

Tu b'Av: The Loveliest Day of the Month

Mishnah Ta'anit 4a

אָמַר רַבִּין שִׁמּוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל, לֹא הָיוּ יָמִים טוֹבִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל כַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בְּאָב וְכִיוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים

(8) Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel said: There were no days of joy in Israel greater than the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur.

Why was Yom Kippur considered such a joyful day?

Bartenura on Mishnah Ta'anit 4:8:2

וַיְהִי כִּי שָׁבוּ נַתְנוּ לַוְחוֹת הָאֲחֵרוֹנוֹת, וְהוּא יוֹם מַחִילָה וְסְלִיחָה :

And the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur): upon which the second set of Tablets (of the 10 Commandments) were given. This is a day of **forgiveness and reconciliation**.

And what, the Rabbis asked, was the special joy of Tu b'Av, the fifteenth of Av?

Ta'anit 30b: 9-10

ט"ו באב מאי היא אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל יום שהותרו שבטים לבוא זה בזה מאי דרוש זה הדבר אשר צוה ה' לבנות צלפחד וגו' דבר זה לא יהא נוהג אלא בדור זה

What is the special joy of the fifteenth of Av? Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: This was the day on which **the members of different tribes were permitted to enter one another's tribe, by intermarriage**. It was initially prohibited to intermarry between tribes, so as to keep each plot of land within the portion of the tribe that originally inherited it. This *halakha* was instituted by the Torah in the wake of a complaint by the relatives of the daughters of Zelophehad, who were worried that if these women married men from other tribes, the inheritance of Zelophehad would be lost from his tribe (Numbers 36:1-12). What did they expound, in support of their conclusion that this *halakha* was no longer in effect? The verse states: "This is the matter that the Eternal has commanded concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying: Let them marry whom they think best; only into the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry" (Numbers 36:5). They derived from the verse that this matter shall be practiced only in this generation, when Eretz Yisrael was divided among the tribes, but afterward members of different tribes were permitted to marry. **On the day this barrier separating the tribes was removed, the Sages established a permanent day of rejoicing.**

Ta'anit 30b: 11

אמר רב יוסף אמר רב נחמן יום שהותר שבט בנימין לבוא בקהל שנאמר ואיש ישראל נשבע במצפה לאמר איש ממנו לא יתן בתו לבנימין לאשה מאי דרוש אמר רב ממנו ולא מבנינו

Rav Yosef said that Rav Nahman said: The fifteenth of Av was the day on which **the tribe of Benjamin was permitted to enter the congregation of the Jewish people**. After the tragic incident at Gibeah, for which the tribe of Benjamin was blamed, the other tribes ostracized them. They took an oath to prohibit themselves from marrying a member of the tribe of Benjamin, as it is stated: "And the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying: None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife" (Judges 21:1). The Gemara asks: What did they expound that enabled them to dissolve this oath? Rav said: They understood the verse literally, as it states: "None of us," and not: None of our children, i.e., **the oath applied only to the generation that took the oath, not their descendants**.

Ta'anit 30b: 12

אָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חַנָּה אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן יוֹם שְׁפָלוּ בוֹ מִתִּי מִדְּבַר דְּאָמַר מָר עַד שְׁלֹא כָּלוּ מִתִּי מִדְּבַר לֹא הָיָה דְּבוּר עִם מֹשֶׁה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּ כָּל אַנְשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה לְמוֹת וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלַי אֵלַי הָיָה הַדְּבוּר

Rabba bar bar Hana said that Rabbi Yohanan said: The fifteenth of Av was the day on which **the deaths of the Jews in the wilderness ceased**. The entire generation that had left Egypt had passed away, as the Master said: After the sin of the spies, on account of which the Jews of that generation were sentenced to die in the wilderness, as long as the death of the Jews in the wilderness had not ceased, God's speech did not come to Moses, as it is stated: "And it came to pass, when all the men of war were consumed and dead from among the people, that the Lord spoke to me, saying" (Deuteronomy 2:16–17). This indicates that only then, after the last member of that generation had died, was God's speech delivered to me, i.e., Moses, but not beforehand. **When the Jews realized that the decree that God would not speak to Moses had been lifted, they established that day as a permanent day of rejoicing.**

Ta'anit 30b-31a: 13 & 1

עוֹלָא אָמַר יוֹם שְׁפִיטַל הוֹשַׁע בֶּן אֶלְהָ פְּרוֹסְדִיּוֹת שְׁהוֹשִׁיב יְרֻבְעֵם בֶּן נִבְטָ עַל הַדְּרָכִים שְׁלֹא יַעֲלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְרַגְלָא וְאָמַר לְאִיזָה שְׁיִרְצוּ יַעֲלוּ

Ulla said: The fifteenth of Av was the day on which King Hoshea, son of Ela, canceled the guards that Jeroboam, son of Nevat, placed on the roads so the Jews would not ascend to Jerusalem for the pilgrim Festival. And Hoshea, son of Ela, said **they may ascend to wherever they wish**, i.e., they may go to Jerusalem, Bethel, or Dan.

What's this about Tu b'Av being a sort of "Jewish Valentine's Day"?

Mishnah Ta'anit 4:8

אָמַר רַבִּן שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל, לֹא הָיוּ יָמִים טוֹבִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל כַּחַמְשָׁה עָשָׂר בְּאָב וְכִיוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים, שְׂבָהֶן בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יוֹצְאוֹת בְּכָלִי לְבָן שְׂאוּלִין, שְׁלֹא לְבִישׁ אֶת מִי שְׂאִין לוֹ... וְכַנּוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יוֹצְאוֹת וְחוֹלוֹת בְּכַרְמִים. וּמָה הָיוּ אוֹמְרוֹת, בְּחוֹר, שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה, מָה אַתָּה בּוֹרֵר לָךְ. אֵל תִּתֵּן עֵינֶיךָ בְּנוֹי, תֵּן עֵינֶיךָ בְּמִשְׁפָּחָה. שְׂקָר הַחֵן וְהַבֵּל הַיָּפִי, אֲשֶׁה יִרְאֵת ה' הִיא תִתְהַלֵּל (מִשְׁלֵי לֵא). וְאוֹמַר, תָּנוּ לָהּ מִפְּרֵי יַדֶּיהָ, וַיְהִלְוֶהּ בְּשַׁעְרֵים מִעֲשִׂיהָ...

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel said: There were no days of joy in Israel greater than the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur. On these days the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in borrowed white garments in order not to shame anyone who had none...The daughters of Jerusalem come out and dance in the vineyards. What would they say? Young man, lift up your eyes and see what you choose for yourself. Do not set your eyes on beauty but set your eyes on the family. "Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman that fears the Eternal, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30). And it further says, "Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her works praise her in the gates" (ibid, 31:31)...

Ta'anit 31a: 5

שְׂבָהֶן בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם כּוֹ' תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן בֵּית מִלְךָ שׁוֹאֵלֶת מִבֵּית פֶּהֶן גְּדוּל בֵּית פֶּהֶן גְּדוּל מִבֵּית סָגָן וּבֵית סָגָן מִבֵּית מְשׁוּחַ מִלְחָמָה וּבֵית מְשׁוּחַ מִלְחָמָה מִבֵּית פֶּהֶן הָדְיוּט וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל שׁוֹאֵלִין זֶה מִזֶּה כְּרִי שְׁלֹא (יְתִבִישׁ) [לְבִישׁ] אֶת מִי שְׂאִין לוֹ:

The mishna taught: As on them the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in white clothes, and on the fifteenth of Av they would go out to the vineyards and dance. The Sages taught this tradition in greater detail: The daughter of the king borrows white garments from the daughter of the High Priest; the daughter of the High Priest borrows from the daughter of the deputy High Priest; the daughter of the deputy High Priest borrows from the daughter of the priest anointed for war, i.e., the priest who would read verses of Torah and address the army as they prepared for battle; the daughter of the priest anointed for war borrows from the daughter of a common priest; and all the Jewish people borrow from each other. Why would they all borrow garments? **They did this so as not to embarrass one who did not have her own white garments.**