

Orthodox Jewish man photographed covering himself in plastic bag during flight because faith forbids him to fly over cemeteries

By Nina Golowski

A startling photo of a plane passenger who wrapped himself in a plastic bag for his flight has hit the internet.

The man dressed entirely in black beneath folds of plastic, slightly bows his head beneath the tied ends seen piled on his head. The passengers behind him strain to catch a look.

The photo was posted to [Reddit](#) on Thursday amid suggestions that the man is a Kohein, religious descendant of the priests of ancient Israel, who are banned from flying over cemeteries. Many wrap themselves in plastic bags as a compromise measure.



Sight to see: This photo of a man who appears to be an Orthodox Jew shows him seated aboard a plane while wrapped in a plastic bag, drawing controversy and question on what for

WHY'S THAT MAN IN A PLASTIC BAG?

Kohanim (plural of Kohein) are the male-line descendants of the priests of ancient Israel. Descendants are shunned from flying over cemeteries and being in contact with the dead. Contact with the dead is believed to inflict him with impurity.

Why a plastic bag?

Some consider that the bag provides a potential barrier from the impurities/dead

How can they breathe?

Pre-punched holes invalidate the barrier

If the kohein is putting on the bag and it accidentally rips some leniency to breathe is provided Contact with the dead would consequently inflict him with impurity.

Problems:

Flights have been delayed or turned around because of the ensuing safety hazards The passengers would not be able to reach an oxygen mask or quickly escape the plane in the event of an emergency

'In orthodox and Conservative communities, Kohanim,' plural of Kohein 'are expected to abstain from coming in contact with the dead, which includes a prohibition on visiting cemeteries except for the funerals of close relatives,' Rabbi Jeffrey W. Goldwasser writes in an article for [About.com](#).

As a controversial solution - [not entirely agreed upon](#) even by those in the Jewish Orthodox - the plastic bag used by the man here, would create a kind of barrier between the kohein and the surrounding tumah, or impurity. Some flights also go to great lengths to take specific paths to avoid cemeteries. Passengers can also be made aware in advance if a body will be aboard the plane in cargo. Despite what could be seen as a solution, albeit unusual, flights have been delayed or turned around because they refused to carry the passenger wrapped in a bag out of safety concerns. Even if they can be secured by a seat belt, the passengers wouldn't be able to reach an oxygen mask or quickly escape the plane in the event of an emergency.



Way around it? Israel's Ben Gurion airport is surrounded by small regional cemeteries, dotted in red, creating long concern for Orthodox Jews trying to fly into the airport

Also is the question of how they can breathe.

Pre-punched holes in the plastic are said to invalidate the barrier, according to Jewish newspaper [YatedNe'eman](#). 'Only if when the kohein is putting on this bag it accidentally rips can there be some leniency,' the article claims.

'Kohanim have a duty to protect their taharah, purity,' according to the article. 'They have been bestowed with extra kedushah which makes them worth of being meshorsei Hashem. At times, there may be extra demands made upon them in order to maintain that standard of kedushah and taharah.'

Read more:

- [Q. Is Kohanim status inherited from the father only?](#)
- [Yated Newspaper - Kohanim Concerns While Flying To and From Eretz Yisroel](#)
- [Kohanim Advised to Fly From Israel at Night :: Jewish Media Resources](#)