

Dancing with the Daughters of Jerusalem

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Talmud - Conclusion of Tractate Taanit: Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel said: Never were there any more joyous festivals in Israel than the 15th of Av and Yom Hakippurim, for on them the maidens of Jerusalem used to go out dressed in white garments-borrowed ones, however, in order not to cause shame to those who had none of their own. These clothes were also to be previously immersed, and thus the maidens went out and danced in the vineyards, saying: Young man, lift up your eyes and observe well whom you are about to choose (as a spouse); regard not beauty alone, but rather look to a virtuous family, for "false is grace, and vain is beauty: a woman only that fears G-d shall indeed be praised" [Proverbs, xxxi. 30]; and it is also said [ibid. 31]: "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in her gates."

The rabbis taught: The pretty ones among the maidens would say: "Regard but beauty alone, because a woman is made only for beauty." Those among them who were of good family would say: "Rather look to a good family," for women are but made to bear children (and those of good family produce good children). The homely ones among them would say: "Make your selections for the sake of Heaven, but provide well for us."

Av 15 in history

- 1) The dying of the generation of the Exodus ceased.
- 2) The tribes of Israel were permitted to intermarry.
- 3) The tribe of Benjamin was permitted to re-enter the community.
- 4) Hosea ben Eilah opened the roads to Jerusalem.
- 5) The dead of Beitar were allowed to be buried.
- 6) "The day of the breaking of the ax."