

Megillat Covid

Along the Lines of Lamentations

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The following poem is based on selected verses of the Book of Lamentations, traditionally read on the Fastday of Tisha b'Av. This year, Tisha b'Av begins on the evening of 7/29/2020, and ends in the evening of 7/30/2020. The—at times, creative—translation is my own, based on the JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh from 2003.

CHAPTER 1: Connection

Lonely—once great with people! (1:1).
Bitterly she weeps at night;
There is no one to comfort her
Of all her friends (1:2).
She finds no rest (1:3).
Her place is deserted (1:4).
All the precious things she had
In the days of old... (1:7)
She can only sigh--
And shrink back (1:8).
Her uncleanness clings to her skirts.
She gives no thought to her future (1:9).
“How abject have I become!” (1:11).
“I am forlorn, and
In constant misery!” (1:13).
“It saps my strength.” (1:14).
“I cried out for my friends (1:19),
'See the distress I am in!' (1:20).
There was no one to comfort me” (1:21).
“My heart is sick” (1:22).

CHAPTER 2: Pride

We were laid waste (2:5).
We were stripped like a garden;
Ended have Shabbat and festivals (2:6).
Our gates have sunk into the ground (2:9).
Elders sit silently;
Women bow their heads to the ground (2:10).
My eyes are spent;
My being melts away (2:11).

What can I take as a witness? (2:13).
Day and night!
Give your eyes no rest (2:18).
See and behold (2:20).

CHAPTER 3: Shelter

My path is made a maze (3:9).
It has left me numb (3:11).
I am filled with bitterness (3:15);
I forgot what happiness was (3:17).
“It is good to wait patiently
Till rescue comes” (3:26).
“Let me sit alone and be patient (3:28);
Let me put my mouth to the dust—
There may yet be hope” (3:29).
“To deny a man his rights (3:35)—
Each one his own sins!” (3:39).
Panic and pitfall are our lot;
Death and destruction (3:47).
My eyes shed streams of water
Over the ruin of my people (3:48).
Water flows over my head;
I said: “I am lost!” (3:54).

CHAPTER 4: Money

The gems are spilled
At every street corner (4:1).
People have turned cruel,
Like ostriches in the desert (4:3).
Little children beg for food;
None gives them a morsel (4:4).
Better off were the slain of the disease,
Than those slain by hunger (4:9).
The kings of the earth did not believe,
Nor any of the inhabitants of the world (4:12)
“Away! Unclean!,” people shout,
“Away! Away! Touch not!” (4:15).
It showed no regard for the homeless,
No favor to elders (4:16).
As we waited, still we wait,
For a nation that cannot help (4:17).
Our steps were checked,
We could not walk in our squares (4:18).
The breath of life,
Is captured in traps (4:20);
The cup shall pass;
We will expose our nakedness (4:21).

CHAPTER 5: Beauty

The old men are gone from the parks,
The young men from their music (5:14);
Some get their bread at the peril of their lives (5:9);
Exhausted, we are given no rest (5:5).
Gone is the joy of our hearts;
Our dancing is turned into mourning (5:15).