Laws and Traditions of the Three Weeks

During the three weeks between the 17th of Tamuz (July 23th, 2024) until the 9th of Ab (August 13 at night), we observe certain restrictions associated with mourning. These traditions differ considerably from one community to another and become stricter as we approach the 9th of Ab.

There are four periods of mourning that we keep during these days.

1. The first period, the least strict, is from the 17th of Tammuz until the beginning of the month of Ab (August 5th).

2. The second period, from the beginning of the month of Ab until the week of the 9th of Ab.

3. The third period of mourning is during the week of Ab 9, that is, from the Sunday previous to the 9th of Ab (this year August 11) until the end of the 9th of Ab.

4. The most severe time of mourning is obviously observed on the day of 9th of Ab.

Here are some examples of the restrictions we observe from now until the beginning of the month of Ab:

MARRIAGES: The rabbis of the Talmud, Maimonides, the Shulchan ‘Arukh, etc., did not mention any limitations regarding the celebration of weddings before the beginning of the month of Ab, and that was the tradition in most Sephardic communities for centuries. In Ashkenazi communities, however, wedding ceremonies are suspended from the 17th of Tamuz. In our days, and to maintain a level of uniformity in the matter of marriages between the two communities, virtually all Sephardic congregations have also adopted the custom of suspending marriages on these days.

SHEHECHEYANU: The Shulchan ‘arukh mentions that it is appropriate to avoid the consumption of a new seasonal fruit, which requires reciting the Shehecheyanu blessing, during these three weeks. The Sephardic and Ashkenazi tradition is to reserve the recitation of Shehecheyanu for a new fruit for Shabbat.

HAIRCUT: Most Sephardic communities allow haircuts or shaving until the week of Tish’a BeAb. In the Mashadi community and other Sephardic communities, men do not get a haircut from Rosh Hodesh Ab but are allowed to shave until the week of Tish’a BeAb. The Ashkenazi tradition (Ram”a 551: 4) and the custom of Moroccan Jews are different: haircutting and shaving are banned from the 17th of Tamuz until after Tish’a beAb (haircut restrictions do not apply to women).

Abstaining from wine and meat, showering, bathing, etc., does not apply to Sepharadim during this first mourning period.