

WHAT TO DO WHEN OUR WALLS FALL

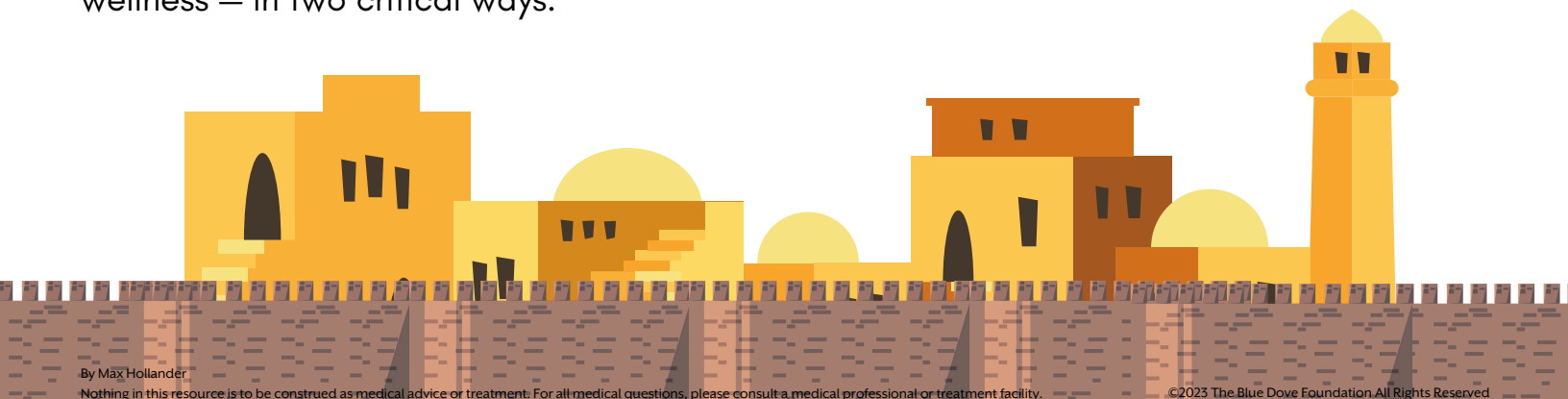
Of the handful of fast days on the Jewish calendar, Shivah Asar b'Tammuz (the 17th of Tammuz) offers the best metaphor for anxiety. But why?

Shivah Asar b'Tammuz commemorates, among other things, the breach of the walls of Jerusalem by invaders that led to the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, which we memorialize on Tisha B'av.

Five things happened on the 17th of Tammuz, and five other disasters happened on the 9th of Av. On the 17th of Tammuz:

- **The tablets were broken by Moses when he saw the Jews had made the golden calf.**
 - **The daily offering was stopped by the Roman authorities and never sacrificed again.**
 - **The city walls of Jerusalem were breached.**
 - **The Greek general Apostemos publicly burned a Torah scroll.**
 - **Manasseh placed an idol in the sanctuary**
- (Mishnah Ta'anit 4:6)**

The destruction of Jerusalem's walls may feel like a far-removed historical event, but those walls and their destruction are actually deeply relevant to our lives – and our mental wellness – in two critical ways.





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Walls offer security.

The walls in our lives serve as the boundaries we set between ourselves and people/things that can harm us or that can influence us in negative ways ([UC Davis](#)). They can also be the routines that keep us grounded: a regularly scheduled break, a meeting with a friend, a time block dedicated to self-care or spending time with a person who makes us feel safe and heard. When we don't honor our boundaries, we may experience increased anxiety and a sense of vulnerability that can feel debilitating.

Walls offer identity.

Without walls, Jerusalem was a collection of structures, lacking any concrete shape or boundaries. Similarly, we have parts of ourselves that define who we are, what our purpose is and where we belong. The uncertainty that comes when we are deprived of the things that make us feel whole or give us orientation, direction or a sense of belonging can induce or increase anxiety.





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Shivah Asar b'Tammuz commemorates the loss of the walls that protected and identified our people and city in antiquity. We can also use the time to reflect on the walls that protect and identify us now and those we have lost. For the walls we still have, we should consider how we can fortify them to ensure we don't lose them. If we're talking about a person, how can we let them know how important they are to us? And for the ones we've lost or might lose, what can we do to build resilience so, like the Jewish people for the past 2,000 years, we survive the experience despite the hardships?

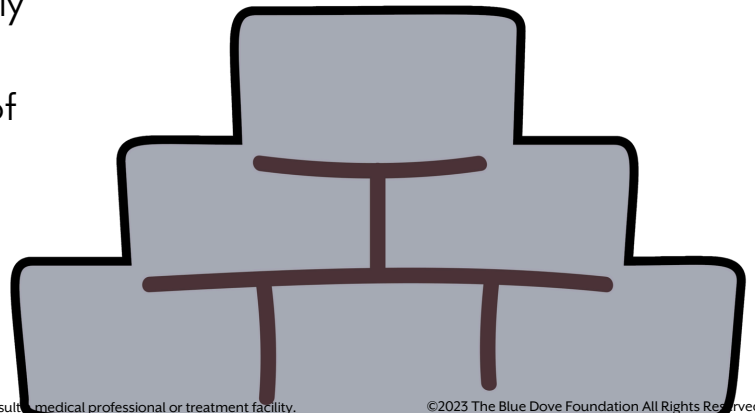
Activity

Shivah Asar b'Tammuz is the first day of what Jewish tradition calls "the three weeks," referring to the period leading up to Tisha B'Av. This time is considered to be an auspicious one associated with various mourning practices. However, the Lubavitcher Rebbe encouraged Jews to study the laws of the Temple over the course of these three weeks, inspired by the idea that we should live with hope for a future where we'll be able to practice them again. Similarly, we can spend these weeks thinking about and nurturing the walls of our lives.

Consider the following ideas.

1. Building Your Walls

Think about the parts of your life that make you feel safe and grounded. Some probably come to mind immediately, while others may take more time to notice. Take stock of those items, and make each a "building block" in your walls.





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2. Reinforcing Your Walls

Once you've identified your building blocks, consider three or more of them that could use some "reinforcing." If it's a person, what can you do to let them know how much they mean to you? You can write them a letter, buy them a coffee or just thank them — anything that communicates how much they matter to you. If it's a routine, ask yourself if there are parts of your life that have been encroaching on that time and what you can do to either minimize that encroachment or adjust your schedule to give this part of your life the full time it deserves.

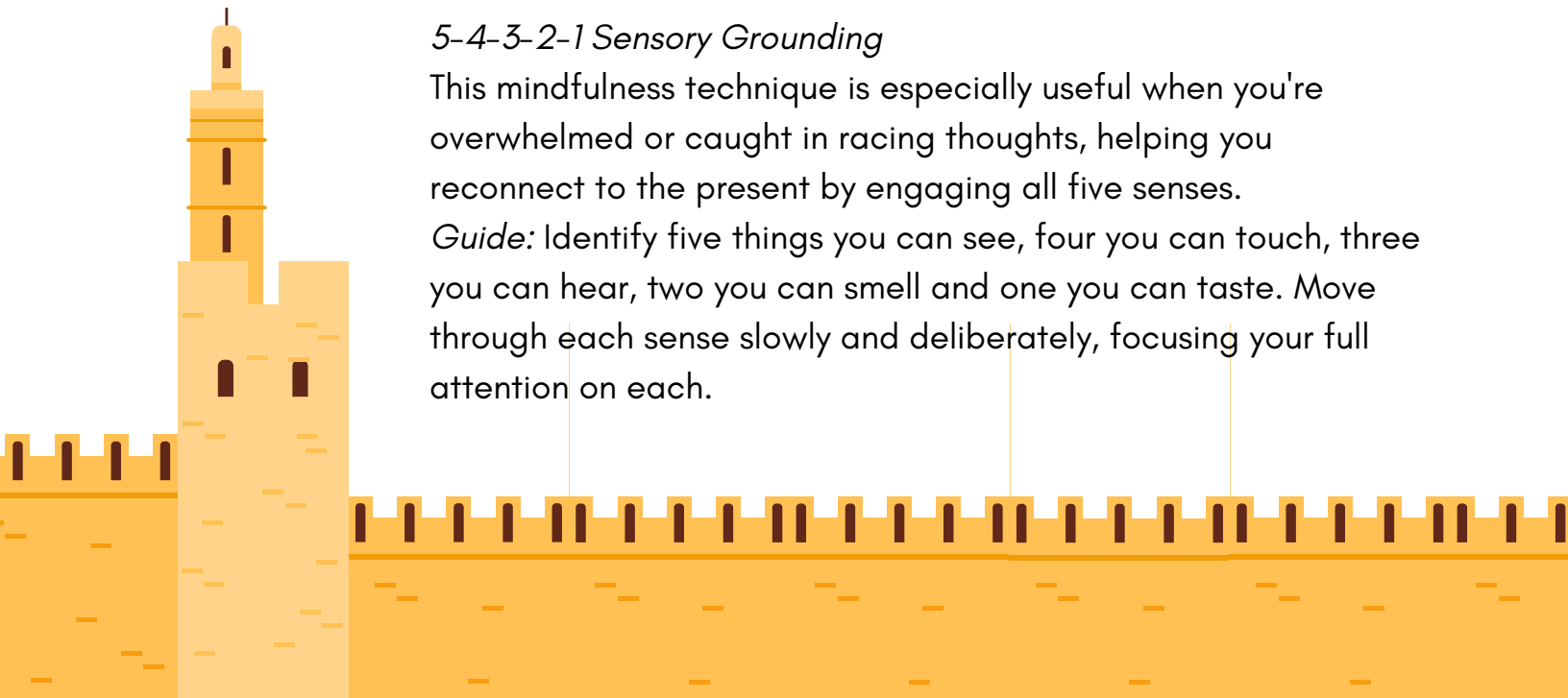
3. Rebuilding Your Walls

We don't always want to acknowledge it, but unfortunately walls can fall. We face moments of vulnerability and anxiety that can offer opportunities for growth, but the initial anxiety can be so overwhelming that we can't take advantage of them. We offer some techniques below for managing acute moments of anxiety and daily grounding exercises to help you maintain a sense of calm as you rebuild your walls.

5-4-3-2-1 Sensory Grounding

This mindfulness technique is especially useful when you're overwhelmed or caught in racing thoughts, helping you reconnect to the present by engaging all five senses.

Guide: Identify five things you can see, four you can touch, three you can hear, two you can smell and one you can taste. Move through each sense slowly and deliberately, focusing your full attention on each.





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Object Focusing

Ideal when you're feeling emotionally flooded or disconnected, this practice grounds you through detailed attention to a physical object. *Guide:* Hold a small object (like a stone or coin) and notice everything about it – its texture, temperature, weight and shape. Let your mind rest on the object, using it as an anchor to the here and now.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Helpful when you're experiencing stress or physical tension, the practice of breathing slowly soothes the nervous system and promotes calm. *Guide:* Sit comfortably, place a hand on your stomach, and inhale deeply through your nose, letting your belly rise. Exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat the cycle for a few minutes, keeping the breath relaxed and steady, feeling your body move and centering yourself around it. Continue this until you return to a state of calm.

Journaling

Journaling every morning and night helps regulate emotions by creating a structured space to process thoughts, track moods and express gratitude or intention. Try starting a journaling practice to help yourself function in periods of transition and/or uncertainty. Consider the following prompts:

Morning

What evidence do I have that I've made it through hard things before? Reflect on past challenges and how you overcame them – what helped, what you learned and how you grew stronger.

What would I say to a close friend going through what I'm feeling right now? Write down the kind, reassuring words you'd offer someone else, and consider how those same words might apply to you.

What one thing, no matter how small, can I count on today? Focus on a source of steadiness or comfort – a person, routine or inner quality—that reminds you you're not adrift.



Night

What challenge did I face and conquer today? This prompt reinforces resilience by helping you recognize your strength in overcoming difficulties.

What one thing, no matter how small, brought me joy? Focusing on small moments of joy nurtures gratitude and shifts attention away from negativity.

What was something I learned today? Reflecting on learning promotes growth, curiosity and a sense of purpose.



