

## *Selections from Lamentations and Responsive Readings*

On Tisha B'Av, we recall destructions past

*And through our recollections, we hope for insight.*

Insight into how we have responded and how we might respond today

*And how our response may, if wise and passionate and strong, stave off further destruction.*

We are caught up in snare of isolation; struggle through waves of deception and denial

*Sink into the depths of depression; strive against blame and anger.*

And yet, in the midst of mourning, we also may remember hope:

*“One may lay down at night weeping, yet in the morning, joyous song.”  
(Psalm 30:6)*

If, with clear eye and strong heart, we face disaster unflinching,

*Strengthened by each other, inspired by the Breath of Life*

It may yet come to pass that we will again stand mountain-strong

*Our dirge turned into dance, sackcloth undone and bound instead with joy (Psalm 30:12)*

### **I. Isolation and Disconnection – Chapter 1:1-3**

*“Alas! How lonely sits the city once great with people! She that was great among nations is become like a widow; the princess among states is become a thrall. Bitterly she weeps in the night, her cheek wet with tears. There is none to comfort her of all her friends. All her allies have betrayed her; they have become her foes. Judah has gone into exile Because of misery and harsh oppression; when she settled among the nations, she found no rest; all her pursuers overtook her in the narrow places.”*

Lamentations begins with a cry, a threnody of anguish:

*How lonely sits the city once great with people!*

Tragedy looms, disasters strike, and they become multiplied by isolation.

*We feel disconnected, abandoned, powerless.*

The Temple, when it stood, was the center of our people's world.

*There, we gathered. There we felt God's presence. There, life was given meaning.*

Through the Temple, we felt connected to the Most High.

*A connection we thought severed when the Temple was burned.*

But, as we have learned in ages since, our whole world is our Temple.

*The dwelling-place of holiness, the gateway to the sacred.*

The Earth and all in it, our mystics saw as garments of the *Shekhinah*, the indwelling presence of the divine.

*And so we can reconnect with our Creator through our connection to all creation.*

And yet today, this most basic of connections may be severed, as we stand on the brink of the burning of not just the Temple, but also our world.

*Too many have become disconnected from the consequences of their fossil fuel addictions, isolated from those even now facing fires and floods, droughts and disease fanned by the flames of climate change.*

Today, Breath of Life, help us to reconnect to you, to all life on this planet, to our responsibility to care for others and to the consequences of our actions and inactions.

*Help us to see that we are not alone, powerless against a global problem.*

May we realize that our cries, though they come from the depths, will be heard.

*Our lives, rewoven together, can make a difference.*

## **II. Denial and Deception: Lamentations 2:3,13-14**

*Alas! In blazing anger God has cut down all the might of Israel and has withdrawn the Divine right hand in the presence of the foe; God has ravaged Jacob like flaming fire, consuming everything. What can I take as*

*witness, what liken to you, O Daughter Jerusalem? What can I compare with you so as to console you, O Fair Maiden Zion? For your ruin is vast as the sea: Who can heal you? Your prophets spoke visions of folly, mere cover-ups and delusion. They did not reveal your iniquity so that you might change course, but instead prophesied to you oracles of empty speech and deception.*

When tragedy strikes, or even when a crisis looms,

*It is natural to look the other way, to deny, to disbelieve, to pretend that life can go on as before.*

Alas! This cannot be happening – must be but a nightmare.

*When the mind does not want to grasp, the heart too often closes, denies.*

Denial is natural – but futile, even dangerous. Actions taken today that could save lives may be as empty speech if put off till tomorrow.

*The carbon curve climbs, the waters rise, the fires rage – there is such a thing as too late.*

To this personal denial, those who profit from the status quo add deception.

*They lull us with the poppy-milk of false prophecies*

It's not happening; humans aren't causing it; and anyway it won't be so bad.

*Or if it is, we can trust in technology to find a painless solution.*

With deception and delusion, we are distracted from justice

*But justice delayed and justice denied bring the sword into the world.*

This day, we recommit to the pursuit of justice, as we remember:

*Zion will be save by justice, her repentant ones by righteousness. (Isaiah 1:27)*

Too often, we, afraid of changing course, hesitant to undertake sacrifice,

*Become half-willing accomplices, bargaining away our children's futures for the convenience of the moment.*

How do we help each other see that turning off a light can be a moral act?

*What would it take for driving alone to be seen as a sin or public transit a mitzvah?*

How can we wake from our slumber, see the cost of our bargains, move from what is convenient to what is required?

*Help us, Breath of Life, to hear the cries of those already in peril, to be moved to act for those yet to come.*

### **III. Overwhelming Depression – Lamentations 3:52-56**

*My foes have snared me like a bird, without any cause. They have ended my life in a pit and cast stones at me. Waters flowed over my head; I said: I am lost! I have called on Your name, O Eternal, from the depths of the Pit. Hear my plea; do not shut Your ear to my groan, to my cry!*

*Surely, ours is not the first age to feel sunk in the depths of sorrow, tragedy, disaster and depression.*

*The Psalmist wrote (69:3-4) I have sunk in the slime of the deep, and there is no place to stand. I have entered the watery depths, and the current has swept me away. I am exhausted from my calling out. My throat is hoarse.*

We are far from the first age to ask, as did the author of Lamentations,

*Why have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time?*

And yet, it seems only recently depression has become pandemic, the “new normal.”

*So we must ask, what about our age is uniquely overwhelming?*

Is it what we face externally – a climate spinning out of control, forests burned, species driven to extinction?

*Perhaps it is what is between us, deepening divisions and splintering societies, or an internal void, a loss of meaning coupled to our loss of connection*

Isolated and alone, facing global crises, paralysis and depression feel almost inevitable

*There is no place to stand, the current has swept us away, our throats are hoarse.*

But we must not be content to sink into the slime of the deep, for the task is great

*And the Master of the global house is insistent*

And we are, truly, not alone, but called to be partners in creation

*To take part in Tikkun Olam, the world's healing*

We, created in the image of the Divine, have the ability –

*Which path shall we choose?*

Will we shut our ears to the pleas of the earth, the cries of climate refugees?

*Or will we grasp hands across divides, climb from depths of despair, and help shape a better future for the planet and all people?*

#### **IV. Blame and Responsibility – Lamentations 4:13-15**

*It was for the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests, who had shed in her midst the blood of the just. They wandered blindly through the streets, defiled with blood, so that no one was able to touch their garments. “Away! Unclean!” people shouted at them, “Away! Away! Touch not!” So they wandered and wandered again; for the nations had resolved: “They shall stay here no longer.”*

On Yom Kippur, we each search our souls,

*Examining our personal faults, striving for self-improvement.*

Tisha B'Av too, could be a time for soul-searching

*Not just of selves, but also of society, a time to take account of sins of social injustice*

What is the moral state of our community? How have we fallen short?

*How have we failed to pursue climate justice? What is the nature of our responsibility?*

In ancient days, our people knew,

*Even with great learning, there can be great evil*

Unless people of learning bind themselves to the community,

*Unless we all become responsible for each other.*

On Tisha B'Av, through the ages, our people confronted tragedy by asking:

*What did we do wrong? How have we sinned?*

Was that blaming the victim? Doesn't tragedy often strike without cause – or caused by those least affected by the tragedy?

*But perhaps there is another way to hear their question – perhaps they also were asking, what can we do now to improve our world?*

As we face the fires of climate change today, there are those more to blame, those who have through action and inaction shed the blood of the just.

*For the sins of the profits, the iniquities and inequities of politicians, who seem blind to the needs of the streets, for their sins our whole planet pays.*

But Tisha B'Av calls for more than cries of blame – it is a call as well to reflection and renewed responsibility by all

*A call to sensitize our society's soul, for turning anger into action.*

Even against the flooding of coasts and the loss of species, we cannot take refuge in blame or powerlessness.

*It is time to accept our call, to shoulder responsibility to undertake the healing of the world.*

We may not live to see the completion of the task,

*But we are not free to abstain from the work. May we be blessed with the strength and wisdom to do it well.*

## **V. Mourning and Hope – Lamentations 5: 15,20-21**

*Gone is the joy of our hearts; our dancing is turned into mourning. Why have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time? Take us back, O Eternal, to Yourself, And let us come back; Renew our days as of old!*

Ours is a time when, in equal measure, we are devoted to happiness and avoidant, even afraid, of mourning.

*But much is already lost, and only those with closed hearts and narrow minds can look at the world and not shed tears.*

On Tisha B'Av, we remember, for we are a remembering people.

*We recall the pain and destruction of long ago.*

And as we remember, as the flames of ancient fires rise in our collective memory, pouring out our hearts like water in the presence of the Eternal,

*We also recall – mourning is different from despair, from giving up. To the contrary, only when we fully understand how broken our hearts are can we begin to find a path toward healing.*

When we remember, when our eyes have been washed by true tears, when we let the light in through the cracks in our hearts,

*We can find a path forward, no longer condemned to flames arising yet again.*

In our scroll of laments, we cry out, “Why have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time?”

*Only after our cry, can we truly move to a plea of hope: Renew our days as of old.*

Ecclesiastes Rabbah tells a tale of God endlessly creating and destroying world. Finally, God created this one. The Divine Breath led Adam, earthling, and Eve, Life-giver, through the green and growing garden, and the Voice called to them:

*See my works, how fine and excellent they are. Now all that I have created, you see arrayed before you. Think upon this and do not corrupt and destroy my world, for if you do, there is no else to restore it.*

That Voice calls to us still, more urgently than ever.

*This is our sacred task. Now, let us work for healing, together.*