

**Rabbi Lisa Edwards**  
**BCC, Los Angeles - July 12, 2002**  
**Shabbat Chazon (Devarim)**

Everybody's favorite Jewish holy day, tisha b'av is coming up – Wed. night in fact. Favorite holy day? you know tisha b'av, don't you? that holy day of communal commemoration of all the bad things that ever happened to the Jewish people. It joins Yom Kippur as the only other full fast day on the Jewish calendar. It is a day of mourning that many Reform Jews, and other liberal Jews, gave up observing long ago.

Yet despite the sadness of Tisha B'av, and the reticence of many Reform and other liberal Jews to observe it (many Reform congregations do not in fact, observe it), I find year after year that I appreciate this low moment on the calendar – for many reasons. And those of you who choose to join Fran here on Wednesday night for Tisha B'av will find a somber, lovely observance of this quiet time on the Jewish calendar and in the Jewish heart. I say join Fran, rather than Fran and me, because I will be off co-leading services elsewhere for Tisha B'av this year – at the UAHC Kallah in Santa Cruz that runs from Wed. through Sunday. I am serving on the faculty there for the first time, and the BCCers who are regulars there have let me know to expect a good experience.

Why do I like Tisha B'av? It was Tisha B'av, I think, that made me realize I had integrated the Jewish calendar into my body and my emotions/heart. I tend each year to come into a reflective, somber, sometimes sorrowful mood as we enter the month of Av (which began a few nights ago). It happens whether I am thinking about it or not. It reminds me, shows me, that indeed the Jewish calendar works – with its many seasons and holy days meant to elicit certain emotions and responses in us. One can live in this calendar. I like taking some time, even if it's only one day a year, to reflect together on what has befallen us through the generations.

And I like tisha b'av for the Shabbat before it, for this Shabbat, known in Jewish tradition as the Shabbat Chazon, the shabbat of vision, because of a verse in the special haftarah. It's also the shabbat in which we begin our annual reading of the Book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy differs from the books of Torah in that it is the first person narrative of Moses, just before his death, reflecting back on the last forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

There is a line repeated twice in this week's Torah portion that I just love. Moses is reminiscing with the Israelites about the past 40 years in the wilderness, and he tells them about two different times when God says to them, "You've had enough of being at this mountain. Turn..." [1:6, 2:3]. The first time God says it about Mt. Sinai. Specifically Moses says that God said, "You've had enough of staying at this mountain. turn and travel and come ...and See: I've put the land in front of you...that God swore to your ancestors ...to give to them and to their seed

after them." [1:7-8]

The second time Moses says it of Mt. Seir "You've had enough of staying around this mountain. Turn north." [2:3] Mountains in the wilderness are important places. Mt. Sinai in particular of course – the place of God's revelation to the Israelites, the place where the ten commandments were given, the place in Jewish tradition, where the Israelites stood under the chupah and married God – the Torah as their ketubah, their wedding contract. A place of awe and fear, of safety and fright.

You have stayed long enough at this mountain, turn and travel, come and see what lies before you. I love this image of being told to leave behind a haven, a known place, but a place of both awe and fear, of revelation and safety. I love God's commentary: rav lechem – "enough for you!" or "You've had enough." Is it a criticism? an observation? or perhaps, a word of sympathy? Rav-lechem could also be translated, "[this has been] a lot for you."

And I love God's instructions that follow immediately after "enough of staying around this mountain": turn and travel and come and see..." don't just look down from up on the mountain (mostly we're at the foot of the mountain anyway, not usually the best view), but turn and walk away – travel, journey forth – and come to the next place (Amorite hill country and its neighboring places in the plain, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the [desert] Negev and by the seashore, [the land of the Canaanite and Lebanon as far as the Euphrates River]), and then, says God through Moses, "See." "R'eh" in the Hebrew. "See I've put the land in front of you. Come and possess the land that God swore to your ancestors...to give to them and their seed after them." [1:8]

"R'eh" "See" The view from the mountain is different from the view while you're traveling, or the view when you get "there" – to the Promised Land. "R'eh" "see" -- It's a different Hebrew word from the word that names this Shabbat "Chazon," which means vision. Shabbat Chazon refers specifically to the vision of Isaiah – both the vision of what he sees and what he wishes he saw. Tonight I pause not at the specific visions themselves, but at the words (after all, Devarim, the name of this last book of Torah, means "words") and the ideas behind them: long enough! turn and travel, come and see what's next.

What is it for you? in this season of sorrow and remembering? in what space, in what mindset, in what place have you been long enough? Do we grieve, do we remember only to long for what's past? Or do we do grieve and remember in order to move forward to what's next? toward what or whom should you turn, where should you journey and with whom, what promised land should you come and see?

Tonight, even as we look toward a day of mourning, we take time also to celebrate. Two new members of our congregation – Lisa and Angie – will stand together under a chupah on Sunday. Standing under a chupah is a lovely way to follow the instructions I've been talking about tonight: a perfect way to turn and travel, to come and see what's next. Toward whom do they turn? Toward each

other and toward God who blesses them. With whom do they travel? With each other through whatever twists and turns, hill country, and plain, lowland and seashore and riverside their lives together take them. What should they come and see? Whatever Promised Land God will set before them as a couple – whatever home, family, community they create and become a part of.

I want to thank Lisa and Angie for joining us tonight (for joining BCC!), and for illustrating one more piece about Tisha B'av that I love: In the traditional commentaries about this shabbat scholars such as Rashi suggest that on Tish'ah be-Av our sense of grief actually coexists with a subtle sense of joy. One scholar appreciates the fact that the Sabbath before Tish'ah be-Av is called Shabbat CHazon, the shabbat of vision, because that word, chazon, is also used by the prophet Habakkuk [2:3] when he comforts the Children of Israel with the words, ki od chazon la-mo'ed – "there is yet a vision of joyous occasion." Thus, says our sage, even as a Jew begins this period of grief, we also envision the sadness turning to happiness, for we know that is the course our lives tend to take. [ftnt on that is Sefer ha-Mat'amim p.13, and Rashi to Habakkuk 2:3]

The ability to envision a future time of happiness, even in the midst of worry and sadness; the ability, the belief, the understanding that there will yet be "a vision of a joyous occasion"; that will be expressed in a few moments when we throw candy at this loving couple in an effort to heap sweetness upon their life together. As we toss, we'll have before our eyes a "Vision" of what our Jewish sages often taught: that life - its sorrows and its sweetness – is something to celebrate. Shabbat shalom