

HALOCHOSCOPE

Congregation Shaaray Tefilah, Pittsburgh, PA

This week's topic:

This year Asara B'Teves falls on Friday. A request was made for some clarification of various issues related to fasting on Erev Shabbos and the dating of the fasts.

The issues to discuss:

- (A) Fasting and the various types of fast-days.
- (B) Fasting on Shabbos.
- (C) Dating and rescheduling the fasts.

(A) Fasting and fast-days

The Jewish view is that people were created by G-d as humans, not angels and are supposed to eat to sustain their bodies. Ascetism or a self-imposed ban on a particular food is considered sinful except when undertaken in special circumstances. There are occasions when we should deprive ourselves of what is really a necessity. The Hebrew word for fast, *Taanis*, means self-affliction. This abstinence is a sign of self-negation and is recommended either for penitence, to express sorrow, or to minimize our worldly enjoyment. Fasting is usually accompanied by *Teffillah*, prayer, because it is understood 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.]

There are primarily two types of fast: *Taanis Tzibbur*, a public fast, and *Taanis Yachid*, a personal fast. A public fast is imposed on the community in general and no individual should exclude himself. A personal fast is self-imposed.

The Torah imposes one Scriptural fast: Yom Kippur. This is a penitential fast, and the Torah commands us to afflict ourselves, which is understood to mean to refrain from eating and drinking anything at all. Rabbinally, 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 are very stringent Rabbinical ordinances since they appear in the Divine writings of the Prophets, the Navi. They are all directly related to the destruction of the Bais Hamikdosh and are expressions of sorrow. It is as if to say: "If the Bais Hamikdosh is in ruins,

it is inappropriate that we indulge in our material self-satisfactions." Understandably, they are also for prayer and penitence. The Fast of Esther is not mentioned in the Navi. The reasons for this fast are: To remind us of the fasts that Esther proclaimed as supplication to Hashem to have the decree of annihilation of the Jews annulled. In addition, Jews fast when they go to war. The thirteenth of Adar, was the day that the Jews went to war to defend themselves against their enemies in the time of Esther. 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.

Personal fasts are undertaken for penitence and on certain occasions. One who has a disturbing dream undertakes a fast the next day praying that it should signal good rather than bad tidings. A bride and groom fast on their wedding day because it is a personal Yom Kippur for them as they are atoned for all their sins. It is customary for some to fast on a Yahrzeit for a parent. One who wishes to repent may follow a prescribed procedure including fasting. Some exceptional individuals undertake fasting to raise themselves spiritually to levels they feel are unattainable while they are tied to physical comforts. Most personal fasts must be verbally self-imposed in the form of an oath taken the previous day.

There are some fasts that are not public fasts, yet 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 Tzaveh. 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. Fasts like these do not require verbal self-imposition according to many authorities. [See Mishnayos and Talmud Taanis esp. 12a. Sh. Ar. O.C. esp. 562-3.etc.]

(B) Fasting on Shabbos

On Shabbos we have a Mitzvah, Scriptural or Prophetic/Rabbinical, of *Oneg*, general enjoyment, which, by definition, 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 because this is like fasting half a day, known as *Taanis Shas*, which is also forbidden. (There is an opinion that on Yom Tov one must not fast past midday, but that on Shabbos one may. [See Bach O.C. 242])

There are a number of exceptions to this rule. There is a case of fasting that is considered *Oneg*, or rather that if the person eats it is considered *Inuy*. This is when one has been fasting everyday to raise his spiritual level and is

uncomfortable eating. If one has had a disturbing dream, his anxiety if he does not fast is worse *Inuy* than his fasting. Nonetheless, many Poskim feel that today one should not fast on Shabbos for a dream. The practice is to fast only for certain types of bad dreams, and then to fast another day as repentance for having spoiled one's *Oneg Shabbos*. [See Shabbos e.g. 117b-119. Beitzah e.g. 14beto. Tur, Bais Yosef, Sh. Ar. O.C. 242, 249, 288.]

Regarding communal fasts, 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*. [See Bais Yosef O.C. 288.]

Generally, since one should not experience *Inuy* at any time on Shabbos, one should also not undertake a personal fast on Friday. The Talmud discusses whether one who fasts on Friday should fast until nightfall or is he obligated to eat a little before Shabbos so that he is not experiencing *Inuy* at the onset of Shabbos. The apparent conclusion of the Talmud is that one should finish the fast. However, as we shall see, there are other interpretations. [See Eruvin 40b-41b, commentaries. Sh. Ar. O.C. 249, 568]

(C) Dating and Rescheduling Fast-days

The Jewish calendar is lunar. Originally, the calendar was not planned ahead, but the length of each month was decided according to the testimony of witnesses who has seen the *Molad*, new moon, signalling the beginning of a new month. However, there always existed a formula by which to calculate the calendar ahead of time and to keep Rosh Chodesh close to the *Molad*. This involved accurately predicting the day and time of all the *Moldos* far ahead and then fixing the *Roshei Chodeshim* accordingly. Today, our calendar is based on this calculation, known as *Sod Ha'ibur*. Having this calculation made it possible to manipulate the dates of Pesach or of Rosh Hashana, which was necessary to avoid having Yom Kippur on a Friday or Sunday and Hoshana Raba on a Shabbos. By manipulating the lengths of Cheshvan, Kislev and Teves, days can be "borrowed" and "repaid" to the *Molad*.

Accordingly, it should be possible to manipulate the fast-days so that they do not fall on Friday or Shabbos. Evidently, however, this was not deemed necessary. Thus, the fast-days do sometimes fall on Shabbos, but we do not fast then, except for Yom Kippur, which, Scripturally, must be kept on the tenth of Tishrei. The fasts of Tisha B'av, the seventeenth of Tammuz and of Gedalia are rescheduled to the following day, while 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, whereas Taanis Esther is primarily a reminder of the war which ended in victory. When Rosh Chodesh is a Sunday, Yom Kippur Kattan is also pushed back to the preceding Thursday. None are scheduled for Friday for the reasons

explained in section B. If one forgot to fast on Thursday, he should then fast on Friday. Asara B'Teves is the only one that falls on Friday, but never on Shabbos. (Some Poskim say that were it to fall on Shabbos, we would indeed fast because the Pasuk says that this fast is also to be kept strictly on this date. [See Bais Yosef O.C. 550.] Many 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. According to these opinions, the conclusion of the Talmudic passage mentioned earlier is that one is allowed to finish one's fast on Friday, but not obligated to. The prevailing practice is to finish communal fasts, but to break personal fasts before Shabbos. [See Eruvin 41b Tosafos, Bais Yosef O.C. 249.]

[Note: See O.C. 686, Ba'er Hetev 5.]

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

SCHEDULE:

SHABBOS SHACHARIS	9:00 am
SHABBOS MINCHA	4:35 pm
SHACHARIS SUNDAY	8:00 am
SHACHARIS MON - FRI	7:00 am
MINCHA SUN - THURS	4:50 pm
CANDLE-LIGHTING SHEMOS	4:46 pm
MINCHA EREV SHABBOS	4:50 pm

SHIURIM:

GEMORA MAKOS-	SUNDAY 7:15 am
HALACHA B'YUN-	MONDAY 8:30 pm
HILCHOS SHABBOS	SHABBOS 8:15 am

-Junior Minyan for boys on the third floor beginning at 9:00.

-Playgroup with refreshments for preschoolers and first-grade girls on the second floor.

This issue of HALOCHOSCOPE has been sponsored by Rabbi and Mrs. Yosef Eisen in honor of their new son, Benzion. Mazel Tov.

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Comments and suggestions are welcome and can be addressed to :

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