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## THE 17TH OF TAMMUZ, THE NINTH DAY OF AV AND THE THREE WEEKS

### INTRODUCTION

Tisha B'Av (the Ninth day of the Hebrew month Av) is the second most severe fast day of the Jewish calendar (behind Yom Kippur). It marks the culmination of a three-week period mourning the destruction of both the first and second Temples in Jerusalem, known as "*bein ha-metzarim*" (literally, "between the straits") or more colloquially known as the "Three Weeks". The period begins with another fast day, the 17th of Tammuz, when the second Temple walls of Jerusalem were breached in 70 CE. On Tisha B'Av both the first and second Temples were burned to the ground. This year Tisha B'Av begins on the evening of July 17th. The 17th of Tammuz begins before sunrise on June 27th. Tisha B'Av and the Three Weeks period has become a national time of mourning for the Jewish people, commemorating a host of tragedies that have befallen us throughout the generations. Restaurants and theaters are closed in modern day Israel on Tisha B'Av.

### PRACTICES AND CUSTOMS

Jewish tradition dictates that acts of mourning and abstinence become more severe as Tisha B'Av approaches. On Tisha B'Av itself we follow the same strictures as Yom Kippur: in addition to refraining from eating and drinking, bathing, anointing oneself, wearing leather shoes and marital relations are prohibited. There are additional traditions to sit low to the ground just like a mourner does, not to greet people, and -- because Torah study is always considered joyful, one is enjoined to only learn material that is connected to the tragic events of the day or other somber material. Talit and Tefilin are not worn until the afternoon of Tisha B'Av since these are symbols of Israel's glory, and it is considered unseemly to wear them at the peak of this day of collective mourning. At night it is customary to read the Biblical book Lamentations which laments the destruction of the first temple. Also, it is customary to add liturgical poems called *kinot* which commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem as well as many other calamities that the Jewish people have endured.

From the 17th of Tammuz until Tisha B'Av, customs vary over what prohibitions one follows. Many people do not shave or get haircuts or listen to live music from the 17th of Tammuz. Additionally, many refrain from having weddings during this period. With the advent of the month of Av, the mourning practices intensify. Many refrain from eating meat, drinking wine, wearing freshly laundered or new clothing, and from engaging in any joyous activity. Some begin the more severe restrictions only during the week during which Tisha B'Av falls.

## RELATING TO TISHA B'AV TODAY

Clearly the destruction of the Temple was a calamity to the Jews of that time. However, after close to 2000 years of life without the Temple it is difficult to relate to the tragedy of its loss and its impact on us.

The following passage from the Talmud provides an explanation for why both Temples were destroyed.

### Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 9b

תלמוד בבלי מסכת יומא דף ט עמוד ב  
מקדש ראשון מפני מה חרב? מפני שלשה דברים שהיו בו: עבודה זרה, וגלוי עריות, ושפיכות דמים... אבל מקדש שני, שהיו עוסקין בתורה ובמצוות וגמילות חסדים מפני מה חרב? מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם. ללמדך ששקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות: עבודה זרה, גלוי עריות, ושפיכות דמים.

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three things that occurred in it: Idolatry, unseemly provocative sexual behavior, and bloodshed... But the Second Temple, where they occupied themselves with Torah, Commandments and acts of benevolence, why was it destroyed? Because there was baseless hatred. This teaches that baseless hatred is equated with three sins: idolatry, provocative sexual behavior and bloodshed.

## YOUR TALMUD NAVIGATOR

What does it mean that baseless hatred is equated to the three severe sins of idolatry, provocative sexual behavior and bloodshed?

How does this passage from the Talmud help to make Tisha B'Av more relevant to us?

## A WORD

One of the immediate responses of the Jews to exile was to declare the oft-quoted verses from Psalms 137:5-6.

### Psalms 137:5-6

אִם-אֶשְׁכַּחךְ יְרוּשָׁלַם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי: תִּדְבַּק-לְשׁוֹנִי | לְחִפְי אִם-לֹא אֲזַכְּרֶכִי  
אִם-לֹא אֶעֱלֶה אֶת-יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל רֹאשׁ שְׂמֹחָתִי:

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember thee not; if I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy.

This year with all of the events and tragedies occurring in Israel, Jerusalem is very much at the center of our thoughts. The Talmud teaches:

### Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 60b

תלמוד בבלי בבא בתרא דף ס עמוד ב  
כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחתה, ושאינו מתאבל על ירושלים – אינו רואה בשמחתה.

All who mourn Jerusalem will merit and see her when she is joyful, and whoever does not mourn Jerusalem will not see her when she is joyful.

Our sages teach that Tisha B'Av will ultimately become a day of great joy when redemption comes to the Jewish people. May we use Tisha B'Av as an opportunity to mourn the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem so we may see its joy.