

Jewish Fasting Traditions Rules and Religious Significance

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In Judaism, fasting is well known as a calendrical event. (Miller, 2012) In North America and the UK, Jews and Muslims are seen practicing fasting. The rules of these two religious groups differ from one another. This event is linked with Yom Kippur and Tisha Be; it also includes some other fasts. These fasts are mostly done in regard to the destruction of temples. It is also heard that in Judaism, fasting takes place under some special rules and regulations. This litany of rules includes the following:

- Except for Yom Kippur, they are not allowed to fast on Shabbat or on any other festival or holiday.
- In Judaism, they are not allowed to fast in the month of Nisan.
- The people who are too ill are not allowed to fast.
- Pregnant women are also not allowed to fast.
- In Judaism, it is believed that if you are a teacher, doctor, or you have any other occupation, you should not fast because you won't be able to perform your duties well.
- In Judaism, you are also not allowed to publicize your fast.
- Neila services also take place at the start of prayers.
- Private fasts can be kept on any occasional day.

Private fasting is very common among Jews. Other than these rules anyone can also engage themselves in some private fasting. This is done to atone for the sins you have done in your life and also to make peace in your life and with those you have done wrong deeds with. Fasting is also done to seek God's mercy and to mark certain events in your life. Other reasons to fast personally can be that you want to be spiritually connected to God and want to come closer. Fasting is also done to show gratitude towards God. Nurses and pregnant women who are not allowed to fast are also not allowed to take regular meals. Instead, they are asked to eat the food that is necessary for them so that they can participate in the sorrow with other people. One is also not allowed to indulge themselves in pleasure-taking activities.

The fast in Jews begins from the sunrise And it ends when the first star appeared in the sky by evening. All fasts are done in this way, excluding the Day of Atonement and the Ninth and Ab, which end from even till even.

Yom Kippur:

When the people of Israel left Egypt in 2448, they started worshipping a golden calf. The day when Moosa came down is known as the Yom Kippur. In the same year, people also build a portable house

for God. It was known as Tabernacle which was later a place for worshipping and for sacrificing activities. On Yom Kippur, the high priest performed some special and unique services. The services performed included the offering of incense at the place where the ark is placed. The lottery of two goats at the same time was also done. One goat was brought to sacrifice in the name of God, and the other goat was sent to the wilderness. On this day, the high priest wore golden clothes and wore white garments while performing the services.

This practice continued from that time for hundreds of years. Jews from all around the world come to this temple just to see the high priest performing these services. Through these services, the high priest seeks forgiveness for all the Jews around the world. In 3830, the second temple was destroyed, but still, the virtues and customs of Yom Kippur were carried. But a single change was brought; instead of the High priest, all the Jews performed the services of his or their own will.

The fasting of Jews is very different from the fasting of people in other religions. From the first day of Elul, the Jews begin to blow the shofar. It is blown every early morning, and Psalm 27 is also regularly recited after morning and afternoon prayer. It is also a compulsory act to recite Selichot every morning to create a sense of forgiveness from the Holy God.

10 days before Yom Kippur is known as the Day of Repentance. From this day, some special additions are made to the prayers offered, and all the people keenly observe the priest performing them. Yom Kippur is basically the day of fasting, and on this day, there are some acts that are done before the day of Yom Kippur. Here are they:

- Kapoor is often performed in the early hours of the morning.
- The beautiful custom of giving and requesting honey cake is still followed. It is believed that in this way, God bless them with a sweet year ahead.
- Two festive meals are taken; one is taken in the afternoon, and the other is taken after the fats are opened.
- People set up special charity trays and are given them before the afternoon.
- People believe that it is obligatory to give the children priestly blessings.
- Before the holy day candles are lit everywhere.
- On this special day, no work is done. The official holiday is given to everyone.

5 actions are forbidden on this day, which include the following:

- Eating and drinking are prohibited.
- Wearing leather shoes is not allowed.
- No one is allowed to apply any type of lotion or cream on their body.
- No sexual activities.
- No one is allowed to wash anything or take a bath.

At night, the Neila service comes to an end with the prayer sound of Shema prayers. Then songs and dances take place. On this day, people express the feeling that God will accept their forgiveness and

bless them with a life full of health and happiness.

In this way, people welcome the new year of Jerusalem. People mostly spent their whole day worshipping, repenting, and fasting. The tradition and culture of Yom Kippur are followed from the time when the people or the Jews finally reached the land of Israel.

In English, Yom Kippur means The Day Of Atonement. Jewish thinks that asking forgiveness without fasting is just not enough. It marks the event when Moosa went to God to ask forgiveness for worshipping and golden calf and came back with the news that forgiveness was granted. Since that time, people have marked this day and carried out the practices every year.

People spent most of their day in synagogues. It stems from the special verses of the Torah, which are also a necessary component of Yom Kippur. No medical expectance is seen about Yom Kippur. Only some rules are to be followed during the fasting.

After spent fasting and repenting, people believe that they are forgiven by God. Oaths are taken, and services are performed by the individuals who wish to do so.

Yom Kippur Confessions:

Two types of Confession take place.

- Short term confession
- Long-term confession.

Short-Term Confession:

Short-term confession begins with Ashamnu which means that we are sinners and we have sinned. It describes the series of words for sins that are arranged in an alphabetical manner.

Long-term Confession:

The long-term confession begins with the word Al Cheyt, which means sin. During prayer service, all the Jews sing these words to represent that they are being cleaned of their past sins.

These confessions include that we have been offensive in the past, we have been stubborn the whole year, we disobeyed, etc. The majority of the sins said in the prayer include the acts that people do the whole year.

Tisha Bev:

It is the ninth day of AV month. It starts with the sunset of eight days and ends on the ninth day. It is the day when the mourning reaches its peak. According to some studies, many events took place on this day.

Fasting In Christianity:

In the Bible, Fasting is obligatory for a number of reasons. Fasting for two days in a week first became very common in early Christianity. Christians believed in fasting basically on Wednesday and Friday instead of Tuesday and Thursday. The Didache also views fasting and prayer together because both are at the same level.

Fasting is recommended in church. There are different types of fasting which are mentioned in the Bible.

- **A Regular Fast:**

Regular fasting means not drinking and eating at all. It is seen that most people still drink water or juice during fasting. Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights in the desert. The Bible says that after fasting, Jesus was hungry. People say that the Bible does not mention anywhere that Jesus was thirsty.

- **A partial Fast:**

Partial fast means to refrain from a one-time meal or omit a meal from your daily diet. It means that they can refrain from eating some kind of fruit or vegetables.

- **A Full Fast:**

A full fast means not drinking or not eating anything. It is also said that such kind of fast is done with extreme caution, not on a regular basis.

- A sexual fast:

This type of fast means that both husband and wife must fulfill their marital duties towards each other. The Bible says that the wife's and husband's bodies are not just theirs. They are not allowed to deprive each other of their basic rights through mutual consent and devote themselves to prayers.

Fasting in Church:

Montanus is considered the first one to give the laws to the church. Romans used to fast for three continuous weeks just before Easter. They also fasted for alternate weeks. Some people also abstained from some specific living creatures such as fish and fowl. Some abstained from eggs, fruits, and vegetables. Some did not touch bread and milk. Some people also fasted till three in the afternoon, and after they opened their fast, they took whatever pleased them. The fast of Yom Kippur is a well-known holiday in the Jewish calendar. This Holiday is set so that Jews can repent of their past sins. There is also a special book that is read on Yom Kippur. The evening prayer on Yom Kippur lasts for two hours.

However, there are some universal obligations that are followed all around the world.

- People can fast on Wednesday and Friday throughout the year in any month except between Christmas and Epiphany.
- The greatest fast lasts for 48 days, that is, from Monday of Sexagesima till Easter Eve.
- A fast of almost three days is observed before the Great Fast.
- The greatest fast can also sometimes continue for fifty-five days, and nothing is eaten in this time period except bread and certain vegetables that to only in the afternoon after the end of church prayer.
- The Nativity almost lasts for twenty-eight days before Christmas.

The fasting of Christians is voluntary; it is not considered obligatory. They also don't have to believe that fasting will atone for their sins or will give forgiveness. Christians fast to follow Jesus by heart. The Bible says that the faith of Christians is the result of their good deeds. Through fasting, Christians express their dire needs and desire toward God. They say that it is obligatory for them to fast for just one day a year, i.e., on the Day of Atonement.

Some events took place to the ancestors on this day:

- Their first and second temple was destroyed.
- The temple area was plowed after the fall of Betar.
- World War 1 began.
- In 1492, no Jew was allowed to cross Spanish Soil.

Until Tisha Beav, no individual is allowed to sit on a chair or bench. One can only sit or stand on the floor like a mourner in the Shiva. No one is allowed to meet their friends or relatives on this day. If anyone greets they should answer in a low tone. In the evening everyone sits on the floor to recite the Book of Eicha to weep for the destruction. The early morning is the saddest part where everyone recites Kinot and this day is not considered as the day of Glory for Cristian.

The three Weeks

- The three-week period is called Bein JaM'Tzarim. It further refers to calamitous events and some specific customs observed in this period.
- Visiting cinemas and concert halls where entertainment is held is strictly not allowed to visit.
- Except for socks and undergarments, new dresses must not be brought from the market.
- Haircuts are not allowed for both men and women. Men who shave on a daily basis for their profession can shave during this time.
- No one can eat meat or drink wine during this period.
- Weaving and needlecraft work is also prohibited during this period.

Fasting In Islam

Ramadan is considered as the 9th holy month in Islam. This month marks the completion of the Holy Quran. The Holy Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad S.A.W in 610 CE. It was revealed on Laylatul Qadr, which is also known as the night of power. This month is the most religious and also the most significant time for all Muslims. During this Holy month, Muslims refrain from eating or drinking. The fasting time is from sunrise to sunset. During their fast, the Muslims are also not allowed to think impurely. Muslims have a strong belief that during this month, all the spiritual rewards are doubled. ("The Purpose of Fasting in Islam," 2017)

The fast breaks with a meal soon after hearing the Magrib prayer. At the end of Ramadan, a three-day festival is celebrated known as Eid ul Fitr.

The first Ramadan:

When the Holy Muhammad was forty, he started spending time alone. He used to spend hours and hours in the cave. In 610 CE, the angel Jibrael came to him and asked him to Read. He was unable to read or write. He ran home and told his family about this incident. Soon, He came to know that He was the prophet, and he started receiving other revelations as well. The door of Forgiveness is always open for those Muslims who wish to seek forgiveness for their sins during this Holy Month.

The traditions of Ramadan:

Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is known as a sacred tradition. The Month of Ramadan starts with the new moon. Before a day or two of Ramadan, Muslims decorate their houses, streets, and shops with fairy lights and lamps. People keep their fasts before the Fajr prayer. As soon as they hear the Fajr azan, they stop eating and drinking.

The day ends with a special prayer known as tarawih. The last ten days are the most sacred days. Muslims give too much importance to the last ten days, special the 27th of Ramadan. My special prayers and nails are done on this night. Ramadan is all about getting close to their creator, the one and only Allah. It is also about developing your self-control different charities are also given in this holy month. The exact timing of fast changes according to the rotation of Earth around the sun. The timing of Ramadan gets longer as summer approaches. Most Muslims spend the night socializing with others. Other Christian communities enjoy short working hours during this month. Muslims dedicate this Holy Month to Studying and reciting the Holy Quran and also offering additional prayers.

The fast in Islam starts from dawn and ends during sunset. The holy month of Ramadan consists of 29 to 30 days. Muslims all around the world wait for the new moon to start fasting. Here is a brief meaning of fasting in the Islamic month.

- It tells the Muslims the real meaning of love towards Allah.
- It shows a Muslim how to please Allah and to seek forgiveness with the belief that he will be rewarded with the best.
- It shows him how to be honest and sincere because when he fasts for Allah, he forgives all the bad habits during fasting.
- It shows a man not showing off. Because when a man fasts he keeps his fast secret even in public. He does not fast just for worldly means, but he fasts to please Allah.
- Fasting provides a man with a clear mind and heart. It keeps him active and strong.

Who Must Fast?

Fasting is obligatory for everyone. Either male or female who has such qualities:

- The person who is physically and mentally fit.
- The person who is at the full age of puberty. Children under the age must not fast, but they must practice to start fasting. When they reach the age of puberty they will be ready mentally and physically to fast.
- The person who is not traveling or the person who is in his hometown and almost fifty miles from their house.
- The person who is sure that fasting will not harm you except hunger and thirst.

Exemption from Fasting

It is not compulsory for such people to have certain qualities.

- Children who are under the age of puberty.
- Abnormal people will not be questioned about their deeds.
- Adults who are too old, either men or women. Those who cannot take the hardship of fasting.
- Sick people who are unable to fast because of their medical treatments. Sick people who cannot fast during Ramadan can make up their days after they get well.
- People who are traveling can break their fasts or cannot fast if they are far away from their houses.
- Women who are pregnant or are feeding their children can opt to fast because there is a risk to their health and their children's health.
- Women in their menstruation period can also not fast but they also must make up after they get well.

Some general recommendations by Prophet Muhammad S.A.W

There are some general practices that are given by our Holy Prophet regarding the month of Ramadan.

- To take a light meal before school.
- Breaking the fast with a date or plain glass or warm water.
- There is a certain dua that must be said before breaking the fast.
- The opening and keeping of fast must be with a lightweight meal.
- Taraweeh prayer must be offered by all Muslims after the isha prayer.
- To also exchange social visits with other Muslims
- The recitation of the Holy Quran must also be increased during this Holy Month.
- To be patient and humble with other fellow members in Ramadan.
- Giving as much charity as you can.

Ramadan is said to be a month of self-devotion and sacrifice by Muslims. More than 8 million Muslims are even from North America Fast in this month. Every night in mosques, almost one-thirtieth of the Holy Quran is recited. In the same way at the end of Ramadan Quran is completed. During Ramadan month almost all the restaurants and cafes are closed in all Muslim communities during the day. Fasting is done to remind Muslims about the thirst and hunger of poor and needy people. When a Muslim keeps a fast and feels thirsty, he feels the thirst of other poor people who suffer the whole year. It helps to practice self-control and also helps to keep your mind and body sound.

During this holy month, People treat each other with love and affection. It also helps a believer to feel the peace of mind and soul that is continuously coming from spiritual devotion for the whole month.

This also helps Muslims to learn that charity and good deeds are always rewarded in Islam. It is said that in the month of Ramadan, the doors of Heaven are opened, and the doors of Hell are closed, and Satan is put in jail. It means that Allah Almighty opens the door of mercy and forgiveness. He sends blessings to all Muslims around the world. During this Holy Month Muslims all around the globe make special preparations to seek mercy from Almighty Allah and to repent of their sins.

Importance of Ramadan:

- Ramadan is considered the fourth pillar of Islam
- In Ramadan, Muslims attain taqwa through fasting.
- Ramadan is the month of the Holy Quran. Muslim Holy Quran more than they recite in their daily routines.
- The night of power also comes in Ramadan, and it is said that this night is far better than a thousand nights.
- Umrah, performed in Ramadan, is equal to Hajj.
- Muslims everywhere in the world go for itiqaf, especially in the last 10 days.
- Offering iftaar to any Muslim who is fasting is very rewarding Near Allah.
- Zakat and Sadaqah to poor and needy people are given in this Holy Month.
- A hadees states that a fast kept for the sake of Allah is rewarded that all the previous sins are forgiven.

Celebration of Ramadan

After Muslims fast the whole month, they celebrate a three-day festival known as Eid. Eid ul Fitr. People offer Eid prayer in mosques early in the morning. Sweet dishes made of sweet milk are known as "sheer khurma." This dish is very common on Eid day. People greet each other, and gifts are exchanged with the children. Eid ul Fitr marks the end of the Holy Month of Ramadan. People and children wear new clothes for three days and celebrate this day. They thank Allah for showering blessings on them and pray for a happy life ahead.

People celebrated the first Eid ul Fitr in 624CE. It was celebrated by the Holy Prophet and his companions in Madinah. Takbir is recited after and before congregational prayers to declare their faith. It is a day when all Muslims greet each other and celebrate the day with joy.

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