Why should we fast tomorrow, and who should not fast?

□□□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□ □□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□□ □□

WHO AGAINST WHO?
When Queen Esther was informed of Haman's decree to eliminate the Jewish people, she decided to speak to King Ahashverosh and persuade him to reverse that royal edict. But this mission was not simple. Rabbi Moshe Almosnino explains that Esther did not know if Ahashverosh and Haman thought alike, and both indeed wanted to carry out this genocide, or if the king had been tricked by Haman to write that terrible edict. Esther, then, decided to invite the king and Haman to a private banquet (5:4) and in this way try to obtain the information she needed to know: if she would find out that Ahashverosh was in complicity with Haman, she would try to dissuade Haman. And if she discovered that Ahashverosh had been deceived by Haman, then she would expose Haman in front of Ahashverosh, hoping to gain the favor of the King. This was undoubtedly a very risky mission for Esther.

SOCIAL DISTANCING
But there was a previous step to this mission, which was even MORE risky: Esther had to speak to the King. We probably think that for Esther this was the easiest part of ther mission, after all she was the Queen and lived in the palace. But in the Persian Empire no one could approach the king without being invited. Why? Because it was the king's exclusive prerogative to summon his subjects, including the Queen. And Esther had not been called by the King for a month (4:11). The only option left to Esther was to appear directly "defiiantly" in front of the King. But this, which also seems simple, was very risky too! Since if someone entered the area of □□maximum security (*hatser hapenimit*) without being called by the king, the guards hads very precise orders to execute the trespassers, for reasons of national security. The Persian kings had next to them their "Praetorian guards" armed with

long axes, ready to execute on the spot any person who might threaten the physical integrity of the king.

OBSESSED WITH MURDER

The Persian emperors were obsessed with their personal safety, and with good reason. Ahashverosh himself was killed by one of his own loyal bodyguards, Artabano. The Persian law (*dat*) established that anyone entering the security zone of Ahashverosh should be executed immediately (4:11), unless the king himself, once (and IF!) he detected that person's presence, stops his guards before execution and extends his scepter as a sign of royal pardon to the traspasser. This rule also applied the Queen. Since not few times Queens or other people very close to thew King, were part of the plot to assassinate the King. Esther also knew that Ahashverosh had already dethroned and executed the previous Queen: Vashty (1:19), and that he would not hesitate to get rid of her if he suspected that she was a threat.

NON-INTERMITTENT FASTING

"Approaching the king" in order to talk to him and ask for a hearing was *a suicide mission* in and of itself. Esther, with good reason, feared for her life and for the success of her delicate mission: to save her people from genocide, but she had no choice. There was no one else who could do anything to access the king and try to stop Haman's decree. To save her people, Esther decided to risk her life (4:16) and she embarked on this suicide mission. But before entering the security perimitr, Esther asked all the Yehudim to fast with her and for the success of her mission for three days in a row, day and night, (*tsumu 'alai,* 4:16) on the 13th, 14th and 15th of Nisan. Fasting, along with Tefila, is what our Tora and our rabbis instructed us to do in difficult circumstances. At the request of Esther, all Jews fasted for three consecutive days and prayed for the success of Esther. As we all know, with the help of HaShem, Esther's "mission Impossible" at the wend was successful. Eleven months later, on the 13th of Adar when the Jews had to fight and defend themselves against the enemies who were eager to eliminate them, they also prayed to HaShem and fasted for the success of their mission. The custom of fasting before battle is very

old, and according to our Sages it goes back to the wars waged by Moshe Rabbenu. Why fasting before the battle? To demonstrate and declare our belief that victory in the battle does not come from our physical strength but from the help of HaShem, our God.

In memory of the fasting days mentioned in the Megilla (□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□) we observe today the fast of Esther.

The fast begins before sunrise at 5.13am (others: 5:31am) and ends at nightfall 6.13pm (others 6.03pm) after reading Megillat Esther

WHO IS EXEMPTED FROM THIS FAST?

Boys under 13 and girls under 12 years old are exempted from fasting today.

Nursing women and pregnant women do not fast today.

A person who feels sick , for example, someone with fever or an individual who has a chronic disease like diabetes, should not fast.

In times of a pnademic you should extreme our precaution and avoid this fast if because of your age or medical history, you are considered at a higher risk. Ask your doctor. BEING SAFE, HEALTHY AND STRONG SHOULD BE YOUR FIRST CONCERN THIS YEAR.