

# Fasting

## The Power and Purpose

“Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a Shofar (trumpet); declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Yaaqob (Jacob) their Sins. **2** Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the Judgment of their Aluahym (God); they ask of me Righteous Judgments; they delight to draw near to Aluahym (God).**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. **4** 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. **5** 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 אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah)? **6** “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? **7** 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? **8** Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the esteem (glory) of אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah) shall be your rear guard. **9** Then you shall call, and אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah) 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, **10** 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. **11** And אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah) will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. **12** And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in. **13** “If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my Kadosh (holy) day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the Kadosh (holy) day of אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah) honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; **14** then you shall take delight in אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah), and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the

heritage of Yaaqob (Jacob) your father, for the mouth of אַיָּהּ (Yahuah) has spoken.” **Isaiah 58:1-14**

First (1st) let's look at the root word which is used for "fasting." The Hebrew verb that means “to fast” is the word tsum/tzum (tsoom). In the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, the Greek word for the Hebrew word tzum is nesteuo (nace-tyoo'-o) 3522.

The Greek word nesteuo generally means to abstain or go without food.” In paganism, fasting as abstinence from food was part of the initiation into the mystery cults. It was believed that it increased the power of prayer to the aluahym (gods).

Definitions in common use today explain that Tzom (tsoom) and its Greek counterpart means “to abstain from food.” Such is the English dictionary definition. Is this correct? What about the view of the ancient Greek world? Is it correct? Or is abstaining from food merely a common association with fasting where it actually means something else?

The Hebrew noun that means “a fast” or “fasting” is spelled the same way as the verb, but is pronounced differently. It is the word Tzom (tsoom).

The original meaning of the words tzum (tsoom) or tzom (tsoom) is easily derived from the three (3) pictographic Hebrew letters that formed the word from earliest times. By identifying the original meanings of each these three (3) letters; tzad-uau (vav)-mem, we are able to see how these three (3) letters combined together to form the words for fasting such as tzom (tsoom) 6685, meaning to Fast, and tzum (tsoom) 6684 meaning you have Fasted, now give us much more clarity

- Hebrew letter tzad ז – originally, “a man lying down”; derivations - “on one’s side, to lie down (as with a loss of appetite from worry, grief, stomach ache or sickness), to lie down in adversity, trouble”
- Hebrew letter uau (vav) ו – originally, “a nail, a peg”; derivations – “peg, fasten, hook, attachment, gripping; as connectives, and, but, for”
- Hebrew letter mem מ – originally, “ripples of water”; derivations – “water, turbulent, mighty, blood, juice, stirred feelings deep within, from”

When these three (3) letters combine, they tell a pictographic story in the formation of the words tzum and tzom. The picture is that of a person lying down in despair with a loss of appetite for food or entertainment in a state of mourning or grief with deep stirring compassion in the pit of the stomach over

injustices done to others, or with deep regrets that grip and stir feelings deep within the abdomen for having committed acts of injustice toward others that deserve reparation.

The idea of fasting, as we shall learn from its scriptural, Hebraic usage according to its pictographic word image, is a movement from despairing, to caring, sharing and, finally, repairing.

The Greek word for fasting is *nesteia* a compound of *ne* (a negative prefix) and *esthio* which means "to eat." So the basic root meaning of fasting simply means "not to eat."

Fasting is more than just not eating, is it "afflicting one's body". It is "afflicting one's soul." In other words, fasting in the Hebrew mind is something my soul participates in. Fasting is denying my self. It is denying not only my own body, but also my own wants. It is a way of saying that food and my desires are secondary to **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah). Fasting is "afflicting one's soul" an act of self-denial. But it is not only an act of self-denial, it is a way of entering into communion with **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah) at a much closer and deeper level.

Our fasting, like prayer, is based on our acceptance of **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah)'s rule and his attributes revealed in his Name. We fast and pray as imitators of **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah)—out of compassion, graciousness, slowness to anger, abounding loving kindness and faithfulness, out of forgiveness for iniquity, transgressions and Sin, realizing that injustice shall not prevail forever.

Whereas prayer first (1st) judges ourselves before we ask for **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah)'s mercy, intervention and justice in a matter, fasting does the same. Fasting, like prayer, has a two (2)-fold application:

- First (1st), fasting, when understood according to its scriptural, Hebraic understanding, describes the personal and corporate weight and depth of our heart-felt feelings of regret, remorse, repentance and compassion, even to the loss of appetite, for mercy and justice for the oppressed, enslaved, hurting and needy
- Second (2nd), fasting conveys the gripping conviction that something must be done on our part, if at all possible in spite of our weakness, to remedy the injustice by alleviating the oppression, removing the abusive situation, lifting up the fallen, providing essential care and healing the brokenness by striving for freedom, restoration and restitution.

In this light, fasting seeks restoration and restitution for wrongs done to someone or a body of people. It recognizes that **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah) is just in all his ways, even when we are put upon to intervene and remedy an injustice.

Prayer and fasting is defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with **יְהוָה** (Yahuah). Prayer and fasting often go hand in hand, but this is not always the case. You can pray without fasting, and fast without prayer. It is when these two (2) activities are combined and dedicated to **יְהוָה** (Yahuah)'s esteem (glory) that they reach their full effectiveness. Having a dedicated time of prayer and fasting is not a way of manipulating **יְהוָה** (Yahuah) into doing what we desire. Rather, it is simply forcing yourself to focus and rely on **יְהוָה** (Yahuah) for the strength, provision, and wisdom you need.

Fasting is the most powerful spiritual discipline of all the disciplines. Through fasting and prayer, the Ruach ha Kodesh can transform your life. According to Scripture when **יְהוָה** (Yahuah)'s people fast with a proper scriptural motive-seeking **יְהוָה** (Yahuah)'s face with a broken, repentant, and humble ruach (spirit), **יְהוָה** (Yahuah) will hear and heal our lives, our communities, our nation and world. Fasting and prayer can bring about revival - a change in the direction of our nation and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

### **Why You Should Fast**

If you do not already know of the power and importance of fasting, here are some very important facts:

- Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Tanakh (OT) and Brit Hadashah (New Testament). For example, Moshe (Moses) fasted at least two (2) recorded forty (40)-day periods. **וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה** (Yahusha) fasted 40 days and reminded His followers to fast.
- Fasting and prayer results in a more intimate relationship with **וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה** (Yahusha).
- Fasting is a scriptural way to truly humble yourself in the sight of **יְהוָה** (Yahuah) **Psalms 35:13; Ezra 8:21**. King David said, "I humble myself through fasting."
- Fasting enables the Ruach ha Kodesh to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.
- The Ruach ha Kodesh will quicken the Word of **יְהוָה** (Yahuah) in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you!
- Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.
- Fasting can result in a personal revival in your own life-and make you a channel of revival to others.

**יְהוָה** (Yahuah) said, "When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you" **Jeremiah 29:13-14**. When a man or woman is willing to set aside the appetites of the body to concentrate on the work of praying, they are

demonstrating that they mean business, that they are seeking אַיָּהּ (Yahuah) with all their heart.

Denying yourself food to focus on אַיָּהּ (Yahuah) and His program shows humility. That is why fasting is also the equivalent of the phrase "to humble oneself before אַיָּהּ (Yahuah) "**Psalm 35:13; 1 Kings 21:29; Ezra 8:21**. When a person is really concerned about the things of אַיָּהּ (Yahuah), he will humble himself. There will be times when he will abstain from the enjoyment of food to continue concentration and focus on that which is important to אַיָּהּ (Yahuah).

### **Fasting - Required or Recommended?**

When OWHYָּהּ (Yahusha) spoke about fasting, he didn't say if you fast, but "when you fast" **Matthew 6:16**. Our Mashiach (Messiah) assumes that believers will fast. And from the rest of the books in the New Testament we know that they did but, The Word of אַיָּהּ (Yahuah) does not specifically command believers to spend time in prayer and fasting. At the same time, prayer and fasting is definitely something we should be doing. The purpose of fasting should be to take our eyes off the things of this world and focus our thoughts on אַיָּהּ (Yahuah) and to gain a deeper fellowship with אַיָּהּ (Yahuah).

There once was an inappropriate time for fasting though: when our Mashiach (Messiah) OWHYָּהּ (Yahusha) was here on earth. During that time OWHYָּהּ (Yahusha)'s disciples never fasted and that seemed unusual to the religious leaders and John the Baptist's friends.

"Then the followers of John came to OWHYָּהּ (Yahusha) and said, 'Why do we and the Pharisees often fast for a certain time, but your followers don't?' OWHYָּהּ (Yahusha) answered, 'The friends of the bridegroom are not sad while he is with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast.'" **Matthew 9:14-15**.

By taking our eyes off the things of this world through prayer and scriptural fasting, we can focus better on OWHYָּהּ (Yahusha). When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." **Matthew 6:16-18**

We need to be careful to avoid pitfalls of legalism like the Pharisees had done, which was to prescribe certain set times for fasting: twice a week on

Wednesday and Friday! Some believe a particular day for fasting was commanded in Scripture only once -- on the Day of Atonement **Leviticus 16**.

I do not believe the commandment about the Day of Atonement has to do with Fasting, even though it very well could if you feel called to do so, but the command to afflict your soul is more of a spiritual affliction.

In all the rest of Scripture there are no other Scriptures which command fasting at a specific time or on a specific occasion! None! Yet even now, says **יְהוָה** (Yahuah), return to me with all your heart, with mourning/wailing .

**Joel 2:12**

### **Types of Fasting**

Let's take a look at the different types of fasting in scripture, because I don't want you to feel overwhelmed by the thought of going without food for days and days. There are types of fasting that don't involve such a radical commitment. Scripture gives examples of many different kinds of fasting.

The One (1) day Fast: There are very few rules when it comes to fasting. What you do is really between you and **יְהוָה** (Yahuah). This fast was from sunset of one (1) day to sunset of the next **Leviticus 16:29-32**. So in this type of fast the person abstained from food and liquid for a period of one day (from sunset to sunset).

The Partial Fast: In this type of fast, the emphasis is placed on restriction of diet, rather than abstaining completely from eating. Examples are: Daniel, Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego eating only vegetables and drinking only water **Daniel 1:15** Although the water fast seemed to be the custom of the prophet, there was a three (3)-week period in which he only abstained from meat, and wine **Daniel 10:3**. Some people would argue that this isn't really a fast at all, but **Daniel 10:3** does use the word "mourned" which is scriptural occasion for fasting.

The Absolute: This type of fast is one (1) in which the person refrains from both food and water OR simply food (but not water) for an extended period of time. This radical fast can be harmful to your health and in most cases should not exceed three (3) days. An example of an absolute fast can be found with Esther and her household. Esther decided to fast for three (3) days abstaining from both "food and water" both "day and night" **Esther 4:15-16**. The rabbi Ezra and the apostle Paul also went without food and water for three (3) days **Ezra 10:6-9; Acts 9:9**. David is another example of an absolute fast. He went seven (7) days without food as a plea to **יְהוָה** (Yahuah) to save the life of his child **2 Samuel 12:15-20**.

The Supernatural Fast: that extend beyond three (3) or seven (7) days can be found in Scripture, but these exceptions were based upon direct guidance

from **אֲיָהּ** (Yahuah) or a supernatural ability given by **אֲיָהּ** (Yahuah) to complete the fast. Examples of these supernatural fasts are: Moshe (Moses) **Deuteronomy 9:9-18** and **Exodus 34:28**; EliYAH **1 Kings 19:8**; and OWYAH (Yahusha) **Matthew 4:1-11**.

### **When should a Believer Fast?**

When we feel the Ruach (Spirit) of **אֲיָהּ** (Yahuah) leading us to fast. The occasion for fasting is a totally voluntary decision. Some of the specific times when people in scripture fasted are listed below. But basically we can say a believer may decide to fast whenever there is a spiritual concern or struggle in his or her life. Of course, there may be times when those in authority over us proclaim a fast, as was done by King Saul **1 Samuel 14:24** or Yahoshaphat **2 Chronicles 20:3**. But normally and ultimately that decision is solely between us and **אֲיָהּ** (Yahuah).

In scripture, fasting often occurs as something you do while carrying on your everyday activities! **OWYAH** (Yahusha) pictures a situation in which believers are among other people going about their normal duties and activities. In fact, soldiers involved in the activity of warfare sometimes fasted **1 Samuel 14:24** as well as the sailors on the ship with Paul **Acts 27:33**. There is a certain sense in which fasting, even in the midst of your daily activities, becomes a constant prayer to **אֲיָהּ** (Yahuah) and in the actual experience of fasting; a periodic hunger pain can become a good reminder to send up a short "prayer" for which you are fasting.

What a marvelous freedom **אֲיָהּ** (Yahuah) gives us in the area of fasting. **OWYAH** (Yahusha) assumes that we will fast, yet he leaves the choice of when to fast, the length of our fast, and the decision of how we will spend our time while fasting completely up to us!

We cannot fast and pray expecting **אֲיָהּ** (Yahuah) to Barach (Bless) when there is known Sin in our lives. Fasting does not impress **אֲיָהּ** (Yahuah) with our spirituality to the point that he ignores our disobedience. On the contrary, genuine fasting will always cause us to examine our hearts to make sure everything is right with Him.

The people of Isaiah's day thought that they could fast in disobedience and **אֲיָהּ** (Yahuah) would hear them. But **אֲיָהּ** (Yahuah) said, "on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. 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" **Isaiah 58:3-4**.

“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?”

**Isaiah 58:6**

Therefore also now, says אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah), turn [even] to me with all your heart, and with a fast (tsom), and with weeping, and with mourning **Joel 2:12**

### **Reasons for Fasting**

We find Seven (7) occasions when the people of אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah) fasted. אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah)'s people fasted in these situations:

We see fasting and mourning connected in **1 Samuel 31:13; 1 Chronicles 10:12; 2 Samuel 1:12; and 2 Samuel 3:35**. In these situations fasting showed the sorrow that the people felt over the loss of someone אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah) used in their lives. In fact, the custom of fasting in mourning was considered normal behavior among the Yisraelites. That's why the servants of David were so astonished when David got up and ate following the death of his son: "David's servants said to him, 'Why are you doing this? When the baby was still alive, you refused to eat and you cried. Now that the baby is dead, you get up and eat food?!" **2 Samuel 12:21**. When someone experiences the loss of a close friend or relative, they usually don't feel like eating. This is a normal, natural reaction in the initial stages of grief. It is a perfectly good reason to fast.

Mourning, repentance and confession of Sin are found in **Deuteronomy 9:18; 1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 10:6; Jonah 3:5; and Acts 9:3-9**. When people wished to demonstrate that they were serious about repenting from their Sin, they fasted. Our willingness to sacrifice shows the depth of our commitment and in this case fasting is a pictorial way of saying to אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah), "I care more about getting right with You, אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah), than I do about even my own life." So a good occasion for fasting is when we are truly grieving over our Sins.

There are occasions when death or danger threatens us. We see from the Scripture that it is certainly appropriate to employ fasting as a means of receiving אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah)'s protection during these times. When Ezra was carrying a large consignment of gold and silver to the temple in Yerusalem along a route infested with bandits, he records: "I proclaimed a fast...that we might humble ourselves before our Aluahym, אֲיָהוָה (Yahuah), to seek from him a straight way for ourselves, our children, and all our goods" **Ezra 8:21-23,31**. Other examples of fasting for protection are found in **Jeremiah 36:** and **Esther 4:3**.

Fasting helps us find אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah)'s will. If we expect אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) to reveal his direction for our lives, we must put Him first (1st). Often this means putting aside the fulfillment of our physical appetites, so that we can focus our attention on Him.

We find an example of fasting for direction in **2 Chronicles 20:1-30**. Three (3) nations were coming against Yahudah (Judah) to destroy them. King Yehoshaphat, the king of Yahudah (Judah), proclaimed a fast for the whole nation and they asked אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) what they should do. אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) heard their prayer and their fast and gave the people prophetic direction through one of the choir members! אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) told them what to do.

**Acts 13:2** is another example of direction being given by אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) during a fast. Here we find the leaders of the believers of Antioch worshiping and fasting. The Ruach ha Kodesh used this occasion to tell the leaders to choose Paul and Barnabas from among their group and send them out to spread the Message of the Masiach (Messiah) among the Gentiles. So fasting is one of the ways we seek אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah)'s guidance and direction in our lives.

Sickness: There are two (2) examples in Scripture of fasting on behalf of those **2 Samuel 12:15-23; Psalm 35:13**. Both of these examples come from the life of David. In **Psalm 35:13** David says, "Yet when they were sick, I put on clothes of sadness and showed my sorrow by going without food." David saw fasting as a way to ask אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) for physical healing in the lives of other people.

Special revelation: The final occasion for fasting is for special revelation. Exceptional insights from אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) were sometimes given to the prophets and others during periods of fasting. Daniel sought אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) with fasting to ask אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) to fulfill His promise to restore Yerusalem **Daniel 9:9-18, Jeremiah 29:10-13**. He received through the Malak (angel) Gabriel a wonderful unfolding of אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah)'s plan for Yisrael. If we have sought אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) in vain for the fulfillment of some promise, it could be that He is waiting for us to humble ourselves by fasting and seek Him as Daniel did.

Other examples of prophetic revelation during times of fasting are found in **Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9-18; and Daniel 10:1-3**. אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) decided to speak to these men while they were in the midst of a fast. For those seeking prophetic guidance or revelation today, אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Yahuah) may also use the occasion of fasting to speak to them in a very unique way.

## **Spiritual Preparation**

In preparation for this special time with **יהוה** (Yahuah), I strongly urge you to examine your heart, and detect any unconfessed Sin. Scripture records that **יהוה** (Yahuah) always requires His people to repent of their Sins before He will hear their prayers, so in your prayers, confess not only obvious Sins, but less obvious ones as well.

King David said: Come and hear, all of you who reverence **יהוה** (Yahuah), and I will tell you what he did for me: For I cried to him for help, with praises ready on my tongue. He would not have listened if I had not confessed my Sins. But he listened! He heard my prayer! He paid attention to it!

Another great way to prepare for your fast is to practice what I call "Spiritual Breathing." The concept is simple, Like physical breathing, Spiritual Breathing is a process of exhaling the impure and inhaling the pure (Kadosh). If you knowingly Sin, breathe spiritually to restore the fullness of **יהוה** (Yahuah)'s Ruach ha Kodesh in your life. You exhale by confessing your Sins immediately when you become aware of them, and you inhale by inviting the Ruach ha Kodesh to re-take control of your life. As an act of Amanah (faith), trust Him to empower you. During the fast, spiritual breathing-constant reliance on the Ruach ha Kodesh-will enables you to resist temptation, not only to Sin but to abandon your fast.

## **Caution**

It is strongly advice you to drink plenty of liquids. Obviously, if **יהוה** (Yahuah) leads you to undertake an absolute fast, you should obey. If so, be certain, without doubt, that **יהוה** (Yahuah) is leading you.

Water-only fasts that last for more than several days need to be undertaken with complete rest and under medical supervision because of the extreme danger of over-toxification, breakdown of vital body tissues, and loss of electrolytes.

We recommend water and juice fasting, if you are going to fast for an extended period of time. This type of fast will provide you with more energy than absolute or water-only fasts and still lead you into the humbling experience of denying your desire for solid food that you can chew.

When it comes to making your final decision about what type of fast is right for you, the best advice I can give you is to follow the leading of the Ruach ha Kodesh. He will guide your heart and mind as to what is best for you.

Remember, the most important consideration in fasting is your motive. Why are you fasting?