



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Stripes Forever
2. Raven Maven
3. Yiddle Riddle



OHR SOMAYACH או"ר שומאך
TANENBAUM COLLEGE

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Aaron Goldman <agoldman1@juno.com> wrote:

I enjoy your postings immensely. Could you please tell me the reason for stripes on a tallit? I imagine that not having them would not disqualify the tallit but how did the black stripes come about? I know that the Sefardim have white stripes on their Tallit — and modern ones have different colors. But I am interested in the traditional ones. Thank you very much.

Saul <SBEHR@MCKQ.CO.ZA> wrote:

Here's a poser: Why do talleisim have stripes? Regards

Ruth Marcus from Hyde Park wrote:

Why don't cotton tzitzit have stripes?

Dear Aaron Goldman, Saul, and Ruth,

The stripes on the tallit remind us of the 'strand of techelet' once worn as part of the tzitzit.

Techelet is sky-blue wool. It is dyed with a special dye made from the blood of a fish/snail called the *chilazon*. The Torah says that if we wear a four-cornered garment, we should put strings on the corners, and one of these strings should be a 'strand of techelet.'

Over the centuries, the exact identity of the *chilazon* became forgotten. Hence, the 'strand of techelet' became a mitzva we are unable to fulfill (according to most authorities).

The idea behind tzitzit is that they serve as a reminder. Like royal subjects who wear special insignias to symbolize their loyalty to the king, we wear tzitzit to remind us of our duty to Hashem and His commandments. The beautiful blue reminds us of the sky, which in turn inspires us to ponder Hashem's greatness. Now that we no longer have techelet, we have the stripe on the tallit to remind us of the techelet.

Some people used to have a blue stripe. I don't know why ours is black.

It makes sense that only a woolen tallit has stripes, since techelet is made from wool.

According to some authorities, the tallit should be the same color as the tzitzit — white. That would explain the Sefardic custom to have white stripes.

Sources:

Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 9:4
Pri Megadim, Mishbetzot Zahav 9:6
Ta'amei Haminhagim 15

Kalman Estrin <estrinkm@cadvision.com> wrote:

In a conversation a few months ago, a friend raised the following question. The RAVEN is specifically identified in the story of Noah as the first bird that Noah sends out in search of land. The Raven is also given special prominence in the dietary laws concerning which birds are clean and which are not. Is there a special significance and symbolism connected to the raven?

Dear Kalman Estrin,

Noah sent the raven to find out the state of the world. Since the raven is a bird of prey, it would return with carrion of man or beast if the water had abated to that degree. The raven failed, however, flying back and forth time after time.

Why did Noah send a raven specifically? According to the Talmud, Hashem forbade procreation on the Ark, but the raven violated this prohibition. Therefore, Noah reasoned that of all the birds, the raven was the safest one to send out on this dangerous mission. That way, if the raven didn't survive it wouldn't mean the extinction of its species.

Also, the ancients considered the raven a portent of the future. They would build special cages where the priests would study the motions and flying formations of the ravens. They interpreted these movements as divinations of the future. In this sense, the raven's mission was successful, since Noah could discern from the raven's flying patterns something about the future.

Also, the raven reminds us of Hashem's kindness to even the most helpless of creatures. How? Ravens are cruel to their young, leaving them to die of starvation. But Hashem has mercy on them, and provides them with insects to eat. Thus, sending the raven may have been Noah's way of asking Hashem "Please provide for us, just as you provide for the poor helpless young ravens."

Sources:

- Tractate Sanhedrin 108b
- Tractate Ketubot 49b
- Malbim

Yiddle Riddle:

On Tisha B'Av morning, everyone sits on the floor as a sign of mourning. However, one person in every synagogue publicly sits down on a chair. Who is this person?

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Ask The Rabbi is written by Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom Lefkowitz and other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

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