

*A Message from Rabbi Tilsen*



## **Fasting & Not Fasting on Yom Kippur**

The practice of fasting on *Yom ha-Kippurim* is one among several strictures adopted to fulfill the Biblical requirement of “tormenting one’s soul” on this Day of Atonements (note the plural form). The purpose of fasting is to enhance our spiritual sensitivity and contrition on this Holy Day, and to force ourselves for at least a few hours to control our material desires and eschew sensual pleasure. The purpose is *not* to “cull the herd” of people for whom, for a variety of reasons, fasting is medically contraindicated. In fact, Jewish law ***prohibits*** us from putting ourselves in mortal danger under normal circumstances. Rather, fasting is intended to be beneficial to the individual and community, and for most people this is indeed the case.

If you have a medical condition which precludes your safely fasting on Yom Kippur, or if you have instructions from your physician against fasting or requiring the taking of food or drink with life-sustaining medication, you may wish to note the following guidelines, to the extent that they are consistent with your physician’s orders.

First, consult with your physician if you have a condition that you suspect may interfere with your ability to fast safely. Clarify with your physician that “fasting” in the Jewish tradition means complete abstinence from food or

drink. In some other religious disciplines or medical settings, the term “fasting” may mean abstaining from food but allows drinking.

Second, if you must eat or drink, determine with your physician the “safe minimum” amount that you should consume. The ideal of fasting is not “all or nothing.” If you must eat, then it should be a modest meal, such as toast and juice. Chocolate bars, banana cream pie or three bowls of cereal per meal are probably not medically necessary.

Third, if you feel dizzy, light-headed or nauseous, or see “stars” while at BEKI, please *sit down* and ask a neighbor to summon an usher. An usher will then guide you to an aid station where light food and drink are available or otherwise help insure your safety and wellness.

Fourth, please remember that there are other ways in which we fulfill the obligation in law from which fasting derives. This includes refraining from wearing luxurious clothing or shoes; refraining from romantic or sexual contact; declining entertainment; and the like.

Please do not risk violating the Torah commandment against endangering one’s life. The importance of this rule is far greater than that of fasting.

Gemar Hatima Tova,

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