

Parsha Ponders

Tisha B'Av | July 26, 2023 | 8 Av 5783

Temple fasts¹

כה אמר יקוק צבקות צום הרביעי וצום החמישי וצום השביעי וצום העשירי יהיה לבית-יהודה לששון ולשמחה ולמעדים טובים וגו'

Thus says Hashem, Master of Legions, that the fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, will be for the House of Yehudah for joy and celebration, for festivals...²

The fast of Tisha B'Av commemorates the destruction of both the First and Second Temples. The day that both Temples were destroyed is the ninth of Av. A question that many wonder is during the time of the Second Temple, did they fast on Tisha B'Av? On the one hand, the destruction of the First Temple was devastating, as described in *Megillas Eichah*³. On the other hand, they were in a state of redemption. The Jews were (somewhat) back in their homeland, and they had a Temple again⁴. While this question doesn't necessarily have any bearing on our own practice, considering we lack a Temple, still, it potentially could shed light on the nature of the fast.

The *gemarra* presents⁵ a seeming contradiction. The prophet Zechariah refers⁶ to the fast of the fourth month (17th of Tammuz), the fast of the fifth month (9th of Av), the fast of the seventh month (*Tzom Gedalya*), and the fast of the tenth month (10th of Teves). The prophet says that these fast days will be joy and celebration. The *gemarra* is bothered that if that's the case, why are they referred to as fast days? The *gemarra* answers that it depends. If the Jews are in a state of peace, with no foreign entity subjugating them, then these days are days of fasting. If the Jews are in a state of peace, then these days become days of joy and celebration. If there's no subjugation, but no state of peace, then these fast days are optional. The *gemarra* then asks why is Tisha B'Av different, as the fast is obligatory regardless of the state of the nation. The answer given is that it's a day of doubled tragedies.

Tosafos ask⁷ why is Tisha B'Av any different than the fast of the 17th of Tammuz. The latter fast commemorates five tragedies that happened on that day⁸. Why then would the fast be optional when

¹ Based on based on a *devar Torah* heard from [Rav Yonasan Weiner](#), *Moreh Tzedek* for the *She'eiris Yisroel Beis Din*, and *Rosh Chabura* for the *Ohr LaGolah Halacha Kollel*. For more discussion on this, see [LeHoros Nasan Orach Chaim](#) § 34:4, [Rav Zevin's Sofrim USeferim Teruas Melech](#), and [Ratz KaTzvi](#) 1:31:3

² [Zachariah](#) 8:19

³ The [Rambam](#) to [Rosh Hashanah](#) 1:3 says they fasted. [Halachos Ketanos](#) 2:140 as well. [Teshuvos Yad Sofer](#) § 54, by a great grandson of the [Chasam Sofer](#), suggests this is alluded to in [Megillah](#) 1:3. It's obvious to me that according to [Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky's](#) approach to the Second Temple, brought in his [Emes L'Yaakov](#) to [Genesis](#) 49:10 and [Exodus](#) 12:2, that he would hold they fasted. He suggests that the Second Temple was known to all that it was a temporary reprieve from exile, but it would eventually be destroyed. See <https://parshaponders.com/vayechi-5783/>. [Teshuvos Chasam Sofer](#) 1:157 brings from [Yosifun](#) that the Jews fasted all the fasts during the Second Temple period

⁴ The [Magen Avraham](#) 552:11 holds they didn't fast, as he says Tisha B'Av was a day of rejoicing and feasting. He suggests this is the reason why we eat on the eve of Tisha B'Av, as a commemoration of that original feasting. The [Teshuvos Tashbetz](#) 1:271 is shocked that the [Rambam](#) would suggest that they fasted when there was a Temple. See [Sefas Emes](#) to [Rosh Hashanah](#) 18a s.v. על אב, who tries to explain the [Rambam](#). The [Turei Even](#), cited below, also holds they didn't fast

⁵ [Rosh Hashanah](#) 18b

⁶ [Zachariah](#) *loc. cit.*

⁷ [Tosafos](#) *ad. loc.* s.v. הואיל

⁸ [Ta'anis](#) 4:6

there's no subjugation, or a joyous day when there's peace? Tosafos gives two answers: Since the destruction of the 9th of Av was a calamity beyond measure⁹. Another answer is that Tisha B'Av is different. True, the 17th of Tammuz had many tragedies. Nevertheless, Tisha B'Av is unique in that the same tragedy happened twice on the same day. As a result, it's considered more severe.

Some want to suggest¹⁰ that the question we started with, if the Jews fasted on Tisha B'Av when the Second Temple stood, is dependent on these two answers of Tosafos. According to the second answer, the reason to fast on Tisha B'Av more than any other fast is because the tragedy was doubled. In the times of the Second Temple, it wasn't yet a doubled tragedy. As a result, there would be no reason to fast on it¹¹. This is not so according to the first answer, which says that the tragedy was a calamity beyond measure. According to this reason, we could say that they fasted even when the Second Temple stood.

Perhaps this discussion is dependent on the proper text of the *Mishnah*. The *Mishnah* says¹² that in the days when the Jewish Court would decide when *Rosh Chodesh* occurred, they would send messengers throughout the country to announce the new month. This was only on six months of the year, when it was more pertinent to know when the new month was declared. One of these months is Av, to know when the fast of Tisha B'Av would occur. The *Mishnah* then says that when the Temple existed, they would **also** send messengers for the month of *Iyar*, to inform people when *Pesach Sheni* would be.

The word "also" implies that even when the Temple stood, people needed to know when the fast of Tisha B'Av would occur. This would support those that say that they fasted even when the Temple stood¹³. However, old manuscripts of the *Mishnayos* take out the word "also"¹⁴. The Turei Even takes it out as well¹⁵, and says that the intent is that there were always six months that messengers were sent out. Instead of sending out for Av, they would send out for *Iyar*. If this understanding is correct, it would inform us that they in fact did not fast on Tisha B'Av¹⁶.

May the Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days.

⁹ See Kesubos 62a

¹⁰ Teshuvos Yad Sofer *loc. cit.*

¹¹ See Rabbeinu Chananel *ad. loc.*

¹² Rosh Hashanah 1:3

¹³ Cf. Teshuvos Tashbetz *loc. cit.*, who has the word "also", but understands it's not literal

¹⁴ The Rambam in his Mishneh Torah *Hilchos Kiddush HaChodesh* 3:9 also has two versions in the manuscripts if he says "also" or not

¹⁵ Turei Even to Rosh Hashanah 18a s.v. וכשהיה. See Halachos Ketanos *loc. cit.*, where there's a marginal note which asks on the author from this Turei Even. See Sefas Emes *loc. cit.*, who addresses the Turei Even's concerns

¹⁶ Although, according to the Magen Avraham *loc. cit.* that they would celebrate on that day, seemingly they should still know when it occurs. The *Mishnah* does explicitly say the **fast** of Tisha B'Av, so even he would agree the word **also** is problematic. Also, see Turei Even *loc. cit.* and s.v. על אב, who addresses this. See also Aruch LaNer to Rosh Hashanah 18b s.v. ברש"י ד"ה דאמר