

Religious School . . . education and enrichment

Did you know....Asarah B'Tevet~ The Tenth of Tevet is a fast day on the Jewish calendar.

Coming as it does a week after the last day of Hanukkah, the fast on the 10th of Tevet might easily be overlooked. It occupies, however, an important niche in the story of Israel and the history of our people.

The text in Kings II (25:1-4) tells us that on the 10th day of the 10th month, in the ninth year of his reign, (588 BCE), Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, began the siege of Jerusalem. Three years later, on the 17th of Tammuz, he broke through the city walls. The siege ended with the destruction of the Temple three weeks later, on the 9th of Av, the end of the first Kingdom and the exile of the Jewish people to Babylon. It can thus be considered part of the cycle of fasts connected with these events: Tzom Gedaliah (3rd of Tishrei); Shivah Asar B'Tammuz (17th of Tammuz) and Tisha B'Av (9th of Av). The first mention of this fast appears in Zechariah (8:19) where it is called the "fast of the tenth-month..." (counting from the month of Nisan, which was the first month in Biblical times). Other references to the fast and the affliction can be found in Ezekiel 24:1-2 (the siege); Jeremiah 52:4-6.

Although the fast is historically tied to events surrounding the destruction of the First Temple, the purpose of the fast is not the commemoration of an historical event, but the state of affliction of the Jewish people.

- As with all Jewish fasts, the prayers for Asarah B'Tevet include Selihot, marking the day as an occasion for each of us to devote time to Teshuvah (repentance), the introspection that motivates us to reexamine our actions and change our ways. As the Talmudin Brachot says, "one who is afflicted should examine his or her actions and do Teshuvah."
- Asarah B'Tevet is the day of mourning for people whose last resting place or date of death is unknown (the Kadish Clali).
- Asarah B'Tevet is one of four public fasts which begin at dawn (alot hashachar - about an hour before sunrise), but do not carry additional restrictions, such as washing oneself or wearing leather shoes, etc. (while Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av begin from dusk the night before). However, it is the only fast which is not brought forward or postponed if it falls on a Friday, a mark of its immense significance.

Bob