

## **Preparing for the Three Weeks, Nine Days & Tisha b'Av**

### **Rabbi Elie Buechler**

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 (Thursday, July 9th) and culminating three weeks later with the deep mourning of Tisha B'Av (Wednesday night, July 29th – Thursday, July 30th). 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 (July 9th), 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 fast begins at 4:21 A.M. and concludes at 8:58 P.M.

**The Month of Av:** The Talmud (Ta'anit 26b) instructs that as the month of Av begins (Wednesday, July 22nd), we are to mute 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 Tisha 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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:** Wednesday night, July 29th – Thursday, July 30th our mourning reaches its depth on Tisha 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.

Before the onset of the fast, the Seudah HaMafseket is eaten. This meal traditionally consists of only one cooked food and should not be eaten with a group of people. The fast begins at 8:14 P.M.

Once Tisha b'Av begins, 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.

Pregnant, nursing, and postpartum women, as well as the infirm, should seek additional guidance about fasting.

Because we are all mourners on Tisha b'Av, we behave accordingly: we refrain from offering greetings the entire day, sit on low chairs until midday (1:02 P.M.) 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. The fast concludes at 8:42 P.M.

Most years, swimming, bathing, haircuts, washing clothing, consuming meat and wine are not permitted until the following day after midday. As

the tenth of Av is Erev Shabbat, these are all permitted starting Friday morning in honor of Shabbat.

“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.

There are no changes to the practices of the three weeks due to COVID-19, barring any illness.

*For more information please contact Rabbi Buechler at [ebuechler@jewishcenter.org](mailto:ebuechler@jewishcenter.org)*