Kevin from Johannesburg asked:

Dear Rabbi,

I understand that Rosh Hashana is the day of judgment, and Yom Kippur is the day of repentance and forgiveness. Shouldn’t Yom Kippur be first? Wouldn’t we be better off doing Teshuva (repentance) before Rosh Hashana, and go into Rosh Hashana to be judged, already having been forgiven?

Dear Kevin,

On Yom Kippur, Hashem showers the world with forgiveness: But just like a shower, if you want the cleansing effect, you have to get into the water!

‘Getting into’ Yom Kippur, however, is easier said than done. We earthlings relate to things that are tangible, i.e., french fries and phone bills. Spiritual matters — Mitzvot, Olam Haba (the world to come), repentance, etc. — are harder for us to get excited about.

Therefore, we have Rosh Hashana first. On Rosh Hashana all our physical needs are determined — Will we live or will we die? Will we have money for the phone bill? Once we begin thinking about these issues, asking Hashem for a year of health and wealth, will we then hopefully go one step further, asking Hashem to enlighten us, forgive us, and help us towards Teshuvah (returning to the way of Torah).

Sources:
- Kochvei Ohr, Ma’amor 83.

Lars-Toralf Storstrand <laffen@vestnett.no> wrote:

There is a word in our “westernized” copies of the Tanach that seems to baffle a lot of people to the degree that they say: “We don’t know what it means!” Now I am asking you: What does “Sela” (in the Psalms) mean. I’ve heard several theories, but I want to get this clear.

Shalom,

Dear Lars-Toralf Storstrand,

The word “Sela” appears not only in our “westernized” translations of Tanach, but in the original Hebrew as well.

Some commentaries maintain that the word “Sela” has no translation; rather it is a word used to control the meter and allow the preceding words to flow correctly. The proof for this is that the word appears only in the “poetic” Book of Psalms and one “Psalms-like” chapter in Chavakuk.

The Ibn Ezra translates “Sela” as “truth” or “so it is.”

The Talmud teaches us the meaning of the word in a similar fashion: “Every time the word “Sela” is used, it refers to something that goes on and on without end.” Hence the translation of the Targum — “L’almin” — meaning “forever.”

Sources:
- Psalms 3:3, Targum, Ibn Ezra.
- Talmud, Tractate Eruvin 54a.

Yiddle Riddle:

One day every year, a Halacha of Shabbat is different than the rest of the year. What day is it? (Hint: the answer pertains to the prohibition of “Hotza’ah” — transferring objects between public and private domains, or carrying within a public domain.)