

## THURSDAY, 9 TEVES

### TODAY IN HISTORY

Chazal state that the 9th of Teves is one of the dates on which calamities befell our ancestors and it is appropriate to spend the day fasting. They also note, however, that there is no record of what these calamities were.<sup>99</sup> It has since been explained that *Ezra Hasofer* passed away on this date. The commentators to *Megillas Ta'anis* describe additional events. The Rebbe's explanation appears in *Sefer Hasichos* 5749.<sup>100</sup>

## THURSDAY NIGHT, EVE OF 10 TEVES

### A day of Rejoicing-to-be

The Rebbe often mentions that the preparations for Yud Shevat begin thirty days in advance, from the 10th of Teves.

### NIGHT UN-FAST

On the eve of the 10th of Teves 5752, the Rebbe explains that although the 10th of Teves begins at night (as is the case with all Jewish dates), the actual fast only begins at dawn. The lack of fasting on the eve of the 10th of Teves symbolizes the power that is granted at that time to reverse the negative events that the fast day commemorates. It is an auspicious time for *teshuvah* that will bring the Redemption and a night of opportunity to forever nullify the fast before it begins. The Rebbe pointed out that the night stretches for a number of hours, which offers ample time for *teshuvah*.

### STARTING THE FAST

As is the case with any fast that begins in the morning, we are permitted to eat throughout the night until dawn, provided that we had not gone to sleep in between. Dozing off temporarily is not considered going to sleep in this regard. You may also eat or drink if you stipulate before going to sleep that you intend to awaken before dawn. Someone who regularly rises from their sleep to drink at night, may do so tonight even without a stipulation

Nevertheless, from within a (halachic) half hour of dawn (*alos hashachar*) it is forbidden to eat a meal or wash for bread. It is permitted only to snack on fruits or vegetables, drink as much non-alcoholic beverages as you wish, or eat a quantity of *mezonos* the size of *kebeitzah* (the volume that would fit in two small matchboxes) but not more.

## FRIDAY, 10 TEVES

### Fast of Asarah B'Teves - A day of Rejoicing-to-be.

### TODAY IN HISTORY

The fast commemorates the date on which the king of Babylon laid siege to Yerushalayim.

<sup>99</sup>) *Megillas Ta'anis*, quoted in *Shulchan Aruch*

<sup>100</sup>) *Vayigash*, 9 Teves

“In one aspect at least, the fast of *Asarah B'Teves* even nowadays is more severe than other fasts: If it coincides with *erev Shabbos*, the fast must be completed all the way until nightfall (*tzeis hakochavim*). This is true even for those who prayed Maariv for Shabbos early, while it was still daytime. This ruling is upheld even according to those authorities that prohibit fasting on the other fast days that coincide with *erev Shabbos*, once Maariv has been recited.”<sup>101</sup>

“The *halachah* states that ‘regarding all of these four fasts, if they coincide with Shabbos they must be postponed.’ Nevertheless, *Asarah B'Teves* carries a stringency not found in the other three fasts, and that is because nowadays, it is the only one that is able to coincide with *erev Shabbos* (as it does this year). When it does, we must continue fasting until nightfall even if we recited Maariv for Shabbos while it was still daytime.”<sup>102</sup>

### WHO FASTS

All men (from the age of thirteen years) and women (from the age of twelve years) should refrain from eating and drinking from daybreak until nightfall. Those who wish to wake up early and eat before daybreak should have in mind to do so before retiring the night before. Pregnant or nursing women who have difficulty fasting, or people feeling ill, are exempt.

A bride and groom during *Sheva Brachos* are not exempt from fasting, nor a father whose son is circumcised that day. (At the ceremony, the wine is given to a young child to drink and the *seudah* is held when the fast is over.) Someone who is exempt from fasting for health reasons, should eat only what is required and not indulge for pleasure.

Dawn, the start of the fast, is at **5:48 am**.

### LAW OF REDEMPTION: FROM THE FIRST

All of the fast days (except Yom Kippur) will be canceled in the era of Moshiach. In fact, they will become “*Yomim tovim* and days of feasting and gladness.” This is further discussed in *Likkutei Sichos*, and the Rebbe draws particular relevance to the Fast of the 10th of Teves.<sup>103</sup>

The Rebbe explains that the events marked by the Fast of Teves were the start and eventual cause of the calamities commemorated by the remaining fasts. Therefore, when the Fast of Teves is transformed into a Yom Tov, all other fast days are consequently transformed along with it into “*Yomim tovim* and days of feasting and gladness.”<sup>104</sup>

**Tzedakah:** It is customary to increase *tzedakah* on fast days. According to

101) *Sichas Asarah B'Teves* 5749, in *Sefer Hasichos* p.136.

102) *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 25, p. 267, fn. 5

103) *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 15, p. 412. For the concept of holding a festive meal in the era of Redemption, see *Magen Avraham*, *Tisha B'Av*, 552:11 and *Sichas Beis d'Rosh Hashanah* 5752.

104) *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 25, p. 449

custom, a person should estimate the average cost of their daily meals and donate that amount to *tzedakah* on the eve of the fast.

### FASTING

We do not rinse our mouths on a fast day.

Someone who accidentally eats today is nevertheless obligated to complete the fast. In such a case, there is no obligation of compensation, meaning that there is no requirement to fast on a subsequent day. Nevertheless, they may choose to do so as an atonement for breaking a fast.

If you only ate a small amount of food accidentally (less than the size of *koseves*, a large date, eaten within the time frame of *bichdei achilas pras*, or about four minutes), or drank a small quantity of liquid (less than a *revi'is*, approximately 3 ounces), it is still considered fasting and the *Aneinu* prayer in the *Amidah* may be recited. If, however, these limits were exceeded, the *Aneinu* text should be amended to read: *Aneinu beyom tzom hata'anis zeh* (“Answer us on this fast day”), rather than *ta'aniseinu* (“our fasting”).

### SHACHARIS

In Shacharis (and later, at Minchah), the *chazzan* adds *Aneinu* in the *Amidah*, between the blessings of *go'el Yisrael* and *Refa'einu*.<sup>105</sup> If he omitted *Aneinu*, see the chart at the end of the booklet.

This is the order for Shacharis: *Tachanun*, *Selichos* (starting with *Ki im Hashem* and omitting *Ashamnu*), *Avinu Malkeinu* for fast days, *Va'anachnu lo neida* followed by *chatzi-Kaddish*. *Kel erech apayim* is not said. This is followed by the reading of the Torah. The *aliyos* are read from the section of *Vayechal Moshe*.

When a *chassan* is present for the prayers, or if a *bris* will be held, or the like, the custom practiced in 770<sup>106</sup> is for the congregation to proceed with *Selichos* but to omit *Viduy*, *Tachanun*, and *Avinu Malkeinu* from the prayers.<sup>107</sup>

### MINCHAH

It is preferable to daven Minchah earlier so that it does not run into *bein hashmoshos* (between sunset and nightfall), finishing before *shki'ah*. In addition to the fact that it is appropriate to daven Minchah before *shki'ah* every day, on a fast day and specifically Erev Shabbos, this is the correct thing to do. In the event

<sup>105</sup> If there are less than a minyan of fasters, see the Hebrew footnote regarding if and how the *chazzan* should recite *Aneinu*.

<sup>106</sup> Over the years, the Rebbe issued varying directives to various individuals regarding this matter, which makes the topic too lengthy to analyze here. The current practice is as we have described.

<sup>107</sup> There is no interference with the order of the *Selichos* itself; the congregation begins with *Selach lanu*, and also recites the *viduy* part of *Selichos* (*Ashamnu*) as usual. It is only the *Tachanun*, etc., that are recited as part of Shacharis that are skipped on such an occasion—and this concession is sufficient recognition of the *chassan's* presence, or of the *bris* that will take place.

that someone does daven late, he may still conduct *Krias Hatorah* and *Maftir* even once it has reached *bein hashmoshos*.

During Minchah, each individual recites *Aneinu* in *Shema Koleinu*. If you forgot to recite it, see the chart at the end of the booklet.

The *chazzan*, when repeating the *Amidah* out loud, recites the *Aneinu* prayer before beginning the paragraph of *Refa'einu*.

The *chazzan* recites *Birchas Kohanim* in his repetition of the *Amidah* (as he usually does during Shacharis).

This is the order for Minchah: *Hodu, Pasach Eliyahu* (this year), *Korbanos*, then *Ashrei* followed by *chatzi-Kaddish*. The reading of the Torah (*Vayechal*) and the *Haftorah* of *Dirshu Hashem* follow. Next, *Yehalelu* followed by *chatzi-Kaddish* and the *Amidah* with the addition of *Aneinu; Kaddish tiskabel. Aleinu* followed by *Kaddish Yasom* and then *Al tira* and *Ach tzadikim*. If an *avel* is present, he recites *Mishnayos* followed by *Kaddish D'rabbanan*.

This year, neither *Tachanun* nor *Avinu Malkeinu* for fast days are recited during Minchah.

After Minchah, it is customary to listen to *divrei kivushin*—a speech urging self-improvement and further advancement in the service of Hashem. This is done today, despite it being *erev Shabbos*.<sup>108</sup>

### Rebuking with Joy?

In 5744, the Rebbe says: “We have repeatedly discussed the *minhag Yisrael* of delivering *divrei kevushin* (an address that motivates its audience to self-improve) following the Minchah service on fast days... to inspire people to *teshuvah*. However, when the fast of *Asarah B'Teves* coincides with *erev Shabbos*, there is room to debate whether this custom should be implemented:

“Firstly, on the afternoon of *erev Shabbos*, people are extremely preoccupied with their Shabbos preparations. According to Torah, we should **run** to ensure that all of the Shabbos preparations are completed in time... Seemingly, there is simply no time to stop and listen to *divrei kevushin*. Secondly, we are not permitted to experience sadness on Shabbos. It is obvious that we cannot **enter** Shabbos in a morose frame of mind either. And even before the entry of Shabbos, we are to engage in our Shabbos preparations joyfully.

“Now, as far as the actual fast is concerned, we have an **obligation** to fast—as recorded in the *Shulchan Aruch*. This must be observed all the way until the end of the day, despite the fact that *Asarah B'Teves* coincides with *erev Shabbos*. By contrast, the delivery of *divrei kevushin* is merely a *minhag* (custom). There is room to question whether this practice remains relevant when the fast coincides with *erev Shabbos*.

“It is also worth noting that it is extremely rare for one the four fasts to coincide

108) see *Sichas Asarah B'Teves* 5744

with *erev Shabbos*... which could lead us to conclude that the force of the *minhag* is removed by the rarity of the circumstance ... in accordance with the principle that the force of a *minhag* does not apply to an uncommon case.

“That said, there is a simple solution to maintaining the *minhag* even when *Asarah B'Teves* coincides with *erev Shabbos*, as we will explain: The main theme of a fast day is that it is *yom ratzon laHashem*, a day of special Divine favor ... Naturally, an occasion of Divine favor is a happy experience. Furthermore, the point of fasting is to engage in “one of the methods of *teshuvah*” ... and the *perfection of teshuvah* is *teshuvah ila’ah*, “higher *teshuvah*,” which is conducted specifically with great joy. Accordingly, an address that focuses on the theme of the fast day, *divrei kevushin*, can be devoted to joyful matters, to the idea that it is a time of special Divine favor, to *teshuvah ila’ah* that must be performed with tremendous happiness, and similar concepts. In this way, the address will not contradict our obligation to avoid sadness on Shabbos.

“Furthermore, even the concept of affliction associated with abstaining from food and drink, along with the part of *divrei kevushin* that calls for *mussar*, rebuke for inappropriate matters—both of which are not happy experiences—are reframed as **preparations** for the complete joy of Shabbos. This can be understood in light of the teaching in *Igeres Hakodesh*,<sup>109</sup> that as a preparation and preface to *teshuvah ila’ah*, we must first experience *teshuvah tata’ah*, the lower (ordinary) form of *teshuvah*. The regular *teshuvah* completes and amplifies the joy of *teshuvah ila’ah*... Consequently, even literal *divrei kevushin*, meaning words of *mussar* and the like, remain relevant today—as a preparation for Shabbos, for they allow us to arrive at the superior experience of *teshuvah ila’ah* on Shabbos itself.”<sup>110</sup>

## LAW OF REDEMPTION: MAFTIR FOR MOSHIACH

“Today may be the day Moshiach arrives,” the Rebbe said on a fast day.<sup>111</sup> “In that case we won’t be saying the fast-day liturgy in Minchah, but adding happy remarks, for in the middle of the brachah of *Shema Koleinu* we are permitted to add any personal *tefillos*.”

During that same *sichah*, the Rebbe added, “When Moshiach comes today, we will reserve the Minchah *aliyah* for him.”<sup>112</sup>

**Traveling:** Someone who travels to a different time zone during the fast continues to fast until nightfall (*tzeis hakochovim*) in the place that they are at that time.

## EREV SHABBOS PREP

Those who are scrupulous to avoid showering or bathing on a fast day should not

109) ch. 10

110) *Sichas Asarah B'Teves* 5744

111) 18 Tammuz (17 Tammuz *Nidcheh*), 5751

112) And not Shacharis? Perhaps the Rebbe spoke thus because it was Minchah time. And would we still read the Torah at Minchah if we are no longer fasting? See Hebrew footnotes for a comprehensive discussion on these topics.

follow this stringency today; they should wash themselves in honor of Shabbos. Nor should one be stringent to avoid cutting hair or nails, or laundering clothes.

If it is necessary to taste the food that is being readied for Shabbos for the sake of accurate preparation, one may rely on those authorities that permit tasting a small quantity and then spitting it out.

Someone who feels the need may be lenient and brush their teeth just before Shabbos, in honor of Shabbos. Be careful with the angle of your head, so as not to swallow even a small amount of water if gargling.

Today we recite *shnayim mikra v'echad targum* for *Parshas Vayigash*.

Check your pockets on *erev Shabbos* before the onset of Shabbos. This is especially important for those who wore the same Shabbos-Yom Tov clothing earlier this week in honor of Hei Teves.

**Early Shabbos:** Those who accept Shabbos early, before its official starting time, must be careful to avoid lighting Shabbos candles before *plag haminchah* (in Brooklyn, **3:35 pm**). Regardless of when they accept Shabbos, they must continue fasting until nightfall (*tzeis hakochavim*, which is **5:03 pm**). At that point, they must recite *Shema* (since the obligation of the nighttime *Shema* has begun), and only then recite *Kiddush* and eat.

Candle lighting is at **4:14 pm**.

The fast ends at **5:03 pm**.<sup>113</sup>

## FRIDAY NIGHT, SHABBOS PARSHAS VAYIGASH, 11 TEVES

The fast must be continued until nightfall (*tzeis hakochavim*).

### MAARIV & KIDDUSH

We make a point of reciting *Kabbalas Shabbos* and Maariv as soon as the appropriate time arrives, without delaying it further. There should be sufficient time to conclude and recite *Kiddush* before the seventh hour (in Brooklyn, this is 5:56–6:56 pm).

Remember to avoid tasting anything before *Kiddush*.

Those for whom, for whatever reason, it is impossible to wait until after Maariv to break their fast may recite *Kiddush* immediately after nightfall (*tzeis hakochavim*). In such a case, they may not eat more than the amount of a *kebeitzah* of *mezonos* before praying Maariv. Alternatively, they may arrange for someone to remind them later of their obligation to recite *kri'as shema* and daven Maariv.

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<sup>113</sup> There are various methods of calculating the time of nightfall (called *tzeis hakochavim*, when three stars are observable). Following the Alter Rebbe's opinion to account for "smaller stars" we generally wait some minutes after this time to say the nighttime *Shema*. But for the purpose of the fast, you may daven earlier, and then repeat the *Shema* sometime later.

Those who do not wish to drink wine tonight should either compel themselves to drink it nonetheless for the sake of *Kiddush*, or listen to someone else reciting *Kiddush* and fulfill their obligation that way. But they should not recite the nighttime *Kiddush* over *challah*, nor should they use an alternative beverage to wine.

If the above options are not possible—for example, if a woman cannot wait for her husband's return from *shul* to break her fast but cannot drink the wine herself—and if grape juice is also not a possible alternative, they should recite *Kiddush* over bread and not employ an alternative beverage to wine or grape juice.

As mentioned in the entry for Shabbos, Chof Kislev, you must eat immediately after *Kiddush* at the location where it was recited, for *Kiddush* is only halachically binding *b'makom seudah*. This entails eating at least a *kezayis* of *Hamotzi* or *Mezonos*,<sup>114</sup> or by drinking a full *revi'is* of wine in addition to what was drunk for *Kiddush*. (*B'dieved*, you are *yotzeh* even if you drank just one *revi'is* of wine for *Kiddush*.)

Someone who desires to drink water immediately following *Kiddush*, before washing for *challah* (or eating *mezonos*), must be careful to drink less than a *revi'is* of water.

**Krias Hatorah:** The Rebbe states that “according to Jewish custom (which becomes part of the Torah), the third Torah portion ends with the verse ‘And they told him all of Yosef’s words ... and the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived.’<sup>115</sup> (According to alternative custom, this is the end of the fourth portion.)”<sup>116</sup> The significance of this is explained there at length, and this is indeed the practice in 770.

## MOTZOEI SHABBOS, EVE OF 12 TEVES

**Shabbos ends at 5:19 pm.**

Following Maariv, anyone who has not recited *Kiddush Levanah* this month should do so tonight while wearing fine clothes (or while still dressed in his Shabbos clothes).

## NITTEL NACHT - SUNDAY NIGHT, EVE OF 13 TEVES

The Rebbe notes that *Nittel Nacht* occurs often during or in proximity to the days of Chanukah.<sup>117</sup>

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114) See footnote for Chof Kislev regarding the dispensation to delay the meal and eat *mezonos* now instead.

115) 45:27

116) *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 30, p. 224

117) *Sefer Hasichos, Shabbos Parshas Vayeishev* 5750

### CUSTOMS FOR NITTUL

Be sure to complete daily study of *Chitas* and Rambam before sunset.

If you didn't manage to complete the learning before sunset, it should be done after midnight.

Regarding the deferment of marital relations on *Nittel*, see the footnote.<sup>118</sup>

### WHAT IS NITTEL?

The name *nittel* alludes to an absence, a euphemism for birth. Some suggest it is related to the word *nitleh* and *taluy*, “the hanged one”, a reference to *oso ha'ish*, the individual who is the focus of worship in the *notzri* religion. The date officially marks the birth of that man. As such, the term *nittel* can be related to the Latin *natal*, “birth.”

It is an ancient Jewish practice (which thereby becomes a venerated part of Torah) and it is also the Chabad custom, to refrain from studying Torah on *Nittel Nacht*, from sunset until halachic midnight. The reason is “to avoid adding vitality to the forces of impurity.” Other reasons, offered by great Torah sages, are recorded in the books that explain the reasons for *minhagim*. The Rebbe mentions these in *Igros Kodesh* and *Likkutei Sichos*.<sup>119</sup> In other sources, it is explained that the phrase “to avoid adding vitality to *kelipos*” is directed at “that man” who was deified by the non-Jews as well as those who presently follow his path. See the above *Igros Kodesh* to understand how it is possible for Torah study to produce negative results.

### WHEN IS NITTEL?

The timing of *Nittel Nacht* does not follow the Jewish dates, but rather, the secular calendar. The date must be determined by the observance of the local non-Jewish population. The Jews of each country observe this custom on the eve of *yom eidam* (lit. the day of their calamity, used as a metonymy for “festival”) as it is celebrated by the non-Jews of their country. In the United States, this sets the date as December 25th. In a location with variances in the dates for the non-Jewish *yom eidam*, *Nittel Nacht* is observed on the date that the majority of the local non-Jews celebrate.<sup>120</sup>

The willful avoidance of Torah study is a surprising and unprecedented concept. It must not be extended beyond the strict duration set by Jewish custom just one night, until midnight.

### THE REBBEIM & NITTEL

Regarding the conduct of the Rebbe Rashab on *Nittel Nacht* and the implied

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118) This topic is discussed in *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 12 p. 424. If it is *mikvah* night, it is better to wait until after *chatzos* (halachic midnight).

119) *Igros Kodesh* vol. 14, p. 351; *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 15, p. 554

120) See footnotes to *Sefer Hasichos* 5750, vol. 1, p. 192



directive, see *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayeishev* 5750: “From this we derive a directive as well as an infusion of ability to utilize the duration of *Nittel*, not to waste our time, G-d forbid (simply in order to avoid adding vitality to *kelipos*), but rather for a practical benefit. It is especially appropriate to use this time for matters that lead to increased wisdom ... or to increase in acts of *tzedakah* and *chesed*, or to take care of the home, and the like.”<sup>121</sup>

In his notes from the winter of 5695, recorded in Vienna, the Rebbe relates that the Rebbe Rashab would also refrain from studying *Chassidus* on *Nittel Nacht*, even in a cursory manner. When *Nittel* coincided with the eve of Shabbos, he would defer the delivering of his customary *maamar* to Shabbos morning instead.<sup>122</sup>

Despite the general ban on Torah learning, a mourner recites the usual Mishnayos.

## FRIDAY, 17 TEVES

Today we recite *shnayim mikra v'echad targum* for *Parshas Vayeichi*.

Candle lighting is at **4:18 pm**.

## SHABBOS PARSHAS VAYECHI, 18 TEVES

### Shabbos Chazak

During today's Torah reading, it is customary to rise for the reading of the final verse in the book of Bereishis, after which the entire congregation (men, women, and children) shouts loudly and joyfully—*Chazak, chazak, venischazeik!* This call symbolizes the strength of the Jewish people in all matters of Torah—with the additional strength of a *chazakah*.

The one who is called to the Torah for the seventh *aliyah* should join the rest of the congregation in proclaiming *Chazak*. This is not considered an interruption in the reading, because it is considered part of the final verse's reading process.

### FARBRENGEN & HACHLATAH

It is customary for the *gabbaim* to organize a special *farbrengen* on this Shabbos, beyond the ordinary Shabbos *farbrengen*. They should use this opportunity to discuss and encourage strengthening of all aspects of Torah and mitzvos.

On this Shabbos, it is customary to increase in *divrei Torah* and to rejoice at having completed an entire *sefer*, and to make resolutions to increase in Torah study and to keep the mitzvos in the best possible way.

<sup>121</sup>) Printed in *Sefer Hasichos*. See further in the original *sichah*.

<sup>122</sup>) For more on this topic, see *Heichal Menachem*, p. 268. However, refer to the *reshimah* of Chof Kislev 5693. Also take note of a short *sichah* delivered on *Leil Gimmel D'Chanukah* 5750.

Regarding the *mitzvah* of a *mikveh* night that coincides with *nittel*, see *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 12, p. 424.