

Laws of The Three Weeks, Nine Days, and Tishah B'Av 5774

The Three Weeks and the Fast of Tammuz

The Three Weeks is a period beginning with 17 Tammuz (Tuesday, July 15th), and continuing until 9 Av (Tuesday, August 6th) and briefly after.

Overview

The Three Weeks are hinted at briefly in Rabbinic literature and become more fully developed in medieval Ashkenaz (France-Germany), especially among the Hasidei Ashkenaz (pietists). The period connects the breach of the walls of Jerusalem commemorated in 17 Tammuz and its ultimate destruction, commemorated on 9 Av. We mark this time with some customs of mourning or reduced joy. The period is also known as "*bein hametzarim*" – between the straits. There is minimal liturgical marking of this time (just the three special haftorot on the Shabbatot of the Three Weeks), so arguably these customs are critical to keep our awareness on this period and its general feeling of loss and memory.

Fast of Tammuz

The period begins with the Fast of Tammuz, usually called the Seventeenth of Tammuz (Tuesday, July 15th). This fast commemorates 5 bad events that befell the Jewish people, including Moses' breaking the tablets and the breach of the walls of Jerusalem leading to the destruction of the Temple. This is a minor fast. The fast begins at daybreak (**4:25am** this year) and ends at nightfall (**9:08pm** this year). Eating and drinking are prohibited during this time. Pregnant and nursing women are exempt from this fast, although there is a custom to fast if there is no health concern. The ill and infirm are also exempt.

Three Weeks

There are three main observances of this first period of sadness from the 17th of Tammuz to the 9th of Av (not including the customs of the Nine Days):

- 1) Limits on joyous occasions: while this begins with the custom not to marry during this time, some expand this to include large joyous outings. There is great variation of opinion and definition in the area of social outings, and a variety of customs exist. We avoid listening to live music during this time, and some are strict regarding recorded music as well. Playing music for professional needs is allowed during this time.
- 2) Haircuts: our custom is not to get haircuts during this time. Shaving is the source of significant debate, and there are various customs including not shaving during this time, shaving for Shabbat, or shaving as usual.
- 3) Shehecheyanu (Who sustained us... until this day): we avoid saying the Shehecheyanu blessing (and consequently performing the discretionary acts that would induce that blessing – eating a new fruit or wearing new clothes). For a mitzvah (like Redemption of Firstborn) or a situation which cannot be postponed, we do recite the blessing. We are lenient to allow it on Shabbat and Rosh Hodesh as well. While Shehecheyanu is not recited, the blessing "Hatov vехаMeitiv" (Who is good and does good) is said on its appropriate occasions.

The Nine Days

Overview

The Nine Days is a period beginning with *Rosh Hodesh Av* (Monday, July 28th), and continuing until 9 Av (Tuesday, August 6th). These days are discussed in the *Mishnah*, which says that when Av enters, we diminish our joy. This diminishing is as we enter the intensified period leading up to the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple(s), commemorated on 9 Av. Much of the practice recorded here is strongly-accepted custom and not law, and some is formal law, mostly mimicking the laws of mourning. Beyond the three main observances of this first period of sadness, the Three Weeks, which were discussed separately (1- Limits on joyous occasions, 2- No haircuts, 3- recital of *Shehecheyanu*), the Nine Days have many more limitations on joy or rituals meant to evoke the Destruction of the Temple. Broadly, this is a time period of “holding our breath”: we try to minimize major activities like construction, moving, traveling, medical procedures, and the like.

Meat and Wine

The custom is not to eat meat and wine during these days, including poultry and grape juice. The exceptions to this are after a *siyyum* (completion of a major section of Torah learning) or other mitzvah-related meal, those who cannot eat other food, or who are ill. On *Shabbat Hazon* (Shabbat, August 2nd), one may eat meat and drink wine.

Laundering and Wearing Laundered Clothes

During the Nine Days, the custom is not to wash clothes (even to be worn after Tishah B'Av) nor to wear freshly laundered clothes (this includes bed sheets and handkerchiefs). One may do laundry in the case of running out of clothes and for children's clothes. One may wear fresh underclothes when the ones being worn accumulate dirt or sweat or smell bad, and one may wear fresh clothes for *Shabbat Hazon*. One who only has fresh clothes should dirty the clothes – for example, by putting them on the floor for a little while. Clothes should also not be repaired during this period.

Washing and Bathing

The custom is not to wash one's entire body during the Nine Days. One may wash one's hands and face in cold water during this time. Showering is permissible if one becomes dirty on too many parts of the body to spot-clean, or if one becomes very sweaty. The widespread practice to shower during the Nine Days is because of sweatiness during this period, or because of the additional principle that someone who suffers when not showering for some period (an *istenis*) should shower during the Nine Days. Any showering should be done in (not oppressively) cold water and to get clean, not to luxuriate.

Shabbat Hazon

As Shabbat is a time to refrain from public mourning, the Shabbat before Tishah B'Av has aforementioned relaxations of the customs of the Nine Days: one may eat meat and drink wine, wear freshly laundered clothes (although our custom is not to launder Shabbat clothes during the Nine Days), use a new tablecloth, and cut fingernails (for those who do not do so during the Nine Days). *Havdalah* should be made on grape juice/wine, but it should be given to a child old enough to understand blessings but not at the age of mourning the Temple. In the absence of a child, the one who recites *Havdalah* may drink the liquid. *Kiddush Levanah* is deferred until after Tishah B'Av.

Tishah B'Av

Overview

Tishah B'Av is a day of national mourning for the tragedies which befell the Jewish people from Biblical times until the modern era. Many tragedies happened on Tishah B'Av, and others are simply remembered on this day. Like a day of *shivah*, Tishah B'Av is designed to be a day of uninterrupted focus on our national losses. Activities which distract from that remembering and mourning should be minimized. One should search for maximally meaningful ways to connect to the sorrows of our people.

Erev Tishah B'Av

No *Tahanun* is recited at *Minhah*. The final meal eaten before the fast should not contain more than one cooked dish. A common practice to satisfy this is to eat a substantial meal first (even preferably without bread), recite the concluding blessings for that meal, and then have the final meal (*seudah hamafseket*) consisting of only bread (and customarily an egg dipped in ashes). The final meal should be eaten sitting on the floor or a low chair if possible, and no *zimun* should be recited, so a group which would otherwise recite *zimun* together should be careful to eat separately. The fast begins at sundown, **8:08pm** this year.

Tishah B'Av Night

Maariv is recited, followed by *Megillat Eikhah* and a short *Kinot* (elegies) service. The synagogue lights are dimmed, and the ark cover is removed. One customarily limits one's comfort in sleeping at night, usually by removing a pillow.

Prohibited Pleasures

From sundown until the fast ends at nightfall, five categories of pleasures are prohibited: eating/drinking, anointing, washing, wearing leather shoes, sexual relations. Torah study is also severely restricted.

- The prohibition on eating/drinking applies to all adults, but one who is sick in any danger should eat as much as is necessary. Customarily, mothers who have recently given birth are exempt from fasting for the first seven days, but not afterwards. Nursing does not automatically constitute an exemption from fasting, nor does pregnancy. Please consult the rabbinic staff with any questions.
- The prohibition on anointing does not include deodorant, but does include makeup.
- The prohibition on washing includes any kind of wetting the hands, so even dishwashing should be avoided. Exceptions include washing before prayer, to remove dirt (including after the bathroom), or sweat. Any washing which can should be limited to the fingers (to the knuckles).
- The prohibition on wearing leather shoes includes leather in any part of the shoe. Although there are exceptions in case of traveling long distances on foot or travel in the rain, we try to be strict in an age where comfortable shoes of many non-leather materials are available.
- The prohibition on Torah study excludes sad passages and laws of the day, such as *Eikhah*, *Midrash Eikhah*, Book of Job, the prophecies of destruction in Jeremiah, the last chapter in *Talmud Moed Katan*, and the section in *Talmud Gittin* dealing with the destruction.

On Tishah B'Av, in keeping with the strictest customs of mourning, we refrain from greetings, but may answer someone who greets us without realizing the prohibition. This prohibition, contrary to popular belief, extends throughout the day. Like a mourner in *shivah*, we sit on the ground or on a low chair on Tishah B'Av, until *hatzot* (halakhic midday – **1:01pm** this year).

Tishah B'Av Day

Shaharit is recited without *tefillin* or *tallit gadol*. *Tahanun* is omitted, as well as *El Erekh Apayim* and *Lamnatzeah*. The Torah reading is Deuteronomy 4:25-40, and the *haftarah* is Jeremiah 8:13-9:23.

At *Minhah*, *tefillin* and *tallit gadol* are donned with their traditional blessings. The Torah reading is Exodus 32:11-14 and 34:1-10, and the *haftarah* is Isaiah 55:6-56:8. *Anenu* and *Naheim* (special for Tishah B'Av) are added in the *Amidah*. If *Nahem* is forgotten, it can be recited in the *Retzeh* blessing without its concluding blessing line. If that point has passed, one need not repeat the *Amidah*.

The fast concludes at nightfall, **8:52pm** this year. One refrains from eating meat and drinking wine, laundering, washing and bathing, and haircuts, until midday the next day.

Feel free to contact any member of our rabbinic team with questions about specific situations.



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