

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Niddah 32-38

Week of 15-21 Av 5757 / 18-24 August 1997
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

The Lions and the Dove

"Daughters of the Kutim" is the name of the *perek* of *Mesechta Niddah* we are learning this week. This title refers to the special status of ritual impurity by our Sages for the woman of a particular sect in Jewry.

Who were the Kutim?

About 2,500 years ago the Assyrian ruler Sancheriv conquered the Kingdom of Israel and exiled the ten tribes to an unknown foreign land. In line with his policy of population transfers, this conqueror of all nations replaced the Jewish exiles with imported subjects from a number of lands including Kuta.

These new arrivals continued their idol worship in the Holy Land and Hashem sent lions to prey upon them. Out of fear they converted to Judaism. Although this conversion was shaky at the start, they eventually become stronger in their commitment to Torah and were considered to be Jews during the Mishnaic period. At a later stage an investigation revealed that they had all along secretly continued to worship a dove-shaped idol at their shrine on Mount Grizim and there were thereafter considered as non-Jews.

Even during the Mishnaic period when they were considered full-fledged Jews there was a strange aspect to their religious observance. They believed only in the Written Torah, not in the Oral Torah, and in regard to those mitzvos which they accepted they were even more careful than other Jews. In regard to the *birchas hamazon* after meals they could therefore be part of a threesome making the blessing because this was an explicit command which they accepted (*Mesechta Berachos 45a*). But in regard to the laws of *niddah* they did not abide by the ruling of the Sages, based on the Oral Law, as to which sort of menstrual flow induced a state of *niddah* impurity. This created a situation in which every one of the Kutim women had to be considered ritually impure as a *niddah* all of the time because she may unknowingly have prematurely commenced and prematurely concluded her *niddah* cycle.

Niddah 33a

The Eyes Have It

A battle over respect for rabbinical authority in halachic matters raged between the Sages Shila bar Avina and Rabbi Asi. There was such a sharp difference of opinion as to the final ruling of their departed master, the Sage Rav, regarding a certain law of *niddah* that their dispute resulted in Heaven decreeing the premature death of both.

At their joint funeral a most interesting thing happened. It was customary to place a *hadass*, a myrtle branch, on the bier of the deceased. The *hadass* on one of the biers mysteriously lifted from its place and alighted on the other bier while the *hadass* on that bier jumped across to take its place.

Understanding quickly replaced the initial amazement of the onlookers. "The rabbis," they deduced, "are making peace with each other."

But why was the *hadass* the Heaven-chosen symbol of this post-mortem reconciliation?

Tzaddikim, explains Maharsha, are compared to *hadassim* (*Mesechta Megillah 13a* on the basis of *Zacharia 1:8*). The rapprochement of the souls of these two saintly sages was therefore signaled to the living through *hadassim*.

It may be suggested that the role of the *hadassim* in this instance reflects the symbolism assigned to this myrtle branch by the Midrash which compares the four species used for a mitzvah on Sukkos with different parts of the human anatomy and their functions. *Hadassim* leaves are similar in shape to the human eyes and serve as a reminder to the Jew to serve his Creator with his sense of sight. The *tzaddik* uses this sense to objectively see the good in his fellow man. Even if the two sages mentioned in our Talmudic section had some objective criticisms of each other's behavior on a particular issue, this did not blind them to an appreciation of each other's virtues and saintliness. It was therefore fitting that this mutual respect of saintly souls found expression in the crossflight of *hadassim*.

Niddah 37a

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

©1997 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

The Weekly Daf is available from several sources:

- World Wide Web: Our address is <http://www.ohr.org.il>
- Fax and Mail in Israel and US-MAIL in America. Send us a note requesting a subscription in Israel, or call 800-431-2272 in the US for details.
- E-Mail via InterNet. To subscribe, send the message "sub dafyomi (your full name)" to listproc@virtual.co.il

☎ 22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel ☎ 972-2-581-0315 fax: 972-2-581-2890 ✉ ohr@virtual.co.il
☎ 38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA ☎ 1-212-213-3100 fax: 1-212-213-8717 ✉ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com
☎ 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada ☎ 1-905-886-5730 fax: 1-905-886-6065 ✉ Somayach@MSN.com

Dedication opportunities are available for The Weekly Daf — Please contact us for details.

This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Do not let this land on a garbage heap.

Issue #184 - Niddah 32-38

Production Design: Lev Seltzer

For the week of 15-21 Av 5757 / 18-24 August 1997 (Parshas Eikev)