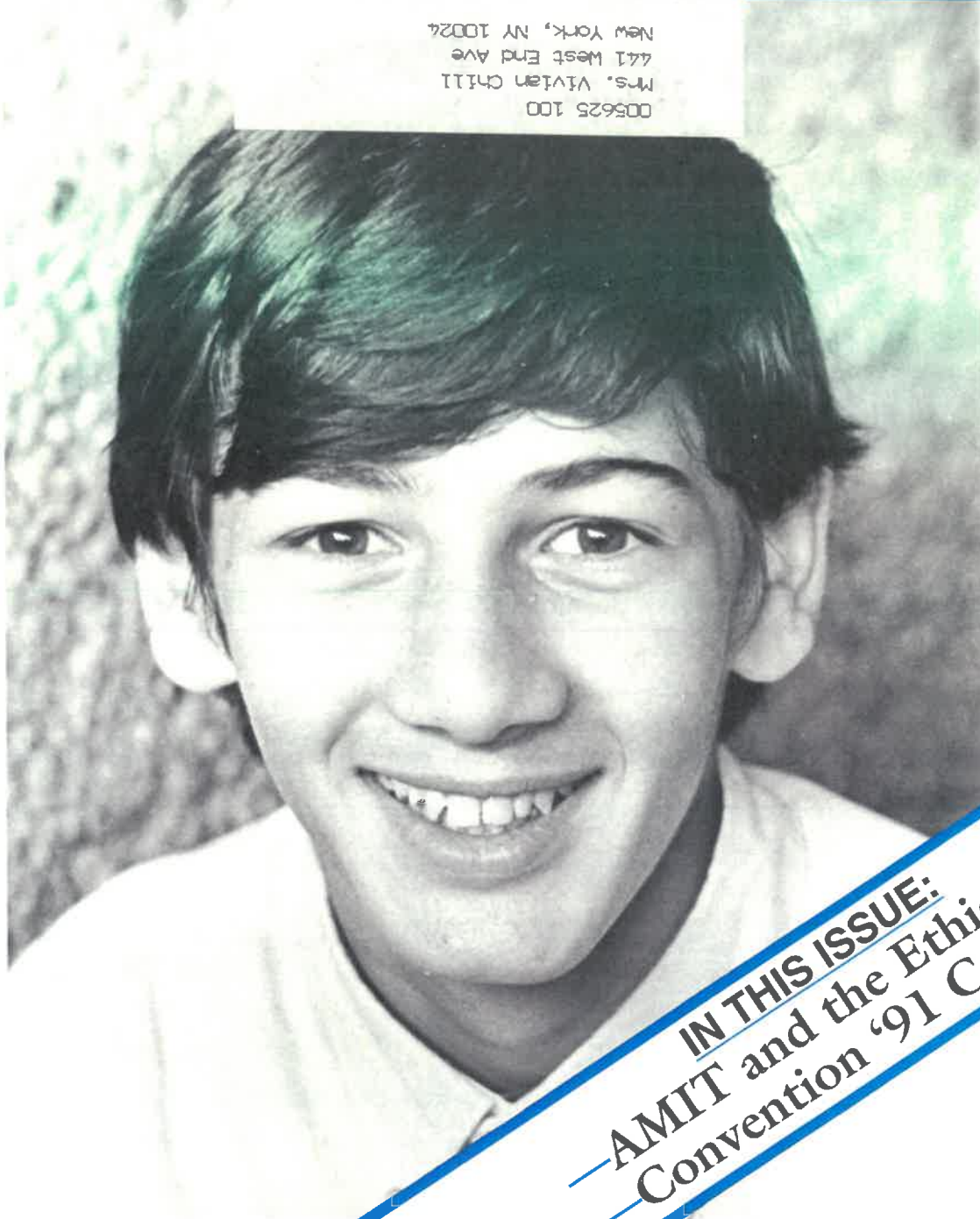


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Twelve-year-old Eddy Talgiev, a recent immigrant from Firgana in the Soviet Union, is one of many students at the AMIT High School, Akko, who are benefiting from AMIT's determination to foster and develop the potential of every child (see "Moving a Generation Forward," page 9).

Photo: Debbi Cooper

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AMIT WOMEN, THE LARGEST WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS ZIONIST ORGANIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES, SPONSORS THE ONLY GOVERNMENT-APPOINTED *RESHET* (NETWORK) FOR RELIGIOUS SECONDARY TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN ISRAEL. IN ADDITION, ITS INNOVATIVE CHILDREN'S HOMES AND YOUTH VILLAGES HAVE REVOLUTIONIZED CHILDCARE IN ISRAEL.

A Day Marked For Disaster

by RABBI ADAM MINTZ

Tisha B'Av (the ninth day of Av), a day of mourning and fasting, primarily commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem. Indeed, the central focus of the Tisha B'Av service is the recitation of the book of *Eichah* (Lamentations), Jeremiah's elegy on the suffering brought about by the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. Over time, however, a number of other catastrophes have come to be associated with Tisha B'Av, among them the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, which is said to have taken place on Tisha B'Av. Even some events that did not take place on Tisha B'Av, such as the Crusades, are remembered on this day. The Talmud (*Taanit* 29a) confirms the inclusive nature of the day and refers to Tisha B'Av as "a day marked for disaster". Parallel to the broadening of Tisha B'Av's historical significance, the liturgy has also been greatly expanded through the addition of *kinot*, dirges, which describe in dramatic poetic language the tragedies of the Jewish people.

The *kinot* that we recite were composed throughout the ages. The earliest were written by Rabbi Eleazar Kallir, one of the most prolific and influential liturgical poets of all time, who lived during the Gaonic period (extending from the end of the sixth century to the middle of the eleventh). In the thirteenth century, Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg, Talmudic scholar, poet, and community leader, wrote one of the most famous *kinot* in our liturgy, *Sha'ali Serufa Ba'esh* (Inquire You that Was Burnt by Fire). He was imprisoned in Germany for the last nine years of his life for opposing the king's right to tax the Jewish community. This *kinah* (singular for *kinot*) describes the public burning of the Talmud in 1242 by the

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Kirk Gauda

Church in Paris. Another *kinah*, depicting the massacres of the Jews in the Rhineland communities of Speyer, Mainz and Worms in 1096, was composed by Rabbi Kalonymus ben Judah, an eyewitness to the event. In recent years, some congregations have begun to recite a *kinah* composed by Rabbi Abraham Rosenfeld in memory of the six million Jews who died during the Holocaust.

Two somewhat lesser known *kinot* said on Tisha B'Av recall the tragic events that occurred in York, England in 1190. One was written by Rabbi Menahem ben Jacob, a twelfth century member of the rabbinical court in Worms; the other was composed by Rabbi Joseph of Chartres, a thirteenth century student of the famous Tosafist, Rabbenu Tam. Rabbi Joseph of Chartres writes,

Let there be no rain or dew on the
Land of the Isle

From the day your king was
crowned, woe to you O land!

O daughter of my people, arise
from its midst and go forth!

Could I have seen this tragedy after
what I had seen?

The "Land of the Isle" is England; the "king" is Richard I, also known as Richard the Lion-Hearted.

Jews began settling in England

sometime after the Norman Conquest in 1066 and lived there until their expulsion by Edward I in 1290, which, according to Jewish tradition, also took place on Tisha B'Av. During the time the Jews lived in England, they were the victims of recurring accusations and massacres. The first incident, involving a blood libel, took place in Norwich after a twelve-year-old boy was found murdered in the nearby woods before Pesach of 1144. The populace claimed that Jews had killed Christian children in order to use their blood for the preparation of wine and matzoh for Pesach. While no deaths occurred in Norwich, this event was the prototype for a series of blood libels that occurred throughout Europe for many centuries, often resulting in the death of many Jews.

When Richard I became king in 1189, the Jews hoped for better times and brought gifts to the king in honor of his coronation. Their hopes were dashed when the Jews carrying the gifts were humiliated by the palace guard outside Westminster Abbey. A rumor spread that the king had ordered the destruction of the Jews; a riot ensued in London during which many Jews were killed, and their property looted and burned. Rather than fall victim to the mob, some Jews committed suicide, while still others were forced to accept baptism. Following this episode, the king ordered three instigators of the riot hanged and issued a decree banning such lawlessness throughout England. However, when the king set out for Jerusalem with the Third Crusade, his edict was ignored and anti-Jewish violence spread from London throughout the kingdom.

In York, several local barons who were heavily indebted to the Jews decided to take advantage of this opportunity to wipe out their debts. One rainy March night, when an outbreak of fire caused confusion in the city, several of the barons broke into the house of Benedict of York, a leader of the Jewish community who had been killed during the London riots. They murdered his

widow, stole his property, and set his house ablaze. The next morning, the Jews of York, fearing future attacks, took their belongings and sought shelter in the royal castle. The Jews took refuge in Clifford's Tower, the central tower of the royal castle which stood isolated on a large mound. The warden of the tower, who at first allowed the Jews to remain, later turned against them after the Jews, suspecting his intentions, locked him out of the tower. Accordingly, he sought the assistance of the sheriff, who ordered a siege of the tower. Thus, these helpless Jews were imprisoned in the tower, short on both food and water rations and aware that surrender meant either forced baptism or death by torture.

One of the Jews held in Clifford's Tower was Rabbi Yom Tov of York, the famous Tosafist and liturgical poet, whose poem, *Omnam Ken* (However So), is still recited on Yom Kippur night. On Friday night, March 16, 1190, *Shabbat Ha-Gadol* (the Shabbat preceding Pesach) of that year, Rabbi Yom Tov, understanding the full implications of the situation, inspired his fellow Jews to perform an act of *kiddush ha-Shem* (sanctification of G-d's name) by taking their own lives rather than giving in to their enemy. He declared that they should "prefer a glorious death to a shameful life." The Jews set their valuables on fire, and the act of self-sacrifice was carried out. The number of victims is said to have exceeded 150 men, women and children. The next morning, those who remained alive were persuaded to open the gates of the tower, based on a promise of clemency if they agreed to accept Christianity. However, as they left the fortress, the mob butchered them all. In total, more than 500 Jews perished in the massacre.

Immediately after the last Jew had been

killed, the mob proceeded to the York Minster Cathedral where the records of city debts were kept. The citizens forced the guard to hand over these records, which they then burned on the floor of the Cathedral. When reports of the massacre reached King Richard, who was still overseas, he instructed his regent to punish the perpetrators. However, the guilty barons had already escaped to Scotland, free from the reach of English justice. The only punishment that was finally meted out was a fine on the citizens of York and the dismissal of the sheriff.

A small plaque on the stone ruin of what was once Clifford's Tower is all that remains in York to commemorate this massacre. The plaque, unveiled in 1978, reads, "On the night of Friday 16 March 1190, some 150 Jews and Jewesses of York, having sought protection in the Royal Castle on this site from a mob incited by Richard Malebisse and others, chose to die at each other's hands rather than denounce their faith." The inscription concludes with a verse from *Isaiah* (42:12), "Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the Isles."

On Tisha B'Av, we remember through the *kinot* the heroism of the victims of the tragedy at York, just as we recall the suffering of the Jews during the many other tragic events in Jewish history. By means of the dramatic recounting of these past events, we affirm that the Jewish people have not forgotten the sacrifice of these martyrs. As Rabbi Joseph of Chartres writes at the conclusion of his *kinah*,

May their dust rest in the bond of eternal life;

This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their just reward. □

IT HAPPENED ON TISHA B'AV

Throughout our history, major calamities have occurred on Tisha B'Av, the saddest day of the Jewish calendar:

- Following the exodus from Egypt, spies were sent ahead by the Israelites to scout their destination, the Land of Israel, and they returned with a negative report. G-d decreed on Tisha B'Av that the generation that left Egypt would therefore die in the Sinai Desert.

- In 586 BCE, the first Temple, built by King Solomon, was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

- According to some opinions, on Tisha B'av in 70 CE, the Second Temple, built after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Exile, was destroyed by the Romans.

- In 135 BCE, Betar, the last stronghold of the Bar Kochba revolt, was captured.

- One year later, the Roman emperor Hadrian rebuilt Jerusalem as a pagan city and the Temple as a pagan temple. He forbade Jews to enter the city.

- In 1492, the Jews were expelled from Spain.

- During the period of the Crusades, several massacres took place on this date.

- Some individuals equate the beginning of World War I with Tisha B'av, which fell on August 1, 1914. (Because that day was Shabbat, the actual fast was deferred to the next day.)

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