



Holiday: Tu B'Av

"From The Look Of Love, From The Eyes Of Pride"

by Chaim Moshe HaLevi (Marc Howard Landas) on Saturday August 16, 2008

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Tu B'Av

Dedicated to Esther (better known as Madonna), celebrating 50 years of reinventing herself. Yom huledet sameach!

One of the fascinating things about Jewish time is that it not only goes in cycles from Shabbat to Shabbat, "one season following another," and one year to the next. It also moves through a rollercoaster ride of "ups and downs" e.g. *Pesach* (joyous) to *Omer* (mournful) to *Yom HaShoah* (very mournful) to *Yom HaZikaron* (mournful) to *Yom HaAtzmaut* (joyous) to *Lag Ba'Omer* (joyous) to *Shavuot* (very joyous).

Despite an old joke that says Jewish holidays often center around the theme "They oppressed us, we defeated them, so let's eat!" the Jewish calendar simply doesn't allow for sustained mourning—periodic, carefully timed mourning, yes, but "down time" is always followed by a period of "high."

Tu B'Av is one of several holidays celebrated throughout the Jewish year [the others being *Tu B'Shevat*, *Purim*, *Pesach*, and *Sukkot*] that fall on or around the 15th of various Hebrew months. As a religion with deep roots in and connections to tribal beliefs and practices, this is hardly surprising since midmonth is the time that usually coincides with the full moon and, for all except *Purim*, each of the holidays is tied to the rhythms of nature – first blossoms, the onset of spring, the autumn harvest. But, what exactly is *Tu B'Av* and how does it figure into these rhythms?

Well, we can start our investigation by making note of the pilgrimage holiday not included in the aforementioned list. We count the *Omer* for seven weeks beginning with the 2nd seder until *Shavuot*, which is celebrated in the month of *Sivan*. Counting a little more than seven weeks from the middle of that month, we come to *Tisha B'Av*. We have gone from the highest point in the Jewish calendar (the holiday when we received the Torah) to the lowest point in our calendar (the fast day when we commemorate the greatest tragedies of our people, most especially the destruction of both Holy Temples in Jerusalem). Five days after *Tisha B'Av* we celebrate *Tu B'Av*.



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This year *Shabbat Nachamu*, the Sabbath following *Tisha B'Av*, coincides with *Tu B'Av*. Just as *Purim* is mislabeled as “the Jewish Halloween,” *Tu B'Av*, has become known to some as “the Jewish Valentine’s Day.” While each Jewish holiday shares some characteristics with its paired secular holiday, the labels are misnomers. *Tu B'Av*, is actually best paired with *Yom Kippur*.

Both *Yom Kippur* and *Tu B'Av* celebrate God’s forgiveness of mistakes made by various groups of Israelites. According to tradition, on the 17th of *Tammuz*, Moses descended Mount Sinai with the two tablets he had received from God. Upon seeing the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf, he smashed the tablets. That day has become a fast day that begins a “down time” known as the Three Weeks, which culminates in *Tisha B'Av*. *Yom Kippur* is when it is said that God finally forgave the Israelites for their idolatry. At that time Moses is also said to have received the second set of tablets from God.

Tisha B'Av commemorates the time ten of the Israelites sent to scout out the land of Canaan came back with a faithless report about what they had seen. As punishment, it was decreed by God that the Israelites would wander in the desert for 40 years, and that no person 20 years or older would enter the land of Israel. Annually, on *Tisha B'Av*, those who had reached the age of 60 that year died—15,000 each year. During the 40th year, as the 9th of Av approached, the last 15,000 people prepared themselves to die, but nothing happened. Thinking they might have been wrong about the date, they waited the next several days. On the 15th of Av, the full moon appeared. The people realized that the 9th of Av had come and gone and they were still alive. It became clear to them that God had finally forgiven the people for the sin of the Spies.

In this way, *Tu B'Av* and *Yom Kippur* are both holidays when God demonstrated unconditional love for his people absolving them from sin. Incidentally, counting approximately seven weeks from the former we come to the latter.

Tu B'Av is likewise associated with the end of the ban on intermarriage between the tribes of Israel as a way of preserving the tribe of Benjamin which was in danger of dying out. Over the years, the day became known as a day devoted to making *shidduchs* (arranging matches between single men and women). According to the *Talmudic* tractate *Taanit*, Chapter 4, “There were no better days for the people of Israel than *Tu B'Av* and *Yom Kippur*, since on these days the daughters of Israel go out dressed in white and dance in the vineyards. What were they saying: Young man, consider whom you choose (to be your wife).”

In this day and age of personal ads, dating websites, and 3-minute instant-matching events, wouldn’t it be nice to go back to the “good old days,” to a holiday of love preceding the artifice of greeting cards, chocolate, flowers, and stuffed animals? Singles could go out, into the fields, to dance, schmooze, and hopefully meet their *basherte* all under the disco ball of the full moon. Wouldn’t it be great if the J-GLBTIQ community adopted *Tu B'Av* as a day of Queer-Jewish love? I can just picture it. Everyone gathering to show off their best white outfits knowing full well



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that come Labor Day, it's back to black or whatever is the "new black." All of us could frolic and play on a fully endorsed "cruising" holiday. "Hooking up" would not just be possible, it would be expected.

Okay, so I'm being silly. But in truth, wouldn't it be great to set aside this day to celebrate the love we have for each other as "twice blessed" people? What a perfect day for same-sex couples in the U.S.A. to "get hitched," whether in California or Massachusetts, laying claim to all of those rights and privileges afforded to opposite-gendered married couples. Our mishpacha in the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Norway, South Africa, and Spain could do the same. Just as we can use the day of Yom Kippur to gain at-one-ment with God, we can honor ourselves and each other by emulating God's benevolent love on Tu B'Av.



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