Meat, Wine and Haircuts during the Nine Days

“Once the month of Ab begins, we minimize our happiness.”

During the first nine days of the month of Ab, we prepare ourselves to mourn the destruction of the Bet haMiqdash, the great Temple of Jerusalem. To do this, we minimize our happiness by avoiding celebrations and abstaining from the consumption of what is considered luxurious food: meat and wine.

Why meat and wine? Because these foods were offered in the Bet haMiqdash as animal sacrifices (qorbanot) or wine libations (nisukhin). Thus, abstaining from these foods also expresses our longing for the Bet haMiqdash.

The Mishna in Ta’anit (26B) mentions the prohibition to eat meat and drink wine during the Se’udat haMafseqet, which is the meal right before the fast of Tish’a beAb begins. This is the custom of Yemenite Jews, who avoid eating meat and drinking wine only during the meal before the fast. Over time, most Jews extended these restrictions for a longer period. The Shulchan ‘Arukh (551:9) mentions three different customs:

1. Those who refrain from meat and wine from the 17th of Tamuz.
2. Those who refrain from meat from the beginning of the month of Ab.
3. Those who refrain from meat only during the week of the 9th of Ab.

MEAT In Ashkenazi communities, and in some Sephardic communities (such as the Sephardic Jews of Yerushalayim), people avoid eating meat also during the day of Rosh Chodesh, following the tradition of the Ari z”l. In most Sephardic communities, however, the tradition is to avoid eating after

Rosh Chodesh. Meat and wine restrictions do not apply on Shabbat. On the contrary, during Shabbat, we have to eat meat in honor of the Seventh day. The restriction from meat also includes avoiding poultry. Consuming fish during the Nine Days is allowed.

A person who is sick or weak, or a nursing woman during the first thirty days after giving birth, is allowed to eat meat during these days. The rabbi's advice that, when possible, they should eat chicken instead of red meat. Children are not subject to the restriction of meat. However, Rabbi Obadia Yosef recommends that one year before the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, once they better understand the meaning of mourning for the Temple, they should also avoid eating meat. If a Se'udat Mitzva, such as a Berit Mila, takes place during these days, it is allowed to serve meat. In the old days, in many communities, meat was not served at a Se'udat Mitzva during the first days of the month of Ab because the Shechita, the Kosher slaughtering of animals, was discontinued once the month of Ab began, and fresh meat was not available.

WINE The Ashkenazi custom is to refrain from drinking wine during the Nine Days. The Sephardim have three different traditions:

1. Those who refrain from wine for Nine Days.
2. Those who avoid wine only during the week of Tish'a beAb.
3. Those who do not follow any restriction from wine during the Nine Days.

The Mashadi community's tradition is to refrain from eating meat and drinking wine once the month of Ab begins, except for Rosh Chodesh Ab and Shabbat.

Other alcoholic beverages, such as beer, are not forbidden during the Nine Days.

HAIRCUT AND SHAVING The Ashkenazi custom is to forbid shaving

and cutting one's hair during the three weeks. In most Sephardic communities, men avoid shaving and cutting their hair only during the week of Tish'a beAb. This is also the opinion of Shulchan Arukh.

In the Mashadi community and other Sephardic communities, men do not get a haircut from Rosh Chodesh Ab, but they are allowed to shave until the week of Tish'a BeAb. Haircut restrictions do not apply to women. Each person should follow his or her community's tradition.

For more information, see also this great article in Hebrew

For a more detailed summary of Syrian and all Sephardic traditions of the 9 days, watch this video.