

"Halacha Sources" Highlights - The "Yom Tov" of Tu B'Av

Question: Isn't *Tu B'Av* just a "technical" *Yom Tov*, applying only to fasting and saying Tachanun?

Answer: Indeed, that *is* how the Levush [R. Mordechai Yaffe, Italy and Poland, 1530 - 1612, *Levush HaChur* O.C. 580:2] characterizes the fifteenth of the month of Av. However, there are two additional aspects which the Halacha sources discuss:

- (1) increased nighttime Torah study starting then (and so on through the summer etc.),
- (2) eating meat.

[Not discussed here: There are conflicting sources as to whether a mourner can be the "*chazzan*" on *Tu B'Av*; see *Halacha Sources* to Chanukah, pg. 33.]

Part 1: Increased Nighttime Torah Study starting *Tu B'Av* (and so on through the summer etc.)

One of the Gemara's explanations for *Tu B'Av* (*Ta'anis* 31a [and *Bava Basra* 121b]) is:

From the fifteenth of [the month of] Av and onwards, the power of the sun [begins to be] diminished, and they would not cut [any more] logs for the [mizbayach's] woodpile [after then], because they [i.e. subsequently cut logs] were not [sufficiently assured to be totally] dry [and we are concerned for worms, which cause wood to be invalid for the woodpile (Rashi, quoting the Mishnah in Middos 2:5 - as does the Yerushalmi here 26a)]. From this [day] and onwards [i.e. as the days become shorter and the nights become longer (Rashbam, Bava Basra ibid.)], whoever increases [his nighttime Torah study (Rashi)] gets increased [length of life (Rashi)], and whoever does not increase will "terminate" [i.e. die before his time (Rashi, explaining the Gemara which follows)].

Accordingly, the *Rema* rules (*Yoreh Dei'ah* 246:23) [as the *Mishnah Berurah* (238 n2) quotes as Halacha]: **One should begin studying at night from the fifteenth of Av and onwards, and whoever does not increase** [little by little (*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 71:1)] **will "terminate"**.

Is there any *direct* relationship between studying in the long light and sun-wood-baking analysis in the day? Before addressing that, let's focus on the question: What exactly is the *celebration*, according to this position in the Gemara?

The Rashbam [*Rabbeinu Shmuel ben Meir*, France, 1085 - 1176, commentary to *Bava Basra* ibid.] explains that it's an occasion for celebration because of the completion of such an important Mitzvah [i.e. what we would call a "*siyum*"].

(This does fit the language of the *Mishnah Berurah* [131 n30] that it "was" a *Yom Tov* "when the *Beis HaMikdash* stood". Without the Mitzvah of preparing for the woodpile, we can't really have the "*siyum*".)

On the other hand, *Rabbeinu Gershom* [commentary to *Bava Basra*, *ibid.*] seems to interpret the entire flow of the Gemara completely differently: "When they were occupied by cutting the logs for the woodpile, they were [to that extent] removed from Torah study; but on that day they stopped, and they made it a *Yom Tov*, for from that point onwards they were involved [instead] in Torah study."

While *Rabbeinu Gershom's* unique approach does not fit with the generally accepted explanation that the increased study is at night (and because the nights begin to get longer), this does provide a clearer "flow" between the two subjects (i.e. answering our earlier question).

As for the accepted approach of the authorities, it can be suggested that *Tu B'Av* is the *turning point* from "the time of the sun" - in which the gentile nations have a certain ascendance - to "the time of the moon", and *that* is the common denominator between the studying and ending the wood-cutting (heard from Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky).

[Incidentally, R. Elchanan Wasserman asks (*Kovetz Shiurim* 1, *Bava Basra* 369): How can the power of the sun depend on the Jewish months, which follow the moon [and do not correspond neatly to the solar year]? He answers: Perhaps the majority of the time the occurrence is on *Tu B'Av*, and a fixed time was established for all years based on that majority.

Part 2: On *Tu B'Av* it is Appropriate to Eat Meat

The appropriateness of celebrating *Tu B'Av* by eating meat can be inferred from two places where the *Magen Avraham* [R. Avraham HaLevi (Avli) Gombiner, Poland, ~1637 - 1683, commentary to *Shulchan Aruch* volume *Orach Chayim*] says *not* to eat meat on *Tu B'Av*, both cited (*ad loc*) by the *Mishnah Berurah*:

(a) *siman* 551 n16: If a community accepts a *minhag* not to eat meat or drink wine even during the latter part of "the week in which *Tish'a B'Av* falls" (i.e. like the position held by *Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel - Ta'anis* 29b), then "even if *Tu B'Av* falls on Friday - **they** are *assur* in [eating] meat."

(b) *siman* 572 n5: "Once, the *Maharil* [*Rabbeinu Yaakov HaLevi* (Siegel) Mullen, Germany, ~1360 - 1427] decreed that meat not be eaten on any Monday until *Rosh HaShanah*, and *Tu B'Av* fell on Monday - and he did not want to [permit himself to] eat meat."

Apparently, under *normal* circumstances, eating meat *would* be appropriate (although obviously far distant from anything resembling an obligation).

Perhaps this can be best understood according to the explanation of the Rashbam (in part 1 above) that *Tu B'Av* was considered a form of "*siyum*" (and perhaps even according to *Rabbeinu Gershom*, that it celebrates Torah study).

Interestingly, R. Moshe Feinstein wrote (*Igros Moshe* O.C. 1:157) "We do not find [in the sources] any obligation or Mitzvah to hold a [festive] meal on *Tu B'Av*, and logic would dictate that even in "their days" when they *actually* finished the Mitzvah [of the wood-cutting] they held no [festive] meal, [and it was] a mere '*Yom Tov* with respect to not fasting'." [see also *Minchas Yitzchak* 8:45] As mentioned, I think the above inferences from the *Magen Avraham* show that eating meat is at least "appropriate" (though apparently not more than that).

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