

**A Crescendo of Mourning for the Temple:
The Three Weeks from the Fast of *Shivah Asar Be-Tammuz* to *Tishah Be-Av*
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The laws of personal mourning guide the bereaved individual from a period of intense mourning, when the loss of a loved one is usually most deeply felt, through stages of decreasing intensity: *Shiva*, *Shloshim*, and the year-long practices of mourning observed for the loss of a parent. Each summer, as we mourn the destruction of both Temples, we experience as a community a process exactly the opposite of the usual pattern of personal mourning. Instead of lessening our mourning practices as time goes on, we gradually increase the intensity of our sadness, beginning with the fast of *Shivah Asar Be-Tammuz* (which falls out this year on Thursday, July 9) and culminating three weeks later with the deep mourning of *Tishah Be-Av* (Wednesday night/Thursday July 29-30). Just as the personal process of mourning is marked by significant points, so is the communal process of mourning for the Temple marked by stages. Our expressions of mourning become more apparent at each stage.

We begin with “The Three Weeks” and the fast of Tammuz, commemorating the Roman army’s breach of Jerusalem’s walls, a significant step toward the Second Temple’s destruction. Starting from the 17th of Tammuz, Ashkenazim do not hold weddings or get haircuts. We also avoid saying the blessing of *She-Hechiyyanu*, and therefore refrain from eating new fruits and buying or wearing expensive new clothing. On each Shabbat during this period, we read a *haftarah* which expresses the sad themes and warnings of destruction.

The Talmud (*Ta’anit* 26b) instructs that as the month of Av begins (Tuesday night, July 21), we are to mute our sense of joy, as this month brings with it the day on which both Temples were destroyed. During “The Nine Days”, Ashkenazim abstain from meat and wine (except on Shabbat or for the infirm) because of their association with celebration (Sefaradim abstain beginning with the Sunday before the 9th of Av). Dry-cleaning clothing is delayed until after *Tishah Be-Av*. Freshly dry-cleaned clothing (other than clothing for Shabbat) should not be worn. Activities for the purpose of celebration or pleasure, such as beautifying or expanding one’s home, are best suspended until after the 9th. Swimming and even extended bathing for pleasure are avoided as well.

Our mourning reaches its depth on *Tishah Be-Av* itself, the day of ultimate tragedy. History has singled out this day for catastrophe: besides the destruction of both Temples, the 9th of Av has brought many other terrible events, including the evil report of the *meraglim*, the scouts sent to reconnoiter the Land of Israel.

Our final meal before the fast, the *Se’udah Ha-Mafseket*, is eaten while seated low to the ground and traditionally consists of hard-boiled eggs, water, and bread symbolically dipped in ash. At sundown on Wednesday night, July 29 (8:14 PM) the fast begins and all eating must cease. From sundown the following are prohibited as well: learning Torah (other than those portions which address the Destruction or the laws of mourning); washing with water; applying oils, creams, or fragrances for pleasure; engaging in marital relations; and wearing leather shoes. Most people wear shoes made of canvas or other non-leather materials. Pregnant, nursing, and postpartum women, as well as the infirm, should seek additional guidance about fasting.

Because we are all mourners on *Tishah Be-Av*, we behave accordingly: we refrain from offering greetings the entire day, sit on low chairs until midday, and limit business dealings. In addition to the everyday prayers in the morning, we recite *Kinnot*, poems of lament and mourning, and delay wearing *tallit* and *tefillin* until *Minchah*.

Swimming, wearing dry cleaned clothing, and consuming meat and wine are permitted only after midday on the 10th of Av. These restrictions extend beyond the 9th because the Temple continued to burn until this time. This year, because the 10th of Av is erev Shabbat, one may get a haircut and dry clean one’s clothing before midday.

“Whoever mourns over Jerusalem shall merit witnessing its rejoicing” (*Ta’anit* 30a). May our observance of this sad time merit our greeting *Tishah Be-Av* in the future with rejoicing at the rebuilding of the Temple.

Times for 17th of Tammuz - Thursday, July 9

Fast begins: 4:21 AM

Shacharit: 8 AM

Mincha: 8:05 PM followed by Ma’ariv: 8:30 PM;

Fast ends: 9:00 PM

Times for 9th of Av- Wednesday & Thursday, July 29-30

Wednesday, July 29

Mincha: 6:30 PM

Fast Begins: 8:14 PM

Ma’ariv followed by Eicha: 8:30 PM

Thursday, July 30

Shacharit & Kinnot: 8:30 AM (Chatzot: 1:01 PM)

Mincha: 7:45 PM followed by Ma’ariv: 8:15 PM

Fast Ends: 8:45 PM