

CHURBAN

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What happened?

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What is Tisha
B'av?

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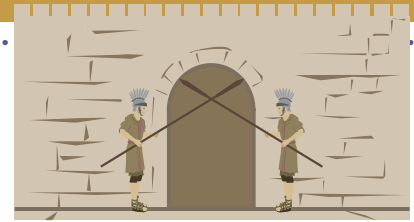
Why do
I care?

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Why do
we fast?

AROUND THE YEAR

What happened on our fast days?



But First...

There are six fast days on the Jewish calendar, when everyone over the age of bar or bas mitzvah (with some exceptions) may not eat or drink anything. These fast days are not just

“recommended,” but an obligation and a mitzvah to keep! Fast days are meant for *teshuvah*; some of them are connected to the *Churban*, the destruction of both Batei Mikdashim (holy temples) as well. In this unit, we are going to focus on the fast days that are connected to the *Churban*.

FASTS FOR THE CHURBAN

There are four fast days that are connected to the Churban. Each one of these days signifies an event that was a turning point in Jewish history, and specifically in the timeline of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

ASARA B'TEVES (the 10th of Teves) Asara B'teves marks the day when the Jews passed the point of no return and were going to be forcibly expelled from their land. On this day in the year 423 BCE, the army of Nevuchadnetzar surrounded the city of Yerushalayim¹ and slowly starved the thousands of Jewish people who were taking refuge inside.

Asara B'Teves falls out in the winter, usually in early January, and is the only fast day that can be observed on Friday due to its significance as “the beginning of the end” of an independent Jewish nation.

SHIVAH ASAR B'TAMMUZ (The 17th of Tammuz) This fast marks the day when both the Babylonians (on the 9th of Tammuz) and the Romans (on the 17th of Tammuz) broke through the walls of Yerushalayim and began their destruction of the city and the brutal massacre

of its inhabitants.

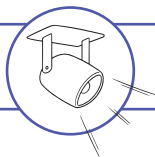
Shiva'h Asar B'Tammuz usually falls out in July, and marks the beginning of a three-week period of gradually intense mourning leading up to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

TISHA B'AV (the 9th of Av) On this day, both the Babylonian army in 423 BCE and the Roman army in 70 CE set our holy Beis Hamikdash aflame after plundering its treasures, and dragged the surviving Jews to be captives or sold as slaves.

Tisha B'Av usually falls out in August, and is the only one of the *Churban*-related fasts to be 25 hours long. It begins in the evening at sundown, and is over the following day at nightfall.

TZOM GEDALIA (The fast of Gedalia) On this day, the third of Tishrei, we commemorate the murder of Gedalia, the last governor of Eretz Yisrael (Israel). After that, the last Jews left and land of Israel lay abandoned².

Tzom Gedalia is always the day after Rosh Hashanah, which is usually in September.



Spotlight

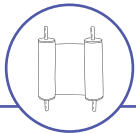
We mourn the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and our distance from Hashem's Holiness.

OTHER FASTS

These two fasts are not related to the Churban, but are obligations nonetheless.

TAANIS ESTHER On the 13th of Adar (usually in March), we fast to remember the power of fasting and *teshuvah* to nullify a bad decree, as happened by the *neis* of Purim.³

YOM KIPPUR Also unrelated to the *Churban*, we fast for 25 hours on the 10th of Tishrei (usually in September), to do *teshuvah* and achieve atonement⁴. This is the only fast day specifically commanded in the Chumash.⁵



The Beginning of the End

Most people understand why we fast on the 10th of Teves, 17th of Tammuz, and Tisha B'Av, as they mark the process of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and the end of Jewish life in Israel on two separate occasions. But why do we have a fast day for the assassination of Gedaliah ben Achikam?

He may have been a great rabbi and leader, but throughout Jewish history, many great leaders have been killed. Think about Rabbi Akiva⁶ and the nine others who were brutally murdered by the Romans, or Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava, who was a great *Tanna* who was brutally executed by the Romans for ordaining students at a time when *semicha* was banned. The Romans pierced his body with 300 spears⁷, yet we do not have a fast day in his memory. What makes Gedalia's death so important that every Jew is obligated to mourn it every year on Tzom Gedaliah?

Gedaliah's assassination was so much more than the loss of one man, no matter how great he and his individual influence may have been. Gedalia's death was the final blow to Jewish independence after the destruction of the First Temple. More than that, it was a tragedy caused by Jews turning against each other. The fast of Tzom Gedaliah reminds us that internal hatred and division can be just as dangerous as any enemy from the outside.

Who Was Gedaliah and What Happened to Him?

Gedaliah ben Achikam was chosen by the Babylonians to be the governor of the remaining Jews in Eretz Yisrael after the First Beis Hamikdash was destroyed in 423 BCE. Most of the Jewish people had been exiled to Bavel, but some were allowed to stay and live under Gedaliah's leadership. He encouraged the Jews to rebuild their lives, plant crops, and have hope for the future⁸.

However, not everyone supported Gedaliah's leadership. A man named Yishmael ben Nesanyah, who was from the royal family of Yehudah, believed that Gedaliah was a traitor for working with the Babylonians. He

planned to assassinate him, and Gedaliah was warned by his loyal friend, Yochanan ben Karach, multiple times about this threat. But Gedaliah refused to believe that a fellow Jew would do such a thing⁹. His insistence on not listening to *lashon hara* was misplaced in this instance, since a person should take precaution when warned of harm, without actually accepting the words as true¹⁰.

On Rosh Hashanah (the first and second of Tishrei), Yishmael and his men came to Gedaliah, pretending to be friendly. While Gedaliah was hosting them for a Yom Tov meal, they suddenly attacked, killing him and many others¹¹. After this, fear and chaos spread. The remaining Jews in the land panicked and fled to Egypt, officially ending Jewish self-rule in Eretz Yisrael for that time¹².

The Rambam explains¹³ that the fast (which is held on the third of Tishrei, as one cannot fast on Rosh Hashanah) is about both mourning Gedaliah's death and also understanding the consequences. His assassination led to the complete collapse of Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael. The Jewish people had lost their land, their Temple, and now even the small community that had remained.

Fast days are meant to make us think and do *teshuvah*, not just feel uncomfortable and sad¹⁴. The first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins—idolatry, immorality, and murder¹⁵. But Gedaliah's death reminds us of a different kind of tragedy: when Jews turn against each other. Even though the first Beis Hamikdash fell due to widespread *avodah zarah*, the final blow to Jewish settlement after its destruction came from an act of internal betrayal. This pattern repeated itself later, with the second Beis Hamikdash being destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred).

By fasting on Tzom Gedaliah, we are reminded that both external and internal dangers threaten Jewish survival. Whether it is abandoning Torah values or allowing hatred and division to tear us apart, our actions shape the future of our nation.

Why don't we fast on the day that the Chofetz Chaim, or Rashi, died?





What happened on Tisha B'Av?

REASON TO CRY

Tisha B'Av is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar, a day marked by immense tragedy and suffering throughout Jewish history. The origin of this day's sorrow dates back to the times of the *Meraglim* (spies). When Bnei Yisrael heard their discouraging report about Eretz Yisrael, they cried in despair, fearing they would never enter the land. Hashem responded with a chilling decree:

*"You cried for nothing, so I will establish this as a night of crying for generations."*¹⁶

From that moment on, Tisha B'Av became a day of devastation for the Jewish people, as countless tragedies have unfolded on this very date—most notably, the destruction of both Batei Mikdash. The echoes of this sorrow continue to be felt, as we reflect on our history and mourn the suffering our nation has endured.

A FUTURE YOM TOV

Despite the immense sorrow that Tisha B'Av has brought throughout history, it is not meant to remain a day of mourning forever. Chazal teach us that in the future, when Mashiach comes and Hashem brings the final *Geulah*, Tisha B'Av and the other fasts of mourning will be transformed into days of joy and celebration. The Navi Zechariah prophesies:

"כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת, צוֹם הָרְבִיעִי וְצוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְצוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵית יְהוּדָה לְשִׂשׂוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה וּלְמַעֲדִים טוֹבִים..."

*"Thus says Hashem, Master of Legions: The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month, and the fast of the tenth month will be for the house of Yehudah for joy and for gladness, and for festive times."*¹⁷

The very day that has been marked by destruction and exile will become one of rebuilding and redemption. The tears of suffering will be replaced with tears of joy, and instead of fasting, we will celebrate the return of Hashem's presence to Yerushalayim. On that day, all the pain of our long exile will be understood as part of a greater plan, leading to the ultimate *Geulah Shleimah*.

IT HAPPENED ON TISHA B'AV

The Sin of the Spies (1312 BCE)

After scouting Eretz Yisrael, the *Meraglim* (spies) returned with a negative report. The nation cried in despair, lacking faith in Hashem. As a result, Hashem decreed that this night of "crying for nothing" would become a night of real tragedy for generations.

Destruction of the First Beis Hamikdash (423 BCE)

The Babylonians, led by Nevuchadnezzar, destroyed the First Beis Hamikdash massacring thousands and exiling most of the Jewish people to Babylon.

Destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash (70 CE)

The Romans, led by Titus, destroyed the Second Beis Hamikdash, killing and enslaving hundreds of thousands of Jews.

The Fall of Beitar (135 CE)

The final Jewish stronghold of the Bar Kochba Revolt fell to the Romans, leading to the slaughter of over 500,000 Jews.

Plowing Over of Yerushalayim (136 CE)

Hadrian plowed over the site of the Beis Hamikdash and turned Yerushalayim into a pagan city called Aelia Capitolina, forbidding Jews from entering.

The First Crusade Begins (1096 CE)

Pope Urban II launched the First Crusade, leading to the massacre of tens of thousands of Jews in France and Germany.

The Expulsion from England (1290 CE)

King Edward I expelled the Jews from England, forcing them to leave behind their homes, synagogues, and possessions.

The Expulsion from Spain (1492 CE)

The Spanish Inquisition, led by Ferdinand and Isabella, expelled the Jews from Spain on Tisha B'Av, causing immense suffering and exile.

The Start of World War I (1914 CE)

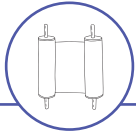
World War I began on Tisha B'Av, leading to global upheaval that ultimately set the stage for the Holocaust.

The Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto (1942 CE)

On Tisha B'Av, the Nazis began mass deportations of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka, where they were murdered in the gas chambers.

AMIA Bombing in Argentina (1994 CE)

The Jewish community center (AMIA) in Buenos Aires was bombed, killing 85 people and injuring hundreds.



What Are We Really Mourning?

Tisha B'Av is a day filled with sorrow. We mourn the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the suffering of our people, and the tragedies that have occurred throughout Jewish history. But the reason we cry on this day goes back much further—to an event that happened in the desert, soon after the Jewish people left Egypt.

The Gemara¹⁸ teaches that on the night of Tisha B'Av, the Jewish people cried after hearing the spies' negative report about Eretz Yisrael. They were afraid to enter the land, believing it was impossible to conquer. Even though Hashem had performed open miracles for them like the plagues in Egypt, the splitting of the sea, the *mon* falling from the sky—they doubted He would help them this time. Hashem responded: *"You cried for nothing; I will establish this night as a time of crying for generations."*

At first, this sounds harsh. Why should one night of tears lead to so much suffering throughout history? Wasn't it natural for them to feel afraid? But their mistake wasn't that they cried—it was *why* they cried. Instead of trusting that Hashem was guiding them, they believed they were alone. Instead of seeing the challenges ahead as part of a greater plan, they saw only darkness. They were not crying because of real danger; they were crying because they imagined a world where Hashem wasn't there to help them.

That night that the Jewish nation sat and cried after hearing the spies' report, something devastating happened: the Jewish people momentarily forgot that Hashem loved them and was personally involved in their lives. They lost the trust they had shown when they accepted the Torah and declared *"Na'aseh v'nishma."* They doubted that Hashem would continue to help them, despite all He had done.

"You cried because you imagined I wasn't on your side," Hashem said. "I will show you what life looks like when I'm not on your side."

This was not an angry response from a frustrated parent—it was a reality check. **Hashem's presence in our lives depends on how much we let Him in.** If we push Him away and act as if the world runs on its own, He will let us experience life as if He is distant. But when we recognize His presence, when

we trust Him even in difficult times, we allow Him to be close to us.

The Torah tells us¹⁹, *"If you walk with Me casually (as if events happen randomly, without My involvement), I will walk with you casually."* This means that the way we relate to Hashem determines the way He relates to us. If we assume everything happens by chance, Hashem will let us experience life that way. But if we open our hearts to His love and guidance, we will see that He is involved in every moment of our lives.

The mistake of the spies is not just a story from the past—it is a challenge we face today. We often find ourselves crying over things that seem unfair, feeling lost when life doesn't go the way we planned. We struggle to see Hashem's hand in our lives, and we convince ourselves that we are on our own.

But Tisha B'Av reminds us that this mindset is the very thing that led to our greatest suffering. The exile, the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and so many of our national tragedies all stemmed from a failure to recognize Hashem's presence. Just like in the desert, when we believe we are alone, we bring upon ourselves a world where Hashem feels distant.

The solution is simple, yet powerful: **let Hashem in.** See Him in your daily life, in both the struggles and the successes. Trust that even when things seem difficult, He has a plan. When we do this, we transform our pain into connection, and our exile into the beginning of redemption.

When you fast this year on Tisha B'Av, when you sit on the floor and mourn, don't just cry over the past—think about the present. Ask yourself: *Am I making the same mistake as the spies? Am I pushing Hashem away by believing that He isn't here with me?*

Tisha B'Av is not just about feeling sad—it's about fixing the mistake that caused this day to become one of mourning in the first place. If we use this day to strengthen our awareness of Hashem, to recognize that He has never abandoned us, then maybe next year, Tisha B'Av will no longer be a day of tears. Instead, it will be a day of joy, when the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt and Hashem's presence is fully revealed once again.

How can the sin of the *meraglim* (spies) affect the way you approach a life challenge?

Why do we care?

TESHUVAH TIME

The mistakes and events of the past are not remembered for the sake of history, but to encourage us to take a closer look at our own thoughts and actions and examine where we can do better. We must take this time to see if our choices measure up to the standards of Torah and mitzvos. Jewish history, especially as we remember it on these fast days, seems overwhelmingly depressing. But we can channel that emotion to motivate us to evaluate our own mistakes and do *teshuvah*, and thereby merit the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash.

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

The loss of the Beis Hamikdash is not a sad history lesson that we recount a few times a year to make sure we don't forget it. The Beis Hamikdash was more than a place to serve Hashem and bring *korbanos*; it was the conduit for the holiness and *Shechina* of Hashem to permeate the Jewish nation. Without the Beis Hamikdash, the Jewish nation was no longer united physically or spiritually, leading to widespread decline of Torah and Torah values. We fast four times a year to acknowledge and mourn the fact that we are distanced from Hashem.



Corny Corner

Why do archaeologists lead sad lives?

Because their career lies in ruins.

TOTAL PURIFICATION

The Beis Hamikdash offered each Jew a chance to completely cleanse themselves of *aveiros*. Through watching the *kohanim* perform the *avodah*, they would be inspired to do *teshuvah* and reach incredible spiritual heights. Without the ability to draw close to Hashem and cleanse ourselves of *aveiros*, we continue to suffer, both spiritually as our growth remains stunted, and physically as we lack the immense blessings the Beis Hamikdash once brought²⁰.

NEVER A PEACEFUL MOMENT

*"Since the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, not a day has passed without a curse."*²¹

From the moment the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, the world has been in a state of spiritual and physical decline. The presence of Hashem, which was once so clear in the world, became hidden. Because of this, suffering, hardships, and difficulties became part of everyday life.

Before the destruction, the Jewish people had a direct connection to Hashem, and blessings flowed through the Beis Hamikdash. But without it, we constantly struggle, both in our personal lives and as a nation. The pain that we experience today—whether sickness, poverty, or exile—is all part of the ongoing impact of the Churban. This reminder pushes us to long for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, when blessing and closeness to Hashem will return.

FOR THE LOVE OF G-D

As Hashem's chosen nation, when the Jews are exiled and oppressed, the world either denies Hashem's presence or think that Hashem is unable or unwilling to take care of His nation that He promised to protect. This opened the narrative that Hashem abandoned the Jews as His nation and moved on to "other" nations as His chosen people. Such a concept ignores Hashem's direct promise to us in the Torah that Hashem will never reject us, even when we are in *galus*²². When we mourn the *Churban*, we are also mourning the desecration of Hashem's honor.



Ask The Rabbi

with Rabbi Chaim Mintz
(Ask The Rabbi Book 1 pg. 290)

HOW CAN WE CRY FOR SOMETHING WE NEVER HAD?

Q Tishah B'Av is a day of mourning over the loss of the Holy Temple (Beis Hamikdash) and the many tragedies that have befallen our people. But how are we supposed to feel a sense of loss over something we never experienced? And living today with such an abundance of blessing, both material and spiritual, what is there to mourn?

A It is certainly difficult to feel the tragedies that happened long ago, or mourn something that we never experienced. However, the very fact that we can ask this question is possibly the saddest testimony to our current state. Precisely because we don't know what we are missing, we think that life is great. We don't know what it's like to have the Divine Presence in our midst, to be fully alive and standing in Hashem's presence in the Beis Hamikdash, as well as throughout the Holy Land.

As any Jew can testify, when performing certain mitzvos one can occasionally experience an overpowering feeling of inspiration, in which he or she will feel especially connected to Hashem. Some people feel spiritually uplifted after they learned Torah for many hours. Others become inspired at *Kol Nidrei* or *Ne'ilah* on Yom Kippur, dancing with the Sefer Torah on Simchas Torah, or opening the door for Eliyahu HaNavi at the Pesach Seder. Some women are deeply inspired when lighting the Shabbos candles and davening for the wellbeing of their children. Other people have this special feeling when visiting certain holy places, such as the Kosel, the Western Wall.

The list goes on, but every person has their special moments in which they feel connected to Hashem. During those uplifting moments, when one feels a true connection to Hashem, all physical pleasures become meaningless, and one would not give up those moments of pure joy and inspiration for anything.

We must realize that in the times of the Beis

Hamikdash, the Divine Presence dwelled in our midst, and the Jews felt these wonderful feelings constantly, multiplied many times over. In this rarified atmosphere they were able to feel Hashem's precious Fatherly warmth smiling down at them and showering them with overwhelming goodness.

In addition, without a Beis Hamikdash, we are missing so much. During the time of the Beis Hamikdash, there were dozens of mitzvos that were performed that cannot be done today. The daily service in the Beis Hamikdash included many different offerings, both daily and on special occasions. And of course, there was the national pilgrimage three times a year, which gave every single Jew an opportunity to absorb some of the great holiness of the Beis Hamikdash.

Being in the Beis Hamikdash on these occasions elevated the Jewish nation to great heights, and the infusion of spirituality kept them on an elevated plane throughout the year. All of this is lacking and cannot be attained today without the performance of these mitzvos. Every mitzvah brings us closer to Hashem, and without these mitzvos we are severely lacking in our connection to Hashem.

Of course, as the Talmud teaches, Hashem is always with us — even in exile — and we are always able to connect with Him. But that strong, palpable feeling of a loving connection that we had in the times of the Beis Hamikdash is not there.

These are some of the reasons why the life we live in exile isn't the real thing, and we are dead in comparison to what life is meant to be. We may feel as if we are "hanging in there," doing the mitzvos to the best of our abilities, and holding onto our faith that the Final Redemption will come soon. We have to do our best to bring the world back to the way it is supposed to be, a world in which Hashem and His beloved nation will be as happy and close to each other as a joyful bride and groom.

IN SHORT: *If we would realize how much we are lacking today in our connection to Hashem without a Beis Hamikdash, we would surely mourn.*

Why is fasting important?

STOP SIGN

The purpose of a fast is not to starve yourself, to punish your body, or to lose weight. A Jewish fast is intended to make us pause in our race to accomplish “life” and do some soul-searching, and to recognize our *aveiros* and their results²³. We do not fast to feel depressed about what happened in the past, but to learn from our ancestors and the lessons that their lives-and deaths!- teach us.

TESHUVAH TIME

The Torah teaches us (see *Teshuvah unit*) that anytime you feel like you’ve made a mistake or blocked your connection with Hashem, you can repair and strengthen your connection to Hashem through the process of *teshuvah*. However, no one says that *teshuvah* is easy! It can be daunting to really sift through your thoughts, words, and actions, identify what is blocking your connection to Hashem, feel real regret, and create a plan for the future so that you’re less likely to make that mistake again.

This is where fast days come to the rescue! Six times a year, we are forced out of the clockwork pace of our lives and into a day where things are just...off. We can’t eat or drink, we feel kind of icky and empty, but we have a chance to look past our daily routines and think deeply about how we can become better servants of Hashem.

TAKE THE ESCALATOR

Hashem is a kind, benevolent, and constantly giving father. He doesn’t want us to be starving and dizzy for no reason! He wants us to be close to Him, and gave us a way to amplify our *teshuvah* so that we can be closer to Him, sooner! *Teshuvah* on its own is powerful. *Teshuvah* combined with fasting is even more powerful, and *teshuvah* while fasting along with the rest of the Jewish people is like shooting your *teshuvah* through a rocket ship!

Often, people will do anything they can do to make the fast day pass by, like watching movies or sleeping for hours. While a person would still get “credit” for fasting as long as they didn’t actually eat or drink, they’ve wasted their chance to use the power of their fasting to catapult their connection to Hashem.

KORBAN

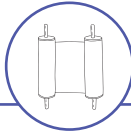
In the time of *korbanos*, sacrifices, there was a process where the fat of the animal was burned on the *mizbeiach*, and the blood was poured as well. These *korbanos* would help the person become closer to Hashem and do *teshuvah*. We cannot give sacrifices without a Beis Hamikdash, but when we fast, we are burning our fat and using the nutrients in our blood more so than we have a steady stream of nutrition. Therefore, it is as if we are still bringing Hashem a *korban*, and we can achieve *teshuvah* this way.



STAY STRONG

In the last few centuries our bodies have become weaker, and we are not able to handle fasting as well as we used to. Fasting is very difficult for our weak bodies, and a rabbi might tell you not to fast, or to break your fast early so that you won’t be really sick. You can still achieve the levels of *teshuvah* and connection that fasting brings, by eating foods that aren’t so exciting, and keeping in mind the meaning and value of the day. It’s harder to stay focused on the seriousness of *teshuvah* when you’re busy with iced coffees and acai bowls, but you can still tone down your focus on food and reach out to Hashem.

Fasting induces frailty, which means your body is tired and weak. Frailty, in turn, generates humility. It reminds a person that they are not all-powerful and that they rely on Hashem for strength. Feeling small and humbled in this way opens the heart to honest reflection. A person is more likely to recognize their mistakes, feel sorry for what they have done wrong, and truly want to change for the better.²⁴



Fast Track

In many cultures and religions outside of Judaism, physical ascetism, which means depriving the body of its needs and wants, is often seen as an ideal. Excessive fasting, poverty, and not getting married are seen as the highest form of service to their religion. Judaism is quite different, rarely encouraging ascetism except in specific circumstances and for specific periods of time.

The Torah teaches us that life is meant to be lived with a balance between physical and spiritual needs. The goal is not to reject the physical world but to use it in a way that brings a person closer to Hashem. A key idea in Yiddishkeit is that the physical and spiritual worlds are deeply connected. Instead of rejecting physical existence in favor of spirituality, you are meant to use the physical world as a tool to strengthen and express your spiritual side. In this life, the physical and spiritual are intertwined, and it is up to you to use both to reach your highest potential and fulfill your ultimate purpose.

You can access the spiritual through the physical. This is why you prepare for Shabbos by cleaning your home, cooking delicious meals, and wearing your best clothing. A peaceful and tidy home creates an atmosphere of calm, good food brings joy and satisfaction, and dressing in fine clothes adds a sense of honor and importance to the day. These actions are not just about comfort or appearance—they help you shift your mindset away from the ordinary and toward a deeper connection with Hashem. By elevating the physical, you create an opening for spiritual growth.

The opposite is true as well. Judaism does not encourage extreme self-denial, but it does believe that sometimes, limiting physical comforts can help a person grow spiritually. Fasting is not about suffering for its own sake but about using physical discomfort to create a deeper awareness of our spiritual side.

When you are fasting, you stop eating and drinking for a period of time. This leads to feelings of hunger and weakness, which serve as reminders that humans are not completely independent and that we rely on Hashem for our strength and survival. These physical sensations can help shift your focus away

from everyday material concerns and toward more meaningful thoughts. The emptiness that you feel in your body can reflect a deeper spiritual longing, pushing you to think about your relationship with Hashem and their purpose in life.

When a person fasts, they feel more vulnerable and humble, which makes it easier to take an honest look at their actions and recognize where they have gone wrong. This self-reflection is an important step toward change. By experiencing discomfort, a person is reminded of their need to rely on Hashem, and this can inspire them to return to a better path.

Fasting can also be viewed as a personal offering to Hashem. In the times of the Beis Hamikdash, people would bring sacrifices as a way of showing their devotion and seeking closeness to Hashem. Today, in the absence of the Beis Hamikdash, giving up food and comfort during a fast can serve a similar purpose. It is a way of demonstrating that a person's spiritual growth and connection to Hashem are more important than their physical desires. This act of self-control strengthens a person's commitment to their values and their faith.

However, fasting is not meant to be an act of suffering with no purpose. The goal is not simply to feel hungry or weak, but to use those feelings as a tool for spiritual reflection and connection. When fasting is done with the right mindset, it helps a person step away from their usual distractions and focus on their relationship with Hashem. It serves as a reminder to improve yourself, appreciate what Hashem provides, and seek a deeper connection to holiness.

Don't waste it!

List things you can do on a fast day to access the spiritual momentum of the day.



ZONIAK CHALLENGE

”וַיִּפֹּל עַל-צִוְּאָרֵי בְנֵימִין אֶחָיו וַיִּבְךְּ, וּבְנֵימִין בָּכָה עַל-צִוְּאָרָיו.”

When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he and his brother Binyamin cried on each other's shoulders. Binyamin cried because he foresaw the destruction of the Mishkan, which was in the territory of Yosef. Why did Yosef cry?

HINT: The Beis Hamikdash was built in the territory of Binyamin

Halachos of fast days

FAST DAYS IN GENERAL

Any person over Bar or Bas Mitzvah should fast, which means not eating or drinking anything from the beginning of the fast (sunset the day before for Yom Kippur and Tisha B'av, or that morning at sunrise for other fasts) until the end (nightfall).

Those who are truly too weak to fast, such as pregnant or nursing women, or those with certain medical conditions, should consult a rabbi and ask what they should do. Some may be advised to fast for part of the day, or not at all. If one feels sick while fasting, one can consult a rabbi as well to find out if they could break their fast.

Children below the age of bar/bas mitzvah, or those who are not fasting for medical reasons, should not indulge in special treats or parties.

THE "THREE WEEKS"

The three weeks from the fast day of the 17th of Tammuz until the 9th of Av mark a period of gradually increasing mourning, commemorating the increasing torture of the Jewish people under the Babylonians and Romans, culminating in the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and the exile of the Jewish people. During these three weeks, we observe certain restrictions to minimize our joy and happiness.

Acapella We do not listen to live music, which is a natural conduit of happiness and positive energy. Some people will not listen to any music at all, even recorded music!²⁶

Weddings Marriages are not performed during the Three Weeks, although engagements are certainly permitted.²⁷

Shehecheyanu Some people avoid wearing or using something on which we would normally say a "shehecheyanu" brachah on, such as an expensive new watch or piece of clothing.

Haircuts We do not get haircuts or shave during the Three Weeks, just as a mourner does not cut his hair.

THE "NINE DAYS"²⁸

Beginning from Rosh Chodesh Av until midday after Tisha B'av (9 days), Ashkenazim go into a higher level of mourning than the rest of the Three Weeks. Sefardim keep this level of mourning just the week of Tisha B'av on the days proceeding it.

Bathing and Showering We take short showers just long enough to get clean, instead of long, luxurious, refreshing showers and baths. Some people will take only cold showers, and some will shower one limb at a time!

Vegetarian Unless we are participating in a *simchah*, like a *bar mitzvah* or *siyyum* (a party after someone finishes learning an entire *sefer*), we do not eat meat or chicken, or drink wine. These foods are considered to bring pleasure, so we stay away from them to add to our mourning.

Laundry Other than small children who get very dirty, many do not wear freshly laundered clothing or do laundry during the Nine Days. Therefore, many have the custom to wear their clothing for a few minutes before the Nine Days start, to ensure they aren't fresh anymore.

Be Safe! Because of the long list of terrible things that happened to the Jews during the first 9 days of Av, some are careful not to do anything specifically dangerous. This includes water-related activities like boating, travelling unnecessarily, or undergoing surgery that can be pushed off.²⁹

TISHA B'AV²⁵

Because of the severity of the mourning, Tisha B'av has the strongest level of physical restrictions. In addition to fasting, we may not bathe or even wash our bodies (unless something is really dirty), wear lotions or perfumes, or wear leather shoes. Even for Netilas Yadayim in the morning, we only wash until our knuckles. We don't even greet each other with a cheerful "Hello!" Instead, we sit on the floor or on low chairs like mourners, focusing on the terrible history of the day and working on our own *teshuvah*. At midday, the mourning restrictions lift somewhat, and we can sit on regular chairs and do productive activities like cleaning or cooking.



Tefillos of Fast Days/Tisha B'av

FAST DAYS IN TEFILLAH

On fast days, we add certain tefillos and leining (reading from a Torah portion) that help us connect to the meaning of the day.

Avinu Malkeinu: Written by Rabi Akiva, this tefillah is a heartfelt plea to Hashem to help us in spiritual and physical matters. It is not said on Tisha B'av, but is included in the tefillos of all the other fast days.

Aneinu: The tefillah of Aneinu is a special supplication recited on fast days, asking Hashem to answer our prayers and show mercy in times of distress. It is said during Mincha Shemoneh Esrei in the brachah of Shema Koleinu. Someone who is not fasting would not say Aneinu.

Leining: On these fast days, we *lein* from Shemos 32:11-14 and 34:1-10, which includes Moshe Rabbeinu's plea for mercy after the chait ha'egel (sin of the golden calf), Hashem's response and instructions to carve the second set of Luchos, and The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy (Yud-Gimmel Middos Harachamim), emphasizing Hashem's compassion and willingness to forgive.

These *pesukim* are chosen because they show us the power of *teshuvah*.

The Haftarah for Minchah on all four fast days is Yeshayahu 55:6-56:8, which begins with "Dirshu Hashem b'himatzo," a call to seek Hashem while He is near, reinforcing the theme of *teshuvah*.



TEFILLAH TIME

In Shemoneh Esrei, we say

תָּקַע בְּשׁוּפָר גָּדוֹל לְחִירוֹתֵנוּ וְשָׂא נֶס
לְקַבֵּץ גְּלִיתֵינוּ וְקַבְּצֵנוּ יְחִיד מֵאֲרָבַע
כְּנָפֹת הָאָרֶץ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מְקַבֵּץ נִדְחֵי
עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Since the beginning of our *galus*, Jews have been scattered across the globe. This brachah expresses our deep longing for the day when every Jew will return to our true home together, united, in the land Hashem gave us.

TISHA B'AV TEFILLOS³⁰

Megillas Eichah: a megillah read on Tisha B'Av after Maariv on Tisha B'Av night. It vividly describes the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash and the immense suffering that followed. Written by the *navi* Yirmiyahu, to warn of the coming devastation, the book mourns the loss of Yerushalayim, the exile of the Jewish people, and the horrors of starvation and death. It reminds us that Hashem's punishments are meant to guide us toward *teshuvah* and that redemption is possible. Despite its mournful tone, *Eichah* ends with hope, pleading for Hashem's mercy: "Hashiveinu Hashem eilecha v'nashuva, chadeish yameinu k'kedem," "Bring us back to You, Hashem, and we shall return; renew our days as of old."

Tallis and Tefillin: Men do not wear their *tallis* or *tefillin* until Mincha, which is after midday, when the mourning restrictions ease somewhat.³¹

Tachanun and Avinu Malkeinu: In *Shacharis*, there is no *Tachanun* or *Avinu Malkeinu*.

Kinnos: *Shacharis* is followed by *Kinnos*. *Kinnos* are special poems that express sorrow over various tragedies that have happened to the Jewish people throughout history. Although most *kinnos* focus on the destruction of the Batei Mikdash, others remember events like the martyrdom of ten Jewish sages, the massacres of Jewish communities during the Crusades, and even the burning of the Talmud in medieval Paris. Some communities have added *kinnos* that mourn tragedies such as the Holocaust.

The *navi* Yirmiyahu wrote the first *kinnah* after the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, and over the centuries, many scholars and poets composed additional *kinnos* to reflect on later tragedies.

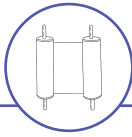
We should try and understand the *kinnos*, not just read the words, so it's a good idea to use a translated *kinnos*.



One is not allowed to learn Torah on Tisha B'av.

Can you think why this would be?

Zoniac Zone



Fast, Remember, Repent

The four fast days that commemorate the destruction of the Batei Mikdash, Tzom Gedaliah, Asarah B'Teves, Shiva Asar B'Tammuz, and Tisha B'Av, are not just about remembering history. They are meant to inspire us to do *teshuvah*, reflect on our actions, and strengthen our connection to Hashem. These fasts remind us that we are still in exile and should long for the final *geulah*, when the third Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt.

Fasting is not just about physical discomfort; it is a tool to help us pause and think. It pushes us to step away from distractions and focus on our spiritual growth and connection to Hashem. The restrictions of the Three Weeks and Nine Days are also meant to help us internalize this message. When we observe these days properly, our *tefillos* and *teshuvah* reach Hashem more powerfully, bringing us closer to the time when mourning will turn to joy and redemption will come.



Someday We Will All Be Together

Ruby had never really cared much about Jewish history. To her, it was just a bunch of old stories about people she had nothing to do with. What did it matter? So when her friends at TheZone started talking about fasting on *Shivah Asar B'Tammuz*, she rolled her eyes.

"Wait, you're not eating or drinking anything today? That's insane. Why would you do that?" she asked, incredulous.

Her *TorahMate*, Leah, smiled. "It's not just about not eating. Today marks the day when the walls of Yerushalayim were breached. It was the beginning of the end for the Beis Hamikdash."

Ruby shrugged. "So? That was, like, forever ago."

Leah's face grew serious. "It's part of our history, Ruby. This day started three weeks of tragedy for the Jewish people—destruction, exile, suffering." She paused, then added, "Imagine if America was destroyed today. No home, no

country, no safety. That's kind of what happened to us."

That hit a little differently, but Ruby shrugged it off.

Over the next few weeks, everyone at camp seemed to be talking about the Beis Hamikdash, the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades—like they actually *felt* it. Ruby started to wonder if she was missing something. They spoke about Jews from centuries past like they were family, like their pain was *our* pain. But Ruby? She felt nothing.

Then came Tisha B'Av. She sat on the floor, listening as Rabbi Davidowitz spoke.

"The Beis Hamikdash wasn't just a building," he said, his voice filled with longing. "It was a time of glory, of closeness to Hashem, of miracles. The Jewish people were united like never before. We stood together, stronger than any enemy, connected to something greater than ourselves." His voice

lowered. "And then we lost it. Not because of war. Not because of armies. We lost it because we weren't unified anymore. We fought each other. We looked down on each other. And when we fell apart, our Beis Hamikdash fell with us." He looked around the room, his eyes burning with hope. "But we can get it back. We can bring Mashiah. When you learn with your *TorahMate*, when you let someone cut in front of you, when you keep Shabbos, you can bring back that perfection."

As the haunting melody of '*Someday We Will All Be Together*' filled the room, something clicked inside Ruby. This wasn't just *their* story—it was *her* story. Avraham Avinu, Moshe Rabbeinu, King David... they weren't just historical figures. They were *her* ancestors. This was *her* nation. *Her* history.

The tears came before she even realized it. This is what it meant to be part of a nation.



Acheinu



אחינו כל בית ישראל

Brothers, sisters, all of Yisroel
We shed bitter tears of hardship and of fear
We stand in battle for our souls
through galus all these years

אחינו כל בית ישראל

Hear your children cry out painful wails
Through the shackles of exile, your spirit must
withstand the trial
Between the land and sea,
we pray redemption sets us free

Chorus x2:

הַמְקוֹם יְרַחֵם

Please have mercy on your nation
Take us out of tzara and bring us bracha
Show us light, ignite the spark
Shine the sunlight out of darkness
Don't stall, please hear our call
The time is now

אחינו כל בית ישראל, אחינו כל בית ישראל

הַנְּתוּנִים בְּצָרָה, בְּצָרָה וּבְשִׁבְיָה
הָעוֹמְדִים בֵּין בָּיִם וּבֵין בִּיבְשָׁה
הַמְקוֹם יְרַחֵם, יְרַחֵם עֲלֵיהֶם
וְיוֹצִיאֵם מִצָּרָה לְרוּחָה,
וּמִשְׁעָבוֹד לְגִאֲלָה,
הַשְׁתָּא בְּעִגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב

Chorus

Don't stall, please hear our call
The time is now



Zoniac Challenge

Put these in the right order:

- 1 Bais Hamikdash is set on fire
- 2 Enemy surrounds the city of Yerushalayim
- 3 Enemy kills thousands of Jews and drags everyone else to slavery or captivity
- 4 Enemy breaks through the walls of Yerushalayim
- 5 Enemy loots the Beis Hamikdash and steals its treasures



ZONIAc DILEMMA

Sam was ready for Tisha B'Av. He had a whole lineup of movies to keep his mind off the hunger, and honestly, he was pretty proud of himself for fasting. *Whatever gets me through the day*, he thought. *That's the goal.*

But something nagged at him—a little voice whispering that maybe zoning out in front of action movies wasn't exactly the point.

Fine, he grumbled, scrolling for a Holocaust film. *I'll make myself sad.*

But was that really the goal of Tisha B'Av?

Was he getting through the day — or missing the point entirely?



DID YOU KNOW?

A person's *tefilllos* are more readily accepted when they are fasting, since they are slightly removed from Olam Haze³².



Daily Challenge

**Think of one way
Galus affects you today.**



Sources

- 1) Melachim II 25:1
- 2) Yirmiyahu 39-44
- 3) Mishnah Berurah 686:2)
- 4) Hilchos Teshuvah 1:3, Hilchos Shevisas Asor 1:1
- 5) Vayikra 16:29, 23:27
- 6) Midrash Eleh Ezkerah
- 7) Sanhedrin 14a
- 8) Melachim II 25:22-24, Yirmiyahu 40:7-12
- 9) Yirmiyahu 40:13-16
- 10) Niddah 61a
- 11) Yirmiyahu 41:1-3
- 12) Yirmiyahu 41:17-18
- 13) Rambam Hilchos
- 14) Hilchos Taaniyos 5:2
- 15) Yoma 9b
- 16) Taanis 29a, based on Bamidbar 14:1
- 17) Zechariah 8:19
- 18) Taanis 29a
- 19) Vayikra 26:21
- 20) Tosafos Bava Basra 21a
- 21) Maseches Sotah 48a
- 22) Vayikra 26:44
- 23) Aruch Hashulchan and Mishnah Berurah 549:1
- 24) Rabbi Mayer Twersky, The Fast Past to Teshuvah
- 25) Shulchan Aruch 554-555
- 26) Mishna Berurah 551:16, 555:1
- 27) Shulchan Aruch 551
- 28) Shulchan Aruch 551
- 29) Shulchan Aruch 554 and Emes VYaakov
- 30) Shulchan Aruch 552 and 559
- 31) Mishnah Berura 555:4
- 32) Mabit Shar Tefilla Ch. 13 - Beis Elokim



Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*

- 1) Sefer Yirmiyahu Perek 36 and on
- 2) Melachim II Perek 24-25
- 3) Kinnos for Tisha B'Av
- 4) Gemara Gittin 55b-58a, Rosh Hashana 18b
- 5) Shulchan Aruch 549-559