

Halakhot of Ta'anit Sibbur (Public Fast Days)

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I. Overview

There are six fast days in the Jewish calendar. One, Yom Kippur, is from the Torah. Four of the five others are from the days of the Prophets specifically referred to by Hashem in a communication to the Prophet Zechariah: "The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month, and the fast of the tenth month shall become occasions for joy and gladness, happy festivals for the House of Judah; but you must love emet and shalom" (Zech. 8:19).

These four are associated with the vanquishing of Jerusalem, destruction of the Bet Hamiqdash and the extinguishing of the last flame of the first Jewish Commonwealth in 586 B.C.E. and the corresponding events destroying the Second Temple in 70 C.E. The sixth fast day is associated with Purim.

Following are the names, dates and events commemorated (in calendrical order):

1. *Shib'a Asar B'Tammuz*, the 17th day of Tamuz (the fourth month from Nissan, the month of the Exodus, declared to be the first of the months). This is the date the Romans broke through Jerusalem's walls in 70 C.E. In 586 B.C.E. the Babylonians broke through Jerusalem's walls on the 9th of Tamuz, but the fast date was modified to reflect the later destruction, as it is that destruction that still prevails. The Talmud relates that on this day in different years four other national calamities befell the Jewish People: the Tablets were broken; the daily *tamid* sacrifice was terminated in the First Temple; the Roman Emperor Vespasian burned the Sefer Torah and placed an idol in the Temple.

2. Tisha B'ab - 9th of Ab (the fifth month, the fast being exactly three weeks after the 17th of Tammuz). The Mishnah relates that on this date the destruction of both the first and second Temples occurred and three other national calamities befell the Jewish People: Hashem's decree denying entry to the Land of Israel to the generation that exited Egypt, because of the transgression associated with the spies, that the people were fearful of proceeding to the land, capture of the great city of Bethar (by the Romans in 135 C. E., crushing the Bar Kokhba revolution) and the ploughing of Jerusalem (see Jer. 26:18).

3. Saum Gedalya, on the 3rd of Tishri, the seventh month. Gedalya ben Ahiqam, who had been appointed by the victorious Babylonians as the Jewish governor of Judea after the sacking of Jerusalem, officially permitting a remnant of the nation to remain in the land, was assassinated in an act of political treason and the remnant went to Egypt. This ended over six hundred consecutive years of Israelite government in the Land of Israel, which was not restored for seventy years. The event occurred on the first of Tishri 586 B.C.E., but out of consideration for Rosh Hashanah it is commemorated on the day following the holiday.

4. Asara Betebet - 10th of Tebet, the tenth month. The day the long and devastating siege of Jerusalem began in 588 B.C.E.

5. Ta`anit Esther - 13th of Adar, the day before Purim. Placed approximately 527 B.C.E. It commemorates the fasting and repentance the people engaged in the day before the scheduled battle with Haman's followers.

Yom Kippur and Tisha B'ab are the only 24 hour (plus) fast days, beginning at sunset and concluding the next evening (at 'the appearance of the stars'). The other four begin at dawn (1.2 proportionate hours before sunrise) and conclude at evening. Yom Kippur and Tisha B'ab also each have a number of unique halakhot. Halakhot of Yom Kippur and of Tisha B'ab will be discussed in their separate sections. The following will deal with the other four fast days only.

II. General Halakhot of Fast Days (Excluding Yom Kippur and Tisha B'ab)

All eating and drinking, even of a small measure, is prohibited. Sick and very weak people whose health requires eating or drinking are exempt. (Of course this refers to a sickness that does not pose a threat to life; in cases of life-threatening sicknesses one must eat even on Yom Kippur.) Someone close to becoming sick, who by fasting might become sick, is also exempt. Someone who is able to fast but must take medicine may do so providing it is not pleasant tasting and he does not take water (or any drink) with it.

Pregnant women are exempt as are those who gave birth within twenty four months before the fast.

Children are discouraged from fasting these fasts before becoming obligated in mitzvot (twelve years of age for girls, thirteen for boys).

If one mistakenly ate, regardless of how much, he should continue the fast from the moment he remembered. If he ate less than a *kazzayit* he is still considered fasting and should recite anenu in the amida.

If by mistake one recited the berakha on a food item, he should eat a tiny amount not to let the berakha be in vain.

Taking showers and wearing fresh clothing are permitted. Brushing teeth and gargling mouthwash are permitted provided one does not swallow.

When one of these fasts falls on a Shabbat the fast is pushed forward to Sunday. In the case of Ta`anit Esther, as the Sunday would be Purim, it is pushed back to Thursday.

Abi Haben (the father who had *mila* performed to his son that day), the *sandaq* (the one who held the boy) and the *mohel* (the one who performed the circumcision), although they participated in a great and joyous mitzvah, are not exempt from fasting except on Ta`anit Esther. However, when the *b'rit* is on one of these fast days that was pushed off

from Shabbat, they are permitted to eat after mid-day. The same applies to a bride and groom within the seven days after their wedding.

III. Prayers

In the amida a special prayer *anenu* is recited by all who are fasting in the midst of the berakha *Shema Qolenu*. The individual does not recite a berakha for *anenu*, whether praying alone or with a minyan. If he forgot to recite it he does not repeat the amida. If he remembered before concluding the amida, he should recite it at the end, before saying *Oseh Shalom*.

In hazara, the hazzan recites *anenu* with a concluding berakha between the seventh and eighth berakhot (between *Go'el* and *Rophe*).

The hazzan should be one who is fasting except in the circumstance when none of those fasting can competently so serve. In the latter case the hazzan may recite *anenu* although not personally fasting, as his prayer is on behalf of the public.

If a hazzan forgot to say *anenu* in hazara and remembers or is reminded after he concluded the eighth berakha (*Refa'enu*) but before concluding *Shema Qolenu*, he should say it in the midst of *Shema Qolenu* as the individual does, without the additional berakha. If he forgot it even there, he does not return and does not repeat the amida.

In a minyan praying *Beqol Ram*, that is when the hazzan prays silently after the first three berakhot, he should recite the *anenu* berakha aloud in its usual place in hazara with its berakha. The other members of the minyan, at whatever spot of their amida they are in, should be attentive, listening silently and not answer amen in the middle of their amida. They should recite *anenu* in the usual place it is recited in the silent amida, in *Shema Qolenu*. The hazzan should not recite it again.

A special selection is read from the Torah both in *shahrit* and *minha* from *Perashat Ki Tissa* recounting Moshe Rabenu's prayer after Israel's transgression of the golden calf and Hashem's favorable response to Moshe's prayer. Only those fasting should receive aliyot.

For the hazzan to recite *anenu* as a separate berakha in hazara, and for the minyan to read the special portion from the Torah, it is proper there should be ten fasting. Nevertheless, if only six members of the minyan are fasting both the above are permitted.

If there are not at least six members of the minyan fasting, the hazzan does not recite *anenu* between *Go'el* and *Rophe* but in *Shema Qolenu* as the individual does, without a berakha. If it is Monday or Thursday morning, the regular portion for that week is read from the Torah; in *minha*, and on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday mornings, the Torah is not read.

Many have a custom to don tefillin for *minha*. The purpose is either to have an opportunity to recite additional berakhot to arrive at the recommended daily minimum of

one hundred or to provide additional sanctity on the fast day. In early 20th Century Aleppo this custom was not universal and most other Sephardic communities do not have it. It is optional. Thus, if one finds it difficult to get his tefillin for mincha, he may pray without them. If one finds himself in a mincha minyan where the congregation is not donning tefillin he should not feel required to don them and he may be given an aliya and be hazzan.

Birkat Kohanim is recited in mincha only when mincha is prayed close to sunset (the time *ne`ila* would be said on Yom Kippur). A kohen who is not fasting does not recite *Birkat Kohanim* in mincha.