

Fasting

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I am quite fascinated by the concept of Fasting. I don't enjoy it and am not a major practitioner but the idea behind it intrigues me. Yom Kippur in the period of the Temple was one non-stop sequence of offerings - as one can read in Mishnah Yoma as well, the High Priest spent half the day changing his robes and washing the blood off his hands. (Though NOT like Pontius Pilate!)

What was the purpose of the Sacrifices? The underlying concept is so simple that no-one understands it. One is a human being, created, here, on Earth. Somewhere "up there" dwells God, the Creator and the force behind the entire universe. One wishes to communicate with this power and if possible even influence it. But how? One is in the position of a child who wishes to give a parent a birthday present - and yet, all that one has, materially, is the pocket money which has been given by that very same parent! So all one can do is to create something with Love - for a child this can be a picture, a card, a model..... something that shows one cares - and then this is presented as a gift.

Or one can bake a cake.....

The laws of physics tell us that if one is "down here" and one believes God is "up there" and one throws the present upwards, it will fall back down to earth again. So that doesn't work. However, if one were to burn the present, it changes its physical characteristics, goes from matter to gas, to smoke, and rises upwards - to where this invisible God can enjoy the "*re'ach nicho'ach*". Moreover, if one then eats a part of the sacrifice here, either alone, or sharing it with family or a priest, one is in effect Sharing a Meal with God. And to share a meal is an important act of communion (long before Christianity took that word over). It's what we do now with the *Kiddush* when we invoke God's name and presence before drinking and eating.

But Fasting means..... doing Nothing. Not eating. Not drinking. One can extend this to not shopping or cooking or any other related activity. And the irony is that on Yom Kippur God was inundated with barbecue tidbits, whilst the believers below and their priests did not partake of any of this. It was "all for you". And the hope was that God would notice the rumbling tummies and the dried lips and feel even more appreciative of this different form of sacrifice, the sacrifice of one's own comfort, one's own indulgence. Even though there is no blessing said for the fasting, no formal beginning, no formal end, no ritual at all connected with it, one assumes that God notices it. And that God is favourably impressed.

So we seek this closeness to God by NOT doing something which we normally do; we deprive ourselves of the opportunities to perform the *mitzvah* of reciting *berachot* over foodstuffs. (Even 'Fast Food' is forbidden!) Fasting is actually a negative and not a positive commandment. And yet we seek the positive within it, harnessing our bodies for - let us hope and pray - the benefit of our souls.

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