

Hilkhot Tisha b'Av 5775

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Tisha B'Av is the most tragic day in the Jewish calendar. The Mishnah in Ta'anit tells us that five tragedies occurred on the 9th of Av: (1) the sin of the spies occurred resulting in the generation of the desert not being allowed to enter the Land of Israel, (2) the first Temple was destroyed, (3) the second Temple was destroyed, (4) Betar - the final Jewish stronghold against the Romans - fell, and her residents were slaughtered, (5) and one year later, the spot where the Temple stood was plowed¹. Many other calamities have befallen us through the generations on this nefarious day².

Every effort should be made to fast on Tisha B'Av. Anyone for whom fasting poses a medical issue should consult with their rabbi and doctor about their halakhic options.

Special this year

The ninth of Av falls out this year on Shabbat. We only ever fast on Shabbat for Yom Kippur,³ so the fast is delayed until Sunday. Certain procedures will reflect the transition from Shabbat to Tisha b'Av.

Shabbat

It is forbidden to show signs of mourning on Shabbat. Yet, some of the laws of Tisha B'av - which include symbolic acts of mourning - become applicable on the afternoon before the fast begins, which this year is on Shabbat. This is a tension we must resolve.

Seudah Mafseket

The final meal we eat before the fast is the *Seudah Mafseket*. Traditionally, it comprises only one course - bread and a hard boiled egg dipped in ashes. The *seudah mafseket* is usually eaten while sitting on the ground, or low to the floor, and should not be eaten in a group. **This year, the seudah mafseket is seudah shlishit. Unlike other years, you can eat many cooked things and sing happy songs.**⁴ One must mind to **only eat until shkia**. Unlike the rest of the year, where we let seudah shlishit linger, this year we must finish eating promptly.

Please find the timing of shkia in your locale on your [local Orthodox calendar](#).

¹ Mishna Taanit 4:6

² The Edict of Expulsion from England in 1290, the Alhambra Decree from Spain in 1492, and Jews expelling other Jews from their own homes in 2005, to name a few.

³ and, in theory, the 10th of Tevet, but our calendar is fixed to prevent this from ever happening

⁴ Unless you are Ashkenazi - and thus always sing sad songs. In that case, stay the course.

In normal years, may continue eating and drinking after the seudah mafseket so long as one does not accept the fast early.⁵ The Mishna Berura recommends stating out-loud that she or he is not accepting the fast early.⁶

This year, you must not accept the fast early. After you finish eating by shkia, from shkia until the conclusion of Shabbat, treat the day as though it were Tisha b'Av, but don't anything that you *can't* do on Shabbat. For instance, don't eat, sing, greet people, wash your hands, etc. Although those are things we do on Shabbat, we are not required to do them *all* of Shabbat, so refraining is not a violation of Shabbat. On the other hand, changing clothes, especially your leather shoes, would be preparing for after Shabbat and thus constitute a violation of Shabbat.

This year, leather shoes create a unique problem:

Leather shoes

There are multiple solutions for what to do with your leather shoes. In some shuls, maariv is called later so that people can go home, wait until the conclusion of Shabbat, say *ha-mavdil bein kodesh le-chol*, and remove their shoes. In other shuls, maariv is called for at the normal time, and one should remove their shoes after they say the *Barechu* that begins maariv.

Havdallah

This year: Saturday night, recite "*Baruch ha-mavdil bein kodesh le-chol*" (just so, without using God's name) which allows you to work but not eat/drink. Say the brakha on the Havdallah candle ("*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha'Olam Borei Meorei Haesh*") as this cannot be recited after Saturday night⁷. Then, Sunday night, after the conclusion of the fast, recite the havdallah as it appears in your siddur, but skip the brakha on good-smelling things and fire.

If one is not fasting for whatever reason, they should say the full havdallah Saturday night, but substitute wine for an important beverage (and replace the brakha over the wine with the appropriate substitution).

Prohibition of the Day

Tisha B'Av has the same prohibitions as Yom Kippur

- a. no eating or drinking
- b. no bathing
- c. no anointing with oil

⁵ SA OC 553:1.

⁶ MB 553:2 in order to preclude the possibility that the fast can be accepted mentally.

⁷ The fire of the havdallah candle is connected to the fire of the first motzei Shabbat, so it cannot be recited after Saturday night, even though the rest of Havdallah can be said until Tuesday.

- d. no leather shoes
- e. no marital relations

Eating and Drinking -- please consult with a rabbi (and a doctor) if you think you should not be fasting.

Unlike on other fast days, many poskim are stringent to prohibit brushing your teeth.

Bathing and Anointing -- one may not place their hand even in cold water. You can only wash your hands if they are dirty or for medical reasons. Therefore, wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom.

Anointing precludes use of creams, oils, soaps, and perfumes. One may use deodorant.⁸

Torah -- Additionally, on Tisha B'Av we are limited in the Torah that we may learn. Since learning Torah brings us joy, we only study material that relates to the somber mood of the day. Traditional options include Lamentations, Job, and the sad parts of Jeremiah, the midrashim on those books, the third chapter of Tractate *Mo'ed, Gittin* 55b-58a, and *Sanhedrin* 104.

Because Tisha B'Av parallels *shiva* -- the most intense period of mourning - we also have the custom to sit on the floor or low to the floor at night and for the first half of the day. Many people also have the custom of sleeping on the floor or mitigating their comfort during sleep by using one pillow less than they normally do.

Greetings

We do not greet people on Tisha B'Av, as is the practice of mourners. If someone greets us, we can return the greeting.

Morning preparations

In the morning of Tisha B'Av, we may not wash our hands and face in the normal manner. Rather, just as on Yom Kippur, we wash *negel vaser* (morning washing of the hands) only up to our knuckles. We may use the residual water on our fingers to wipe away sediment from our eyes. The *brakha* of *al netilat yada'im* is said.

Tallit and Tefillin

We do not wear *tallit* or *tefillin* during Shacharit on Tisha B'Av to show our intense mourning. Tefillin is referred to as *pe'er* - the Jewish people's glory. We do not display our glory during our most intense time of mourning. Rather, we delay wearing tefillin until Mincha when the intensity of our mourning is less severe. The *tallit katan* is worn without a *brakha*. Those who do not wear a *tallit* during *davening* should answer *amen* to the *brakha* of someone who does.

⁸ See SA OC 554:15 and Beur Halakha s.v. *sikha* ad loc. Then see Rav Moshe Feinstein in Shmayta d'Moshe pg 433 and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in Halikhot Shlomo Bein HaMeitzarim Ch. 14 Orkhot Halakha pg 56.

Liturgical additions

At night we recite the Book of Eicha (Lamentations) in which the prophet Yermiyah (Jeremiah) describes the destruction of Jerusalem.

As part of the evening and morning services we traditionally recite *kinot* -- liturgical poems lamenting the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. Because Tisha B'Av is the day on which we commemorate the many tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people, we also recite *kinot* for other calamities including the Crusades, the expulsion of Jews from Spain, and the Holocaust.

At the same time, we do not recite *tachanun* on Tisha B'Av. When Meshiach comes, Tisha B'Av will become a day of great celebration, and the prophet Jeremiah refers to Tisha B'Av as a "*mo'ed*" - a holiday.

The Day After Tisha B'Av

Tradition teaches that the fires that destroyed the Beit ha-Mikdash burned into the 10th of Av. Normally, many of the stringencies of the Nine Days carry over to the following day. **This year, since we are fasting on the 10th of Av, all restrictions cease with the fast.** Some poskim, however, think eating meat and drinking wine that night is inappropriate⁹ while other disagree.¹⁰

Our sages teach that whoever mourns over Jerusalem will merit the future vision of her joy. As it is written in Isaiah (Chapter 66, verse 10), "rejoice greatly with her, all who mourn her."

G-d willing, this will be the last Tisha b'Av on which we mourn.

⁹ The Rama 558:1, MB s"k 4-5

¹⁰ Rav Chaim Vital and the Pri Chadash