

TU B'AV

The mishna - Taanit 4:8 - cites a passage that concludes its discussion of the month of Av, as well as the entire masechet of Ta'anit, on a positive note. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: There were no days as joyous for the Jewish people as the fifteenth of Av and as Yom Kippur...

In the middle of this "tragic" month, the month at whose entrance we are commanded to diminish our joy, we find a most joyous festival. If you will ponder the various reasons for TU b'Av, you can see that each one is a counterpoint to Tish'a b'Av and carries a message of consolation and promise... and joy.

- In the aftermath of the "Sin of the Spies", G-d decreed that the entire adult male population of that generation should die out during 40 years of wandering. Not only was this decree handed down on Tish'a b'Av, but the "sentence" was carried out on Tish'a b'Av each year... There is a Tradition that in the final year of wandering, none of the remaining 15,000 men died... Only when the full moon of Av took its place in the sky, all joyously realized that the decree had been rescinded through G-d's mercy. The 15th of Av was thus marked as a day of joy. It marks the existence of forgiveness, even from very serious sins. And don't miss the numbers - 15,000 lives were spared on the 15th of the month.

- TU b'Av was the end of the season for wood-gathering for the Mizbei'ach. It was an occasion for special korbanot in the Mikdash, and TU b'Av was celebrated as a family festival by those involved in this mitzva. Again, a contrast to the Beit HaMikdash being in ruin and no Avoda being done.

- Following the terrible episode of the "Pilegish from Giv'a", there was a ban on marrying into the tribe of Binyamin. This ban was lifted on a TU b'Av.

- For a long period of time, due to a misunderstanding in the rulings concerning who the daughters of Tz'lofchad should marry, there was little or no inter-tribal marriage. After a later Sanhedrin clarified the issue, inter-tribal marriages became common-place. This reuniting of all of Israel, was

associated with TU b'Av, and the cause of great joy.

- The mishna referred to above, tells us that the young maidens of Jerusalem would wear borrowed white dresses, so as not to embarrass one who had no dress... and they would dance in the vineyards.. (so that eligible young men might choose their brides - with their consent, of course). The two items just mentioned, and the fact that there have not been weddings during the Three Weeks (or at least the Nine Days), combine to make TU b'Av a special day for Shidduchim and marriages, and a truly joyous day. Again, a contrast.

- Following the fall of Beitar about 65 years after the destruction of the second Beit HaMikdash (on a Tish'a b'Av, non-coincidentally), the Romans did not permit the bodies of the dead Jews to be buried, as a punishment for rebelling against and resisting Rome. A few years later, a new emperor allowed burial of the bodies. Tradition records that this was on the 15th of Av. The bodies were found not to have decayed in the years that they lay unburied. The Sanhedrin at Yavne declared this a miracle and composed the fourth bracha of Birkat HaMazon - HaTov V'ha'Meitiv, to thank G-d for His kindnesses, even in darkest of times.

- On a TU b'Av, Hoshei'a ben Eilah removed the roadblocks set up by Yeravam ben Navat that prevented the people of the northern kingdom from traveling to Yerushalayim for Aliya L'Regel.

Each item above is in some way the other side of a Tish'a b'Av coin. Churban and exile vs. a way back to Yerushalayim and the Mikdash. Decree against Dor HaMidbar vs. they stopped dying off in the last year of wandering. Fall of Beitar vs. burial of the victims. Sin'at Chinam vs. reconciliation. And more.

TU B'AV, like Rosh Chodesh Av, and like Purim in Yerushalayim (there's something significant to say there) cannot fall on a Sunday, Tuesday, or Thursday. It falls on Monday 31.89% of the time, on Wednesday (like this year) 28.57% of the time, Friday 28.03% of the time, and rarest on Shabbat 11.51% of the time.