



The ORIGINAL small group program.

***ROSH CHODESH AV***

*By Rabbi Debra Smith & Nina Fondiller Woldin*

Rosh Chodesh is the name  
given to the first day  
of every month  
in the Hebrew Calendar.

Rosh Chodesh means  
“Head of the Month.”



Rosh Chodesh is marked by the new moon, and is considered a minor holiday. The Torah is taken out and special blessings are read proclaiming the new month and asking for God's blessings.



Rosh Chodesh is considered a women's holiday because women refused to participate in the sin of the golden calf ~ this was their reward.



# Rosh Chodesh Blessing: Welcoming the New Month

*An Original Blessing by Rabbi Debra Smith*

*Our God and God of those who have come before us:  
We pray that the new month of Av that You bestow upon us  
is one of goodness and blessing.*

*Please bless us with good health, long life, peace  
and success in all we do.*

*Gift us with a life filled with Torah and with  
Your Eternal Presence.*

*Bring us a life in which the things we pray for aloud  
and yearn for silently become realities.*

***Keyn y'hi ratzon*** - let it be so

Rosh Chodesh is the name given to the first day of every month in the Hebrew calendar. Rosh Chodesh means the Head of the Month. According to the [Sefer Yetzirah](#), the *Book of Creation*, each month in the Jewish year has a letter of the alef bet, a zodiac sign, one of the 12 tribes of Israel, and a controlling limb associated with it.



ט

11/5



FATHER = אב

Menachem Av

## AV FACTS:

1. Av is the 11th month of the civil year and the fifth month of the Hebrew year. It usually comes mid July through August.
2. The name Av means Father. The month is referred to as Menachem Av, which means “comforting father,” to remind us that God comforts us in difficult times.
3. The tribe associated with Av is Shimon. He was known for being a hothead, which is reflected in the story of Dina, which we will read today.
4. Aaron, Moses’ brother, died during the month of Av.
5. Tradition tells us that the letter of this month, *tet*, associated with the word *tov*, which means good, or best. In this month of negative events, we are reminded of the good that is always around us.
6. The attribute associated with Av is hearing. This attribute reminds us to concentrate on our own thoughts, and clearly listen to our own thoughts.
7. The zodiac sign is Leo.
8. Tisha B’Av, the ninth of this month, is a time designated as one of mourning over the destruction of the Holy Temple and the *galut* (exile). Tisha B’Av is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar, on which we fast and pray. It is said that on this day both of the temples in Jerusalem were destroyed.
9. The fifteenth of this month is Tu B’Av, the festival of love and loving relationships. It comforts us as it focuses on positive relationships, and gives us hope.



# WOMAN OF THE MONTH



*Dina, daughter of Jacob and Leah*

Dina, whose name means “justice” was the seventh child of Jacob and Leah. Her story is often referred to as the “Rape of Dina.”

Young Dina “went out to see the daughters of the land.” These were Canaanite women in the land of Shechem where Dina’s family were newly settled. It is thought that she went to see how the women dressed or acted, and perhaps even to befriend them. It is said that her rape by Shechem follows as a result of this, something which could be equated to modern day accusations against sexual assault and rape victims: “She shouldn’t have been there; she shouldn’t have worn that; she shouldn’t have been drinking...”

Dina certainly didn’t deserve to be the victim of violence. Perhaps, however, she was a rebellious teenager, an independent thinker, who decided to go out and see how others were living in her new surroundings. While we know that Shechem “saw her, seized her, and lay with her by force” our text also tells us that “Dina touched his heart: he fell in love with her and spoke tenderly to her” and [told his father to get her as his wife](#). (continued)

There is a [law regarding non-betrothed virgins](#) who are corrupted by a man. The man must pay a dowry, and offer to her father that she become his wife. She can never be sent away by the man. We do not know, as the Torah text never tells us, if she consented to the sex or not. A variety of commentators, from [Abraham Ibn Ezra](#) to [Nachmanides](#), offer a variety of interpretations which run the gamut from rape, to a consensual encounter, to a teenage love affair. In the Bible, once her brothers arrive, she is only mentioned by name once, but it is said in commentary that she resisted leaving Shechem's house when her brothers arrived.

In her acting on her own and going out “to see the daughters of the land” and then by resisting leaving Shechem's house, Dina seems to speak her own truth. She need not only be remembered as a victim. Dina can also be remembered as a strong woman who wanted to connect with other women and learn about how they lived and who they were, and a woman who followed her own heart.

## CONVERSATION:

- Our story begins with Dina going out to meet the daughters of the land. As a girl alone in a house of boys, she only wanted to see the girls and what they wore, and their jewelry, since in the house of Jacob there were no young girls except for herself. She wanted to learn from the other girls – this was permitted. Why do you think she was criticized for going out?
- Read [Genesis 34:3-24](#). What do you think of the relationship between Dina and Shechem?
- In [Genesis 34:26](#) all of Shechem's men are killed by Shimon and Levi, Dina's brothers. They then force Dina to leave Shechem's house against her will. Why do you think they reacted this way? How does this speak to Dina's independence?
- Do you think Dina grieved for Shechem? Would you consider the story of Dina and Shechem to be an ancient Romeo and Juliet story? Why or why not?

## NOTES FOR TEXT 1:

*Eicha* is a text of laments chanted in a mournful trope on Tisha B'Av.

## CONVERSATION FOR TEXT 1:

- What does it feel like when no one can bring you comfort?  
How do we comfort others? How does it feel to do so?
- How do you know when someone is your ally? Have you been betrayed by someone you trusted? How did you feel? How did you respond?
- How can you keep your faith in others after being betrayed?

## TEXT 1:

*Eicha, Chapter 1 Verse 2:*

*Bitterly she weeps in the night,*

*Her cheek wet with tears.*

*There is none to comfort her of her friends.*

*All her allies have betrayed her.*

*They have become her foes.*

אִיכָהּ | יִשְׁבֶּה בַדָּד הָעֵיר רַבְתִּי עִם הַיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבְתִּי בַגּוֹיִם שְׁרִתִּי  
בְּמַדִּינֹת הַיְתָה לְמָס:

## *TEXT 2:*

*Rabbi Ellen Bernstein, resource for Tisha b' Av*

*Eicha, the text of Lamentations:*

*Curiously, the Hebrew word that begins the lament, Eicha — echoes the word Ayecha from the Garden of Eden story linking these stories.*

*Ayecha is translated as “where are YOU”?*

*When God cries out, ayecha, God is confronting Adam and Eve, who are hiding from God — shirking their responsibility. In the book of Lamentations,*

*the term Eicha — translates to a mournful complaint “HOW—How is it possible?” When I read the word Eicha in light of Ayecha, I hear:*

*HOW, How could YOU let this happen to my precious garden, my earth, my creatures, my peoples?*

A landscape photograph showing a tree on a hill. The left side of the image is dominated by dark, heavy, grey storm clouds, while the right side is bright and clear with a blue sky. The ground in the foreground is cracked and dry, suggesting drought or a long dry spell. The tree is positioned on the crest of the hill, with its left side appearing bare and skeletal against the storm clouds, and its right side being full of vibrant green leaves against the clear sky.

*CONVERSATION FOR TEXT 2:*

- *Both in times of trouble and in good times, how much control do we really have? What can we control?*
- *What is our responsibility in terms of both the earth and our community? How can best meet this responsibility?*

### TEXT 3:

Tu B'Av is an unlikely day of **joy**, coming as it does in a season of **sadness**. In its essence, Tu B'Av is a hinge between the time of mourning and the time of gladness, between the pathos of reaping and the celebration of harvest.

**It is a door opening** from death back into life. Tu B'Av is a day of rebirth, when the cut-down stem yields the ripe, sweet fruit.

Rabbi Jill Hammer



### CONVERSATION FOR TEXT 3:

- What are some ways you can prepare to leave the season of mourning and enter a joyous new year?



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