



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Plane Prayer
2. Two Shins
3. Answer to Yiddle Riddle



Alan Levine from Illinois wrote:

My parents recently flew to Israel on El Al. The airplane was very full and they ended up having to sit in the back in the smoking section and unfortunately had a very bad flight. On top of the smoking and the people marching back and forth to the bathrooms — just when my mother had finally fallen asleep — the people started davening Shacharit [praying the morning service]. My dad said it bothered them and woke my mother up. He said it wouldn't have bothered them if it'd just been quieter. My question is this: Can I pray sitting in my seat if I feel more comfortable? I think I would be able to concentrate better and it wouldn't bother anybody.

Dear Alan,

According to the Shulchan Aruch, someone traveling in a ship and unable to stand may pray while sitting, but must pray **over again** when he reaches his destination. (Today, however, due to our low level of concentration during prayer, we wouldn't pray over, but rather would rely on the sit-down prayer.)

On a 'jumbo jet', though, there are places where ten or more can stand and pray together, while following common courtesy: Pray quietly, avoid stepping on toes, don't block the bathroom or aisle, etc.

To find out El Al's official policy towards in-flight prayer groups, I called their assistant director of public relations. The official told me, "El Al is a Jewish airline. We have never stopped this [people praying with a *minyan*] ... We do know that people are complaining about this." If enough people were to congregate and cause a noticeable weight imbalance, the captain would be obligated by international aviation regulations to disperse them, said the official, but this never actually happens.

I asked Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, *shlita*, if one should pray with a *minyan* on an airplane. He said yes, adding that he does it "all the time." While strictly speaking it might be permitted to pray at your seat, Rabbi Scheinberg prefers that one pray with a *minyan*, but quietly in a way that doesn't disturb others.

True story: Two rabbis I know were flying from one city to another somewhere in America's 'Wild West'. Heavy turbulence caused one passenger --- a first-time flyer --- a great deal of fear and anxiety. Just as the flight attendant succeeded in reassuring him that all was normal, it came time for afternoon prayer. The rabbis got up, put on their hats and jackets, and headed towards the back of the plane. Seeing this, the frightened passenger became hysterical, saying, "You see! You see! Those guys are getting off!"

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 94:4,9

Julian Freedman of Institute of Management Accountants <imacma@CLASS.ORG> wrote:

The head Tefillin has the Hebrew letter 'shin' embossed twice on it. One of them is written normally with three branches, and the other one has four branches. Why?

Thank you!

Tefillin embody the entire Torah. According to the verse, *Tefillin* enable "the Torah of Hashem to be in your mouth." The two different *shins* represent the two ways the Torah was written: In stone and upon parchment.

Hashem told Moses to write a Torah scroll using ink and parchment. This Torah was written as we write it today --- i.e., with the 'normal' three-pronged *shin*. The letters engraved on the tablets, on the other hand, were formed by empty space --- this empty space is legible due to the outline formed by the remaining stone. The four-pronged *shin* represents the outline of the *shin* engraved on the tablets. By the way, this is the only instance of a four-pronged *shin*.

This teaches us that if **we** learn Torah (the three-pronged *shin* of the scroll written by Moses), Hashem will give us the gift of understanding (the unique four-pronged *shin* of the Tablets, which were given as a gift to the Jewish people).

Sources:

- Hagahot Semag, cited by Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim 32

Yiddle Riddle:

Last week we asked: What is the longest *Birkat HaMazon*? What can make it longer?

Answer: When Rosh Chodesh Tevet falls on Shabbat, the *Birkat HaMazon* contains additions for Rosh Chodesh, Shabbat and Chanukah. It is even longer after a meal celebrating a Brit Milah, in which case there is an addition to the *Zimun* (introduction) and extra '*Harachamans*' (special supplications).

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