

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

July 2026

Tammuz/Av 5786

✉ P.O. Box 87406, Houghton, 2041

☎ 011-646-6020 📠 086-580-2624

🌐 www.oxfordshul.com 📧 info@oxfordshul.com

📘 facebook.com/oxfordshul

SHABBAT TIMES

🔊 Parasha - 🕯 Candle Lighting
🕯 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)
For service times see page 2

10 & 11 July – 26 Tammuz

🔊 Matot- & Masei

🕯 5:13 – 🕯 6:05

17 & 18 July – 4 Av

🔊 Devarim

🕯 5:16 – 🕯 6:08

24 & 25 July – 11 Av

🔊 Va'etchanan

🕯 5:20 – 🕯 6:11

31 July & 1 August – 18 Av

🔊 Eikev

🕯 5:23 – 🕯 6:14

7 & 8 August – 25 Av

🔊 Re'eh

🕯 5:26 – 🕯 6:17

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Early one morning last week, just before sunrise, I had occasion to drive towards Heidelberg. As I left Johannesburg, my car's dashboard displayed a chilly 3°C. Cold enough, I thought.

As the kilometres rolled by, however, I noticed the temperature dropping. Two degrees. One. Then zero. Before long it had slipped below freezing. By the time I reached my destination, barely 30 kilometres away, the display read an icy -5°C.

Such a relatively short journey can produce such a dramatic change in temperature. Cities are noticeably warmer than the surrounding countryside. Buildings, roads and other infrastructure absorb heat during the day and release it

slowly at night. Homes are heated, vehicles are constantly on the move, and the bustle of urban life all contributes to making cities warmer than the open countryside.

It struck me that perhaps there is a lesson hidden in this phenomenon.

Where people build communities, there is warmth. Not only the physical warmth measured by a thermometer, but the emotional and spiritual warmth that comes from living alongside one another. A neighbour who checks in. A friend who listens. A family that shares a meal. A congregation that celebrates together, mourns together and looks after one another. Human beings warm each other's lives in countless ways.

By contrast, isolation is cold. Loneliness is cold. A relationship that has broken down feels cold. A community in which people become distant from one another inevitably loses some of its warmth.

We have now entered the Three Weeks, the period during which we mourn the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Our Sages teach that while the First Temple fell because of grave sins, the Second Temple was destroyed because of *sinat chinam*—baseless hatred. The remedy is not merely to avoid conflict. It is to cultivate its opposite: genuine friendship, kindness, respect and concern for one another.

Perhaps that is why so much emphasis is placed during the Three Weeks on strengthening our relationships. Every act of reconciliation, every word of encouragement, every favour done without expecting anything in return, every effort to judge another person favourably, helps to restore the warmth that needless division extinguishes.

As I drove home later that day, I found myself glancing once again at the little temperature display on my dashboard. It occurred to me that each of us carries an invisible spiritual thermometer as well. Every act of kindness raises the temperature a little. Every harsh word, every grudge and every unnecessary disagreement lowers it.

During these Three Weeks, may we each do our part to raise the temperature around us. By replacing distance with friendship, indifference with compassion and division with unity, we can help recreate the atmosphere in which the Beit Hamikdash can once again become a reality.

Just as the coldest moment of the night comes immediately before dawn, so too we pray that the chill of exile will soon give way to the warmth and light of Redemption. May our efforts to bring warmth into the lives of others hasten the coming of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash, speedily in our days.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

DVAR TORAH

Meeting G-d in the Ruins

By Rabbi Avraham Kovel
(aish.com)

Tisha B'Av, the Jewish People's national day of tragedy, is paradoxically a sacred festival. Discover how pain and distance can unlock the deepest closeness with G-d.

Tisha B'Av marks the saddest day in the Jewish calendar. It bears the weight of millennia—from our ancestors' tears in the desert to the ashes of two Temples, from medieval expulsions to Holocaust deportations.

Paradoxically, the saddest day in Jewish history is also classified as a "*moed*"—a sacred time of meeting with G-d, the same classification given to our most joyous holidays. How can a day marked by such tragedies also be viewed as a joyous festival?

History of Tragedy

The story begins in 1314 BCE with a national nervous breakdown. Our ancestors, freed from Egyptian slavery and poised to enter the Promised Land, choose fear over faith. They accept the spies' slanderous report about

Israel, weeping against G-d and wishing they'd never left Egypt. As a result, G-d condemns that generation to wander for forty years and die in the desert.

More significantly, the Talmud tells us that G-d decrees that their needless tears on that day, the 9th of Av, would establish this date as a perpetual day of catastrophe and mourning for the Jewish nation.

It goes on to list four other major calamities that subsequently occurred on this day: the First Temple's destruction by Babylonians (586 BCE), the Second Temple's destruction by Romans (70 CE), the crushing of Bar Kochba's revolt (135 CE), and the plowing over of Jerusalem by Roman forces (135 CE). Centuries later, the tragedies continued—England's expulsion of Jews (1290), Spain's expulsion (1492), World War One's outbreak (1914) and the Warsaw Ghetto deportations (1942) all began on Tisha B'Av.

Meeting in Mourning

With all this tragedy and sadness, you might be shocked to discover that the *Shulchan Aruch*—the authoritative Code of Jewish Law—quoting Lamentations 1:15, designates Tisha

B'Av a "*Moed*." This term, meaning "a time of meeting with G-d," typically describes our most joyous festivals: Passover, Sukkot, and Shavuot.

But how can a day of devastation deserve the same classification as our festivals?

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovits reveals the secret: Jewish tradition recognizes two types of divine encounters—meetings born of closeness and meetings born of distance. Both qualify as sacred appointments with the Divine.

This concept might seem counterintuitive until we consider the following analogy, offered by one of my mentors, Rabbi Dovid Steinhauer: Imagine a couple going through real struggle. For years, they ignore their issues and pretended everything is fine. But each day, the pain mounts, the resentments grow more bitter, and the end of their marriage draws near.

One day, something shifts—they catch each other's eye and a flicker of recognition passes between them. For the first time in too long, they stop pretending. They begin to cry, and in their tears, they finally face one another. The shared

acknowledgment of distance paradoxically becomes their closest moment in years—the beginning of the relationship's repair.

With this metaphor, we can understand the concept of a *moed*, festival, of distance. As a nation and as individuals, our relationship with G-d is far from perfect. We remain in exile, our Temple lies in ruins, and personally, we often choose convenience over commitment in our spiritual lives. On Tisha B'Av, we come face to face with the sad reality of that distance.

In a certain sense, Tisha B'Av becomes the most real of all the holidays—we don't commemorate something that once was; we mourn for what is. Through mourning, through feeling the pain of the broken dream of our relationship with G-d, we find a closeness that we hardly reach any other time of the year. In the words of the great Chassidic master, the Baal Shem Tov, "He who believes he is close to G-d is really far, while he who believes he is far is really close."

From Recognition to Reconstruction

This perspective revolutionizes how we observe the "holiday" of Tisha B'Av. Most people approach the day by immersing themselves in historical tragedy—watching Holocaust documentaries, reading accounts of the Temple's destruction, or studying the chronicles of Jewish persecution throughout the ages. While reflecting on these historical tragedies connects us to Tisha B'Av's gravity, we mustn't stop there. The day's transformative power emerges when we examine our personal distance from G-d.

Ask yourself: How far am I from truly believing in G-d and living according to that belief? Do I only think about G-d when things go wrong, ignoring Him during ordinary moments that are filled with blessing? Do I stress about my future instead of turning to G-d with my troubles?

Sadly, we spend most of our lives distant from G--d. Throughout the year, G-d feels that separation while we remain largely oblivious to His presence. Tisha B'Av offers us the opportunity to pause, sit on the floor, and share that pain with G-d. Through this honest acknowledgment, we take

the first step toward rebuilding our relationship.

This process of transformation doesn't happen overnight. The seven weeks separating Tisha B'Av from Rosh Hashanah represent the time needed to convert recognition into repair. The painful acknowledgment we experience today becomes the foundation for the High Holy Days' work of *teshuvah* (return/repentance). Without feeling how far we've drifted, we lack motivation for the difficult work of coming back.

Only from this place of authentic recognition and shared sorrow can we plant seeds for a better life and world—one filled with G-d's presence and our awareness of that presence.

Wishing you a meaningful fast.

The Fast of Tisha B'Av is observed on Thursday, 23rd July.

SERVICE TIMES

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Monday and Thursday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:30

KABBALAT SHABBAT (P.M.)

Friday	6:00
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MAZALTOV



We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHDAYS

- Glenda Schneider on her 83rd birthday on the 13th of July.
- Donald Krausz on his 96th birthday on the 17th of July.
- Ygal Mencer on his 75th birthday on the 30th of July.

9 LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS ABOUT THE HOLY TEMPLES IN JERUSALEM**1. Dual Purpose**

While the Temple was both a place of spiritual enlightenment and animal sacrifice, there is a dispute as to what its primary purpose was. According to Maimonides, it was most basically defined as “a house for G-d that is prepared for the offering of sacrifices.” According to Nachmanides, “The main object . . . is realized in the ark, as G-d says to Moses, ‘I will commune with you there, speaking to you from above the ark’s cover . . .’” In other words, the main purpose of the Temple was a dwelling place for the Divine Presence.

2. From a Jebusite

King David purchased the site of the Holy Temples, Mount Moriah, from a Jebusite named Aravnah during a terrible plague that ravaged the Israelites after David conducted a census of the people. Following G-d’s command, David built an altar and brought a sacrifice on Aravnah’s threshing floor, and the plague stopped.

3. One, Two, Three . . .

- a. The portable Tabernacle, built by Moses, which accompanied the people of Israel through their 42 desert encampments and was set up in various places in the Land of Israel, including Shiloh.
- b. The First Holy Temple, built by King Solomon on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, which lasted for 410 years before it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 423 BCE.
- c. The Second Holy Temple, built in the same spot as the first one by Ezra, Nehemiah and the returnees from the Babylonian exile. It was renovated extensively by King Herod in the year 19 BCE, and destroyed by the Romans in the year 69 CE.

4. High Court

The Holy Temple in Jerusalem contained a special hall called the Lishkat Hagazit (the “Hall of Hewn Stone”), which served as the seat of the Sanhedrin, the nation’s highest court of 71 jurists. It was specially constructed partly on sacred ground and partly on the less-holy area of the Temple Mount complex, since sitting is not permitted in the most sacred place. It was there that the most important issues of Jewish law and tradition were deliberated, debated and decided.

5. Twice as Nice

The Holy Temples contained two altars. The large copper altar in the courtyard was used for the many animal sacrifices that were brought. The golden altar inside the Temple was used only for incense, brought twice a day by the priests.

6. Wash It Away

A stream of fresh water ran through the Temple courtyard. On the afternoon before Passover, when every family would bring a sacrificial lamb to eat at their Seder, the floor of the Temple courtyard would become so filthy that the stream would be dammed up, flooding the courtyard. When the blockage was removed, the entire courtyard would be left clean and fresh.

7. On Guard

The Temple Mount was constantly guarded by cadres of priests and Levites in 24 locations. “Even though there is no fear of enemies or thieves,” Maimonides explains, “the guarding is only for honor, since an unguarded palace cannot be compared [in prestige] to one with guards.” If a guard would fall asleep, the overseer of the guards (called the Man of the Temple Mount) had permission to rap him with his stick, or even singe the edge of his cloak.

8. Still Sacred

Even though the Temple has lain in ruins for nearly 2,000 years, the Temple Mount is still sacred, for G-d’s Presence has not left. In fact, tradition tells us that the Ark of the Covenant is still there, in a specially built vault deep under the Temple Mount.

9. Back to the Books

Even though we can’t actually build the Third Holy Temple until Moshiach arrives, G-d told the Prophet Ezekiel that “the study of the Torah’s [design of the Holy Temple] can be equated to its construction. Go tell them to study the form of the Temple. As a reward for their study and their occupation with it, I will consider it as if they actually built it.”