

Fast of Esther

Ta'anit Ester,

תענית אסתר

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The Fast of Esther commemorates the three-day fast observed by the Jewish people in the story of Purim. The Fast is called by the name of Esther because it was she who first requested the observance of a fast, of Mordechai: 'Go and gather all the Jews who are found in Shushan and fast over me, and do not eat and do not drink three days, night and day; and I and my maidens will also fast thus. (Esther 4:16).

"Go, assemble all the Jews to be found in Shushan, and have them fast for me, neither eating nor drinking for three days, night and day; also I and the girls attending me will fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16)

When was this? It is a common misconception that this fast was attached to the month of Adar. However we read,

"In the first month, the month of Nisan (Aviv), in the twelfth year of Achashverosh, they began throwing pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman every day and every month until the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. 8 Then Haman said to Achashverosh, "There is a particular people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people; moreover, they don't observe the king's laws. It doesn't befit the king to tolerate them. 9 If it please the king, have a decree written for their destruction; and I will hand over 330 tons of silver to the officials in charge of the king's affairs to deposit in the royal treasury."

10 The king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the son of Hamdata the Agagi, the enemy of the Jews. 11 The king said to Haman, "The money is given to you, and the people too, to do with as seems good to you." (Esther 3:7-11)

"When Mordechai learned everything that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes and went out through the city, lamenting and crying bitterly. 2 He stopped before entering the King's Gate, since no one was allowed to go inside the King's Gate wearing sackcloth. 3 In every province reached by the king's order and decree, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing, as many lay down on sackcloth and ashes...Mordechai 13 asked them to give Ester this answer: "Don't suppose that merely because you happen to be in the royal palace you will escape any more than the other Jews. 14 For if you fail to speak up now, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from a different direction; but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows whether you didn't come into your royal position precisely for such a time as this."

15 Ester had them return this answer to Mordechai: 16 "Go, assemble all the Jews to be found in Shushan, and have them fast for me, neither eating nor drinking for three days, night and day; also, I and the girls attending me will fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." 17 Then Mordechai went his way and did everything Ester had ordered him to do." (Esther 4:1-3, 13-17)

The fast which we observe is nevertheless not observed for a three-day period, as was the case with the original Fast, nor is it observed on the same date. Did you notice the date? It was "In the first month, the month of Nisan (Aviv)..." **(Esther 3:7)** Originally the Fast was observed by Esther and the entire people of Israel on, according to the Rabbis, the 14th, 15th and 16th of Nisan, immediately

after Mordechai was informed of Haman's decree and of the letter of annihilation which Haman wrote on the 13th of Nisan. Our Fast however, is observed on the 13th of Adar, in memory of the Fast observed by Israel on the day of their mobilization for war against the enemies. The Fast is nevertheless called by the name of Esther since it was she who first proposed its observance.

They fasted on Passover because Esther reasoned it would be better to fast on one Pesach lest they all be destroyed and thus never be able to observe the holiday in the future. The 13th of Adar was a fast day for the warriors while going out to battle, as it is believed to have been customary to fast during the battle in order to gain divine favor. Because fasting during Passover would be inappropriate in almost all circumstances, the "Fast of Esther" became attached to the eve of Purim, the 13th of Adar.

But since the Fast could not be permanently fixed for later years in its proper time (because fasting is not permitted during Passover - 'In the first month - Nisan (Aviv), on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is YAHWEH'S Passover. – Leviticus 23:5; Now you shall EAT it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste - it is YAHWEH'S Passover. – Exodus 12:11 Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. - 1 Corinthians 5:8 For Messiah our Passover also has been sacrificed. - 1 Corinthians 5:7), the Sages therefore fixed it for the 13th of Adar - which was also a Fast day for the Jews, who then gathered to wage war against their enemies.

And although the Fast of Esther is therefore a memorial to the original three days of fasting, the Rabbis were nevertheless lenient in fixing it for only one day – from dawn till evening. Others voluntarily fast the night as well as the day on the 13th of Adar, since the original three-day Fast was observed night and day.

If the 13th of Adar falls on Shabbat, the Fast is observed the preceding Thursday which is the 11th of Adar. Friday being needed to prepare for the Sabbath and the following Purim festival (**Abudarham, l.c. p. 94b; Oraḥ Ḥayyim, 686**).

Because we cannot fast on Shabbat: "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and YAHWEH's holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words." (**Isaiah 58:13**)

Midrash Tanhuma reads as follows:

They asked: It was taught that the Megillah may be read on the 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th, but not earlier or later. R. Judah said that this rule is only in effect when the calendar is established by the testimony of witnesses and Israel dwells on its own land, but in our times...the Megillah can only be read on the proper date (=the 14th or 15th). Does the halakha follow the first opinion or does it follow R. Judah?

They responded: According to both R. Judah and the first opinion, the Megillah can only be read on the proper date. The following is what the first opinion meant. Towns that were surrounded by walls at the time of Joshua son of Nun read on the 15th. Villages and cities read on the 14th, but villages may advance their reading to yom ha-kenisah. When the Mishnah taught that the Megillah may be read on the 11th, 12th, 13th, etc., that applied to one who is engaged in fasting, as it was taught at the end of the Mishnah: "but villages may advance their reading to yom ha-kenisah." What is yom ha-kenisah? The day of gathering, as it is stated (**Meg. 2a**): The thirteenth was a day of gathering for

all (Heb: yom [12] kehillah la-kol hiy), as it is written (**Est. 9:1-2**): "in the 12th month, the month of Adar, on its thirteenth day... the Jews gathered themselves (Heb: nikhalu) in their cities." They gathered themselves and decreed a fast on the 13th of Adar. But the 14th was a holiday, as it is written (Est. 9:17) "and they rested on its 14th and made it a day of feasting and gladness." In Shushan ha-birah, they only rested on the 15th. Therefore, Shushan and all walled towns read on the 15th and make that a festive day. When the Mishnah taught that "the Megillah may be read (on the 11th, 12th, 13th ...)" that concerned one who is engaged in fasting, because it is forbidden to engage in fasting on shabbat. If the 14th falls on the first day of the week, it is forbidden to fast on shabbat. It is also forbidden to fast on 'erev shabbat, because of the necessity of preparing for shabbat. Rather, the fast is advanced to Thursday, which is the 11th of Adar. If the 14th falls on shabbat, it is forbidden to fast on 'erev shabbat because of the necessity of preparing for shabbat. The primary reason for a fast day is the recital of selihot and rahamim, and reciting these (instead of preparing for shabbat) will detract from honoring the shabbat. Honoring the shabbat is more important than a thousand fasts, for honoring the shabbat is a commandment from the Torah, while the fast is a rabbinic decree (Heb: ta'anit de-rabbanan). The Torah commandment of honoring the shabbat takes precedence over the fast, a rabbinic decree. Hence the fast is advanced to Thursday, the 12th. If the 14th falls on 'erev shabbat, the fast is observed on Thursday, which is the 13th. This is set forth in the Mishnah. How does this occur? If it falls on a Monday, villages and cities read that day and walled towns read the next day. If it falls on shabbat or the first day of the week, villages advance the reading to yom ha-kenisah, etc. But when the 9th of Av falls on shabbat, the fast is postponed until after shabbat, since this fast was instituted as a punishment. Therefore, the fast is postponed and not advanced.

The early 9th century polemical letter of Pirkoy ben Baboy uses almost the same language:

"One who delights in one shabbat is greater than one who sacrifices a thousand sacrifices and (fasts) a thousand fasts." (Ozar Ha-Ge'onim, Yom Tov, 20, sec. 41).

This was a polemical letter written to the Jews of North Africa and Spain, instructing them that Palestinian customs should not be followed. Pirkoy, a Babylonian Jew, tells us that he was a disciple of someone named Rava who was a disciple of R. Yehudai. (R. Yehudai was head of the academy at Sura from approximately 757-761 C.E.) Pirkoy writes that many of the Palestinian customs originated as emergency measures during times of persecution, or were customs resulting from ignorance. It was only in Babylonia that accurate traditions were preserved. Among the Palestinian practices that Pirkoy criticizes was their practice of fasting on shabbat.)

it must be stated that the Fast of Esther, celebrated before Purim, on the 13th of Adar, is not an original part of the latter, nor was it later instituted "in commemoration of the fasting of Esther, Mordecai, and the people" (Hastings, "Dict. Bible, " i. 854, col. 2),

It was a Palestinian Jewish practice of fasting three days (on a Monday-Thursday-Monday cycle) in Adar. These sources are: **Massekhet Soferim (chaps. 17 and 21)**, and three other sources that have come to light from the Genizah. The Palestinian practice almost certainly was a commemoration of the three days of fasting initiated by Esther in Nissan.

The first who mentions it is R. Aḥa of Shabḥa (8th cent.) in "She'eltot," iv.; and the reason there given for its institution is based on an arbitrary interpretation of Esth. ix. 18 and Meg. 2a, "The 13th was the time of gathering," which gathering is explained to have had also the purpose of public prayer and fasting (comp. Asheri on Meg. i., beginning; Abudarham, l.c. p. 94; Brück, l.c. pp. 56 et seq.; and Berliner, in "Kaufmann Gedenkbuch," p. 270, Breslau, 1900).

Today, the fast on the 13th of Adar is still commonly observed; but when that date falls on a Sabbath the fast is put back to Thursday.

It is a common misconception that this fast was accepted by the Jews for all future generations during the time of Esther, as it is stated in the Book of Esther: "They had established for themselves and their descendants the matters of the fasts and fasting and lamenting" (Esther 9:31). This verse actually refers to the four fasts which relate to mourning for the Temple.

Zechariah 7:1-7 In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev. The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech, together with their men, to entreat Yahweh By asking the priests of the house of Yahweh Almighty and the prophets, "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?" Then the word of Yahweh Almighty came to me: "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves? Are these not the words Yahweh proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?'"

Yahweh is saying, as you fast what is your "kavanah," what are your intentions. But notice, He mentions the fasts and the feasts equating their mutual significance. He is saying as oft times you do this do this in remembrance of Me.

The four fasts mentioned in Zechariah are:

1. Asarah B'Tevet (Tevet 10 - in the winter), when the siege of the city by the Babylonians began.
2. Shiv'ah 'Asar B'Tammuz (Tammuz 17 - summer), when the walls of the city were breached by the Babylonians, several years after the beginning of the siege. This day of fasting that marks the beginning of a three-week period of national mourning for all the Commonwealth of Israel.
3. Tisha B'Av (Av 9 - summer), when the Beit haMikdash (Temple) was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE.
4. Tzom G'daliah (Tishri 3 - fall) when the Judean governor was assassinated in an Ammonite-generated plot. This brought about the end of Jewish autonomy under the Babylonians.

Why did Esther call for a fast? Because a fast afflicts the soul and allows the spirit to dictate to the body, "As for me and my house we will serve YAHWEH! This facilitates the process of "teshuva" -- literally "return." We return to our essential state of purity. Esther called for a fast, knowing that through soul-searching and self-introspection the Jews would forge a spiritual connection necessary to make her mission successful. THIS WAS SPIRITUAL WARFARE!

So instead of focusing on the when the fast was to be observed let us NOT lose track of WHY the fast was called. It was a 3 Day Crisis Fast:

(Esther 4: 15-16)- Esther bid them return Mordecai this answer, "Go. Gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan. Fast for me. Neither eat nor drink 3 days and 3 nights. I and my maidens will fast likewise. I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law. If I perish; I perish." [Emphasis added] –

This is the type of fast that lifts an execution of a judgment that is manmade where only YAHWEH can change this execution by His divine intervention through Mercy, Grace and div The 3 Day Crisis

Fast calls forth divine intervention against a demonically inspired plan to bring about harm to God's people through a legalized decree regardless of whether the decree is just or unjust.

In this situation, Esther had to reveal that she was Jewish to Shah Achashverosh who was also the same King that had legalized a decree to kill all the Jews through the counsel of one of his evil princes named Haman. Shah Achashverosh was not aware that Esther was Jewish which insinuates that most if not all the concubines and wives in his Harem were supposed to be Persian. Haman was the wicked Grand Vizier that had tricked the Shah into legalizing this evil decree – The Persian Final Solution - as a conspiracy to kill all the Jews because as an Amalekite he hated the Jews. He also plotted to have Esther's cousin Moredecai to be arrested and killed on the gallows. When Esther heard what had been done to her uncle and heard about Haman's evil conspiracy to destroy all the Jews, she called for a 3 Day Crisis Fast that required all of her people who were Jews to Fast with her in preparation to decide to do the unthinkable, which was to request an audience with the Shah unannounced. Requesting the audience of the Shah was unthinkable at that time because no one was allowed to do that unless the Shah requested to see a specific someone which was also rare on occasion. This act could have cost Esther her life but she went ahead and did it anyway. She lavished the Shah with a banquet that please him greatly to such an extent that he was willing to bend and hear of her request. Through this fast she was able to strategize a way to inform Shah Achashverosh of Haman's conspiracy to destroy the Jews and the plot to kill her cousin Moredecai by revealing that she herself was in fact a Jew and if he allowed Haman to have his way, she would surely perish because of her status as a Jew. The King loved Esther so much and was heavily enraged by Haman's evil plot to trick him into killing her and the Jews that Shah Achashverosh decided to free Mordecai from the unjust sentence and sentenced Haman into the gallows for his evil deeds. The evil plot and conspiracy against the Jews was reversed in this Fast.

I believe that the 3 day Crisis Fast has the ability to provide strategies when facing impending doom in a crisis. It has the ability for YAHWEH to provide a way out of no way out of that crisis through divinely inspired strategies to thwart the evil schemes of your enemies and reverse the outcome. The nature of this Fast is also quite intense in that you do not eat nor drink for three days straight as you pray for YAHWEH to answer swiftly in your dire situation. This is the type of Fast that this is, and I believe that it requires more than one person doing this. It is a collective group fast and I don't classify it to be an individualistic type of fast because of the nature of the crisis. If the crisis affects more than one party than it should be a group fast. If it only affects only one person, then I would still recommend a group fast in such a situation as well because it requires a serious level of intercession to thwart the enemies attack on your life. You will definitely need back up in regards to receiving instructions concerning strategies to fight against your enemies and reverse their plans so that they backfire on the enemy. I classify it as a COVERT OPERATIONAL FAST.

In Remembrance of this Fast we remember it not on the day Esther did BUT on the day before we celebrate Purim to be reminded how much this Festival cost us as a people!

13 Adar actually commemorates the fasting of the Jewish warriors before their battle on 13 Adar, but it is named for Esther, who also fasted before her important task.