



Preparing for the Three Weeks, Nine Days and Tisha B'Av

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The laws of 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 as the pain abates: the profound grieving of *shivah* is succeeded by the more subtle sadness of *sheloshim*, which is muted still further in 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 mourning. Instead of lessening our mourning as time goes on, we gradually increase the intensity of our sadness, beginning with the fast of Shivah Asar B'Tammuz (Sunday, July 24th) and culminating three weeks later with the deep mourning of Tishah B'Av (Motzei Shabbat, August 13th – Sunday, August 14th). Just as the personal process of mourning is marked by significant points (seven days, thirty days and a full year), so is the communal process of mourning for the Temple marked by stages. Our expressions of mourning become more apparent at each stage.

- ❖ **Shivah Asar B'Tammuz:** We begin with the fast of 17 Tammuz (observed this year on Sunday, July 24th), commemorating the Roman army's breach of Jerusalem's walls – a significant step toward the Second Temple's destruction. Starting from this day, we do not hold weddings or take haircuts. We also avoid saying the blessing of *shehechianu*, 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 these themes and warnings of destruction.
- ❖ **The Month of Av:** The Talmud (Ta'anit 26b) instructs that as the month of Av begins (Friday, August 5th), we are to curtail our sense of joy as this month brings with it the day on which both Temples were destroyed. We abstain from meat and wine (except on Shabbat or for the infirm) because of their association with celebration. Washing or dry-cleaning clothing, other than children's clothing and other circumstances of great necessity, is delayed until after Tishah B'Av. Freshly laundered clothing (other than undergarments and clothing for Shabbat) should not be worn until the 10th of Av. (It is recommended that clothing to be worn between 1-10 of

Av be worn very briefly before the 1st of Av.) Activities for the purpose of celebration or pleasure, such as beautifying or expanding one's home, are best suspended until after the 9th. Swimming for pleasure is avoided as well.

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

This year the 9th of Av falls out on Shabbat and the commemoration of Tisha B'av is postponed until Motzei Shabbat/Sunday. As a result, a number of changes should be noted. First, Shabbat remains in full force as it would on any other week. Therefore, one may consume meat and wine, wear leather shoes and sit in regular chairs throughout the day. Furthermore, no Seudah HaMafseket is eaten.

The fast begins with sunset but Shabbat continues through nightfall. As a result, Minchah will be held early at 6:00PM to allow everyone to return home for Seudah Shlishit, which must be completed before 7:57PM. Please note that preparation for Tisha B'av (changing shoes, etc.) should begin no earlier than 8:39PM. To accommodate for this restriction, Maariv will begin at 9:00PM allowing those who wish to change at home to do so. You are welcome to leave the appropriate shoes at shul before Shabbat as well. Havdalah, consisting of only the brachah on grape juice and *Hamavdil*, is postponed to Sunday night. On Saturday night, prior to the reading of Megillat Eichah, we will recite the brachah of *borei m'orei ha-esh* over a candle in shul.

Once Shabbat is over and Tisha B'av has fully begun, the following are prohibited: Eating, drinking, learning Torah (other than those portions which address the destruction or the laws of mourning); applying oils, creams, or fragrances for pleasure; engaging in marital relations; bathing and wearing leather shoes.

Particularly this year, as Tisha B'av is postponed from its proper date, pregnant, nursing, and postpartum women, as well as the infirm, should seek additional guidance about fasting.

Because we are all mourners on Tishah B'Av, we behave accordingly: we refrain from offering greetings the entire day, sit on low chairs until midday (1:00PM) 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.

Because Tisha B'Av is observed this year on the 10th of Av, swimming, bathing, haircuts and laundering clothing are permitted immediately

following the conclusion of the fast (8:26PM). Consuming meat and wine are not permitted until morning.

“Whoever mourns over Jerusalem shall merit witnessing its rejoicing” (Ta’anit 30a). May our observance of this sad time enable us to merit greeting Tishah B’Av in the future with rejoicing at the rebuilding of the Temple and the return of God’s presence to our midst.

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