

SUMMER

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The holiday of Shavuot marks the beginning of the summer season for all of us. Those of us fortunate enough to live in Jerusalem can look forward to hot days and pleasant nights with very little humidity. Jerusalem has a semi-desert climate and many medical people have remarked that it is essentially a very healthy climate. But summer is more than a story of weather and sun, important as these factors are.

It is also a mood, a sense of relaxing from our dizzying pace of living and a chance to recharge our emotional and physical batteries. The famous American song of George and Ira Gershwin summed it up succinctly: "Summertime, and the living is easy."

Well, here in Israel one can hardly ever describe the "living " as being easy but even here the long sunny days (it almost never rains here in the summer) and the fact that the pace of life, school, and even commerce slows, contributes to the mood change that I described above.

Children are free from school in the main and their voices and laughter and excitement fill the air. A few years ago, a leading charedi educator boasted to me that except for the few days of Av surrounding Tisha B'Av, his school never had any vacation for its students. I gently reminded him of a responsa of Rabbi Yitzchak of Dampiere, Rashi's grand nephew and one of the chief editors of Tosafot to the Talmud.

Rabbi Yitzchak was presented with a case where a teacher was discharged by his employer because he allowed the child to take off a day from his studies. The teacher appealed to Rabbi Yitzchak to have him reinstated.

Rabbi Yitzchak found in favor of the teacher and remarked that it was beneficial for both the teacher and the student to have some time off from the regimen of studies. The educator was most impressed by my erudition but as far as I know the calendar at his school has yet to be adjusted to conform to this idea.

The Jewish summer is divided into three distinct periods of time. The first one in which we are now engaged is from Shavuot to the seventeenth of Tammuz. This is usually the most pleasant time of the summer, weather wise and mood wise. It still has the anticipation and excitement of summer plans and the chance to wind down and appreciate life and its blessings in spite of its problems and

disappointments.

It is the season for weddings, family visits, trips and vacations. This first enjoyable part of the summer reaches an almost abrupt ending with the advent of the seventeenth of Tammuz and the period of mourning for the destruction of the Temples and the Jewish exile.

In the Ashkenazic world, there are no weddings until after Tisha B'Av and enjoyable occasions and trips are minimized. The Sephardim begin their period of commemoration mourning on Rosh Chodesh Av or on the week in which Tisha B'Av itself falls. In any event this second period of the summer is the low point of the season for Jews, heavy with memory, angst and an aching sadness.

This period of time does allow us to assess what we do have and the progress that we and civilization have made over the past nineteen hundred and thirty eight years since the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem - but it also poignantly points out to us the distance in the road that we have yet to travel to make good that loss.

The final period of the summer from after Tisha B'Av until Rosh Hashana is already a busy time. Elul marks the beginning of the season of the High Holy Days, schools reopen (hopefully on time this year) and the pace of life picks up in anticipation of the great and holy days that lie immediately before us.

The end of summer brings with it a sadness related to departing time coupled with a heightened anticipation of the new year and its potential blessings and accomplishments. The knowledge that the great holidays are just beyond the horizon is the true comfort for the otherwise sad departure of summer, its warmth, beauty and relaxed mood.

The Jewish calendar of the year is truly a work of Divine genius. It is meant to give humans the greatest benefits of bounty, pleasantness, anticipation and meaning. I think that it certainly accomplishes that goal in a most efficient and wise manner. It is a further example of how the Torah is the book of human guidance and challenge.

A very pleasant and happy summer to all.

Shabat shalom.

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