

A New Yavneh Publication

18 Tishrei 5769 // 17 October 2008

Minyan Times

Friday Mincha	5:55 PM
Kabbalat Shabbat	After Mincha
Saturday Shacharit	8:45 AM
Saturday Mincha	5:50 PM
Saturday Maariv	7:04 PM
Monday Shacharit	6:45AM
Tuesday Shacharit	8:45AM
Wednesday Shacharit	8:00AM

Announcements

- There's an oneg tonight at 9:30PM (but show up whenever) in Jacqui's room, 322 North C Whitman. It's in honor of Matt PG's birthday. Yay!
- Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are this very week! Last chagim of the season, better enjoy them. We've got two scholars-in-residence in town—Rabbi Mike Schultz and Rachael Gelfman—to give shiurim, divrei torah, and spirit. So come dance and sing and learn and rock out.
- For the sake of said “rocking out,” you might want to contribute your own personal zemirot to Mendy's zemirot database! Go to <http://zemirotdatabase.org> for details on how. If your songs are up, we can know ahead of time and print out the lyrics for singing. Thanks!

A Brief Thought

By David Wolkenfeld

I wish to follow up last weeks *mehitzah* piece with a seemingly (but only seemingly) unrelated halakhic concern that effects our communitys *tefilah*. The *Shulhan Arukh* in O.H. 102:4 (based on the *Gemara* in *Berakhot*) rules that it is forbidden to pass within four cubits (about 6 feet) in front of another person praying lest your walking interfere with the other persons concentration in prayer. The corollary to this sensitivity would be refraining from praying at a time and place when it can be assumed that others will wish to pass such as in isles or near room exits.

Practically, there are two main moments where attention must be paid to this *halakhah*. one is at the conclusion of the recitation of the *amidah* where it is customary to take three steps backward. If the individual praying behind you has not completed his or her *amidah*, it is necessary to wait before stepping into his or her personal space. The other moment when this *halakhah* is relevant is when someone wishes to enter or leave the synagogue space during a time when others are praying. It is nearly impossible to leave most synagogues without walking in close proximity of another worshipper. It is possible, however, to mitigate the situation in the two rooms where our own *tefilot* take place. If we all tried our hardest to avoid congregating in the back of the room, a path of egress would be created that would allow those who needed to leave the synagogue early or enter late to do so without encroaching on the prayer space of others.

Beyond the technical law, a broader issue is at stake. This *halakhah* is highly relevant to the dilemma common to all spiritual seekers who must learn to balance their own spiritual growth and religious experiences with those of the community around them. Our presence in synagogue spaces must not interfere with or distract our neighbors. To generalize even further, we must always be cognizant that our behaviors, actions, and manner of being in the world impacts upon others. The Torah is meant to sensitize us to their needs so that we have positive impacts upon the world around us and not negative ones. When choosing a location to pray, or a route to enter or leave a synagogue—we must think, even then, of the other and not just on our own personal prayer experience.

Obscure Halacha

How Frum are You?

By Kerry Brodie

For all you people who happen to have extra cattle or elephants hanging around, this one's for you!

The rabbis discuss in Masechet Sukkah 22b whether or not an elephant can be used as a legitimate wall for the sukkah. This of course applies to a broader question of what constitutes a wall, and what does not.

Rabbi Yehuda says that an elephant is a permissible sukkah wall. Rabbi Meir disagrees. Rabbi Meir is one who states generally that something that contains the breathe of life cannot be used for various other usages. For example a gravestone cannot be made of something that has the breathe of life. As a side note, Rabbi Jose of the Galilee says that you cannot use a living animal for a bill of divorce. General rule—if it breathes don't use it for halachik purposes!

Anyways, back to the main and exciting issue. What are you going to do with your elephant? Actually the debate extends beyond just the elephant. What are you going to do with any animal you desire to complete your awesome sukkah?

Rabbi Meir vetoes using an elephant or an animal as the wall of the sukkah. But on what grounds? Abaye states it's because the elephant might die. Rabbi Zera says because it might run away.

So now we are left to figure out what the actual reason is. Well, there is agreement amongst everyone. If your animal can run away, it cannot be used as a sukkah. So this is not necessarily the best argument to support Rabbi Meir's veto. It is quite simple to tether an animal down, and thus prohibit its escape. So if you want you could have your animal as your sukkah, it just won't be a very happy animal. Additionally there is an understanding that your animal has a space under its legs, so you need to fill your hole with leaves, so that your wall is actually a wall. But again this is a very feasible activity, and not grounds for prohibiting using the animal as a wall.

Next we deal with the issue of the elephant's death. If your elephant dies you have an issue, because after all he did have a purpose in life—to support your sukkah. However, the rabbis state that death is a rare occurrence. The foremost issue is that it's tiring being an elephant, or any beast for that matter. So the animal might sit down. But have no fear! Your semi-permanent structure could involve some device that could hold the animal up, and prevent this poor beast

from sitting. So you're okay, your animal sukkah wall is doing fine.

But we get back to death. True the sudden death of your animal is not imminent. But now your animal is suspended in mid air, so you wouldn't be able to tell if it died. So hypothetically your elephant could pass away without you even noticing. So you would be oblivious to the death of the animal. This is not such a big deal it seems because now you have a dead animal as the wall of your sukkah (no breathe of life). But it is an issue because the animal's body will constrict, making the wall shorter than the mandatory height. Thus your sukkah will cease to be kosher

So in short, no you cannot use an animal as the wall of the sukka—hopefully the zoo will let you return the elephant you rented!

Moadim l'simcha and Shabbat shalom!

Want to Write?

Have a good idea for a column? Contact Greg Burnham (gburnham@) if you are interested in writing for this newsletter. We'll publish most anything relating to Judaism or Judaism at Princeton.