



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Orthodox Equinox Paradox
2. What in the World is the World to Come?
3. Yiddle Riddle



Lauren Schiff < Laurenrs@aol.com > wrote:

My Artsroll siddur says to add the words 'tal u'matar' [prayer for rain] starting the evening of December 4th. Later I saw in the Book of our Heritage that it says December 5th. Which date is correct?

Dear Lauren Schiff,

The *Book of our Heritage* is correct.

In Talmudic times, the rainy season in Babylon started 60 days after the autumn 'tekufa' — i.e., the halachic equinox. That's the time of year when the Jews in Babylon started to pray for rain. The Sages fixed this date for all Diaspora Jews.

Whereas all Jewish holidays are based on the moon and don't correlate to the civil calendar, the 'tekufa' is based on the sun. That's why it's the only yearly Jewish occurrence associated with the civil calendar.

The Talmudic sage Shmuel approximated the year to be 365 and 1/4 days long. The 'tekufa' is based on this figure. The Roman calendar established by Emperor Julius Caesar is based on the exact same figure — 365 1/4 days. For a thousand years, everything was rosey.

But in 1582 Pope Gregory XIII changed the calendar to what is now known as the Gregorian calendar, which is the one currently in use. According to this calendar, every fourth year is a leap year **except** those **century years** which cannot be divided by 400. For example, the year 1600 was a leap year, but the years 1700, 1800 and 1900 were not. The year 2000 is a leap year.

So the year 1900, which was a leap year according to the Julian calendar, was not a leap year according to the Gregorian. Therefore, the calculations made in the 1800s are no longer valid.

Most current English *prayer books* today are based on reprinting *prayer books* from the 1800s; hence, the mistake. Therefore, the words 'V'tein tal u'matar L'vracha' — 'Give dew and rain for blessing' — should have been added this year on the fifth of December, and not on the fourth.

Which reminds me of a story of a very punctual Jew. On December 5th he calls his wife and tells her, "I'll be 3 seconds late for dinner tonight, dear, we are starting "Tal U'matar."

Sources:

- Tractate *Ta'anit* 10a
- *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 117:1
- *Iggrot Moshe Orach Chaim* 4:17 that the 'tekufa' is according to Shmuel
- Rabbi Yedidya Menat, author of *Luach Kir*

Alice Schubach < aa909@cleveland.freenet.edu > wrote:

I have a coworker who used to ask me many questions about Judaism. One morning when he came to work he told me his children asked him why they have to go to church. He didn't know what to tell them. He said an honest answer would have been, "Go to church, so you won't go to Hell." But he didn't know if he should be so blunt with his young children.

Then, he suddenly looked at me and asked, "Alice, what would you tell your children? Don't Jews believe in Hell?" I said that I had never been taught the concept in my religious education and had never heard it discussed in synagogue. I was taught that Judaism emphasizes this world. So, does Judaism believe in Hell?

Dear Alice Schubach,

In fact, Judaism does believe in "life after death." We do not call it "heaven and hell"; but we refer to the "world to come" — olam haba and gehinom — "hell." Gehinom — a purification process — is part of the world to come.

When a person dies, his soul gets a chance to 'think objectively' about his lifetime spent on earth. Depending on how the person spent his lifetime, this can be a painful process in which the soul mourns its bad deeds, lost opportunities and wasted potential or it can be a process of joy in which the soul delights in its closeness to G-d.

Ultimately, the gehinom process is temporary, and eventually enables the person to enjoy the benefits of all the good things he did during his lifetime.

Although there is a Jewish concept of 'heaven' and 'hell,' we nevertheless emphasize this world. Here's a parable to explain:

A wealthy man goes on a cruise ship. The ship sinks, and he finds himself afloat in a tiny rubber raft. This raft is his only hope of arriving safely to his family, his mansion and all his wealth.

Judaism looks at this world like a raft. By following the survival manual — the Torah — this little raft can bring us safely to the World to Come.

Therefore, Judaism emphasizes this world. Only through good deeds in this world does a person earn reward in the next.

We educate our children about the World to Come, including the idea that no bad action goes without redress. But the emphasis is positive and the aim is to help everyone maximize potential and live the best life possible.

Sources:

- Mishna *Eduyot* 2:10
- The Aryeh Kaplan Reader p. 179 citing *Sefer Haikkarim* 4:33

Yiddle Riddle:

When is a non-kohen called first to the Torah in the presence of Kohanim?

Thanks to Zev Rosen

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