

Bein Hametzarim 5781 – Updated June 27, 2021

Very soon, we will begin to mark the period known as “The Three Weeks” during which we mourn the destruction of the Beit Ha-Mikdash and our ongoing state of exile. In Hebrew, it is known as “Bein Ha-Metzarim.” There is a pasuk in Eicha that says:

גָּלְתָהּ יְהוּדָה מֵעֲנִי וַיִּמְרָב עֲבֹדָהּ הִיא וְשָׁבָה בְּגוֹיִם לֹא מְצָאָה מְנוּחַ כָּל רִדְפֶיהָ הַשְּׁיִיגוּהָ בֵּין הַמְּצָרִים

– “Judah has gone into exile Because of misery and harsh oppression; When she settled among the nations, She found no rest; All her pursuers overtook her In the narrow places.” The Midrash explains that the term בין המצרים refers to the three weeks between Shiva Asar B’Tammuz and Tisha B’Av.

Here is a short guide that will address a number of matters pertaining to this time period, and I will also address issues that are specific to our observance this year. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any specific/personal questions. Much of this guide reflects Ashkenazic practice; if you are Sefardi and are unsure of your practice, please consult with me or a Sefardi rabbi.

Shiva Asar B’Tammuz – Sunday, June 27, 2021

- According to the Gemara (Taanit 26b), Shiva Asar B’Tammuz commemorates the day that the first Ten Commandments were broken, the *korban tamid* (daily offering) was discontinued, the walls of Yerushalayim were breached, and Apostamos burned a Torah and placed an idol in the Beit Ha-Mikdash. According to the Gemara, it was only during the Second Temple period during which the walls were breached on the 17th of Tammuz, but as indicated by Tanakh, during the First Temple period, the walls were breached on the 9th of Tammuz. Since the second destruction was more severe and still affects us, we observe the latter date, even though the fast overall is based on a biblical institution (Zechariah 8:19).
- While sometimes, the fast is observed on Sunday because it is pushed off from Shabbos, in this case, the actual day falls on Sunday.
- The fast **begins** at 3:37 am and **ends** at 9:05 pm.
 - If you would like to eat before the fast begins, you should stipulate that before going to sleep the night before.
- Shacharis will take place in shul at 7:15 AM and Mincha/Maariv at 8:00 PM.
- For those not davening with a minyan, please keep the following in mind:
 - No changes in silent Shemoneh Esrei for Shacharis.
 - After Shemoneh Esrei, say Selichos (the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy should only be sung with Torah trope when said without a minyan, as they are *devarim she-bikdusha*), Avinu Malkeinu, and tachanun.
 - At Mincha, add “Aneinu” in Shema Koleinu and say Sim Shalom instead of Shalom Rav. Avinu Malkeinu, followed by Tachanun.
- It is important to be mindful of the mood of the day – meant to instill a sense of mourning and to arouse *teshuva* – and to choose activities accordingly. This is especially relevant on a Sunday.
- Be sure to hydrate the day before the fast starts. However, *one should not explicitly state they are drinking to prepare for the fast*, since one may not prepare from Shabbos to a weekday.

- If you begin to feel sick, you may break your fast, even if it is not a life-threatening “pikuach nefesh” situation.
 - Please be especially careful, given the COVID-19 situation.
 - Pregnant and nursing women need not fast.
 - If you normally take medicine with water and it is difficult to take without water, it is recommended to either add something bitter or use mouthwash. If those options are not possible, it is permissible to take the medicine with the smallest quantity of water possible.
 - It is permissible to brush teeth and use mouthwash. Rav Hershel Schachter allows the use of Listerine PocketPaks as well. One should be careful not to swallow water.

Torah During *Bein Ha-Metzarim*

Please feel free to listen to my past shiurim on topics related to this season (accessible at <https://www.yutorah.org/search/?teacher=83160&category=0,234187>):

I encourage everyone, whether you are able or not to attend shiurim, to learn Torah related to the themes of the season over the course of the three weeks. Some recommended resources include

- YUTorah.org
- [Maggid Book's Three Weeks Companion](#)
- *In the Narrow Straits* by Dr. Erica Brown
- *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways* edited by Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter (based on *kinos* explanations by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik zt”l)
- *Jeremiah* by Rabbi Binyamin Lau
- [Virtual Beit Midrash](#)
- Of course, relevant sections in Tanach and classic halachic works that address the laws of this time period.

General *Bein Ha-Metzarim* Practices (from June 27-July 9)

- We refrain from making the blessing **Shehechyanu** during the Three Weeks, in order to minimize our joy (Maharil) and/or because we experience a sense of tragedy that does not call for thanking God for allowing us to reach this time (Magen Avraham). Therefore, **one should not buy** new clothing upon which one would say Shehechyanu. One should also avoid buying new cars, appliances, or other items that give one joy. However, if the item(s) in question benefit more than one person (such as a family), the *berakha* may be Ha-Tov v’Ha-Meitiv, and one could purchase them. If waiting until later would incur financial loss, or the item will not be available, one may be lenient to purchase, although it may be advisable to not use it until after Tisha B’av.
- We do not conduct weddings during the three weeks, although a couple may get engaged during this period. In a similar vein, we do not attend live musical performances. Some say that one may not listen to any **music** at all, even privately; others say a cappella music is acceptable but not instrumental; others say that only live music is prohibited. Even if one listens to music, it should still reflect the mood of this time period. Additionally, even if one is lenient during Sefirat Ha-Omer, it may be appropriate to be more stringent during the Three Weeks since music was part of the Beit Ha-Mikdash rituals, and we mourn that absence.
*Rav Hershel Schachter has said that this year, if one is at risk of being depressed *

- Social gatherings and **celebrations** in general should be avoided during this time.
- **Haircuts** are prohibited during this period. Many men do not **shave** at all during this period, even on Erev Shabbat. However, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik zt”l held that one who shaves every day may do so during this period; certainly, if it is necessary for one’s livelihood it is permitted.
- Some poskim recommend avoiding risky activities during this period as well as particularly fun and pleasurable activities, although these prohibitions are not explicit. Some recommend this specifically for the Nine Days.

The Nine Days (from July 10-17)

- The Talmud says משנכנס אב ממעטין בשמחה – when Av enters, we diminish our joy. Some poskim and communities only applied some of the prohibitions above to this period. Either way, we increase our mourning practices during the first nine (or this year, ten) days of Av.
- There is a widespread custom to **not eat meat or drink wine** during this period to commemorate the discontinuation of the sacrifices and to minimize our joy. This does not apply to Shabbat during the Nine Days. When making *havdalah* on Motzaei Shabbat (July 10), the custom is to use beer, coffee, or pure orange juice. However, if there is no other alternative, grape juice can be used.
- We do not do **laundry** or dry cleaning, even if a non-Jew does it for us. This applies to both clothes (other than undergarments) and non-clothing items (such as linens and towels). Likewise, we do not wear freshly laundered clothing, even if it was done before the Nine Days began. There are exceptions:
 - We wear fresh clothing on Shabbat as we normally would.
 - One may wash children’s clothes if necessary.
 - If one wishes to do laundry before the Nine Days, briefly throwing them on the floor or wearing them before use is permitted.
- Rama writes that Ashkenazic practice is to refrain from **bathing** during the entire nine days. However, nowadays we shower more frequently, and it is unreasonable to go a week without showering. One should therefore bathe regularly, but it is best to shower in cooler water and for a shorter period of time than normal.
- Barring potential financial loss, men should refrain from **shaving**.
- The Talmud discusses avoiding **litigation** with non-Jews during this period, as it is considered to be a period of poor luck.
- Please see above regarding music.
- The Talmud discusses limiting activities in business, building, and planting in order to minimize joy. Some try to avoid expanding business activities. In any of these cases, one may be lenient where there is financial loss involved.

Shabbat Before Tisha B’av – Erev Tisha B’av (Shabbat, July 17)

- This Shabbat is known as “Shabbat Chazon,” based on the haftarah we read that describes God’s first appearance to the prophet Yeshayahu.
- One may wear regular Shabbat clothes and shower as normal on Erev Shabbat.
- Because Tisha B’av does actually fall on Sunday, private mourning practices generally are not operative. Therefore, marital relations are permitted on Shabbat.
 - Learning Torah is permitted. However, the common practice is to not learn Pirkei Avot.
- Like with Shabbat before 17 Tammuz, it is important before a summer fast to be sure to drink a lot of water, but one should be careful not to say they are doing this explicitly in a way that suggests preparing on Shabbat for the next day.

- Mincha will be held at 6:00 pm. Tzidekatecha Tzedek is not said. Seudat Shlishit will not be held in shul.
 - Families may still have a regular Seudat Shlishit, even with meat and wine.
- **Please be sure to finish eating by 8:23 PM.** One may still bentch afterwards.

Observance of Tisha B'av (Motzaei Shabbat, July 17/Sunday, July 18)

- Tisha B'av traditionally mourns the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash, the day that God decree that the generation of B'nei Yisrael who left Egypt would not enter Eretz Yisrael, Beitar was captured, and Turnus Rufus plowed the sight of the Beit Ha-Mikdash (Ta'anit 26a). Since the Gemara, it has taken on greater significance, mourning the Crusades, the expulsion of Jews from Spain, France, and England, and the Shoah (including the approval of the Final Solution in 1941).
- **Shabbat ends at 9:13 pm.** We do not make a full *havdalah* until Sunday night, but one should say “Baruch Hamavdil Bein Kodesh L'Chol” before changing shoes and coming to shul. Additionally, if one will not be in shul for Ma'ariv, you should light a *havdalah* candle and say “Borei Me'orei Ha'esh” at home.
 - It is suggested to bring shoes to shul before Shabbat, and then one can change them after Barechu.
 - We will begin **Ma'ariv** and **Eicha** at 9:30 PM.
 - One should deprive themselves of comfort on some level the night of Tisha B'av while sleeping. For example, if one sleeps with two pillows, it is suggested to use one.
- **Sunday**
 - Two shacharis minyanim will be held: 8:30 AM in the Main Shul (with introductory remarks and a few explanations), and 9:00 AM in the Bais Hamedrash.
 - If one is davening alone, remember:
 - Tallit/tefillin are not worn until mincha. One may still wear a tallit katan without a beracha.
 - One does not say Tachanun on Tisha B'av. Avinu Malkeinu is also omitted, even though it is a fast day.
 - At Mincha, all individuals recited “Aneinu” in Shomeia Tefillah and “Nachem” in Bonei Yerushalayim at Mincha. Sim Shalom replaces Shalom Rav.
 - The **five inuyyim** that apply to Yom Kippur apply to Tisha B'av: we refrain from eating/drinking, wearing leather shoes, bathing, using perfumes/lotions, and marital relations (and other forms of affectionate touch; non-affectionate touch is permitted during the day of Tisha B'av).
 - Pregnant and nursing women should fast. However, like anyone else who is sick, should she feel that fasting will cause undue agony and/or medical complications, she may eat. One who eats should say make havdalah first (on coffee or pure orange juice) and say Nachem in Birkat Hamazon.
 - Poskim are more hesitant about brushing teeth on Tisha B'av. Mishna Berurah permits rinsing one's mouth in the case of great discomfort but caution should be taken not to swallow. Listerine PocketPaks are permitted.
 - Deodorant is permissible on Tisha B'av, preferably unscented.
 - We do *netilat yadayim* in the morning up until the knuckles.
 - We sit on the floor or on a low stool until **chatzot** (1:01 PM).
 - Early mincha will be held at 1:40 PM.
 - We **refrain from learning Torah** on Tisha B'av. With that said, I encourage everyone to choose activities that are consistent with the mood of Tisha B'av – in that

sense, learning those areas of Torah pertaining to Tisha B'av (e.g. its halachot, laws of mourning, Eicha and its midrashim, Yirmiyahu, Iyov) or Holocaust literature is appropriate. See above for additional recommendations. More to be announced.

- Rabbi Kerbel will give a shiur at 2:15 PM (after first mincha; subject to change) on the topic of “The Future Beit Hamikdash.”
- We refrain from **greeting** each other throughout the day (of course, if greeted, one should respond gently).
- Late mincha will be at **7:50 PM** (note the time change).
- **Fast ends at 8:59 PM**. One should try to say Kiddush Levana after the fast.
- One should refrain from laundry, cutting hair, shaving, and eating meat/drinking wine until Monday at *chatzot* (1:00 PM).

I would like to end by reminding ourselves that we should not lose sight of the forest for the trees. While *halacha* helps us externally display our sense of mourning, the essence of mourning is the internal feelings we have, and as hard as it is for anyone to do, we should strive to take time throughout these three weeks to contemplate the meaning of the observance of this period. Of course, throughout this time especially, both on the fast days and in between, we should strive to treat each other and all of Klal Yisrael with the utmost respect.

God willing, next year, we will be in Yerushalayim, celebrating Tisha B'av as a holiday rather than a day of mourning.

כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחתה!

One who mourns Yerushalayim will merit to see it in its joy (Ta'anit 30b)!

May we greet Mashiach with Klal Yisrael together in the near future.

Rabbi Judah Kerbel