

# Three Weeks Quick Reference

By Rabbi Yaakov Hoffman

Washington Heights Congregation, New York, NY

**Note:** This is by no means a complete guide to the laws of the three weeks and Tisha B'Av; it is only meant to draw attention to key issues. Please do not hesitate to [e-mail](#) or call/text me with specific questions or for more information.

The footnotes generally only address *halachot* that are not explicit in the classical legal sources. References to all books, unless otherwise indicated, are to the section or volume on the laws of the Three Weeks.

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## **I. The Seventeenth of Tammuz**

The fast begins at dawn (when the first light appears on the eastern horizon)<sup>1</sup> and concludes at the appearance of three medium-sized stars.<sup>2</sup> At night, one may eat and drink without restriction.<sup>3</sup>

The only prohibitions are against eating and drinking—bathing, wearing shoes, anointing, and marital relations are permitted. One may rinse out one's mouth and brush one's teeth, taking care not to swallow.<sup>4</sup>

Anyone with even a minor medical reason not to fast should not fast. Pregnant and nursing women are exempt as well.<sup>5</sup> Healthy people who find themselves feeling unwell during the fast, substantially beyond the discomfort normally experienced by those refraining from food and drink, may break their fast.

Those who are permitted to eat should not indulge, but rather eat only simple foods required for nutrition. Similarly, one should not eat in a restaurant.<sup>6</sup>

Children under Bar and Bat Mitzvah need not be trained to participate in this fast.

When the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz falls on Shabbat, the fast is delayed until Sunday. When the fast is delayed, the standard of who is exempt from fasting is lowered even more.

## **II. The Three Weeks**

Ashkenazim observe certain mourning practices beginning the night of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz until after Tisha B'Av ("The Three Weeks"). Sefardim generally begin only on Rosh Chodesh Av, although customs vary.

Weddings are not conducted during the Three Weeks. Engagement parties without dancing are permitted.

One should not listen to lively music during the Three Weeks. Classical music for relaxation, or calm Jewish music for spiritual inspiration, is permitted.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> העיקר בזה דאזלינן בטר ראיית האור בפועל ולא ד' מילין לפני הנץ החמה דאין אנו בקיאים בזמני הנץ והשקיעה המדויקים. והיינו עלוה"ש האסטרונומי כשהשמש 18 מעלות מתחת לאופק. אבל אין למחות בידי המאחרים זמן זה מעט, וכגון 16.1 מעלות. אבל במחשבים עלוה"ש כ-72 דקות לפני הנץ החמה הנהוג בכל מקום ובכל זמן יש למחות בכל תוקף.

<sup>2</sup> כשהשמש קצת יותר מ-7 מעלות מתחת לאופק, עיין בספר הזמנים בהבנה. וכן כתב הגר"מ פיינשטיין שיש להקל בזמן זה בשעת הדחק, אבל לענ"ד זמן זה הוא לכתחלה. וראיתי מי שכתב להקל להפסיק הצום בשקיעת החמה הנהוגה, כדאיתא בתענית (דף יב.) "כל תענית שלא שקעה עליו חמה לאו שמייה תענית." וישתקע הדבר שאין ברור כלל שהשקיעה הנהוגה היום היא מה שכינו חז"ל "שקיעת החמה" וגם קיי"ל לחומרא כר' יוסי שבין השמשות כהרף עין וגם לפעמים קרי לצאה"כ שקיעת החמה ואכמ"ל.

<sup>3</sup> לא ראינו בזמן הזה מי שמחמיר בזה.

<sup>4</sup> פסקי תשובות תקס"א, ובזמננו כולם מצטערים בלא זה.

<sup>5</sup> אע"פ שהרמ"א (תקנ"א) כתב שנהגו להחמיר כשאין מצטערות, בדורות חלשים אלו מורים שלא להתענות כעיקר הדין. אבל נ"ל

שאין להקל בזה כל כ"ד חודש של לידה כשאינה מצטערת, רק בתקופת ההנקה בפועל.

<sup>6</sup> שמעתי מהרה"ג רב"ח סיימאן שליט"א.

<sup>7</sup> ירושלים במועדיה.

Haircuts and shaving are not allowed. However, if appearing unshaven will affect one's livelihood, one may shave for work. If one shaves or trims one's beard weekly in honor of Shabbat, many permit doing so during the Three Weeks as well.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, if one's mustache interferes with eating, one may trim it.

Leniencies in this matter are much less forthcoming after Rosh Chodesh Av—all the more so beginning the Sunday before Tisha B'Av (“*shavua she-chal bo*”), when haircuts are forbidden by Mishnaic law (when Tisha B'Av is observed on Sunday, *shavua she-chal bo* is not in force).

Married women may cut their hair to prepare for the *mikvah*, or in order to better facilitate covering it. Cutting nails is allowed until *shavua she-chal bo*, and even then is permitted for *mikvah* purposes or other mitzvah needs.

It is customary to avoid reciting *she-hecheyanu* on a new fruit or garment during the Three Weeks, except for on Shabbat. However, if a time-sensitive opportunity to recite the *beracha* presents itself during this period, one may do so. One may purchase new clothing of the type that does not necessitate a *she-hecheyanu*.

One should intensify one's awareness of and sorrow over the destruction of the *Beit ha-Mikdash* during this time.

### III. The Nine Days

When Av enters, one reduces one's happiness. In addition to a general reduction in levity and good humor starting on Rosh Chodesh Av, there are specific mourning customs during the “Nine Days” until Tisha B'Av that go beyond those of the Three Weeks. The Nine Days are also considered a time of bad luck for the Jewish people, so one should avoid being party to a court case or a somewhat dangerous activity during this time.

One should not engage in renovations to one's dwelling during the Nine Days, unless they are structurally necessary. One should also not make purchases of new items that are particularly gladdening.

One may neither launder nor use freshly laundered clothing, towels, and linens, unless necessary for hygienic purposes. For example, undergarments may be changed when required for cleanliness but not to enjoy the freshness of a clean garment.<sup>9</sup> Guests at a hotel or another's home

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<sup>8</sup> שבזמננו ניכר טובא הנוול למי שמתגלה בתדירות והוי פגיעה בכבוד שבת שהיא אסורה מדינא, ודוחה את מנהג ג' השבועות. ומדינא דמתניתין מותר תמיד לכבוד שבת אף בשבוע שחל בו. אמנם לאחר ראש חודש לא שמענו מתירים בזמננו לכבוד שבת וצע"ק.

<sup>9</sup> שו"ת שיע נחום. אע"פ שרבו המשיגים על הפתחי תשובה שהסתמך עליו, מ"מ הסברא מוכרחת ובפרט בזמן הזה שנשתנה לגמרי הגישה לכביסה וכולם מחליפים תחתונים וגופיות בתדירות מטעמי נקיות. ובשיח נחום שם התיר אף במכנסיים וחולצות שמחליפים משום זיעה ולכלוך רק לא בחליפה וכד' ובמקום צורך יש לסמוך על זה.

may use clean sheets. Items that may be used freshly laundered should preferably be laundered before the Nine Days; when impossible, it is permitted to wash them during the Nine Days.<sup>10</sup>

Even if a garment was worn for a brief period of time before the Nine Days, it is no longer considered freshly laundered and may be worn. Many people prepare clothing before Rosh Chodesh for use during the Nine Days by wearing it for a few minutes.<sup>11</sup> On Shabbat, one may wear freshly laundered garments, and may even prepare garments for weekdays by wearing them a bit on Shabbat.<sup>12</sup>

A woman may launder white garments for use during her seven clean days. Young children's clothing may be laundered. One may apply a bit of water to any garment to rub out a stain. New garments may not be worn, purchased, or made.

One may not bathe or swim for pleasure during the Nine Days. One may wash one's face, feet, and hands in cool water. One may also wash for medical reasons or to remove dirt.

Nowadays, most people shower regularly for hygienic purposes, especially in the summer. The following are guidelines for showering during the Nine Days: The shower must actually be necessary to remove sweat, dirt, or odor—one may not shower simply because that is part of one's routine (e.g., showering every morning in order to feel revitalized for the day). The water should be as cool as one can tolerate (but does not need to be freezing cold). Soap should be applied only to those body parts that are actually soiled.<sup>13</sup> One should exit the shower immediately upon finishing washing and not stay any longer to enjoy the feel of the water.

When preparing for Shabbat, one may wash one's hands, head, and feet in warm water even if not necessary to remove dirt.<sup>14</sup> Otherwise, the standard rules for washing during the Nine Days apply. When Rosh Chodesh Av falls on Friday, one may shower normally to prepare for Shabbat.

Women are permitted to prepare for a *hefsek tahara* and *mikvah* immersion as usual. Men who are careful to immerse in the *mikvah* before Shabbat or for *Tvilat Ezra* may do so during the Nine Days, and may wash beforehand to avoid soiling the *mikvah*.

Some Sefardim observe the prohibitions of laundry and bathing only during *shavua she-chal bo*. It should be noted that laundry is prohibited by Mishnaic law during that time, whereas bathing is only a *minhag* even then.

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<sup>10</sup> דנראה כמסירה דעת מן האבלות, אבל במקום צורך יש להקל כמ"ש בשיח נחום שם.  
<sup>11</sup> וצע"ק שבדרך כלל אין שינוי של ממש בבגד וגם אולי אין צריך לזה כי מחליפים בגדים אלה בתדירות ומותר ללבוש נקיים בתשעת הימים.  
<sup>12</sup> ואין בזה משום הכנה שהרי נהנה בשבת עצמה.  
<sup>13</sup> ודלא כהלכות חג בחג שאסר בסבון לגמרי, ופסק זה תמוה בזמן הזה שסבון נחשב הכרחי להסרת לכלוך ואיננו משום סיכה כלל.  
עיי' בקובץ הלכות וירושלים במועדיה.  
<sup>14</sup> חיי אדם.

One may not eat meat or drink wine after Rosh Chodesh. Ashkenazim are stringent even on Rosh Chodesh itself but Sefardim are lenient. This includes all types of meat and poultry (but not fish), and even grape juice (but not wine vinegar). Other alcoholic beverages are permitted. One who requires meat for health purposes should, if possible, eat poultry rather than red meat. If possible, all meat should be avoided even for health reasons beginning on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Av.

Foods that were cooked together with meat (e.g., the barley and onions from a cholent) are not allowed even if one removes the actual meat. Foods that were cooked in a meat utensil are permitted. One should not use wine as an ingredient in cooking or baking.

Meat and wine are permitted on Shabbat and in the context of a mitzvah-meal. For example, one may serve meat and wine at a *siyum* or a bris during the Nine Days. One may even recite *birkat ha-mazon* over a cup of wine at such a meal (although not otherwise, since it is not an absolute obligation to do so).

One may drink the wine of *Havdalah*. Some have the custom to give the *Havdalah* wine to a child (approximately age 7-10, or at least under Bar/Bat Mitzvah) when one is available. If one makes *Havdalah* on grape juice, this is certainly unnecessary and one may drink the cup oneself.<sup>15</sup> In any event, this is not a reason to use *chamar medinah* (beer, coffee, orange juice, etc.) for *Havdalah*.<sup>16</sup>

It is customary not to recite *Kiddush Levana* until after Tisha B'Av.

#### IV. Shabbat Chazon

The classical Ashkenazic custom was to wear weekday clothes on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av. Since there was not such a major difference between Shabbat and weekday clothes in medieval times, wearing weekday garments was not such a disgrace to Shabbat.<sup>17</sup> Nowadays, however, it would usually be immediately recognizable if one wore a full weekday outfit on Shabbat. Thus, one should only wear those weekday garments on Shabbat Chazon that will not be noticeable (e.g., undergarments, *kippah*; for some people even belt, shoes, hat).<sup>18</sup>

Sefardic custom is to wear all Shabbat clothes as usual even on Shabbat Chazon. Some Ashkenazim, especially in Israel, follow this practice.<sup>19</sup> One should remove one's Shabbat clothes immediately after *Havdalah*, however.

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<sup>15</sup> הלכות חג בחג פרק ד' סעיף נ'.

<sup>16</sup> שיש להסתפק טובא מה נקרא "חמר מדינה" בזמן הזה ואם יש לנו בכלל חמר מדינה.

<sup>17</sup> ערוך השלחן או"ח תקנא:יא.

<sup>18</sup> דלמנהג אשכנז דברים שבצנעה נוהגין בתשעה באב שחל בשבת, ושבת חזון בדומה לו. וכן נהג החזון איש.

<sup>19</sup> כדעת הגר"א והחכם צבי.

Those who sing *Lecha Dodi* to the mournful tune of *Eli Tziyon* should preferably *daven* early enough that *Kabbalat Shabbat* is completed before sunset.<sup>20</sup>

## V. Erev Tisha B'Av (on a Weekday)

In the final meal that one eats before the fast, one may consume only one cooked dish. There is no restriction on raw foods. It is customary to dip some bread or egg in ashes and say, "This is the Tisha B'Av meal."

Meat and wine are forbidden by Mishnaic law; thus, any permission to partake of meat or wine during the Nine Days is inoperative during the *se'udah ha-mafseket*.

The meal is eaten while sitting on the floor, or at least on a low cushion or bench. One should not eat the meal in the presence of others whose participation would require a *zimmun*.

The above restrictions only apply to the final meal before the fast, when it is eaten after midday. If one plans to eat another meal later, or one eats one's final formal repast before midday, they do not apply.

One may continue to drink and snack after *benching* of the *se'udah ha-mafseket*; however, one should state explicitly before *benching* that one is not accepting the fast at that time.

## VI. Tisha B'Av

The restrictions begin at sunset on the eve of Tisha B'Av,<sup>21</sup> and continue until the appearance of three medium-sized stars the following night. They are: eating, drinking, washing, anointing, wearing shoes, marital relations, and studying Torah.

Those who experience serious discomfort are nevertheless required to fast. Those who are seriously ill, or who will become seriously ill, are exempt from fasting even if the illness is not life-threatening. A pregnant or nursing woman is required to fast unless medically contraindicated for her or the child. Those who are exempt from fasting should eat the simplest foods possible.

If medically sanctioned, those exempt from fasting, as well as older children under Bar/Bat Mitzvah, should begin fasting at nighttime and continue as long as they can during the day.

One should not brush one's teeth or use mouthwash on Tisha B'Av unless not doing so causes great discomfort.

Washing is permitted only to remove actual filth from the body. One may not even stick one's finger in water otherwise. One may wash one's hands when halachically required (e.g., in

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<sup>20</sup> כן הצעתי להגרמ"מ קארפ שליט"א והסכים לזה, שכדאי לשיר נישון זה לפני כניסת השבת ולא בעיצומו של יום.

<sup>21</sup> יש להתחיל התענית בשקיעה הנהוגה על אף הספיקות בזה.

the morning, after using the bathroom, and before eating bread for one who is not fasting), but should make sure to only wash the fingers.

One may not apply oil or lotion to any body part unless required for medical purposes. Deodorant should preferably be applied before Tisha B'Av.

Leather shoes are prohibited. Those without a pressing need should avoid wearing any type of dress shoe or sneaker regardless of material.<sup>22</sup> Those who wish to fulfill all opinions should wear only socks while indoors (one may certainly wear non-leather shoes when needed for protection, such as outdoors).<sup>23</sup>

Husband and wife should not sleep in the same bed, nor should they touch each other affectionately.

One may not study any Tanach, Talmud, Midrash, etc. Exceptions are: *Eichah*, *Iyov*, the depressing parts of *Yirmiyahu*, the laws of mourning, the laws of Tisha B'Av, and sections of the Talmud pertaining to the destruction of the Temple. One may also study *mussar* works with an eye to fixing the character flaws that lengthen our exile.

Biblical and Mishnaic/Talmudic passages which are part of the daily service may be recited as usual on Tisha B'Av. One may also ask any halachic questions that arise.

The *tallit gadol* and *tefillin* are worn at Mincha, rather than Shacharit. Some Sefardim wear them at Shacharit as usual. One should ideally extend the recitation of Shacharit, with the *kinot*, until midday.

It is customary to sit on the floor, or at least on a low cushion or chair, until midday (this does not apply, e.g., in a car). Those who can should sleep with one fewer pillow than usual on Tisha B'Av.

Greetings are not extended on Tisha B'Av. If someone extends a greeting to you anyhow, you should respond, but with a serious demeanor. If at all possible, one should not go to work.

## **VII. When Tisha B'Av Falls on Sunday**

When the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av falls on Shabbat, the fast is deferred until Sunday. In such a situation, the standards of those who are exempt from fasting are lowered somewhat. Pregnant and nursing women need not fast unless they feel up to it. Parents celebrating a Bris or Pidyon Ha-Ben that very day may eat after praying *Mincha Gedolah*.

Although the restrictions of Tisha B'Av are not observed on Shabbat, Ashkenazic custom is to forbid marital relations unless it is *mikvah* night.

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<sup>22</sup> הלכות חג בחג פרק ז' הערה \*47 וכן פסק הגר"ש אלישיב זצ"ל ו"כ בפניני הלכה.  
<sup>23</sup> הלכות חג בחג פרק ז' סעיף ל'.

Note: the previous two paragraphs refer only to when Tisha B'Av falls on Shabbat and its observance is delayed until Sunday, not to when the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av itself actually falls on Sunday. The rest of this section applies in either case.

On Shabbat, the restrictions of the *se'udah ha-mafseket* are inoperative. One may eat meat and drink wine in unlimited quantities even during *se'udah shlishit*.

The restrictions of Tisha B'Av begin on Saturday at sunset, although Shabbat itself obviously does not end until nightfall. If one always wears leather shoes at home, or will be walking outside between sunset and nightfall, one may wear such shoes until nightfall, since removing them would be an obvious insult to the honor of Shabbat. One who often goes shoeless at home should not wear leather shoes after sunset. The custom to sit low begins at nightfall.

The classical practice was to hold Motza'ei Shabbat services immediately after nightfall—those attending services would remove their shoes right after *barechu*; those at home would recite *baruch ha-mavdil bein kodesh le-chol* and then take them off. Nowadays, many congregations delay the start of services until well after nightfall in order to allow people to change into Tisha B'Av clothes and shoes after Shabbat is over and then come to *shul*.<sup>24</sup>

*Havdalah* is delayed until Sunday night; at that point, one recites only the blessing over the wine and the *Havdalah* blessing. The blessing over the candle is recited on Saturday night prior to the reading of *Eichah*, and the blessing over the spices is skipped entirely.

Those who are exempt from fasting must recite *Havdalah* prior to eating or drinking (anything but water).<sup>25</sup> *Havdalah* should be made on grape juice—one should only use wine if no grape juice is available.<sup>26</sup>

## VIII. The Day After

Since the destruction of the *Beit ha-Mikdash* continued until the 10<sup>th</sup> of Av, the restrictions of the Nine Days continue until midday of the 10<sup>th</sup> of Av.<sup>27</sup>

When Tisha B'Av falls on Shabbat and the fast itself is observed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Av, the restrictions of the Nine Days terminate immediately upon conclusion of the fast. However, one continues refraining from meat and wine (with the exception of *Havdalah*) on the night following the fast.

When Tisha B'Av falls on Thursday, one may launder clothing and get a haircut in honor of Shabbat immediately following the fast.

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<sup>24</sup> גם מפני שבימי קדם לבשו בגדי חול בשבת זו, אבל היום שלובשים בגדי שבת לא שייך לשבת לקריאת איכה וקינוח בבגדי שבת.

<sup>25</sup> צ"ע שרבו הפוסקים הפוסקים מהבדלה, אבל המנהג פשוט כמ"ש בפנים. עיין הלכות חג בחג פרק ח' סעיף י"ב.

<sup>26</sup> דמיץ ענבים (יין מגיתו) מותר מדינא דמתניתין אף בסעודה המפסקת. אבל בהעדר מיץ ענבים מותר אף ביון שהוא לצורך מצוה

וכמו בתשעת הימים. ואין להשתמש בחמר מדינה כמ"ש לעיל.

<sup>27</sup> יש אוסרים כל היום אבל עמא לא דבר הכי.