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MINISTRIES

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Is Yom Kippur a Day of Fasting?

It is often understood that Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement is considered a day of fasting. But is this simply tradition or is it a commandment?

In the Jerusalem Talmud, the Jewish oral law, Yom Kippur is referred to as Tzoma Rabbah, "the great fast" (j. Peah 7:4), and in another place as simply Tzoma, "fast" (j. Bava Batra 9:7).

We even see in Acts 27:9 a day referred to as “the fast” which was likely referring to Yom Kippur.

However, was the fast associated with Yom Kippur merely one of many traditions and not commanded in the Torah, or is a fast commanded on Yom Kippur?

The Hebrew word for fast is tsum (צום) (H6684). It means to refrain from eating for a period of time. This could include any drink as well.

However, the Torah does not specifically call us to fast for Yom Kippur, but to “*anah*” ourselves.

In Leviticus 16:29, 23:27 (and Numbers 29:7), the word *anah* (עָנָה) (H6907) is used, which refers to a “*humbling (or mortifying, afflicting) one’s soul.*” The Hebrew word for fast, tsum, is not used as it relates to Yom Kippur.

Why?

Anah in the context of Yom Kippur has been interpreted as including, in addition to fasting, refraining from bathing, anointing, wearing leather shoes, and sexual relations (*Yad, Shevitat Asor 1:5*). These are forbidden only by rabbinic legislation (*Tosafot, Yoma 7b*) and not by specific instructions found in the Torah.

We know what it means to “*fast*” (*tsum*), but what does it really mean to “*afflict*” (*anah*) ourselves?

The Hebrew word “*anah*” appears about 79 times in the TANAKH (Old Testament).

We can find the first occurrence in Genesis 15:13:

Genesis 15:13

Then the LORD (YHWH) said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted (*anah*) for four hundred years.

Here we see how being “afflicted” is synonymous with being a “servant” or placed under the “authority” of another.

In this light, it is not very positive, because it is unwillful bondage. It is not by their own desire that they become a servant, but the circumstances outside of their control, not of their own free will.

The next instance of the word is similar:

Genesis 16:6

But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly (*anah*) with her, and she fled from her.

Again, under the authority of another...in this illustration, the master has the right to reward or punish the servant.

Exodus 10:3

So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the LORD (YHWH), the Elohim of the Hebrews, ‘How long will you refuse to humble (*anah*) yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me.

Again, another use meaning placing oneself under the authority of another...

It can also be used in context of a marriage, related to vows and binding. Keep this in mind for later in the teaching.

Numbers 30:13

Any vow and any binding oath to afflict (*anah*) herself, her husband may establish, or her husband may make void.

Our Creator uses the word with us...meaning to humble us, or to make us low.

Deuteronomy 8:16

...who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end.

This is a test as to whether we will follow His instructions or not, His Torah.

For example...

Psalm 119:71

It is good for me that I was afflicted (*anah*), that I might learn your statutes.

Psalm 119:75

I know, O LORD (YHWH), that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted (*anah*) me.

See how humbling ourselves is directly correlated with following His instructions. To “*anah*” something is a response to authority.

In these instances, “*anah*” is positive, and it is

willfully placing ourselves under the authority of our Creator.

This is why the Torah does not focus, or really, even mention fasting as it relates to Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is designed to encourage us and call us to humble ourselves...to make ourselves low before Him, in obedience to Him. We are to cease work, and meditate and focus on His authority.

Meaning this...though it is always important to follow Him and be obedient...it is most important to be sure that we are following His authority on Yom Kippur.

Because of this, many believe, that Yom Kippur will be the last day to repent and appeal at the time of the beginning of the Day of the Lord.

So, on Yom Kippur, it is of utmost importance to focus on Him and His ways...to humble ourselves, to prostrate ourselves, to make ourselves low...to only be following His instructions, and not our own ways.

Now, here is the question.

If we are to afflict ourselves on Yom Kippur, is there a particular type of obedience that our Creator brings to our attention on this day?

In other words, does YHWH define for us the manner of affliction that He expects from us.

We already mentioned that YHWH makes no mention of fasting as it relates to Yom Kippur...but He does mention another type of obedience related to the affliction several times.

Watch how many times He tells us that we should rest and that this particular appointed time (*moedim*) is a Sabbath.

Leviticus 23:26-32

And the LORD (YHWH) spoke to Moses, saying, “Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict (*anah*) yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD (YHWH) .

Ok...so we should afflict ourselves...what does that mean?

And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make

atonement for you before the LORD (YHWH) your Elohim.

So in continuing in that same line of thought, it says as follows:

For whoever is not afflicted (anah) on that very day shall be cut off from his people.

Do you see how working or not working on Yom Kippur is related to being afflicted or not afflicted? In case we miss it...YHWH continues to say it again in verse 30.

And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people.

That's the second time, So, again, being afflicted (anah) is being related to not working...a Sabbath.

But, in case we missed two times...YHWH says it again in verse 31.

You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.

And in case we missed it three times, YHWH says it again for a fourth time in verse 32...afflicting yourself on Yom Kippur is related to resting on the Sabbath.

It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath."

So the affliction that YHWH desires from us on Yom Kippur is a day of rest and self-reflection, not necessarily fasting.

We cannot humble ourselves by meditating on His authority if we are negating his authority by consuming ourselves with work and focusing on ourselves. That should only make sense and that is why YHWH highlights the first part of what it means to "*anah*" on Yom Kippur, which is to cease...to stop. After we cease and stop, we can then humble ourselves by meditating on His ways, repent where we need to repent, and do some serious introspection on where we are aligned with or not aligned with His Torah.

Have you considered the calendric placement of Yom Kippur as it relates to what we are to be doing on that day and why?

Yom Kippur is sandwiched between the feast of the awakening blast, Yom Teruah, and the feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkot.

What lies between the sound to awaken and our dwelling in booths is a time to self-reflect and focus on our disobedience and rebellion as a body. We are to rest, meditate, and focus. We are to be humbled by His authority and ensure that we are operating under His authority, 100%.

Our meditation and solemn self reflection on our walk with YHWH is concentrated in the Hebrew word 'anah (ענה), translated as affliction and humble.

Connect Leviticus 23:27 to Matthew 23:12...

Leviticus 23:27

“Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict (humble) yourselves and present a food offering to the Lord (YHWH).

Matthew 23:12

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

The etymology of “*anah*” means to respond or react to someone or some thing. Hence it is also translated as to answer or respond.

Genesis 18:27

Abraham answered (*anah*) and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord (YHWH), I who am but dust and ashes.

Do you see there, how when he responded, he was recognizing Yahweh’s authority, and he was humbling himself by realizing his position under that authority. There are a number of translations of this word in both the TANKAH and the Brit Hadasha.

To answer is to respond to a particular condition or stimulus.

The idea of afflicting your souls is to stop and give an account of one's self.

Paul admonishes us to examine ourselves in 1 Corinthians 13:5. It is a time of retrospection.

As we mentioned, traditionally this word has been tied to fasting during Yom Kippur.

Fasting is infrequently tied to affliction (Ezra 8:21), but that’s not what the word really means.

While fasting is a type of affliction, while infrequently noted in Scripture, it is not the only type of affliction or the type of affliction that we need to focus on. We see YHWH calling our attention to this in Isaiah 58 as fasting slowly became the focus of affliction or Yom Kippur.

Isaiah 58:4-7

Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.
Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on high.
Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?

See how he’s calling it back to a humbling? To prostrate ourselves.

Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?
Will you call this a fast,
and a day acceptable to the Lord (YHWH)?
“**Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,**

to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

Fasting (tzom (צום)) is NOT a time of self-analysis and reflection, but rather a time to get up and loose bands, undo burdens and break yokes.

Obviously, there is nothing wrong with fasting during this time of year as long as one is about the business of afflicting their souls.

As a side note, one of the gradational variants of this word is “*anan*” (ענן), which is translated as clouds.

When water vapors rise from the earth and begin to cool the response or result is a cloud. Clouds are a response to rising water molecules.

A cognate of this word is “*aniy*” (עני) or the poor.

Matthew 5:3

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

One who is wise and humble enough to really look at himself and see a need for a Savior and someone greater than himself is truly afflicting his soul.

Jonah 3:7 and Nehemiah 9:1-3 both mention fasting, but not in the context of humbling or affliction.

Make no mistake though, fasting can be a type of affliction, or really, lead into it.

Psalm 35:13

But I, when they were sick—I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayed with head bowed on my chest.

But all affliction is not fasting. Fasting can humble us by forcing us to be constantly reminded of our own mortality, and thus a need of a savior from our promised end, death.

So, it is not that one cannot fast on Yom Kippur. We would simply urge those in the faith to realize that Yom Kippur is not so much about fasting, if it is about fasting at all, but about obeying our Creator, about humbling ourselves, and making sure that we rest on that very important day.

Some like to point out Isaiah 58 to further illustrate this problem...

It makes no sense to fast on the Yom Kippur Sabbath, yet cause others to work. It is missing the whole point of this very important day.

Isaiah 58:3

Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no

knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.

YHWH states that they were seeking their own pleasure in making others work for them, despite their fasting...yet they were confused as to why YHWH did not recognize their fasting. They missed the whole point.

The whole point of it all is to humble yourself in obedience. They should not have been making others work on that particular day.

YHWH, of course, answers...

Isaiah 58:4-5

Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD (YHWH)?

Isaiah 58:13-14

“If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day (which was defined as others working for you earlier), and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD (YHWH) honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the LORD (YHWH), and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD (YHWH) has spoken.”

So, in conclusion, though we can fast on Yom Kippur, and though fasting is a form of affliction, it does not appear to be the form of affliction our Creator desires us to focus on...the important matters of Yom Kippur seem to be focusing on repenting and humbling, and leading to full obedience, centered around afflicting ourselves in a Sabbath rest.

Many realize the Isaiah 58 is about Yom Kippur. They will quote Isaiah 58 and say “see, Yom Kippur is all about fasting.”

What is both a little sad and a little comical, is that they are making the same mistake that Isaiah 58 is trying to correct.

Isaiah 58:3 clearly reveals that it was interpreted by the Jews that they should fast on Yom Kippur. That is the way that they chose to understand what it means to afflict themselves. That is what many also do today.

But YHWH corrects them in their limited understanding. He gives us the actual meaning of what it means to afflict ourselves on Yom Kippur if we just keep reading. Pay particular attention to verses 7 and 10.

Isaiah 58:6-10

“Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
**Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;**
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord (YHWH) shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'
**If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
if you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,**
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.

Do you see how YHWH corrects their understanding of what it means to afflict ourselves on Yom Kippur? Yes, verse three does indeed show that the Jews did interpret afflicting ourselves on Yom Kippur to be about fasting, but if we keep reading, YHWH offers clarification on what it really means to afflict ourselves. YHWH clarifies the Torah for us!

Within that clarification YHWH even mentions hungry people twice, even going as far as to say to feed them with bread! If fasting is so important on Yom Kippur, why is YHWH saying to feed people with bread on this day! Feed people on the annual fast day?!? It is almost as though YHWH is mocking them in their limited understanding of what it means to afflict yourself, especially as it relates to YHWH's intent on Yom Kippur.

Every year those in Hebrew Roots erupt into arguing on this subject. Many do not like this teaching. In a continued dose of irony found in Isaiah 58, that is also covered. Astoundingly, it is found right after verse three, the verse many like to quote about Yom Kippur and fasting:

Isaiah 58:3-4

'Why have we fasted, and you see it not?
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?'
Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure,
and oppress all your workers.
**Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.**

So, as verse ten says, take away the pointing finger and speaking wickedness. Go feed the hungry on Yom Kippur. Invite the homeless in. If you are making Yom Kippur to be about a fast. You are missing the point according to YHWH. And if you are arguing such interpretations with others about it, you are doing exactly what Isaiah 58 says not to do.

Does that mean we shouldn't fast? No, that is not what we are saying. As we said earlier, it is ok to fast. But don't make that your obedience to Yom Kippur as your focus on how to afflict yourself.

Personally, our family does fast on Yom Kippur. We believe it to be a good tradition, but only when it is used in a good way. Do not make the same mistake those in Isaiah 58 did.

Some point to Jeremiah 36 as support for Yom Kippur being a day of fasting. Let's read.

Jeremiah 36:6

so you are to go, and on a **day of fasting** in the hearing of all the people in the Lord's (YHWH's) house **you shall read the words of the Lord (YHWH) from the scroll** that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the men of Judah who come out of their cities.

Jeremiah instructed Baruch to read the Word of YHWH to the people on the day of a fast. Many, quick to try to find any support for a fast to be commanded on Yom Kippur immediately say, "see, here is a fast, and this fast must be Yom Kippur."

This is said while ignoring that any prophet that adds to the Torah, according to Deuteronomy 13, is a false prophet. So, since the Torah does not declare a fast on Yom Kippur, if Jeremiah is stating such, then he is adding to the Torah. Thankfully, Jeremiah is not a false prophet. If we simply continue reading, we find that the fast occurred on the 9th month, not on the 10th day of the 7th month, or Yom Kippur.

Let's read:

Jeremiah 36:9-10

In the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, **in the ninth month**, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem **proclaimed a fast** before the Lord (YHWH). Then, in the hearing of all the people, **Baruch read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll**, in the house of the Lord (YHWH), in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the secretary, which was in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the Lord's house.

The 9th month is clearly not the 7th month, so we cannot say that this is about a fast for Yom Kippur.

Then we have Zechariah 7:5, and it does mention a fast in the 7th month, so again, some immediately say, see, here is a fast in the 7th month, and this fast must be Yom Kippur."

So, again, Zechariah cannot be adding to the Torah, for the same reasons we already outlined in Jeremiah.

Zechariah 7:5

Then the word of the Lord (YHWH) of hosts came to me: "Say to all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you **fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh**, for these **seventy years**, was it for me that you fasted?'"

So, this verse also mentions a fast in the fifth month. Is there a fast commanded in the Torah on the fifth month?

No.

So Zechariah is pointing to a tradition of fasting in the 5th and 7th month that occurred for 70 years. The fast mentioned in the seventh month is no more of a commanded fast than the fast Zechariah mentions in the fifth month. Suffice it to say that Zechariah does not even state that the 7th month fast was on the 10th day! So, clearly, there are several problems here. We cannot say that Zechariah was referring to the 10th day of the 7th month without adding to what is written. We also see that Zechariah references the fifth month as a fast, which no one is suggesting that is commanded in the Torah, so how can we then say the seventh month fast mentioned in the same context is one that is commanded in the Torah? We can't.

Then we have Joel 2.

Joel 2:15-16

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
gather the people.
Consecrate the congregation;
assemble the elders;
gather the children,
even nursing infants.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her chamber.

These two verses certainly mention a fast, in the context of the future day of the Lord. This is the day that Yeshua returns, and unleashes judgment on the Earth.

Note that it says to consecrate a fast. If fasting was already consecrated to occur on Yom Kippur, we would not need to consecrate again a new fast. That might seem like a small point, but it is important. The phrase "consecrate a fast" was chosen for a reason.

Furthermore, on which of the mo'edim are we commanded to blow a trumpet? Is it Yom Kippur? No. It is the day of Trumpets.

When we see other verses about the return of Yeshua on the Day of the Lord, it is the blowing of trumpets that is emphasized.

So, Joel 2 could easily be a fast that is occurring on the Day of Trumpets. We need to be careful that we do not read into the text, and definitively declare more than what is written.

Consider another calendric connection. The spring mo'edim and the fall mo'edim share similar dates. The mirror image of the first day of the month of the year is Yom Teruah, or the Day of Trumpets, just six months later. The fifteenth day of the first month starts the Feast of Unleavened Bread; just six months later starts the Feast of Sukkot.

What do we have in the middle? On the tenth day of the first month the Passover lamb is to be tested. Six months later we see that the tenth day of the seventh month is Yom Kippur, the day that we are tested. A day we are to make sure that we are afflicting ourselves being under YHWH's authority.

Remember how we stated that affliction is connected to testing.

Deuteronomy 8:16

who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble (or anah) you and test you, to do you good in the end.

This is a test to whether we will follow his instructions or not, his Torah, in the end. For example,

Psalm 119:71

It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.

So, in this, we certainly recognize that fasting is a means to afflict ourselves on Yom Kippur, and it is a traditional means of affliction that is associated with Yom Kippur in both the prophets and the Brit Hadasha. Is it the only type of affliction? No. It is not even really the type of affliction YHWH is really concerned with. That is why YHWH never even details fasting on Yom Kippur in the Torah. He clarifies what he wants in Isaiah 58. He wants us to humble ourselves before Him in obedience. He wants us to afflict ourselves by placing other people's needs before our own needs. That is true fasting, when we give up serving ourselves in order to serve others. That is what the Day of Atonement is all about. We serve YHWH and place Him before all of our needs. We humble ourselves under Him. We repent and follow Him. On this day of fasting, we give bread to the hungry, and we invite in the homeless. We give up what our flesh needs to serve others. We sacrifice so others may be blessed. Yes, we can fast as a form of affliction, but it means nothing without observing what YHWH really means in terms of afflicting ourselves.

We hope that this teaching blessed, and remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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