Laws and Customs of the Nine Days and Tisha B’Av

**Rosh Chodesh Av**
With the onset of the month of Av, our mourning practices become more intense, and parallel those of shloshim (the first 30 days after the loss of a relative).

**Bathing**
Recreational bathing and swimming is to be avoided.  Since we live in a society where we bathe regularly, one may shower for hygienic purposes.

**Eating**
We do not eat meat or drink wine during the nine days, with the exception of Shabbat.  The reason for this is that meat and wine are associated with festive occasions. Meat may be consumed as part of a seudat mitzvah such as a siyum (completion of the learning of a significant portion of Torah text) or brit milah.

**Laundry**
Because we are in a state of mourning, we do not wear freshly laundered clothing during the nine days (with the exception of Shabbat). The restriction does not apply to underwear and other garments worn directly on the skin.

**Major Purchases**
We also avoid making major purchases and having major work done on our homes during this time.  If delaying the purchase/work will cause a significant financial loss, one may make the purchase.  The item should not be used until after Tisha B'Av.

**The Week of Tisha B'Av**
The Sepharadic community does not enact the majority of the stringencies of the 9 days until the week in which Tisha B'Av falls (shavua she-chal bo).  When Tisha B’Av falls on Shabbat and is observed on Sunday, Sephardim treat the entire week preceding the fast as shavua she-chal bo except for preparations required for Shabbat on Thursday and Friday of that week.  (See Shulchan Aruch OH 551:3).

**Tisha B'Av**
Tisha B'Av is the most tragic day in the Jewish calendar.  The Mishnah in Ta'anit tells us that five tragedies occurred on the 9th of Av:  The sin of the spies occurred resulting in the generation of the desert not being allowed to enter the Land of Israel; The first Temple was destroyed; the second Temple was destroyed; Betar – the final Jewish stronghold against the Romans – fell; the spot where the Temple stood was plowed.  Additionally, the Jews were forced out of Spain by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in 1492 on Tisha B'Av.

Every effort should be made to fast on Tisha B'Av.  Anyone for whom fasting poses a serious medical (or other) issue should consult with their rabbi about their halachic options.

**When Tisha B’Av Falls on Shabbat**
Though we do not observe Tisha B’Av on Shabbat, the fast begins at sunset (shkia) of Shabbat.  One must finish their meal by sunset and thoroughly wash out their mouth.  Because it is Shabbat we do not eat the traditional seudah mafseket (see below).  One should not hold back from what they normally eat for Seudah shlishit, and we are permitted to eat meat if that is our custom.

One may continue to wear their regular shoes until the beginning of Ma’ariv.
Please note that we will hold Mincha earlier than normal on Shabbat afternoon to allow people to eat Seudah Shlishit before the onset of the fast.  There will be no Seudah Shlishit at shul.
There are many posekim who advise against learning Torah which causes happiness after mid-day of Shabbat, and they advise only learning material that would be appropriate for Tisha B’Av.  However, there are also significant posekim who allow learning for all of Shabbat.

**Sexual Relations**
There is debate among the posekim whether sexual relations (and other “private matters”) are allowed when Tisha B’Av falls on Shabbos and its observance is delayed until Sunday.
Practically speaking, the Shulchan Aruch allows marital relations on Shabbat.  The Rema notes that there are those who forbid it, and we should therefore be stringent.  However, the Gra allows marital relations and the Mishnah Berurah allows it if it is the woman’s mikvah night.

**Havdallah**
We do not recite Havdallah as normal because we cannot drink wine.  The proper procedure is as follows (please see Shulchan Aruch OH 556): After Shabbat, before Ma’ariv say baruch ha-mavdil bein kodesh le-chol.  (Blessed is He Who distinguishes between the holy and profane.)
Say the paragraph of Atah chonantanu  in the fourth blessing of the Amidah. Before the reading of Eicha we recite the blessing of Boreh me’orei ha-eish (Blessed is God Who creates flames) over a lit candle.  We do not recite any of the other blessings of Havdallah at this time.

At the conclusion of the fast on Sunday night we recite Havdallah over a cup of wine.  We recite only the blessing of Boreh pri ha-gafen and ha-Mavdil.    (See the Mishnah Berurah OH 556:3 who explains that we may recite Havdallah over wine and drink it ourselves despite the restrictions against wine during the nine days.)

**Seudah Mafeseket**
The final meal we eat before the fast is the Seudah Mafseket.  Traditionally, it comprises only one course – bread and a hard boiled egg dipped in ashes.  The seudah mafseket should be eaten while sitting on the ground, or low to the floor, and should not be eaten in a group.

We do not eat the seudah mafseket this year because it is Shabbat.

**Prohibition of the Day**
Tisha B'Av has the same prohibitions as Yom Kippur
no eating or drinking
no bathing
no anointing with oil
no leather shoes
no marital relations

Additionally, on Tisha B'Av we are limited in the Torah that we may learn.  Since learning Torah brings us joy, we only study material that relates to the somber mood of the day.
Because Tisha B'Av parallels shiva -- the most intense period of mourning – we also have the custom to sit low to the floor for the first half of the day.  Many people also have the custom of sleeping on the floor or mitigating their comfort during sleep by using one pillow less than they normally do.

Greetings
We do not greet people on Tisha B'Av, as is the practice of mourners.  If someone greets us, we can return the greeting.

Morning preparations
In the morning of Tisha B'Av, we may not wash our hands and face in the normal manner.  Rather, just as on Yom Kippur, we wash negel vaser (morning washing of the hands) only up to our knuckles.  We may use the residual water on our fingers to wipe away sediment from our eyes.  The bracha of al netilat yada'im is said.

Talit and Tefilin
We do not wear talit or tefilin during Shacharit on Tisha B'Av to show our intense mourning.  Tefilin is referred to as pe'er – the Jewish people's glory.  We do not display our glory during our most intense time of mourning.  Rather, we delay wearing tefilin until Mincha when the intensity of our mourning is less severe.  The talit katan is worn without a bracha.  Those who do not wear a talit during davening should answer amen to the bracha of someone who does (at mincha).

Liturgical additions
At night we recite the Book of Eicha (Lamentations) in which the prophet Yermiyah (Jeremiah) describes the destruction of Jerusalem.
As part of the evening and morning services we recite kinot -- liturgical poems lamenting the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem.  Because Tisha B'Av is the day on which we commemorate the many tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people, we also recite kinot for other calamities including the Crusades, the expulsion of Jews from Spain, and the Holocaust.
At the same time, we do not recite tachanun on Tisha B'Av.  When Meshiach comes, Tisha B'Av will become a day of great celebration; The prophet Jeremiah refers to it as "moed" – a holiday.