

Is Daylight Savings time year round a good idea?

Category: Tzav, Vayikra

The Breaking News This Week

This week on Tuesday, in the middle of the day, there was breaking news: the Senate unanimously approved a new law. When I saw the headline, I thought for a moment that it was about aid to Ukraine or about stopping the growing inflation, but no, this was about something far more important: daylight savings. Until now, daylight savings has only been practiced for eight months of the year; now, the Senate passed a law to have daylight savings throughout the year.

As you all know, the United States Senate does not usually agree on anything, and certainly not unanimously. Here, thank G-d, they found an issue that unites everyone from the right to the left: to have summer all year round.

Interestingly, the United States is actually following in the footsteps of Russia...

In 2011, then-Russian President Medvedev instituted a year-round daylight savings, but after three years, due to a widespread public protest in 2016, Putin reversed it and instituted a year-round winter clock. Even earlier, in England and Ireland between 1967 and 1971, daylight savings was practiced all year round, and this too was stopped due to public demand.

This week I did a personal survey, and everyone I spoke to was in favor of daylight savings; everyone responded the same way — another hour of light in the evening sounds wonderful.

I do not intend to get into the question of whether an hour of darkness in the morning or evening is better for people's physical and mental health; I will leave that to the experts. But we, as Jews, have a different issue. Every Jewish man who wakes up in the morning, if he is over the age of bar mitzvah, is obligated to put on tefillin.

The time for the mitzvah begins at sunrise, but in difficult circumstances, it is

permitted to go ahead and put on tefillin earlier, a little after dawn. Normally, it is not much of an issue, but every year, in the beginning of winter when daylight savings is still in effect, it is impossible to put on tefillin with a blessing at seven in the morning, and we are forced to delay our daily service here at the synagogue for five or ten minutes.

The reason for this issue is that the sages forbade putting on tefillin at night for fear that a person might sleep with the tefillin and mistreat them; therefore, they ruled that tefillin must be put on only after dawn. Therefore, in the Jewish calendars and on online sites, there are “Tallis and tefillin times,” which are always a bit before sunrise.

Now, if they run daylight savings all year round, we will have to delay the morning service until eight o'clock in the morning in winter months, and the practical result will be that hundreds of thousands of Jews in the United States who go to work early will not be able to put on tefillin in the morning before work, and they definitely will not be able to participate in a minyan. Those who want to say Kaddish on a Yahrzeit or, G-d forbid, during a year of mourning, will lose the ability to do so during the morning prayers, unless they are late for work every day, because Kaddish can only be recited with a minyan.

When Tefillin Could be Worn at Night

Rabbi Yisrael Yitzhak Kahn, a Holocaust survivor, related that while in a Nazi labor camp, he woke up one night to whispers. He listened to the discussion and could not believe his ears: “I have tefillin...” Murmurs began coming from all over the barracks. “Tefillin? How could that be?” “That’s so dangerous!”

Within minutes, the entire barracks was gathered around a distinguished rabbi from Hungary who was holding in his hands no less than a kosher pair of tefillin! Both hand tefillin and head tefillin!

They stood around him excitedly and listened to his story of how the tefillin was smuggled into the camp through a large bribe — all so that they could put on tefillin after almost two years in the camps in which they had not been able to perform such an important mitzvah.

Immediately, a halakhic discussion ensued. It was nighttime, and the blessing on

tefillin is not permitted to be recited at night; an animated discussion began regarding the possible options. Yisrael Kahn listened in amazement. Jews in a Nazi labor camp who had been stripped of any human dignity, hungry, tired, and suffering in inhumane conditions — people who treasured every additional moment of sleep — were standing around and carrying on in a Halachic discussion about the permissibility of putting on tefillin at night!

He burst into the circle of debaters and declared, “When I go to heaven, I want to be among those who will be whipped by the angel for putting on tefillin at night during the war, after not putting on tefillin for almost two years, and not among those who did not put on tefillin despite having such a precious opportunity.”

Without thinking twice, he snatched the tefillin from the rabbi, put them down and recited a blessing enthusiastically.

The barracks fell silent. Everybody was shocked. After a few seconds, all the Jews stood in a row and began to put on tefillin with a blessing, despite the halachic questions.

It turned out that the angel he was talking about was not long in coming...

The noise in the barracks was probably too loud; after a few minutes of spiritual bliss, a crowd of SS police stopped the celebration.

“What’s going on here?” Asked two of the officers who rushed into the barracks.

Quiet.

“What is this? What do you have in hand?”

The Hungarian rabbi tried his best to hide the tefillin in his hands, but in vain...

The Nazi grabbed his hands and began beating him, as well as Rabbi Kahn who was standing next to him. He hit them with a terrible ferocity, and then he called the camp commander.

A few minutes later the camp commander entered the barracks. The commander was tall, his clothes are pristine, his shoes were polished, and his eyes projected pure hatred.

“Bring me the tefillin!” demanded the camp commander.

Hearing the command, the officer snatched the tefillin from the rabbi and handed them to the commander.

“Tomorrow, at dawn, I will burn the tefillin in front of all five hundred Jews in the camp,” the commander declared. “That will be the greatest punishment for you cursed Jews.”

He turned and left the barracks.

Silence reigned in the barracks. Kahn lay on the floor sore from the beatings, and next to him lay the Hungarian rabbi who had smuggled the tefillin. Suddenly, a big smile spread on Kahn’s face. “That was the angel, beating me for putting on tefillin at night...”

“What a terrible disgrace it will be tomorrow,” voices began to be heard throughout the barracks. “Will they burn tefillin in front of our eyes and we won’t do anything about it?”

“It must not be allowed to happen,” Kahn said. “We must go rescue the tefillin.”

In the same labor camp, there was one Jew who was in charge of all the woodwork. This Jew, who was not observant, suggested that he make two wooden cubes that look similar to tefillin, on condition that someone volunteer to sneak into the commander’s room and replace the real tefillin with them. Kahn was amazed at his courage and Jewish pride, and he was inspired to make the commitment. He would go. Within a few minutes, the Jew made two black-painted wooden blocks that were very similar to the tefillin, and it was time to make the switch.

By Divine providence, it was Sunday night, a time when the camp commander was often a little drunk after imbibing too many spirits to mark the Christian sabbath, and therefore deeply asleep.

Late at night, it was silent throughout the camp; only occasional barks were heard from the ferocious SS dogs. Kahn was joined by two others who would help enter the commander’s room. They reached the camp commander’s office and Kahn climbed onto the roof with a ladder and entered the room through the vent. The opening was very narrow, but his small body managed to penetrate it. He crawled inside the vent to the main room and found the tefillin on the commander’s desk.

He jumped into the room, placed the dummy tefillin on the table, grabbed the real ones, and quickly went out through the same opening.

In the morning, everyone was very nervous. Would the commander notice the replacement? Would he burn the wooden tefillin? All the Jews in the barracks agreed not to talk about the issue and to behave as usual.

Lo and behold, they were taken out to work on the railway as every day — as if the events of the previous night had not occurred. At first, they thought the Nazis were planning something for the evening, but even the evening passed routinely, without any mention of the tefillin.

In the end, nothing happened. The same Hungarian rabbi took the tefillin with him and immigrated to Israel with them after the war (*Hachasid Ha'acharon* p. 148).

As an aside — there are Halachic opinions which allow a blessing to be recited on Tefillin before dawn in extenuating circumstances, such as times of war, and definitely during the Holocaust (See *Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim* v. 1 *siman* 10).

The Sacrifice and the Menorah

In this week's Torah portion, the verse says that "Fire must always be lit on the altar, it shall not be extinguished" (6:6). Rashi comments: "The fire regarding which it says, '[to kindle the lamps] continually (תָּמִיד)' (Exod. 27:20) — this fire must also be kindled from [the fire] on the outer altar." In other words, the menorah — the eternal flame — was to be kindled from the other eternal flame, the altar.

Now, there were two altars in the Temple, the inner altar and the outer altar. The inner altar, upon which the incense was burned, stood inside the Temple sanctuary, right next to the menorah, while the outer altar, for the sacrifices, stood in the courtyard.

If you need fire to light the menorah, wouldn't it be more convenient and practical to take from the fire on the incense altar? Nonetheless, the Torah emphasizes that the fire for the menorah needed to be brought from the outer altar where sacrifices were offered.

Perhaps the Torah wants to tell us that in order to light the menorah, in order to become a source of light which illuminates others, we need personal sacrifice. To influence others, one must be a personal example. It is precisely when a person shows that he is willing to make sacrifices for the sake of his Judaism, that his children and those around him will internalize just how important it is to him, and that will positively influence themselves as well.

The morning prayer represents the morning tamid-offering. Perhaps G-d wants our morning prayer to come with a little more personal sacrifice, to be a little bit more difficult, and that morning sacrifice will help us become a menorah and illuminate the world around us.