



## The Laws of Ta'anit Esther and other Fast Days

By Rav Baruch Rubanowitz

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Yerusholayim

1. From the second trimester of a normal pregnancy until two years after delivery, women are exempt from fasting on *Tzom Gedalyoh*, *Asoroh BeTeiveis*, *Taanis Esther* and *Shiv'oh Osor BeTammuz*.<sup>1</sup>
2. During the first trimester, the Mishnah Berurah rules that a woman who experiences pain, significant nausea, a feeling of weakness that is not appropriate for her condition or other abnormal condition, should not fast either. It is my opinion that since women today do not have the same physical constitution that women had over a hundred years ago and are more susceptible to negative reactions, it is appropriate to rule that all pregnant women in our days should not fast, regardless of their condition. Any small change in a woman today may have negative repercussions for her foetus.
3. A nursing mother should not fast.
4. Even when a woman is not nursing, after delivery, a mother is considered weaker than most and should not fast until her strength returns in full. That usually takes a minimum of six weeks. Once she has reached her predelivery level of fitness and strength she may fast. At that time, it is also appropriate to recite the *berochah* of *bagomel*, not earlier. This is a special *berochah* for the woman to recite thanking Hashem for His protection and guidance bringing the woman through the difficult travail of labor and delivery and finally the recovery. Until the recovery is complete, a woman should refrain from reciting the *berochah*.
5. Any person who is classified as sick with a non-life-threatening illness. For example, someone who has a fever, or has just recovered from an illness but is still weak, the elderly who do not fast well and suffer greatly from the fast—should not fast.

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<sup>1</sup> עיין מ"ב תק"ן סק"ג ודעת תורה למהרש"ם תק"ן ס"א בשם כנסת יחזקאל סימן ע"א ס"ל.

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- 5.1. A person who is chronically weaker than most people or a person who is not weak, feels strong, functions normally but has extreme reactions to fasting, are exempt from these standard fasts.
- 5.2. A person who does not fast well and when fasting is weaker than others who fast, is exempt from fasting.<sup>2</sup>
- 5.3. A person who feels fine but has a serious illness (e.g., cancer) should consult with his or her physician whether they can fast.
6. A woman that delivered a stillborn or livebirth (even if she is not nursing her infant) may rely on the opinion that such a woman need not fast for 24 months after delivery.<sup>3</sup>
7. A person who is exempt from fasting on Ta'anis Esther should substitute a fast day at a later stage when they are able to fast.<sup>4</sup> This is not the case for the other fast days.
8. Despite the pandemic, a healthy person should fast on Taanis Esther.
9. A person who is exempt need not eat or drink in *shiurim*. That system is only appropriate for Yom HaKippurim.
10. Children under *bar* and *bas mitzvah* should not fast.
11. When one is permitted to eat, he or she should only eat healthy foods in reasonable quantities. It is inappropriate to eat food for pleasure; the motivation should be to maintain good health.<sup>5</sup> This is also true for children that have reached the maturity level to understand why we are fasting. They should be educated with some restrictions on their diet by avoiding sweets and other special treats.

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<sup>2</sup> ז"ל אג"מ או"ח ח"ד סימן קי"ד מי שהוא חלוש בטבעו יותר משאר בני"א נחשב נמי כחולה שמותר לאכול עיין מ"ב תקנ"ד ס"ק י"א עכ"ל. ובתוך דבריו ג"כ התיר למי שהוא שכור אצל אחרים לדבר הרשות, והוא בריא וחזק ויכול לצום אילו לא היה עוסק במלאכתו, מ"מ רשאי לעסוק במלאכתו כיון שאם ימנע מכך יהיה הפסד לאחרים, ולכשיחלש יצטרך לאכול, מותר. וכן אם עוסק בצרכי שמים ולדבר מצוה, בלי הפסד לאחרים, רשאי לעבוד, ולכשיחלש, יצטרך לאכול ש"ד. הרי שהגדיר חולה לענין צום רגיל, ואף לענין ת"ב, כל מי שנחלש יותר משאר בני"א הצמים. ואפשר לסמוך על דבריו אף שמחודשים המה.

<sup>3</sup> דעת תורה למהרש"ם תק"ן.

<sup>4</sup> ביה"ל תק"ן בשאר צומות אולם לתענית אסתר שאני שכשיחזרו לאיתנם ויש בכחם להתענות יפרעו התענית לאחר מיכן עד"מ בשם האגודה. ועיין בב"ח דקאי אכולהו ולא רק אכאבי עיניים, וכ"ה בא"ר סימן תק"ן והובא בביאורו"ל, וכ"ה בח"א, ובקיצור ש"ע. ובביאור הגר"א הסביר טעמא דמילתא היות ואין התענית קבוע ליום מסויים, ובימי מרדכי ואסתר צמו בניסן. אולם יעויין בתרפ"ו סק"ה במ"ב, שסיים דמהב"ח לא משמע כישוע"י, אבל דעת הישועות יעקב דרך כואבי עינים צריכים להשלים ולא שאר חולים, ולא הכריע. ונראה דיש להחמיר בזה.

<sup>5</sup> תקנ"ד ס"ה.

12. Medical professionals (doctors and nurses that treat hospitalized patients or healthcare providers treating patients that may have life-threatening illnesses) that need to work on the fast day and are aware that the fast will likely cause them to be less alert, weak and tired to the point in which there might be less than optimal care for the patient/s, should not fast. They should eat and drink as regular.
13. This year (Taanis Esther 5781) the fast starts in Yerusholayim at 4:58 a.m. This is when the sun is  $16.1^\circ$  below the horizon and rising. The fast begins at the start of the halachic day and concludes shortly after the sun goes down. One may arise early to eat or drink before this time (*alos hashachar*). The fast is over at 5:52 p.m. This corresponds to the sun being  $4.42^\circ$  below the horizon.<sup>6</sup>
14. A person that has no exemption and is required to fast and inadvertently drank or ate something in the morning and subsequently realized that it is a fast day, should complete the fast. It was an inadvertent mistake for which one must do *teshuvoh*, however, the fast is still in force and he or she should still comply with the halachah of avoiding consumption of food for the remainder of the day. He or she may include *aneinu* in their silent *shemone esrei* since it is still a national day of mourning for which the words of the prayer “please respond favorably to us on our national day

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<sup>6</sup> The consensus of the Jewish people around the globe is to follow the opinion of the Geonim as to when the halachic day is over. While there are many observant Jews who keep Shabbos until the sun is 16.1 degrees below the horizon (or some other variation of 72 minutes), it is often done as a stringency and certainly the overwhelming majority of observant Jewry do *melochob*, recite *kerias Shema* and consider the day over well before that. (As a mohel for over 20 years I have not encountered a family whose son was born after Tzeis Hakochavim of the Geonim and before the first *shekiyah* of Rabbeinu Tam, who considered arranging the bris on the earlier day.) Accordingly, the correct interpretation of the gemoro in Ta'anis describing when the fast is over should be understood literally; “when the sun sets” and *not* as Rabbeinu Tam explains that the fast ends “after the sun sets when 3 stars become visible”. The Shulchan Aruch who has adopted the position of Rabbeinu Tam, requires one to wait until the stars are recognized since the Shulchan Aruch does not see halachic significance to the physical sunset. According to the Geonim, however, once the sun set the fast ends. The Vilna Gaon (261) offers that even according to the Geonim, custom has it to wait a little longer. Shaar Hatziyun (562:1) offers 3 explanations for the custom.

הטעם שאנו מחמירין לאכול רק לאחר ג' רבעי מיל לפי השיטה שמיל הוא 22.5 דקות, אף שלגאונים מותר לאכול מיד בשקיעת החמה, כתב בשער הציון סימן תקס"ב סק"א, דחוששין לשיטת ר' יוסי דביה"ש הוא כהרף עין ולפנ"כ הוי יום ודאי. ועוד, אין אנו בקיאים בהתחלת ביה"ש. ועוד י"ל דאין להקל בספיקו באפקי יומא כשיש חזקה של היום.

of fasting” are still true, since it is the day which was designated as a fast day even though that person personally did not fast the full day.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> עיין מ"ב סימן תקס"ח סק"ג וסק"ח.