Tu BeAv (the fifteenth day of the month of Av) is, without a doubt, the most mysterious day in the Jewish calendar. The Shulchan Aruch (the code of Law written by Joseph Caro in the sixteenth century) does not mention any special observance or custom for it, with the exception of skipping Tachanun and other similar penitential prayers that are omitted during the festivals.

Many happy occurrences did happen on Tu Be’av, which the Talmud lists:

1- The death of the generation of the Exodus ceased. After the incident with the Spies, God decreed that all of that generation should perish in the desert, and that only their children, born to freedom, would enter the Promised Land.

2- The tribes of Israel were allowed to marry one another.

3- The tribe of Benjamin was allowed back into the community of Israel.

4- After the death of King Solomon, Jeroboam the son of Nevat, the regent of the Northern kingdom set up barricades to prevent the annual pilgrimage of the people to the Great Temple of Jerusalem, the capital of the Southern kingdom. Joshua the son of Eilah opened the roads and removed the guards allowing for the pilgrims to pass.

5- The dead soldiers of Beitar were buried. Beitar was the last resisting fortress in the Bar Kochba revolt.

6- It was the day in which the last tree was fallen to build the altar of the Temple of Jerusalem. It was such a joyous occasion that it was celebrated with banquets.

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: “There are no greater festivities for the people Israel than the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur.” (Talmud, Taanit 26b)

The Talmud further narrates that in days of yore, when this was the only celebration in the month of Av, “the daughters of Jerusalem danced in the vineyards dressed in white” on the fifteenth of Av.

And “whoever lacked a wife” would find a bride on that date. Thus, Tu Be’av is the festivity of love par excellence.

In the Kabbalistic tradition, we are told that this is the day when the spiritual and the physical world unite, discovering thus the kindred spirits, and arousing the love, the strengthening of relationships and setting new beginnings and new dreams, which would later come to fruition.

The Torah tells us many stories of love between human beings. But the greatest manifestation of love is the one of the people Israel towards God when they claim the essence of their faith: “Listen, oh Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem only.” And then continues to claim: “Love Hashem your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your might.” (Deuteronomy 6.5)

Even when we lay tefillin, we repeat the words of the prophet Hosea (2.21-22): “And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in justice, and in lovingkindness, and in compassion. And I will betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Hashem.”

As we can see, Tu Be’av does not only celebrate the love of a man and a woman but also the love between the people and God.

May it be your Will, Lord of the Universe, that this union and this love that is more than three thousand years old be manifest and strengthen itself with each passing generation.

Tu Be’av Sameach.

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