

TA'ANIT TZEDEK: JEWISH FAST FOR GAZA

www.fastforgaza.net

The ritual which follows draws upon Mishnah Ta'anit, which describes a service for calling for a communal fast and is based upon a service created by Rabbi Arthur Waskow and Lee Moore of the Shalom Center (www.shalomctr.org). Please feel free to incorporate whichever elements of the ritual that appeal to you.

A few words about fasting:

The Rambam teaches that all fasts assist in the holy process of *t'shuvah* — repentance, which literally means, “turning.” By turning away from feeding our bodies as we do on most days, we more easily open our hearts to compassion, our minds to wisdom, and our hands to acts of peace. There are many ways to fast if you are able to and choose to do so. Your fast may be as strict as refraining from all food from sunrise to sunset, to abstaining from particular foods or skipping one meal on the fast day. The money you save on food can be given to Tzedakah. We suggest the [Milk for Preschoolers Campaign of the American Near Eastern Refugee Aid \(ANERA\)](#), an important relief campaign combating malnutrition among Gazan preschool children through daily provisions of fortified milk and high energy biscuits.

JUDAISM has an ancient tradition of calling for communal fasts in times of impending disaster such as drought, plague, famine, and war. Today we face a crisis that calls us to renew the tradition of calling for a public fast. The Israeli blockade of Gaza, which is responsible for an ongoing and under-reported humanitarian crisis, has continued to impact the lives of Palestinians through restricting the import of food, fuel and other essential goods and services. The situation facing Palestinians in Gaza right now is a crisis of conscience for people of all faith traditions. A minyan of rabbis has convened us here today, in the city of _____, to join with people of all backgrounds to reclaim Judaism's tradition of justice through this fasting ritual. “Ta'anit Tzedek,” a fast for justice, is a public call to all those who support peace to undertake a monthly fast in expression of the following commitments:

1. To call for a lifting of the blockade that prevents the entry of civilian goods and services into Gaza;
2. To provide humanitarian and developmental aid to the people of Gaza;
3. To call upon Israel, the US, and the international community to engage in negotiations without pre-conditions with all relevant Palestinian parties - including Hamas - in order to end the blockade;
4. To encourage the American government to vigorously engage both Israelis and Palestinians toward a just and peaceful settlement of the conflict.

THE ARK is brought out into an open, communal space, as described by the Mishnah, when a community is called upon to undertake a day of fasting. Wood ashes are strewn upon the ark and upon the heads of the secular and religious leaders, as well as everyone who is present, as a symbol of distress, as it says in Psalm 91:15, “Imo anochi b’tzarah,” “I, Adonai, am with them in distress.”

[Pause to allow people to place ashes upon their heads, skipping anyone who prefers not to do so. If the community has not brought an Ark outdoors, ashes may be strewn on the Torah cover or on a cloth surrounding it.]

An elder of the community reads:

As our sages have taught, "Lo sak v'ta'anit gormim, ela t'shuvah uma'asim tovim gormim." — It is not sackcloth or fasting that enables our prayers to be answered, but rather repentance and acts of goodness (BT Ta'anit 16a). We gather to acknowledge our stake in the just livelihood of our brothers and sisters in Gaza. We gather to commit ourselves to the lifting of the blockade of civilian goods and in an effort to ensure that sufficient food, milk, fuel, and other essential goods reach the people living there. In the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, we remind ourselves that “morally speaking there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings” and that “in regard to cruelties committed in the name of a free society, some are guilty, all are responsible.”

[The next section of the service includes two shofar blasts, one for the “Zichronot” section and one for the “Shofarot” section. A period of silent prayer or meditation can be added between the shofar blasts.]

THE SHOFAR is sounded, according to the Torah, when a calamity befalls the community of Israel. It is a sound of alarm, a cry of awakening, and a signal calling us to repentance and responsibility. As the Prophet Isaiah says, “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a shofar, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.”

זכרונות/Remembrances

When we blow the shofar for Zichronot, we call upon the memory of our ancestors in Egypt whose suffering was disregarded for so many years until God remembered and redeemed them. We ask ourselves to remember those whom we have forgotten. In what ways have we forgotten the humanity of others? In what ways have we inadvertently or deliberately averted our attention to the suffering of the people in Gaza. Take a moment to reflect either privately or aloud: What and whom have you forgotten?

A leader of the ritual recites:

מי שענה את אבותינו ואת אמותנו על ים סוף הוא יענה אותנו וישמע קול
צעקתנו היום הזה. ברוך אתה ה' זוכר הנשכחות.

May God who answered our ancestors at the Sea of Reeds answer us and hearken to the sound of our call today. Blessed are you, Adonai, who remembers the forgotten.

[Blow the shofar — Tekiah, Shevarim, Teruah, Tekiah]

[silent prayer/reflection]

שופרות/Shofarot

We blow the shofar to awaken ourselves and our leaders to the transformative possibilities of peace. For as we are taught, "All you who dwell upon the planet and live throughout the earth shall see when the banner is lifted on the mountain, shall hear the Shofar when it is sounded forth." (Isaiah 18:3).

אתה שומע קול שופר ואתה עונה את צעקתו. אין כמותך ה'. ברוך אתה ה' שומע בקול
שופר.

For You hear the sound of the shofar and You heed its call. There is none like You. Blessed are You, Adonai, who in compassion hears the shofar sounding of Your people.

[Blow the shofar - Tekiah, Shevarim, Teruah, Tekiah Gedolah]

PSALMS are traditionally included in the service for a fast day, according to Mishnah Ta'anit. In this service we draw from the traditional list of psalms described in the Mishnah (Psalms 120, 121, 130 and 102) and include additional words from the Hebrew Prophets and a selection from contemporary poetry.

Psalm 121

שִׁיר לַמַּעְלוֹת אֲשֶׁא עֵינַי אֶל־הַהָרִים מֵאֵין יבֹא עֲזָרִי:
עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:
אֶל־יִתֵּן לַמוֹט רַגְלִי אֶל־יְנוּם שְׁמֶרְךָ:
הֲיֵה לֹא יְנוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל:
יְהוָה שְׁמֶרְךָ יְהוָה צִלְךָ עַל־יַד יְמִינֶךָ:
יוֹמָם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לֹא־יִכָּפֵה וַיָּרַח בַּלַּיְלָה:
יְהוָה יִשְׁמְרֶךָ מִכָּל־רָע יִשְׁמַר אֶת־נַפְשְׁךָ:
יְהוָה יִשְׁמַר־צִאתְךָ וּבֹאְךָ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם

Song:

Esa Einai, el ha-harim

Mei-ai'yin, mei-ai'yin yavo ezri?

Esa Einai, el ha-harim

Mei-ai'yin, mei-ai'yin yavo ezri?

Ezri me-im Adonai oseh shamayim v'aretz

(x2)

I lift up my eyes unto the mountain
From where, from where will my help
come?

I lift up my eyes unto the mountain
From where, from where will my help
come?

My help will come-come from the One,
Maker of the heavens and the earth.
My help will come-come from the One,
Maker of the heavens and the earth.

Psalm 130

שִׁיר הַמַּעְלוֹת מִמַּעַמְקִים קָרָאתִיךָ יְהוָה:
אֲדַנִּי שְׁמַעַה בְּקוֹלִי תַהֲיִינָה אֲזַנֶּיךָ קְשׁוּבוֹת לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי:
אִם־עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמְרֵיָה אֲדַנִּי מִי יַעֲמֵד:
כִּי־עַמְךָ הִסְלִיחָה לְמַעַן תִּגְרָא:
קִוִּיתִי יְהוָה קִוְיָתָה נַפְשִׁי וְלִדְבָרוֹ הוֹחֵלְתִי:
נַפְשִׁי לֹא־דַנִּי מִשְׁמָרִים לְבַקֵּר שְׁמָרִים לְבַקֵּר:
יַחַל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה כִּי־עַם־יְהוָה הִחֲסֵד וְהַרְבֵּה עַמּוֹ פְּדוֹת:
וְהוּא יַפְדֶּה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל עֲוֹנֹתָיו:

From the depths have I called You, O
Eternal.
YHWH, hear my voice.
May your ears attend to the sound of my
pleas.
For if you were to keep track of all
misdeeds,
Oh God, who could breathe?
Yet with You comes forgiveness
That fills us with awe.
In You I place my hope,

With every breath I place my hope in You,
And for Your word I yearn.
My every breath awaits You,
More than watchmen wait for the dawn —
Yes, more than watchmen yearn for dawn.
You who wrestle God, take hope in YHWH!
For with the Source of Life is loving-
kindness
And many forms of freedom —
For the Breath of Life will free us from all
our unjust acts.

Reading from the Prophets - Isaiah 56

What is the fast that I demand of you? —
What is a day that truly presses down your
ego?
Is it bending down your head like a bulrush?
Sitting on sack-cloth and ashes?
No!
This is the fast that I have chosen:
Break the handcuffs put on by wicked
power;

Undo the yoke of heavy burden;
Let the oppressed go free.
Share your bread with the hungry;
Bring the homeless to your own house.
When you see the naked, clothe them;
Don't hide yourself; they are your flesh and
blood!

Selections from "Under Siege" by Mahmoud Darwish

Translated by Marjolijn De Jager

Here on the slopes of hills, facing the dusk
and the cannon of time
Close to the gardens of broken shadows,
We do what prisoners do,
And what the jobless do:
We cultivate hope.

A country preparing for dawn. We grow less
intelligent

For we closely watch the hour of victory:
No night in our night lit up by the shelling
Our enemies are watchful and light the light
for us
In the darkness of cellars.
Here there is no "I".
Here Adam remembers the dust of his clay.

On the verge of death, he says:
I have no trace left to lose:

(continue above)

Free I am so close to my liberty. My future
lies in my own hand.
Soon I shall penetrate my life,
I shall be born free and parentless,
And as my name I shall choose azure letters
(...)

You who stand in the doorway, come in,
Drink Arabic coffee with us
And you will sense that you are men like us
You who stand in the doorways of houses
Come out of our morning times,
We shall feel reassured to be
Men like you!

When the planes disappear, the white,
white doves
Fly off and wash the cheeks of heaven
With unbound wings taking radiance back
again, taking possession
Of the ether and of play. Higher, higher still,
the white, white doves
Fly off. Ah, if only the sky
Were real [a man passing between two
bombs said to me] (...)

The siege is a waiting period
Waiting on the tilted ladder in the middle of
the storm.

Alone, we are alone as far down as the
sediment
Were it not for the visits of the rainbows.

We have brothers behind this expanse.
Excellent brothers. They love us. They
watch us and weep.
Then, in secret, they tell each other:
"Ah! if this siege had been declared..." They
do not finish their sentence:
"Don't abandon us, don't leave us." (...)
Our cups of coffee. Birds green trees
In the blue shade, the sun gambols from
one wall
To another like a gazelle
The water in the clouds has the unlimited
shape of what is left to us
Of the sky. And other things of suspended
memories
Reveal that this morning is powerful and
splendid,
And that we are the guests of eternity.

Declaring the Fast for Gaza

We call upon our community to undertake a communal fast from dawn to dusk every third
Thursday of the month with the goal of ending the blockade of Gaza. On these days we commit
ourselves to thoughtful speech and action in response to the suffering of Palestinians, with the
aim of bringing about a just and peaceful settlement to the conflict in Gaza.

To join ... fastforgaza.net.

*Very special thanks to Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center and Lee Moore, who created
the original version of this fasting ritual during the onset of the war in Iraq. This ritual, authored
by Rabbi Jarah Greenfield, is based heavily upon their incredible work.*