**Ta’anis Esther – A *Ta’anis* of *Simcha***

What historical event are we remembering and thinking about on Ta’anis Esther? There are two answers given to this question. One is that Ta’anis Esther is a *zecher* to the three-day fast that Esther declared before she went to speak to Achashverosh. This three-day fast actually took place in Nissan and coincided with Pesach. The *minhag*, however, is not to fast during Nissan, so *Chazal* moved the fast to before Purim so that it would be associated with Purim. The three days became one day because three days of fasting would be too difficult.[[1]](#endnote-1)

The other opinion is that Ta’anis Esther is a *zecher* to the fact that *Bnei Yisroel* fasted on the day of the war. We fought a war against our enemies on the 13th of Adar, and the custom was that the Jewish People would fast on the days they fought in order to have more *siyata dishmaya* in the battle. We fast on the 13th of Adar to commemorate their fast on that day. According to this approach, the fast is called Ta’anis Esther because Esther played a major role in the entire Purim story.[[2]](#endnote-2)

It’s important to note that according to both opinions, Ta’anis Esther commemorates something positive. *Hashem* helped Esther when she approached Achashverosh after the three-day fast, and *Bnei Yisroel* were victorious in the war against their enemies while fasting. Ta’anis Esther commemorates something positive – *Hashem* listens to us in our time of difficulty. As the *Chayei Adam* writes, we fast on this day “כדי לזכור שהבורא יתברך רואה כל איש בעת צרתו כאשר יתענה וישוב אל ה' בכל לבבו.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

Based on this idea, Rav Soloveitchik *ztz”l* and others maintain that Ta’anis Esther is different from the other fast days. Other fast days are sad days on which we observe some aspects of *aveilus*, including not eating and drinking. Ta’anis Esther, however, is a happy day. Many *mekoros* indicate this *yesod*.[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Fasting the Day Before a *Yom Tov***

*Megillas Ta’anis* was the first part of *Torah SheBe’al Peh* that was put into writing. It is a list of *yomim* *tovim* *miderabbanan* – some one day long, some two days long, and others a week long – that commemorate something positive that happened to *Bnei Yisroel* in connection with the *Batei Mikdash*.[[5]](#endnote-5) Among the *Yomim Tovim* listed in *Megillas Ta’anis* are Chanukah and Purim.[[6]](#endnote-6) The *gemara* says that after the destruction of the *Beis* *HaMikdash*, “בטלה מגילת תענית,” all of the *yomim tovim* in *Megillas* *Ta’anis* have been annulled and are no longer celebrated, with the exception of Chanukah and Purim.[[7]](#endnote-7)

*Megillas* *Ta’anis* says that on these *yomim* *tovim* *miderabbanan*, one is prohibited to fast. Furthermore, one is prohibited to fast on the day before and the day after these days. *Chazal* wanted to strengthen the celebration of the *yom tov*, and they therefore forbade fasting even on the days before and after.[[8]](#endnote-8) The fact that we fast on Ta’anis Esther, the day before Purim, seems to go against this *halacha.* Why are we allowed to fast on Ta’anis Esther? We are breaking the rules of *Megillas Ta’anis*!

The *Rishonim* addressed this question.[[9]](#endnote-9) The Ran quotes an answer from the Raavad, who says that Ta’anis Esther is different: “אינה דומה לשאר תעניות, דזכרון הוא לנס שנעשה בו.” Ta’anis Esther is different because it commemorates the *nes* that happened on that day.[[10]](#endnote-10) In general, *ta’aniyos* are sad days. *Chazal* felt that fasting before a *Yom* *Tov* would weaken the *simcha* of the *yom* *tov* *derabbanan*. However, since fasting on Ta’anis Esther commemorates something positive, the miracle of our salvation, there is no contradiction or tension between Ta’anis Esther and Purim. Fasting on Ta’anis Esther blends into the celebration of Purim and is therefore an exception to the rule. Ta’anis Esther is a *ta’anis* of *simcha*, a *zikaron* *la’nes*, and it is therefore permitted the day before Purim. This is a very strong source in support of this *yesod* that Ta’anis Esther is a *ta’anis* of *simcha*.

**Moving the Fast Earlier**

When a fast day falls out on Shabbos, it is generally pushed off to Sunday. This often happens with Shiva Asar B’Tamuz and Tisha B’Av. If Ta’anis Esther falls out on Shabbos, however, it is not pushed off to a later day, but is rather moved earlier, to Thursday. Why is Ta’anis Esther different? The *Maggid Mishna* offers a technical answer. It would not be practical to push off Ta’anis Esther to Sunday because Sunday would be Purim itself![[11]](#endnote-11) However, in the writings of the *Geonim*, we find a different answer.[[12]](#endnote-12) The *gemara* explains that the reason that we generally push off a fast day to a later time is that we are not “מקדים פורעניות;” we are not in a rush to commemorate something negative.[[13]](#endnote-13) We therefore do not commemorate Tisha B’Av or Shiva Asar B’Tamuz early, but rather push them off to the following day. The *She’iltos* writes that we are *makdim* Ta’anis Esther “מפני שהוא נס, ונס מקדימים ולא מאחרין.”[[14]](#endnote-14) Since Ta’anis Esther commemorates something positive, we commemorate it – even celebrate it – earlier rather than later. This is another very powerful source.

**Reading the *Megillah* on Ta’anis Esther**

The *mishna* at the beginning of *Maseches Megillah* writes that under certain circumstances, one can read the *Megillah* early, on the 11th, 12th, or 13th of Adar. The *gemara* there looks for a source in *Tanach* to support this *takana*. The *gemara* writes that one does not need a special source to allow the reading of the *Megillah* on the 13th of Adar because it is the “זמן קהילה,” “the day of gathering.” What does this mean? The *Rishonim* cite Rabbeinu Tam, who says that this refers to Ta’anis Esther, because the people would gather together on the *ta’anis* to daven to *Hashem*. Apparently, it is so logical that one can fulfill the *mitzva* of reading the *Megillah* on Ta’anis Esther that no special source is necessary. Why?

Rav Mirsky *shlit”a* cites earlier *Achronim* who develop the following idea. Ta’anis Esther is a *ta’anis* of *simcha* when we commemorate that *Hashem* saves us and helps us in our times of need. As we read the *Megillah*, we are similarly thinking about the fact that *Hashem* helps us in our time of *tzaros*. Therefore, Rabbeinu Tam holds that Ta’anis Esther is a natural time to read the *Megillah.* No special source is needed.[[15]](#endnote-15)

***Halachic* Ramifications**

This idea that Ta’anis Esther is a happy day has several practical *halachic* ramifications.[[16]](#endnote-16)

The Rambam writes that on a fast day, “לא ינהג עדונים בעצמו ולא יקל ראשו ולא יהיה שמח וטוב לב.”[[17]](#endnote-17) A person should not be overly happy on a fast day and he should not engage in special *simcha* activities. Several *Achronim* maintain that this does not apply on Ta’anis Esther. On Ta’anis Esther, one is allowed to be in a state of *simcha* because it is a *ta’anis* of *simcha.* One is therefore allowed to be in an extra special happy mood, unlike on the other fast days.[[18]](#endnote-18)

There is a discussion in the *Poskim* regarding whether one is allowed to get married on the night before a fast day.[[19]](#endnote-19) Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach writes that in general, one should be *machmir* and not get married on the night before a fast day. However, it is *mutar* to get married on the night before Ta’anis Esther.[[20]](#endnote-20)

Some observe a *chumra* that they act on fast days – even those other than Tisha B’Av – according to the practices of the Nine Days.[[21]](#endnote-21) There is no such custom on Ta’anis Esther. Why not? The answer is that Ta’anis Esther is a day of *simcha*. Since we are commemorating something positive that happened to *Klal* *Yisroel*, there is no need for the extra *chumros* associated with the other *ta’aniyos*.[[22]](#endnote-22)

There are certain *kulos* regarding the details of fasting on Ta’anis Esther beyond the other fast days.[[23]](#endnote-23) What are these leniencies based on? There are two approaches in the *Poskim*. One is that Ta’anis Esther, as opposed to the other *ta’aniyos*, is not mentioned or referred to directly in *Tanach*.[[24]](#endnote-24) The other approach is based on the *yesod* we have been developing. Rav Zolte *ztz”l* writes that since Ta’anis Esther is a happy day, we are more *meikil* regarding the rules of fasting:

Ta’anis Esther does not relate to the *tzaros* of that day; rather just the opposite – it is part of the celebration of Purim, *zichron la’nes*. It therefore does not have all of the *chumros* that we have on the other *ta’aniyos*.[[25]](#endnote-25)

Finally, there is a *chumra* on Ta’anis Esther that may be related to this *yesod*. The basic *halacha* is that one is not allowed to eat a meal before the *Megillah* reading, but a *te’ima b’alma*, a light snack, is *mutar*. However, the *Magen Avraham* and others write that we are *machmir* not to eat even a *te’ima b’alma* unless it’s truly necessary.[[26]](#endnote-26) What is the reason for this extra *chumra*?

The simple *pshat* is that since we are fasting and are therefore hungry, we are afraid that if a person has a light snack, he might come to eat a big meal, and he may end up forgetting about *Megillah* reading entirely.[[27]](#endnote-27) However, others suggest that this *chumra* is based on the idea that Ta’anis Esther is really part of the celebration of Purim. One theme of Purim is that *Hashem* listens to our *tefillos*; Ta’anis Esther commemorates the fasting and the *teshuva*, which then leads into Purim, when we celebrate the *yeshua.* Therefore, we want to blend and merge the commemoration of Ta’anis Esther with the celebration of Purim. Since there is one *kiyum* of Ta’anis Esther/Purim, we want the *ta’anis* to lead into Purim itself. For this reason, we are extra *machmir* not to eat even a light snack before the *Megillah*.[[28]](#endnote-28)

On Ta’anis Esther, our thoughts should be focused on celebrating the fact that *Hashem* listens to our *tefillos* during our times of *tzaros*, בכל קראנו אליו.

1. See *Aruch HaShulchan* 686:2-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See *Mishna Berura* 686:2. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Chayei Adam*, *klal* 155:3. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Most of the sources cited in this *dvar Torah* are found in *Harerei Kedem*, *siman* 188, the *Mesorah* *Journal*, vol. 10, pp. 50-51, and the *Mishnas Ya’avetz*, *siman* 76. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. For a full discussion of *Megillas Ta’anis*, see *B’Ikvei HaTzon*, *siman* 19 (especially *os* 3). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The *nes* Purim led up to *binyan* *Bayis Sheni*, so it is also connected to the *Beis HaMikdash*. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. *Rosh Hashana* 18-19. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. This is in contrast to Shabbos and other *Yomim* *Tovim*; one is permitted to fast before and after an ordinary Shabbos and *Yom* *Tov*. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. See *Tosfos*, *Ta’anis* 18a, and other *Rishonim* there. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ran, *Ta’anis* 5a in the *dapei* *haRif*. The Rosh (*Ta’anis* 2:24) uses language similar to the Raavad: “גם הוא מעיקר הנס.” [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. *Maggid Mishna*, *Hilchos Ta’aniyos* 5:5. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. The Rav would often quote this view. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. *Megillah* 5a. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. *She’iltos* 67. Similarly, the Mordechai writes (*siman* 776, note 1): “מקדימין, דצום אסתר לא פורענותא.” [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. *Hegyonei Halacha*, vol. 1, pp. 249-50, quoting Rav Turchin *ztz”l*, a close *talmid* of the Brisker Rav *ztz”l.* [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The fact that we fast does not mean that the day is necessarily sad. The best proof, of course, is Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is a fast day, and yet it is a happy day as well. This is explicit in the *mishna* at the end of *Ta’anis*. We have discussed elsewhere (*Mei’Afeilah L’Ohr Gadol*, pp.143-51) that *simcha* in *Yahadus* means the feeling of being *lifnei* *Hashem*. When a person fasts and does *teshuva*, that brings him closer to *Hashem*, and that generates *simcha*. The same comparison applies to *Selichos* as well. We say *Selichos* on Ta’anis Esther, and we also say *Selichos* on Yom Kippur. There is no contradiction between *Selichos* and a *yom* *simcha*.

    Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach notes (*Halichos Shlomo*, vol. 2, ch. 18, *Orchos Halacha* 31) thatalthough we say *Tachanun* on Ta’anis Esther, there is no inherent contradiction between a *yom simcha* and *Tachanun*, at least regarding Purim. The Tur (*siman* 693) quotes Rav Amram Gaon, who was of the opinion that *Tachanun* should be said even on Purim itself, and everyone agrees that Purim is a *yom simcha*! (We don’t *pasken* this way, but the existence of the opinion proves the point.) Similarly, on Tisha B'Av, which is thought of as the saddest day of the year, we *pasken* that we do not say *Tachanun* (*Shulchan Aruch* 559: 4). Clearly, Rav Shlomo Zalman explains, our great *Rabbanim* instituted which days are better for *Tachanun* and which are not, and their wisdom is beyond ours: “כמה גהבו מחשבותיהם ממחשבותינו.” Whatever their reasoning, *Tachanun* is certainly not a definitive indicator of whether a day is a *yom simcha* or not. Therefore, the fact that we say *Tachanun* on Ta'anis Esther in no way disproves the *yesod* we develop here.

    If Ta’anis Esther is really a *yom simcha*, why do we recite *Aneinu*, as we do on the other fast days? *Aneinu* describes, “כי בצרה גדולה אנחנו,” “for we are in great distress.” We conclude, “כי אתה ה' העונה בעת צרה,” “For You, *Hashem*, are the one who responds in times of distress.” How does this fit with the different theme of Ta’anis Esther?

    I discussed this question with Rav Baruch Simon *shlit”a*. He brought a proof that there is no contradiction between a day being defined as a *yom simcha* as well as an *eis tzara* from the *halachos* of *semichas geula letefilla*. The *halacha* is that one is not allowed to talk or make any *hefsek* between the *bracha* of *Ga’al Yisroel* and the beginning of *Shemona Esrei* (*Shulchan Aruch* 111). The Rama (111:1) quotes the opinion of Rabbainu Tam that this *halacha* applies during the week, but not on Shabbos. Why? Because one of the sources for connecting *geula* with *tefilla* is based on the linkage of two *pesukim*: “יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי לפניך ה' צורי וגואלי” (*Tehillim* 19:15) and “יענך ה' ביום צרה” (*Tehillim* 20:2) (see Rashi, *Berachos* 4b, “*zeh hasomeich*”). *Geula* is mentioned in the *posuk* right before *tzara* is mentioned, and we therefore juxtapose *geula* and *tefilla*. Shabbos, however, is not a *zman* of *tzara*, and we therefore do not have a source to connect *geula* with *tefilla* regarding Shabbos.

    The Rama continues to write, however, that the *halacha* of *semichas geula letefilla* **does** apply on *Yom Tov.* Why? Because they are *yemei hadin*, as the *mishna* says (*Rosh Hashana* 1:2), “During four times of the year, the world is judged. On Pesach for the produce…” The *Yamim tovim* are obviously *yemei simcha*, yet the Rama indicates that they are also *zman tzara*, as the *halacha* of *semichas geula letefilla* applies on them. Accordingly, saying *Aneinu* on Ta’anis Esther in no way contradicts the notion that Ta’anis Esther is a *yom simcha*. This is a fabulous proof brought by Rav Simon.

    The simple explanation is that the *tzara* aspect of the day relates to our commemoration of the fast at the time of Purim, when *Bnei Yisroel* were *be’eis tzara* and required special *tefilla* and *teshuva*. On Ta’anis Esther, we relive that *ta’anis*, but at the same time, since we know that the outcome was positive and *Hashem* listened to our *tefillos*, we experience *simcha* as well.

    Rav Nevenzahl *shlit”a* suggests another approach. Every day of one’s life is really an *eis* *tzara*; a person is always completely dependent upon *Hashem*. On days that are set aside as special days of *tefilla*, such as fast days, we emphasize the concept of *eis* *tzara* in order to enhance our *tefillos* even more. On a regular fast day, we are in *aveilus* over the *churban* of the *Beis* *HaMikdash* and we are doing *teshuva*, and it is therefore appropriate to *daven* even harder and emphasize the concept of *eis* *tzara*. Ta’anis Esther, although not a day of mourning, is a day that *Hashem* answered our *tefillos* and is especially set aside for *tefilla*. Therefore, we emphasize the concept of *eis tzara* on Ta’anis Esther as well. This is not a *stirah* to Ta’anis Esther being a *yom simcha*. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. *Hilchos Ta’aniyos* 1:14. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. This is the view of the Rav and Rav Zolte *ztz”l*, as well as *ybl”ch* Rav Nevenzahl *shlit”a*. See also *Halichos* *Shlomo* 18:5-6 for similar comments. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Rav Moshe Feinstein *ztz”l* is *meikil* (*Iggros* *Moshe*, *Orach Chaim* 1:168), but the Rav is *machmir* (*Nefesh* *HaRav*, p. 196). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. *Halichos Shlomo* 18:5 with *Dvar Halacha* 9. The language of the *Halichos Shlomo* is: “Ta’anis Esther is different… because it is a *zecher* to the *ta’anis* that happened in the days of Mordechai and Esther, and we remember that *Hashem Yisbarach* listens to every person who fasts and does *teshuva*.” The Rav made a similar distinction (*Nefesh HaRav*, p. 196). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. See the *Bi’ur Halacha*, beginning of 551. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. *Halichos Shlomo* 18:6 and *Nefesh HaRav*, p. 196. There may be another reason why there is no custom to observe the other *inuyim* beyond eating and drinking on Ta’anis Esther. When they fasted at the time of Purim, their fast may have been specifically focused on abstaining from eating. Why? Many *meforshim* explain that *Bnei Yisroel* needed a *kapara* for the fact that they ate and drank at Achashverosh’s party. Their *ta’anis* was therefore focused only on the prohibition of eating; it did not include other customary fast day restrictions, such as washing or wearing leather shoes. (See *Let My Nation Live*, p. 227 with footnote 23.) Based on this, one can suggest that just like their fast was focused only on avoiding eating, our fast of Ta’anis Esther is focused only on avoiding eating, not the other *inuyim*. We can thus arrive at the same *halachic* conclusion as the Rav and Rav Shlomo Zalman from a different angle! This beautiful insight was pointed out by my dear *talmid* Daniel Raymond, who was in my *shiur* in 5766. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. See the Rama 686:2 and the *Mishna Berura* there. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. This point is actually subject to a *machlokes*. The *Megillah* writes, “לקיים את ימי הפרים האלה... דברי הצומות וזעקתם” (9:31). The *meforshim* discuss whether the word “הצומות” refers to Ta’anis Esther; see the Ran, *Ta’anis* 7a in the *dapei haRif*, and the *Beis Yosef* 686. If the *posuk* there does refer to Ta’anis Esther, then Ta’anis Esther is mentioned in *Tanach* and another explanation is needed for the leniencies on that fast. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. *Mishnas Ya’avetz*, end of *siman* 76. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. See the *Mishna* *Berura* 692:14. This is as opposed to *Krias* *Shma*, for example, where a light snack is permitted before *Shma*; see *siman* 235. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. See the *Levush* and *Eliyahu Rabba* at the end of *siman* 692. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. I heard this idea from Rav Mayer Twersky *shlit”a* in the name of the Rav. I saw that Rav Karp *shlit”a* in *Hilchos Chag B’Chag* (chapter 6, footnote 11) quotes exactly the same idea: “Ta’anis Esther is ‘*chelek* *meihaPurim*,’ a part of Purim.” The common theme is we cry out to *Hashem* in our times of *tzaros*, and he responds with a *yeshua*. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)