Anyone who starves himself in years of famine – יֵאָכֵיל בִּשְׁנֵי גַּסָּה
In times of famine, one should eat less and allow himself to go hungry, in accordance with the opinion of Rav Yehuda. Furthermore, it is prohibited to engage in marital relations during a famine, except on the right the wife usually immerses herself. However, couples who are as yet without children may engage in relations even in years of famine. Many authorities rule leniently in this regard, in accordance with the opinion that refraining from sexual relations during years of famine is an act of piety, not a requirement (see Shulchan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 110:4).

Others note that these regulations are not limited to times of famine, but they apply whenever the community is faced with an impending calamity (Shulchan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 574:4, and in the comment of Rema).

HALAKHA

Eating while traveling – מִשְּׁנֵי גַּסָּה
One who is traveling should not eat more than he would during a time of famine, in order to prevent intestinal disease (Magen Avraham; Shulchan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 110:10).

NOTES

Bowels – פַּרְסָה
The commentary on the text follows Rabbeinu Hananel, who explains that this is a reference to diarrhea. If a traveler eats in his customary way, he is likely to suffer from stomach problems, which might prevent him from continuing his journey. Others suggest that if one who wishes to set out on a journey eats too much, his full stomach will weigh him down and make it difficult for him to travel as planned (Rabbeinu Gershoni).

LANGUAGE

Station [אָמוּנָא] – עַל דיַרְקֵי: From the Syriac word for station or inn, although some associate it with the Greek ἐσπιρα, euné, meaning bed.

NOTES

Each and every parasang – פַּרְסָה
Some commentators suggest that Rav Pappa maintains that the advice to a traveler to eat sparingly was to help him avoid digestive problems that might result from the consumption of a heavy meal. He therefore divided his rations into small quantities that he ate every parasang, roughly every 4 km. In this way he ate a large number of small meals, rather than a single heavy meal (Sefat Emet).

In famine, He will redeem you from death – וִאֵ יְהַפְּךָ מִמִּי מַפְתָּח
The fact that the verse does not state: He will redeem you from famine, but rather: He will redeem you from death, is an indication that you will be spared all types of unusual deaths (Maharsha).

HALAKHA

It is taught in a baraita that Joseph said to his brothers: Do not take long strides and bring the sun into the city, i.e., you should enter the city to spend the night there before the sun has set. The Gemara elaborates: Do not take long strides, as the Master said: A long stride takes away one five-hundredth of a person’s eyesight, and this loss is not worth the time saved.

The Gemara further explains: And bring the sun into the city, this is in accordance with a statement that Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: As Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: A person should always leave the place where he has spent the night with “it is good” (Genesis 1:4), i.e., after sunrise, as the Torah uses the expression “it is good” with regard to the creation of light. This goodness is manifest in the sense of security one feels when it is light. And likewise, when one comes into an unfamiliar city he should enter with “it is good,” before sunset, as it is stated: “As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away” (Genesis 44:3).

Similarly, Rav Yehuda said that Rabbi Hiyya said: One who is walking along the road should not eat more each day than he would normally eat each day in a year of famine. The Gemara asks: What is the reason for this? Here in Babylonia they interpreted that the reason is due to one’s bowels. Since the exertion of traveling can damage full bowels, it is preferable to eat less than the normal amount. In the West, Eretz Yisrael, they say that the reason is due to food, i.e., if one eats too much, his food may not last the entire journey, and therefore he should ration his meals. The Gemara asks: What is the practical difference between these two opinions? The Gemara answers: The practical difference between them...
And one of them separates himself — רashi

One who separates himself from the community at a time of distress, when it is in his power to help the community in some way (Magen Avraham), will not merit to see its eventual consolation. Conversely, whoever participates in the community’s suffering will merit seeing its consolation (Shu’han Arukh, Orah Hayyim 514:5).

Similarly, Reish Lakish said: It is prohibited for a person to have conjugal relations in years of famine, so that children not be born during these difficult years. As it is stated: “And to Joseph were born two sons before the year of famine came” (Genesis 41:50). It was taught in a baraita: Nevertheless, those without children may have marital relations in years of famine, as they must strive to fulfill the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply.

Likewise, the Sages taught in a baraita: When the Jewish people is immersed in distress, and one of them separates himself from the community and does not share their suffering, the two ministering angels who accompany a person come and place their hands on his head, as though he was an offering, and say: This man, so-and-so, who has separated himself from the community, let him not see the consolation of the community.

A similar idea is taught in another baraita: When the community is immersed in suffering, a person may not say: I will go to my home and I will eat and drink, and peace be upon you, my soul. And if he does so, the verse says about him: “And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine; let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die” (Isaiah 22:13). And the prophecy continues with what is written afterward, in the following verse: “And the Lord of hosts revealed Himself in my ears: Surely this iniquity shall not be expiated by you until you die” (Isaiah 22:14).

The baraita comments: Up to this point is the attribute of middling people, who merely exclude themselves from the suffering of the community. However, with regard to the attribute of wicked people, what is written about those who hope for more of these days? “Come, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant” (Isaiah 56:12). And what is written afterward: “The righteous perishes, and no man lays it to heart; and godly men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come” (Isaiah 57:1). This verse teaches that righteous people suffer early death to prevent them from witnessing the harm that will befall these evil people.

The baraita continues: Rather, a person should be distressed together with the community. As we found with Moses our teacher that he was distressed together with the community, as it is stated during the war with Amalek: “But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat upon it” (Exodus 17:12). But didn’t Moses have one pillow or one cushion to sit upon; why was he forced to sit on a rock? Rather, Moses said as follows: Since the Jewish people are immersed in suffering, I too will be with them in suffering, as much as I am able, although I am not participating in the fighting. The baraita adds: And anyone who is distressed together with the community will merit seeing the consolation of the community.

Those without [hasukhel] children — רashi

Most early authorities maintain that this expression is referring to couples without children, who are permitted to engage in marital relations even during years of famine. The early authorities and the later authorities dispute the precise meaning of the phrase, whether it refers solely to those who have no children at all (Meiri, Taz), or whether it includes those who have a son or a daughter, but not both, and who have therefore not yet fulfilled the husband’s religious obligation to be fruitful and multiply (Rashi; Ran; Talmid HaleMabran).

It is stated in the Jerusalem Talmud that even couples who are without children, whom the Gemara there calls: Those who are desirous of children, may engage in marital relations during years of famine only on the right when the wife ritually immerses herself, when conception is most likely.

The Ritva suggests an entirely different explanation of this passage, which he bases on a variant reading available to many of the early authorities: Hashukhel bannam, those whose children’s actions are dark. According to this opinion, those couples whose children are wicked, so-called children of dark deeds, are permitted to engage in marital relations during years of famine.

Middling people … wicked people — רashi, הָרֹג

The commentators suggest various explanations for the difference between those who are considered middling, i.e., neither righteous nor wicked, and those who are classified as wicked. The commentary on the text follows Rashi, who explains that although the members of the middle group refuse to show sympathy toward those who are in distress, they do recognize that they themselves are in danger, whereas the wicked imagine that they are immune to the perils threatening the community.

Others suggest that although the members of the middle group withdraw from the community in its time of need, they do so only in private, whereas the wicked declare publicly that they are unaffected by the problems of others (Rabbi Eliyakim). Yet other commentaries argue that although the members of the middle group are indifferent to the troubles suffered by the community, they repent when they themselves are struck by the same afflictions. By contrast, the wicked fail to repent even when suffering reaches their own doors (Ritva).
The baraita further states: And lest a person say, I have acted in secret; who will testify against me? on the Day of Judgment? The Tanna explains that the stones of a person’s house and the beams of a person’s house will testify against him, as it is stated: “For a stone shall cry out from the wall, and a beam out of the timber shall answer it” (Habakkuk 2:20). In the school of Rabbi Sheila they say: The two ministering angels who accompany a person will testify against him, as it is stated: “For He will give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways” (Psalms 91:11).

Rabbi Hidka said: A person’s soul will testify against him, as it is stated: “Keep the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom” (Micah 7:5). And some say: A man’s limbs will testify against him, as it is stated: “You are My witnesses, says the Lord” (Isaiah 43:10).

The baraita cites another verse that deals with judgment. “A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, He is just and righteous” (Deuteronomy 32:4). The baraita interprets “a God of faithfulness” to mean that just as punishment is exacted from the wicked in the World-to-Come even for a light transgression that they commit, so too, punishment is exacted from the righteous in this world for a light transgression that they commit. The righteous suffer their punishment in this world to purify them so they can enjoy the World-to-Come.

The baraita turns to the second section of the verse: “And without iniquity.” This teaches that just as reward is paid to the righteous in the World-to-Come even for a minor mitzva that they fulfill, so too, reward is paid to the wicked in this world for even a minor mitzva that they fulfill, to give the wicked all the reward they deserve for the performance of mitzvot in this world, and deprive them of any share in the World-to-Come.

With regard to the third section of the verse: “He is just and righteous,” the Sages said: At the hour of a person’s departure to his eternal home, all his deeds are enumerated before him and are rendered visible to him once again, and the deeds themselves say to him: You did such and such, in such and such a place, on such and such a day, and he says: Yes, that is exactly what happened. And they say to him: Sign a statement that this is correct, and he signs it, as it is stated: “He makes the hand of every man sign” (Job 37:7). And not only that, but after a one has been shown all his deeds, he justifies the judgment upon himself, and says to them: You have judged me well. This response serves to fulfill that which is stated: “That You may be justified when You speak and be right when You judge” (Psalms 51:6).

Who will testify against me – בר推广应用ים: Some commentaries explain that this testimony should be understood in the sense of the disclosure of the truth (Flasha). The beams of a person’s house, the angels who accompany him, his soul, and his very body will reveal his true behavior during those times when the community suffered distress. When the Gemara speaks of the beams of a person’s house it is referring to his neighbors, who are aware of his actions in his own home, and who will share their knowledge with the rest of the community. The angels display a person’s true character to the public when they withdraw from him the protection that had shielded him from calamity up to that point. A person’s soul sheds light on his conduct when it receives fitting punishment in the World-to-Come. Lastly, one’s own body reveals his true character when his organs are afflicted in this world.

And without iniquity – בר推广应用ים: The early authorities cite different versions and interpretations of this passage. According to the standard talmudic text, the first part of the verse: “A God of faithfulness,” teaches that punishment is exacted from the righteous in this world even for their slightest transgressions, while the second part of the verse: “And without iniquity,” indicates that reward is paid to the wicked in this world for every small mitzva. Rashi explains in his commentary on the verse that both parts promise that one will ultimately be rewarded for his mitzvot. The phrase “a God of faithfulness” teaches that God will reward the righteous in the World-to-Come, while the expression “without iniquity” means that He will reward the wicked in this world.

Others commentaries prefer the version of the Yalkut Shimon, according to which the first part of the verse is referring to all aspects of God’s justice, the reward paid to the righteous and to the wicked, as well as the verdicts meted out to both the righteous and to the wicked. The second part of the verse teaches the subsequent claim of the baraita, that when one dies all his deeds appear before him and remind him of all he did in the course of his lifetime. From the third part of the verse: “He is just and righteous,” it is derived that when the deceased receives his punishment he accepts the judgment and confesses his sins (Maharsha).
There are many theories concerning the relationship between Rabbi Elazar HaKappar and the Sage bar Kappara. An inscription was recently discovered on a doorpost in the Golân Heights that states: This is the study hall of Rabbi Elazar HaKappar.

The Gemara returns to the primary topic of the tractate, the issue of fasts. Shmuel said: Whoever sits in observance of a fast is called a sinner, as it is inappropriate to take unnecessary suffering upon oneself. The Gemara comments: Shmuel holds in accordance with the opinion of the following tanna, as it is taught in a baraita: Rabbi Elazar HaKappar the Great says: What is the meaning when the verse states, with regard to a nazirite: “And he will atone for him for that he sinned by the soul [nafesh]?” (Numbers 6:11). But with what soul did this nazirite sin? Rather, the nazirite sinned by the distress he caused himself when he abstained from wine, in accordance with the terms of his vow.

And are these matters not inferred a fortiori? And if this nazirite, who distressed himself by abstaining only from wine, is nevertheless called a sinner and requires atonement, then with regard to one who distresses himself by abstaining from each and every matter of food and drink when he fasts, all the more so should he be considered a sinner.

Conversely, Rabbi Elazar says: One who accepts a fast upon himself is called sacred, as it is stated with regard to the nazirite: “He shall be sacred, he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long” (Numbers 6:5). Here too, one can apply an a fortiori inference: And if this nazirite, who distressed himself by abstaining from only one matter, wine, is nevertheless called sacred, then with regard to one who distresses himself by abstaining from every matter, all the more so should he be considered sacred.

The Gemara asks: And according to the opinion of Shmuel, the nazirite is indeed called sacred, as stated by Rabbi Elazar. The Gemara answers: That verse is referring to the sanctity of the growth of the locks, as the nazirite's hair does possess an element of sanctity, but it does not refer to the nazirite himself. The Gemara reverses the question: And according to the opinion of Rabbi Elazar, the nazirite is called a sinner. The Gemara answers: That verse refers specifically to a nazirite who rendered himself futilely impure by coming into contact with a dead body, an act that is prohibited for him. This particular nazirite must bring an offering to atone “for that he sinned by the soul.”

The Gemara asks: And did Rabbi Elazar actually say this, that fasting is a virtuous act? But didn’t Rabbi Elazar say: A person should always consider himself
The sacred is in your midst – Reish Lakish said: This student of a Torah academy who sits in observance of a fast has let a dog eat his portion. Since his fast weakens him and prevents him from fasting on the Ninth of Av, Reish Lakish derives from this verse that one who abandons from food is a pious person. Similarly, Rav Sheshet said: This student of a Torah academy who sits in observance of a fast has let a dog eat his portion. Since his fast weakens him and prevents him from fasting on the Ninth of Av, Rav Sheshet is student of a Torah academy who sits in accordance with Rav Sheshet’s remark as a curse: As for a Torah scholar who observes a fast, may a dog eat his meal (Shita Mekbubetzer).

There is no communal fast in Babylonia – Various reasons have been suggested for this principle. One may say it is because there is no need to pray for rain in Babylonia, where the land is watered by rivers (Tosafot). Others claim that as most inhabitants of Babylonia were poor, the Sages did not want to prevent them from working (Ravad). Yet others state, based on the Jerusalem Talmud, that a communal fast can be declared only in a place where there is a Nasi and a Sanhedrin (Ramban).

PERSONALITIES

Rav Sheshet – Rav Sheshet was a famous Babylonian amora of the second and third generations, a colleague of Rav Nahman and Rav Hida. He was outstanding in his knowledge of the Mishna and of baraitot, acquiring it through exceptional diligence, despite his blindness.

With regard to his disputes with Rav Nahman, the geonim rule that the halakha is in accordance with Rav Sheshet’s opinion in all matters of ritual law. Many amoraim of the third and fourth generations were his disciples, including Rava.

HALAKHA

Where he is able to distress himself – One who observes a fast when he is able to do so without causing himself bodily harm is considered sacred. However, one who does so when he is weak or ill is called a sinner, in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Elazar. The ruling applies only to one who observes the fast as an act of piety. However, one who knows that he has committed a transgression is required to fast, even if he is weak or ill (Tosafot). The authorities associated with the moralistic musar movement have suggested a variety of alternatives to fasting for those who seek atonement for their sins. These include refrain from eating because a dog has eaten his portion, this individual, Reish Lakish argues, is derived no benefit from it.

A Torah scholar is not permitted to sit in observance of a fast – It is prohibited for a Torah scholar to accept a fast upon himself, as it diminishes his capacity to study Torah. However, if the entire community is fasting he should do so as well, so as not to separate himself from the community. Whoever spends all his time studying Torah is called a Torah scholar for the purposes of this halakha, even nowadays (Magen Avraham). Teachers of schoolchildren are also considered Torah scholars, as explicitly stated in the Jerusalem Talmud (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 571:2).

A fast is said: The pious man does good [gome] to his own soul; but he who troubles his own flesh is cruel (Proverbs 11:17). The verb gome can also mean weaning, or abstaining from unnecessary pleasure. Accordingly, Reish Lakish derives from this verse that one who abandons from food is called pious. Similarly, Rav Sheshet said: This student of a Torah academy who sits in observance of a fast has let a dog eat his portion. Since his fast weakens him and prevents him from fasting on the Ninth of Av, Rav Sheshet is student of a Torah academy who sits in accordance with Rav Sheshet’s remark as a curse: As for a Torah scholar who observes a fast, may a dog eat his meal (Shita Mekbubetzer).

There is no communal fast in Babylonia – Various reasons have been suggested for this principle. One may say it is because there is no need to pray for rain in Babylonia, where the land is watered by rivers (Tosafot). Others claim that as most inhabitants of Babylonia were poor, the Sages did not want to prevent them from working (Ravad). Yet others state, based on the Jerusalem Talmud, that a communal fast can be declared only in a place where there is a Nasi and a Sanhedrin (Ramban).

as though a sacred object is immersed in his bowels, which he may not damage, as it is stated: “The sacred is in your midst,” and I will not come into the city (Hosea 11:9). This statement indicates that it is prohibited to take a fast upon oneself. The Gemara answers: This is not difficult. This first ruling, that one who fasts is sacred, is referring to a case where he is able to distress himself without causing bodily harm. That second ruling, that one may not overly burden his body, deals with a situation when he is unable to distress himself while avoiding all harm, and he proceeds to fast nevertheless.

Reish Lakish said: One who fasts is called pious, as it is stated: “The pious man does good [gome] to his own soul; but he who troubles his own flesh is cruel” (Proverbs 11:17). The verb gome can also mean weaning, or abstaining from unnecessary pleasure. Accordingly, Reish Lakish derives from this verse that one who abstains from food is called pious. Similarly, Rav Sheshet said: This student of a Torah academy who sits in observance of a fast has let a dog eat his portion. Since his fast weakens him and prevents him from fasting on the Ninth of Av, Rav Sheshet is student of a Torah academy who sits in accordance with Rav Sheshet’s remark as a curse: As for a Torah scholar who observes a fast, may a dog eat his meal (Shita Mekbubetzer).

There is no communal fast in Babylonia – Various reasons have been suggested for this principle. One may say it is because there is no need to pray for rain in Babylonia, where the land is watered by rivers (Tosafot). Others claim that as most inhabitants of Babylonia were poor, the Sages did not want to prevent them from working (Ravad). Yet others state, based on the Jerusalem Talmud, that a communal fast can be declared only in a place where there is a Nasi and a Sanhedrin (Ramban).
An individual who took a fast upon himself, even if he ate and drank the entire night – מִתְﬠַנֶּה דְּלָא מִתְﬠַנִּין: With regard to one who took a fast upon himself in the afternoon service of the previous day, he is permitted still to recite the Aneinu prayer (Ritva).

Rav Huna is saying that for someone who has committed himself to fast for several days in a row, he is permitted to eat and drink on each of the intervening nights. Some authorities add that on each of the days one has committed himself to fast he inserts the Aneinu prayer in the afternoon Amidah (Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 575:7, and in the comment of Rema).

Some commentaries suggest that even if the priestly garments were not worn, and the priest administered the recital of the Aneinu prayer included in the Amidah on a fast day. If someone is fasting for no more than a few hours, does he recite that prayer?

In what did Moses serve – מִתְﬠַנֶּה דְּלָא מִתְﬠַנִּין: The commentary on the text follows the explanation of Rashi here and in tractate Avoda Zara (34a), that Moses could not have worn the priestly garments during the seven days of inauguration, as those garments were designated exclusively for Aaron and his sons, and Moses was not a priest.

Tosafot objects (Avoda Zara 34a) that Moses could indeed have worn the priestly garments, as the Gemara states elsewhere (Avoda Zara 10b) that during the forty years the Jews spent in the wilderness, Moses had the status of a High Priest. According to Tosafot, the Gemara here is asking specifically about Moses’ clothes during the seven days of inauguration, as at that time the priestly garments had not yet been consecrated. Some commentaries suggest that even if the priestly garments had already been consecrated, Moses could not have worn them during the seven days of inauguration, as at that time the Tabernacle had the status of an improvised altar, and the priestly garments are not meant to be worn for the service of an altar of this kind (Rabbi Yakkov of Orléans). Yet others maintain that it is obvious to the Gemara that Moses wore priestly garments during the seven days of inauguration. The question is only whether he wore the eight garments of a High Priest or the four garments of a common priest.
Mar Utkva went and asked these questions in the study hall. They said to him: The halakha is: One may fast for hours, and he even prays the prayer of a fast. And the halakha is that the jars belonging to gentiles are permitted after they have not been used at all for twelve months. Finally, in what garments did Moses serve all seven days of inauguration? He did not serve in his own clothes, nor in the regular priestly garments, but in a special white cloak. Rav Kahana taught: Moses served in a white cloak that does not have a hem.

Rav Hisda said:

In a white cloak that does not have a hem [inro – בַּבָּלָן] – the term inro is referring to the border of a hem at the bottom of a garment. The white shirt that Moses wore during the seven days of inauguration did not have a border, neither a folded hem nor an additional piece of material sewn to the bottom of the garment. Rav Kahana taught: Moses served in a white cloak that does not have a hem. According to most early authorities, the term inro is referring to the border of a hem at the bottom of a garment. The white shirt that Moses wore during the seven days of inauguration did not have a border, neither a folded hem nor an additional piece of material sewn to the bottom of the garment. Rashi explains that the shirt was made without a hem so that it would be clear to all that it was new and had never been worn before. Alternatively, this was to prevent people from thinking that some defect had been found in Moses when they saw that he was replaced by Aaron at the end of the seven days of inauguration. Since the shirt that Moses wore lacked a hem, it would be apparent to all that it had been intended from the outset to be worn for only a short time. Tosafot also cite an alternative explanation, that inro means wool. The priestly garments were made of wool and linen, a combination that is ordinarily prohibited as diverse kinds. According to this explanation, Rav Kahana is saying that as the cloak worn by Moses was not a priestly garment, it was made of linen without any admixture of wool.

The halakha is that which you said, that one may fast for a few hours, provided that one took a fast of a few hours upon himself, and that he fasted and did not taste anything until the evening. Abaye said to Rav Hisda: This ruling is obvious, since it is a full-fledged fast, as one ultimately fasts the entire day. Rav Hisda answered: No, it is necessary to say this halakha in a case where he changed his mind, i.e., he began the day without intending to fast, but for various reasons he did not eat, and halfway through the day he decided to continue fasting for another few hours until nightfall. Rav Hisda maintains that this kind of fasting for hours is considered a fast.

One may fast for hours – מתיו וּמִתְפַּלְּלִין הָאִירָא וְהוּא. In the Talmud, one is obligated to fast for the remainder of the day if he becomes immersed in his daily activities, and does not eat in the morning, and subsequently decides that he wants to fast for the remainder of the day, he is allowed to do so, and should then insert the Ani Eneu prayer into the Amidah. However, some authorities maintain that even one who observes a fast for only a few hours needs to have taken it upon himself the previous afternoon. If one obligates himself to fast for the first part of a day, and then eats, or conversely, if he has eaten during the first part of the day and subsequently takes upon himself a fast for the rest of the day, he is not considered to be observing a fast that requires the recital of the Ani Eneu prayer. However, he is required to observe the terms of his obligation (Shulchan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 571:10–11).