

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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THE CUSTOM OF YOUR ANCESTORS WHOSE SOULS ARE AT PEACE

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The people of Mesha took it upon themselves not to sail the Great Sea saying, "Our ancestors were accustomed not to sail on the Great Sea, what shall we do?" He said to them: Since your ancestors were accustomed to treat it as a prohibition, do not deviate from the custom of your ancestors whose souls are at peace. (Y. Pesachim 4:1)

Modern Day Mesha is in Morocco on the Mediterranean coast near Gibraltar. If that is where it was in ancient times, one can easily imagine that sailors worked hard to make it home for Pesach and, once there, were not eager to embark back onto Spring's stormy seas for at least a week.

But the sages don't want to make a halachic ruling that one is prohibited from sailing during the intermediate days of the festival but they don't want to invalidate the practice of Mesha's generations. Plenty of fishermen, sailors and trades people would be caught on the road or at sea at Pesach. You can make a sukkah on a boat, certainly. The sages, always sensitive to the needs of the poorer versus the richer, wouldn't want to make it financially impossible for those who had to work to observe the full week of Pesach.

Discussion Questions:

1. The sages want to respect local custom of generations' standing but they don't want to make a halachic ruling, either. In what areas of today's Jewish practice do we see this sort of restraint? For example, the letter of the law does not demand that we have two complete separate sets of dishes to keep kosher but it is our custom that we do so.
2. What are some of your Passover customs that aren't laws but that are precious to you and your ancestors whose souls are at peace?