Dear Dr. Don Weissman,

Wisdom and righteousness didn’t begin at Sinai. One need look no farther than the Chumash to see that Mankind had mitzvot and Divine wisdom before the giving of the Torah:

Example: Hashem directed Noah to take into the ark seven of every kosher-type animal and two of every non-kosher animal (Genesis 7:2). From this it’s clear that Noah understood the idea of ‘Kosher’ 700 years before the giving of the Torah.

After the flood, Noah and his offspring were commanded not to eat a limb from a live animal (Genesis 9:4). This plus the six mitzvot given to Adam make up the seven ‘Noachide Laws,’ including prohibitions against stealing, killing, idol worship, etc.

Today the Talmud contains no less than three tractates — Bava Kama, Metzia and Batra — dealing almost exclusively with property laws. Isn’t it logical that people in ancient times — in seeking the wisdom received at Sinai, it’s quite rational that academies always existed for the study of the seven Noachide laws and the prophetic wisdom of the time.

Therefore, Noah’s son Shem and Shem’s grandson Ever directed an academy in Be’er Sheva where these traditions were studied and upheld in the hope that they be passed on to future generations.

Ever hear of Hamurabi? ‘The Code of Hamurabi’ (18th century B.C.E.) is one of the oldest known legal codes on record. I heard from Rabbi Simcha Wasserman, B.C.E.) is one of the oldest known legal codes on record. I

I. Frankel <itchie@ibm.net> wrote:

Dear I. Frankel:

During prayer one should face towards Israel; in Israel towards Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem towards the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount.

However, if the entire congregation is facing the wrong direction — although they’re ‘out of line’ — one shouldn’t differ from them but rather should face the same way they do. So in your case where the synagogue and the congregation face east, one should stand with his body facing east along with the rest of the congregation. However, he should tilt his face southeast towards Jerusalem.

Likewise someone praying at the Western Wall today should turn his face somewhat to the left so that he will be facing the place of the Holy of Holies.

And don’t forget to point your heart in the right direction.

Sources:
- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 94:1,2
- Mishnah Berurah 10

Yiddle Riddle:

Last week we asked: There is a day in the Jewish Calendar when some years we say Hallel and other years we say Tachanun. Which day is it?

Answer: The third of Tevet. Some years Kislev has 29 days and other years it has 30. When Kislev has 29, the third of Tevet is the last day of Chanukah on which we say Hallel, but when Kislev has 30 days, the third of Tevet is the day after Chanukah, and we say ‘Tachanun.’