The fast of the Tenth of Tebet

This coming Sunday December 23rd, 2012, we will observe the Tenth of Tebet, a fast day, which reminds us of three tragic events.

1. The main event we remember in this day is the onset of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuḥadnezzar, the King of Babylonia. The siege of the city signaled the beginning of the battle that ultimately destroyed Yerushalayim and the first Bet haMiqdash in the year 586 BCE. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed or sent as captives to the Babylonian exile. The date of the Tenth of Tebet was recorded by the prophet Yeḥezqel, who was already in Babylonia, with the first group of Jews exiled by Nebuḥadnezzar, eleven years earlier than the actual destruction of the Temple.

2. On this day we also remember the death of Ezra haSofer (=the Scribe). Approximately in the year 516 BCE a group of Jews (roughly forty thousand) came back to Ereṣ Israel with the blessing of the Persian Emperor Cyrus. They were led by Neḥemia and Ezra the Scribe. Ezra had the responsibility to reeducate the Jews who, after more than two generations in exile, had forgotten their language, the Tora and its laws and adopted many customs and values from the Babylonian culture. In the absence of a King or any other political institution, Ezra formed the Anshe Keneset haGedola, the first "Jewish Congress", composed of 120 scholars and prophets. They established many rulings to maintain and retrieve Jewish values. For example, the days of Tora reading, the text of the Amida (main prayer), many decrees to prevent intermarriage and much more. Ezra was considered by the Rabbis as the historic link between the written Tora and the oral Tora. Together with Neḥemia, they began the building of the second Bet haMiqdash. Ezra died on a 9th of Tebet. He was regarded by our Rabbis as second to Moshe Rabbenu.

(*To be continued…*)

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by Yvette Alt Miller, from Aish