


# HALOCHOSCOPE

TOI



This year the 20th of *Sivan* falls on *Erev Shabbos*. This day was customarily observed as a fast day in many European communities. Though it was not universal, and fell into disuse, it was reinstated after the holocaust. If one never observed it before, and wishes to do so, is it advisable to begin when he will have to fast *Erev Shabbos*? Or, should he wait until a regular year?

The issues:

(A) The 20th of *Sivan*

(B) Fasting and the various types of fast-days.

(C) Fasting on *Erev Shabbos*.

(A) *The 20th of Sivan*

The year 4856 (1096) brought a wave of anti-semitism based on the choice of forced conversion or annihilation, for entire communities. The crusaders marched through Europe, destroying communities in the Rhineland. On the twenty-third Iyyar, first, third and sixth of *Sivan* great communities were destroyed. In the year 4931 (1171) a massacre occurred in Bloise. A Jew witnessed a gentile drowning a child. To cover himself, the murderer accused the Jewish community of the crime. As a result, three sages were killed and thirty-one more Jews were burned alive. As they burned they sang *Aleinu* (according to tradition, to the tune used on *Rosh Hashana*). None of the bodies were consumed. To commemorate these horrors and to mourn the general destruction that had taken place over the years, it was felt that a fast day should be proclaimed. Heaven had shown that the month of *Sivan* was destined for such tragedy. [Rabeinu Tam, who instituted the fast, was himself a victim in this month. He was badly beaten and left for dead, but was revived by fellow Jews who found him.] The twentieth of *Sivan* became a day for fasting and *Selichos*. In Worms, they actually fasted on the first, despite *Rosh Chodesh*.

In the 1600s Polish lords controlled most of modern day Baltic countries, Western Russia, Ukraine and other regional states. Ukrainian Cossak peasants revolted in 5408 (1648). Mostly out of hate and religious fanaticism, they turned their attention to Jewish communities as well. In sudden attacks, they adopted the tactics of the crusaders. Entire communities were rounded up and given the choice of *Kidush Hashem*. The atrocities continued in the following year, and only subsided the next year. Estimates of the number of *Kedoshim* vary, from a half million, to a million. Though some communities were rebuilt, losses were huge.

The first massacres occurred on the 20th of Sivan, with the destruction of the major communities of Nemirov and Ostropol, including their Rabbis, the leaders of the generation. [According to some versions, the day these Kehilos were destroyed was Erev Shabbos, *Parshas Chukas*. Others attribute the fast day made on that day to the burning of the Talmud in the days of the Rishonim.] In the following year, the *Vaad Arba Aratzos*, council of sages who convened every twenty years to make communal institutions, determined that the 20th Sivan fast should be reinstated. However, they only imposed it on males over eighteen and females over fifteen. It only applied to regions that had suffered directly. Other communities adopted the fast voluntarily, and some just adopted it as a day of Selichos.

In spring 5704 (1944) the Nazis deported the Jews of Hungary. Most were taken during May and June, and sent to Auschwitz. Immediately upon arrival there were mass exterminations. Eyewitnesses maintain that on the first, third and sixth of Sivan the Nazis were exceptionally busy, murdering twenty thousand on the third alone. Many survivors regrouped and started to observe the twentieth of Sivan again. Our question deals with a member of one such community who had not been that observant before. If he decides to observe it, should he begin in a year when it falls on Erev Shabbos. [See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 566:2 (Taz 3 Eliyahu Raba 3) Magen Avraham 568:10 572:3 580:9, (Shaarei Teshuva 9 Ar. Hash. 1). Sefer Hatoda'ah.]

### **(B) Fasting and fast-days**

Under normal circumstances, a self-imposed ban on food is considered sinful. The Hebrew word for fast, *Taanis*, means self-affliction. This self-negation is recommended for penitence, to express sorrow, or to reduce worldly enjoyment. Fasting is accompanied by *Teffillah*, prayer, as a form of *Avodah*, service to Hashem. It is, in fact, meaningless if done without intent. [See Taanis 11. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 571, 562. Rambam, end Hil. Nedarim etc.]

The Torah imposes one penitential fast, *Yom Kippur*. Rabbinically, there are five communal fasts: *Tisha B'av*, the Seventeenth of *Tammuz*, the fast of *Gedaliah* (third of Tishrei), *Asara B'Teves*, and the Fast of *Esther* (the day before Purim). The first four of these appear in the *Navi*. They are expressions of sorrow on the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*. Taanis Esther is not mentioned in the *Navi*. It reminds us of the fasts Esther proclaimed in supplication to Hashem to annul the decree of annihilation of the Jews. In addition, Jews fast when they go to war. On the thirteenth of Adar the Jews went to war to defend themselves.

Additional communal fasts can be imposed by the elders of a community on a single community or on the entire Jewish people as the need arises. These are usually imposed to prevent particularly harsh Heavenly decrees from being

fulfilled. Fasts were imposed when the rains did not come at their usual time in Israel. Certain dates were observed as fast-days by various communities to commemorate pogroms, etc., an example of which arises in our case. Personal fasts are undertaken for penitence and on certain occasions. Most personal fasts must be verbally self-imposed in the form of an oath taken the previous day.

Some fasts are not public fasts, yet are not considered personal. For example, it is customary for people to fast on the Thursdays of the weeks of *Shemos* through *Mishpatim*, and in a leap-year through *Tetzaveh*. Another example is *Yom Kippur Kattan*, the day preceding *Rosh Chodesh*. Some people fast on the *Selichos* days before *Rosh Hashana* and between *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*. Such fasts require no verbal self-imposition according to many authorities. [See Mishnayos and Talmud Taanis esp. 12a. Sh. Ar. O.C. esp. 562-3.etc.]

### **(C) Fasting on Shabbos**

On Shabbos we have a *Mitzvah*, Scriptural or Prophetic/Rabbinical, of *Oneg*, general enjoyment. By definition, this includes eating. The *Mitzvos* of Taanis are *Inuy*, self-affliction, which, by definition, forbids eating. They are thus mutually exclusive, and *Oneg Shabbos* takes precedence over *Inuy* of Taanis. On Shabbos or *Yom Tov*, one should not wait until midday before eating. This is like fasting half a day, known as *Taanis Shaos*, which is also forbidden.

An exception occurs when fasting is *Oneg*, or rather when eating is considered *Inuy*. One fasts everyday to raise his spiritual level and is uncomfortable eating. If one had a disturbing dream, his anxiety if he does not fast is worse *Inuy* than his fasting. Nonetheless, many *Poskim* feel that nowadays one should not fast on Shabbos for a dream. The practice is to fast only for certain bad dreams, and then to fast another day as repentance for having spoiled one's *Oneg Shabbos*.

*Yom Kippur*, being Scriptural, takes precedence over *Oneg Shabbos*. Other fasts are rescheduled if they fall on Shabbos. There is an opinion that when a community is under a physical threat by enemies, they may proclaim a fast on Shabbos, too. However, commentaries maintain that this is an erroneous version of the text of this *Posek*. One source is cited saying that the 20th of Sivan was chosen because it never falls on Shabbos.

Generally, since one should not experience *Inuy* at any time on Shabbos, he should not undertake a personal fast on Friday. The Talmud discusses whether one fasting on Friday should fast until nightfall or is obligated to eat a little before Shabbos to avoid *Inuy* at the onset of Shabbos. The apparent conclusion of the Talmud is to finish the fast. However, there are other interpretations.

Nowadays, our calendar is based on a calculation, known as *Sod Ha'ibur*, that accurately predicts the new moon. Thus, it is possible to manipulate the dates of

*Pesach* or of Rosh Hashana. This avoids having Yom Kippur on a Friday or Sunday and *Hoshana Raba* on Shabbos. By manipulating the length of *Cheshvan* and *Kislev* days can be “borrowed” and “repaid” to the *Molad*. Nonetheless, fast-days sometimes fall on Shabbos, but we do not fast then, except for Yom Kippur. Scripturally, it must be kept on the tenth of Tishrei. Tisha B’av, the seventeenth of Tammuz and Tzom Gedalia are rescheduled to the following day. Taanis Esther is rescheduled to the preceding Thursday. The reason the others are not rescheduled earlier is because they remind us of *Pur’anus*, Divine punishment, and we do not wish to hurry them up. None are scheduled for Friday for the reasons explained. Asara B’Teves is the only one that falls on Friday, but never on Shabbos. Most Poskim say one should fast all the way to nightfall. However, there are opinions that one should daven early, right after *Plag Hamincha* (one and a quarter seasonal hours before the end of the day) and then break the fast after Maariv even before dark. One great Posek ate before he left for Shul. The prevailing practice is to finish communal fasts, but to break personal fasts before Shabbos.

The Poskim discuss the 20th of Sivan, concerning certain instances. It must be noted that some Poskim say that if 20th Sivan is on Erev Shabbos, some people do not complete the fast. The issue discussed is whether to read the *Taanis Krias Hatorah* at Mincha. [A separate discussion concerns whether the Taanis is serious enough to take precedence over the usual Monday/Thursday *Kriah*.] Since some daven early and then eat and some eat before the end of the day anyhow, some Poskim say that one should not read it, even if there is a Minyan fasting. In one instance, a *Bris* was being celebrated. Actually, one may eat a *Seudas Bris* on certain fasts. However, the practice arose to put the Seuda off to the night. If, however, it falls on Erev Shabbos, no-one would come to a Seuda by night. Therefore, based on the lenient rulings, it was ruled to eat the Seuda by day. In our case, the questioner has until now not observed this fast. Observing it for the first time in a year in which it conflicts somewhat with Oneg Shabbos would therefore seem inappropriate. On the other hand, the fast of *Erev Shabbos Chukas* was intentionally based on the day of the week, and not the calendar day. Nonetheless, it would appear that if one wishes to initiate the practice, he should either wait until it does not interfere with his current obligation of Oneg Shabbos or decide to follow those who do not complete the fast when it falls on Erev Shabbos. [See Shabbos 117b-119, Eruvin 40b-41b, Beitza e.g. 14b etc. Tur, Bais Yosef, Sh. Ar. O.C. 242, 249, 288, 550:3, 568 (Magen Avraham 10), Shaarei Teshuva 580:9, 688:5.]