

Kol THE VOICE OF Barrack

Tevet: Fasting in the 21st Century

The month of Tevet has no holidays, except for the last days of Hanukkah (which we are still celebrating!), but there is a fast day: the **עשרה בטבת** (Asara b'Tevet), the Tenth of Tevet. The Tenth of Tevet is considered a "minor fast," meaning that traditionally one does not eat or drink from before sunrise until after sunset. This fast commemorates the mourning for the siege of Yerushalayim by Nevuchadnezzar II of Babylonia, which eventually culminated in the destruction of the first Temple.

My question to you is: does this fast, or do any of the fasts on the Jewish calendar throughout the year, have value in the 21st century?

Let us first look at some of the reasons for fasting in Judaism. There is the fast for the atonement of our sins which is primarily observed on Yom Kippur. There are commemorative mourning fasts, such as the Tenth of Tevet. There are fasts of supplication, asking God to save us as we read in Megillat Esther. There is the fast of the first born on erev Pesach. There is the fast of the chatan/groom and kallah/bride on their wedding day. Jews fast for both joyous occasions and sad occasions.

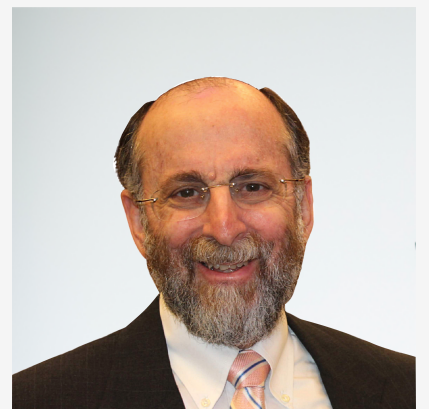
I believe that fasting does have a role in 21st century Jewish practice for the following reasons. First, through fasting, we are able to better focus on the day at hand, whether it is the Tenth of Tevet or Yom Kippur. We have an opportunity to learn more about the day, more about ourselves, more about our connections to Judaism, more about our connections to the Jewish People. Second, there is a sense of purifying our souls. Most of us take very good care of cleaning our physical bodies, but how many of us take the time and care to cleanse our souls? Fasting provides a person an opportunity to do so. Third, fasting may take a person to a higher spiritual plane, both in regard to one's relationship with God as well as in regard to one's relationship with one's family and friends. Certainly after the last 20 months, we have come to a greater appreciation of our connectedness and our need for love and support from our family and friends.

I am sure that while you have read this, you have come up with other meaningful values for fasting in the modern era. Fasting can certainly become a time for each of us to sit down and reflect on our lives.

Wishing each and every one of you a **חודש טוב**!

For those who are fasting on Asara b'Tevet, may you have a reflective fast.

Kol Barrack (The Voice of Barrack) is a periodic publication that recognizes the new month in the Jewish calendar. In this edition, Rabbi Steven Razin shares his thoughts about the value of fasting in Judaism.



Rabbi Steven Razin

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Rabbi Steven Razin has been a Jewish Studies teacher at Barrack for 17 years and has taught Jewish Studies and Tanakh to hundreds of our students.

Rabbi Razin and his wife of 37 years, Beth, are also the proud parents of Yosef 07, Vitoria, Yakira, and Yonatan '10.

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