



Fasting for Famine Supporting East Africa on a Day Without Food

Lev 16: 29-31

כט וְהִיְתָה לָכֶם, לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם: בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּעֶשְׂרֵי לַחֹדֶשׁ תַּעֲנּוּ אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם, וְכָל-מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ--
הָאֲזָרָח, וְהַגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם. **ל** כִּי-בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם, לְטַהַר אֶתְכֶם: מִכָּל, חַטָּאתֵיכֶם, לִפְנֵי יְהוָה, תִּטְהָרוּ.
לא שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן הִיא לָכֶם, וְעַנִּיתֶם אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם--חֻקַּת, עוֹלָם.

²⁹ “This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must practice self-denial and not do any work—whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you—³⁰ because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins.³¹ It is a day of sabbath rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance.

Lev 23:27-32

כז אִךְ בְּעֶשְׂרֵי לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים הוּא, מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם, וְעַנִּיתֶם, אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם; וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם
אִשָּׁה, לַיהוָה. **כח** וְכָל-מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ, בְּעֶצְמָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: כִּי יוֹם כִּפּוּרִים, הוּא, לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם, לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. **כט** כִּי כָל-הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תַעֲנֶנָּה, בְּעֶצְמָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה--וְנִכְרְתָהּ, מֵעַמִּיהָ. **ל** וְכָל-הַנֶּפֶשׁ, אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה כָל-
מְלָאכָה, בְּעֶצְמָם, הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה--וְהִאֲבֹדְתִי אֶת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא, מִקְרַב עַמִּיהָ. **לא** כָּל-מְלָאכָה, לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: חֻקַּת עוֹלָם
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם, בְּכָל מִשְׁבַּתֵיכֶם. **לב** שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן הוּא לָכֶם, וְעַנִּיתֶם אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם; בְּתַשְׁעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ, בְּעֶרֶב--מֵעֶרֶב
עַד-עֶרֶב, תִּשְׁבְּתוּ שַׁבְּתוֹכֶם.

²⁷ The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and practice self-denial and present a food offering to the LORD.²⁸ Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God.²⁹ Those who do not deny themselves on that day must be cut off from their people.³⁰ I will destroy from among their people anyone who does any work on that day.³¹ You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.³² It is a day of Sabbath rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your Sabbath.

Num 29:7

ז וּבְעֶשְׂרֵי לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה, מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם, וְעַנִּיתֶם, אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם; כָּל-מְלָאכָה, לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ.

⁷ On the tenth day of this seventh month hold a sacred assembly. You must practice self-denial and do no work.

**From the Biblical sources above,
what is the purpose of fasting on Yom Kippur?**

Joel 1:10-14

¹⁰ The fields are ruined,
the ground is dried up;
the grain is destroyed,
the new wine is dried up,
the olive oil fails.

¹¹ Despair, you farmers,
wail, you vine growers;
grieve for the wheat and the barley,
because the harvest of the field is destroyed.

¹² The vine is dried up
and the fig tree is withered;
the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree—
all the trees of the field—are dried up.

Surely the people’s joy
is withered away.

¹³ Put on sackcloth, you priests, and mourn;
wail, you who minister before the altar.
Come, spend the night in sackcloth,
you who minister before my God;
for the grain offerings and drink offerings
are withheld from the house of your God.

¹⁴ Declare a holy fast;
call a sacred assembly.
Summon the elders
and all who live in the land
to the house of the LORD your God,
and cry out to the LORD.

י שָׁדַד שָׂדֵה,
אֲבָלָה אֲדָמָה:
כִּי שָׁדַד דָּגָן,
הוֹכִישׁ תִּירוֹשׁ
אֲמָלֵל יֵצֶהָ
יֵא הַבִּישׁוֹ אֲפָרִים,
הִלִּילוּ כַרְמִים,
עַל-חֹטֵה, וְעַל-שְׁעֵרָה:
כִּי אָבַד, קִצִּיר שָׂדֵה.
יֵב הַגֶּפֶן הוֹבִישָׁה,
וְהַתְּמָנָה אֲמָלְלָה;
רְמוֹן גַּם-תְּמָר וְתַפּוּחַ,
כָּל-עֵצֵי הַשָּׂדֵה יִבְשׁוּ--
כִּי-הַבִּישׁ שָׁשׂוֹן,
מִן-בְּגֵי אָדָם.
יֵג חָגְרוּ וְסָפְדוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים,
הִלִּילוּ מִשְׁרָתִי מִזִּבְחִי--
בֹּאוּ לִינּוּ בַשִּׁקִּים,
מִשְׁרָתִי אֵלֵהֶי:
כִּי נִמְנַע מִבַּיִת אֱלֹהֵיכֶם,
מִנְחָה וְנֹסֶף.
יִד קִדְשׁוֹ-צוּם,
קִרְאוּ עֲצֵרָה--
אִסְפוּ זְקֵנִים
כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ,
בַּיִת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם;
וְנַעֲקוּ, אֶל-יְהוָה.

Joel 2:15-17

¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion,
declare a holy fast,
call a sacred assembly.

¹⁶ Gather the people,
consecrate the assembly;
bring together the elders,
gather the children,
those nursing at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room
and the bride her chamber.

¹⁷ Let the priests, who minister before the LORD,
weep between the portico and the altar.
Let them say, “Spare your people, LORD.
Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn,
a byword among the nations.

Why should they say among the peoples,
‘Where is their God?’”

טו תִּקְעוּ שׁוֹפָר, בְּצִיּוֹן;
קִדְשׁוֹ-צוּם,
קִרְאוּ עֲצֵרָה.
טז אִסְפוּ-עַם
קִדְשׁוֹ קֹהֵל,
קַבְּצוּ זְקֵנִים—
אִסְפוּ עוֹלָלִים,
וַיִּנְקֵי שָׁדִים:
יֵצֵא חַתָּן מִחֻדְרוֹ,
וְכַלָּה מִחַפְתָּהּ.
יז בֵּין הָאוֹלָם, וְלַמְזֻבָּח,
יִכְבּוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים, מִשְׁרָתִי יְהוָה;
וַיֹּאמְרוּ חוֹסֵה יְהוָה עַל-עַמּוֹ,
וְאֵל-תַּתֵּן נַחֲלֶתְךָ לְתַרְפָּהּ
לְמִשְׁל-בָּם גּוֹיִם--
לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ בְעַמִּים,
אֵיחָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם.

I Sam 7:5-7

ה ויאמר שמואל, קבצו את-כל-ישראל המצפּתה; ואתפּלל בעדכם, אל-יהוה. ויקבצו המצפּתה וישאבו-מים וישפכו לפני יהוה, ויצומו ביום ההוא, ויאמרו שם, חטאנו ליהוה; וישפט שמואל את-בני ישראל, במצפה. ז וישמעו פלשתים, כי-התקבצו בני-ישראל המצפּתה, ויעלו סרני-פלשתים, אל-ישראל; וישמעו בני ישראל, ויראו מפני פלשתים.

⁵ Then Samuel said, “Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the LORD for you.” ⁶ When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the LORD.” Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah.

II Chron 20:1-3

א ויהי אחרי-כן באו בני-מואב ובני עמון ועמיהם מהעמונים, על-יהושפט--למלחמה. ב ויבאו, ויגידו ליהושפט לאמר, בא עליך המון רב מעבר לים, מארם; והנם בחצצון תמר, היא עין גדי. ג וירא, ויתן יהושפט את-פניו לדרוש ליהוה; ויקרא-צום, על-פל-יהודה.

¹ After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat. ² Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, —A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar” (that is, En Gedi). ³ Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.

Judges 20:24-28

כד ויקרבו בני-ישראל אל-בני בנימן, ביום השני. כה ויצא בנימן לקראתם מן-הגבעה, ביום השני, וישחיתו בבני ישראל עוד שמנת עשר אלף איש, ארצה: פל-אלה, שלפי חרב. כו ויעלו כל-בני ישראל וכל-העם ויבאו בית-אל, ויכפו וישבו שם לפני יהוה, ויצומו ביום-ההוא, עד-הערב; ויעלו עלות ושלמים, לפני יהוה. כז וישאלו בני-ישראל, ביהוה; ושם, ארון ברית האלהים, בימים, ההם. כח ופינחס בן-אלעזר בן-אהרן עמד לפניו, בימים ההם לאמר, האוסף עוד לצאת למלחמה עם-בני-בנימן אחי, אם-אחדל; ויאמר יהוה עלו, כי מחר אתגנו בידך.

²⁴ Then the Israelites drew near to Benjamin the second day. ²⁵ This time, when the Benjamites came out from Gibeah to oppose them, they cut down another eighteen thousand Israelites, all of them armed with swords. ²⁶ Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD. ²⁷ And the Israelites inquired of the LORD. (In those days the ark of the covenant of God was there, ²⁸ with Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, ministering before it.) They asked, “Shall we go up again to fight against the Benjamites, our fellow Israelites, or not?” The LORD responded, “Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands.”

In the four sources above, what is the reason for the Israelites' fasts? Are they self-serving or do they help others in need?

Isaiah 54:3-10

³ ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,
‘and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled ourselves,
and you have not noticed?’

“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please

ג למה צמנו
ולא ראית,
ענינו נפשנו
ולא תדע;
הן ביום צמכם תמצאו-תפן,

and exploit all your workers.
⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
 and in striking each other with wicked fists.
 You cannot fast as you do today
 and expect your voice to be heard on high.
⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
 only a day for people to humble themselves?
 Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
 and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
 Is that what you call a fast,
 a day acceptable to the LORD?
⁶ "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
 to loose the chains of injustice
 and untie the cords of the yoke,
 to set the oppressed free
 and break every yoke?
⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry
 and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
 when you see the naked, to clothe them,
 and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
 and your healing will quickly appear;
 then your righteousness will go before you,
 and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
 you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
 "If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
 with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
 and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
 then your light will rise in the darkness,
 and your night will become like the noonday.

וְכָל-עַצְבֵיכֶם תִּנְגְּשׁוּ.
 ד הֲנִי לְרִיב וּמִצָּדָה תִּצְוִמוּ,
 וְלִהְפוֹת בְּאַגְרֵף רָשָׁע;
 לֹא-תִצְוִמוּ כִּי־יֹם,
 לְהִשְׁמִיעַ בְּמָרוֹם קוֹלְכֶם.
 ה הַכֶּזֶה, יִהְיֶה צוֹם אֲבֹתֵיכֶם—
 יוֹם עֲנוּת אָדָם, וּנְפֹשׁוֹ;
 הִלְכֶף כְּאֵמָן רֹאשׁוֹ,
 וְשָׁק וְאָפֶר יִצְיֵעַ—
 הַלְזָה תִקְרָא-צוֹם,
 יוֹם רָצוֹן לַיהוָה.
 ו הֲלוֹא זֶה, צוֹם אֲבֹתֵיכֶם—
 פֶּתַח חֲרָצְבוֹת רָשָׁע,
 הַתֵּר אֲגָדוֹת מוֹטָה;
 וְשִׁלַּח רְצוּצִים חֲפָשִׁים,
 וְכָל-מוֹטָה תִּנְתְּקוּ.
 ז הֲלוֹא פָרַס לְרַעֲב לֶחֶמְךָ,
 וְעֵנִיִּים מְרוֹדִים תְּבִיא בֵּית:
 כִּי-תִרְאֶה עָרֹם וְכִסְיֹתוֹ,
 וּמִבְּשָׂרְךָ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם.
 ח אִזּוֹ יִבְקַע כְּשֹׁחַר אוֹרְךָ,
 וְאַרְכָּתְךָ מִהֲרָה תִצְמַח;
 וְהִלְךְ לְפָנֶיךָ צְדָקָה,
 כְּבוֹד יִהְיֶה יְאַסְפֶּךָ.
 ט אִזּוֹ תִקְרָא וַיִּהְיֶה יַעֲנֶנּוּ,
 תִשְׁוֶע וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּבּוֹר:
 אִם-תִּסִּיר מִתּוֹכְךָ מוֹטָה,
 שְׁלַח אֲצַבַּע וְדָבַר-אָוֶן.
 י וְתִפַּק לְרַעֲב נַפְשְׁךָ,
 וְנָפֵשׁ נַעֲנָה תִשְׁבִּיעַ;
 וְזָרַח בְּחֹשֶׁךְ אוֹרְךָ,
 וְאַפְלִתְךָ כְּצֹהַר יוֹם.

What is the purpose of fasting according to the portion of Isaiah above, which is read as the Haftarah during Yom Kippur morning? How does this compare with the other sources seen this far?

B. Taanit 11a

אמר שמואל כל היושב בתענית נקרא חוטא סבר ... אלעזר אומר נקרא קדוש
 Samuel said: Whosoever fasts [for the sake of self-affliction] is termed a sinner.... Rabbi Elazar said: [One who fasts] is called a holy man.

What may be the various reasons why fasting for the sake of self-affliction may be problematic? Alternatively, why may fasting be considered a righteous act?

B. Taanit 11a

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב כל המרעיב עצמו בשני רעבון ניצל ממיתה משונה שנאמר (איוב ה) ברעב פדך ממות מרעב מיבעי ליה אלא הכי קאמר בשכר שמרעיב עצמו בשני רעבון ניצול ממיתה משונה אמר ריש לקיש אסור לאדם לשמש מטתו בשני רעבון שנאמר (בראשית מא) וליוסף ילד שני בנים בטרם תבוא שנת הרעב תנא חסוכי בנים משמשין מטותיהן בשני רעבון

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: He who starves himself in years of famine escapes unnatural death, as it is said, "In famine He will redeem thee from death." [Scripture should have said] 'from famine'. This is therefore what [Scripture] meant to convey. As a reward for starving himself in years of famine one will escape unnatural death. Resh Lakish said: A man may not have marital relations during years of famine, as it is said, And unto Joseph were born two sons before the year of famine came. A Tanna taught: Childless people may have marital relations in years of famine.

Rashi on B. Taanit 11a, s.v. asur l'shamesh meetato b'shnai re'avon

אסור לשמש מטתו בשני רעבון: דצריך אדם לנוג צער בעצמו
For a person is required to create for himself grief

What are the various attitudes toward fasting in the Talmudic section above? What does Rashi add to the conversation? What does it say about someone who enjoys him/herself while other suffering according to Resh Lakish?

Shulchan Arukh, Orach Hayyim, 574:4

מצוה להרעיב אדם עצמו בשנת רעבון ואסור לשמש בו מטתו, חוץ מליל טבילה; ולחשוכי בנים מותר.
It is a mitzvah for a person to starve one's self in years of famine and it is forbidden to engage in sexual relations except for the night of ritual immersion, for those without children it is permitted.

Shulchan Arukh, Orach Hayyim, 574:5

כל הפורש מן הצבור אינו רואה בנחמתו; וכל המצטער עמהם, זוכה ורואה בנחמתו.
Whoever separates one's self from the community does not see their consolation.
Whoever suffers with them merits to see their consolation.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, (London: Continuum, 2002), p.30

David Hume noted that our sense of empathy diminishes as we move outward from the members of our family to our neighbors, our society and the world. Traditionally, our sense of involvement with the fate of others has been in inverse proportion to the distance separating us and them. What has changed is that television and the Internet have effectively abolished distance. They have brought images of suffering in far-off lands into our immediate experience. Our sense of compassion for the victims of poverty, war and famine, runs ahead of our capacity to act. Our moral sense is simultaneously activated and frustrated. We feel that something should be done, but what, how, and by whom?

What are our responsibilities vis-à-vis life saving charity to those who live on the other side of the planet and who we will likely never meet?

Dow Marmur, *The Toronto Star*, “Making fasting relevant during famine,” August 11, 2011

There’s much value in restricting what’s normally permitted as ways of reminding us that nothing of what we partake is owed to us. Everything we have is a gift to be gratefully cherished.

It’s also to be shared. For a religious ritual to be relevant, traditional observance isn’t enough, even when it helps us to impose a spiritual dimension on such mundane activities as eating and drinking. Though hallowed by the past, rituals must also have meaning in the present.

That’s the challenge of every religion. While children in affluent countries are exposed to the mortal danger of overeating, children in the Third World are dying of hunger. It’s immoral and irreligious to ignore them. If our eating restrictions are to make sense, they must be expressions of solidarity with victims of starvation manifest in tangible ways of feeding the hungry.

That, for example, is what is behind the “famine events” of voluntary fasting for 30 or 40 hours that seek to raise awareness and funds for world hunger. The practice started some four decades ago when 14 teenagers in Calgary came together to fast and collect money for World Vision. It has since spread to more than 20 countries and engages thousands of young people in the project.

Parents often tell their children to finish their food because there are starving children in Africa. The wise (mouthy) child retorts that the parent is welcome to send the uneaten food overseas.

What is the relationship between eating here and famine there?

What role do we play in the systemic problems that enable the average North American diet (USA 3754 calories/day/person – Canada 3605 calories/day/person) to be more than twice that of the Democratic Republic of Congo (1606 calories/day/person) **when there is no famine?**

How can our fasting here improve food conditions for them there?