



APOCALYPSE

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

While Tisha BeAv is described in a modern short work as “the sacred Jewish holiday commemorating God’s renegeing on every promise,” (Woody Allen, *Getting Even*), the real cause behind the disaster of 9 Av as our ancestors understood it was even worse than that. The Talmud teaches that gratuitous hatred among the Jewish People led to the collapse of the commonwealth in the first and second century of the common era.

Unfortunately, a community can tear itself apart, or unravel, from a range of stresses. The feelings of anger, fear, outrage, despair and more that emerge from violence directed at synagogues and other institutions close to us are generated by “external” forces. But our own responses to those feelings can stress our communal cohesion.

Those who have been close to or experienced such trauma have a range of responses. Some people feel, “The synagogue should be a place of safety. I don’t want to enter a synagogue unless security is high and visible.” Others feel, “The synagogue is my refuge from the troubles of the world; I don’t want to walk into a place that boldly emphasizes danger, violence and trauma.” While these responses have more nuanced and complicated thinking behind them, and a range of variations, they both represent the sincere feelings and thoughts of our members – seemingly irreconcilable beliefs.

It may be easy to feel threatened, or at least annoyed, by other people’s perceptions. One might even be angry, or hateful. Transitory emotions are natural, and usually

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not a threat to community if they can eventually be managed and directed. But sometimes anger persists, and can become hatred. Remarkably, theories of terrorism understand exactly that, and depend on this process for achieving their aims. And unfortunately, even knowing this in advance, communities can fall to this dynamic. Having strongly different feelings, knowledge bases, analysis and priorities should not be a reason for us to hate each other; any hate based on this is gratuitous.

The cycle of observances around Tisha BeAv, including the minor fast day commemoratives of the fasts of Tamuz, Tevet and Gedalia, remind us that just as Rome was not built in a day, Jerusalem was not destroyed in an hour. These “minor fast days” remind

us that societal collapse usually comes gradually, one step at a time. Surely the “slide” into the world wars occurred in many steps, just as the collapse of Syria and Venezuela were part of a longer process. Naomi Wolf, in 2007, wrote “[Fascist America, in 10 easy steps.](#)” which are partly sequential. Whether or not we agree with her particulars, the notion of sequence and gradations may be valid. The same can happen in our communal institutions and our private lives. The good news is that if we pay attention and can adjust course, we might save ourselves.

Beyond that cognitive process of identifying and reversing decline, we have an additional tool available. It is a counterforce to gratuitous hatred: gratuitous love. It means despite other people’s irrational or unreasonable beliefs and actions, we still love, respect and care for them.

