

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

Someone has undertaken to fast *Shovavim*, the Thursdays of *Parshiyos Shemos* through *Mishpatim*. He has also been trying to fast *Yom Kippur Katan*, *Erev Rosh Chodesh*, since the troubles in Eretz Yisroel began. If a *Shovavim* fast falls on *Erev Rosh Chodesh*, should he fast an additional day? Some have the custom to fast on the Monday when Thursday happens to be a day forbidden to fast.

The issues:

- A) *Shovavim*
- B) *Yom Kippur Katan*
- C) *Devar chova min hachulin*, discharging one obligation with another obligation
- A) *Shovavim* [excerpted from Halochoscope VIII:42]

The word *Shovavim* is the acronym of the first letters of the *Parshiyos Shemos* etc. *Mishpatim*. The word also appears in *Tanach* in reference to repentance: *Shuvu banim shovavim*, Return, o wayward sons! These weeks are especially propitious for repentance. Times in the annual cycle are symbolic. Some symbolism relates to the weekly Torah reading. In *Shemos* we read the onset of the bondage. This represents the cycle of reconciliation Israel went through to rectify the sin of *Adam Harishon*. The completion of the cycle is represented by the contents of *Parshas Mishpatim*.

Self-deprivation or self-affliction is part of the process of atonement of *Yom Kippur*. Some say that instead of fasting (or in addition to it) the intended correction is accomplished through diligence in Torah study. Some add that one should study one of the five books of *Tehilim* and some part of *Mishnayos seder Taharos*, dealing with ritual purity. The period is propitious for ritual purification through Torah study.

There are numerous other explanations for the choice of these weeks, with accompanying variations in practice. The most commonly cited practice is to fast only during leap years. This practice often adds the letters *Tat*, the first letters of *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*. Some even add (after skipping *Ki Sisa*) *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei*.

One reason is the lapse between *Sukos* and *Pesach* in a leap year. After *Pesach* and *Sukos*, there is a practice to fast *Bahab*, Monday, Thursday and Monday in the month following *Yomtov*. This atones for the frivolity over *Yomtov* that leads to sin. Such frivolity occurs at other times in the year. It is sufficient to fast a *Bahab* series every six months. In a leap year, there are more than six months between these series. Therefore, additional fasts were instituted.

Another reason for the institution is to pray for pregnant women. It was observed that the occurrence of miscarriages rose during this period. Some connect it to the Hebrew word for a leap year, *ibur*, which also means pregnancy. The term represents the

“bulge” that the year has when an extra month is added. On a similar theme, a reason for the institution is that in each month there are roughly eight Mondays and Thursdays. Rather than fasting all eight in the *ibur* month (*Adar* 1), eight Thursdays were instituted as fast days to correspond to them, ending during that month, *Adar* 1. They begin with *Shemos*, in which the people of Israel multiply profusely. Thursday, fish were created and were blessed with prolific reproduction.

Another reason is connected to the creation of the sun and moon. Initially both were the same size. The moon “sinned” and was reduced in size and function. The shape of its visible part cycles through stages of reduction and enlargement, but most of the time it is deficient. Our months are based on this cycle. Due to this inconsistency in nature our world is prone to sin. Due to the incompatibility of the sun (year) and moon (month) cycles, we need to adjust the calendar with an *ibur*. Accordingly, leap years are propitious for repentance (adjustment) for sin.

Another reason is that the Egyptian exile ended early (210 years instead of 400). We are completing those missing years in our present exile. The cause of this exile is hinted in the first word of *Shemos*, an acronym for *avak lashon hara*, the “dust” of slander and gossip. This caused the exile, when Yosef brought the reports of his brothers' doings to his father. To atone, the body went through bondage and suffering. Fasting is to contemplate this bodily suffering and exile.

In modern times, the fast is not widespread. Even when enough people are fasting, some say one should not publicize it by convening a *minyán*, but it should be personal and private. In some circles, those who feel unable to fast redeem them with *tzedakah*. Common practice is to donate the amount they plan to spend on food for the day or eighteen units of currency. Some buy the “*pidyon*” back for a smaller amount. Others adopt a partial fast. On the preceding day, they adopt fasting half-day or until *mincha*. Yet others restrict some form of enjoyment, such as certain foods or one meal, and study specially for the occasion. Special penitential prayers can be found in some *sidurim*. [See Tur Sh Ar OC 685, commentaries (Levush). Sidur Bais Yaakov, Shaar Yechanya. Sidur Otzar tefilos. Yesod Veshoreh Havoda, Shaar Hamikdash. Nitei Gavriel Chanukah-Shovavim.]

B) Yom Kippur Katan

Literally translated, this is a “small *Yom Kippur*”. The concept comes from the *Kabalists*. *Rosh Chodesh* is a day of atonement, based on the communal *chatas*, sin-offering that is offered. In addition, an *olah*, burnt offering, atones for violations of positive *mitzvos*, or neglecting to perform them. The *olah* of *Rosh Chodesh* atones for the violations of the month. The *kabalists* say that it atones for the month. It seems that this refers to the past month. It seems that the actual day of atonement is *Rosh Chodesh* itself. Since one may not fast or say *selichos*-type prayers on *Rosh Chodesh*, it was pushed back to *mincha* on *Erev Rosh Chodesh*. Some seem to indicate that the atonement for the preceding month is actually at the end of the month, or *Erev Rosh Chodesh* of the incoming month. It is also possible that this is a preemptive atonement for the coming month.

The one main fast in the Torah, *Yom Kippur*, is for repentance and atonement. The other four main fasts are based on the *Churban*, destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash* and

gatus, the exile, and commemorate sad events. They are like a type of mourning fasts. One deprives himself of the comforts of living, including food and drink. *Taanis Ester* commemorates the fasting in preparation for the war, which is a type of penitence. It also commemorates the fasts that Ester proclaimed, albeit on different dates. These were fasts to evoke divine mercy during a period of hardship and calamity. While there is a component of penitence, the type of fasts is different. It could be termed earmarked repentance. It is focused on what might have gone wrong in this situation. Other fasts are observed just for the sake of repentance, without any known focus. These include the fasts that some people observe after *Pesach* and *Sukos*, known as *Behab*, Monday, Thursday and Monday. Some people fast every Thursday in the *Parshiyos Shemos* through *Mishpatim*, known as *Shovavim*, based on their acrostic. These are also routine penitential fasts.

On days that we observe fixed fasts, such as those in the yearly cycle, there is a special *krias hatorah*, known as “*Vayechal*”. These fasts generally commemorate hardships and calamities. The poskim debate whether this special *krias hatorah* is read on fasts that are purely for *teshuvah*, repentance. In its original form, *Yom Kippur Katan* was instituted as a penitence fast. Hence its name. To justify the practice to read *vayechal* on *Yom Kippur Katan* when a *minyán*, quorum of ten men fast, the poskim say that the fast has evolved into a *taanis tzara*, fast undertaken due to troubles and hardships. Indeed, even those who routinely fast every *Rosh Chodesh* have in mind that the fast should also help gain the merits needed to overcome the hardships that seem to be prevalent all the time.

The origins of this fast do not seem to go back further than R. Moshe Cordovero, the leader of the *Kabalists* in Tzefas. It was never adopted by the community at large, and is observed by few people. However, in some communities, it is observed on *Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul*, as a preparation for the *teshuva* of the month, and the *teshuva* season in general. Nonetheless, as mentioned, it is invoked periodically as an opportunity to combine a standard *teshuva* fast with some pressing crisis to make it a *taanis tzara*.

There is some debate on how long one should fast. Some say that one should not fast until nightfall, because it infringes on *Rosh Chodesh*, when one may not fast. Others maintain that one should finish it. The Talmud says that a fast that is not observed until night does not count. However, all agree that one should not delay eating, but should break the fast as soon as possible. In fact, the poskim discuss various *teshuva* fasts that are not observed all day, but until *mincha*. The earliest time for *mincha* is *mincha gedolah*, a half-hour after *halachic* midday. Some people call this a *taanis sha'os*.

Along with the fast, there are *selichos* that are recited. The poskim debate whether they should be said before *mincha*, so they do not encroach into *Rosh Chodesh*. The consensus is to say them after *chazaras hashatz*, the repetition of *shemone esrai*. Ideally, they should be finished before sunset, but one may continue after this time to finish them. When there is a crisis in a community or world-wide, it is usually the *selichos* that are said communally. [See Sh Ar OC 417:1 566:2, commentaries.]

C) Chova min hachulin

This concept arises in many contexts. If one has *maaser* money, he may not use it to pay off a debt to a Levite. Similarly, one may not use *tzedakah* funds to pay for a differ-

ent *mitzvah*. An exception is the *mitzvah* to eat *shalmei simcha*, offerings brought to instill joy on *Yomtov*. One could discharge this *mitzvah* by eating meat of another offering.

Established fasts incumbent on all Jews need not be undertaken personally. Personal fasts for penitence and the like must be adopted verbally. *Yom Kippur Katan* is not really a personal fast. It is an established *minhag*. Certain fasts are considered so widespread that one need not verbalize an undertaking to consider it binding. This means that though not all people fast, it is considered similar to a communal fast in this respect. *Yom Kippur Katan* seems to fall in the category of a personal fast in this respect. The *kabalah* is based on the *minhag*. The poskim discuss similar fasts, such as *Behab*. If the community has the practice to fast, even though not everybody fasts, an individual need not make the *kabalah*. He may consider the communal *minhag* enough to make it a fast for himself as well. Others contend that the indication is that the community adopts it as their *minhag* with a *kabalah* of sorts, in a blessing made on the preceding *Shabbos*. Any congregant that says *amein* may assume that he has made a *kabalah* if he so wishes. It is the type of *amein* that can also be considered a voluntary *kabalah*. He could revoke it later. *Yom Kippur Katan* is even less prevalent than *Behab*, with fewer people adopting it routinely. Therefore, most poskim maintain that one should make a *kabalah taanis* every time, even if one personally practices this fast every month. In early times, *Shovavim* was adopted communally on *Shabbos Vayechi*. In more recent times, it is left to the individual. Nonetheless, based on the above discussion, one might not need to adopt it ahead of time.

Personal fasts can be adopted as a series, a number of days, or specific days. What if a personal fast coincides with another fast? Does one discharge his vow by fasting on this day, when he would anyway need to fast for the other reason? The poskim say that one may discharge it with an established obligatory fast, based on *shalmei simcha*. The bigger question is a conflict such as in our case. Both fasts are neither purely obligatory communal, nor voluntary personal. The poskim seem to debate this point. In one view, if a community undertakes a series of fasts and one coincides with *Yom Kippur Katan*, they must make up for the lost day. Another view maintains that many communities combine *Shovavim* with *Yom Kippur Katan*. Furthermore, it may be assumed that when adopting the fasts, they had this in mind. This seems to be the consensus, even if one does not always observe either of these. [See Tus Sh Ar OC 568:11, MA22 end, Elya Raba 17, commentaries. Nitei Gavriel Chanukah-Shovavim 4:9.]

In conclusion, he need not fast an additional day.

On the Parsha ... If you will listen ... you will be my chosen people ... The entire people answered together: "We will do everything ..." [19:5 8] When it was first given, the Torah was offered as a voluntary undertaking. Subsequently, it was obligatory. Perhaps since the entire people said *naase venishma* together, it became a compulsory obligation on everyone.

Sponsored in memory of Harav Yosef Yitzchok zt"l ben Rav Yisroel Gedallahu Halevi shlit"n, whose

yahrzeit is the 28th of Shevat. ה

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