

Yom Kippur: A Hunger Text Study Guide
Fasting to Understand Hunger
www.rac.org/holidayguides

Yom Kippur is the most well-known of the Jewish fast days. We willingly deny ourselves sustenance in order to be drawn closer to God and also to help us recognize the pain of those suffering hunger throughout the year. We turn our thoughts and our actions to the millions of people around the world who cry out daily in hunger.

We encourage you to use the High Holy Day Hunger Fact Sheet (see www.rac.org/holidayguides) as well as the following texts and discussion questions to engage in dialogue about hunger on Yom Kippur:

Texts 1 and 2: Self-denial

And this shall be to you a law for all time: in the seventh month on the tenth day of the month, you shall practice self-denial; and you shall do no manner of work, neither the citizen nor the stranger who resides among you. - **Leviticus 16:29**

בְּחִנּוּשׁ: עוֹלָם לְחַקָּת, לְכָם וְהַיִתָּה
אֵת תְּעַנוּ לְחִנּוּשׁ בְּעֶשֶׂר הַשְׁבִּיעִי
—מְעַשּׂוֹ לֹא מַלְאָכָה-וְכָל, גַּפְשְׁתִּיכְמָם
בְּתוֹכְכֶם הַגָּר וְהַגָּר, הַאֲזָרָה

1. What does self-denial feel like to you?
2. Given that the reason behind this self-denial is never specified in the Bible or the Mishnah, what purpose does this self-denial serve? Does it make you feel closer to God? How does it affect how you feel about the needy?

On Yom Kippur eating, drinking, washing, anointing, putting on sandals and marital relations are forbidden.
-Mishnah Yomah 8:1

ובשתיה באכילה אסור הכהורות יומ
הסנדל ובנעילת, ובסיכה וברחיצה
המיטה וบทشمיש

1. Why do you think the Mishnah chooses these six things to list in its interpretation of self-denial? Would you add any? Subtract any?

Text 3 & 4: The Fast I Desire

Is such the fast I desire, a day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, a day when the Eternal is favorable? No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke.

It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to

אָדָם עֲנוֹת יוֹם—אֲבָתָרוּ צוֹם וְהַיִה, הַכְזָה
—יְאִיעַזְעָר וְשָׁק, רָאשׁוֹ כָּאֲגָמָן הַלְכָה; גַּפְשׁוֹ
זֶה הַלּוֹא. לִיהְוָה רַצְוֹן וְיוֹם, צוֹם-תְּקֻרָא הַלּוֹזָה
הַפָּר, רַשְׁעָר חַרְצָבָות פְּתַח—אֲבָתָרוּ צוֹם
—וְכָל, חַפְשִׁים רְצָוִצִים חַרְשָׁל; מַזְטָה אֲגָדָות
וְעַנְיִים, לְהַמָּה לְרַעַב פְּרַט הַלּוֹא. תְּנוּתָקוּ מַזְבָּה
וְכַסְפִּיתָו עַרְם תְּרָאָה-כִּי: בֵּית הַבִּיא מְרוֹזָדִים
תְּתַעַלְמָם לֹא וּמַבְשָׁרָך.

ignore your own kin.

-Isaiah 58: 5-7

1. What is the self-affliction that Isaiah desires? Why do we read this text on Yom Kippur?
2. Can hunger serve as a call to action? Do you connect your fast to the hunger of others?
3. How does this passage change what you think God desires from the fast and the Day of Atonement?

Even as R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Isaac, "If on a fast day, the distribution of alms is postponed over night, it is just as though blood were shed."

-Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 35a

רבי ד אמר, יצחק רבי אמר אלעזר כדורי
תענית כל: יצחק רבי אמר אלעזר
שופך כאיילו - קההצד את בו שמליין
דמים

1. What responsibility does this Talmudic text say that we have throughout the year? What is the price of inaction on our part?

Text 5: Chassidic Tale on Self-Denial

Rabbi Israel, the Maggid of Ksnitz, asked a rich man what he usually ate. The rich man was rather ascetic; he proudly described to the Chassidic master his one daily meal in which he ate and drank nothing more than bread with salt and a jug of water. "Fool," scolded the Maggid. "Go home and eat meat and drink aged wine. If the rich dine on meat and wine then you will at least feel the poor deserve bread and salt. But if you subsist on dry bread and salt, you may come to believe the poor can live on stones." -

Chassidic Tale about R. Isaac, Maggid of Ksnitz

1. What does this story teach us about self-denial? What kind of attitude must we have about our fasting?
2. How do the ways that we feed ourselves reflect the attitudes we have about giving to those in need?