



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Diet Kosher
2. Gold Star
3. Eden for Yidden
4. Burying and Swearing
5. Three Times Dry
6. Yiddle Riddle
7. Public Domain



OHR SOMAYACH תנומת טאנענבאום קאלעדז
TANENBAUM COLLEGE
23 January 1999
Issue #223
Parshat Bo

DIET KOSHER

Joshua Kaplan <jkaplan@rics.bwh.harvard.edu> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

As a doctor I run into an issue similar to the one raised by a recent questioner. I treat many patients who are Jewish but do not keep kosher, and I have to order diets for them. I try to avoid the problem by never asking what a patient's religion is, but if I know a patient is Jewish, am I not halachically obligated to order a kosher diet for them, even if they don't want one? Thanks.

Dear Dr. Joshua Kaplan,

It's prohibited to be the direct cause of a sin, because of the Torah's prohibition against "placing a stumbling block before the blind." Therefore, you are not allowed to provide a Jew, even a non-observant Jew, with non-kosher food.

Your case, however, isn't a case of *causing* a Jew to sin, as you aren't *providing* the food. Rather, your case might involve the Rabbinic prohibition of *encouraging* or *assisting* a sin; if the diet you suggest contains several choices of foods, some kosher and some not, this reduces the level of your assisting in sin.

I asked your question to Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, *shlita*, of the Jerusalem Beth Din. He said that it would be sufficient to write on the diet plan something like this: "Those interested in observing the Jewish dietary laws (kashrut) should consult with me and their Rabbi regarding this diet."

Sources:

- Leviticus 19:14
- Tractate Avodah Zarah 6b

GOLD STAR

Kevin Woodhouse from New Zealand <shalom@ihug.co.nz> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have a couple of gold nuggets. I want to take one of them to the jeweller and have him make me a Magen David (Star or Shield of David). The question is, can I have inscribed upon it the Shema Yisrael prayer?

Dear Kevin Woodhouse,

If you have the *Shema Yisrael* engraved on your Magen David it will be forbidden to take it into an unclean place (e.g., bathroom). If you want to have something engraved on it, why not your Hebrew name (in English letters)?

EDEN FOR YIDDEN

Igor Doon from Moscow, Russia <igordoon@mtu-net.ru> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am a Jew in Russia and I have one question for you that has interested me for a long time. What happens with a Jew after death? I know a non-Jewish concept about hell and heaven, but I know that such concept doesn't exist in Jewish tradition. Please explain me the point of view, that Jewish tradition provides. Thank you beforehand.

Dear Igor Doon,

Jews believe in life after death. We call it the World to Come. *Gehinom* — a purification process — is part of the World to Come. When a person dies, his soul gets a chance to "think objectively" about his lifetime spent on earth. Depending on how the person spent his life, this can be a painful process in which the soul mourns its bad deeds, lost opportunities and wasted potential.

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Ultimately, the *gehinom* process is temporary, and eventually enables the person to enjoy the benefits of all the good things he did during his lifetime.

Nevertheless, Judaism emphasizes life in *this* world. Here's a parable to explain: A wealthy man goes on a cruise ship. The ship sinks, and he finds himself afloat in a tiny rubber raft. This raft is his only hope of arriving safely to his family, his mansion and all his wealth. Judaism looks at this world like a raft. By following the survival manual — the Torah — this little raft can bring us safely to the World to Come.

Sources:

- Mishna Eduyot 2:10
- The Aryeh Kaplan Reader p. 179 citing Sefer Ha'ikkrim 4:33

BURYING AND SWEARING

Alana Jacob from Silver Spring, MD <alanzo@juno.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

In Parshat Vayechi, why does Yaakov make Yosef swear to bury him in Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel)? It seems a little extreme to make him swear. Shouldn't Yaakov have just believed Yosef and trusted him?

Dear Alana Jacob,

Yaakov trusted Yosef. But he didn't trust Pharaoh. Yaakov was concerned that unless Yosef made an oath, Pharaoh would not allow Yaakov's body to leave Egypt.

Rabbi Eliyahu Munk explains why it was so important that Yaakov not be buried, even temporarily, in Egypt. Yaakov wanted to establish the fact that the Land of Israel should be the focal point of the Jewish People. Merely *asking* Yosef would not have had the same impact as to the importance of the message for all future generations. Thus, he asked Yosef to take an oath.

THREE TIMES DRY

Victor Rodriguez from Thornhill, Ontario <yaakov@cpol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

From the Artscroll Gemara, book Tractate Shabbat, I would like to ask you the following question: On page 108b and under Rashi's comments #46 it says "An evil spirit called bat melech rests on the hands in the morning." Where does this spirit come from? Why the name 'princess' and not any other name? Why do the hands need to be washed three times each, and not two or four times for that matter?

Dear Victor Rodriguez,

"Bat melech" or Princess is the name of a certain "evil spirit," a type of spiritual impurity, which rests on a person's hands in the morning. The name "*bat melech*" connotes some sort of prominence this spirit enjoys among other spirits.

This impurity rests on a person during sleep because the person is as if dead, not moving or performing *mitzvot* with the accomplishing tools, the hands. Thus, when we wake in the morning, we remove this impurity by pouring water over our hands three times. Water symbolizes Torah, and the number three symbolizes the three aspects of Torah — *Torah*, *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim* (The Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Writings). Torah study has the power to fend off any impurity, as it causes you to meditate on G-d's omnipotence and helps you to understand that the "spirit" has no power of its own if not for the will of G-d.

Sources:

- Aruch, Bat Chorin

Yiddle Riddle

One Friday eve recently, I said the first paragraph of *Shema* five times, and each time it was for a different reason. How did this occur?

Riddle Submitted by Benjie Gerstman, Jerusalem <gerstbpg@netvision.net.il>

Answer next week...

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

*Comments, quibbles, and reactions
concerning previous "Ask-the-Rabbi" features*

Re: Deluge of Email:

I cannot believe the deluge of email I've been getting since you published my riddle. I even met (in cyberspace) a member of my extended family who recently became frum and lives far away. Keep up the good work.

Zvi Freund < miltonf@villagenet.com >

The reason I learned in Yeshiva was that "derech erez kadma l'Torah" — before you learn Torah you must first learn derech erez — proper interpersonal relations. That's the first page.

Dovid Papoff, Toronto < dpapoff@canada.com >

Re: Tribal Lineage (Ohrnet Vayechi):

In a recent "Ask the Rabbi" Gabriella asked: "My real mom's last name was Levin. What tribe would I be from?" I think it would have been noteworthy to mention that her tribe is determined by her paternal lineage.

Rabbi Chaim Y. Schreiner < bcys@netvision.net.il >

Re: "Seasons of the Moon" (Tevet 5759):

I read your publication "Seasons of the Moon" by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair. I loved every word, it was inspiring and captivating. What a wonderful gift that Hashem gave him. I enjoyed reading it so much.

Danny Freedman Johannesburg, South Africa < dfreedman13@hotmail.com >

Re: Why the Talmud Starts on Page Two (Ohrnet Vayigash):

Ever noticed how each tractate assumes that you have already learned all of the other tractates? I remarked once to Dr. Gershon Miles, head of the Technology Management & Marketing department of the Jerusalem College of Technology, that I like to study in an orderly fashion, rather than just jumping into the middle of things. Dr. Miles suggested (tongue-in-cheek) that the reason each tractate starts with page two is that in Talmud, it doesn't matter where you start, you've jumped into the middle.

Haim (Howard) Roman, Jerusalem College of Technology
< roman@beitza.jct.ac.il >

Re: Simcha's Torah Stories:

This is so lovely to get your "Simcha's Torah Stories." I have not seen something so perfect for kids, and how healthy and easy they are. The article about smiling is so good for everyone. We kids smile more than the big people, maybe they should learn from us. Keep up the great work. I know a lot of kids here, and this way every kid can get into your stories, and learn thru enjoying and not get bored. Shalom. PS: Every one calls me by the name Bli'neder — in Hebrew it means "without a promise" or something like that — because I say it all the time.

Bli'neder from Miami, Florida < Blineder@aol.com >

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