

# Kol THE VOICE OF Barrack

## Eyes Wide Open: Finding Perspective in Av

I once flew into the Denver Airport — I remember it as a nice airport, but I was focused on where I was going, so I quickly deplaned and hurried out to the arriving passenger pickup area. By contrast, it was entirely a different experience when I drove cross-country to Los Angeles. Coming across Nebraska on I-80, then down 76 into Denver, the Rocky Mountains appeared on the horizon and grew magnificently and awe-inspiringly as the miles faded and we drew closer.

The Mishnah, in [tractate Taanit \(4:6\)](#), teaches, “once Av enters, we reduce celebration.” This statement follows a list of terrible things that befell the Jewish people on Tisha b’Av (the Ninth of Av): our ancestors in the generation after Egypt were punished to wander in the wilderness rather than going directly into the land; both Temples were destroyed; and major Jewish cities — Beitar and Jerusalem — were decimated by the Romans. Other disastrous events are recorded [in more-recent history](#): Jews were expelled from England, France and Spain in the Middle Ages; major events happened in both World Wars; and the AMIA community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina was bombed by Iranian terrorists in 1994. So all things considered, Tisha B’Av should be a good day to keep a low profile. But wouldn’t it be adequate to note the day itself? Why preemptively “reduce celebration” for a week (or three, in Ashkenazi practice) in advance?

The Mishnah, almost immediately afterwards, also [teaches about two wonderful days](#) that were the height of celebration in the Temple times: T”u b’Av (the Fifteenth of Av, our ‘[Jewish Valentine’s Day](#),’ and Yom Kippur (which at that time was a day of both fasting and celebration, since the day allowed atonement for national failings). The Mishnah describes some ways that Jews celebrated at that time, but really: how could there have been days of celebration so close to days of national solemnity and sadness?

We often are blessed with time to plan for festive events, especially family events: mitzvah celebrations, weddings, birthdays and anniversaries. We don’t usually have the same kind of time to plan for catastrophes; instead, those come when they come. And sometimes, they bump against each other. Jewish tradition does have ideas about which things should take precedence when one faces a conflict between obligations toward sad events, especially mourning, and festive events, like holidays, weddings, and new life. But this Mishnah gives a perspective on something different: how do you get ready for sadness?

Both sad events and happy occasions call on us to be present with them, whether they are remarkable calamities or everyday victories. Rushing through, or rushing into, either one of them doesn’t allow us the preparation or the perspective really to experience these events through anything other than a blur. When landing into Denver Airport and hurrying through the terminals, it could have been any airport in any city, but when I drove cross-country, the experience of the slow approach gave me an opportunity to put the upcoming encounter with the awesome Rocky Mountains into context.

The Mishnah invites us to consider that keeping our eyes open for what comes ahead — when we have the privilege to see it — can improve how we experience each place where we are. And moreover — as [the Mishnah points out](#) — being fully present with the sad events when they come can help make even sweeter the work necessary to recover, and even prepare us to experience celebrations in the future.

Kol Barrack (The Voice of Barrack) is a periodic publication that recognizes the new month in the Jewish calendar. In this edition, Judaic Studies and Tanach Teacher Rabbi Daniel Rosenberg, Ph.D. shares his thoughts with our school community.



Rabbi Daniel Rosenberg,  
Ph.D.

JUDAIC STUDIES & TANACH  
TEACHER

Rabbi Daniel Rosenberg just finished his sixth year at Barrack, where he teaches Judaic Studies and Tanach in the Middle and Upper School. Previously, he was the Director of Jewish Life and Learning at the Solomon Schechter Day School of Metropolitan Chicago and at Bialik High School in Montreal, and the rabbi of the Croton Jewish Center in New York. He enjoys woodworking and reading, and has been improving his relationship with his rowing ergometer. This summer, he is beginning a two year fellowship in Teacher Leadership in the Advanced Graduate Studies program at Brandeis University.