

Asarah B'Tevet

Fasting on a Friday?

We will enter the coming Shabbat on empty stomachs.

It's interesting to note that we generally don't have fast days on Fridays. The reason for this is that we want to ensure we have the stamina and energy needed to properly prepare for Shabbat.

However, every good rule has an exception, and the exception in this case is the tenth of Tevet. On rare occasions, when it falls on a Friday, we fast on that Friday. And this is exactly what will happen this coming Friday. So, why is this the case?

In the book of Ezekiel, chapter 24, we are given details of the events that transpired on the 10th of Tevet. The prophet uses the term "Etzem Hayom Hazeh," meaning "in the midst of this day," which is the very same phrase used in the Torah in Parshat Acharei Mot to describe Yom Kippur.

Therefore, just as we always fast on Yom Kippur on the 10th of Tishrei, regardless of which day of the week it falls on, so too, we observe a fast on the 10th of Tevet.

One might wonder: why is Asarah B'Tevet, of all the fast days, elevated to such a position? Why must it be kept on the specific day?

The 10th of Tevet marks the day when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army laid siege to Jerusalem during the time of the First Temple. What followed was the destruction of the First Temple, and a series of catastrophes began to unfold.

The Second Temple was later built, but many tragedies continued, and eventually, the Second Temple was also destroyed, leading to our exile.

Asarah B'Tevet was the original cause—the first event that, had a domino effect, setting many other tragic events in motion.

Consider a river with polluted waters. The solution would not be to focus on cleaning the water downstream—that will only help temporarily. The real solution is to go upstream to address the root cause of the pollution.

Asarah B'Tevet calls upon us to reflect on the ways in which we, as a nation, sinned, leading to these catastrophic events.

And to this day, more than any other sin committed by our people, we recall Sinat Chinam—causeless hatred.

In my Drashot, Divrei Torah, and Shiurim, you may have noticed that I frequently speak about Jewish unity. This is the central message of Asarah B'Tevet. It is the root cause of many of the challenges we face as a Jewish nation to this very day.

We must never stop and never tire of emphasizing the importance of unity among our people. Indeed, by fasting this Friday, in such an uncharacteristic way, let us remember this root cause. Let's direct our focus toward ensuring Jewish unity, not just for today, but well into the future.

I wish you a Tzom Kal and Shabbat Shalom.