



THE HOLIDAY OF LOVE OR THE HOLIDAY OF UNITY?

A fascinating exploration of the story behind the 15th of Av.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS



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15TH OF AV

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Founded in 2008 in memory of Rabbi Gabi and Rivky Holtzberg OB" M
Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India



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Contents

A. A Holiday Like No Other.....1

The Talmud tells us that “There were no festivals for the Jewish people like the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur,” when the girls of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards (Sources 1–2). The Kol Bo explains that this event was an opportunity for older unmarried girls to find their match (Source 3).

The Talmud lists six events for which the 15th of Av was chosen to be celebrated alongside Yom Kippur:

1. On this day, the tribes were permitted to intermarry with one another.
2. On this day, the tribe of Benjamin was once again allowed to intermarry with the other tribes, after this had been banned following the incident of the Concubine at Givah.
3. On this day, the generation of the desert—those who sinned with the spies—ceased to die.
4. On this day, the restrictions preventing the ten tribes in the northern kingdom from ascending to the Temple in Jerusalem were lifted.
5. On this day, the fallen of Beitar, who died in the Bar Kochba revolt, were brought to burial.
6. On this day, the cutting of the wood for the altar—needed for offerings throughout the year—was completed. (Source 4)

B. Connecting the Dots.....7

The Rebbe uncovers a unifying thread running through all the events that took place on the 15th of Av: they all express the concept of Jewish unity.

The permission for the tribes to marry one another, and likewise the lifting of the ban on the tribe of Benjamin, represent the removal of barriers and the restoration of unity among the Jewish people.

The end of the decree against the generation of the desert—until then, the nation was divided between those allowed to enter the Land and those barred from it. When the decree ended, this division dissolved.

The removal of barriers that prevented pilgrimage to the Temple allowed all tribes—from both

the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel—to ascend together to Jerusalem, a tangible expression of Jewish unity.

The burial of the Beitar martyrs symbolized their reintegration with the collective Jewish dead, who will one day rise at the resurrection of the dead. Burial is a prerequisite for resurrection. Another point: the people of Beitar had rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem, and were therefore punished—Beitar was destroyed, and its dead denied burial (Source 5). When that decree was annulled and burial permitted, it was a sign that Heaven had forgiven them and unity had been restored among the nation. As the verse says, "Your brother should not be disgraced before your eyes"—once he has been punished, his sin is forgiven, and he is again your brother (Source 6).

The wood-offering also expresses unity. The donation of wood enabled the offering of sacrifices on behalf of anyone, even those who could not afford or obtain wood themselves, symbolizing charity and unity.

Another point: When the Second Temple was built, there was a severe shortage of wood. Nine families donated wood for the altar throughout the year. To honor their merit, each family was assigned a specific annual date when they would bring their donation (Source 7).

Over the years, many Jews wished to join the wood donation, and they would attach themselves to one of the nine families from their own tribe. But what if someone didn't know their tribal identity? They would join the family of Zatou ben Judah, which brought wood on the 15th of Av. This is yet another example of the unity that characterized this special day (Source 8).

Finally, the matchmaking event with the daughters of Jerusalem also reflected unity: they all wore borrowed, identical garments, danced in a single circle, and expressed the idea that everyone is equal—without differences in status or lineage.

Introduction

Some have dubbed the 15th of Av as the "holiday of love," often expressed commercially in advertisements and gift shops in Israel. But the truth is that this day holds a much deeper meaning. This day, which is compared to Yom Kippur, reflects the inner and profound unity between all segments of the Jewish people. In the following lesson, we will review the historical events that took place on this day and discover the common thread that connects them all.

השיעור לשבוע חמשה עשר באב

חלקים משיחות ט"ו וכ"ף מנחם אב ה'תשל"ט
שיחות קודש ה'תשל"ט, חלק ב', בלתי מוגה, בתרגום המערכת
ומלקוטי שיחות חלק כ"ד, שיחת חמשה עשר באב – א', בתרגום ללה"ק

A. A Holiday Like No Other

Daughters of Jerusalem Dance

Source 1 Talmud, Taanit 26b

Student's
pg. 1

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: There were no days as joyous for the Jewish people as the 15th of Av and as Yom Kippur, because on these days the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in white clothes, which each woman borrowed from another. Why were they borrowed? They did this so as not to embarrass one who did not have her own white garments...

The daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? Young man, please lift up your eyes and see what you choose for yourself for a wife. Do not set your eyes toward beauty, but set your eyes toward a good family, as the verse states: "Grace is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears G-d, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30)

Source 2 Talmud, Taanit 31a

Student's
pg. 1

The daughter of the king borrows white garments from the daughter of the High Priest; the daughter of the High Priest borrows from the daughter of the deputy High Priest; the daughter of the deputy High Priest borrows from the daughter of the priest anointed for war, (i.e., the priest who would read verses of Torah and address the army as they prepared for battle;) the daughter of the priest anointed for war borrows from the daughter of a common priest; and all the Jewish people borrow from each other. Why would they all borrow garments? They did this so as not to embarrass one who did not have her own white garments.

What would the beautiful women among them say? Set your eyes toward beauty, as a wife is only for her

אמר רבן שמעון בן גמליאל: לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כחמשה עשר באב וכיום הכפורים, שבהן בנות ירושלים יוצאות בכלי לבן שאולין – שלא לבייש את מי שאין לו....

ובנות ירושלים יוצאות וחולות בכרמים. ומה היו אומרות: "בחור, שא נא עיניך וראה מה אתה בורר לה. אל תתן עיניך בנאי, תן עיניך במשפחה. שקר החן והכל היפי אשה יראת ה' היא תתהלל".

תנו רבנן: בת מלך שואלת מבית כהן גדול, בת כהן גדול – מבית סגן, ובת סגן – מבית משוח מלחמה, ובת משוח מלחמה – מבית כהן הדיוט, וכל ישראל שואלין זה מזה כדי שלא לבייש את מי שאין לו.

תנו רבנן: יפיפיות שבהן, מה היו אומרות? – "תנו עיניכם ליופי, שאין האשה אלא ליופי". מייחסות שבהן מה היו אומרות? – "תנו עיניכם

Student's beauty. What would those of distinguished lineage
pg. 2 among them say? Set your eyes toward family, as a wife is only for children, (and the children of a wife from a distinguished family will inherit her lineage). What would the ugly ones among them say? Acquire your purchase for the sake of Heaven, provided that you adorn us with golden jewelry after our marriage to beautify us.

לְמִשְׁפָּחָה, לְפִי שְׂאִין
הָאִשָּׁה אֵלָּא לְבָנִים".
מְכֻעָרוֹת שֶׁבָּהֶם מָה הָיוּ
אוֹמְרוֹת? – "קָחוּ מִקְחֶכֶם
לְשׁוּם שָׂמִים, וּבְלֶבֶד שֶׁתַּעֲטֹרוּנוּ
בְּזָהוּבִים".

In the book Kol Bo—one of the important halachic works from the period of the Rishonim (whose authorship is uncertain)—an important explanation is offered regarding the development of this unique holiday. At first glance, it may seem surprising that this celebration involved the daughters of Jerusalem dancing and calling out to the young men, saying, "Lift your eyes and see."

The Kol Bo explains that this holiday was specifically for those who had been unsuccessful in finding a spouse. It was a second chance celebration for older unmarried women, and the community organized an extravagant event in the vineyards to help arrange matches for them. This sheds light on the statement that "there were no festivals for the Jewish people like the 15th of Av," because there is no joy like that of someone who had been waiting for a while and finally merits to find their spouse.

Source 3 Kol Bo ch. 62

Student's This practice shouldn't sound shocking. Know
pg. 2 that anyone who could afford to marry off their daughter wouldn't send her there ... This custom was for women whose fathers weren't financially able to marry them off. If not for this practice they would remain single until their hair turned white.

וְאִין זֶה תָּמָה, כִּי יֵשׁ לְדַעַת
שְׂכָל מִי שִׁידּוֹ מַנְעֵת לְהַשְׁיֵא
בְּתוּ לֹא הָיָה שׁוֹלְחָה שָׁם... אֲבָל
הַמְנָהֵג בְּשִׁבְלֵי הַבָּנוֹת שְׂאִין יָד
אֲבִיהֶן מִשְׁנֵת לְהַשְׁיֵאן, וְאוּלַּי
הָיוּ יוֹשְׁבוֹת עַד שֶׁתִּלְבִּין רֹאשָׁן
אִם לֹא עַל יְדֵי הַמְנָהֵג הַזֶּה.

Due to societal concerns, this custom was discontinued after the destruction of the Holy Temple. It seems that we are not pious enough to engage in such a practice for pure reasons. The book of Lamentations mourns the loss of this festival.

Why the 15th of Av?

Source 4 Talmud, Taanit 31a

Student's Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: There were
pg. 2 no days as happy for the Jewish people as the 15th of Av and as Yom Kippur. [The Talmud asks:] Granted, Yom Kippur is a day of joy because it

אָמַר רַבֵּן שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל:
לֹא הָיוּ יָמִים טוֹבִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל
כְּחֻמְשָׁה עָשָׂר בָּאָב וּכְיוֹם
הַכִּפּוּרִים. בְּשָׁלְמָא יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים

Student's has the elements of pardon and forgiveness, and
pg. 2 moreover, it is the day on which the last pair of
tablets were given.

— מְשׁוּם דְּאִית בֵּיה סְלִיחָה
וּמְחִילָה, יוֹם שְׁנִיתָנוּ בּוֹ לוחות
הָאֲחֵרוֹנוֹת.

Regarding Yom Kippur, the Talmud explains that it was chosen as a day of celebration because it is a day of forgiveness and atonement, on which G-d gave the second tablets. (Apparently, the most powerful foundation for a marriage is to begin it on a day of forgiveness and atonement...)

The Ritva adds (Bava Batra 121a) that the celebration was established specifically on Yom Kippur to give it a framework of awe of Heaven and seriousness, fitting for a day on which the evil inclination holds no sway. (The Hebrew word HaSatan equals 364 in gematria, implying that the Satan is inactive on one day out of the 365 days of the year—Yom Kippur.)

Student's But what is the significance of the 15th of
pg. 2 Av?

אֵלֹא חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בְּאָב מֵאֵי הִיא?

Still, the question remains: “What is unique about the 15th of Av?” Why not choose Purim or Chanukah for such a celebration?

In response, the Talmud at the end of Tractate Ta'anit lists six separate events that occurred on this date—a range of historical moments spanning over a thousand years, from the generation of the desert to the Bar Kochba revolt after the destruction of the Second Temple.

What's surprising is that, at first glance, there seems to be no connection between these events, nor is it clear how they relate to establishing a matchmaking festival on this day. [The list initially seems like a “This Day in History” collection, grouping everything that happened on this date, without a clear thematic link between the events.]

Intertribal Marriage is Permitted

Student's Rabbi Judahh said in the name of Shmuel: On
pg. 2 this day, tribes were permitted to intermarry
with each other.

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל: יוֹם
שֶׁהוֹתְרוּ שְׁבָטִים לְבֹא זֶה בְּזֶה.

When the Jewish people inherited the Land of Israel, the Torah commanded that in a family with only daughters—such as the daughters of Tzelafchad—the daughters would inherit their father's portion. However, they were required to marry only within their own tribe, in order to preserve the inherited land within the tribal allotment.

If they were to marry men from a different tribe, their children—whose tribal identity follows the father—would cause the inheritance to pass to another tribe. As a result, parts of one tribe's land would end up under the ownership of another tribe.

However, once the people had settled in the land and each tribe was firmly established in its

region, it was decided on the 15th of Av to annul this restriction and allow any woman to marry the man of her choice, regardless of tribal affiliation.

Student's
pg. 2

What was their source? The verse states, "This is the matter that G-d has commanded concerning the daughters of Tzelafchad." From here, they derived that it was only applicable in that generation.

מה דרשו? "זה הדבר
אשר צוה ה' לבנות
צלפחד וגו'" – דבר זה
לא יהא נוהג אלא בדור
זה.

What was the reason or this change? How could a Torah law be altered?

The sages explained that the verse specifies "to the daughters of Tzelafchad"—meaning the restriction applied only to that generation, not to future ones.

The Tribe of Benjamin was Permitted

Student's
pg. 3

Rabbi Yosef said in the name of Rabbi Nachman: On this day, the tribe of Benjamin was re-permitted to marry into the rest of the Jewish people, as the verse says: "Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mitzpah, saying, 'No man from us shall give his daughter to Benjamin for a wife.'"

אמר רב יוסף אמר רב
נחמן: יום שהותר שבט
בנימין לבוא בקהל,
שנאמר: "ואיש ישראל
נשבע במצפה לאמר איש
ממנו לא יתן בתו לבנימין
לאשה".

After the incident of the "Concubine at Givah," in which men from the tribe of Benjamin abused a woman passing through their town, the people of Israel took a strong stand and decided to ban marriages with the tribe as an act of protest.

As time passed, it became clear that the tribe of Benjamin would become extinct without women, so the elders of the nation sought a creative way to lift the ban. They suggested that the men of Benjamin observe the daughters of Shiloh dancing in the vineyards on the 15th of Av and take wives from among them.

Student's
pg. 3

What verse did they derive this permission from? Rav said, "It said 'From us' but not from our descendants."

מה דרשו? אמר רב:
"ממנו", ולא מבנינו.

What was the reasoning? How could the sages annul the oath not to intermarry with the tribe of Benjamin?

They paid close attention to the wording of the oath, which stated "from us" (mimenu) and not "from our children" (mibaneinu). This indicated that the oath applied only to that generation, not to future ones.

The day on which this prohibition was lifted was the 15th of Av.

The Dying in the Desert Ceased

Student's Rabbah the son of Bar Chanah said in the
pg. 3 name of Rabbi Yochanan: "On this day, the
dying in the desert ceased."

אָמַר רַבָּה בֶּר בַּר חַנָּה אָמַר רַבִּי
יוֹחָנָן: יוֹם שֶׁכָּלּוּ בּוֹ מֵתֵי מִדְבָּר.

After the sin of the spies, it was decreed that all 600,000 men of that generation—those between the ages of twenty and sixty—would die in the desert.

Each year, on the night of Tisha B'Av, the men who had reached age sixty would dig graves for themselves and lie down in them. By morning, they would not rise, and the people would cover them with earth and bury them.

In the 40th year, 15,000 remained—one-fortieth of the original number—and they entered their graves on Tisha B'Av night, expecting to die. But when morning came, the sun rose and they were still alive.

They assumed they had miscalculated the date, so they repeated the process the next night—and again the next—until the night of the 15th of Av. When they saw the full moon, they realized it was already mid-month and that the decree had been lifted.

The Roadblocks to Jerusalem Were Removed

Student's Ulla said: "On this day, Hosea ben Alah
pg. 3 removed the roadblocks Jeroboam ben Nevat
placed to prevent the Jews from ascending
in pilgrimage to the Holy Temple, saying,
'Whoever wants to, shall ascend.'"

עוּלָא אָמַר: יוֹם שֶׁכִּטְל הוֹשֵׁעַ
בֶּן אֱלֹה פְּרוֹסֵדִיּוֹת שְׁהוֹשִׁיב
יֶרֶבְעָם בֶּן נָבַט עַל הַדֶּרֶכִּים
שֶׁלֹא יַעֲלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהֶגֶל, וְאָמַר:
לְאִיזָה שִׁירְצוּ יַעֲלוּ.

For hundreds of years a border divided the Land of Israel—between the Kingdom of Israel in Samaria and the Kingdom of Judah in Jerusalem. The people of the north were forbidden by their kings from ascending to the Temple in Jerusalem. On the 15th of Av, the last king of Israel, Hosea ben Alah, opened the borders and allowed all of Israel to once again go up to Jerusalem.

The Slain of Beitar Were Buried

Student's Rabbi Masnah said: "On this day, the slain
pg. 3 of Beitar were buried. That day, the sages
of Yavneh instituted the blessing: 'Who is
good and Who does good.' 'Who is good'—
because their bodies did not decay; 'Who
does good'—because they were eventually
brought to burial."

רַב מַסְנָה אָמַר: יוֹם שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ
הַרוּגֵי בֵּיתֵר לְקִבּוּרָה. וְאָמַר רַב
מַסְנָה: אוֹתוֹ יוֹם שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ הַרוּגֵי
בֵּיתֵר לְקִבּוּרָה, תִּקְנוּ בְּיָבְנָה
— "הַטּוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב", "הַטּוֹב" —
שֶׁלֹא הִסְרִיחוּ, "וְהַמְּטִיב" —
שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ לְקִבּוּרָה.

When Hadrian destroyed Beitar, he treated the slain with terrible cruelty. He even used their corpses to fence in a large vineyard he owned, surrounding it on all sides—a distance of seventy-two mil.

Later, another king came and permitted the dead to be brought to burial, and that day was the 15th of Av.

At that time, the sages instituted the blessing “Who is good and Who does good” in the Grace after Meals.

“Who is good”—because the bodies did not decompose.

“Who does good”—because they were finally given a proper burial.

Cutting the Altar Wood was Completed

Student's
pg. 3

Rabbah and Rabbi Yosef said: “On this day, the wood cutting for the Altar was completed.

As we learned, Rabbi Eliezer the Great said:

Student's
pg. 4

‘From the 15th of Av on, the weather is cooler and wood was no longer cut, because it wouldn’t be dry.’ Rabbi Menashya said: This day was called ‘The Day of the Breaking of the Axe.’”

רָבָה וְרַב יוֹסֵף שְׁאָמְרוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם:
יוֹם שֶׁפָּסְקוּ מִלְכְּרוֹת עֲצִים
לְמַעַרְכָּה. דִּתְנִיָא, רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר
הַגָּדוֹל אוֹמֵר: מִחֻמְשָׁה עָשָׂר
בָּאָב וְאֵילָן תָּשֵׁשׁ כּוֹחָה שֶׁל
חֲמָה, וְלֹא הָיוּ כּוֹרֵתִין עֲצִים
לְמַעַרְכָּה, לְפִי שְׁאִינֵן יָבֵשִׁין.

The fire on the altar burned twenty-four hours a day, as it is written, "A continual fire shall burn upon the altar; it shall not go out." Throughout the day (and part of the night), individual and communal offerings were brought, requiring a large supply of wood to keep the fire burning.

Several families in Jerusalem had the privilege and responsibility of donating this wood as their offering.

The Talmud states that the custom was to finish cutting the wood by the 15th of Av, since from that day onward, the sun's strength begins to wane, and the wood becomes damp and susceptible to worms.

Therefore, all the wood was cut and prepared by the 15th of Av, providing a supply that would last until the following month of Nisan.

B. Connecting the Dots

This raises the question: What is the connection between all these events, which took place centuries apart, and how are they all related to a matchmaking celebration and the dancing of young women in the vineyards?

Intermarrying tribes

>> The Rebbe

Student's
pg. 5

The connection between these five reasons is as follows: each of them are related to the concept of unity and love among the Jewish people.

Regarding the holiday of the 15th of Av, the Talmud says that the reason it is a festive day is because it is "the day on which the tribes were permitted to intermarry." This reflects the theme of unity, showing that there was no separation or division between the tribes.

Intermarrying with Benjamin

Student's
pg. 5

Similarly, the reason that it is "the day on which the tribe of Benjamin was allowed to rejoin the community" also reflects the concept of unity.

There had been a reason for establishing a barrier between the tribe of Benjamin and the other tribes. But by interpreting the verse, "None of us will give his daughter to Benjamin," as regarding "us, but not our children," they permitted the tribe of Benjamin to once again intermarry with the rest of the Jewish people. This restored complete unity among the people.

וזהו הקשר של חמש הסיבות הללו, משום שכולן קשורות עם הענין של אחדות ואהבת ישראל.

והביאור:

אודות החג של חמשה עשר באב אומרת הגמרא את הטעם שזהו "יום שהותרו שבטים לבא זה בזה" - שזה מראה על ענין של אחדות, שאין שום הבדל וחילוק בין השבטים.

על דרך זה בנוגע ל"יום שהותר שבט בנימין לבוא בקהל" - שגם הוא מראה על האחדות.

היות שהיה אירוע שבגללו עשו חילוק בין שבט בנימין לשאר השבטים, ומצד זה שדרשו את הפסוק "איש ממנו לא יתן את בתו לבנימין" ש"ממנו ולא מבנינו", אזי "הותר שבט בנימין לבוא בקהל", ואז הייתה אחדות שלימה בין יהודים.

End of the desert deaths

Student's
pg. 5

The same idea applies to the reason that it is “the day on which the people in the desert stopped dying.”

Student's
pg. 6

Before that event, there was a major division among the people. There was the “generation of knowledge” —Moses' generation— who, despite their greatness, were the generation of the desert and could not enter the Land of Israel; And there was the following generation, those who would eventually enter the land.

It is clear that before “all the men of war had perished,” the people could not truly stand as equals. G-d Himself had divided them: some had been sentenced not to enter the land, while others had been told they would enter, take possession of it, and reach the place G-d had chosen to rest His presence.

But once the deaths in the desert had ended—and it was clear that the decree was over, and all those who remained were destined to live and enter the land — they stood together in unity. They were “all whole and ready to enter the land,” about whom the verse says “You are all alive today” because they all shared one Father, and stood before Him together in true unity.

Removing the roadblocks

Student's
pg. 6

The same idea applies to the reason that it is “the day on which Hosea son of Elah removed the guards that Jeroboam had stationed to prevent people from going up to Jerusalem for the festival pilgrimage.”

על דרך זה בנוגע ל"יום שכלו בו מתי מדבר":

לפני ש"כלו מתי מדבר", היה חילוק עיקרי בין יהודים: היה את ה"דור דעה" - "אנשי משה", שיחד עם העילוי העצום שנאמר עליהם, היו הם גם "דור המדבר" שלא יכלו להיכנס לארץ ישראל; והיה את הדור הבא - אלו שכן נכנסו לארץ ישראל.

מכך מובן, שלפני ש"תמו כל אנשי המלחמה למות", לא יכלו בני ישראל להיות כולם בשווה, משום שהקב"ה בעצמו חילקם - יש את אלה שנגזרה עליהם הגזרה שאינם יכולים להיכנס לארץ ישראל, ויש את אלה שנאמר להם שהם יכנסו לארץ ישראל - "וירשתם אותה וישבתם בה", ושם יהיה ה"מקום אשר יבחר ה' גו".

אך כאשר "כלו מתי מדבר" - כשידעו שכבר בטלה הגזרה, וכל הנוכחים במדבר באותה שעה יחיו ויכנסו לארץ ישראל, במילא עמדו הם באופן של אחדות - "כולם שלמים ועומדים ליכנס לארץ", והם מאותם שכתוב עליהם "חיים כולכם היום" משום ש"אב אחד לכולנה", והם עומדים לפניו כולם באופן של אחדות אמיתית.

על דרך זה בנוגע ל"יום שביטל הושע בן אלה פרוסדיות שהושיב ירבעם בן נבט על הדרכים שלא יעלו ישראל לרגל":

Student's
pg. 7

When Jeroboam set up guards to stop people from making the pilgrimage, and placed golden calves in Dan and Bethel, he created division among the people. Instead of all making the same pilgrimage, Jews were made to go to different sites.

It is clear then that when those guards were removed on the 15th of Av, and the Jews were once again able to go to the Holy Temple for the pilgrimage, it restored unity among the people. Jews from all twelve tribes could now travel together to the same place—the one chosen by G-d.

Burying the dead of Beitar

Student's
pg. 7

The same is true regarding the reason that it is “the day on which the victims of Beitar were allowed to be buried.”

The Talmud says that on the day the people killed in Beitar were finally allowed to be buried, the sages in Yavneh instituted the blessing “Who is good and does good.” “Good,” because the bodies had not decayed, and “does good” because they were allowed to be buried.

This shows that on the 15th of Av, peace and unity were brought about not only among the living, but also among the departed souls—the victims of Beitar.

Through their return to the earth, they were united with all those who will one day rise in the resurrection of the dead. In order to be part of that resurrection, they needed to first experience “to dust you shall return,” as the Talmud explains in Tractate Shabbat.

כאשר ירבעם בן נבט העמיד שומרים כדי שיהודים לא יוכלו לעלות לרגל, והעמיד עגל בדרום ובבית אל, הוא יצר פירוד בין יהודים - שיהודים יעלו לרגל למקומות שונים.

מכך מובן, שכאשר התבטלו השומרים בחמשה עשר באב, והתאפשרה עלייה לרגל, אז נהיה ענין של אחדות בין יהודים, שכל היהודים, מכל שנים עשר השבטים, עלו לרגל לאותו “מקום אשר יבחר ה'”.

על דרך זה בנוגע ל”יום שנתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה”:

הגמרא אומרת שב”אותו יום שנתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה, תקנו ביבנה הטוב והמיטיב, הטוב - שלא הסריחו, והמטיב - שנתנו לקבורה”.

שמכך מובן, שבחמשה עשר באב נפעל ענין של שלום ואחדות - לא רק אצל אלו שהם נשמות בגופים, אלא נהיה שלום ואחדות - גם בין הנשמות שכבר לא היו בגופים (“הרוגי ביתר”) -

משום שעל ידי קיום “ואל עפר תשוב”, הם מתאחדים עם כל אלו שיקומו בתחיית המתים, שלשם כך הם צריכים לחוות את ה”עפר אתה ואל עפר תשוב”, כפי שהגמרא אומרת במסכת שבת.

There is an additional point here:

The Talmud says that the decree against Beitar came about because its people were in conflict with the people of Jerusalem. At the time when Jerusalem was in mourning and sorrow, Beitar was in a state of celebration. Because of this disconnect, they were punished by being denied burial for a time.

Source 5 Jerusalem Talmud, Taanit 4:5

Beitar stood for fifty-two years after the destruction of the Temple—it had not been destroyed when the Temple fell. Why was it eventually destroyed? Because they lit celebratory lamps after the destruction of the Temple—Beitar rejoiced over Jerusalem's downfall.

Why did they light lamps? Because members of Jerusalem's city council were living in the region. When they saw someone traveling toward Jerusalem, they would say to him: "We've heard that you wish to become a ruler or official, so we've come to support your appointment." But their real intent was malicious—to extort money from him.

If the person responded, "That's not my intention," they would say, "We've heard you're trying to sell your field." Again he would deny it. Then one of them would say to the other, "What do you want from him? Just write it, and I'll sign it." In other words, they forged a deed of sale.

They would then send the forged document to the official in charge of the fields and tell him, "Don't allow so-and-so to enter his field—he sold it to me."

When the victim found out, he would say in anguish, "Better if my leg had broken and I never made the trip to Jerusalem."

ויש בזה ענין נוסף:

הגמרא אומרת שעל ביתר נגזרה הגזירה משום שלא היה שלום בינם לבין ירושלים. באותו זמן שבירושלים היה מעמד ומצב של היפך השמחה, הרי בביתר היה מצב של שמחה. ולכן הם קיבלו את העונש שלא נתנו לקבורה.

חמשים ושתים שנה שהתה ביתר לאחר חרבן בית המקדש – שלא חרבה כשחרב הבית. ולמה חרבה? על שהדליקה גרות לאחר חרבן בית המקדש – משום ששמחה ביתר לאידה של ירושלים.

ולמה הדליקה גרות? שהיו חברי מועצת העיר של ירושלים יושבים באמצע המדינה. וכשראו אדם העולה לירושלים, היו אומרים לו: כיון ששמענו עליך שאתה רוצה להיות שר ומושל לכן פנינו אליך, כדי לסגור לך להתמנות. והיתה פונתם לרעה לטל ממנו ממוץ על פה. והוא אמר להם: אין בדעתי. – כיון ששמענו שאתה רוצה למכור את השדה שלך. והוא אמר להם: אין בדעתי.

והיה חברו אומר לו: מה אתה רוצה ממנו? כתב ואני אחתם! (הכה גזיף שטר מכר), והיה פותח וחברו חותם.

והיו שולחים את השטר לבית הממונה על השדות ואומרים לו: אל תתן לפלוני לרדת לשדהו, כי הוא מכר אותה לי.

כיון ששמע פה, אמר הלה על עצמו: הלאי ורגלי היתה נשכרת ולא היתי עולה לירושלים.

Student's As a result of this corruption and the bitterness
pg. 9 it caused, the people of Beitar rejoiced at the destruction of Jerusalem. But they, too, did not go unpunished—as it is written, “One who rejoices at another’s downfall will not go unpunished.”

Anyone who takes joy in the suffering of others is not spared from judgment—and so Beitar was destroyed.

>> The Rebbe

Student's From this we understand that as long as the
pg. 9 decree was still in effect and the punishment had not been lifted, there was a lack of unity among the people. Some were in the category of “whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit to see its joy,” while others did not mourn for Jerusalem at all—and even acted in ways that were the very opposite of mourning.

But when the 15th of Av came, the day on which the victims of Beitar were allowed to be buried, it became clear to everyone that their spiritual punishment had been lifted. The fact that the decree was nullified in the physical world meant that it had already been revoked in the spiritual realm. As a result, unity was restored among the Jewish people, even amongst those Jews who had previously acted contrary to the spirit of mourning for Jerusalem.

Once they had received their punishment, the principle of “When your brother is degraded before your eyes” applies. The sages explain that this means that once he has suffered, he is again considered your brother. For such a person, the commandment to “Love your fellow as yourself” applies in full force—genuine love and fellowship, as defined by the Torah.

ומתוך ששנאו מה שנעשה להם, שמחו אנשי ביתר על חרבן ירושלים.

אף הם - אנשי ביתר - לא יצאו בטוב משום שנאמר: "שִׂמְחָה לְאִיד לא יִנָּקֶה". מי ששִׂמְחָה לְאִסוֹן שָׂפָא על חֵבֶר, לא יִנָּקֶה מִן הָעֵנֶשׁ, וְלִכֵּן חָרְבָה בֵּיתֶר.

ומזה מובן שכל זמן שהגזירה היתה עדיין בתקפה, והעונש עדיין לא התבטל, היה חסר באחדות בין יהודים. משום שהיו יהודים שנכנסו בקטגוריה של “כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחתה” והיו יהודים שלא התאבלו על ירושלים, ועד כדי כך שהם נהגו להיפך מ”מתאבל על ירושלים”.

אך כשהגיע חמשה עשר באב, שאז “נתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה”, הבינו כולם שעונשם הרוחני התבטל (משום שהעובדה שהגזירה התבטלה למטה, היא משום שהתבטלה למעלה), ולכן נהייתה אחדות בין יהודים, גם עם היהודים שקודם לכן היו במעמד ומצב שלהיפך מ”כל המתאבל על ירושלים”.

משום שלאחר שקבלו את העונש, אומרים “ונקלה אחיך לעיניך” - ש”כשלקה הרי הוא כאחיד”, ולגביהם יש גם את הענין של “ואהבת לרעך כמוך”, אהבה ואחוה אמיתית, על פי תורה.

Source 6 Talmud, Makkot 23a

Student's
pg. 10

All those liable to receive karet [excommunication of the soul] who were flogged are exempted from their punishment of karet, as it is stated: "And your brother shall be degraded before your eyes" (Deuteronomy 25:3), indicating: Once he is flogged he is as your brother, as his sin has been atoned and he is no longer excised from the Jewish people; this is the statement of Rabbi Chananya ben Gamliel.

כָּל חַיִּבֵי כְּרֹתוֹת שֶׁלְקוֹ –
נִפְטְרוּ יְדֵי פְרִיָתָם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
"וְנִקְלָה אָחִיךָ לְעֵינֶיךָ" כְּוִנְתּוֹ:
כְּשֶׁלָּקָה הָרִי הוּא כְּאָחִיךָ,
שֶׁנִּמְחַל עֲוֹנוֹ, וְהָרִיחוּ כְּאָחִיךָ
– אָדָם כָּשֶׁר כְּמוֹתָךְ. אֵלּוּ
דְּבָרֵי ר' חֲנַנְיָה בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל.

>> The Rebbe

The history of the wood offering

Student's
pg. 10

The reason why they prepared wood in the designated wood chamber was so that people would be able to offer their sacrifices at the proper time without any obstacles or delays. In other words, even if someone needed to bring a sacrifice at a time when it was no longer possible to cut fresh wood, or if the person bringing the sacrifice couldn't provide wood—whether due to lack of money, time, or some other reason—there would already be wood available in the chamber for the altar, and the sacrifice could still be brought.

Thus, preparation of wood for the altar was associated with charity.

הסיבה לכך שהכינו עצים ב"לשכת העצים" היתה, כדי שאנשים יוכלו להקריב את קרבנם בעתם ובזמנם, ללא שום מניעות ועיכובים. היינו שגם אם אדם יקריב קרבן בזמן שכבר אי אפשר לכרות עצים חדשים, או שאדם מסוים אינו יכול להביא עצים (כי אין לו כסף או זמן וכיו"ב) - יהיו בלשכה עצים מוכנים למערכה, והוא יוכל להקריב את הקרבן.

מכך מובן, שכריתת העצים למערכה קשורה עם ענין של צדקה.

Source 7 Talmud, Taanit 28a

Student's
pg. 10

This is what happened: When the Jewish exiles returned during the time of the Second Temple, they found no wood available in the storehouses needed for the altar. Some families volunteered to donate wood for the altar.

כך הָיָה מַעֲשֶׂה: כְּשֶׁעָלוּ בְּנֵי הַגּוֹלָה בַּיָּמִי הַבִּית הַשֵּׁנִי לֹא מָצְאוּ עֲצִים בְּלִשְׁכַּת דֵּי הַצֶּרֶךְ עֲבוּר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, וְעָמְדוּ מִשְׁפָּחוֹת אֵלּוּ וְהִתְנַדְּבוּ מִשְׁלֵחֵן לְהָבִיא אֶת הָעֲצִים לַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

When Ezra and Nechemiah returned from Babylon with the goal of rebuilding the Second Temple, they found the land desolate and all its trees uprooted by enemies. Since they needed wood for the Temple's construction, for the altar fire, and for the service of the Temple, donating wood became an important act of charity. Anyone who fulfilled this mitzvah would bring an offering called the "Wood Offering," done with great joy.

Student's
pg. 11

Thus, the prophets among them established: even if the designated chambers in the Temple were filled with wood, these donors would continue to bring their contributions on those days.

וְכֵן הִתְנוּ נְבִיאִים שְׂבִינִיָּהֶם:
שְׂאֵפִילוֹ לְשֹׁכֵה הַמִּיָּעֲדָת לְכֹךְ
בְּמִקְדָּשׁ מְלֵאָה עֲצִים – יִהְיוּ
אֵלֹהֵי מִתְנַדְבִּים מְשֻׁלָּהֶם בְּיָמֵם
הַלָּלוּ.

>> The Rebbe

Student's
pg. 11

Initially, one family donated wood for the altar. When that supply was used up, another family stepped forward and donated more, and so it continued.

בתחילה, משפחה אחת נידבה עצים למערכה, וכאשר נגמרו העצים שנדבו, נידבה משפחה שניה עצים נוספים למערכה, וכן הלאה.

Therefore, the prophets among them instituted the rule that even if the designated chamber is full of wood, these families should still bring their own donation. Since they had originally donated wood at a time when there was no wood in the chamber, their day was established as their special holiday every year.

ולכן "התנו נביאים שביניהם: שאפילו לשוכה מלאה עצים - יהיו אלו מתנדבים משלהם". מכיון שהם נדבו עצים למערכה כאשר "לא מצאו עצים בלשכה" - לכן למשך כל השנים הוא יישאר כיוםם וחגם המיוחד.

During that critical period, nine families contributed wood over the course of those months. As a gesture of honor and appreciation, they were given the lasting privilege that this day would be theirs, and they would be the ones to bring the offering. The Mishnah lists those nine dates so they would be remembered forever among the Jewish people.

Then the Talmud continues: the families that donated wood after the fifteenth of Av— their donation is considered even greater. Why?

Student's
pg. 11

There is an additional point here:

וישנו בזה ענין נוסף:

There was a major difference between those who donated wood for the altar before the 15th of Av and those who did so afterward.

יש הבדל גדול בין אלו שנדבו עצים עד חמשה עשר באב, לאלו שנדבו עצים לאחר חמשה עשר באב:

Student's
pg. 11

The families who donated wood up until the 15th of Av certainly fulfilled a great mitzvah. However, even if they hadn't donated, someone bringing a sacrifice could still go to the forest and cut wood themselves for the altar. In contrast, the families who donated wood after the 15th of Av provided a much greater benefit, because by that time it was no longer possible to go to the forest to cut wood for the altar—since the sun was no longer shining in full strength.

Student's
pg. 12

This shows that donating wood at that time was a “great mitzvah”—greater than at any other point during the year.

And that is why it is considered an additional and central reason for the unity of the Jewish people.

Student's
pg. 12

Another point:

According to the schedule of the wood offering, there were a number of families who brought their offering after the fifteenth of Av. The Mishnah lists dates such as the twentieth of Av and later. These offerings all have a special quality, because by that time wood was no longer readily available.

However, the offering of the fifteenth of Av has a unique distinction: it was associated with all Jews.

The Mishnah states that “anyone who was unsure of their tribal lineage”—someone who didn't know which family or tribe they belonged to and therefore didn't know with whom to bring the wood offering—was to join the offering of Zatu of the tribe of Judah, who brought on the fifteenth of Av.

אותן משפחות שנידבו עצים למערכה עד חמשה עשר באב אכן קיימו מצוה גדולה, אך גם אם לא היו מנדבים עצים, היה המקריב יכול ללכת ליער ולכרות עצים למערכה. בשונה מכך, אותן משפחות שנידבו עצים לאחר חמשה עשר באב, התועלת בזה הייתה הרבה יותר גדולה, משום שאז כבר אין את האפשרות ללכת ליער לכרות עצים למערכה, משום שכבר “תשש כחה של חמה”.

ומזה מובן, שנדבת העצים שהיתה באותו זמן, היא “מצוה גדולה” ביותר, יותר מאשר בכל השנה כולה.

עניין נוסף:

בין תשעת הזמנים שהביאו בהם את “קרבן העצים” היו כמה משפחות שהביאו את הקרבן אחרי חמשה עשר באב, כפי שהמשנה מציינת את הזמנים של עשרים באב, וגם לאחר זה. (ולכן לכל אלו יש את המעלה, שאז העצים לא היו בנמצא). אך ישנה מעלה מיוחדת בקרבן העצים של חמשה עשר באב, משום שלזה היתה שייכות לכל היהודים:

המשנה אומרת ש“כל מי שטעה בשבטו” - הוא לא ידע מאיזו משפחה הוא מגיע, ובמילא הוא לא ידע עם איזו משפחה הוא יביא קרבן העצים, עליו להצטרף לקרבן העצים שהביא זתוא בן היודה, בחמשה בעשר באב.

Source 8 Talmud, Taanit 26a

Student's
pg. 12

On the 15th of Av, the descendants of Zatu of the tribe of Judah. Included with this group of Zatu's descendants were other priests, Levites, and anyone who erred with regard to his tribe, i.e., Israelites who did not know which tribe they were from.

בְּחֶמְשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ – בְּנֵי
זְתוּא בֶן יְהוּדָה, וְעַמֶּהֶם
הָיוּ חֹגְגִים כֹּהֲנִים וְלִוִּים
וְכָל מִי שִׁטְעָה בְּשִׁבְטוֹ
וְאֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ לִבְנֵי אִיזָה שֶׁכֵּט
הוּא שִׁיָּהּ.

>> The Rebbe

Student's
pg. 12

From this we see that the wood offering brought on the 15th of Av is associated with all Jews.

שְׁמִיזָה מוֹבֵן, שֶׁקֶרְבֵּן עֲצִים שֶׁל חֲמִשָּׁה
עָשָׂר בָּאֵב יֵשׁ לוֹ שִׁיכוּת לְכָל הַיְּהוּדִים.

Over the years, many people wanted to take part in this important mitzvah of donating wood. Each person would join one of the nine families mentioned earlier—someone from the tribe of Reuben would join a family from that same tribe, and so on. The Mishnah states that if someone didn't know which tribe they were from, they would join the family of Zatu from the tribe of Judah on the 15th of Av.

This fact further highlights the deep unity associated with this special day—the 15th of Av.

מְשִׁיחוֹת ט"ו וּכ"ף מִנְחָם אֵב ה'תשל"ו
שִׁיחוֹת קוֹדֵשׁ ה'תשל"ו, חֶלֶק ב', בְּתִרְגוֹם הַמַּעֲרָכָה

How to celebrate

Student's
pg. 13

Based on the above—that the central theme of the 15th of Av is unity among the Jewish people, the opposite (that is, the repair and undoing) of baseless hatred, which was the cause of the destruction—it becomes clear why the way this holiday was celebrated was by “the daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards.”

Despite all the differences between them—

עַל פִּי הַנֶּל, שְׁתוּכֵן הַיּוֹם טוֹב שֶׁל
חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בָּאֵב הוּא עֵינֵן הָאֲחָדוֹת¹
בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל - הִיפֶךְ (הֵינּוּ הַתִּיקוֹן
וּבִטּוֹל) שְׁנֵאת חֲנֹם, שֶׁהִיא סִיבַת
הַחֹרְבָן - מוֹבֵן הַטַּעַם שֶׁאֹפֵן הַיּוֹם טוֹב
וְהַשְׂמִיחָה שֶׁל ט"ו בָּאֵב הִיא ש"בִּנּוֹת
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יוֹצְאוֹת וְחוֹלוֹת בְּכַרְמִים²,
הֵינּוּ שְׂמִיחָה הַבֵּט עַל כְּמָה חִלּוּקִים
שְׂבִינִיָּה - יִפְיָפוֹת, מִיּוֹחֲסוֹת,

תענית כו, א).
2. במשנה שם ע"ב.

1. וכמודגש גם ב"זמן עצי הכהנים והעם (שמתנדבים עצים)... והיו מקריבים קרבן
אותו היום – רש"י שם) כו' בחמשה עשר בו (באב) בני זתוא בן יהודה ועמהם
כהנים ולוים וכל מי שטעה בשבטו ובני גונבי עלי ובני קוצעי קציעות (משנה

Student's
pg. 13

whether in appearance, background, or status, as detailed in the Beraita—they all joined together in the same dance, in peace and unity.

מכוערות, כמפורט בברייתא³ לקמן -
היו כולן יוצאות במחול אחד, בשלום
ואחדות.

First of all, they all danced in one circle. There were no class divisions—no separate circles for the wealthy or the poor. No exclusive groups. Everyone danced together.

Student's
pg. 13

Moreover, when they danced they all wore borrowed white garments—"so as not to embarrass those who had none."

ויתירה מזו: במחולן היו לבושות
"כלי לבן שאולין שלא לבייש⁴ את מי
שאין לו" -

As the Talmud later describes, a king's daughter would borrow from the daughter of the high priest, the high priest's daughter from the daughter of the deputy, and so on. This practice powerfully expressed the extent of their peace and unity: even someone from a more prominent family would humble herself before someone of lesser status, ask her for help, and gratefully accept it.

כסדר הדברים המפורט בהמשך
הגמרא⁵: בת מלך שואלת מבת כהן
גדול בת כהן גדול מבת סגן כו' -
והנהגה זו מבטאת ביתר שאת את
שלימות השלום והאחדות, עד שזו
השייכת לסוג החשוב יותר "שואלת"
- מכניעה עצמה בפני השייכת לסוג
נמוך יותר וכו', מבקשת ומקבלת
ממנה.

Secondly, a rule was established to strengthen the unity among the girls: no one would wear her own clothing. This was to prevent the poor girls from feeling ashamed if they didn't have beautiful garments. Instead, each one would borrow a dress from a friend. In this way, even those with limited means could participate without any embarrassment.

לקוטי שיחות חלק כ"ד,
שיחת חמשה עשר באב - א'
בתרגום ללה"ק

Key Points:

Student's
pg. 14

- The 15th of Av (along with Yom Kippur) is considered by the Talmud to be one of the greatest days for the Jewish people. The Talmud lists six unique events that occurred on this day.

- The Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches that the common thread connecting all these events is the theme of Jewish unity. Here's how:

5. ישע"י כה, מ.

3. לא, א.
4. במשנה שם ע"ב.

1. Lifting the marriage restrictions between tribes, including readmitting the tribe of Benjamin, symbolizes the removal of barriers and the unification of all segments of the nation.

2. The annulment of the decree on the generation of the desert created a connection between the older generation that left Egypt and the new one entering the Land of Israel—bridging the past and the future.

3. The burial of the victims of Beitar:

- Enabled them to be part of the resurrection, which depends on burial.
- Their death was punishment for rejoicing over Jerusalem's fall. Their burial marked forgiveness and the return of unity to the nation.

4. The donation of wood for the altar:

- Families donated wood so that even the poor—those who lacked resources—could participate in Temple service. This mitzvah reflects national unity.
- On the 15th of Av, even those unsure of their tribal lineage could bring the wood offering, representing shared participation and inclusive unity.

5. The daughters of Jerusalem danced in borrowed, identical garments and in a shared circle, without social classes or distinctions—expressing equality, inclusion, and unity.

Takeaway:

The holiday of Tu B'Av teaches us the immense value of unity among all Jews. Even when we differ in worldview, status, or lifestyle, we must always focus on what unites us. We must seek common ground with those who think differently, remove barriers, and strengthen the bond and love between all segments of the Jewish people.