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Q & A Feature -- Tisha B'Av

The Jewish calendar has many holidays throughout the year. Some are joyous while others are sad and soulful. Each of the holidays has a spiritual influence on the Jewish people, and the world in general. The saddest day of the Jewish year falls on Tisha B'Av, or the Ninth of the Jewish month of Av. Throughout this day in history, the most terrible things have happened to the Jewish people, both during ancient times and in recent history. Avraham Tapp, public relations manager at the Jewish Discovery Center in Williamsville, offers an overview.

Q: What is Tisha B'Av?

A: Tisha B'Av is considered to be the saddest day in the Jewish calendar, occurring on the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av.

Q: Why is Tisha B'Av so sad?

A: Many events that were tragic to the Jewish people occurred throughout history on this day, although in different years. These tragedies include the destruction of the First and the Second Holy Temples in Jerusalem; the massacre of the city of Betar by the Romans; expulsion from England, Spain, and Vienna; as well as the start of WWI and the presentation of "the final solution" to the Nazi Party by Himmler. The deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto also

began on this day.

Q: How do the Jewish people properly observe this holiday?

A: The Sages instituted a list of restrictions to help set the proper serious attitude of the day. Refraining from drinking or eating anything, including water, as well as not sitting on anything comfortable or anything taller than ten inches from the ground are some of these restrictions. Many of the customs are similar to those observed by an individual who is still within the first week of mourning from having lost a mother or father.

Q: Are Jews allowed to read a book, or watch television? How do they pass the time?

A: Reading or watching anything not directly related to the sad events marked by this day is strictly prohibited as the day is intended to be a time of reflection and sadness. Any distraction from that goal is discouraged, and in some cases not allowed.

Q: This holiday looks to be very serious and depressing. How long does it last?

A: Tisha B'Av lasts for 25 hours, with most of the laws including the fast lasting the entire frame of time. Some of the restrictions however don't last the whole time. The prohibition against sitting comfortably, for example, is only kept until after midday.

Interestingly, in connection to the Jewish faith being one of joy and happiness, as strict as it is to observe the proper customs, it is equally strict not to extend the customs longer than called for by law. There is a clearly stated law not to add or subtract from the commandments. This includes making a day of mourning harder than it needs to be.

The Jewish people are taught that the purpose of this world is lost from those people who dwell in sadness and depression. However, there is a necessary and appropriate time for sadness. Therefore, while Jews have very strict mourning laws, there is always a time limit. After the limit has expired, the Jewish people have an obligation to pick themselves up off the floor and begin again to search for the joy and light in everything.