

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY
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SHIUR #14: THE UNIQUE STATUS OF TA'ANIT ESTER

Generally, when a fast day occurs on Shabbat, we delay its observance until the following Sunday. This scenario is familiar primarily regarding Shiva Asar Be-Tammuz and Tisha Be-Av, which each may occur on Shabbat. However, when Ta'anit Ester – the 13th of Adar - coincides with Shabbat, it is prescheduled on the proximate Thursday. The Rav zt"l suggested that Ta'anit Ester is fundamentally different than the four others fasts: Asara Be-Tevet, Shiva Asar Be-Tammuz, Tzom Gedalya and Tisha B-Av. These classic fasts commemorate tragic national calamities which relate to the destruction of the Beit Ha-mikdash. Since they recall disasters, their commemoration cannot be prescheduled, in light of the concept that "we do not accelerate tragic commemorations" ("akdumei puranuta lo makdaminan" – see Megilla 5a). Unlike these fast days, Ta'anit Ester demands that we undergo the 'complete' Purim experience, including the fast days proclaimed in response to the national threat. Specifically, the unique demand of *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing the miracle) obligates us to publicize Hashem's receptivity to our fervent prayers as the source of our rescue. As Haman's threat was removed, Ta'anit Ester is not a day of sadness, but rather a prelude to the great joy which Purim invokes. As it commemorates no tragedy, it can be rescheduled to Thursday (see especially the She'iltot to Parashat Vayakhel siman 20).

There are several additional indicators that Ta'anit Ester is, indeed, a unique ta'anit. Firstly, the pasuk itself appears to address the ta'anit as part of the Purim celebration when it describes the Jewish people as accepting the Purim traditions "as they accepted the days of fasting" ("ka'asher kiyemu al nafsham ve-al zar'am divrei ha-tzomot ve-za'akatam" – 9:31). In fact, the Ra'avad cited this pasuk as part of his answer to a famous question about the validity of fasting at all on the 13th of Adar. Purim itself - aside from its status as a chag - also belongs/belonged to the series of national holidays enshrined in Megillat Ta'anit. These days commemorated significant national events – on a much smaller scale than Purim and Chanukah. To commemorate these secondary but important events, no fasts or eulogies could be

held on any of these national holidays. To lend these moments greater austerity, fasts and eulogies were prohibited also on the day prior and subsequent to these holidays. Consequently, the day before Purim (the 13th) should be a day on which a fast cannot be proclaimed, and Ta'anit Ester thus appears illegal! The Ra'avad responded that the fast of the 13th of Adar differs from ordinary fast days in that it serves to commemorate the miracle and is alluded to in the (aforementioned) pasuk - "divrei ha-tzomot ve-za'akatam."

In fact, the scheduling of Ta'anit Ester suggests its nature as an integral component of the Purim festivities. Historically, the drama surrounding the entrapment of Haman – prefaced by three days of fasting - occurred during Nissan. If the fasts were commemorative of that potential tragedy, they should occur during Nissan. Shiva Asar Be-Tammuz, for example, commemorates that calamity by fasting on the day during which those actual events occurred. The scheduling of Ta'anit Ester during Adar, immediately prior to Purim, implies its essence: to recreate a complete Purim exhilaration. The relief of Purim's miracle can only be appreciated by a prior simulation of the tension and fasts which were so pivotal to the miracle itself.

In fact, one might question the exact texture of the fast based on the above stated deviances. The Rambam (Hilkhos Ta'anios 1:14) asserts that a fast day should be experienced without personal luxury, frivolity, or excess joy; a person should express on fast days feelings of anxiety and lament ("do'eg ve-onen"). Is such a mentality necessary or even appropriate for Ta'anit Ester? If indeed this fast launches the Purim festivities, then the halakha mentioned by the Rambam would not apply to Ta'anit Ester. Interestingly, the Rema rules (Orach Chayim siman 686) that Ta'anit Ester is the most lenient of all fasts and can be suspended for those who experience excessive discomfort. Would this be reflective of Ta'anit Ester's extraordinary status? Had it been commemorative of a national tragedy, we might have been less willing to exhibit leniency for sufferers. Since it participates in the Purim celebration, it might be waived in cases of particular discomfort.

The Rav zt"l posed an additional question which clearly stems from the previous one. The Rambam claims (Hilkhos Ta'anios 5:9) that the fasts will be abolished during the Messianic era; the tragedies which they represent will no longer be commemorated during the era of final redemption. Will Ta'anit Ester face a similar fate, or will it be retained? A different comment by the Rambam, in Hilkhos Megilla (2:18), asserts that "even though the memory of the tragedies will fade, the DAYS of Purim will not be rescinded...." When the Rambam mentioned the DAYS of Purim, might he be including Ta'anit Ester as part of this experience, sparing it the fate of the

classic fast days in the Messianic era? The Brisker Rav did, in fact, suggest this reading of the Rambam, further confirming our view of Ta'anit Ester as integral to the celebration of Purim itself.

An interesting teshuva in the Geonim, however, might call this view into question. An opinion is cited demanding that we fast on the 13th of Adar during Adar I of a leap year. Even though Purim will not be celebrated during Adar I, this position maintained, the fast is still held. Would this not indicate that the fast is NOT integral to the celebration of Purim – as it is held during a month in which Purim celebration does not occur? Of course, this position must be inspected in light of the general status of Adar I during a leap year. Is it truly a month entirely bereft of Purim celebrations, or are some Purim aspects allocated to it as well? (The Ran cites an opinion requiring that we actually conduct a Purim se'uda on the 14th of Adar I.)

This view of Ta'anit Ester might explain an intriguing gemara in Megilla (2a). Attempting to justify the multiple options for reading the Megilla (in certain circumstances the megilla is read as early as the 11th of Adar), the gemara cites the word 'bi-zmaneiheim' ('during their periods'), which suggests multiple dates of reading. Recognizing that this phrase adds at least two additional options to the base options of the 14th (for regular cities) and 15th (for walled cities), the gemara questions that perhaps only the 13th and 12th should be added. How, then, may we justify reading the megilla as early as the 11th? The gemara responds that the 13th does not require a source to warrant Megilla reading, since it is "zeman kehilla la-kol" - a day of public gathering. Though Rashi offers a dissenting opinion, most Rishonim interpret this concept as Rabenu Tam did: since everyone gathers on the 13th of Adar for the ta'anit, it is an appropriate day for Megilla reading, even without an overt textual precedent. At first glance, we might question the nature of this self-evident warrant. The fact that people gather to conduct a fast does not necessarily mandate Megilla reading without textual license. But if, as stated earlier, we view the ta'anit as an incorporated element of the Purim festivities, or, as we suggested in the Rambam, as part of 'yemei ha-Purim' – the days of Purim, we can easily understand Rabenu Tam's argument. Viewing Ta'anit Ester as part of the Purim process, we do not require an additional pasuk to mandate possible Megilla reading on this day.