



# Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

## This Issue Contains:

1. Katz in Hats
2. Answer to Yiddle Riddle



Nachum from Jerusalem wrote:

*We were planning to buy our children pet hamsters. Is there anything wrong with having/playing with an unkosher animal? Is there anything wrong with buying/wearing pigskin gloves or having a pigskin attaché case? (Should one prefer cowhide instead?)*

*The Chassidic 'Streimal' is rumored that it is made from beaver tails. Wouldn't touching one or wearing one make someone 'tameh' [ritually defiled]? It seems strange to me that a considerable number of Jews wear these 'tameh' skins while they daven [pray]. I would be most grateful if you can clarify this issue.*

Dear Nachum,

First let's talk about pets in general. By caring for pets, children can learn to be responsible and caring. A pet can cheer up a lonely person. Dogs can guard against intruders. You can even learn good character traits from animals — e.g., modesty from a cat and industriousness from an ant.

But causing pain to animals is a Torah prohibition. If your pets are hungry, you must feed them before you yourself eat. Causing them pain or delaying their food — *even once* — is a serious transgression. For this reason, Rabbi Eliezar Pupo (b. 1785 Sarajevo) advises against raising birds, and the same can be said of hamsters. So if you have a pet, you must be **extremely** careful to treat it with kindness, especially pets like hamsters which are cooped up in a cage all the time.

A dog can keep away intruders. But does the dog always know who is an intruder? I know a family whose German Shepherd growls menacingly at new visitors, while the owners smile and say "Sweet dog ... He won't bite!" A truly Jewish home is open and friendly, a place of warmth for guests and visitors.

You must make sure your animal doesn't cause damage. For this reason, the Sages looked unfavorably on raising certain animals, such as dogs, unless you live in a dangerous area where you need one for protection. Sadly, most places nowadays probably fit this description.

If your pet gets loose on Shabbat, trapping it is forbidden in certain cases. Even handling an animal can be forbidden, due to the prohibition of *muktza*. Another consideration: It's a Torah prohibition to have your pet sterilized.

As far as having/playing with a non-kosher animal, there is in fact a Kabbalistic idea that one shouldn't stare at an unkosher animal.

What about 'unkosher' hats and gloves? It's permitted to touch an animal carcass, even though it imparts *tumah* (ritual defilement). Furthermore, once the hide is processed it no longer imparts *tumah*.

By the way, Hassidim aren't the only ones who wear fur hats: The Lithuanian-style 'Borsalino' is made from a hare/wild-rabbit fur blend.

Which reminds me: A balding gentleman goes to a dermatologist, who tells him to buy a rabbit and put it on his head.

"A rabbit?" asked the man. "How will that help?"

"Well, from a distance it looks like hare," the doctor said.

Sources:

- Pele Yoetz, Ba'alei Chaim*
- Beit Yosef, Yoreh Deah 107*
- Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 409:1,3*
- Shulchan Aruch, Even Haezer 5:11,14*
- Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 316:12, MB 54,57*
- Shmirat Haguf V'hanefesh 237:2*
- *Rambam Hilchot Avot Hatumah 1:9*

## Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked: Which two tractates in the Talmud begin with the same Mishnah?

**Answer:** Tractate *Nidah* and Tractate *Eduyot*. Tractate *Eduyot* does not have as its focus any one subject. Rather, it contains a variety of topics, and repeats some concepts mentioned in other tractates.

*Thanks to Avi Steinhart, Jerusalem*

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