

Atonement and Fasting

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5th day of the 7th month 5848 years after the creation of Adam
The 7th Month in the Third year of the third Sabbatical Cycle
The Third Sabbatical Cycle of the 119th Jubilee Cycle
The Sabbatical Cycle of Earthquakes Famines, and Pestilences

Shabbat Shuva
September 22, 2012

Shabbat Shalom Brethren,

Yom Kippur
(The Day of Atonement)

Yom Ha-Kipurim (Yom Kippur), the Day of Atonement, is a fast day on the Tenth Day of the Seventh Month (Tishrei).

On the 10th day of the Seventh Month (Tishrei) is the holiday known as Yom Ha-Kipurim (or Yom Kippur), "The Day of Atonement". This is a day dedicated to fasting and prayer on which we ask YHWH to atone for our sins.

"Ye shall afflict your souls"

On this holiday the Torah commands us to "afflict our souls ('INul NeFeSH)" as we read:

- "And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourns among you... It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever." (Lev 16,29.31)
- "Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto YHWH... For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people... It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath." (Lev 23,27.29.32)

- “And ye shall have on the tenth day of this seventh month an holy convocation; and ye shall afflict your souls: ye shall not do any work therein:” (Nu 29,7)

To “afflict the soul” means to fast

In Biblical Hebrew the expression “to afflict your souls” means “to fast” (Tzom). The Hebrew phrase ‘INul NeFeSH translated as “afflicting the soul”, also appears in a number of Biblical passages, from which it is clear that this expression signifies fasting:

- “...I afflicted (KJV: “humbled”) my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.” (Psalms 35,13)
- “...I wept, and afflicted (KJV: “chastened”) my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach.”(Psalms 69,11)
- “Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and you see not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and you take no notice?...” (Isaiah 58,3; see also vv.5.10)

“Soul” Means “appetite”

It should be pointed out that one of the meanings of the word “NeFeSH”, commonly translated as “soul”, is in fact “appetite”. For example:

- “And put a knife to your throat, if you be a man given to appetite (NeFeSH).” (Proverbs 23,2-3)
- ” For he satisfies the longing soul (NeFeSH), and fills the hungry soul (NeFeSH) with goodness.” (Psalms 107,9)
- “The full soul (NeFeSH) loathes a honeycomb; but to the hungry soul (NeFeSH) every bitter thing is sweet.” (Proverbs 27,7)
- “Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never satisfy their souls (NeFeSH) (KJV: “have enough”)” (Isaiah 56,11)

Therefore the expression “to afflict your NeFeSH” is more accurately translated as “to afflict your appetite”, hence the meaning “to fast”. [Linguistic note: NeFeSH has the literal meaning of “throat” as in the verse “Save me, O God; for the waters have reached [as high as] my throat

(NeFeSH)" (Ps 69,2) and thus by extension came to signify: breath, life, appetite, etc.]

What is involved in a fast?

In the Tanach to fast means to refrain from eating or drinking throughout the entire period of the fast (Esther 4,16). In Biblical Times a fast also included the following elements:

- Crying (i.e. intense prayer), see Ps 69,11; Joel 2,12
- Donning sackcloth and putting dust or ashes on the head (a sign of mourning), see Daniel 9,3; Nehemiah 9,1
- Prayer and Repentance, see Esther 9,31; Nehemiah 1,14; Isaiah 58 passim

Work is Forbidden on Yom Kippur

In addition to the above aspects of fasting, work of any form is forbidden on the Day of Atonement, as is having a fire burning and cooking food. While many holidays are described as a "Shabbaton" (rest-time), Yom Ha-Kipurim is described as a Shabbat-Shabbaton (Sabbath of rest-time) and all things forbidden on the Sabbath are also forbidden on Yom Ha-Kipurim.

Fasting and Charity

We can learn much about what to do and what not to do on a fast day from Isa 58, which describes "an acceptable [fast] day to YHWH". In this Biblical passage we are told that fasting must be accompanied by righteous action and that the fast and prayer of a person who oppresses or neglects the poor and hungry shall not be received.

- "1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. 3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and you see not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and you take no notice? Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact all your labors. 4 Behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: you shall not fast as you do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to YHWH? 6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to lose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? 7 Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? when you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you hide not

thyself from thine own flesh? 8 Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and your righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of YHWH shall be your reward. 9 Then shall you call, and YHWH shall answer; you shall cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If you take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; 10 And if you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall your light rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon day: 11 And YHWH shall guide thee continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and make fat your bones: and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. 12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.” (Isa 58,1-12)

Fasting and Repentance

In Joel 2 we are taught that fasting must be accompanied with genuine repentance:

- “12 Therefore also now, says YHWH, turn you even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: 13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto YHWH your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repents him of the evil. 14 Who knows if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto YHWH your God?” Joel 2,12-14

Shoes

The Rabbis have a custom of not wearing leather shoes on fast days. This is based on Ez 24,17 which indicates that there was an ancient custom for mourners to remove their shoes as a sign of their mourning when someone died. This apparently refers to all shoes, and not just leather shoes. However, this was a mourning custom and there is no indication that this was done on fast days and it is certainly not a requirement. Biblical Passages which mention The Day of Atonement

- Lev 16,1-34
- Lev 23,26-32
- Nu 29,7-11
- Lev 25,8-10 (Jubilee year)
- Ex 30,1-10 (esp. v.10)