

Welcome to Yom Kippur, Welcome to your marathon 25 hour fast. No eating. No drinking. No bathing, lotioning. No sex. It's what Yom Kippur is famous for. We're going to spend many hours hitting, tapping, or patting our chests to remind our bodies that despite the deprivations, we are not yet angels, we have sinned, hopefully we have repented, and this fast will complete our process of atonement.

But a prophet named Isaiah, 2500 years ago, questioned the efficacy of such a fast. He questioned the purpose of the fast. Such heresy, questioning the very foundation of our most sacred day! And we'll read his words tomorrow afternoon, at about the 3/4 mark of our Yom Kippur.

“Because you fast in strife and contention and you strike with a wicked fist, your fasting today is not such as to make your voice heard on high! Is such the fast I desire, a day for people to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, a day when Adonai is favorable? No, this is the fast I desire: to unlock chains of wickedness and untie the cords of the yoke. To let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him and not to ignore your own kin.” (Isaiah 58:4–7 JPS)

Let me translate Isaiah for you: If you fast but hold onto your notion that there are people within your community or workplace to whom you will not speak because at some point in the past they insulted you; or if you are punishing, striking out at, or otherwise undermining the success of people you hate; then God will not listen to your fast. Fasting is more than depriving the body of food. This fast is not a fast of mourning or destruction, it is not a time to remember all those who persecuted you. This is a fast to call attention to your own failures, to ask God for forgiveness for your shortcomings. When you fast in arrogance or in anger, with thoughts of the evil other people have done in mind, this does not make God happy or inclined to listen to your prayers.

This is the fast that God wants. Stop your petty disagreements. Let them go. Look around you and smile at the people sitting nearby. If you don't know them, introduce yourself. Take a minute - I'll wait.

When you come into the synagogue, make sure you greet someone you don't know. When you leave, make sure you say goodbye and a *g'mar hatima tova*, roughly, may your Yom Kippur end well, to someone you just met. If you see young families with children running around during the service and making noise, smile at them and thank them for being a part of Ahavas Israel. If you see older members who don't come very often, make sure you smile at them too and let them know how much you appreciate all of the time and money they have put into Ahavas Israel over the past 60 or 70 or 80 years.

The money you would have spent on food, give to the hungry. Take the energy you are wasting on jealousy and anger and instead use it to work for justice. And for God's sake, pay attention to your family members. The family quarrel you inherited. The insult from the past. It's hurting you more than it is hurting them.

Isaiah's message is clear -- there is so much more to fast from on Yom Kippur than food. We need to hear his message now, as we begin Yom Kippur, not just 3/4 of the way through our fast. I am asking you, as individuals, as a congregation, to take Isaiah's message seriously. I want you to move his message from your head, where it is right now, and shift it into your heart. Make it a

part of your essence. Isaiah isn't preaching theology, he's not reciting magic words that absolve you of sin. He's telling us what kind of people we should be.

I know how hard it is to change your life. I know I should get more exercise. I know I should eat fewer carbs. But knowing isn't the same as doing. So I want to make this as simple as possible. I'm taking a page out of the addiction recovery playbook for changing one's life and focusing only on one day. It's easier to change your life just for today than to change it permanently. So just for today, for the next 25 hours, in addition to fasting or instead of fasting for those who have medical reasons not to fast, I want you to engage in a supplemental or alternative fast.

We all have some weakness or obsession. The thing that you can't put down or walk away from. Your addiction. The thing that consumes much of your time. Just for today, I want you to focus on and heal whatever it is that takes you away from activities with your family or friends or community.

In tomorrow's Neilah service at the end of Yom Kippur, we'll read a prayer containing the line, *Yiftah libeinu b'Torato*, May God open our hearts to God's Torah. I want you to open up your hearts tonight to the heart of Torah, and decide that Yom Kippur is going to be a fast from whatever unpleasantness consumes you. Just for the next 25 hours, set it aside.

I want you to fast from *lashon hara*, negative talk. Behave in accord with the principle of *v'ahavta l'rei'akha kamokha*. Love your neighbor as yourself and use words with love and respect, not as weapons. Refrain from criticism, questioning others' motives or commitment, negative political talk, sarcasm intended to demean or belittle others, words intended to embarrass or humiliate others.

I want you to take a break from feeling insulted or offended, and from anger at perceived slights. Set aside petty grievances. Follow the dictate of Pirke Avot, *dan l'kaf zekhut*. Assume that the other person acts with good intentions. Honor those who disagree with you. It is your responsibility to understand their contrary opinions, not to belittle them.

Let me suggest that you take a fast from consumerism. Don't engage in any kind of commerce until the end of Yom Kippur. Fast from consuming anything screen based, including sports. Our screens, large and small, eat up a tremendous number of our hours each day. A regular screen fast is a good thing, but start with Yom Kippur. The world of politics and football will keep grinding on and you can catch up tomorrow night. Nothing will happen that would not have happened anyway if you take a break from tweeting, posting, or photographing it for 25 hours.

Just for today:

If you are an obsessive talker - fast from talking.

If you are an obsessive correcter - fast from critical speech.

If you are an obsessive perfectionist - fast from noticing details and imperfections.

If you are obsessively dissatisfied - fast from expressing disappointment.

If you are obsessively angry - fast from the use of sharp language.

If you are an obsessive accumulator - fast from shopping.

If you are obsessively greedy - fast from taking.

If you are self-centered, fast from thinking about your needs.

If you are obsessively uncompromising, fast from insisting that your way is the better way.

If you obsessively hold on to anger, hurt, and resentment, fast by letting go, releasing the negative memories.

In addition, if you haven't already brought in a check for Operation Isaiah, after Yom Kippur I want you to calculate how much you didn't spend on food over the course of this day. If you are able, I want you to double or triple that and send it to us for Operation Isaiah. We help out with Thanksgiving baskets with that money; but maybe, this year, if we have enough donations, we'll also send some to hurricane relief in Houston and Florida.

If you do all this, you will not only be observing the Yom Kippur that we read about in the Torah, in which we fast from feeding our bodies, but you will also fast from the things that degrade your souls. And when you open yourself up fully to Torah, wholehearted loving, revering, and serving both God and the people around you, then you might experience a Yom Kippur which fulfills the line from Ne'ilah at the end of tomorrow's services:

Adonai our God and God of our ancestors,
may we fulfill Your precepts in this world,
to be worthy of happiness and blessing
in the messianic era and in the world to come.

G'mar Hatima Tova.

May you be sealed in the good books of life, health, and happiness.