

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

A woman is accustomed to wearing white clothing on *Rosh Hashanah*, at least for shul. She is an *availah* for a parent. She is also accustomed to wearing black for *avilus*. Should she refrain from wearing white? May she wear something white and something black at the same time? Should she avoid going to *shul* if she must not wear white?

The issues:

A) Wearing white on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*; the *kittle*

B) *Avilim* wearing black

A) *Wearing white on Rosh Hashanah; the kittle*

The Talmud compares the Jewish approach to the Days of Awe with that of the other nations. On a day of judgment other nations wear black and let their beards and nails grow. Afraid of the judgment, they feel downcast and gloomy. This is reflected in their dressing as mourners would. The Jewish people wear white, wrap themselves in white, shave their beards and cut their nails (before *Yomtov*) and eat and drink with joy. (For a variety of reasons, some change the 'shaving of the beard' to 'shaving the hair.') White is the color worn by a bride and groom on their wedding day. This reflects confidence in Hashem and in His judgment, and indeed, in forgiveness. The terms 'wear whites' and 'wrap in whites' are taken to refer to the clothing worn all the time and the clothing worn specifically for *tefilah*. Some say that this need not be taken literally. White clothing can mean clean, freshly laundered clothing, or it can mean nice clothing. On *Rosh Hashanah* one must wear nice respectable clothing, though not overly embroidered. This is in keeping with the combination of confidence and solemnity. It is not a time for levity. Black clothing for a mourner is a reference to unlaundered, stained clothing, rather than colored black. According to this interpretation, one may wear clean freshly laundered black clothing on *Rosh Hashanah*, as long as he does not do it out of mourning.

A second interpretation is a reference to the whitening of one's sins. The Navi refers to the sins as red, but that through repentance, they are whitened. The stains are washed away. Therefore, one should wear white clothing to represent the freshly laundered soul.

The poskim cite two further explanations in reference to the *kittle*. This is a white over garment worn during the services. Many people wear it on *Rosh Hashanah*. This custom concurs with the earlier explanations. However, others only wear it on *Yom Kippur*. Two reasons are offered for this practice. On *Yom Kippur* we are compared to angels. They do not eat, drink or perform the activities restricted on *Yom Kippur*. By refraining from them, we are like angels. There are Scriptural references to the angels being clad in white. Therefore, we also wear white.

Secondly, a verse says "at all times your clothing shall be white." In context, this is

a reference to being prepared to pass away at any time. Wearing white is a poetic way to represent preparedness. One meaning is the metaphor for repentance. One should always be in a state of penitence, so that his clothing is not stained. A second meaning is a reference to the shrouds worn by a corpse. In the Jewish tradition, a corpse wears white linen shrouds. Although this only became law as a result of a later institution, the fact that the institutionalized color chosen was white indicates the preference of this color previously as well. Therefore, it is also understood as a literal translation of the original verse. Accordingly, on *Yom Kippur*, when one wishes to subordinate himself, the outer garments can be used as a stimulant for this. By wearing a garment worn by a corpse, one subdues the inclinations. This helps in repentance and in gaining a favorable judgment.

According to these last two explanations, it would be appropriate to wear a *kittle* on *Yom Kippur*, but not on *Rosh Hashanah*. On *Rosh Hashanah* we may not fast, but we must eat and drink and be happy and confident. Therefore, we cannot compare ourselves with angels. Furthermore, we would avoid references to death.

[In an interesting side note, a source cited for *availim* wearing black and bride and groom wearing white is a reference to shrouds. In that reference, the person requests that the color of the shrouds not make him stand out, in case he is found more or less worthy than expected (in Gan Eden or when the revival of the dead takes place). He therefore requests not to be dressed in white shrouds, lest he will appear like a groom among the mourners. I.e., he was concerned that he would find himself in the company of those who mourn their lot. He also asked not to be dressed in black shrouds, lest he appear like a mourner among the grooms. According to this reference, one may choose the color of shrouds, but the colors of the mourners or the bride and groom are set.]

Finally, it is common for all those who serve as ritual functionaries during the services to wear whites. This is based, in part, on the white clothing worn by the *kohain gadol* on *Yom Kippur* for the special parts of the service dedicated to that day. According to this, the *minhag* should really only apply on *Yom Kippur*. However, it has become traditional to extend this to *Rosh Hashanah*, at least for the *shliach tzibur* at the main services. They are *shacharis*, *krias hatorah*, *tekias shofar*, *musaf* and in some communities, the *kohanim*. The *shlaich tzibur* wears a *kittle*, with a white girdle, and some also wear a white *yarmulka*. Thus, they wear two or three of the four white garments worn by the *kohain gadol*. If they also wear white undergarments, and if everything is linen, they fulfill the *passuk* completely. However, some suggest that this should be avoided. One should not give the appearance of doing the exact same thing. Rather, the reminder of what took place there should serve as an impetus for our service as well. The Yerushalmi combines this last reason with the third one. The *kohain gadol* wears white to resemble an angel. The service down in this world should be like the service in the upper worlds.

There are varying *minhagim* regarding the *kittle*. An ancient custom was to adorn the collar with silver. This was done for the *chasan* on the day of his wedding, when he would wear the *kittle* for the first time. As mentioned, brides and grooms wear white. Gold was not used for the 'crown' in accordance with an institution at the time of the *churban*, the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*. However, silver was used, firstly to show reverence and importance for the occasion, and secondly, because silver is close to

white. On *Yom Kippur*, we also do not wear gold. The Talmud says that the *kohain gadol* did not wear his golden garments when doing certain special services, because in part, *Yom Kippur* atones for the sin of the golden calf. It is inappropriate for the adversary to become the advocate. For this reason, we also refrain from wearing gold. Some also adorn their white head-coverings, and some embroider it with a reference to atonement.

There are also varying customs regarding women. In some communities all women wear white, both on *Rosh Hashanah* and on *Yom Kippur*. In some communities, women do not refrain from wearing gold, since they were not involved in the sin of the golden calf. In others, they refrain along with the men. Some women also adorn their collars and their head-coverings with silver. (There is a debate on how far the institution against brides wearing gold or ornate crowns is applied nowadays.) In some communities, women do not specifically wear white. This is in accordance with the concept that it represents angels or the *kohain gadol* in his service. Women would not act in this capacity. However, in accordance with the other reasons, the better known practice is for women to wear white. Indeed, women have this practice more so than the men. Some connect this to the tradition that on *Yom Kippur* single women would parade in whites in the vineyards before the single men. [See Vaeschanan 4:7, Midrash, Yeshaya 1:18 Yechezkel 9:3 etc. Koheless 9:8, commentaries. Shabbos 25b 114a Rosh Hashanah 18a 26a Yerushalmi 1:3 Yuma 7:2-3 Taanis 26b 31a Kesubos 8b Sotah 49b, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 560:4 581 597 610:3 (Mateh Efrayim, commentaries) YD 342 352:2 EH 65, commentaries.]

B) *Availim's clothing*

The *halachic* requirements for *availim's* clothing is that they wear the item that they used to tear *kriah*, rending the garment in grief, and that they refrain from wearing freshly laundered garments. In former times, they also covered their faces. These *halachos* apply during the early stages of mourning. After the first thirty days, they may wear freshly laundered clothing. In the Scriptures, there are references to the clothing of the mourners. Sometimes, there is a direct reference to wearing sackcloth and ash. Other times, the reference is vague. Evidently, such clothing existed, but was not absolutely required.

The concept of wearing black, or of not wearing whites is actually tangential. The Talmud debates whether certain *availim* may launder clothing in a reduced fashion. Part of the debate is about white clothing. From this, some deduce that there was a practice of refraining from wearing white when in mourning. The idea of wearing black is based on a number of sources. One is the aforementioned Talmudic passage. There, reference was made to *availim* dressed in black. Another is the aforementioned source about wearing whites on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, in contrast to other nations, who wear black – like mourners. Another source is a reference to one who is unable to control temptation to sin. He should dress in black. Part of the reason for this is that it subdues the person. White is an optimistic color. Black is the color of mourning. It is also metaphoric, mourners' faces are black like the bottom of a pot. The main source comes from the *halachic* ruling about a sinner who left the fold. His relatives may not mourn when he dies. Rather, they should wear whites and wrap in whites. From here it is implied that regular mourners wear black. The poskim say that this practice depends on local custom.

Many people do not seem to have undertaken this practice nowadays. However, it

appears from some of the discussions of the poskim that this is a serious *minhag*. For example, the poskim debate whether one should don black clothing only for a parent or close relative, or also for a teacher. The poskim also discuss whether the *minhag* applies for the entire twelve month period, or only for eleven months. This would depend on whether it is compared to *kaddish*, which is representative of the judgment of the departed soul, or mourning, which applies to the living survivors. *Kaddish* is said as a merit for the departed soul. The Talmud says that the judgment of the wicked is for twelve months. For a parent, one stops reciting *kaddish* after eleven months, to indicate that he does not consider his parent one of the wicked. One may not conduct eulogies on *Chol Hamoed*. The poskim say that one may conduct the first *yahrzeit*. As proof that this is not a sad event, they cite the practice of removing the black clothing then. This implies that the black clothing is worn for twelve months. However, some cite a prevailing custom to remove them after eleven months.

From our earlier quote, it would appear that an *avail* may wear black on *Chol Hamoed*, though public signs of mourning are not shown. Nonetheless, it is possible that this proof is cited from conduct on weekdays. If the black clothing is respectable, and it has no tears in it, it would seem to be permissible on *Shabbos* and *Yomtov*. *Availim* are not the only ones to wear black. However, we have already mentioned that one should not wear specially black clothing on *Rosh Hashanah*.

Our question is: this *avilah* has both *minhagim*. She wears black for mourning and wears whites on the *Yamim Noraim*. Should she wear her whites on *Rosh Hashanah*? The poskim discuss whether an *avail* (man) should wear a *kittle* on *Yom Kippur*. Some say that according to the connection to atonement, the *avail* has experienced this already. Others say that there is no difference between an *avail* and anyone else. They mention no reason to restrict white specifically due to its being distinctively non-mourning clothing. We cited the poskim who maintain that the practice is more widespread for women to wear whites than for men. Accordingly, it would seem that this *avilah* should indeed wear her whites for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, and she need not wear anything black at all. [See Vayeshev 38:11 Ramban. Shmuel II:14:2. Yuma 39b Moed Katan 15a 17a 23a Smachos 2:10, Poskim. Ramban Toldos Adam, Hespel. Teshuvos HaRosh 27:9. Tur Sh Ar OC 547:5 (TZ PMG) YD 345:5, commentaries. References to section A.]

In conclusion, she may wear white, and she should not wear black.

On the parsha ... Hashem did not give you a heart to know, eyes to see and ears to hear until today. I took you for forty years in the wilderness. Your clothing ... and your shoes did not wear out. You did not eat bread or drink wine .. [29:4-5] The *moh*n and the clouds of glory laundering the old clothing meant that the people had no opportunity to show freewill [see *Targum Yonasan*]. When they returned to normal existence they would be able to exercise the ultimate freewill. These specific items – new clothing and shoes and bread and wine – would now be used, to show an appreciation for the kindness of Hashem, as we show on *Rosh Hashanah*.

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