



Ask The Rabbi...



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This edition contains:

1. Why does everyone keep on saying "Mazel Tov"???
2. Kippa Size. Kippa & Women. Keep on Reading ...

Abe from Los Angeles asked:

What does it mean when we say "Mazel Tov" to someone at a Simcha (joyous occasion)?

Dear Abe,

The word *Mazal* does not literally mean "luck." "*Mazal*" is literally associated with the 12 signs of the Zodiac, which are called the "*Mazalot*," but we use the word in a way which means more than just the Zodiac. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto explains that there is a multi-leveled conceptual system through which G-d interacts with the physical Creation. In other words, "energy" which originates with Hashem travels through this system and eventually reaches us. At some point along the way, this energy is said to pass through the *Mazalot*, the stars and the planets, which then transfer it to the rest of Creation. This explains how people trained in astrology may know what will happen to an individual in the future. They are "reading," through the configuration of the *Mazalot*, the energy that is yet to be delivered. However, we are actually forbidden to engage in the prediction of the future via astrology even though it may work. The source of this prohibition is, "You shall be *tamim* (pure, perfect, simple) with the L-rd your G-d."

The Talmud cites three life-issues which are directly affected by the *Mazalot*: life, children and livelihood. Elsewhere the Talmud seems to contradict this and states that "There is no *Mazal* regarding the Jewish People." The classical sources explain this to mean that the influence of *Mazalot* can be overcome by the Jewish People through prayer and other great merits.

Regarding prayer, the Shulchan Aruch states, "A person must pray with sincere supplication like a poor person begging at the door..." The Chafetz Chaim explains this to mean "that he must pray with supplication like one who is asking for mercy and remember that the fulfillment of his request is not in the hands of anything created, not an angel, nor a *Mazal*, nor a Star, etc., it is all up to the will of Hashem, may His Name be Blessed."

A Halachic application of *Mazal* is the custom of a mourner to say *Kaddish* on the *Yahrzeit* of a parent, because that day is one of "harmful *Mazal*" for the mourner, and the reciting of *Kaddish* affords him protection.

So, what do we mean when we say "*Mazel Tov*"? We are saying a brief prayer at this time which is strongly influenced by the *Mazalot*, that Hashem will ensure that the "energy" that is sent will be only for good.

Sources:

- Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto - *Derech Hashem*, 3:7:3.
- *Devarim* 18:13.
- Talmud - *Mo'ed Katan*, 28a, *Shabbat*, 156a.
- Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagen - *Bi'ur Halacha*, 132:1.
- Rav Yisroel Meir Kagen - *Mishna Brura*, 98:3

Kippa: Continued from last week...

Kippa size: Rabbi Moshe Feinstein states that the minimum measure is that "which would be called a **head covering**." Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, *shlita*, rules that the *kippa* needs to be visible from all sides. In communities where larger *kippot* are worn, if a person wears a smaller one this may indicate a lack of "Fear of Heaven."

Women and kippot: I've heard that in Tunisia and Iran it has been the custom of both married and non-married women to cover their heads when reciting *devarim sheb'kedusha*, holy matters, such as prayer and Torah. When they made *aliya*, this practice seems to have been discontinued for unmarried women. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, *shlita*, writes in his Responsa that unmarried women should, in fact, cover their heads for matters of *kedusha*. Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, *shlita*, told me that an unmarried woman doesn't need to cover her hair when saying matters of *kedusha*, but a married woman must cover her head when saying matters of *kedusha*, even in the privacy of her home.

All this talk about head coverings reminds me of a story I once heard about a boy whose parents decided to name him by picking a name out of a hat. The name they chose... six and seven eighths.

Sources:

- Rabbi Moshe Feinstein - *Iggrot Moshe, Orach Chaim* vol. 1.
- Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef - *Yechaveh Da'at*, vols. 4&5.

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