

By The Waters of Babylon

Music by William Billings

By the waters, the waters of Babylon.
We laid down and wept and wept for thee Zion.
We remember, we remember, we remember thee zion.

Eicha – Book of Lamentations

Chapter 1, verses 1-5

(1) Alas! 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. (2) 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. (3) 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. (4) Zion's roads are in mourning, Empty of festival pilgrims; All her gates are deserted. Her priests sigh, Her maidens are unhappy— She is utterly disconsolate! (5) Her enemies are now the masters, Her foes are at ease, Because God has afflicted her For her many transgressions; Her infants have gone into captivity Before the enemy.

Tisha B'Av Text Discussion

(source: canfeinesharim.org/three-weeks/)

Deuteronomy 1:12

(Read on the Shabbat preceding the 9th of Av)

"How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?"

Rabbi Yosef Yozel Horowitz (from Mechachamei Hamussar, quoted in Itturei Torah vol. 6 p. 19) comments, "Traditionally, this verse is read to the melody of the book of Eicha, to teach us that if a person refuses to assume the responsibility for communal needs and thinks that by doing so he makes things easier for himself, he will in the end find out that matters will be worse for him and he will remain alone and isolated." He further states that a person who chooses not to "get themselves dirty" by involving themselves in the social needs around him, is himself a true cause for mourning, as such a person is missing out on what makes him human.

Dr. David Hanschke of Bar Ilan University (in Tisha B'av during the Second Temple Period. A Divinely Given Torah in Our Day and Age. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1998) suggests concerning why the Jews would mourn the destruction of the Temple after it was rebuilt: The destruction of the First Temple ended the notion that the House of Hashem is indestructible; it showed the Jews, and the world, that the Temple could be destroyed...the awareness of the past destruction needs to act as the catalyst for preventing future destruction of all types.

Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Sota, chapter eight, page 23. Rabbi Meir said, it is written [in Ecclesiastes], "The wise man has his eyes in his head." What about the fool? Where are his [eyes]—in his feet? Said Rabbi Aba Mari: The wise man—when he is at the beginning of a matter, he knows what will be at its end."

Discussion Questions: Which of these teachings do you find more empowering? Which do you think of as being more consistent with Jewish values?

Nachamu

Music and English by Elana Arian | Text: Isaiah 40

נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

Nachamu, nachamu ami yomar Eloheichem (2x)

Comfort us, comfort us in our wilderness,
Comfort us as we struggle to take care of one another.
Comfort us, comfort us in our wilderness,
Comfort us as we struggle with this world.

Eicha – Book of Lamentations

Chapter 5, verses 19-22

(19) But You, God, are enthroned forever, Your throne endures through the ages. (20) Why have You forgotten us utterly, Forsaken us for all time? (21) Take us back, God, to Yourself, And let us come back; Renew our days as of old! (22) For truly, You have rejected us, Bitterly raged against us. Take us back, God, to Yourself, And let us come back; Renew our days as of old!

On and On (L'dor Vador)

Music by Nefesh Mountain

There is a past in every portrait
There is a truth in every tale
And all the days that came before us
Are as the wind upon our sails.

There is a forest in every father
As he stands amidst the wild
There is a mountain in every mother
Her sturdy force of heart and mind

L'dor vador nagid godlecha
The light in us shines on and on
L'dor vador nagid godlecha
Time may pass but it's never gone

There is no story without sadness
And not a life without love
When we look back to days that passed us
We hold on to lights above

There is a dream in all the daughters
There is a song in all the sons
And everyone, as pure as water
Has a home from which they come

L'dor vador nagid godlecha
The light in us shines on and on
L'dor vador nagid godlecha
Time may pass but it's never gone

Lai lai la lai

Between the Fires

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow

We are the generation that stands
between the fires:
Behind us the flame and smoke
that rose from Auschwitz and from Hiroshima
And from the burning of the Amazon forest;
Before us the nightmare of a Flood of Fire,
The flame and smoke that could consume all earth.

It is our task to make from fire not an all-consuming blaze
But the light in which we see each other fully.
All of us different, All of us bearing
One Spark.

[Light a candle]

We light these fires to see more clearly
That the earth and all who live as part of it
Are not for burning.

We light these fires to see more clearly
The rainbow in our many-colored faces.
Blessed is the One within the many.
Blessed are the many who make One.

Song of Songs 2:11–13, translated by Marcia Falk

Together:

Come with me, my love, come away,
For the long chill months are past,
The rains have fed the earth
and left it bright with blossoms.
Birds wing in the low sky,
dove and songbird singing in the open air above.
Earth nourishing tree and vine,
green fig and tender grape,
green and tender fragrance.
Come with me my love, come away!

By The Rivers of Babylon

Music by Brent Dowe and Trevor McNaughton

By the rivers of Babylon where we sat down
And there we wept we remembered Zion

Oh from the wicked, carried us away from captivity
Required from us a song
How can we sing the Lord's song in a stranger land.

So let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts
Be acceptable in your sight, Adonai.

*Yihiu l'ratzon im'rei fi,
v'hegyon libi l'fanecha.
Adonai tzuri v'goali.*

Take the 101 north to Eden

How redwoods and Judaism found the same home in a writer's soul

OPPOSITE PAGE
*Tobin Mitnick visits
Jedediah Smith
Redwoods State
Park with his
daughter Lucy.*

When I was 4, I started going to synagogue. The same year, I cracked open the 1990 *World Book Encyclopedia* and was transfixed by an illustration under the article title, "Redwoods." It's the first memory I have where the natural world rose to a mystical level in my imagination.

The imagery of religion and nature began to merge for me. As simplified snippets about the Garden of Eden began to make their way into my Jewish preschool curriculum, I quickly filled it in my mind's eye with magnificent trees. Religion was merely bible stories for me then, and my Eden was populated with marvelous megalodon sharks in the ocean, tremendous amethyst geodes on the shore, and towering redwoods on the land. Adam and Eve? Couldn't tell you.

But this imaginary place soon fell away to the external needs of adolescence. Trees? Sharks? King David stories? These subjects don't help much when you're reliably getting pinned in 12 seconds on the wrestling mat.

It would be many years until my enthusiasm for the big trees returned. Years of religious disillusionment and professional failure as an actor, years of falling in love and relocation to Los Angeles.

Why it took me four years to actually see the sequoias when they were only a stone's throw away I will never know. But as my wife and I navigated pregnancy during the early days of the pandemic, visiting the giant sequoia groves seemed like a pretty safe idea.

There's a video of me when I saw my first big tree. I'm covering my mouth as if scandalized, giggling like an idiot, and muttering something like "I feel like I'm on mushrooms." Not wood ears, just to be clear. Something ecstatic had returned to my life. I made it a point to share this experience on social media. It resonated with my followers.

I started to heal my relationship with Judaism, reasoning that I would emphasize all the good parts with my daughter and leave the rest behind. For a while, I felt like I had found some equilibrium—trees and tradition seemed to share the same nook in my soul. And, for the first time as a performer, people cared about what I had to say. Growth was happening everywhere, the world was newly green, and, finally, my daughter was born.

In 2021, the sequoias burned. I went back the next year on my own. The holy cathedral of trees at Muir Grove in Sequoia National Park had been desecrated, shot through with the stem of a charred, thousand-year-old giant unable to support itself amidst the fire. It was a horrible moment for me. For a few days, I allowed myself to indulge in some heavy-duty fatalism: "This is all gone already. Everyone should get used to it."

"I cracked open the 1990 *World Book Encyclopedia* and was transfixed by an illustration under the article title, "Redwoods." It's the first memory I have where the natural world rose to a mystical level in my imagination."

But a few weeks later, we took our 2-year-old on a planned trip to Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park. It was like discovering a second temple, one that might swallow you up at any moment. The Eden of my childhood—constructed from textbook illustrations and Saturday morning sermons—was real.

Lucy will never have to situate her Eden in an imaginary world. She sees and touches and experiences it. At one point on our trip, she bent down to talk to a banana slug on the base of an ancient, moss-covered giant. Imagine, I thought, trying to tell this child that it's only a matter of time for these trees.

Instead, I have one message for her:

Eden is just a stone's throw away, if we wish it to be.

—Tobin Mitnick

*Tobin Mitnick is an actor, writer, naturalist, and proprietor of @jewslovetrees, which has over 400,000 followers across social media. His debut book, *Must Love Trees: An Unconventional Guide*, was published this year.*

"Community Voices" is a series in which guest writers share their perspectives on redwood forests.