

# THE TIMELESS MAGIC OF TU BE'AV

The perks of being enamored on the festival of love

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**N**ot long after we were married, I asked my Israeli-born husband if there was any connection between Tu Be'av and Tu Bi'shvat. When he stopped laughing long enough to pick himself up off the floor, he answered "No," then rolled his eyes and added, "Only an American would ask a question like that!"

Growing up in New York, I'd never heard of the Jewish holiday many Israelis compare to America's Valentine's Day. Despite its status as a bona fide holiday - the Tachanun prayer is omitted, and men getting married are not required to fast - Tu Be'av still isn't on the radar for many Jews today in Israel or abroad, but in recent years it has been making a comeback.

It's about time. In stark contrast to the hatred and destruction evoked by Tisha Be'av only six days earlier, Tu Be'av symbolizes love, light, and unity of all Jewish factions. Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Noiman of Chabad Reut-Maccabim

shed a little light on the most romantic day on the Jewish calendar.

"Tu Be'av, the 15th day of the month of Av, traces its roots to the Talmud, where it's referred to as one of the most joyous days in Judaism, the day the ban against marrying into the tribe of Benjamin was lifted. Subsequently, Tu Be'av was declared a holiday with religious significance. Historically it's been an exceptionally good day for matchmaking," the rabbi explains. In generations past, unmarried Jewish girls from Jerusalem would borrow white dresses - to symbolize equality -- on the eve of Tu Be'av and dance in the vineyards under the light of the full moon, as the day also marked the end of the grape harvest. Young men would come from all over Israel in hopes of meeting their bride. In recent years, the Jewish holiday of love has been finding its way back into the collective consciousness of Israelis and Jews around the world, secular and

observant alike.

This year Tu Be'av falls on a weekend, presenting excellent opportunities for the romantically inclined from across the religious spectrum to celebrate. Rabbi Noiman suggests that married couples use the day to strengthen their connection through Torah study together, exploring the meaning of Tu Be'av, and that singles avail themselves of the opportunities the day presents to find an appropriate match to start a family.

Organized Tu Be'av singles events are being held around the world. The ubiquitous JDate is throwing a Tu Be'av White Party on July 30 in New York, advertised with the catchy slogan "Cut the crap and come meet someone to marry."

"This is the 14th year we're having a Tu Be'av event," says Laura Seldon, managing editor at JDate, "We've had 20 couples meet and marry from this event alone."



Similar Tu Be'av singles events are being held the same night in Los Angeles, Montreal, London and other cities across the globe.

Of course, there's no lack of love-ly events being held in Israel as well. Whether you're in a relationship or not, there will be plenty of love to go around at Tu Be'av events this weekend.

Popnai is offering a tour of old Jerusalem beneath the full moon on Tu Be'av eve, July 30, for religious singles in Israel between the ages of 25 and 40, with buses departing Netanya at 5 p.m. and Tel Aviv at 6 p.m.

If you happen not to be single and between 25 and 40 but would still like to tour the Old City, Chavaya Yerushalmit is offering a special Tu Be'av tour, Behind the Scenes of the Western Wall, promising a tour that goes where few have gone before. The tour meets at 10 a.m. on July 31 by the Western Wall. In Shiloh, located in the Binyamin area,

you can find a reenactment of the Tu Be'av celebrations of old, complete with vineyard dancing under the moon, on July 30, the eve of Tu Be'av. Or enjoy some local wine under the stars at an evening of love songs and love stories around the campfire on July 31, hosted by the Western Galilee Organization.

Nothing says romance like a good love song, and there are a lot of great concerts celebrating Tu Be'av this weekend, including Israeli singer Rita performing her Love Concert at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem on July 30 at 9 p.m. The legendary Kinneret Night of Love is expanding to a three-day festival this year, featuring Ivri Lider and Avraham Tal on July 31; Evyater Banai and Aviv Gefen on July 30; and Shalom Hanoch and Yehudit Ravitz on August 1.

Or plan your own Tu Be'av weekend with all the beauty that Israel has to offer: a day trip up North, a beach outing, a spa day or a special dinner. If you're feeling

adventurous, Ben-Shemen Tractoronim in the Modi'in area offers self-drive tours for the whole family. If you're not feeling very adventurous, indulge and spend the day binge-watching reruns of your TV favorite show.

Tu Be'av may mean something different to everyone, but it can hold something special for all of us. I have a special surprise for my husband this year, a little information I discovered: There may be a connection between Tu B'shvat and Tu Be'av after all. Astronomical opposites on the Jewish calendar, exactly six months apart, Tu B'shvat was the first day trees were planted, and Tu Be'av was the last day trees were cut down to be used as firewood in the Temple, to allow drying time before the rainy season. Tu B'shvat announces the coming of spring/summer, while Tu Bu'av heralds B'the approach of autumn/winter. How very yin-yang. And how very appropriate for a holiday of love.