

THE PROHIBITIONS OF THE THREE WEEKS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The three-week period between the fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz and Tishah b'Av, known as Bein ha-Metzarim, was established by the Rabbis as a period of mourning over the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash. There are certain activities, normally permitted, which are prohibited during this period. The Talmud[1] tells us that only one who has properly mourned the Temple's destruction will merit to see its rebuilding. It is important, therefore, to become more knowledgeable about the exact nature of those prohibited activities. Let us review:

There are four forbidden activities, for men and women, that are specific to the Three-Weeks period: 1. Taking a haircut or a shave; 2. Getting married or participating in a wedding; 3. Listening to music and dancing; 4. Reciting shehecheyanu.

Important Note: The Three Weeks period includes another period of mourning, called the Nine Days. The halachos of those days—from Rosh Chodesh Av through midday of the tenth of Av—are more restrictive in several areas. Here we are discussing the laws of the Three Weeks only, not the special, more stringent, halachos of the Nine Days.

Cutting Hair—When is it permitted? When is it prohibited?

- It is permitted to trim a mustache that interferes with eating[2].
- It is permitted to pluck one's eyebrows or eyelashes[3].
- Married women may cut hair that is protruding from their head covering[4].
- It is permitted to comb one's hair even though some hair will get torn out while combing[5].
- Nail cutting is permitted[6].
- It is permitted to shave if one's employer insists upon it[7]. But if one's job is not at stake, though he may be ridiculed, it is forbidden to shave[8].
- A mourner who completed his mourning period during the Three Weeks, may take a haircut and a shave[9].
- The prohibition of hair-cutting applies even to small children[10]. Thus if an upsheren falls during the Three Weeks, it should either be moved up or postponed[11].
- If absolutely necessary, some poskim permit taking a haircut or a shave on the evening and night of the Seventeenth of Tammuz[12].
- There are poskim who support the custom of those who shave on erev Shabbos[13], but this is not the custom today in most communities[14].
- On the day of a baby's bris[15], the father, the sandek and the mohel may take a haircut or a

shave[16]. But it is forbidden to take a haircut or shave in honor of a bar mitzvah[17].

Weddings—When are they permitted? When are they prohibited?

- A wedding may be held on the evening before the Seventeenth of Tammuz if the chupah will take place before sunset[18]. If no other date is feasible, some poskim allow the chupah to take place even after sunset[19] while others are more stringent[20].
- Engagements are permitted and may even be celebrated with a party or a meal[21].

Music—When is it permitted? When is it prohibited?

- Listening to music is prohibited, whether it is live, broadcast on the radio, or taped[22].
- Programs or other occasions where the musical accompaniment is incidental to the main event may be attended or viewed[23].
- Children who are old enough to understand about the destruction of the Beis ha-Mikdash may not listen to music[24]. Several poskim, however, permit a child to practice his musical instrument[25].
- Singing in praise of Hashem at a seudas mitzvah, without musical accompaniment, is permitted[26].
- A professional musician, or one who is learning to play professionally, may play music during the Three Weeks[27].

Shehecheyanu[28] —When is it permitted? When is it prohibited?

- On Shabbos, it is permitted to recite shehecheyanu[29].
- On Rosh Chodesh Av, it is permitted to recite shehecheyanu[30] over new fruit[31].
- A new fruit that will not be available after the Three Weeks may be eaten and a shehecheyanu recited[32].
- A shehecheyanu is recited at a pidyon ha-ben[33] and upon seeing one's newborn daughter[34].
- A shehecheyanu may be recited if by mistake the Borei pri ha-eitz was already said over a new fruit[35].
- The blessing of ha-Tov v'ha-Meitiv may be recited during the Three Weeks[36].
- Since it is prohibited to recite shehecheyanu, it is also prohibited to buy any item that normally requires shehecheyanu to be recited. It is forbidden, therefore, to buy a new car for personal use during the Three Weeks. It is permitted, however, to buy a car for business use [and recite the shehecheyanu after the Three Weeks] or for the benefit of the family [since in that case ha-Tov v'ha-Meitiv is recited instead of shehecheyanu[37]].
- New clothes that normally require a shehecheyanu should not be bought during this time. Thus, shoes, shirts, trousers and all undergarments may be purchased and worn without restriction until Rosh Chodesh Av, since shehecheyanu is generally not recited over them. One

who never recites shehecheyanu on clothes, even on expensive ones[38], could also purchase and wear expensive clothes during this time. Those who do recite shehecheyanu when putting on new clothes may still buy and alter them until Rosh Chodesh Av, but they may not be worn until after the Nine Days are over[39].

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1. Ta'anis 31b, quoted in Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 554:25.
 2. O.C. 551:13.
 3. Halichos Shelomo 3:14, Devar Halachah 9; Bein Pesach l'Shavuos, pg. 241, quoting Rav S. Vosner.
 4. Mishnah Berurah 551:79. When necessary, women may shave their legs; Rav M. Feinstein (Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 128, note 9). See also Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:137 where he allows women to take haircuts when necessary during the Three Weeks. When necessary, a girl of marriageable age may take a haircut; Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 3:14, Devar Halachah 10).
 5. Mishnah Berurah 551:20.
 6. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 122:5.
 7. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:102; She'arim Metzuyananim b'Halachah 122:5.
 8. Igros Moshe, C.M. 1:93; Halichos Shelomo 3:14-7.
 9. Mishnah Berurah 551:87.
 10. Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 551:91. Aruch ha-Shulchan 551:31, however, seems to hold that only children above the age of chinuch are prohibited to take a haircut. See also Igros Moshe, Y.D. 1:224 who agrees with this opinion.
 11. Chanoch le-Na'ar 22:1.
 12. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:112-2; She'arim Metzuyananim b'Halachah 122:1. Others do not agree with this leniency; see Halichos Shelomo 3:13, Orchos Halchah 1, and Shevet ha-Levi 8:168-8; 10:81-2.
 13. Kaf ha-Chayim 551:66. See also Beirur Halachah 551:3, quoting Rav Akiva Eiger.
 14. Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 42:52.
 15. Or the evening before; Mishnah Berurah 493:13. If the bris is on Shabbos, it is permitted to take a haircut on Friday, ibid. If the bris is on Sunday, most poskim do not permit taking a haircut on Friday; see Kaf ha-Chayim 493:36.
 16. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 122:15; Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 551:4, quoting Chasam Sofer; Kaf ha-Chayim 551:10; Pischei Teshuvah 551:1; She'arim Metzuyananim b'Halachah 122:16. See, however, Be'er Heitev 551:3, who is stringent.

17. Rav M. Feinstein, quoted in Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 128.
18. Rav Y.Y. Kanievsky and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Nechamas Yisrael, pg. 32.
19. Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:168.
20. See Halichos Shelomo 3:13, Orchos Halachah 1, Tzitz Eliezer 10:26 and Shevet ha-Levi 8:168-8; 10:81-2.
21. Mishnah Berurah 551:19 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 26.
22. Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:166; 3:87; 4:21-4; Minchas Yitzchak 1:111-4; Halichos Shelomo 3:14, Devar Halachah 4; Yechaveh Da'as 3:30.
23. Rav M. Feinstein (quoted in Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 128).
24. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:21-4.
25. See She'arim Metzuyanin b'Halachah 122:2 and Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 128.
26. Rav M. Feinstein (Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 128); Halichos Shelomo 3:14-3; Yechaveh Da'as 6:34.
27. Beiur Halachah 551:2; Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:87
28. Not all poskim prohibit reciting shehecheyanu during the Three Weeks and some conduct themselves according to that view; see Aruch ha-Shulchan 551:38. Our Discussion here is based on the view of the Mishnah Berurah, who does not permit reciting shehecheyanu during the Three Weeks, and this has become the prevalent custom.
29. Mishnah Berurah 551:98. Bein Pesach l'Shavuot, pg. 293, quotes Teshuvos Riva that this is permitted only on Shabbos itself, but new clothing may not be worn for the Minchah service on erev Shabbos.
30. Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 551:99.
31. Halichos Beisah, pg. 371, since clothing may not be bought during the Nine Days.
32. Rama, O.C. 551:17.
33. O.C. 551:17.
34. Nitei Gavriel, pg. 35.
35. Birkei Yosef 551:12.
36. Sha'arei Teshuvah 551:10, quoting Siddur Ya'avetz.
37. Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:80.
38. See Teshuvos Maharshag, Y.D. 1:95

39. Mishnah Berurah 551:45; Kaf ha-Chayim 551:88; Halichos Shelomo 3:14-1.

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