



# Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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19 September 1998  
Issue #207  
Parshas Nitzavim

### **AWE-FULL MARRIAGE**

Amy <clancyport@aol.com> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Why are marriages not encouraged during the Days of Awe between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?*

Dear Amy,

While there is no prohibition against marrying between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, it is customary to refrain from doing so. Because these are days of judgment, we want to direct our primary energies towards repentance: Reflecting on our performance during the past year, and taking steps to improve.

Once, before Yom Kippur, the famed Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer saw one of his students buying an **etrog**, one of the four species needed for the **Succot** festival occurring shortly after Yom Kippur.

"Repentance you have achieved already?"

Rabbi Blazer asked him. His point was that, unless you have attained perfection of character, you should direct your primary focus towards repentance during these days, and leave other matters for after Yom Kippur.

### **ROSH HASHANA IN A SCHNAPPS GLASS**

David from Pittsburgh, PA <glick@nuauticom.net> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Could you email me a brief description of Rosh Hashana? I would like to use it for my web page.*

Dear David,

The first day of Tishrei is called "a day of shofar blasting" (Numbers 29:1). Our oral tradition tells us that this day marks the anniversary of the creation of the world. Hence it is the day when, every year, G-d "takes stock" of Creation, judging our actions. Thus, we call it Rosh Hashana, the "Head" of the Year; for just as the head directs the body, so too, G-d's judgment on Rosh Hashana directs the events of the coming year.

Rosh Hashana is a two-day festival which we honor and enjoy with special (new) clothing and festive meals. There is a prohibition against certain types of work. We light holiday candles and recite kiddush over wine. We eat sweet apples dipped in honey, in prayer that we merit a good, sweet year. The highlight of the daily prayer service is the sounding of the shofar, the ram's horn.

For more, see Ohr Somayach Interactive, our web site, particularly the following: <http://www.ohr.org.il/special/roshhash/index.htm> There's lot's there. Feel free to link your site to as many articles and features as you like.

### **PHYSICAL FEETNESS**

Anon from Australia <nswbje@tmx.com.au> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*What is the rationale behind the prohibition of not wearing leather shoes on Yom Kippur?*

Dear Anon,

The shoe symbolizes the physical body. Just as the shoe encases the lowest part of the body and allows it to ambulate in the world, so too the body encases the lowest level of the soul and allows it to ambulate and relate to the physical world.

Therefore, whenever G-d wants a person to relate on a totally spiritual level, ignoring the body, He commands him to remove his shoes. This was true when G-d spoke to Moses and to Joshua; it was true for the kohanim in the Temple in Jerusalem, and it is true for every Jew on Yom Kippur. We ignore the physical for one day a year, and to symbolize this we remove our leather shoes. Leather specifically, because it came from a living creature and hence symbolizes the body in a much more graphic way than other materials.

The shoe is also removed in a ceremony called "chalitzah," as follows: If one of two brothers dies childless, it is a mitzvah for the widow and the surviving brother to marry each other. If the brother refuses, then the widow is to remove his shoe, signifying that he does not deserve physical comfort or even a body, because he refuses to give a physical form to his deceased brother's soul.

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Ask The Rabbi is written by Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom

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Production Design: **Eli Ballon**

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### RING AROUND THE SHOFAR

Jeffrey Gold from Stamford, CT <1a@iname.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

*There is a practice I have seen in many synagogues during the High Holidays for children to come up to the bimah for the blowing of the shofar. Where does this come from?*

Dear Jeffrey Gold,

It is an expansion of the custom to bring the children to the synagogue in order to educate them in the practicing of mitzvos. They come closer so they can more easily see and hear the shofar. However, if this practice causes a disturbance it should be abolished.

### PAYING FOR PRAYING

John from Sweden <slm95ej9@student1.lu.se>

wrote:

*Dear Rabbi, Synagogue fees: Is it in accordance with Jewish law to take fees from local Jews just to attend the synagogue?*

Dear John,

It is certainly the accepted norm to pay a membership fee to the synagogue in which one prays.

First of all, paying fosters a stronger sense of communal spirit; when a person pays for something, he comes to value it more than had he received it for free. Paying a synagogue fee tends to make a person feel more a part of the community.

But on a practical note, synagogues have tremendous expenses: Books, rent or mortgage, electricity, heat, water, furniture, cleaning supplies, structural maintenance, salaries, social services, etc. Who is supposed to pay for it all, if not the people who avail themselves of the synagogue's services? Even if charitable donors pay for many of these costs, why shouldn't each participant also contribute to the remaining costs according to his/her ability?

(Note: The above is a general description of the appropriateness of paying synagogue fees; it isn't a definitive ruling regarding any specific case. Rulings in such matters should be sought from a rabbi or adjudicating body (beit din) personally familiar with the claims of both parties.)

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 163:1

### YIDDELS AND KITTELS

Alan Shear <alshear@global.co.za> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi, I have read through the entire section of Rosh Hashana in the Mishna Berura, yet found no source which mentions the custom of the shaliach tzibbur (cantor), the ba'al tokeah (one who sounds the shofar), or the ba'al korei (public Torah reader) to wear a kittel (white ritual robe) on Rosh Hashana. Is there in fact a source for this custom? Certainly on Yom Kippur, but no source for Rosh Hashana!*

Dear Alan Shear,

There are two reasons given why a kittel is worn:

- 1) The kittel, being a plain white garment, symbolizes purity from sin.
- 2) A person is buried wearing a kittel. Therefore, when a person wears a kittel he feels humble and remorseful for his sins, remembering the day of death.

According to reason #1, the kittel would only seem appropriate for Yom Kippur, when we are cleansed of our sins, but not for Rosh Hashana. Reason #2 is also not totally applicable to Rosh Hashana; although Rosh Hashana is a day of repentance, it is also a joyous holiday of solemn celebration and one should not display undue sadness.

In some communities the kittel is in fact worn on Rosh Hashana by all congregants. This custom is mentioned by Mateh Moshe and has its source in a midrash which describes how the Jewish people wear white on Rosh Hashana, confident that their sins will be forgiven. Perhaps the custom you mention, namely that the shaliach tzibbur, ba'al tokeah and ba'al korei wear a kittel is based on this midrash, due to their crucial role in the Rosh Hashana services.

Sources:

- Yalkut Shimoni 4:825
- See Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581:13

# Yiddle Riddle

**Last week, we asked:** At the time of the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple), there was a town near the Euphrates in which the first day of Pesach was always observed for one day. The first day of Succos, however, was sometimes observed 1 day and sometimes 2. Why?

**Answer:** This town was 11 day's traveling distance from Jerusalem. When Rosh Chodesh (New Moon) was proclaimed in Jerusalem, messengers went out to inform the people. Even though these messengers did not travel on Shabbat, they would always reach this town in time for Pesach, because at most only two Sabbaths interrupted their journey, giving them 13 days to get there (11 of travel plus 2 of rest). This is enough time to arrive before Pesach, which is on the 15th of Nissan.

Before Succot, however, there are two additional holidays: Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. These are additional days on which the messengers did not travel. Therefore, sometimes the messengers would arrive in time for Succot and sometimes they would not. It depends: If both Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur occur on weekdays, they "use up" two additional travel days. If so, the messengers need 15 days to get there (11 travel plus 2 Sabbaths plus 2 holidays = 15). This is not enough time to arrive before Succot, which is on the 15th of Tishrei. Not knowing the correct date, they therefore needed to observe two days due to doubt. If either Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur occur on Shabbat, however, they gain a day and arrive on time.

## THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

*Comments, quibbles, and reactions  
concerning previous "Ask-the-Rabbi" features*

**Re: Reimbursement for Yom Tov Expenses (Ohrnet Chukas):**

Although it is generally true that a person is reimbursed for clothing that is bought for Yom Tov, there is an important factor to keep in mind. It is explained with a parable of a wealthy man who has two married children. One child is very wealthy while the other one is poor. The father sends out invitations to the two children, inviting them to come visit him in honor of a third child's bar mitzvah. The father asks that, in his honor, they buy new clothing, and that whatever they spend for this, he will repay.

The wealthy child spends a fortune, adorning himself and his family in the finest raiment, while the poor child is unable even to borrow the amount needed to buy the simplest of new clothing. After the bar mitzvah, the wealthy child presents his father with a hefty bill, which the father refuses to pay: "I promised to pay expenses incurred in my honor," says the father. "Had you been concerned with my honor, you would have seen to it that your poor brother attended the bar mitzvah in new clothing. As it occurred, he arrived in rags."

So too, G-d promises to reimburse you for what you spend for Shabbos and Yom Tov; but only if you prove that you are doing so to honor the Shabbos, by providing for the needy and the poor just as you do for yourself.

*Dovid < needmail@aol.com >*

Regarding whether buying one's wife a new dress for Yom Tov is included in the "Divine reimbursement" one receives for "Shabbat, Yom Tov, and children's Torah education" (Beitzah 16a): You may be astonished to find that the Shita Mekubetzes in the name of the Ritva says that the "Divine reimbursement" applies to expenses of all mitzvos, and that these three were chosen as examples because they are common and regular. Not a lot of people know that! Yours faithfully,

*Dons Hool, Kollel Ponevez Bnei Brak  
< ruthie@bsnet.co.uk >*

**Re: Missing numbers in the sequence (Matos-MaseiOhrnet Yiddle Riddle):**

Another excellent Yiddle Riddle that created lots of interesting discussions in my kollel, as per usual. But you missed one: The number 298 would normally be spelled raysh tzadi chet, but since that spells "murder," therefore in one of the newer editions of the Mishna Berura the order of the letters are reversed. (In an older edition it appears as normal.)

*Avi and Dalia Davidowitz, Bait Vegan, Jerusalem*

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