

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Rosh Hashana 2 - 8

Week of 23 - 29 Tammuz 5759 / 7 - 13 July 1999
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Rosh Hashana of the Special Tree

Four varieties of Rosh Hashana are listed in the opening *mishna* of this *mesechta*. One, the Rosh Hashana related to the tree, is on the 15th of Shevat according to the opinion of Beit Hillel; it is familiar to us as “Tu (15th) B’Shevat — the New Year of the trees.”

There are several halachic implications of this date, such as determining the year’s beginning in regard to tithes. Fruits reaching a certain state of development before Tu B’Shevat are not tithed with fruits that reach that stage later. Similarly, this date determines the *type* of tithe that applies: *Ma’aser sheni*, the “second tithe” applies to fruits of the second year in the seven-year agricultural cycle; whereas, *ma’aser ani*, the tithe for the poor, applies to fruits of the third year. There is also the ramification of how to determine when the fruits of a tree have passed the three year stage during which they are forbidden as *orlah*. (Whether Tu B’Shevat determines the beginning of the *shemita* year for fruits is the subject of a lively debate of halachic authorities cited by Rabbi Shlomo Strashun (Rashash) in the back of the *gemara*.)

One of the great Chassidic leaders, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech of Dinov, in his classic work “Bnei Yissachar” makes an interesting observation: All the items mentioned in the *mishna* affected by the various Rosh Hashana dates — kings, documents, festivals, animals and vegetables — appear in the plural form. The only exception is the tree which is referred to in the singular.

This, he suggests, may be a hint that on Tu B’Shevat, the New Year of the trees, we focus on one particular tree, the one which provides the *etrog* for the mitzvah of taking the four species on Succot. There is a tradition, he notes, to pray on that day to have the privilege of acquiring not only a kosher *etrog*, but a beautiful one as well. It is on that day that the sap rises in fruit trees, and the *etrog* each Jew will acquire depends on his individual merit. Prayer on this day, concludes the author, will “bear fruit,” and it is to this prayer which the *mishna* alludes in switching to the singular form in regard to trees.

Rosh Hashana 2a

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel ☎ 972-2-581-0315
38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA ☎ 1-212-213-3100
613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada ☎ 1-905-886-5730

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

☒ info@ohr.org.il
☒ RZCorlin@aol.com or estem@Aol.com
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The Hidden King

Standing before the Persian king whom he served, Nechemia realized that the fate of Jerusalem's beleaguered Jewish community, desperately trying to rebuild the city following the Babylonian Exile, depended on his gaining royal permission to take temporary leave from his post and assuming leadership of that effort. The presentation of his plea is thus described:

"The king said to me 'What is your request?' and I prayed to the Heavenly G-d. I said to the king: 'If it please the king, and your servant finds favor with you, let me be sent to Judea, to the city where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.'" (*Nechemia 2:45*)

The prayer for heavenly assistance appears, on the surface, to be a parenthetical pause between the king's question and Nechemia's response. Maharsha suggests, however, that Nechemia's recording of what he said to the king is not a reference to his response to the Persian ruler but rather constitutes the text of his prayer to Heaven. The king to whom he addressed these words was the King of Kings whom he implored to grant him favor in the eyes of the earthly king.

The source for such an approach is found in the words of another great Jewish leader of that period between the first and second *Beit Hamikdash*. When Daniel interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, he thus described the heavenly gift of power which had been granted him:

"You, King of Kings, Lord of the heavens, a mighty and powerful kingdom has been granted to you." (*Daniel 2:36*)

Wherever the word "king" is used in the Book of Daniel, say our Sages (*mesechta Shavuot 35b*), it refers to an earthly ruler except in this passage. Daniel was explaining to the vainglorious world conqueror that it was the Divine king of Kings, Lord of the Heavens, Who had granted him his mighty and powerful kingdom and Who had sent him a message in his dream that this kingdom, the first of Jewry's four exiles, would eventually give way to others until the Kingdom of Heaven was finally established on earth.

Rosh Hashana 3b

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☎ 972-2-581-0315

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☎ info@ohr.org.il

☎ 38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

☎ 1-212-213-3100

☎ 1-212-213-8717

☎ RZCorlin@aol.com or estem@Aol.com

☎ 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

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