Halachos of the 9 Days

Adapted and modified From “Guidelines to the Three Weeks” by Rabbi Elozor Barclay and Rabbi Yitzchok Jaeger

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Overview

When do the laws of the nine days commence?

At nightfall on the eve of Rosh Chodesh Av. According to some opinions, the laws commence at sunset.

What is forbidden during the nine days?

All forms of rejoicing are forbidden. One must also refrain from certain activities as a sign of mourning. The main restrictions are:

- Making improvements to one’s home or garden.
- Laundering.
- Wearing new or laundered clothing.
- Making or buying new clothes.
- Eating meat or drinking wine.
- Bathing for pleasure.

Whoever refrains from rejoicing during the first ten days of Av will merit to witness ten miraculous changes that will occur at the end of days.

Which types of improvements to one’s home are forbidden?

It is forbidden to do any building or construction work that is unnecessary for basic dwelling. For example, one may not build a vacation home or an extension to one’s home. It is also forbidden to paint or decorate the home, or replace curtains, cabinets etc.

May one make repairs to a house?

All repairs and basic upkeep of the house are permitted. If walls have been damaged by mold or dampness, they may be repaired but not painted.

Laundering during the Nine Days

What is included in the prohibition of laundering?

Adults’ clothing may not be laundered or dry-cleaned, even if the clothing will not be worn until after Tisha b’Av. Towels, dishcloths, sheets, and tablecloths may also not be laundered.
May one wash children’s clothes?

- Clothes of children who constantly soil themselves may be washed during the nine days. This is approximately until the age of five or six.
- Clothes of older children (until bar/bas mitzvah) may be washed until the week of Tisha b’Av, if necessary.

Are there any situations when adults’ clothes may be washed?

- A person who does not have clean clothes to wear on the Shabbos before Tisha b’Av may wash what is required on Thursday or Friday.
- A person who has only one garment (of a particular type) may wash this garment when necessary until the week of Tisha b’Av. The same applies to a person who has many garments but they are all dirty. According to some opinions, such clothes may be washed in hot water without detergent, even during the week of Tisha b’Av.

Why is it forbidden to wear new or laundered clothing?

A person who has lost a close relative may not wear laundered clothes for thirty days. In a similar vein, it is forbidden to wear laundered clothes during the nine days as a sign of mourning. One may certainly not wear any new clothes during the nine days.

Must one wear dirty clothes for nine days?

No. Although it is forbidden to wear freshly laundered clothes, one may wear clothes that have already been worn for a short time. Therefore, a person should prepare the clothes that he wishes to wear during the nine days, by wearing them for about half an hour before Rosh Chodesh. One can be lenient, not having to prepare underwear, socks, and pajamas.

Must one prepare Shabbos clothes before Rosh Chodesh?

No. The main custom is to permit wearing freshly cleaned clothes in honor of Shabbos.

Must children prepare their clothes for the nine days?

Children from the age of nine should not wear freshly laundered clothes during the week of Tisha b’Av, and should prepare them beforehand.

What if one forgot to prepare clothes before Rosh Chodesh?

He should place them on a dirty or dusty floor to remove their freshness. If the floor is clean, he should tread on them to crease them. Alternatively, he may put them in the laundry hamper with dirty clothes for a short time.

May one prepare clothes by wearing them on Shabbos?

Since it is forbidden to prepare anything on Shabbos for the weekday, one may not wear fresh clothes on Shabbos specifically for this purpose. However, if one needs to undress on Shabbos, he may use the opportunity to wear different clothes when dressing again. Therefore, when dressing on Shabbos morning, one may wear fresh clothes, and save the clothes worn on Friday night for the following weekdays. The same applies if one goes to sleep during the day of Shabbos.

May one use fresh bed linen?

It is forbidden to change the bed linen during the nine days (unless it’s dirty), even in honor of Shabbos. Therefore, one should change the linen two days before Rosh Chodesh, in order to use them before the nine days.

May one provide clean bed linen for visitors?

Yes. Similarly, a hotel is permitted to change the linen for guests who arrive during the nine days.

May one use fresh towels?

Freshly laundered hand towels and bath towels may not be used during the nine days. Therefore, one should prepare several towels before Rosh Chodesh by using them at least once after they have been laundered. If all the
prepared towels became completely soiled during the nine days, it is permitted to use a fresh one. Also, a fresh hand towel may be used on Shabbos.

May one use a fresh tablecloth?

A freshly laundered tablecloth may not be used unless the tablecloth becomes completely soiled. A fresh tablecloth may be used on Shabbos.

Making and Buying Clothes during the Nine Days

What is included in the prohibition of making clothes?

One may not make any new clothes even if the garment will not be completed until after Tisha b'Av.

May one repair garments?

- Simple repairs are permitted when necessary, e.g. sewing a tear, adding a patch, sewing on a button.
- According to most opinions, it is permitted to shorten or lengthen a garment.

Which types of clothing may not be purchased?

It is forbidden to purchase all types of clothing, including those that do not require the bracha shehecheyanu, e.g. shoes, socks, underwear. This applies even if one does not intend to wear them until after Tisha b'Av.

What if there is a special sale during the nine days?

One may buy items at such a sale, if there is a considerable saving and one will not find them again at this price after Tisha b'Av.

What if one has no suitable footwear for Tisha b'Av?

Since it is forbidden to wear leather shoes on Tisha b'Av one must remember to buy suitable footwear before Rosh Chodesh. If a person forgot to do so, he may buy simple cheap footwear during the nine days.

May one buy and/or give gifts?

- It is permitted to buy and give inexpensive gifts, e.g. on the occasion of a bris or bar mitzvah.
- It is forbidden to buy or give expensive gifts that will give considerable joy, e.g. an engagement ring.
- Clothes may not be bought even as a gift, e.g. for a newborn baby. If they were bought before the nine days, they may be given during the nine days.

May one buy new furniture and appliances, e.g. fridge, stove, etc.?

It is usually forbidden to buy important items during the nine days, since they bring a person much pleasure. If the old item broke during the nine days and cannot be repaired, a new one may be bought if needed urgently.

May one buy small household items?

It is permitted to buy items of minor importance that are needed regularly in the home, e.g. pots, pans, plates, etc.

May one buy sefarim?

One may buy sefarim that are needed for Torah study during the nine days.

Eating Meat and Drinking Wine during the Nine Days

Why is it forbidden to eat meat during the nine days?

- Eating meat gives a person pleasure.
- In order to remember the animal sacrifices that have ceased due to the destruction of the Temple.

May a sick or weak person eat meat?

- A sick or weak person may eat meat.
- A healthy person who has a limited diet and is unable to eat dairy foods may eat poultry, or preserved meat
that is at least three days old. If possible, he should refrain from eating this from the seventh of Av.

Can one eat meat on Shabbos?

Yes. Children who are not yet accustomed to wait until night for their Shabbos meal may be served meat one or two hours before Shabbos.

May one taste the fleishig Shabbos food on Friday?

It is a mitzvah to taste the Shabbos food every Friday afternoon to ascertain whether it is well flavored. However, during the nine days, the food may not be swallowed but should be spat out.

May one eat meat at a seudas mitzvah?

It is permitted to eat meat in honor of the mitzvah. This includes a bris, pidyon haben, siyum, and bar mitzvah on the boy’s birthday.

- Drinking wine gives a person much joy.
- In order to remember the wine libations that have ceased due to the destruction of the Temple.

Is grape juice also forbidden?

Yes.

Are other alcoholic drinks forbidden?

- If the drink does not contain any wine it is permitted.
- According to some opinions, one should refrain from all alcoholic drinks except for a mitzvah or health reasons, since they give a person much joy.

May one drink the wine of havdalah?

There are different customs about this:

- According to some opinions, the wine should be given to a child between the ages of six and nine. If such a child is not available, the person reciting havdalah should drink the wine himself.
- According to other opinions, the person reciting havdalah should drink the wine himself.

How much wine should be drunk?

One should drink the majority of a reviyis. If possible, one should drink a complete reviyis in order to recite an after-b’racha.

Should one use grape juice for havdalah rather than wine?

According to some opinions, this is preferable. Indeed, according to these opinions, one is not required to give the cup to a child when using grape juice.

Should one use beer for havdalah rather than wine or grape juice?

No. One may not use beer when wine and grape juice are easily obtainable.

May one drink wine on Rosh Chodesh Av?

No (unless it is Shabbos).

May one drink wine at a seudas mitzvah?

Yes (see question 145). This includes the wine used for bensching.

May one drink the wine used at the bris ceremony?

Although this wine is used in honor of the mitzvah, the custom is to give it to a child aged six or above, or to the mother of the baby if she is present. The child or mother should listen to the b’racha that is recited over the wine, and not speak until he/she drinks it. If neither is available, the person reciting the b’racha should drink the wine himself.
What if a person recited a b’racha over wine or grape juice and realized his mistake before drinking it?

He should drink a minute amount in order not to recite a b’racha in vain.

Is swimming permitted during the nine days?

Swimming for pleasure or exercise is forbidden. Opinions differ regarding swimming for medical reasons, e.g. to provide relief from physical pains. If possible, one should use other forms of exercise.

What other activities should be avoided during the nine days?

Since the fortune of the Jewish people is not favorable during these days, one should try to avoid a lawsuit with a gentile until after Tisha b’Av. According to some opinions, the case should preferably be postponed until after the fifteenth of Av, and according to others until the month of Elul.

Is kiddush levana recited during the nine days?

The main custom is to wait until after Tisha b’Av, since kiddush levana should preferably be recited in a state of happiness. Some have a custom to recite it during the nine days in order to perform the mitzvah as soon as possible, or to avoid the risk of missing the opportunity entirely.

What is the seuda hamafsekes?

This is the final meal eaten before the fast commences. Since there are severe restrictions to this meal, the custom is to eat a regular meal early in the afternoon before mincha, and the seuda hamafsekes after mincha. One should take care not to overeat at the first meal, in order to be able to eat the seuda hamafsekes.

How is the seuda hamafsekes eaten?

The custom is to eat it while sitting on the ground (or if need be, a pillow or low chair), in order to feel grief over the destruction of the holy Temple. The mood should resemble that of a person who has just lost a close relative and is waiting for the funeral to begin.
Must one remove his shoes?

No, this is not required until sunset.

What should be eaten at this meal?

- Bread should be eaten.
- The custom is to eat only cold hard-boiled eggs and water, besides the bread.
- If a person does not like eggs, he may eat lentils instead.
- A piece of bread should be dipped in ashes, and one should say, “This is the meal of Tisha b’Av”.

May one have any drinks?

- If possible, one should drink only water.
- The custom is to permit tea or coffee.
- One should not have soft drinks such as orange juice, cola, etc.

Should zimun be recited if three men are present?

No. If possible, the men should sit apart from one another during the meal. Nevertheless, even if they sit together, zimun is not recited.

May one eat any other foods?

- The custom is to eat only eggs or lentils, but if a person wishes he may eat a different cooked food.
- It is forbidden to eat more than one cooked food.
- One may eat any raw fruits and vegetables, but it is proper to refrain in order that the meal be simple and humble.

May one eat or drink after bensching?

It is permitted to eat or drink again until sunset, unless one had firm intention not to do so. It is preferable to say or think before benschung that one is not accepting the fast until sunset.

May one sit on a regular chair after benschung?

This is permitted until sunset.