What happened on the 17th of Tamuz?

This coming Tuesday, July 15th, we will commemorate the 17th of Tamuz, a fast-day.

Five tragedies happened to the Jewish people on this day.

1. The 17th of Tamuz occurs forty days after Shabu'ot. Moshe ascended Mount Sinai on Shabu'ot and remained there for forty days. The people of Israel made the golden calf on the afternoon of the 16th of Tamuz, when they thought that Moshe was not coming down. When Moshe descended from Mount Sinai and saw the Jews worshiping the golden calf, he smashed the tablets which carried the Ten Commandments.

2. Menashe –a Jewish King, the worst sovereign of the Kingdom of Yehuda– placed on that day an idol in the Holy Sanctuary of the Temple of Jerusalem, around the year 700 BCE.

3. In the time of the First Temple, in 587 BCE, the Kohanim (priests) were forced to discontinue the offering of the daily sacrifice. This sacrifice (*qorban hatamid*) had been offered by the Jews since the time of the exodus of Egypt. On the 17th of Tamuz of that year this sacrifice could not be offered anymore due to the shortage of animals caused by the siege of the city of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army.

4. Around the year 50 of the Common Era, Apostomus, a Roman captain, seized a Tora scroll and with abusive and mocking language burned the Tora in public. (According to Maimonides it was Apostomus, not Menashe, who besides burning the Tora placed an idol in the Holy Temple as well).

5. In the year 68 CE the walls of Jerusalem were breached after many months of siege by the Roman army. Three weeks after the breach of the wall, the Bet haMiqdash was destroyed

on the 9th of Ab.

Because of these five tragedies we fast on the 17th of Tamuz. We also recite special prayers (*tahanunim*) which inspire us to mourn and repent for our transgressions and the transgressions of our ancestors.

The fast begins at dawn and ends with the appearance of the three stars.