

Three Weeks: Three Stages of Mourning

Before I begin, I want to encourage all to embrace the appropriate attitude necessary for these days. In our hemisphere The Three Weeks fall *inconveniently* during the heat of the summer. Therefore there are those that either do not appreciate this time of year or G-d forbid ignore the vital Mitzvoth and Minhagim of this time of year. This is not right. The same way that it would be viewed as callous, insensitive and disrespectful to not mourn for an immediate relative, so too when it comes to the Three Weeks, we are bereft without the Beit Hamikdash and Hashem's Shechinah in our presence. Our sages prepared for us the appropriate way to engage in National Mourning at this time. The Halachot teach us how to act as well as how to feel. May we merit fulfilling the Mitzvoth and Minhagim appropriately.

As mentioned – when the Three Weeks arrive we will enter a national mourning period for the Beit Hamikdash and Hashem's Shechina that has been absent since 70 CE. The laws are similar to mourning for a parent albeit in reverse order. There are four stages:

1. **The “Three Weeks”:** The least severe stage starts three weeks preceding the Ninth of Av – which begins this year on Sunday June 27th.
2. **The “Nine Days”:** The next-most severe stage begins on Rosh Chodesh Av- this year on Sunday July 11th.
3. **“Week” of Tish’a b’Av:** The most severe mourning is during the “week” of Tish’a b’Av (this year since Tisha B’av is on Sunday there is no Week of Tisha B’av).
4. **Erev Tisha B’av and Tisha B’av itself** – the most tragic day on the Jewish calendar.

Three Weeks: Restrictions

Forbidden during the Three Weeks :

- Saying Shehecheyanu;
- Shaving; (this does not include women's shaving)
- Haircuts;
- Listening to music (even recorded);
- Getting married.
- One may move into a new home or apartment, whether owning or renting, during the Three Weeks before Tish’a b’Av. Ideally, one should not move into a new place during the Nine Days but if necessary, it is permitted.
- One may swim during the Three Weeks but not during the Nine Days.
- Activities for socializing are not prohibited during the Three Weeks before Rosh Chodesh Av (but the activities might be prohibited for other reasons such as if they are dangerous).

Three Weeks: At Risk Activities

We are discouraged from doing what could be considered potentially dangerous activities during the Three Weeks before and including Tish'a b'Av. Some people do not travel during this time but it is not forbidden to do so. Non-urgent surgery should be scheduled for after this period.

First Nine Days of Av (excluding Shabbat)

Restrictions during the Nine Days before Tish'a b'Av are the same as for Three Weeks, plus:

You may not eat meat or drink wine.

Exceptions

1. One may drink wine on Shabbat (but not on Rosh Chodesh Av or erev Shabbat.)
2. One may drink wine for havdala if there is no child between ages 6 and 10 to do so. Alternatively many say Havdalah on beer.
3. One may eat meat or drink wine at a brit, siyum, or pidyon ha'ben.

Note: One may not wear freshly laundered clothes, or wear or buy new clothes. * It is customary to try on clothing that will be worn during the 9 days beforehand so that they are not considered freshly laundered.

Note: One may wear clean socks and undergarments.

One may not wash oneself for pleasure.

Note: Rinsing off or bathing in tepid water to clean one's soiled body is permitted (except on Tish'a b'Av). So you may bathe or shower during the Nine Days if you are dirty, sweaty, or smelly; but the custom is not to do so in hot water.

One may not say shehecheyanu except on Shabbat.

Note: Therefore one should not buy new fruits or new items that will be enjoyed during the Nine Days..

The custom is not to be involved in a court case opposing a non-Jew during the Nine Days.

Reason: The Nine Days are considered to be an inauspicious time for Jews. But if one cannot avoid it, it is not forbidden and you may proceed.

It is customary not to start new projects or make investments during the Nine Days if they can be delayed without incurring a loss.

Reason: The Nine Days are considered to be an inauspicious time for Jews.

One should not paint the house during the Nine Days.

In a regular year we do not make a Mezuman at the meal preceding Tish'a b'Av (se'uda ha'mafseket). This year there is no Seudat Mafseket.

Reason: Only bread dipped in ashes and a hard-boiled egg should be eaten and that is not a meal for socializing or togetherness.

This Year when Tish'a B'Av begins on Saturday night, the custom is as follows:

Say baruch ha'mavdil when Shabbat ends.

Say the blessing on the candle after ma'ariv.

Do not say the remainder of havdala at all. Instead:

Wait until Sunday night, after the fast is over, and then.

Say only the blessing on the wine and the paragraph of hamavdil blessings.

Note: You will not say the blessings on the spices for havdala for that week.

On Tish'a B'Av, as on Yom Kippur, when we wash our hands ritually:

- We wash our hands only up to the knuckle that connects our fingers to the rest of the hand (thumb: second knuckle; fingers: third knuckle).
- Regarding Dirt from your hand, you may wash wherever the dirt is on your hand.

On Tish'a b'Av, we do not brush our teeth using water. One may use a dry toothbrush as well as floss his teeth.

Tish'a b'Av is similar to the day of burial of a person and so tefillin are not worn in the morning.

The afternoon has a lower level of mourning and so tefillin (and talit gadol) are worn at mincha.

Activities for Tish'a B'Av until halachic midday

- Until halachic midday, one should do things and think about things that will keep us in humbled spirits and remind us of our national plight.
- Sitting: One may not sit on any kind of seat that is higher than 12 inches (30 cm) above the floor or ground until after halachic midday – this year 1:07pm.
- After halachic midday on Tish'a B'Av, one may do any activities except the five activities forbidden on Tish'a B'Av (washing, anointing, eating/drinking, marital intercourse, wearing leather shoes) or the Nine Days. We also do not greet anyone, or reply to someone else's greeting to you, including saying "hello," "good morning," "how are you," etc., until after dark.
- Harchakot – At night on Tisha Bav a couple abstains from any closeness whatsoever as if she is in a Halachik state of Niddah. In the daytime Harchakot need not be observed, but affectionate touch is prohibited throughout the day. The Mikvah is closed on Tisha B'av.

Mincha – as mentioned earlier one would don Tallit and Tefillin at Mincha. While doing so one should recite Shema as well as the Brachot skipped at Shacharit (see Art Scroll Machzor)

We pray that Hashem should show his mercy on us and return His Shechinah to Yerushalayim where we will rebuild the Beit Hamikdash. At that time, Tisha Bav will become a festival and no longer a fast day.

The Talmud states in Taanit – Only he who properly mourns for the Temple, will merit to celebrate its rebuilding.

LESHANA HABOAH BEYERUSHALAYIM