

Tu B'Av – A Lot more than Jewish Valentine's Day Sources

An E-Shiur from the Conservative Yeshiva, Jerusalem
 By Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb

1 Mishna Ta'anit Ch 4 #6

משנה תענית פרק ד' משנה ו'

Five [tragic] events befell our fathers on the seventeenth of Tamuz, and five on the ninth of Av.

On the seventeenth of Tamuz: (1) the Tablets [of law] were broken¹; (2) The daily Tamid-offering was discontinued²; (3) a breach was made in the city wall, and (4) Apostumos [the Greek general] burned the Torah, and (5) an idol was placed in the Temple³.

On the ninth of Av: (1) it was decreed that our fathers should not enter the Land; (2-3) the Temple was destroyed the first and second time; (4) Betar was captured and (5) the city [of Jerusalem] was plowed under. From the beginning of Av, we diminish joy.

חמשה דברים ארעו את אבותינו בשבעה עשר בתמוז, וחמשה בתשעה באב. בשבעה עשר בתמוז (1) נשתברו הלוחות, (2) ובטל התמיד, (3) והבקעה העיר, (4) ושרף אפיסטמוס את התורה, (5) והעמיד צלם בהיכל.

בתשעה באב (1) נגזר על אבותינו שלא יכנסו לארץ, (2) וחרב הבית הראשונה (3) ובשנייה, (4) ונלקדה ביתר, (5) ונחרשה העיר. משנכנס אב, ממעטין בשמחה:

¹ The Ten Commandments were given on the sixth of Sivan, Moshe ascended Heaven the next day to receive the Torah, he stayed there for forty days, coming down with Tablets on the seventeenth of Tamuz. Upon discovering the golden calf, he broke the Tablets.

² due to the siege on Jerusalem there were no lambs available.

³ by Menashe, King of Judah, in the first Temple era, or, according to another view in the Yerushalmi, by Apostumos in the second Temple era.

Note – Not all the events mentioned here are easy to identify historically, but in the list for 9th Av it is clear which comes from the Torah, which from other Biblical accounts and which from the Rabbinic Period (Betar and the plowing of Jerusalem, about 135 CE). The “easy” manner in which the Mishna mixes Biblical and post-Biblical events is evidence of the Rabbis’ view of Oral Torah being on an equal basis with Written Torah.

2 Mishna Ta'anit 4:8

משנה תענית פרק ד' משנה ח'

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: Israel had no greater days of joy than the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur. On them the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in white dresses they had borrowed, so as not to shame anyone who didn't have... The daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? "Young man, lift up your eyes and see what you choose for yourself. Don't set your eyes upon beauty, but rather upon family." [For] "grace is false and beauty is vain; a woman who fears the Lord she will be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

אמר רבן שמעון בן גמליאל: לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כחמשה עשר באב וכיום הכפורים, שבהן בנות ירושלים יוצאות בכלי לבן שאולין, שלא לבגש את מי שאין לו... ובנות ירושלים יוצאות וחולות בכרמים. ומה היו אומרות: "בחור, שא נא עיניך וראה, מה אתה בוחר לה. אל תתן עיניך בנוי, תן עיניך במשפחה," "שקר הסון והכל היפי, אשה יראת ה' היא תתהלל" (משלי לא:ל).

3 Talmud Bavli Ta'anit 30b

גמרא תענית דף ל' עמוד ב'

I can understand the Day of Atonement, because it is a day of forgiveness and pardon and on it the second Tablets were given.* *But what is special about the fifteenth of Av?*

בשלמא יום הכפורים, משום דאית ביה סליחה ומחילה, יום שניתנו בו לוחות האחרונות. אלא ט"ו באב מאי היא?

* According to a tradition in Seder Olam 6, Moses spent three periods of forty days and forty nights in the Mount beginning with the seventh of Sivan and ending on 10 Tishri (Yom Kippur), when he came down on earth with the Second Tables.

Note on Yom Kippur – the Hassidic *vort* (word) that *Tisha B'Av* is “the **black** fast” calls Yom Kippur “the **white** fast” – on a day so spiritual and happy (God’s forgiveness), who *needs* to eat?

4 From Megillat Ta'anit

ממגילת תענית

On the fifteenth of Av [falls the] time for the wood of the Priests, and one is not to eulogize (on them).

בחמשה עשר באב זמן אעי (עצי) כהניא ודלא למספד בהון.

Note on Megillat Ta'anit – The Megilla itself is a brief document, merely a list of dates and notation for those when eulogies are also forbidden. The list is chronological, from Nissan through Adar; their significance is not explained. This is learned from other sources or commentaries, particularly one called the *Scholium* which is very old itself, though of unclear origin. Some scholars assert that *Megillat Ta'anit* itself, or least some the dates therein, were intended to celebrate triumphs of the Pharisees over the Sadducees in the centuries before the *Hurban*, including Heinrich Graetz, who viewed *Tu B'Av* as one of them. (Gesch 3 [1906] 572).

Note on the Wood Offering - The wood-offering brought to the Temple is referred to in Nehemiah 10:35, by Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 2:17 and at other places in Rabbinic literature, see Vered Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*, Yad Ben Zvi, 2003 pp 217-219 (Hebrew).



It has been stated: Rab and R. Hanina hold that the *Megillat Ta'anit* has been annulled, whereas R. Johanan and R. Joshua ben Levi hold that the *Megillat Ta'anit* has not been annulled. Rab and R. Hanina hold that the *Megillat Ta'anit* has been annulled, interpreting the words of the prophet thus: 'When there is peace, these days shall be for joy and gladness, but when there is no peace, they shall be fasts', and placing the days mentioned in the *Megillat Ta'anit* on the same footing. R. Johanan and Resh Lakish hold that the *Megillat Ta'anit* has **not** been annulled, maintaining that it was those others [mentioned by the prophet] that the All-Merciful made dependent on the existence of the Temple, but these [mentioned in *Megillat Ta'anit*] remain unaffected.

איתמר, רב ורבי חנינא אמרי: בטלה מגילת תענית. רבי יוחנן ור' יהושע בן לוי אמרי: לא בטלה מגילת תענית. רב ורבי חנינא אמרי: בטלה מגילת תענית, הכי קאמר: "בזמן שיש שלום - יהיו לששון ולשמחה; אין שלום - צום. והנך נמי כי הני. רבי יוחנן ורבי יהושע בן לוי אמרי: לא בטלה מגילת תענית, הני הוא דתלינהו רחמנא בבנין בית המקדש, אבל הנך - כדקיימי קיימי.

Question – What are the reasons of the Amoraim who claim that *Megillat Ta'anit* has been annulled and of those who claim it is still in force?

Note – Regarding that the halakhic status of *Megillat Ta'anit* Prof. Vered Noam concludes that it “was only decided, apparently, in the post-Amoraic period to invalidate it entirely, except for Hanukka and Purim.” *Megillat Ta'anit* – The Scroll of Fasting,” Ch. 8, *The Literature of the Sages*, Second Part, ed. Shmuel Safrai et al. 2006, p 361.

6 Talmud Bavli Ta'anit 30b-31a

גמרא תענית דף ל:ב – לא:א

7

1) Rab Judah said in the name of Samuel: It is the day on which permission was granted to the tribes to inter-marry ...
 2) R' Joseph said in the name of R. Nahman: It is the day on which the tribe of Benjamin was permitted to re-enter the congregation [of Israel]...
 3) Rabbah b. Bar Hanah said in the name of R. Johanan: It is the day on which the generation of the wilderness ceased to die out...
 4) 'Ulla said: It is the day on which Hosea the son of Elah removed the guards which Jeroboam the son of Nebat had placed on the roads to prevent Israel from going [up to Jerusalem] on pilgrimage and proclaimed “let them go where they wish.”
 5) R. Mattenah said: It is the day when permission was granted for those killed at Bethar to be buried...
 6) Rabbah and R. Joseph both said: It is the day on which [every year] they discontinued to fell trees for the altar.

(1) אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: יום שהותרו שבטים לבוא זה...
 (2) אמר רב יוסף אמר רב נחמן: יום שהותר שבט בנימן לבוא בקהל...
 (3) אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר ר' יוחנן: יום שכלו בו מתי מדבר...
 (4) עולא אמר: יום שביטל הושע בן אלה פרוסדיות שהושיב ירבעם בן נבט על הדרכים שלא יעלו ישראל לרגל ואמר (לא): "לאיזה שירצו יעלו".
 (5) רב מתנה אמר: יום שנתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה...
 (6) רבה ורב יוסף דאמרי תרוייהו: יום שפסקו מלכרות עצים למערכה.

This text in the Gemara has after each statement either commentary or Biblical verse, as proof or explanation. These are omitted here for limits of space, but they are worth looking at.



7 Rashi on Taanit 30b (based on Midrash Rabba – Eichah, Prologue 33)

They ceased dying in the wilderness: It was taught: During the forty years in the wilderness, every eve of the 9th of Av, a herald went through the camp and announced, “Go out to dig (graves)”]; and everyone would go out and dig a grave in which he slept, lest he die unburied. The following day the herald announced, “Arise, let the living be separate from the dead,” and all who were alive would rise and leave (the graves). And so it went year after year, and in the 40th year, they did the same, but found that all were alive in the morning. Bewildered they said, “Apparently we erred in calculating the date.” So they did the same (buried themselves) on the following nights until the evening the 15th of Av. When they saw that the moon was full on the 15th and no one had died, they knew that there calculation was correct and that 40 years of punishment had been completed, and that generation proceeded to make [the 15th] a holiday.

שכלו מתי מדבר. דתניא: כל ארבעים שנה שהיו במדבר' בכל ערב תשעה באב היה הכרוז יוצא ואומר: "צאו לחפור", והיה כל אחד ואחד יוצא וחופר לו קבר וישן בו שמא ימות קודם שיחפור. ולמחר הכרוז "יוצא" וקורא "יבדלו חיים מן המתים", וכל שהיה בו נפש חיים היה עומד ויוצא.

וכל שנה היו עושין כן, ובשנת ארבעים שנה עשו ולמחר עמדו כולן חיים, וכיון שראו כך תמהו ואמרו "שמא טעינו בחשבון החדש". חזרו ושכבו בקבריהן בלילות עד ליל חמשה עשר, וכיון שראו שנתמלאה הלבנה בט"ו ולא מת אחד מהם ידעו שחשבון חדש מכוון וכבר מ' שנה של גזרה נשלמו, קבעו אותו הדור לאותו היום יום טוב:

Question – how is the conclusion (end) of the punishment of the generation of the wilderness connected to *Tu B'Av*?

8 Talmud Bavli Ta'anit 31a

גמרא תענית דף לא' עמוד א'

A) R. Mattenah further said: On the day when permission was granted for those killed at Bethar to be buried [the Rabbis] at Jabneh instituted [the recitation of] the benediction, ‘Who is kind and deals kindly etc.’; ‘Who art kind’: Because their dead bodies did not become putrid; ‘And dealest kindly’: Because permission was granted for their burial.

B) It has been taught: R. Eliezer the elder says: From the fifteenth of Ab onwards the strength of the sun grows less and they no longer felled trees for the altar, because they would not dry [sufficiently]. R. Menashya said: And they called it the Day of the Breaking of the Axe. From this day onwards, he who increases [his knowledge through study] will have his life prolonged, but he who does not increase [his knowledge] will have his life taken away. What is meant by ‘taken away’? — R. Joseph said: His mother will bury him.

(A) ואמר רב מתנה: אותו יום שנתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה תקנו ביבנה "טוב והמטיב" - "הטוב" שלא הסריחו, ו"המטיב" שנתנו לקבורה

(B) תניא, רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר: מחמשה עשר באב ואילך תשש כחה של חמה, ולא היו כורתין עצים למערכה, לפי שאינן יבשין. אמר רב מנשיא: וקרו ליה "יום תבר מגל". מכאן ואילך, דמוסיף – יוסיף, ודלא מוסיף – יאסף. תני רב יוסף: מאי יאסף? אמר רב יוסף: תקבריה אימיה.

