

Shoel U'Mashiv

Fasting Erev Rosh Hashanah

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Q - What is the *Minhag* to fast on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*?

A - What is the source of the *Minhag*?

The *Tur O.C. 581:2* quotes the *Midrash Tanchuma* that gives a parable of a king coming to a town. The closer the king gets to the town, the more people come out to greet him. First it's a third of the people, then another third and finally all the people. The same is true with the Jewish people and *Teshuva*—the closer we get to the King, the more *Teshuva* we do. On *Erev Rosh Hashanah* we fast to be forgiven for the first third of our sins, during *Aseres Yimei Teshuva* we are forgiven for our middle third and finally on *Yom Kippur* we are forgiven for the last third. The *Chayei Adam 138:5* says the reason to fast on *Erev Rosh Hashanah* is because it is the last day of the year and *Chaza"l* say anyone who does *Teshuva* one day of the year, it's as if they did *Teshuva* the entire year.

How long should one fast for?

One should start fasting at *Alos HaShachar* (dawn), just like any other fast. The *Rema 581:2* says some have the custom to eat before *Alos HaShachar* to differentiate themselves from the non-Jews who have the custom to fast the day before their holidays. He also says that one is not required to make a stipulation for fasting on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*. The *Mishnah Berurah 581:20* explains that typically when one is fasting, they cannot eat after waking up in the morning unless they stipulate that they are going to do so before going to sleep. However, on *Erev Rosh Hashanah* this is not necessary to do and one is allowed to eat and drink if they wake up before *Alos HaShachar*. The *Mateh Efraim 581:9* says that one should not fast the full day so that they do not enter *Yom Tov* feeling tortured (i.e., feeling hungry and tired). There are different opinions as to how long a person should fast, but the most prevalent custom is to fast until *Chatzos* (midday).

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