

## "A Time of 'Without' – On the Meaning of Fasting"

**Bookmark Evening on March 18, 2025, with Rabbi Prof. Dr. Andreas Nachama, Former General Superintendent Ulrike Trautwein, and Imam Kadir Sanci**

### **Jewish Perspective by Rabbi Prof. Dr. Andreas Nachama:**

The prophet Zechariah observed that it is not asceticism that brings about improvement, but rather a profound change of heart, a transformation of social life, and a return to the Torah and the Prophets that make the return to Zion possible:

“These are the things you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render true and sound judgment in your gates. And do not plot evil in your hearts against one another.”

But when and how do days of fasting become days of celebration?

In the Talmud, Rav Chana is quoted:

“If there is peace, they shall be joy and gladness. If there is no peace, they remain fast days. This means: if there is persecution, fasting remains in effect. But if there is neither persecution nor peace, one may choose to fast or not.”

Maimonides emphasized in his rulings on fasting:

“Just as the community fasts in times of distress, so too should the individual fast in his own affliction.”

He concluded that the fast days will be abolished in the Messianic era.

### **Which fast days exist in Judaism?**

**Atonement fast:** The fast of Yom Kippur

- No food for 25 hours.
- Evening prayers from sunset until 10 p.m.
- Morning prayers from 10 a.m. until the appearance of three stars. Only then, after 25 hours, is the fast broken.

The other fast days (except for Tisha B’Av) begin at sunrise and end at nightfall.

• **Fast of Esther** on the eve of Purim:

Originally based on themes of mourning and atonement, this fast was primarily a response to the looming threat of the destruction of the Jewish people (Esther 4:16).

• **Fast of the Firstborn** on the eve of Passover:

To commemorate the death of Egypt’s firstborn in the tenth plague.

• **Wedding Day Fast:**

This fast also has an atoning character.

**Fasts of Mourning**

On the following fast days, fasting begins at sunrise and ends at nightfall—similar to the practice in Islam.

• **Asarah B'Tevet (10th of Tevet):**

Commemorates the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 587 BCE. This siege eventually led to the destruction of Solomon's Temple (the First Temple), the conquest of the Kingdom of Judah, and the exile of the Jewish people.

• **Shivah Asar B'Tammuz (17th of Tammuz):**

A Jewish fast day marking the breach of Jerusalem's walls before the destruction of the First and Second Temples.

- It begins the three-week mourning period following the festival of Shavuot.
- According to tradition, Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai following Shavuot, during which time the Israelites created the Golden Calf. In anger, Moses shattered the tablets of the Ten Commandments. This event is also commemorated on the 17th of Tammuz.

• **Tisha B'Av:**

A fast and mourning day marking the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is the climax and conclusion of the three weeks of mourning.

- Tisha B'Av has its own liturgy and scripture readings, including the entire biblical book of *Lamentations*.
- In the synagogue, lights are dimmed or left off entirely. Worshippers sit on the floor or on low stools.
- Like Yom Kippur, no food is consumed for 25 hours. Evening prayers from sunset until 10 p.m., morning prayers from 10 a.m. until the appearance of the first three stars.

• **Fast of Gedaliah (Zom Gedaliah):**

Commemorates the assassination of Gedaliah ben Ahikam in 582 or 581 BCE, as recorded in 2 Kings 25:22–26:

22 But over the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, he appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan.

23 When all the army commanders and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah, they came to him at Mizpah—namely Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of a Maacathite, along with their men.

24 Gedaliah swore to them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid of the Chaldeans. Stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall go well with you."

25 But in the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of royal descent, came with ten men and murdered Gedaliah, along with the Jews and Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah.

26 Then all the people, from the least to the greatest, along with the army commanders, arose and went to Egypt.

**Rabbi Prof. Dr. Andreas Nachama**