

## The Jewish People's National Period of Mourning: The Three Weeks, the Nine Days, and Tisha B'Av

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Our Sages teach us that whoever mourns with Jerusalem will be privileged to see it rebuilt. Only if we recall our national tragedies and integrate them into our own religious life can we move forward to a positive view of Jewish History, comfort from grief, and our own relationship with the Holy One following tragedy.

While much of the mourning practices and halacha of this period resemble the practice of personal *aveilut*/bereavement, Rav Soloveitchik differentiated between *aveilut chadasha* (“new mourning” when we lose a loved one) and *aveilut yeshana* (“ancient mourning” for an event in our past but which has been etched in our religious life and collective Jewish soul).

**17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz:** The period opens with the 17<sup>th</sup> Day of Tammuz, a minor (sunup to sundown) fast day, commemorating a number of historic tragedies including the Golden Calf debacle, but more importantly, the breaking through of the walls of Jerusalem prior to its destruction by both the Babylonians (1<sup>st</sup> Temple) and the Romans (2<sup>nd</sup> Temple). This can be seen as the “overture” to the period of sorrow and mourning. While there is some historic question on the exactness of this day for both Temples, the Sages chose it as the day to fast and begin the mourning. When the 17<sup>th</sup> falls out on a Shabbat (as it does this year) the fast is moved to Sunday.

**Three Weeks:** The main restrictions characterizing this period are on haircuts and weddings. Many also do not shave, although there is leeway on this for work related issues. Situations analogous to weddings (with public musical entertainment) are also not appropriate during this time.

**The Nine Days:** The Mishnah Ta’anit states: “*Mishenichnas Av mima’atin besimchah* – when Av enters, we diminish our joy.” In anticipation of the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and two thousand years of exile and persecution, the halachah mandates that we increase the avoidance of occasions and activities of rejoicing. My colleague Rabbi Benjamin Samuels of Newton MA, in a version of this sent out to Darchei Noam members several years ago, wrote, “Additionally, we should all affirm during this time period the centrality of Israel and Jerusalem in our lives. One simple way to accomplish this and also to participate in quiet activism on behalf of Israel is to utilize Israel products at our dinner and Shabbat tables. Make Israel a topic of dinner conversation, as well.”

The Halachic restrictions of the Nine Days include:

- Eating meat (including fowl) and drinking wine, since they are considered festive foods. The exception for this is on Shabbat. Also non-meat foods cooked in a meat utensil may be eaten. If a child is present for havdala and grape juice is used,

the child should drink the grape juice. If there is no child, then the one making havdala may drink the wine or grape juice. Some make havdala over beer or other juices.

- Experiences of group joy or recreation should be avoided. While children need to be occupied and entertained, and families can and should spend recreational time together, gatherings of public joy and fun should be avoided in order to endow this mourning period with a sense of specialness and seriousness.
- Home decorating and building should be suspended during this time, unless this would constitute a significant financial loss. Similarly, one should not purchase objects of *simcha* (e.g., silver Judaica, artwork) or which might bring great joy (e.g., toys, new clothes), unless the postponement of such purchasing would lead to a financial loss (e.g., a special sale would be over). In the event that such purchases are made, the item(s) purchased should be put away until after the Nine Days.
- To the extent possible, freshly laundered outer clothing should be avoided during the Nine Days. In pre-modern times, bathing and wearing laundered clothing often brought a person great joy. The halacha thus came to proscribe laundering clothing and wearing freshly laundered clothing during the Nine Days, except for Shabbat. Any garment worn directly on the skin and subject to perspiration may be considered an “undergarment” for this purpose and may be laundered and worn afresh. Other garments, i.e., suits, slacks, dresses, skirts, should be “reworn” garments. One should not use dry cleaning services during the Nine Days.
- Halacha proscribes pleasure bathing during the Nine Days. Today, since most people shower daily, we are halachically categorized as “*Istanis* – hygienically sensitive,” and thus we are permitted to shower. However, we should take short, get-clean showers, and not luxuriating hot showers or baths. Along these lines, many halachic authorities allow regular swimming lessons. There also may be some leeway for very young children to splash on a very hot summer’s day.

### **Shabbat Hazon**

The Shabbat immediately before Tisha B’Av is called Shabbat Hazon, after the first word in the haftorah from the prophet Yeshayahu (Isaiah). *Hazon* means vision. The *haftorah* is the Vision of Isaiah. This is the last of three *haftarot* foretelling destruction read before Tisha B’Av. On this Shabbat, there are three customary modifications to the regular *tefillot* (in Ashkenazic tradition) which connect this Shabbat to Tisha B’Av:

- Chanting L’cha Dodi to the melody of Eli Tziyon, the last *kinna* read on Tisha B’Av.
- Chanting a *passuk* of the second *aliyah* of the Shabbat Torah reading in the Eichah mode.
- Chanting most of the *haftorah* in the Eichah mode.

### **Halakhic Notes regarding this year's Tisha B'Av: Shabbat and Motzei Shabbat**

- Because of the fast, which this year begins on motzei Shabbat, *seudah shelishit* must be completed by sunset (*shki'a*). Therefore, Darchei Noam will not be eating *seudah shelishit* as a *kehilla*, per our usual practice, and we will be davening Mincha early.
- *Seudah shelishit* is NOT conducted as the standard pre-Tisha B'Av meal (*seudah hamafseket*). We do not eat this meal seated on low stools or on the ground; and we do not eat the traditional meal of bread, cold hard-boiled eggs and water (with the bread dipped in ashes). Meat and wine may be eaten/drunk.
- Those who return home for *seudah shelishit* and return after Shabbat may, of course, drive to Ma'ariv and the reading of Eichah. Before doing any *melacha* (halachically-defined work) on Motzei Shabbat, one should recite "*Baruch HaMavdil Bein Kodesh L'Chol*" (Blessed is God who has distinguished between the holy and the mundane).
- Havdala should be recited after Shabbat over the candle only. This will be done in shul as part of the service. One should not recite Havdala over spices or wine on Saturday night but Havdala is recited over wine (no spices) after the fast is concluded Sunday night.

### **Halakhic Notes on Tisha B'Av**

- On Tisha B'Av, it is prohibited to eat, drink, bathe or wash, anoint oneself with oil or lotions, have marital relations, wear leather shoes, or learn non-sorrowful portions of Torah. The common practice is to sit on the floor or on low stools until mid-day.
- We do not greet each other on Tisha B'Av or say Shalom Aleichem to each other.
- Children under Bat/Bar Mitzvah age are not required to fast the entire time, but should fast a set amount of time as to be determined in consultation with their parents. [Note this is different from Yom Kippur where 11-year-old girls and 12-year-old boys should fast the whole time.] At the same time, all children of the age of *Chinukh* (education) should be taught about Tisha B'Av, and restrict their eating somewhat, especially of indulgence items (i.e., cookies, ice cream, candy).
- Upon rising, *Negel Vasser* (Morning Hand Washing) is done only from the fingertips until the knuckles. Residual water drops on our fingers may be used to wipe sediment from our eyes. This is also the practice after using the bathroom. A *Tallit Katan* (*tzitzit*) is worn, but without a *bracha* (blessing).
- Tallit and Tefillin are not worn at Shacharit. They are worn at Mincha.
- Normally, the restrictions of the Nine Days are observed through mid-day of the 10<sup>th</sup> of Av. Due to the fact that this year, we observe Tisha B'Av on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Av (since this 9<sup>th</sup> falls out on a Shabbat), one does not need to wait until noon of the 11<sup>th</sup> to go back to a regular routine. But in either

case, one should not rush into one's regular routine the moment Tisha B'Av concludes. The next morning is appropriate.

The Sages teach us that in the time of the Mashiach, Tisha B'Av will become a festival for us all. May this be the last Tisha B'Av we observe in sorrow, and may we rejoice next year in the Bet Hamikdash, spiritual center of a redeemed world!