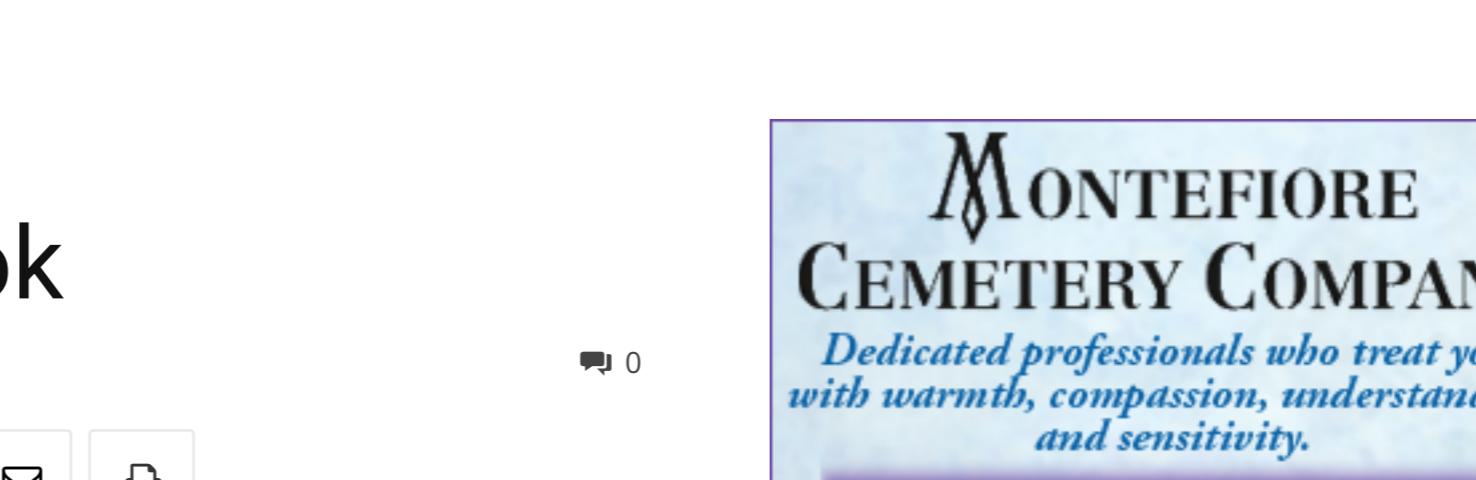


Music and Lyrics by William Finn
Book by William Finn and James Lapine



Community Community Snapshot

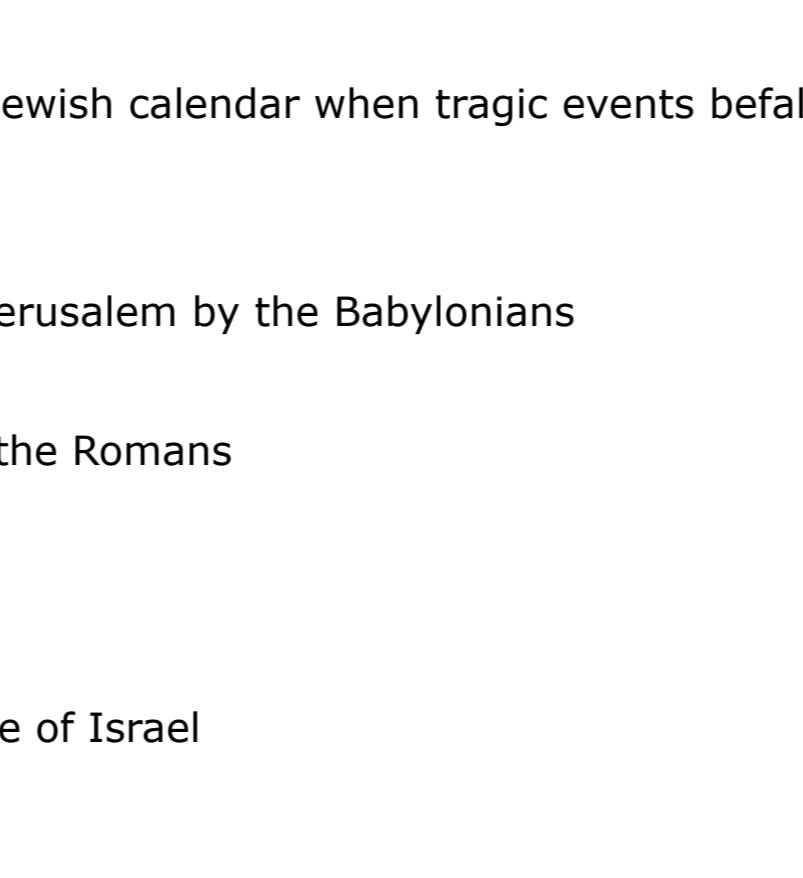
From Facebook to Hatebook

By - - - - - August 10, 2023

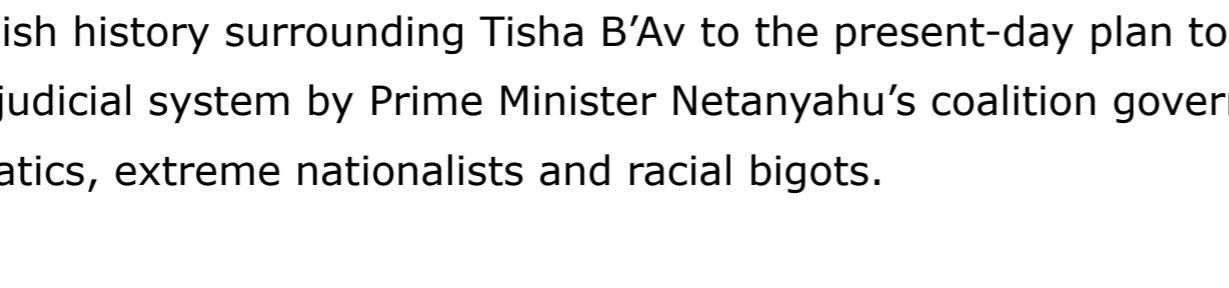
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Fredricka R. Maister

July 25, 2023



Fredricka R. Maister



Tisha B'Av is regarded as the darkest day in the Jewish calendar when tragic events befall the Jewish people. To name a few:

586 BCE: The destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians

70 CE: The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans

1492: The expulsion of the Jews from Spain

July 26-27, 2023: The end of the democratic state of Israel

I am beyond saddened, worried and frightened!

This was my Facebook post I shared as a cautionary tale connecting the catastrophic events in Jewish history surrounding Tisha B'Av to the present-day plan to overhaul Israel's independent judicial system by Prime Minister Netanyahu's coalition government of ultra-Orthodox fanatics, extreme nationalists and racial bigots.

Tens of thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets in mass protests of this unpopular move for more than six months, and thousands of army reservists are threatening or have already done the unthinkable — to not report for military duty.

The far right's objective to weaken the Supreme Court and end the checks and balances governing the country would be disastrous to Israel's economy, defense and security, its international standing and, most importantly, to the very existence of a democratic Jewish state in the Middle East.

Although I recognize the overhaul of the judiciary would especially impact the Palestinians under occupation, further thwarting the possibility of a two-state solution or any solution, my main purpose in writing my post was to express my sorrow and fear regarding the deepening schisms and enmity among Israelis.

The tragedy of Jews hating Jews and what it portends for the future of Israeli democracy keeps me up at night and I live in the United States. How are Israelis coping these days? Their anxiety levels must be off the charts. To me, and I am no drama queen when it comes to Israeli politics, self-inflicted destruction doesn't seem that far-fetched.

The expression, *Sinat Chinam* (Hebrew for baseless or needless hatred) immediately comes to mind. *Sinat Chinam*, to which the Talmudic sages attributed the destruction of the Second Temple is apparently alive and well, leading to the factionalism and internal strife between modern-day Israelis, diaspora Jews — and the two secular Jewish men I grew up with in Trenton, New Jersey who responded to my Facebook post.

Now in their 70s, the two are polar opposites in their views of American and Israeli politics. In the most basic, simplistic terms, I'd describe one as on the far left, the other on the far right. They almost never visit my Facebook page, but in this instance, they felt compelled to spew their extremist, self-righteous views, hijacking my feed for a few days as they hurled their hateful rhetoric, primarily at each other.

The fireworks began almost immediately when a Facebook friend responded to my post with a reasonable question that many are probably asking: "The tragedy of today's Israel ... Golda's Israel, Ben-Gurion's Israel, Rabin's Israel. How did we get here!?"

Mr. Right responded: "Sadly, we got here after 75 years of most of the Arab world wanting us dead, and trying to do it every day."

Mr. Left responded with two diatribes blaming Israel and American Jews for crimes against the Palestinian people that began with: "Golda, Ben-Gurion and even Rabin contributed to the murders of thousands of Palestinian citizens, not to mention the ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands" and ended with a link to purchase his book on Amazon about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

What followed was a down-and-dirty political confrontation that played out for two days in 30-plus posts on my Facebook page, fraught with accusations, insults and name-calling (Mr. Right called Mr. Left an antisemite and Mr. Left called Mr. Right an ignorant bigot).

Mr. Left took his vitriol even further by responding to the benign, politically neutral posts of friends upset by the current situation in Israel dividing the country. One friend wrote, "It's terrible," to which Mr. Left responded, "If it's terrible for the Jews, imagine how much more terrible it will be for the Palestinians."

I took solace in the fact that only one person (not a Facebook friend of mine but a friend of Mr. Left who shared his views) "liked" his posts. Occasionally, when someone did challenge his beliefs and tried to reason with him, he would unleash a new set of endless rants cluttering up my Facebook feed even more.

I finally decided to address this escalating hate-fest in the form of a post that said "... This has got to stop. While I respect your views and right to express them, I would greatly appreciate it if you would cease to hijack my post and use it as a platform to promote them and your books. Also, please don't single out some of my Facebook friends and lecture them on how to think and feel."

When the back and forth continued between Mr. Left and Mr. Right, I wrote another post admonishing both of them: "Your behavior on this page is appalling! Please take your insults against each other elsewhere. You are perpetuating what is called "*Sinat Chinam*" (Hebrew for "baseless hatred"), a contributing factor to the current crisis in Israel. Thank you!"

At least Mr. Right apologized if he offended anyone on my post and promised to disengage from their unhealthy debate, which struck me as a microcosm of the internal divisiveness and animosity threatening the state of Israel.

When two Jews are so entrenched in their extremist positions that they can't even arrive at a consensus or compromise and co-exist, how can there ever be a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinians?

Tisha B'Av may have passed, but I still feel a sense of doom about Israel's future, leaving me more saddened, worried and frightened than ever.

Fredricka R. Maister is an essayist/memoirist based in Philadelphia. Her essays and op-eds have appeared in publications including the Baltimore Sun, Philadelphia Inquirer, Chicago Tribune, Miami Herald, New York Jewish Week, Times of Israel, Baltimore Jewish Times, The Forward and Jewish Exponent.

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Community

Community Snapshot

From Facebook to Hatebook

By - - - - -

August 10, 2023

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