

Section 8**Yom HaKippurim**

Adderet Eliyahu's section on *Yom HaKippurim* (commonly referred to as "Yom HaKippurim") covers the titular holiday as well as the other Karaite fast days. Additionally, when discussing whether there is a requirement to observe what is referred to as the "Fast of Esther", this section of the *Adderet* briefly covers the holiday of Purim.

The topics I will cover in this section are:

1. How we know we are required to fast on Yom HaKippurim
2. Additional Laws of Fasting
3. The Four Fasts
4. Whether there is a Requirement to Observe The Fast of Esther
5. Fasts called in Times of Distress

Adderet Eliyahu also discusses the theology and purpose behind fasting stating that it facilitates *teshuva*. Furthermore, the *Adderet* explores why Yom HaKippurim is dated on the tenth of the Seventh Month, and discusses the Temple service that was performed during Yom HaKippurim. I do not herein summarize these points.

"Therefore Hashem, blessed be He, graced man with this day so that he might atone for his sins . . . and this is done through repentance and through Temple service."

-*Adderet Eliyahu's* Introduction to Section on Yom HaKippurim

§6.1 How We Know We are Required to Fast on Yom HaKippurim

Scripture states regarding Yom HaKippurim that we are to "afflict our souls" (Leviticus 23:27); but Scripture nowhere explicitly commands us to "fast". Such an explicit statement is not necessary, however, since the expression "to afflict one's soul" is synonymous to fasting. This is clear from the numerous uses of this expression throughout Scripture. For instance, Isaiah records that the Israelites asked God "why have we fasted and you see not? Why have we afflicted our soul and you take no knowledge?" (Isaiah 58:3). God responds to *both* of these questions – the one regarding fasting and the one regarding afflicting the soul – with a reference *only* to fasting: "behold in the day of your fast you pursue your desires and exact all your labours" (Isaiah 58:3). Because God mentions only fasting, but his response addresses both questions, it follows that afflicting the soul is synonymous with fasting.

Although the expression "to afflict one's soul" generally refers to fasting, it can refer to other acts if further context or specification is given. For example, in biblical times people would make oaths and vows taking upon themselves some restriction or affliction. Regarding these oaths and vows, Scripture uses the expression to "afflict one's soul", as in the verse: "every vow and every binding oath to afflict the soul" (Numbers 30:14).

Notes on §6.1:

The examples brought from Scripture above serve as evidence that support defining “afflicting the soul” as “fasting” rather than as unequivocal proof. The ultimate source for this definition is the Jewish linguistic tradition. In general, we learn the meaning of the text from our knowledge of the Hebrew language, not the meaning of language from the text. (See “Notes on § 2.1”). For this reason, I have not included explanations of all of the verses cited by the *Adderet* and other Karaite sources attempting to connect “fasting” with “afflicting the soul.” Those other verses include Psalms 35:13 and Psalms 69:11. Other verses connect “nefesh” (commonly translated as “soul” – as in “afflicting the soul”) with man’s appetite. These verses include Psalms 107:9 and Proverbs 27:7, among others.

§6.2 Additional Laws of Fasting

We are to fast on Yom HaKippurim starting from evening on the 9th of the month until nightfall on the 10th of the month (Leviticus 23:32).

Certain people are exempted from fasting on Yom HaKippurim. One whose life would be put at risk by fasting should not fast. Children too are exempt from fasting because it is dangerous to their health. They should, however, be made to fast as much as they can reasonably endure. This is to accustom them to observe fast days. Non-Jews or non-Jewish servants of Jews are not required to fast on Yom HaKippurim. None of these exempted individuals should eat in public, however, so as not to desecrate the fast.

Fasting is a facilitator of repentance. Therefore people should not engage in acts that reduce their ability to feel the effects of the fast. For example, one should not wash himself with cold water to reduce the uncomfortable sensation caused by refraining from drink.

The Rabbanites obligate people to afflict themselves in ways other than fasting on Yom HaKippurim¹. These “obligations” are the words of sages and not a true requirement. Nevertheless, it is commendable to afflict one’s soul in every way possible since afflicting the soul facilitates repentance.

§6.3 The Four Fasts

The Prophets and Writings mention four annual fasts aside from Yom HaKippurim: “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]” (Zechariah 8:19). In contrast with other holidays, there exists no verse explicitly commanding us to observe these fasts or prescribing a set time or purpose for these fasts. Although we confirm the month in which each fast occurs from the verse in Zechariah above, we confirm the proper day and purpose for each of these fasts by analyzing verses in Scripture that mention these fasts in passing.

§6.3A The Fast of the Tenth Month

The Fast of the Tenth month mourns the start of the Babylonian siege against Jerusalem, an event that would lead to the First Exile. The siege began on the tenth of the Tenth Month (Jeremiah 52:4) and the fast is thus observed on this day.

¹ For example, according to the Rabbanites one should not wear leather shoes on Yom HaKippurim.

§6.3B The Fast of the Fourth Month

The fast of the Fourth Month mourns the Babylonians' breaching of the walls of Jerusalem, an event that would lead to the destruction of the First Temple and the First Exile. The Babylonians had laid siege to the city (Jeremiah 52:5) and succeeded in breaching the walls on the ninth day of the Fourth Month (Jeremiah 52:6-7). The fast of the Fourth Month commemorates this tragedy and is thus dated on the 9th of the Fourth Month.

§6.3C The Fast of the Fifth Month

The fast of the Fifth Month mourns the burning and destruction of the First Temple at the hands of the Babylonians. About a month after breaching the walls of Jerusalem, the Babylonians burned the First Temple to the ground. This is recorded to have happened on the seventh of the month in the book of Kings (2 Kings 25:8-9) and on the tenth of the month in the book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 52:12-13). We thus fast on both the seventh and the tenth day of the Fifth Month. The *Adderet* records that those who are particularly stringent fast four days from the seventh to the tenth day, eating only at night².

Notes on §6.3C:

Surprisingly Scripture records two separate dates for the burning of the First Temple. While *Adderet Eliyahu* does not provide an explanation for this apparent discrepancy, *Gan Eden* does. *Gan Eden* suggests that the buildings around the Temple were burned on the seventh of the month and that the Temple itself was burned on the tenth.

I believe that the buildings around the Temple mentioned in *Gan Eden* were likely the storage chambers (1 Kings 6:5-10) adjacent to and built simultaneously with the Temple. These buildings were support structures for the Temple service and so *Gan Eden* argues that they are what is referred to as "the house of *Hashem*" (2 Kings 25:8-9) burnt on the seventh of the month. The Temple itself is the central structure containing the Holy and the Holy of Holies, where parts of the actual service would take place. According to *Gan Eden*, this is the "house of *Hashem*" burned to the ground on the tenth of the month (Jeremiah 52:12-13).

§6.3D Additional Customs of the Fast of the Fifth Month

It is good practice not to wash oneself or one's clothing. It is also good practice to sit on the ground from the 7th to the 10th of the month. Some also sleep on the ground during this time and do not eat meat or drink wine. Some eat broken bread placed in water as their meal on the night of the 7th and the 10th. It is recommendable not to work on these four days. It is also customary during this time to read biblical passages about the destruction of the Temple along with dirges recalling its destruction. One should not study other forms of Torah, however, since it is a joy to study Torah.

On the 10th of the month, the Book of Job is read. After the reading of the Book of Job it is customary to read condolences and to slaughter the meat for the upcoming break-fast. This is because God's promise to rebuild the Temple was given to Ezekiel on the tenth of the month, as it is written: "In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, **in the tenth day of the month**, in the fourteenth year after the city was destroyed, in that selfsame day" (Ezekiel 40:1). The sages understood the 25

² I do not think this more stringent practice is common today and I am unsure when it fell out of use.

years referenced in this passage to refer to the years starting from the time when “the city (Jerusalem) was destroyed”. Thus, the “tenth of the month” at “the beginning of the year” refers to the 25th anniversary of the Temple’s destruction on the 10th of the Fifth month. Since Ezekiel receives a prophecy regarding the rebuilding of the Temple during this fast (Ezekiel 40), it is customary to reduce our mourning during this fast.

Notes on §6.3D:

The *Adderet* records certain additional customs that the sages deemed commendable. Not all of these customary practices mentioned above correspond exactly with today’s practice. Although the *Adderet* records the custom of reading dirges from the 7th through the 10th of the Fifth Month, today it is customary to read dirges from the fast of the Fourth Month through the fast on the 10th of the Fifth Month. It is also customary not to take out the Torah scroll during the synagogue service during this time period. Weekly Torah readings are still read from a regular book, however.

Furthermore, it is customary for men not to shave starting on the first of the Fifth Month until after the reading of the book of Job on the Tenth of the month. Neither do people greet each other joyfully (such as after prayers) during this time period. Please note that the list of customs provided here is not necessarily a complete one.

§6.3E The Fast of the Seventh Month

The people are recorded to have fasted on the 24th of the Seventh Month (Nehemiah 9:1) and this event is identified by the sages as being “the fast of the Seventh Month” mentioned in Zechariah 8:19. There are at least two opinions about the purpose of this fast.

Some of the sages believed it commemorates the murder of Gedaliah, the governor of Judah. Although appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, Gedaliah was Jewish and encouraged the rebuilding and resettling of the land of Israel (Jeremiah Ch. 40). Gedaliah was murdered in the Seventh Month (Jeremiah 41:1), but Scripture does not record on which day of the month this occurred. Nevertheless, these sages identify his murder as the reason for the fast of the Seventh Month.

Another group of sages hold that this fast signals the end of the year’s *mo’adim*. The last *mo’ed* of the year, *Shemini Atzeret*, is on the 22nd of the month. These sages argue that the fast is usually on the 23rd but that perhaps in the events of Nehemiah 9:1 the fast was moved to the 24th because the 23rd happened to be a Shabbat that year. Rav Bashyatzi agrees with this second opinion since we do not know for certain on what day of the month Gedaliah was killed.

Notes on §6.3E:

Rav Bashyatzi’s rationale for adopting the explanation that the fast of the Seventh Month commemorates the end of the holidays appears problematic to me. Although Scripture never explicitly states that Gedaliah was killed on the 24th of the month, neither does it state explicitly that the 23rd of the month was a Shabbat the year Nehemiah observed this fast. In fact, today this fast is observed on the 24th of the Seventh month – not the 23rd.

Furthermore, I do not believe we require an explicit Scriptural statement of when Gedaliah was killed to claim that this is the fast’s purpose. Since this fast is never given as an explicit command in Scripture, it seems that its purpose could be dependent on knowledge not found in Scripture but known to whoever instituted the fast.

Rav Aharon the Younger, who believes the fast commemorates the death of Gedaliah, offers an alternative explanation for why we need not know when Gedaliah was killed. He argues that the fast was created to commemorate Gedaliah's death but may have been set after the holidays of the Seventh Month so as not to interrupt the joy of the holidays³. Rav Aharon's answer eliminates the need to confirm whether this fast actually coincides with Gedaliah's death (since it would have been set after the holidays regardless of when Gedaliah actually died). Rav Aharon's view does not explain, however, why the fast was set two days after the holidays on the 24th of the month and not simply on the 23rd (Rav Aharon rejects the argument that the 23rd was a Shabbat when Nehemiah observed the fast and believes that it is normally held on the 24th). Rav Levi records the argument that the fast was set to be on the 24th so that there could be a day of separation between the joy of the holidays and the sadness of the fast⁴.

Furthermore, I believe the book of Zechariah provides further evidence that this fast is related to the exile and not the end of the holidays. When the Jews of the Second Temple period ask Zechariah about whether they are still required to fast since the Temple has been rebuilt and the Exile is over (Zechariah 7:3), Zechariah responds by stating that the Jews should still fast but that eventually the fasts would be changed to days of gladness (Zechariah 7:4-8:19). In this response he includes the fast of the Seventh Month (Zechariah 8:19), suggesting that it has something to do with the destruction of the Temple and the exile. This supports the argument that the fast is meant to commemorate the death of Gedaliah who returned many Jews from exile (Jeremiah 40:12).

§6.3F On the Duration of the Four Fasts

Some of the sages argued that the Four Fasts should last the entire calendar day, from evening to evening. Others, however, believed that the fasts should begin after the time when one would usually have their last meal of the night. The *Adderet* concludes that the latter opinion is correct and argues that the term "fasting" without further specification implies fasting during daylight hours. For example, Esther explicitly specifies that the Jews fast for her "three days, day and night" (Esther 9:16). Similarly, it is said that some of the Israelites "fasted seven days" when King Shaul died (I Samuel 31:13), which could not reasonably have included fasting day and night due to the great length of the fast. Therefore it is not required to keep the Four Fasts from evening to evening. Doing so is commendable, however. Furthermore, regarding the fast of the Fifth Month, there are those who are stringent and fast from the 7th through the 10th of the month eating only at night.

§6.3G Whether The Four Fasts Still Apply

The Rabbanites also observe the Four Fasts. However, the dates for the Rabbanite fast days differ from those of the Karaite fast days. This is in part because the Rabbanites believe that the fasts should reflect the dates pertaining to the destruction of the Second Temple rather than the First, because the Second Temple has yet to be rebuilt⁵. To this the sages respond that in Zechariah 7:3 the people ask Zechariah whether they should still mourn the destruction of the First Temple in the Fifth Month (Zechariah 7:3), even though the Temple had recently been rebuilt. Zechariah responds by saying that the Four Fasts "will be to the House of Judah as joy and gladness and as cheerful appointed times" (Zechariah 8:19),

³ Gan Eden Inyan Yom HaKippurim Ch. 5

⁴ Rav Levi Ben Yefet's *Sefer HaMitzvot* P. 459 in the edition published by Rav Yosef El Gamil.

⁵ The derivation of the Rabbanite fast dates is not simply due to their using the dates that pertained to the Second Temple's destruction. The source for Rabbanite dates is a complicated issue that deserves discussion in its own right. The First Temple- Second Temple distinction, however, is the most discussed in *Adderet Elyahu*.

which many of the sages understand to refer to the eventual status of these fasts in the end times⁶. Since in biblical times, the fasts for the First Temple continued even when the Second Temple stood, many of the sages argue that these fasts should still be upheld today.

§6.4 The Fast of Esther and the Days of Purim

There is no obligation to observe the fast of Esther kept by the Rabbanites. The Book of Esther reports that Mordechai sent letters to the Jews, urging them “to ordain these days of Purim in their appointed times...as they had ordained for themselves and their descendants the matters of the fasts and their cries” (Esther 9:31). But the “fasts” here do not refer to an annual fast relating to the story of Esther.

The Sages provide two alternative explanations of the “fasts” mentioned in Esther 9:31. *First*, these fasts might refer to the fasts that the Jews kept out of distress (Esther 4:3) before Haman’s plot had been foiled. The verse is thus saying that the Jews should accept Purim upon themselves in much the same way that they accepted this temporary period of fasting upon themselves. *Second*, the verse may be saying that the Jews should keep Purim although it is not commanded in the Torah just as they kept the Four Fasts despite their not being required by the Torah. The *Adderet* also cites a third explanation of these verses by Rav Levi which I do not understand well enough to reproduce here. In any case, this verse does not imply a requirement to observe the fast of Esther.

Notes on §6.4:

The second explanation of Esther 9:31 appears to me to be more plausible than the first. The verse states that the fasts had been “ordained for themselves and their descendants (*zar’am*)”. How then could the “fasts” in question be referring to the temporary fasts kept only before Haman’s plot was foiled? Although one might argue that the phrase “and their descendants” is intended to refer only to the children living at the time, I think it is more likely that the verse would then have used the term child (“*taf*” or “*na’ar*”) to refer to these children. For example, in describing the target of Haman’s intended genocide Scripture uses the following language: “all Jews, from the youth (*na’ar*) to the old; little children (“*taf*”) and women” (Esther 3:13). Furthermore, it is stated clearly in the Megillah that Purim is to be kept “in every generation” (Esther 9:28), so it is reasonable that the “descendants” who were obligated in the fasts refer to those of future generations. Thus, I believe the fasts mentioned in Esther refer to the Four Fasts which were intended for all generations and the meaning of the verses are as given by the second interpretation in §6.4.

Whether Purim and the Four Fasts are a Halakhic Obligation

The Four Fasts and Purim are not commanded in the Torah. Thus, it is not immediately clear whether these holidays are religious obligations or mere customs. This particular question is tied to more general questions regarding the extent of human legal authority and post-Torah commandments. The *Adderet* and many of the classical sages appear to assume the existence of some sort of requirement regarding these holidays, but do not explicitly address the nature of the requirement. By contrast, the present chief Rabbi, Rav Moshe Firrouz, argues that Purim and the four fasts are not a *halakhic* requirement but a matter of custom.

Furthermore, although Gan Eden ultimately concludes that the fasts are obligatory, it briefly considers the possibility that they could be mere custom⁷. According to Gan Eden, one possible interpretation of God’s response

⁶ The verses immediately after Zechariah 8:19 heavily imply that this will happen during the end times.

⁷ See Gan Eden Inyan Yom HaKippurim Ch. 5

to the question regarding the applicability of the fasts during the Second Temple Period (Zechariah 7:3), is that God expresses shock since it was not He who made the fasts applicable to begin with. Therefore, as a purely human initiative, their adherence is optional: "When you fasted these seventy years ...did I fast? And when you ate and when you drank was it not you that ate and drank?" (Zechariah 7:5-6).

Gan Eden ultimately rejects this interpretation, however. Rather, it reads God's response to mean that, although the fasts are mandatory, His true concern is not the fasting. Fasting is a physical matter that affects mankind (and not God) since it is they who must eat and drink. Rather, God's true desire is the repentance and righteous behavior for which fasting is a catalyst. Thus, God continues by saying "love truth and peace" (Zechariah 7:8), by commanding the people to act righteously (Zechariah 7:9-8:9), and by stating that once this is accomplished in the end times the fasts will become days of gladness (Zechariah 8:19).

Finally, I believe that there may be an argument for the institution of post-Torah *halakhic* requirements via the system of oaths given in the Torah itself. I will not, however, discuss this issue here.

§6.5 Fasting in Times of Distress

There is a biblical requirement to fast during times of distress. Indeed, there are many examples in Scripture of calling fasts in times of distress. This is as in the verse "sanctify a fast, call an assembly!" (Joel 1:14) and the fast Shaul called during the war with the Pelishtim (1 Samuel 14:24). The source in the Torah of this requirement is the verse "and when you go in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, you will sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before Hashem" (Numbers 10:9). Since we must repent to be remembered by Hashem and there is no true repentance without fasting, we are required by Scripture to fast in times of distress.

It is fitting not only for the nation but also for local communities and individual people to fast in times of distress. Some people who are particularly stringent fast every Monday and Thursday to facilitate frequent repentance.

Notes on §6.5:

The practice of calling fasts in times of distress is still in use today. To the best of my knowledge, the Mo'etzet HaHakhamim last called a fast a few years ago when a court decision regarding the rights of Karaites in Israel to label their meat as "Certified Kosher by the Karaite Jews of Israel" was being rendered (the fast was called for February 12, 2012). Furthermore, I heard once that the practice to fast on Mondays and Thursdays was kept by some Egyptian Karaites while they still lived in Egypt.