

Welcome to 10 Minute Topics

This week's topic is: Fast Days

Asarah B'Tevet: Commemorating the Destruction of the Temple

Hebrew Date: Tenth of Tevet

Secular Dates: (5769) Jan 6, 2009 | (5770) Dec 27, 2009 | (5771) Dec 17, 2010

Duration: One day

Work: Permitted

Name: Asarah B'Tevet

Summary: Asarah B'Tevet is a Rabbinic fast day that occurs on 10 Tevet (in December or January) and is celebrated as a day-fast. It is a day of grief and mourning over the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem that led to the destruction of the Temple. It has become a day of mourning for those lost in the Shoah (Holocaust). It is a time of fasting, prayer, and self-reflection.

Fasting begins at dawn and ends at sundown. This is one of the public fast days (the others being Tzom Gedaliah, Shiva Asarah B'Tammuz, and the Taanit Esther). If Asarah B'Tevet falls on Shabbat, the fast is delayed. Eating and drinking are not permitted. Those in ill health, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children are exempt from the fast. In Israel, Kaddish (prayer for the dead) is said for those whose date or place of death is not known.

Shiva Asarah B'Tammuz: Commemorating the Tragedies

Hebrew Date: Seventeenth of Tammuz

Secular Dates: (5769) July 9, 2009 | (5770) June 29, 2010 | (5771) July 19, 2011

Duration: One day

Work: Permitted

Name: Shiva Asar B'Tammuz

Summary: Shiva Asar B'Tammuz (Fast of the 17th of Tammuz) is a Rabbinic fast day that occurs on 17 Tammuz (in June or July). The 17th of Tammuz is a day-fast commemorating the many tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people on this day. This day is celebrated by the fast, special prayers, and the beginning of the Three Weeks (the annual period of mourning over the destruction of the First and Second Temples).

Five tragedies (Taanit 26b) that have befallen the Jewish people on this date are:
Moses smashed the Tablets of the Covenant at Mount Sinai
Daily tamid (twice-daily sacrificial) offerings ceased
The walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans
Roman military leader Apostomus burned a Sefer Torah (Torah Scroll)
An idol was erected in the Holy Temple by King Menashe

Taanit Esther: Celebrating Queen Esther's Fast

Hebrew Date: Thirteenth of Adar

Secular Dates: (5769) Mar 9, 2009 | (5770) Feb 25, 2010 | (5771) Mar 17, 2011

Duration: One day

Work: Permitted

Name: Taanit Esther

Summary: Taanit (Fast of) Esther is a rabbinic fast day that occurs on 13 Adar-the day before Purim-(in February or March). It is a day-fast that commemorates the three-day fast of Esther, Mordechai, and all of Klal Yisrael as described in the book of Esther. It is celebrated by fasting, giving to the poor, prayer, and reading the Book of Esther (Megillah Esther).

Fasting begins at dawn and ends at sundown. This is one of the public fast days (the others being Tzom Gedaliah, Shiva Asarah B'Tammuz, and Asarah B'Tevet). If the Fast of Esther falls on Shabbat, the fast is observed the preceding Thursday. Eating and drinking are not permitted. Those in ill health, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children are exempt from the fast.

Tish B'Av: Commemorating the Holy Temple

Hebrew Date: Ninth of Ave

Secular Dates: (5769) July 30, 2009 | (5770) July 20, 2010 | (5771) Aug 9, 2011

Duration: One day

Work: Permitted through mid-day

Name: Tish B'Av

Summary: Tish B'Av is a rabbinic fast day that occurs on 9 Av (in July or August). This day is a day of fasting and commemorating the multiple tragedies that have occurred on this day, most

notably the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Tish B'Av primarily commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples, both of which were destroyed on the ninth of Av.

Tish B'Av is the culmination of a three week period of increasing mourning, beginning with the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, which commemorates the first breach in the walls of Jerusalem, before the First Temple was destroyed. During this three week period, weddings and other parties are not permitted, and people refrain from cutting their hair. From the first to the ninth of Av, it is customary to refrain from eating meat or drinking wine (except on Shabbat) and from wearing new clothing.

The restrictions on Tish B'Av include refraining from eating and drinking (even water); washing, bathing, shaving or wearing cosmetics; wearing leather shoes; engaging in sexual relations; and studying Torah. Work in the ordinary sense of the word is also restricted. Many of the traditional mourning practices are observed: people refrain from smiles, laughter and idle conversation, and sit on low stools. In synagogue, the book of Lamentations is read and mourning prayers are recited. The ark (cabinet where the Torah is kept) is draped in black.

Five tragedies (Taanit 26b) that have befallen the Jewish people on this date are:

Decree that the Hebrews would not enter Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel)

Destruction of the First Holy Temple

Destruction of the Second Holy Temple

Beitar was captured

Jerusalem was razed

Tzom Gedaliah: Commemorating Gedaliah Ben Achikam

Hebrew Date: Third of Tishri

Secular Dates: (5769) Oct 2, 2008 | (5770) Sept 21, 2009 | (5771) Sept 12, 2010

Duration: One day

Work: Permitted

Names: Tzom Gedaliah

Summary: Tzom Gedaliah, a minor holiday, is a Rabbinic fast day that occurs on 3 Tishri (in September or October). It is a day-fast that commemorates the assassination of Gedaliah Ben Achikam. It is celebrated by prayer and the reading of the Thirteen Divine Attributes which are found in Exodus 34:5-7.

Yom Kippur: Day of Atonement

Hebrew Date: Tenth of Tishri

Secular Dates: (5769) Oct 9, 2008 | (5770) Sept 28, 2009 | (5771) Sept 18, 2010

Duration: One day

Work: Not permitted

Name: Yom Kippur

Summary: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is a Biblical holiday that occurs on 10 Tishrei (in September or October). It is a day set aside to "afflict the soul," to atone for the sins of the past year. Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and G-d, not for sins against another person. To atone for sins against another person, you must first seek reconciliation with that person, righting the wrongs you committed against them. The holiday is instituted in Leviticus 23:27 No work can be performed on that day.

On Erev Yom Kippur (the night of 9 Tishri) the service is commonly known as Kol Nidre (all vows), named for the prayer that begins the service. In Kol Nidre we ask G-d to annul all personal vows we may make in the next year. It refers only to vows between the person making them and G-d.

Much of the day is spent in synagogue where the regular daily prayers are expanded. There is a special prayer book called the Machzor used for Yom Kippur. Services begin in mid-morning and continue through mid-afternoon. People then usually go home for an afternoon nap and return a couple of hours later for the afternoon and evening services, which continue until nightfall. The services end at nightfall, with the blowing of the tekiah gedolah, a long blast on the shofar.

Yom Kippur is a complete, 25-hour fast beginning before sunset on the evening before Yom Kippur and ending after nightfall on the day of Yom Kippur. The Talmud also specifies additional restrictions that include: washing and bathing, anointing one's body (with cosmetics, deodorants, etc.), wearing leather shoes, and engaging in sexual relations are all prohibited on Yom Kippur. It is customary to wear white on the holiday, which symbolizes purity and calls to mind the promise that our sins shall be made as white as snow. Some people wear a kittel, the white robe in which the man is married and the dead are buried.