

## ***Aserah B'Tevet* – The 10<sup>th</sup> Day of the 10<sup>th</sup> Month**

*What is the actual meaning for us today?*

**The fast day of the 10<sup>th</sup> of the Hebrew month of Tevet** symbolizes the first in a series of events which led to the destruction of the First Temple: the beginning of the siege by the Babylonians of Jerusalem, the capital city of Judea, also known as ‘the Southern Kingdom.’ The very place from which we once emerged. . .

### **Commemorating the Siege of Jerusalem and the Destruction of the 1<sup>st</sup> Temple**

*This Friday from ‘Sunrise to Sundown’*



*'The Destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem,' Francesco Hayez, circa 1867*

A recalling (or a co-memory) from the Book of Kings:

Zedekiah (the Judean king at the time) rebelled against the king of Babylon. And in the ninth year of his reign, on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month, Nebuchadnezzar moved against Jerusalem with his whole army. He besieged it; and they built towers against it all around. The city continued in a state of siege until the 11<sup>th</sup> year of King Zedekiah, (*// Kings 25:1-2*)

## מְלָכִים ב / 2 Kings Chapter 25

<p>א וַיְהִי בְשָׁנַת הַתְּשִׁיעִית לְמַלְכוֹ, בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי בַּעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ, בָּא נְבֻכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל הוּא וְכָל-חֵילוֹ עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם, וַיִּחַן עָלֶיהָ; וַיִּבְנוּ עָלֶיהָ דְיָק, סָבִיב.</p>	<p>1 And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it round about.</p>
<p>ב וַתָּבֵא הָעִיר, בַּמָּצוֹר, עַד עֲשֶׂתִי עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה, לְמֶלֶךְ צְדַקְיָהוּ.</p>	<p>2 So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.</p>
<p>ג בַּתְּשַׁעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ, וַיִּחַזַק הָרָעֵב בְּעִיר; וְלֹא-הָיָה לָחֶם, לָעָם הָאָרֶץ.</p>	<p>3 On the ninth day of the [fourth] month the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land.</p>
<p>ד וַתִּבָּקַע הָעִיר, וְכָל-אֲנָשֵׁי הַמְּלָחָמָה הִלְיָהוּ דֶרֶךְ שַׁעַר בֵּין הַחֲמַתִּים אֲשֶׁר עַל-גֹּו הַמֶּלֶךְ, וְכַשְׂדִּים עַל-הָעִיר, סָבִיב; וַיֵּלֶךְ, דֶּרֶךְ הָעֲרָבָה.</p>	<p>4 Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war [fled] by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden--now the Chaldeans were against the city round about--and the king went by the way of the Arabah.</p>
<p>ה וַיִּרְדְּפוּ חֵיל-כַּשְׂדִּים אַחַר הַמֶּלֶךְ, וַיִּשְׁגּוּ אֹתוֹ בְּעֲרֵבוֹת יְרִיחוֹ; וְכָל-חֵילוֹ--נִפְצוּ, מֵעָלָיו.</p>	<p>5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him.</p>
<p>ו וַיִּתְּפְשׂוּ, אֶת-הַמֶּלֶךְ, וַיַּעֲלוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל-מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל, רַבְלָתָהּ; וַיִּדְּבְרוּ אֹתוֹ, מִשְׁפָּט.</p>	<p>6 Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.</p>
<p>ז וְאֶת-בָּנָיו, צְדַקְיָהוּ, שְׁחָטוּ, לְעֵינָיו; וְאֶת-עֵינָיו צְדַקְיָהוּ, עוֹר, וַיֹּאסְרוּהוּ בַּנְּחֹשְׁתִים, וַיִּבְאֵהוּ בָבֶל.</p>	<p>7 And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon. {S}</p>

Is it a 'memory' or a 're-calling – for us, as a people, 'to put to purpose'?

The prophet Ezekiel was instructed by God to **turn this day into a day of memory**:

“O mortal, record this date, **this exact day; for this very day** the king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem” (**Ezekiel 24, verse 2**).

*(note: this is one of the reasons that if the fast of Aserah B'Tevet falls on Friday or even on Shabbat, even though we are not permitted to fast on those days, still the fast would be observed (i.e. “this exact day, this very day”).*



MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI  
(1475 - 1564) - Sistine Chapel

## Ezekiel Chapter 24 / יְחֻזְקָאֵל

א וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי בְּשָׁנָה הַתְּשִׁיעִית, בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי, בְּעָשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ, לְאַמֵּר.	1 And the word of the LORD came unto me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, saying:
ב בֶּן-אָדָם, כְּתוּב- (כְּתַב-) לְךָ אֶת-שֵׁם הַיּוֹם-- אֶת-עֵצָם, הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: סָמַךְ מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל אֶל-יְרוּשָׁלַם, בְּעֵצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.	2 'Son of man, write thee the name of the day, even of this selfsame day; this selfsame day the king of Babylon hath invested Jerusalem.

Does this day now morph from an Historic catastrophe into a Religious memory and **then** to a “Memory Place” in the service of the Jewish People – not just as a religious entity, but as a Nation, i.e. as a ‘people’?

Tune in this Wednesday the 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:00 PM EST (and then on Sunday the 27<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 PM EST) in order to think this through together . . .

as it is a memory which we should perhaps begin to recall.

### **The Concept of the “Memory Place”** (for ^ reference, Pierre Nora)

Pierre Nora (born 17 November 1931) is a French historian elected to the Académie française on 7 June 2001. He is known for his work on French identity and memory. His name is associated with the study of new history.

Nora, both French and Jewish, is equally well known for having directed *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, three volumes which gave as their point the work of enumerating the places and the objects in which are the incarnate national memory of the French.

- The term “Memory Place,” attributed to the French historian Pierre Nora, (above) includes not only spatial but temporal places as well, i.e. days of commemoration around the calendar.
- Commemorative days, like the physical monuments, help the collective—in our case the Jewish people—to preserve the memory of formative events of our past, which are meaningful for our future.



- The “Memory Place” creates an encounter between the individual and the collective and the commemorated object, event, or symbol. This encounter disturbs the daily routine, which, because of its nature, encourages forgetfulness. Like a person who encounters the past by passing from time to time by a physical monument in his neighborhood or visiting a memorial, the past is also encountered when the person faces the temporal “Memory Place” on the calendar.
- This encounter is cyclic by its nature (i.e. calendar) and with it, the person reflects about a past event, and in a way, can or may even experiences it every year.

## **The Memory Place: Is it Judaism or is it Zionism?**

- The Jewish people, deprived of state life or sovereignty over their land for many generations, could not develop a widespread tradition of physical memory sites.
- Although we had the Western Wall, the tomb of Rachel, Ma’arat HaMachpela (the burial plot of our Jewish matriarchs and patriarchs located in Hebron), and some other sites associated with events and personalities from the past, the Jewish “memory culture” developed much more extensively through use of temporal places of memory built around the calendar.
  - In the first layer of these “Memory Places” we find the three holidays of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot, which mark historical events and experiences.
  - Later on they were joined by Hanukkah and Purim as well as by the public fasts that commemorate national catastrophes.
  - Scattered around the world, Jews nevertheless gathered “temporally” from time to time in their respective places of residence to mark national memories and to re-experience a piece of their collective past.

## **Maimonides / The Rambam**

In his discussion on the public fasts that commemorate the Temple’s destruction, Maimonides presents the following:

There are days in which all the people of Israel fast to repent the misfortunes which befell them. The fasting will serve as a reminder of our bad deeds and the deeds of our fathers which have caused us hard times. Remembering our misguided ways gives us the opportunity to be better as a people...” (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Taaniot, Chapter 5, 1)

Historical memory, as it is demonstrated in commemorative days like the Tenth of Tevet, has at least two dimensions: the story and its lesson.

- The “story” allows us to remember time and again what happened on that day—the beginning of the Babylonian siege on Jerusalem, in our case.
- The “lesson” has to do with the meaning we apply to the story: why it happened, how it relates to us, and what we are bidden to do.

## **A Maimonidean Ergo . . .**

**(at least for us in recalling the day and the context of ‘Aserah B’Tevet’):**

Maimonides draws a link between the deeds of our ancestors and our own time (i.e., “us -- in every generation”), as well as between our communal troubles and their misfortunes, thus making the memory of the Temple’s destruction an actual one.

- From this starting point, he reaches the conclusion to be made from our Religious and National misconduct:
- Remembering/Recalling our misguided ways allows us to provide ‘the path to redemption’ – to ‘return’ and ‘to go home again,’ also known as ‘Teshuvah’

Note: In this last example, “Teshuvah” is often misunderstood as in the English translation of ‘repentance,’ which is a mistake in both translation and in understanding.

## **Current: Israeli ‘national’ usage combined with ‘religious’ usage . . .**

- The Chief Rabbinate of Israel has chosen to observe the Tenth of Tevet as a "general kaddish day" (yom hakaddish ha'klalli) to allow the relatives of victims of the Holocaust, and those whose yahrtzeits are unknown, to observe the traditional yahrtzeit practices for the deceased, including lighting a memorial candle, learning mishnayot and reciting the kaddish.
- According to the policy of the Chief Rabbinate in Israel, the memorial prayer is also recited in synagogues, after the reading of the Torah at the morning services.
- To some religious Jews, this day is preferable as a remembrance day to Yom HaShoah, since the latter occurs in the month of Nisan, a month in which mourning is traditionally prohibited.