

# Three Weeks Laws and Customs

For eight hundred and thirty years there stood an edifice upon a Jerusalem hilltop which served as the point of contact between heaven and earth. So central was this edifice to the relationship between man and G-d that nearly two-thirds of the mitzvot are contingent upon its existence. Its destruction is regarded as the greatest tragedy of our history, and its rebuilding will mark the ultimate redemption--the restoration of harmony within G-d's creation and between G-d and His creation.

A full three weeks of our year--the three weeks "between the strictures" 1 of Tammuz 17 and Av 9--are designated as a time of mourning over the destruction of the Holy Temple and the resultant galut--physical exile and spiritual displacement--in which we still find ourselves.

In this period, many calamities befell the Jewish people throughout the generations. It was during this period of between the straits that both the first and second Temples were destroyed.

During this period, we lessen the extent of our rejoicing. We don't:

- Conduct weddings. (Engagement parties – without music – are allowed until Rosh Chodesh Av.)
- Play musical instruments or listen to music.
- Recite the *Shehecheyanu* blessing. Thus, we do not wear new clothing or eat fruit which we have not yet eaten this season so that we will not be required to recite *Shehecheyanu*.
- Take a haircut or shave. Many Sephardic communities permit haircuts and shaving until the week of Tisha b'Av (in other words, until the Saturday night before the fast).

(Speak to your rabbi if there are extenuating circumstances that prevent you from observing any of the above customs.)

## Shabbat

All the laws of mourning are suspended on Shabbat. This includes the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av themselves. When they fall on Shabbat, the fast days are postponed until Sunday, and the Shabbat is joyously celebrated. The Rebbe stated on numerous occasions that on these Shabbats we must increase our joy, and add an extra tasty dish to our meals, to emphasize that we are *not* in a state of mourning. On the first Shabbat of the Three Weeks (or on the 17th of Tammuz itself, if it falls on Shabbat) we almost always read the Torah portion of Pinchas. The end of the reading discusses the three Jewish festivals. It has been said amongst chassidim that this alludes to the idea that the three Shabbats of the Three Weeks are to be celebrated on par with the three festivals.

Why is all mourning suspended on Shabbat?

Though these days and weeks heralded an exile rife with persecution and spiritual estrangement, it is our belief that

ultimately this is for the good. Very soon, with the coming of Moshiach, we will understand that all the suffering was necessary in order to reach the ultimate good. At that time, the prophets foretell, these sorrowful days will be transformed into days of joy.

Every Shabbat constitutes a foretaste of the Messianic Era. As such, on Shabbat we only focus on the positive element of this period.

## Determination to Rebuild

Aside for the aforementioned "technical" rules and restrictions, during this period we spend extra time contemplating the less-than-perfect state the world is in now and what we can do to improve it by increasing in deeds of goodness and kindness.

The Rebbe urged that the Three Weeks should be a time of increased Torah study and giving of charity-- in keeping with the verse, "Zion shall be redeemed by law, and her returnees by charity." Particularly, the Rebbe requested time and again the study of those portions of Torah that deal with the building of the Holy Temple.

The Three Weeks should be a time of increased Torah study and giving of charity. Why these laws? The Rebbe based this on a dialogue, cited in the Midrash, that transpired after G-d told the Prophet Ezekiel to instruct the then exiled Jewish People about the measurements and design of the third Holy Temple:

"Master of the world," Ezekiel replied, "why are You telling me to go and tell Israel the form of the House; they are now in exile in the land of our enemies - is there anything they can do about it? Let them be until they return from the exile. Then, I will go and inform them."

G-d answered: "Should the construction of My House be ignored because My children are in exile? The study of the design of the Holy Temple as detailed in the Torah can be equated to its actual construction. Go tell them to study the form of the Holy Temple. As a reward for their study and their occupation with it, I will consider it as if they actually built the Holy Temple."

It is our generation in particular, that stands on the threshold of Redemption, that must study these laws with the awareness that these laws will be quite practical in the imminent future!

## From Destruction to Renewal

But there is more to the Three Weeks than fasting and lamentation. The prophet describes the fasts as "days of goodwill before G-d" - days of opportunity to exploit the failings of the past as the impetus for a renewed and even deeper bond with G-d. A sense of purification accompanies the fasting, a promise of redemption pervades the mourning, and a current of joy underlies the sadness. The Ninth of Av, say our sages, is not only the day of the Temple's destruction - it is also the birthday of Moshiach.

## Tisha B'Av

((When Tisha B'Av is observed on Sunday:

- One may eat normal Shabbos meals but must end the third meal before sunset. (This year this applies to the Shabbos after Rosh Chodesh as well.)
- Av haRachamim is said in the morning prayers; Tzidkatcha Tzedek is not said at Mincha..
- Attah Chonantanu is recited as usual in the Ma'ariv. However, the customary Havdalah is not said. In order to permit us to do work we recite "Baruch Hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol" **without Hashem's name**. Regular Havdalah will be made Sunday night after the fast.))

### Eating and Drinking

- All eating and drinking is forbidden. This includes rinsing the mouth and brushing teeth, except in a case of great distress.
- Swallowing capsules or bitter tablets or liquid medicine without water is permitted.
- The ill or elderly as well as pregnant and nursing women should consult with the Rabbi.
- There are various opinions as to whether boys up to twelve years old and girls up to eleven are required to fast or not. Please consult with the Rabbi.
- Those not required to fast should eat only what is needed to preserve their health.

### Marital Relations

- Since marital relations are prohibited, a husband and wife should not come in contact during the night of Tisha B'Av.

### Wearing Leather Shoes

- Shoes made totally or partially of leather are prohibited. Shoes made of cloth, rubber or plastic are permitted.
- Wearing leather shoes is permitted for medical reasons.

### Learning Torah

- One may learn: Lamentations with its midrash and commentaries, portions of the Prophets that deal with tragedy or destruction, the third

chapter of Moed Katan (which deals with mourning), the story of the destruction (in Gittin 56b-58a, Sanhedrin 104, and in Josephus), and the halachos of Tisha B'Av and mourning.

### Additional Restrictions

- One should deprive himself of some comfort in sleep.
- One should sit on a low bench or chair, or on a cushion on the floor.
- People should not greet each other with "good morning" and the like. One who is greeted should answer softly.
- Consult with the Rabbi with regard to doing any work on Tisha B'Av.

### Prayer

- Ashkenazim do not wear tefillin at Shacharis, nor is a blessing made on tzitzit. At Mincha, tefillin are worn and those who wear a tallit gadol make the blessing then.
- At Mincha, the prayers Nacheim and Aneinu are added to the Shmonah Esrei during the blessing "Veliyerushalayim" and "Shma Koleinu" respectively. "Sim Shalom" is said in place of "Shalom Rav." If one forgot them and completed that bracha, he need not repeat the prayer.

### The Day After Tisha B'Av

- The limitations of the "Three Weeks" and the "Nine Days" continue until midday of the 10th of Av. This includes the prohibition of music, haircuts, meat and wine, laundering and bathing.
- When the 9th of Av is Shabbos and observance of Tisha B'Av is postponed to Sunday the 10th, regular Havdalah is recited Sunday night after the fast.
- When the 9th of Av is Shabbos and observance of Tisha B'Av is postponed to Sunday the 10th, haircuts, laundering and bathing are permitted Sunday night, the 11th of Av.
- The custom is to sanctify the new moon the night after Tisha B'Av, preferably after having eaten something.
- In the merit of mourning properly over Jerusalem, may we be rewarded to rejoice in its rebuilding!