

# WHAT IS FASTING ACCORDING TO THE TANAKH

## What Does “Fast” Mean in Hebrew

Hebrew Word #1: צום (Tzom)

**Literal Meaning:**

To abstain from food.

It simply means:

To stop eating for a period of time.

That’s the physical act.

Hebrew Phrase #2: עָנָה נַפְשׁוֹ (Anah Nefesh)

**Meaning:**

“To afflict / humble the soul”

This goes deeper than just not eating.

It means:

- To lower yourself
- To humble yourself
- To weaken your physical strength so your heart becomes serious

# The Only Commanded Fast in the Torah

Leviticus 16:29

“You shall afflict your souls...”

Leviticus 23:27

“On the tenth day... you shall afflict your souls...”

Numbers 29:7

“You shall afflict your souls...”

This is speaking about **Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)**.

The Torah does NOT use the word “fast” directly there.

It says:

“Afflict your soul.”

From ancient Israelite understanding, this meant:

- No food
- No work
- Complete humility before YAHUAH

So in the Torah:

Fasting = Humbling yourself before YAHUAH on the Day of Atonement.

That is the only required fast.

Everything else in the Tanakh is voluntary.

## **THEN: What Does the REST of the Tanakh Show**

The Prophets and Writings show us how fasting was practiced.

### **Fasting for Repentance**

Joel 2:12

“Return to Me with all your heart, with fasting...”

Fasting was a sign of:

- Turning back to YAHUAH
- Sincere repentance

It wasn't about hunger.

It was about heart correction.

### **Fasting in National Crisis**

Judges 20:26

Israel fasted when they were at war.

Esther 4:16

Esther asked the people to fast for three days.

Why?

Because they were facing destruction.

Fasting was used in times of:

- Danger
- War
- Judgment
- National emergency

## **Fasting for Personal Desperation**

2 Samuel 12:16

David fasted when his child was sick.

This shows:

- Deep sorrow
- Pleading before YAHUAH
- Personal humility

## **Fasting for Guidance**

Ezra 8:21

“To seek from Him a right way...”

They fasted before traveling for protection.

Fasting was used when:

- Direction was needed
- Protection was needed
- Decisions were serious

## **What Does Isaiah 58 Teach**

This is very important for beginners.

Isaiah 58:3–7

YAHUAH rebukes Israel because:

They were fasting  
BUT

- Fighting
- Oppressing workers
- Acting wickedly

So He says:

“Is this the fast that I have chosen?”

Then He explains the true fast:

- Loose wickedness
- Undo heavy burdens
- Feed the hungry
- Help the oppressed

This teaches:

Stopping food without changing behavior is meaningless.

## **So What Is Fasting Really**

Fasting is:

1. Physically stopping food
2. To humble yourself
3. So your heart becomes serious
4. To repent, seek, mourn, or align
5. Before YAHUAH

It is an outward action meant to show inward humility.

## **What Fasting Is NOT**

The Tanakh makes this clear.

It is NOT:

- A diet
- A way to impress people
- A performance
- A way to control YAHUAH
- A replacement for obedience

If someone fasts but continues sinning, it means nothing.

# TYPES OF FASTS IN THE TANAKH

## Full Fast (No Food, No Water)

### **Exodus 34:28**

Moses fasted 40 days and 40 nights before YAHUAH.

#### **Simple meaning:**

Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the covenant (Torah).  
He did not eat or drink because this was a holy, covenant moment.

This shows:

- Total focus on YAHUAH
- Separation from normal life
- A serious spiritual encounter

This was not a regular fast it was a covenant event.

### **Deuteronomy 9:9**

Moses again fasted without eating or drinking.

#### **Simple meaning:**

This happened after Israel sinned with the golden calf.  
Moses fasted because the people had broken the covenant.

This shows:

- Intercession (pleading for the people)
- Repentance on behalf of others
- Deep humility

He was asking YAHUAH not to destroy Israel.

### **Esther 4:16**

Esther asked the people to fast for three days.

#### **Simple meaning:**

The Israelites were about to be killed under a royal decree.  
Esther asked everyone to fast before she went to speak to the king.

This shows:

- National crisis
- Seeking protection
- Serious dependence on YAHUAH

They were preparing for a life-or-death moment.

**Definition:**

No food and no water.

**When seen in Scripture:**

- Covenant moments
- Extreme crisis
- National emergency
- Deep intercession

Important for beginners:

This is intense and not for long periods without wisdom.

A full fast is done in extreme situations  
when someone is seeking YAHUAH with urgency and seriousness.

It is not required regularly in the Torah.  
It appears during covenant moments or national danger.

## **STANDARD FAST**

(No Food, Water Allowed)

**Definition**

A standard fast means:

- No food
- Water is allowed
- Done for a set period of time (often sunrise to sunset)

This is the **most common type of fast** in the Tanakh.

## **2 Samuel 12:16**

David fasted when his child was sick.

### **Simple meaning:**

David stopped eating and prayed because he was deeply distressed. He was humbling himself and asking YAHUAH for mercy.

This shows:

- Personal repentance
- Deep sorrow
- Pleading before YAHUAH

## **Judges 20:26**

Israel fasted during war.

### **Simple meaning:**

The people were losing in battle. They fasted, wept, and sought direction from YAHUAH.

This shows:

- National humility
- Seeking guidance
- Turning to YAHUAH for help

## **Ezra 8:21**

Ezra proclaimed a fast before traveling.

### **Simple meaning:**

They were about to travel with families and treasures. They fasted to ask YAHUAH for protection and a safe journey.

This shows:

- Seeking direction
- Asking for protection
- Depending on YAHUAH

## **Why This Fast Was Used**

The standard fast was used for:

- Repentance
- Seeking guidance
- Humility
- Focused prayer

It was serious but not extreme like a full fast without water.

A standard fast is when someone stops eating to humble themselves and focus fully on YAHUAH, especially during serious decisions, repentance, or crisis.

## **PARTIAL FAST**

Daniel 10:2–3

### **What Happened**

Daniel said:

“I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine into my mouth...”

This means:

- He did not eat rich or enjoyable foods
- He avoided meat
- He avoided wine
- He limited himself for a period of time

He did not stop eating completely.  
He changed what he ate.

### **What Is a Partial Fast**

A partial fast means:

- Removing luxury foods
- Removing comfort foods
- Eating simple, basic meals
- Focusing on humility instead of pleasure

It is not about starvation.  
It is about discipline and seriousness.

### **Why Daniel Did It**

Daniel was mourning and seeking understanding from YAHUAH.

This shows:

- Spiritual focus
- Humility
- Seeking revelation
- Removing distractions

A partial fast is:

- Safer
- More manageable
- Easier to start with
- Still meaningful

It helps someone practice self-control without extreme measures.

A partial fast means removing pleasure from your diet so your heart can focus more clearly on YAHUAH.

## **DAY OF ATONEMENT FAST**

### **Leviticus 16**

This chapter explains the **Day of Atonement**.

It was the one day each year when atonement was made for the sins of Israel.

Part of this day included:

“Afflicting your souls.”

Simple meaning:

- Stop normal activity
- Humble yourself
- Take sin seriously
- Focus on repentance

Fasting became the way Israel physically showed that humility.

## **Leviticus 23:27**

This verse repeats the command:

“You shall afflict your souls...”

It also says:

- It is a holy gathering
- No regular work
- It is a serious day

Simple meaning:

This day is set apart.

You stop working, stop eating, and focus on repentance before YAHUAH.

## **Numbers 29:7**

Again it says:

“You shall afflict your souls; you shall not do any work.”

This confirms:

- Humble yourself
- Stop normal life
- Take the day seriously

## **What Makes This Different**

This is the **only fast commanded in the Torah.**

It is not optional.

It is part of covenant obedience.

## **What Does the Torah Say**

The command says:

“Afflict your souls.”

This means:

- Humble yourself
- Deny yourself
- Take the day seriously

Ancient Israel understood this to include fasting.

## **What Was Required**

On this day:

- No food
- No regular work
- A solemn (serious) gathering
- A focus on atonement

It was a day of repentance and reflection before YAHUAH.

## **What Is Day of Atonement About**

It is about:

- National repentance
- Cleansing
- Accountability
- Remembering covenant responsibility

It was the most serious day of the year.

The Day of Atonement fast is not a personal choice fast.

It is a commanded covenant fast where Israel humbles themselves before YAHUAH.

It teaches that fasting is connected to repentance and obedience not personal preference.

# WHAT FASTING DOES

## It Humbles You

Psalm 35:13

“I humbled my soul with fasting.”

It weakens the flesh so the heart becomes sensitive.

## It Exposes Motives

Isaiah 58

YAHUAH rebuked Israel because:

- They fasted but oppressed others.
- They fasted but fought.

True fasting = heart correction.

## It Aligns You

Ezra 8:21

“To seek from Him a right way.”

Fasting is about direction.

## It Expresses Repentance

Joel 2:12

“Return to Me with fasting.”

Fasting is often paired with:

- Sackcloth
- Ashes
- Prayer
- Weeping

# HOW BEGINNERS SHOULD FAST

## Check Your Why

- Am I repenting
- Am I seeking guidance
- Am I humbling myself
- Am I doing this to appear spiritual

## Start Small

Skip one meal

Do sunrise to sunset

Drink water

Remove distractions

Don't jump into 3-day fasts immediately.

## Replace Eating With Prayer

Fasting without prayer is dieting.

Use that time to:

- Read Torah
- Reflect
- Repent
- Write
- Be still

## Break Fast Gently

In Scripture, fasts were often broken simply.

Break with:

- Water
- Fruit
- Light food
- Do not binge.

## WHAT FASTING IS NOT

It is not:

Starving to impress YAHUAH

Public performance

Social media display

Self-punishment

Religious ritual without heart change

True fast (Isaiah 58:6–7):

- Loosen wickedness
- Undo burdens
- Care for the poor
- Correct injustice

That's covenant fasting.

Fasting in the Tanakh is:

- Physical humbling
- Covenant remembrance
- Heart alignment
- Submission to YAHUAH's authority

It says:

“My appetite does not rule me YAHUAH does.”