



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Succot Significance
2. Myrtle Dealer
3. Close Shave
4. Lefty Leaves
5. Holiday Wrapping
6. Why Do Animals Suffer
7. Succah in the Sun
8. Public Domain



SUCCOT SIGNIFICANCE

Carol from Port Orchard, Washington <ies@web-o.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am wondering about Succot. Why is it important? What is the present significance? How does this relate to the mashiach (messiah)?

Dear Carol,

Succot celebrates the super-natural protection we, the Jewish People, enjoyed when G-d took us out of Egypt. In this sense, Succot is like Passover. While Passover celebrates our rescue from the Egyptians, Succot goes a step farther, celebrating our miraculous existence in the desert for forty years after that.

Thus, the major significance of Succot is a message of gratitude. If not for the food, water, and shelter G-d gave us in the desert thousands of years ago, we wouldn't be here today. Our gratitude to G-d never fades, just like you never stop being grateful to your parents for giving birth to you. So, for the seven days of Succot, Jews leave the protection of their roofed homes and live in huts covered only with branches, recalling the fact that it is not our homes, but G-d who protects us.

Regarding the connections between Succot and messianic times: According to the Prophet Zacharia, the nations who survive the final "War of Gog and Magog" will come to Jerusalem every year "to prostrate themselves to the King, Hashem...and to celebrate the Succot festival." (*Zecharia 14:16*)

The Prophet Ezekiel describes the Jewish People prior to the "War of Gog and Magog" as living in an almost-messianic state, having been recently gathered from amongst the nations and living in prosperity in their own land. Then, the world's nations — led by "Gog" from the land of "Magog" — will attack Israel in an attempt to put a final end to the Jewish People.

Magog is identified by the Talmud as "Gothia," the land of the Goths. The Goths were a Germanic people, in keeping with the midrashic rendering of Magog as "Germamia" or "Germania."

Our miraculous victory against Gog is to occur during the Succot season, and those of our enemies who repent and survive will come to Jerusalem each Succot to celebrate the anniversary of our victory.

Rabbi S.R. Hirsch notes that "Gog" is related to the Hebrew word for roof. A roof, with its ability to shut out the heavenly influences of rain and sun, symbolizes man's imagined independence from G-d. The symbol of the roof stands in diametric opposition to the weak succah-booth. A succah, covered only by some meager branches, symbolizes our dependence on G-d. Thus, Gog's struggle is the battle of the "roof" against the "succah," in which those who believe only in man's ability to manipulate nature try to eradicate the Jews, whose very existence loudly nullifies this world-view.

The universal nature of Succot is also alluded to in the special Succot offerings, which were seventy in number. This corresponds to the number of primary nations of the world; i.e., the seventy nations descended from Noah (see *Genesis Chapter 10*). Seventy is also the numerical value of the Hebrew phrase "Gog and Magog."

Sources:

- Book of Ezekiel 38
- Ibid. Commentary by Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, Mesorah Publications
- Yerushalmi Megillah 3:9
- Targum Yonatan 10:2, Bereishet Rabbah 37:1

If you have E-Mail and a question, you can submit it to Ask The Rabbi for possible inclusion in a future edition. Just write your question using your E-Mail program, set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi" and send it to info@ohr.org.il. Or use our form at <http://www.ohr.org.il/ask/page/ask.htm>. We can't include all questions submitted, but we do try to respond to everyone.

Ask The Rabbi is written by Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom Lefkowitz, Rabbi Mordechai Becher and other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

General Editor: **Rabbi Moshe Newman**
Production Design: **Eli Ballon**

Ask The Rabbi is available from several sources:
• World Wide Web: Our address is <http://www.ohrnet.org>
• E-Mail via InterNet. To subscribe, send the message "sub ask {your full name}" to listproc@vjlists.com

☎ 22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel
☎ 38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA
☎ 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

☎ 972-2-581-0315
☎ 1-212-213-3100
☎ 1-905-886-5730

☎ 972-2-581-2890
☎ 1-212-213-8717
☎ 1-905-886-6065

☎ info@ohr.org.il
☎ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com
☎ Somayach@MSN.com

MYRTLE DEALER

Ted Bucklin from California <tbucklin@vom.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am a myrtle grower in California and I have been preparing Succot myrtle for a gentleman in New York for years, but I am still in the dark about the use of the myrtle stems we so meticulously prepare. I am also interested in exploring the marketplace to see if I can find other potential clients for this product. Could you please explain the significance of myrtle in the New Year celebration, how it is prepared and used, and could you possibly refer me to someone who knows the myrtle market or who might be interested in purchasing my product. Thank you very much.

Dear Ted Bucklin,

Myrtle is one of the "four species" of trees which Jews are commanded to pick up and hold during the Succot festival. As the Torah says regarding Succot, "You shall take to yourselves...the fruit of an *etrog* tree, palm fronds, braided (myrtle) branches, and brook willows...." (*Leviticus 23:40*).

Myrtles are called "braided" because the leaves grow in sets of three with each set of leaves covering the set above it on the branch, giving the myrtle branch the appearance of a braided chain. The myrtle used for Succot has special requirements; for example it should be complete, and the three leaves of each set should grow from the same point along the stem. Agronomists in Israel have recently developed a method which produces myrtles of the highest standard.

For the expansion of your clientele, contact dealers in Jewish communities throughout the USA. You might do this by contacting official congregations listed in the phone book.

CLOSE SHAVE

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is someone who shaves daily all year round allowed to shave during the week of Succot and Pesach (on Chol Hamo'ed)?

Dear Name@Withheld,

No. Shaving is forbidden on *Chol Hamo'ed*. Shaving one's beard with a razor is always forbidden, but during the week of Succot and Pesach, it's even forbidden to trim it with scissors.

In the times of the Chatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer), some Jews in the high society used to shave with a razor, disregarding Jewish Law. Now, the Torah

prohibition against shaving with a razor doesn't apply until the beard stubble has grown somewhat (approximately two or three days' growth). So the Chatam Sofer said that it was better for them to continue shaving on *Chol Hamo'ed* so that the hair would not have time to grow to that length, rather than letting it grow during and shaving after the festival, which would entail the violation of hundreds of Torah prohibitions, one prohibition for every two hairs shaved. Many people misunderstood this, mistakenly thinking that the Chatam Sofer was lenient regarding the prohibition of shaving on *Chol Hamo'ed*.

LEFTY LEAVES

Mel Tanen <meltanen@juno.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am left-handed so I hold my *lulav* (palm branch) in my left hand and the *etrog* (citron) in my right hand. Do I still place the *haddasim* (myrtles) to the right of the *lulav* and the *aravot* (willows) to the left of the *lulav*?

Dear Mel Tanen,

According to Ashkenazic custom, a lefty holds his *lulav* in his left hand. However, the setting of the *haddasim* and *aravot* is the same as everyone else, which is that the *haddasim* go on the right of the *lulav* (as you hold the *lulav* with its spine facing you).

The Sephardic custom is that even a lefty holds the *lulav* in the right hand.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 651:3 and Rema
- Mishna Berura *ibid.* note 12 in the name of the Pri Megadim

HOLIDAY WRAPPING

Michael Braitman from Givat Shmuel, Israel <hy59@popeye.cc.biu.ac.il> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What's the significance of "*isru chag*" (the day after a festival)? Why is there no school (in Israel, at least) on *isru-chag*? A friend said it has something to do with the fact that there was an extra day for people to bring a *korban* (Temple offering) during the festival, in case they couldn't make it to Jerusalem on time. If so, why is this pertinent to our day, when there are no sacrifices?

Dear Michael Braitman,

Ever go jogging? When you're done, you're not supposed to stop suddenly; it's too big of a shock to the system. Rather, you "warm-down" by walking, and finally you can stop.

The same is true of a Festival. We don't go directly from a joyous festival back into everyday life. We need a day to "warm-down," or rather to "wrap-up" the joy of the Holiday. "*Isru chag*" is that day. "*Isru chag*" literally means "tie up the festival." That is, take the happiness and meaningfulness of the festival and bring it with you into the rest of the year.

In Temple times, festive offerings were brought on *isru chag* of the *Shavuot* Festival. *Isru chag* remains a semi-festive day, even today when there is no Temple.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch 429:2
- Succah 45b
- Jerusalem Talmud, Avodah Zarah 1:5

WHY DO ANIMALS SUFFER

Basha Majerczyk < chasidiste@aol.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Here's something that just popped into my head recently: If the specifics of childbearing are a curse, the result of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, why do animals experience similar cycles,

pain, etc.? Thanks. The ladies of my shul are waiting for an answer.

Dear Basha Majerczyk,

Good question. Let me add to your question: Why do animals die? The Sages answer that Adam and Eve went around to all the animals and fed them some of the forbidden fruit. Whether this is meant literally or not, the idea behind it is that this world is created for us humans to have free will, either to build or destroy. When we sin, we destroy not only ourselves but the world as well.

SUCCAH IN THE SUN

Name@Withheld from New York, NY wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can one place branches over the open sunroof of one's car in order to create a valid succah?

Dear Name@Withheld,

The mishna says "One who makes a succah on a wagon, or on a ship, it is a valid succah."

However, a succah has certain minimum dimensions of height and area. The sunroof must be at least 7 x 7 halachic handbreadths (approximately 70 X 70 cm) and the walls must be at least 10 halachic handbreadths high (approximately 100 cm). Ideally, the branches which cover the sunroof should not sit directly on the metal of the car; but rather, they should rest on top of other wood or branches.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Corporate Heads (Ohrnet Nitzavim/Vayelech):

You recently wrote regarding wearing a *yarmulke* (skull cap) at work, and the respect one gains for the integrity of doing so. I would like to relate the following incident told to me by a very religious surgeon, the intern in the incident:

When the intern appeared to participate in an orthopedic surgical procedure, the head surgeon expressed doubt about the intern's ability to operate with his long beard. The intern assured him that the beard would be fully covered by the surgical mask and would not hinder the operation at all. After successfully completing the procedure and impressing the head surgeon with his skills, the head

surgeon told the people present that all during his professional life he had tried to hide his own Judaism and here was someone who was professionally competent and not afraid to live openly according to his beliefs. He even offered the intern to join his lucrative group practice in orthopedic surgery!

Shimshon < shimshon@rokar.co.il >

Regarding the Manhattan man who feels his *yarmulke* hinders his career advancement: I work in a totally non-Jewish business setting in rural Missouri, in a town where I am one of less than a dozen Jews and the only Orthodox Jew, except for my wife. I think that wearing a *yarmulke's* effect on one's coworkers is often based on the perception of

the wearer. Although I only recently started this job, I have never felt that my *yarmulke* was creating a negative response. It is hard to believe that people in Manhattan (where I am originally from) would feel negatively toward *yarmulke* wearing since it is so common in NY.

Larry Weinberg from Maryville,
MO < edlawlarry@geocities.com >

Re: Rosh Hashana (Ohrnet Ha'azinu):

You wrote that Jewish kids can feel special when they "get out of school on Rosh Hashana while all their friends are in school." You should be aware that many major county school systems do not have school on Rosh Hashana (first day), Yom Kippur, or the first day of Pesach.

Menashe Katz < mkatz@sysnet.net >

Is it not true that Rosh Hashana is the new year for the world, so that actually it should be a

worldwide holiday? What a great thing it would be if people worldwide would join together to realize that Hashem is judging the entire world at the same time and thus create a day of world prayer.

Stuart Wise < swise@amlaw.com >

Re: What Levites Never See (Ohrnet Nitzavim/Vayelech):

Regarding your Yiddle Riddle, "what does a *levi* never see in his adult life," here's a second answer: Before the *kohen* blesses the congregation (on Festivals outside the Land of Israel, or daily in the Land of Israel) a *levi* washes the *kohen's* hands. If no *levi* is present then a *bechor* (first-born son) washes the *kohen's* hands. Thus, a *levi* would never witness anyone other than himself or another *levi* washing the *kohen's* hands.

Bruce M Selznick, Richmond, VA < bmselznick@juno.com >

Take part in

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Send your comments to: info@ohr.org.il

You can submit your questions to

Ask The Rabbi

with your web browser from the page:

www.AskTheRabbi.org

Or if you want to use e-mail, address it to: info@ohr.org.il