



The Three Weeks

The Three Weeks is a period beginning with 17th of Tammuz (this year: **Thursday, July 6th**), and continuing until the 9th of Av (this year: **Thursday, July 27th**).

Overview

The Three Weeks are hinted at briefly in Rabbinic literature and become more fully developed in medieval Ashkenaz, especially among the *Chasidei Ashkenaz* (pietists). Because of this, Sephardic tradition differs greatly from Ashkenazic practice; the discussion below reflects the Ashkenazi tradition. The period connects the breach of the walls of Jerusalem commemorated on the 17th of Tammuz, to its ultimate destruction, commemorated on the 9th of Av (*Tisha B'Av*). We mark this time with some customs of mourning or reduced joy. The period is also known as "*Bein Hametzarim (Eichah 1:3)*" – "Between the Straits". There is minimal liturgical marking of this time (just the three special *Haftarot* on the Shabbatot of the Three Weeks), so arguably these customs are critical to keep our awareness of this period and its general feeling of loss and memory.

Fast of Tammuz

The period of the Three Weeks begins with the Fast of Tammuz, usually called the Seventeenth of Tammuz. This fast commemorates 5 tragic events that befell the Jewish people:

1. Moses smashed the tablets.
2. The *Tamid* (daily) offering was canceled (First Temple).
3. The walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans, leading to the destruction of the Second Temple on Tisha B'Av.
4. Apostamos burned a Torah scroll prior to Bar-Kochba's revolt (Second Temple).
5. Apostamos placed an idol in the Temple courtyard (Second Temple).

The Fast of Tammuz is a minor fast. The fast begins at daybreak (**4:18am**) and ends at nightfall (**9:10pm**). Eating and drinking are prohibited during this time. Pregnant and nursing women are exempt from this fast. Those who are ill and infirm, and those where fasting poses a health risk are exempt as well.

*** If you have any questions concerning fasting, please consult any member of the rabbinic team. ***



Customs of the Three Weeks

There are three main observances of this first period of sadness from the 17th of Tammuz to the 9th of Av. **Note:** More stringencies apply during the Nine Days.

- 1) **Limits on joyous occasions:** The prevailing custom is to refrain from marrying during this period. Others expand this to include any 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 to refrain from getting haircuts during this period. The topic of shaving is a source of significant debate, and there are various customs including: not shaving during this time (or during the Nine Days), shaving for Shabbat, or shaving as usual.
- 3) **Shehecheyanu** (Who sustained us...to reach this day): We avoid saying the *Shehecheyanu* blessing (and consequently avoid actions that prompt it – eating a new fruit or wearing new clothes). For a mitzvah (like *Pidyon Haben* - Redemption of Firstborn) or a situation which cannot be postponed, we do recite the blessing. We are lenient about saying *Shehecheyanu* on Shabbat as well. While we do refrain from reciting *Shehecheyanu*, the blessing "*Hatov Vehameitiv*" (Who is good and does good) is said on appropriate occasions, since the text of that blessing does not imply that this is a celebratory time.

The Nine Days

Overview

The Nine Days begins with *Rosh Chodesh Av* (**Wednesday, July 19th**), and continues until *Tisha B'Av* (**Thursday, July 27th**). These days are discussed in the Mishnah¹: "When Av enters, we diminish our joy". Our sadness is intensified as we draw closer to the day commemorating the destruction of the Temple(s) on *Tisha B'Av*. Much of the practice recorded here is strongly-accepted custom and not law. Those practices that are formal law are patterned after the laws of mourning.

Beyond the three main observances of the first period of sadness, the Three Weeks, which were discussed above, the Nine Days have many more limitations on joy. Broadly, this is a time period of "holding our breath": we try to minimize major activities like construction, moving, traveling, hiking, medical procedures, business transactions, and the like.

¹ Taanit 4:6



Meat and Wine

The prevailing custom is not to eat meat and drink wine during these days, including poultry and grape juice, as they are symbols of joy. The exceptions to this are: those who cannot eat other food, those who are ill, and the celebratory meal after a *siyyum*² or other mitzvah-related gatherings. On *Shabbat Hazon* (**July 22nd**), one may eat meat and drink wine. For *Havdalah* guidelines, see below.

Laundrying and Wearing Laundered Clothes

During the Nine Days, the custom is to refrain from washing clothes (even those that will be worn after *Tisha B'Av*). We also refrain from wearing freshly laundered clothes and from using freshly laundered bed sheets. One may do laundry in the case of running out of clothes or for children's clothes. One may wear fresh underclothes as usual, and one may wear fresh clothes for *Shabbat Hazon*. One who only has fresh clothes should make them less fresh – for example, by putting them on the floor for a little while or laying them on the bed and lying on top of them for a bit. Clothes should also not be repaired during the Nine Days.

Washing and Bathing

The custom is to refrain from washing one's entire body during the Nine Days. 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 sweating 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 lukewarm water and to get clean, not to luxuriate.

Swimming

Swimming for purposes of sport or physical therapy is allowed, but not for simple luxury, fun and physical comfort. Small children are permitted to go swimming. Slip 'n' slides, sprinklers, water balloon fights, or putting your feet in water is not considered swimming because they lack capability for full-body immersion and are permissible.

Trips/Hikes

Our custom is to refrain from taking trips or hikes, as the Nine Days are considered a time of danger, and it is appropriate to refrain from special or unique outings (such as a theme park).

² **Siyyum:** completion of a major section of Torah learning



Shabbat Hazon

We acknowledge the coming of *Tisha B'Av* on Shabbat *Hazon* (**July 22nd**) with the singing of *Lekha Dodi* to a sad melody, which is also used for the *kinah Eli Tziyon*³. The *Haftarah* is recited in the *Eichah trop*⁴. At the same time, as Shabbat is a time to refrain from public mourning, the Shabbat before *Tisha B'Av* has relaxations of the aforementioned customs of the Nine Days: in preparation for Shabbat one may shower in warm water and cut fingernails (for those who do not do so during the Nine Days), and on Shabbat one may eat meat and drink wine, wear freshly laundered clothes (although our custom is not to launder Shabbat clothes during the Nine Days), and use a new tablecloth.

One may use grape juice for *Havdalah* as well; if possible it is best to have a child under Bar/Bat Mitzvah age drink it. However, if a child is not available, an adult may drink it, keeping to the minimum amount (2 oz). Note that there is no *Bracha Acharonah* of *Al Hagefen* after drinking this small amount. *Kiddush Levanah*⁵ is deferred until after *Tisha B'Av*.

Tisha B'Av

Overview

Tisha B'Av (**Thursday, July 27th**) 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 *Tisha B'Av*, and others are simply remembered on this day. Like a day of *shiva*, *Tisha 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 Tisha B'Av

The final meal before *Tisha B'Av* - *Seudah Mafseket* - is eaten in a state of "mourning", sitting on the floor, eating a piece of bread and a hard boiled egg⁶ with some ashes. The *Seudah Mafseket* is not eaten as a communal meal. Everyone present sits apart on the floor and recites *Birkat HaMazon* (Grace After Meals) alone to avoid reciting as a group (*zimun*), which increases joy. One may have a larger meal earlier in the evening, and eat the traditional *Seudat Mafseket* right before the fast.

³ The most well-known of the Elegiac poems recited on 9 B'Av

⁴ Cantillation melody

⁵ Special prayer recited when seeing New Moon

⁶ Beans or lentils can be substituted for the egg



The fast begins at **8:18pm**. *Maariv* is recited, at **8:20pm**, followed by *Megillat Eichah* and a short *Kinot* (elegies) service. For this night, the synagogue lights are dimmed, and the ark cover is removed.

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.

- **Eating/drinking:** This prohibition applies to all adults, but one who is sick or is in any medical 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 unless they are feeling ill. Nursing does not generally automatically constitute an exemption from fasting, nor does pregnancy.
- **Anointing:** This prohibition does not include deodorant, but does include makeup.
- **Washing:** This prohibition includes any wetting the hands, so even dishwashing should be avoided. Exceptions include washing upon awakening (*Netilat Yadayim*), washing before prayer, removing dirt (including after the bathroom), or sweat. Any washing which can, should be limited to the finger knuckles.
- **Leather shoes:** This prohibition includes leather in any part of the shoe. Although there are exceptions in the case of traveling long distances on foot or traveling in the rain, we try to be strict in an age where comfortable shoes of many non-leather materials are available.
- **Tashmish Hamitab:** Our general practice is to refrain from sexual touch in addition to refraining from having sexual relations. Some extend this to sleeping in the same bed as well.

Additional Customs

In addition to the five primary prohibitions above, we also refrain from Torah study on *Tisha B'Av*, as this too increases our joy. However, we may learn sad passages and laws of the day, such as *Eichah*, *Midrash Eichah*, the 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.



We customarily limit our comfort for sleeping at night, usually by removing a pillow. On *Tisha 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 *Tisha B'Av*, until *chatzot* (*halakhic* midday – **1:02pm**).

Tisha B'Av Day

Shaharit is recited without *tefillin* or *tallit gadol*. *Tabanun* is omitted, as well as *El Erekh Apayim* and *Lamenatzeah*. The Torah reading is Deuteronomy 4:25-40, and the *Haftarah* is Jeremiah 8:13-9:23. An extended *Kinot* service is added to *Shacharit*.

At *Mincha*, *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. *Aneinu* and *Nacheim* (special for *Tisha B'Av*) are added in the *Amidah*. If *Nachem* 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, **Thursday, July 27th, 9:02pm**. *We normally refrain from eating meat and drinking wine, laundering, washing and bathing, and haircuts, until midday the next day. This is based on the fires of the Temple continuing to burn on the 10th of Av. When Tisha B'Av falls on a Thursday, as it does this year, one may bathe and launder and take haircuts as early as necessary to prepare for Shabbat.*

**** Feel free to contact any member of the rabbinic team with any questions! ****

“Whoever mourns over Jerusalem merits to see it in its joy” (Bava Batra 60b)

