that accrues with each additional generation in which Judaism lives.

In particular, Rosen closes his acknowledgments with a tribute to the extensive theorization of time found in the teachings of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh rebbe of Chabad Lubavitch. These teachings, Rosen writes, "give attention to all facets of the calendar's bearing on life and death, learning and commemoration, creation and redemption—and, above all, the special meaning of each day, week, month and year … Whatever might be worthy of consideration here grows out of my effort to adapt his extraordinary calendar sensitivity to my own purposes."[9]

This is a strong programmatic statement. Rosen's project, and his method of analysis, is not limited to scientific historiography, but also brings a very particular Hasidic hermeneutic of time to bear. Here, however, there is a significant lacuna: While this methodological intervention is put to work on every page, its principles and tools are not delineated or elaborated fully and systematically. How can such an integration of scientific historiography and Hasidic hermeneutics be

[9] Rosen, xiv-xv.

justified? How can it work?

Rosen has chosen to "show" us, rather than "tell" us, what such integration looks like, and he leaves us readers to deductively grasp the theory that underlies his method. To make that deduction we need to pay closer attention to what distinguishes the Lubavitcher Rebbe's hermeneutics of time not only from scientific historiography, but also from the wider corpus of traditional Torah approaches to time and its interpretation.

One hermeneutical tool that is not named explicitly by Rosen, but which is applied throughout *The Holocuast's Jewish Calendars*, is known in Hebrew as *diyuk*. Literally translated as "precision," this refers to a disciplined attentiveness to the intimations of every detail of a text (or artifact), mining every nuance, anomaly, or omission so that they cumulatively yield the kind of fresh insight that casts the whole in new light.

To be sure, scientific historiography also pays intense attention to detail, but it is distinguished by the fundamentally agnostic orientation that is the appropriate hallmark of academic scholarship. While nuances and anomalies must always be noted, the scholar must not be committed to ascribing them with meaning. After all, mishaps, mistakes, ambiguities, imperfections, and indeed contradictions, are all ordinary features of human life. The traditional Torah scholar, by contrast, approaches each nuance and anomaly with a deep-set faith that, ultimately, nothing is amiss. There is always meaning, edification, clarity, and indeed harmony, waiting to be unearthed. Moreso, every detail is endowed with *divine significance*.

This principle is perhaps most powerfully expressed in a letter addressed by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson of Dnipropetrovsk, in 5692 / 1932, to his son, the future Lubavitcher Rebbe:

> All that is said in the written Torah or the oral Torah, whether in a legal or narrative passage, and in all the books authored by righteous scholars . . . and even the law about which afterwards it is said "it is a falsehood" . . . literally all of them were said by G-d; exactly in that formulation that they were said . . . G-d Himself said the law, and He Himself said, "It is a falsehood."[10]

The degree to which this assumption permeates the corpus of the addressee's writings and talks cannot be overstated. It is especially accentuated in his application of *diyuk* to the meaning of time and the dialectic of exile and redemption, tragedy and celebration, that marks the Jewish calendar. It echoes in Rosen's remark that his attention to calendrical inaccuracies "intends to read the

[10] Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, *Likutei Levi Yitzchak - Igrot Kodesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publication Society, 1972), 266. For more on this correspondence and its context see Eli Rubin, "Letters from Yekaterinoslav: Uniting the Facets of Torah - 1933," *Chabad.org*, chabad.org/2619804.

errors as another revelatory dimension of the calendar-making enterprise during the Holocaust."[11]

Much has already been written about the concept of time in Chabad thought, and in the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe especially.[12] But there are two general distinctions, one qualitative and the other quantitative, that set his approach apart even from other branches of traditional Torah hermeneutics of time, and which illuminate Rosen's methodological choice:

1) Qualitatively, the Rebbe's understanding of time is rooted in the concept of the continuous re-creation of the world, and of time itself, as theorized in the second part of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi's *Tanya*. As Wojciech Tworek puts it: "While G-d's energy constantly annihilates and re-creates the world, the re-creation is never an identical copy of what existed beforehand. Rather, the repetition of creation is always a new creation, even though it always refers to G-d's original creative act, as described in Genesis."[13]

2) Quantitatively, the frequency and degree to which the Rebbe invokes this concept of time, and applies it in the hermeneutical interpretation of the Jewish calendar, with all its quirks and confluences, rises to a level of seriousness and attention to detail akin to that which traditional Torah hermeneutics applies to the text of the Torah itself.[14]

A single example from the Rebbe's corpus must suffice in order to illustrate how his method is applied by Rosen in his approach to time and tragedy. It relates to the particular calendrical configuration that we find ourselves in now (in the year 5779 / 2019), according to which Tisha B'av is "pushed off" (*nidhah*) from its native date, which falls on Shabbat, and is instead observed on Sunday.

Tisha B'av marks a series of calamitous tragedies

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[11] Rosen, 14.

[12] For a more general introduction to the discourse on temporality in Chabad thought and practice see Wojciech Tworek, *Eternity Now: Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady and Temporality* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2019). Also see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Achronic Time, Messianic Expectation, and the Secret of the Leap in Habad," in *Habad Hasidism: History, Thought, Image*, edited by Jonatan Meir and Gadi Sagiv (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2016), 45*-86*. On the Lubavitcher Rebbe especially see *idem.*, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), esp. xi-xii, 22-23, 89, 279-281, 285-288; Eli Rubin, "The Giving of the Torah and the Beginning of Eternity: Reflections of Revelation, Innovation, and the Meaning of History," June 5, 2019, *The Lehrhaus*, https://www.thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/the-giving-of-the-torah-and-the-beginning-of-eternity-reflections-on-revelation-innovation-and-the-meaning-of-history/.

[13] Tworek, *Eternity Now*, 31.

[14] To the best of my knowledge, this is a feature of the Rebbe's teachings that has yet to be properly noted in the scholarly literature. Rosen accordingly has broken ground in two ways, firstly be drawing attention to it, and secondly by applying it in his own historiographical work, as will be described below.

that befell the Jewish nation. As the Mishnah records:

> On Tisha B'av it was decreed that our ancestors should not enter the Land [of Israel]; the Temple was destroyed the first and the second time; Betar was captured; and the city [of Jerusalem] was plowed up.[15]

But the Rebbe turns our attention to two additional statements of the Talmudic sages:

> 1) A lion arose, that is Nebuchadnezzar, … in the constellation of the lion … the fifth month (Av), and ruined "Ariel, the city where David camped" (Isaiah 29:1), in order that … a lion shall come, that is the Holy One, blessed be He, … in the constellation of the lion, [as it is written] "and I will turn their mourning into joy" (Jeremiah 31:12), and build Ariel, [as it is written] "the Lord is the builder of Jerusalem; He will gather the outcasts of Israel." (Psalms 147:2)[16]

> 2) It occurred that a Jew was plowing his field: An Arab passed by and heard the ox bellow, he said … "the Temple has been destroyed." It bellowed a second time and he said … "the messianic king has been born."[17]

Read sequentially, these two texts tell us that Av is the month of destruction and rebuilding, and that Tisha B'av is the day of exile and redemption. From this perspective, the Jewish calendar does not merely provide a system through which to mark the temporal interval or duration that separates destruction and exile, on the one hand, from rebuilding and redemption on the other hand. Rather it provides a paradigm through which that interval can be overcome and collapsed; the time of mourning is itself the time of joy.[18] As Elliot Wolfson has noted in a different context, the Rebbe's hermeneutical prism elicits "the contradictory duty of living in two time zones, the time of the exilic present and the time of the redemptive future."[19]

Here, however, we are especially interested in how this dual meaning of Tisha B'av is accentuated when its date falls on Shabbat, and its observation "pushed off" to Sunday. The

[15] *Taanit*, 5:6.

[16] *Yalkut Shimoni, Nakh*, Remez 259.

[17] Talmud Yerushalmi, *Berakho*t, 2:4 (17a-b).

[18] Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Sihot 5751*, Vol. 2 (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publication Society, 2003), 721-722.

[19] Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 285.

following is from a talk delivered and published by the Rebbe in 1991:

> We can say that … only the undesirable things are pushed off — the fast, the laws of affliction and mourning etc. But the positive and desirable things — the fact that on this day "the messianic king has been born" — are not pushed off, and not even weakened due to Shabbat. On the contrary: These good aspects stand with greater revelation and strength … There cannot be anything in the world, including a calendrical configuration (*kevi'ut b'zman*) … that can disturb or weaken a disclosure and revelation of holiness for the Jewish people, including and all the more so vis-à-vis so fundamental a phenomena as the birth of the messiah … To the contrary: The good elements stand with greater revelation and strength on the Shabbat day.[20]

For the Rebbe, this calendrical quirk is not simply a technicality, but draws forth the messianic significance of Tisha B'av so that it stands in much sharper relief.

This is only the beginning of a very involved discussion, which pays special attention to the messianic significance of Shabbat as reflected in Jewish literature, liturgy, and law, and the way that its calendrical confluence with Tisha B'av also changes the meaning of how the fast is observed on the following day. The constraints of space do not allow us to unpack all the details of this talk; the quantitative breadth and attentiveness of the analysis is as noteworthy as the qualitative transformation of the meaning of time that is elicited.

Our next task is to see how this heremauntic of time is transposed by Rosen into the realm of Holocaust historiography.

Tisha B'av in Holocaust Calendars

During periods such as the Holocaust, in which new tragedies were being inflicted on the Jewish people, one would rightly expect the dark oppressiveness of Tisha B'av to becomes even more acutely underscored. Yet in Rosen's telling, our first two encounters with this date mark its absence. The second example is especially anomalous:

A "Small Calendar" (*lu'ah katan*), anonymously printed and distributed in the Theresienstadt (Terezin) concentration camp, is otherwise unusually attentive to the explicit designation of fast days, including minor ones. But the 17th of Tammuz is completely omitted, and Tisha B'av is registered only by the single digit marking the 9th day of the month.

[20] Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *ibid.*, 722.

This is actually the only entry in this calendar in which a date is noted without any indication of its significance. All other days are inscribed in latin script with some appellation (Schabbat, Rosch Chodesch, Pessach, etc.), regular weekdays are not noted at all.

As if to highlight the simultaneous absence and presence of this darkest of all days, it is quickly followed by an equally paradoxical anomaly. Despite the Mishnaic affirmation that "the Jews had no holidays comparable to the 15th of Av,"[21] it's somewhat enigmatic significance is rarely highlighted in "the fine print" of calendars. In other wartime calendars, Rosen writes, it is either appears "prosaically or not at all."[22] Yet in the Terezin *lu'ah katan* this date is boldly singled out with the designation "Freudentag," a day of joy.

What are we to make of the way these two anomalies play off one another?

For Rosen this historical mystery can be approached through the hermeneutical lens that is inherent to the reading of Jewish texts. He reminds us of the fundamental impermanence with which the mourning of Tisha B'av is endowed:

> The prophet Zechariah first spells out, the Talmud then amplifies, and the Rambam later codifies: "All these [commemorative] fasts will be nullified in the Messianic era and, indeed, ultimately, they will be transformed into holidays and days of rejoicing and celebration." (Rambam, Hilchot taanit, 5:19; Cf. Zechariah, 8:19.)[23]

In this light, Rosen allows himself to speculate that the vacant space, where we would expect "Fasttag" or "Tisha B'av" to have appeared, might have been intended "to evoke the ambivalent character of the day … Rather than being prematurely designated as a fast day" the possibly was left open that "changed circumstances … would warrant filling the space with a different, hopefully joyous designation."[24]

On this reading, the bold emphasis of the joyous significance of the 15th of Av serves to retroactively underscore what Rosen calls "the momentum of prophetic tradition." "Together," he writes, these two calendar entries "staged a startling reversal, whereby the commemoration of tragedy would lead to an upsurge of joy where and when one would least expect it."[25]

Other instances in which Rosen takes particular note of the marking of Tisha B'av in Holocaust calendars and diaries are perhaps less mystifying,

[21] *Taanit*, 4:8.

[22] Rosen, 64.

[23] Rosen, 88, n. 56.

[24] Rosen, 64.

[25] Rosen, 65.

but no less weighty in their intimations:

In the summer of 5702 / 1942 the Nazis deported some 275,000 Jews, including 50,000 children, from Warsaw to the Treblinka death camp. The deportations began on the eighth day of Av, preceding the onset of Tisha B'av that evening by mere hours. They continued until another notable fast day, Yom Kippur, several months later. During this period thousands were also murdered in the Warsaw Ghetto itself.[26]

Two diarists of the Warsaw Ghetto, Abraham Lewis and Yitzhak Katzenelson, generally dated their entries according to the Gregorian calendar. In this case, however, both pivot to the Jewish date, calendrically marking the tragic symmetry linking the Holocaust travesties to the Jewish catastrophes of the past. Katzenelson's chronicle, written one year after the events occurred, makes the correlation explicit:

> Today is the eighth [of] Av, no less a day of mourning for all of the Jews, wherever they be, than the ninth of Av … Never will the sun shine upon us again and never will there be any consolation for us on this earth … Tomorrow is the 9th of Av, and it will be a whole year since the killing began in Warsaw itself.[27]

Echoing the lament of the Book of Eikha that is read anew each year, Katzenelson links the temporal event to a larger narrative, indeed an eternal one, according to which tragedy and loss is indelibly inked into the entire span of earthly existence. In a dark paraphrase of Tworek's formulation regarding the Chabad concept of time, we might say that the repetition of Jewish tragedy is always a new tragedy, yet it always refers back to the original Jewish tragedy, as lamented in *Eikha*.[28]

In this case there is no ambiguity, no hope held out that an empty space can yet be filled with joy. Nevertheless, Rosen intimates, these calendrical musings embody a tenacious spiritual resistance, a refusal to give up the unique temporal formula by which the Jewish people chart death as well as life.[29]

The final chapter of *The Holocaust's Jewish Calendars* returns our focus to Tisha B'av, this time through a highly innovative reading of what Rosen describes as "the Lubavitcher Rebbe's wartime calendar book," published in New York, in 5703 / 1943, with the title *Hayom Yom*. Here Rosen applies the author's own method of textual and calendrical *diyuk* to accentuate what he calls an "extraordinary calendrical response to Jewish suffering."[30]

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[26] Rosen, 178-179.

[27] See Rosen, 180.

[28] See Tworek, as cited above, note 11.

[29] Rosen, 176-180.

[30] Rosen, 204-224.

Resacralizing Holocaust Scholarship

As noted above, Rosen has methodologically merged two scholarly traditions that are usually understood to be incompatible. On the one hand, he locates his work within the larger corpus of academic Holocaust research. On the other hand, he also casts it as an applied adaptation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's Torah hermeneutic of temporality.

Appropriately, the academic or scientific method is to scrutinize data and interpret it critically and independently. A vulnerability of this approach, one might suggest, is that it can sometimes create too great a distance between the scholar and the object of their research. The quest for a rigorous scholarly agnosticism can sometimes lead a scholar to overcompensate. Instead of merely escaping a particular set of naive or uncritical commitments, a distinctly secular set of commitments may emerge, leading to the erasure of religious or spiritual dimensions even if they are inherent to the topic at hand.

According to Rosen, the study of the Holocaust, and in particular its chronology, suffers from precisely this sort of overcompensation, unwitting or well intentioned as it may be:

> Most academic study of the Holocaust simply filters out the Jewish calendar … which is deemed meaningful only for those conversant in it … too arcane for the non-Jewish scholar or reader, or for the Jewish scholar or reader not schooled in the finer points of Jewish tradition.[31]

Yet consider what is lost. For the Nazi's Jewish victims, Rosen explains, "the Jewish calendar was eminiently consequential, since the very flow of family and social life depended on the exact marking of the weekly Sabbath, the monthly new moon, and the seasonal holidays."[32] As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once wrote, "the Jews in Eastern Europe lived more in time than in space."[33] To filter out the Jewish calendar, accordingly, is to filter out one of the most fundamental elements of Jewish cultural consciousness, thereby erasing the very particular ways in which Jewish victims contended with Holocaust time.

Beyond the particular examples already cited above, it is worth paying attention to a more general point that illustrates the profound shift in orientation elicited by attentiveness to the Jewish calendar:

Following the Gregorian calendar, we tend to think of the Holocaust as something that belongs definatively to the 20th century. We often hear expressions of shock that some outrage has been

[31] Rosen, 4.

[32] Rosen, 3.

[33] Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jew in Eastern Europe* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Light's Classic Reprint, 2011), 15.

perpetrated *even* in the 21st century, as if such evil belongs wholly to an era that is entirely distinct from our own.

Following the Jewish calendar, however, the Holocaust began in the last month of the year 5699, just as a new century was about to begin. It wasn't till the middle of 5705 that the diabolical program of extermination was brought to an end. Rosen makes the point with particular poignancy: "As I write these lines in the year 5777 (2017), we are, according to the Jewish calendar, still in the century of the Holocaust."[34]

In short, distance is certainly a necessary criterion of clear eyed scholarship. But too much distance can prevent scholars from coming to know their subject intimately. This can lead to the erasure of indignous perspectives and their replacement with new narratives that do not derive independently from the data, and are instead colored, narrowed, or distorted by external impositions.

Rosen's methodological insight is that the Lubavitcher Rebbe's hermeneutical approach to time is a heightened expression of the indigenous culture of European Jewry. His particular attention, not only to the sacrecy of time, but also to calendrical detail (*diyuk*), provides an especially sensitive model for the ways in which the experiences of the Nazi's Jewish victims, and the modes of their resistance, can be more intimately assessed.

The Holocaust's Jewish Calendars accordingly instantiates a corrective to the tendency of academic Jewish scholarship to engage in explicit and implicit processes of secularization, and of materialistic, or non-Jewish, reductionism. As stated in the book's subtitle, the project here is one of "*keeping time sacred, making time holy*." In addition to the richness of the calendrical artifacts surveyed, Rosen provides an evidence based argument against the erasure of Jewish time. Applying a fresh integration of historiography and hermenutics, he forges a path that leads beyond Holocaust time by delving into its devestating details.

"For These Things I Weep": Psychological Readings of Lamentations

Marc Eichenbaum received his semicha from RIETS and is the Rabbinic Researcher for Yeshiva University's Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership.

The Biblical book of Lamentations, *Megillat Eikha,* is fraught with both theological and textual inconsistencies, making it a difficult text to comprehend. Examples are manifold: Was the destruction of the Temple a result of Israel's sins in that generation—e.g., "woe to us, for we have sinned!" (5:16)—or was it their forefathers' fault—"Our fathers sinned, and are no more, and we bear their iniquities" (2:20)? Is there room for hope—"But this I call to mind, and therefore I

[34] Rosen, 4.

have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases…" (3:21)—or, as many verses imply, is the future bleak—"And I said, My strength and my hope are perished from the Lord" (3:18)? Is God just in His ways—"The Lord is righteous," (1:18)—or did He unleash his wrath on innocent victims—"Look Lord and see, to whom have You done this" (2:20)? Textually, its asymmetrical meter, abrupt shifts from first person to third person, and lack of a consistent narrative progression make it arduous to ascertain the speaker and goal of each verse.

While this text is traditionally read collectively on the fast of Tisha be-Av, its messages and purpose remain elusive. Certainly, if the sole purpose was to recall the historical event of the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people, the text should include dates and the chronological sequence of events. Lamentations, however, lacks them both. In order to make sense of this enigmatic book, scholars have tried to decipher Lamentations through a variety of novel lenses.[1] Several relatively recent works have utilized psychological theories and research to guide their understanding of this text.[2] While diverse in content, each one offers a unique perspective on the Book of Lamentations and charts a path to understand many of its inconsistencies. By analyzing the fresh perspective and language that these psychological interpretations give us, we can gain a deeper appreciation of Lamentations and, in turn, transform our Tisha be-Av experience into a day of national healing.

Lamentations Through the Lens of Grief

In 1993, Paul Joyce, of the University of Birmingham, published an interpretation of Lamentations in light of two psychological theories of grief described in two different books: Yorick Spiegel's *The Grief Process* and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' *On Death and Dying*.[3] These two psychologists argued that grief is processed in distinct stages, each one characterized by different emotions. Importantly, both Spiegel and Kübler-Ross acknowledged that these stages don't always occur linearly, and that mourners spend varying amounts of time on each stage. Nevertheless, they claimed that the basic framework of these theories can be appreciated by most mourners. Joyce contended that each of the stages of grief described by these two

[1] See Heath A. Thomas, "A Survey of Research on Lamentations (2002–2012)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 12, no. 1 (2013): 8–38.

[2] In addition to the ones reviewed here, there have been several other psychological readings of Lamentations that will not be covered in this essay. For example, in Tiffany Houck-Loomis, "Good God?!? Lamentations as a Model for Mourning the Loss of the Good God," *Journal of Religion and Health* 51, no. 3 (2012): 701–8, Houck-Loomis reads Lamentations as reflecting Melanie Klein's Object Relations Theory. In Preston Evangelou, "How Might Lamentations Be Read in the Light of Applying Winnicott's Notion of a 'Holding Environment' to Reconcile the Internal Conflict of the Absent Comforter?" *Journal of Dialogue Studies* 7 (2019): 261-275, Evangelou reads Lamentations as expressing Donald Winnicott's notion of a holding environment to reconcile the internal conflict. An analysis of these interpretations is beyond the purview of this essay. Instead, we will focus on two compelling reads: one that reads Lamentations in light of the psychological study of grief and one in light of trauma therapy.

[3] Paul Joyce, "Lamentations and the grief process: a psychological reading," *Biblical Interpretation* 1, no. 3 (1993): 304-320.

psychological theorists are apparent in the text of Lamentations, albeit not in the order of which they were originally conceived.[4] Just as one proceeds through these stages after the loss of a loved one, the text of Lamentations can be read as a bereaved widow, Jerusalem, mourning the loss of her husband, God, through these stages.

Spiegel lays out four stages in what he calls "the grief process." The first stage is shock, the immediate pain that follows shortly after the loss. According to Joyce, this stage is exemplified in the opening verse which expresses utter dismay at Jerusalem's lowly situation: "How does the city sit solitary, that was full of people!" (1:1). The second stage, called the controlled stage, occurs when regression to an immature psychological phase is stalled by the funeral and other mourning rituals. This may be linked to verses that describe rituals of mourning such as, "The elders of the daughter of Żiyyon sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground" (2:10). Regression to infantile behavior, Spiegel's third stage, is expressed in all of the verses that mention weeping. It is also apparent in verses in which Jerusalem recalls earlier times, such as in the verse, "Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old" (5:21). The last stage is adaptation, in which the bereaved assimilates and adjusts to the death, allowing them to continue living their life with a fresh perspective. This is exemplified in verses of consolation such as "but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (3:32).

More famously, Kübler-Ross presented five distinct stages of mourning. The first is denial and isolation. Joyce writes that this stage is apparent

[4] David Reimer in David J. Reimer, "Good Grief? A Psychological Reading of Lamentations," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 114, no. 4 (2002): 542-559, also believed that Lamentations can be read in light of Kübler-Ross' five-stage theory. However, whereas Joyce was of the opinion that there was no particular order to its five chapters and that its lack of order resembles the grieving lived experiences, Reimer believed that each of the five chapters of Lamentations correspond to Kübler-Ross' five stages in sequential order. Heath A. Thomas summarizes Reimer's reading:

> "Lamentations 1 reflects the stage of denial and isolation. The dominant theme of ch. 2 is anger. God is angry, especially in Lam. 2.1-9, but this anger is tempered by the anger of Zion personified, who protests God's actions (Lam. 2.20-22). Lamentations 3 effects 'a transition from hopelessness to hope through a reflection on the character of God. While hope remains uncertain, there is no better option' (Reimer 2002: 551). This is the bargaining stage. It demonstrates the proper way forward: 'good behaviour' will hopefully lead to God's deliverance, although this deliverance remains uncertain for 'God is no automaton' (p. 552). Lamentations 4 reveals depression through the dominant theme of reversal. The former glory of Jerusalem, when contrasted against the present destruction of the people and city, reveals the great reversal God's people have experienced and the deep sadness that this brings: 'what was once precious, good, and vital has become worthless, spoiled, and lifeless' (p. 552). Especially in Lam. 4.1-20, the poetry mourns the loss and depicts a persistent negativity over the desolation of Jerusalem (p. 552). Lamentations 5 is 'the most distinctive section of the book' because prayer frames both this poem and the book as a whole. This poem cries out for future life, refusing to let God see the sufferers perish (p. 555), but it contrasts with Kübler-Ross's stage of acceptance."

See Thomas, "A Survey of Research on Lamentations."

in Lamentations if we read the verses expressing hope—such as the verse, “For the Lord will not cast off forever” (3:31)—as an ironic, passive-aggressive jibe. Themes of isolation are present throughout the book, including the first verse, “How does the city sit solitary, that was full of people!” (1:1). The second stage is anger, and that can be identified in Israel’s anger at God such as in the verse, “Behold, O Lord, and consider to whom Thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, their cherished babes?” (2:20). Kübler-Ross’ third stage is bargaining, in which one pleads for relief from pain and the prospect of death. This theme can be seen in verses that are characterized by Jerusalem negotiating with God to ease her pain, such as in the verse, “Let us search and try our ways, and turn back to the Lord” (3:40). Depression, the fourth stage, is easily discernible throughout the book, but perhaps most plainly in the verse, “The joy of our hearts is ceased, our dancing has been turned into mourning” (5:15). Lastly, Kübler-Ross’ final stage, acceptance, where one resigns and “lets go” of the of the pain of the loss that is preventing them from living a healthy life, is expressed in verses such as, “Who is he that says, and it comes to pass, when the Lord commands it not?” (3:37).

Joyce uses this framework to explain some of the inconsistencies within Lamentations. “Such inconsistency of explanation, casting around for some meaning in the darkness” writes Joyce, “is a recurrent feature of both the grieving and the dying process, as presented by Spiegel and Kübler-Ross.”[5] In other words, the theological and textual inconsistencies that make up Lamentations are not quirks, they are distinctive and literary features. Lamentations lacks coherence, just as a mourner struggles to find coherence in his or her own life. The theological contradictions expressed in Lamentations, such as whether God is benevolent or punitive or whether tragedy is a result of our sins or not, reflect the contradictory thoughts that often are present within the mind of a mourner. Accordingly, Lamentations’ inconsistencies are no longer problematic. After all, Lamentations is not a book of theodicy, but one of raw humanity. It is a descriptive book depicting our reaction to tragedy, not a prescriptive book informing us what God thinks.

The exact science behind Spiegel’s and Kübler-Ross’ theories is hotly debated amongst researchers. Current research confirms what

[5] A similar argument is made by Dr. Yael Ziegler where she explains the inconsistencies in light of the amorphous nature of human emotions. She writes, “Eikha’s seemingly inconsistent and rapidly changing attitudes toward God may be explained by the fact that emotions lie at its core. Is God just or not? An intellectual consideration of the matter approaches the question systemically, offering coherent, logical arguments. However, when humans address the same events through an emotional lens, contradictions abound. God is both just and unjust. Humans are simultaneously baffled, abashed, angered, and comforted by God. The ebb and flow of human emotions and the way they shift and converge, collide and contradict, can account for the rapid swing between different perspectives in Eikha. This represents the emotional condition of humans, offering a realistic and multifaceted portrait of how humans cope with God’s role in their tragedy.” See Dr. Yael Ziegler, *Lamentations: Faith in a Turbulent World* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2021), 35-36.

Spiegel and Kübler-Ross established: that the emotions associated with mourning don't occur in distinct stages but rather oscillate back and forth between each other and often occur simultaneously. Grief is also a deeply personal emotion, and expressed differently among people. Nevertheless, most theories maintain that grieving is a period in which the bereaved struggles to both dwell on the enormity of the loss and restore themselves to a level of functioning. This process occurs over time, with setbacks and losses along the way. This struggle is clearly a theme of Lamentations, regardless of which theory of grieving one may subscribe to.

Lamentations Through the Lens of Trauma

Another psychological trend has been to read Lamentations through the lens of trauma studies. "Unlike commonplace misfortunes," trauma researcher Judith Herman writes, "traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death."[6] Traumatic events, whether experienced in real life, or sometimes even vicariously, alter the brain and body and cause a variety of symptoms, often leading to post-traumatic stress disorder. Before analyzing how elements of trauma can be found in Lamentations, it is important to first clarify the difference between traumatic memories and normal memories.

The French psychologist Pierre Janet was one of the first to accurately explain the difference between regular memories and traumatic memories. Janet writes that regular memory, what he calls "narrative memory," is adaptive and social. The memory is recalled to tell a story for a specific purpose and therefore can be modified and told differently to fit the circumstance. Traumatic memories, in contrast, are more akin to reenactments of the traumatic event. They are often not recalled intentionally, but triggered into memory by stimuli reminiscent of the traumatic event.[7] A classic example is a war veteran who suffers flashbacks upon hearing fireworks, unintentionally recalling the sounds of gunshots in battle. These flashbacks bring the trauma survivor, in a certain sense, back to the scene of the event, often with the overwhelming sensations that were present there as well. As a result, a traumatic memory is not socially adaptive and can't be manipulated to fit the circumstance. It is frozen in time, and reluctantly re-lived.

Traumatic memories also tend to lack the structure of normal memories. One study showed that when people recall non-traumatic events such as weddings, births, and graduations, the events are recalled from the past with a clear narrative; there is a beginning, middle, and end to

[6] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 33.

[7] Pierre Janet, *Psychological Healing: A Historical and Clinical Study, Volume One* (New York: Macmillan, 1925; reprint CT: Martino Fine Books, 2019), 660.

the story. Traumatic events, by contrast, are remembered in a disorganized manner, with the exact sequences of the events muddled and the insignificant details (such as the smell that accompanied the event) taking a more prominent role in the memory than seems warranted.[8] Traumatic memories are not cohesive, they are experienced as piecemeal snippets. Sadly, the highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner trauma victims express their story often results in others questioning whether the event actually happened.[9]

Smith-Christopher reads Lamentations in light of this understanding of traumatic memories.[10] The destruction of the Temple and the subsequent exile was a collective traumatic event that dramatically altered the Jewish peoples' lives forever. The incoherence of the book can be explained in light of a trauma survivor suffering through intrusive memories of the past. The traumatic memories of cannibalism (2:20, 4:10), famine (2:12, 4:4-10), and bloodshed (1:1, 2:21) spontaneously interrupt Jerusalem's thoughts and speech. Smith-Christopher also points out the verses of isolation and depression highlight the symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder.

We can add more evidence to Smith-Christopher's argument that Lamentations should be read in light of the psychological phenomenon of trauma. Firstly, Lamentations' many sensory descriptions are akin to trauma survivor's reliving of the sensory details associated with the traumatic event. Secondly, the theological contradictions as well, it can be argued, are representative of the whirling thoughts that often accompany survivors of trauma. With the world as they knew it destroyed, survivors often grapple with beliefs they once thought self-evident and clear. Their world as a safe place instantly transformed to one of horror, and they consequently question the presence of a just and benevolent God. Furthermore, Lamentations' asymmetrical meter,[11] uncharacteristic of Biblical texts, may reflect the inability to feel grounded and in rhythm with one's life, as so many trauma survivors report.

When trauma remains unresolved, it can take a terrible toll on our relationships and lives. "If your heart is still broken because you were assaulted by someone you loved, you are likely to be preoccupied with not getting hurt again and fear opening up to someone new," writes Bessel van

[8] B.A. van der Kolk and R. Fisler, "Dissociation and the Fragmentary Nature of Traumatic Memories: Overview and Exploratory Study," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 8, no. 4 (1995): 505-25.

[9] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

[10] Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress): 75-104.

[11] K. Budde, "Das hebräisches Klagelied," *ZAW* 2 (1882), 1-52. See also Dr. Yael Ziegler, *Lamentations*, 49-52.

der Kolk, a pioneer in the study of trauma.[12] There have been many different techniques advanced to resolve trauma. Interestingly, one aspect that many trauma therapies have in common is the concept of a trauma narrative in which the survivor, guided by a trained clinician, tries to retell the story of the traumatic event. Scholars debate exactly how this is helpful. According to cognitive-behavioral therapy practitioners, the trauma narrative serves as a type of exposure therapy. Through systematically exposing the survivor to their traumatic memory, the survivor will become desensitized to the intensity of the memory and the trigger reminders associated with them.[13] Others believe that the main purpose of the trauma narrative is to practice being able to retell it to loved ones, with the hope that their empathic listening will be healing in itself.[14]

However, researchers are beginning to learn that the trauma narrative does something even deeper. As we've seen above, traumatic events are experienced as flashbacks frozen in time and qualitatively different from normal memories. According to Janet, these flashbacks are reflective of an "insurmountable obstacle" that prevents the survivor from integrating the traumatic experience and moving on with their lives. They are stuck in the past and therefore find it difficult to integrate new experiences well.[15] Research even shows that survivors often change their tone of voice and speaking style when recalling their traumatic event, perhaps indicating that part of their personality is split and held hostage to the past event.[16] Van der Kolk, therefore, explains that telling the trauma narrative heals because it helps in "integrating the cut-off elements of the trauma into the ongoing narrative of life, so that the brain can recognize that 'that was then, and this is now.'"[17] Essentially, by telling the story of the trauma, the survivor will eventually be able to merge the event with the rest of their life into a cohesive unit. The memory will no longer stand apart as a destructive elephant in the room, but rather tamed and put in its proper place.

In much the same way that a trauma narrative helps heal trauma survivors, Leslie Allen argued that Lamentations can be understood as "the script of a liturgy intended as a therapeutic ritual."[18] According to this approach, Dr. Matthew

[12] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 213.

[13] Esther Deblinger, Anthony P. Mannarino, Judith A. Cohen, Melissa K. Runyon, and Robert A. Steer, "Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Children: Impact of the Trauma Narrative and Treatment Length," *Depression and Anxiety* 28, no. 1 (2010): 67–75.

[14] Mariagrazia Di Giuseppe, Tracy A. Prout, Timothy Rice, and Leon Hoffman, "Regulation-Focused Psychotherapy for Children (RFP-C): Advances in the Treatment of ADHD and ODD in Childhood and Adolescence," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020).

[15] Janet, *Psychological Healing*, 660.

[16] James W. Pennebaker, *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions* (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 50.

[17] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 183.

[18] Cited in Matthew A. LaPine, "The Therapeutic Use of Lamentations after Collective Trauma," The Center for Hebraic Thought, May 25, 2022.

A. LaPine argues that on Tisha be-Av Jews collectively read Lamentations as a way to construct their collective trauma so that they can retell their story.[19] We are essentially frozen in the past, and try, annually, to put together the broken pieces of our lives. "While trauma keeps us dumbfounded," writes van der Kolk, "the path out of it is paved with words, carefully assembled, piece by piece, until the whole story can be revealed."[20]

The idea of assembling the shattered pieces of our past trauma may be reflected in the poetic nature of Lamentations as well. Dobbs-Allsopp suggested that the poetry and acrostic structure[21] of Lamentations allows for "healing through language."[22] By retelling our story we are trying to put order to the scattered pieces of our lives, from *aleph* to *tav.* We may add that, as so often is the case with trauma survivors, we may never truly heal from our trauma in a complete sense. The letters of *ayin* and *peh* are in reversed order in chapters two through four, perhaps indicating that we may never regain perfect harmony. We cannot undo the past, and its memory may still haunt us from time to time, albeit hopefully in a more integrative and less intrusive manner. At the end of Lamentations, we conclude with an open-ended question, "Unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure" (5:22), because sometimes we must accept that we will never fully have all the answers to our painful questions.

It is also notable that the custom is to recite Lamentations specifically in a congregation. Perhaps this reflects the importance of community and relationships in the recovery process. According to Herman, "in her renewed connection with other people, the survivor re-creates the psychological facilities that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These faculties include the basic operations of trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy."[23] Not only can Lamentations be read as a depiction of traumatic flashbacks, but, through its poetic nature and collective retelling, as a tool for recovery as well.

Lamentations as a Transformative Experience

These two psychological readings of Lamentations have ramifications for how we understand its role on Tisha be-Av. R. Maurice Lamm writes that mourning in Judaism is supposed to be a healing process:

> The Jewish tradition has thus designed a gradual release from grief, and has instituted five

[19] Ibid.

[20] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 234.

[21] Chapter 5 lacks an acrostic structure but is still twenty-two verses corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

[22] F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012).

[23] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 133.

> successive periods of mourning, each with its own laws governing the expression of grief and the process of return to the normal affairs of society.[24]

The Jewish mourning stages of *aninut, shiva, sheloshim, yud-bet hodesh* (for the loss of a parent), and *yahrzeit* (anniversary of the day of death) are meant to be healing, allowing the mourner to return to their normal selves and into society. The progressively less restrictive nature of these five stages allows the mourner to achieve *nehama,* comfort, and move on with their life. Halakhic mourning is not only a time for allowed sadness, but a tool that both describes and prescribes mourning to be restorative.

It is then puzzling that the mourning restrictions that commence on the 17th of *Tammuz* and conclude three weeks later on Tisha be-Av become gradually more restrictive over time and are therefore inversive from normal halakhic mourning restrictions which become progressively less restrictive.[25] In explaining this difference, R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik argued that this is due to the fact that the loss of a close relative is an *aveilut hadashah,* a new mourning, that is most painful immediately after the loss and gradually eases as time goes on. The mourning of the three weeks, in contrast, are considered *aveilut yeshanah,* an ancient mourning which requires gradual preparation in order to experience "remote events which seem to have forfeited their relevance long ago."[26] If, as we've seen, the stages of Jewish mourning are ordered specifically to be healing, how then do we heal from the grief we experience on Tish be-Av if the order is inverted?

One answer to this question may be gleaned if we consider what psychologists call traumatic grief.[27] Some people experience uncomplicated bereavement and some develop post-traumatic stress disorder without any bereavement (in its usual sense). However, when trauma is embedded within the loss of a loved one, the psychological trajectory is qualitatively different.

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[24] Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David, 2000), 75.

[25] This question assumes, as R. Soloveitchik does below, that the mourning that takes place during the three weeks should be modeled after the mourning rituals that take place after the loss of a relative. One could argue that although they are both mourning rituals, there isn't a compelling reason that they need to follow the same course.

[26] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition* (ed. David Shatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky, and Reuven Ziegler; Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2003), 19.

[27] Holly G. Prigerson and Selby C. Jacobs, "Traumatic Grief as a Distinct Disorder: A Rationale, Consensus Criteria, and a Preliminary Empirical Test" in *Handbook of Bereavement Research: Consequences, Coping, and Care* (ed. Wolfgang Stroebe, Margaret S. Stroebe, Robert O. Hansson, Henk Schut, H. O. Prigerson, and S.C. Jacobs; Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001), 613–45. Although there exists no traumatic grief diagnosis in the DSM-5 as it is typically seen as too similar to a regular post-traumatic stress disorder diagnosis, the difference between traumatic grief and post-traumatic stress disorder unrelated to a loss has been studied for the last two decades and is likely to exist as its own diagnosis in the next edition of the DSM. It should also be noted that traumatic grief is sometimes referred to by other names.

Whereas typical grief (what psychologists may refer to as uncomplicated bereavement), as painful as it may be, is relatively short-lived, traumatic grief can persist for years and even decades.[28] Research has also shown that those who suffer from traumatic grief have more severe intrusive symptoms and greater functional impairment in comparison to both those who suffered a non-traumatic loss and those who experienced a traumatic event.[29]

One method of healing traumatic grief is through narrative construction,[30] much the same way used for trauma survivors. Constructing a narrative is a gradual process that takes time to develop. Initially, one may only be able to verbalize ambiguous details of the traumatic loss before feeling too overwhelmed to continue. The role of the clinician is to systematically guide the client into being able, over time, to retell the complete story of the traumatic event in a way that puts meaning to their suffering and allows them to move on healthily with their life. The narrative, in these cases, is not only important for helping one cope with the traumatic memory, but with the loss associated with it as well. By being able to tell a cohesive story, the mourner can make some sense of their traumatic loss and heal from it.

The loss of the Temple was certainly an event worthy of traumatic grief. Not only was the Temple the center of Jewish life, it also represented our close relationship and access to God. Its destruction was earth shattering, and we have not yet been able to pick up all the scattered pieces and heal. On Tisha be-Av we are both mourning its loss, but also severely traumatized by it. We may not perceive the magnitude of this traumatic loss because it occurred thousands of years ago, but that does not mean its effects weren't spiritually catastrophic. We should therefore view our reaction to the loss of Temple as traumatic grief, and read Lamentations through the lenses of both grief and trauma together.

In order to resolve this intergenerational traumatic loss, we need to go through the gradual process of constructing our collective traumatic grief narrative. Perhaps this is why, contrary to the mourning rituals for the loss of a relative, *aveilut hadashah,* the mourning rituals of the three weeks, *aveilut yeshanah*, become increasingly more intense over time. Just as trauma survivors gradually train themselves to be able to retell their full story, starting on the 17th of *Tammuz* we gradually train ourselves to be able to reopen the book of Lamentations on Tisha be-

[28] Yuval Neria, and Brett T. Litz. "Bereavement by Traumatic Means: The Complex Synergy of Trauma and Grief," *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 9, no. 1 (2004): 73–87.

[29] Bonnie L. Green, Janice L. Krupnick, Patricia Stockton, Lisa Goodman, Carole Corcoran, and Rachel Petty. "Psychological Outcomes Associated with Traumatic Loss in a Sample of Young Women," *American Behavioral Scientist* 44, no. 5 (2001): 817–37.

[30] Tuvia Peri, Ilanit Hasson-Ohayon, Sharon Garber, Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, and Paul A. Boelen, "Narrative Reconstruction Therapy for Prolonged Grief Disorder—Rationale and Case Study," *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 7, no. 1 (2016): 30687.

Av and recite our traumatic grief narrative. While at the start of these three weeks we may not be ready to fully confront the memories of our past, the progressively strict mourning rituals prepare us to finally engage with them on Tisha be-Av. In this light, Lamentations is not meant to be a mere recording of a historical event or even a mood-setter for the rest of Tisha be-Av. It is meant as the key to help resolve our traumatic grief.[31]

The Sages of the Talmud stated that, "All who mourn [the destruction of] Jerusalem merits to see it in its joy" (*Ta'anit* 30b). Instead of promising us that those who mourn the destruction of Jerusalem *will* merit to see in its joy, as many erroneously translate this passage, the wording of the Sages is that the mourning causes us to see it in its joy *now.* Perhaps the sages were teaching us that if we read mourn through the lens of traumatic grief and use Lamentations as a narrative tool to resolve our ancient trauma, we can begin to put together the broken pieces of our lives, from *aleph* to *tav,* and become sufficiently healed enough to work through our transgenerational flaws and experience true joy. After thousands of years of traumatic grief, we acknowledge that we may never truly be whole. However, in telling our story as a community, year after year, we may heal.[32]

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[31] Even without the notion of a narrative, reading Lamentations may be healing in another fashion: Whereas traditional post-Freudian clinical analysis implied that grief involves the process of detachment and separation from the loss, more recent research points to the fact that grief actually functions to maintain psychological ties to the deceased. See CM Parkes, "The first year of bereavement: a longitudinal study of the reaction of London widows to the death of their husbands," *Psychiatry* 33 (1970): 444–46; and John Bowlby, *Loss: Sadness and Depression, Volume 3* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1980). Understood in this light, perhaps another function of the mourning commencing on the 17th of *Tammuz* and the reading Lamentations on Tisha be-Av is to rekindle our psychological connection to the Temple and its destruction. By grieving, in a manner that is progressively more intense, we obtain a deeper connection to the loss and strengthen our ties to it.

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