Mourning, on Tish’a beAb

Tish’a beAb is a day of fasting and it is also a day of collective national mourning. During Tish’a beAb we behave as mourners grieving a loved one who just passed away. To express or reach this emotional state of grief, during Tish’a beAb (from Saturday night August 13th, after Shabbat is over, until Sunday 14th at nightfall) we avoid engaging in certain activities from which we derive a physical pleasure, activities associated with happiness or which would distract us from the mood of mourning.

Some examples

LIMUD TORA: On Tish’a beAb we refrain from studying Tora, because studying Tora is a joyous and pleasurable activity. We might read and study books or texts with a sad content, such as the book of Iyob or Ekha, some passages of the book of Jeremiah or some Psalms, masekhet mo’ed qatan, etc.

WORK: On Tish’a beAb it is not advised to work because working would divert our minds from the feeling of grief. Refraining from work on Tish’a beAb, however, is not a formal prohibition but rather a tradition some communities have adopted and some have not (minhag hamaqom) and it also depends on each individual’s financial or professional situation. In any case, if one would incur in significant losses or if one’s job position will be compromised, it is permitted to work.

SHE-ELAT SHALOM: On Tish’a beAb we don’t greet each other as usual, because our mood is, or should be, a mourner’s mood. If someone greets us, we can discreetly and politely acknowledge the gesture.

SITTING ON THE FLOOR: The general custom is that during the reading of Megilat Ekha people don’t sit on the Synagogue’s benches but on the floor, like mourners do during the shib’a (the first seven days of Jewish mourning), while the lights are dimmed.

REHITSA (Washing) Same as Yom Kippur, taking a shower, bathing or washing for pleasure is forbidden on Tish’a beAb. However, if a part of the body is unclean we can wash it. Brushing our teeth or washing our mouth is not permitted on Tish’a beAb. Except in a situation of great distress. In such case, one should bend the head downward when washing the mouth to avoid

swallowing any liquid (Rabbi Obadya Yosef z”l). It is permitted to use baby wipes to clean one’s face, eyes, hands, etc. because this type of cleaning is not considered “washing”. Technically we could wash our hands normally in the morning for Netilat Yadayim, because we do it for a Mitsva and not for pleasure. The standard Sephardic custom, however, is to wash only the fingers for Netilat Yadayim.

SIKHA (Using creams) Using creams or ointments for pleasure or comfort is not permitted on Tish’a beAb. Medical creams or oils are permitted. Using deodorant is permitted.

NE’ILAT HASANDAL (Leather shoes) Leather shoes are dress shoes and therefore they are considered a luxurious item. During the day of National mourning then, we don’t wear leather shoes. We should wear sneakers or another type of footwear made of fabric, plastic, etc. Other leather items, like a leather belt or a leather Kipa could be worn.

TASHMISH HAMITA (Intimacy) Marital relations are suspended on Tish’a beAb. If the Mikve night falls on the night of Tish’a beAb, i.e., Saturday, August 13th at night, the Mikve has to be postponed for the following night .

TEFILIN: We do not use Tefilin in the morning of Tish’a beAb. Tefilin is a signal of honor and pride, a crown in our heads which declares that we are the people of God. In most Sephardic communities men wear Talit and Tefilin just in Minha. In Syrian communities, the tradition is that before going to the Synagogue in the morning one says Qaddesh Li and Shema Israel at home with Talit and Tefilin. In other communities, men wear Tefilin and Tallit normally in the morning (=minhag Yerushalayim).

Halakhot of Tish’a beAb

What happened on the 9th of Ab?
Buying, building, renewing during the nine days
Meat and wine during the nine days.