



# Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

## This Issue Contains:

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3. Yiddle Riddle



**This issue is sponsored by Herschel Kulefsky, Attorney at Law, 15 Park Row, New York, NY 10038, 1-212-693-1671**

Burt Falkenstein <BNOHOW@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why is it when we pray to Hashem, many people "shuckle" back and forth while others do not? Isn't it disrespectful to sway back and forth when we are "talking" in our own way to Hashem? Please explain this (I think) "custom." Is it truly disrespectful or is it something else? Thanks,

Father Gant in Belize, Central America wrote:

Dear Rabbi:

I am a Catholic priest serving in Belize/Guatemala. I studied ten years in Rome and while there, a priest from the Biblicum (the Bible school for the Jesuits in Rome) told me that they only know about 30 percent of the words in Hebrew for the scriptures.

I can't believe that a living language that has been handed down orally for all these centuries, can have only 30 percent accuracy. Any ideas?

Dear Burt Falkenstein,

'Shuckling' — swaying back and forth during prayer and Torah study — is a legitimate custom. Several reasons are offered for this custom:

- The soul is akin to a flame. Just as a flame always flickers and strives upward, so too the soul is never still, constantly moving and striving to reach upward towards Hashem.
- Shaking allows you to pray with your whole body, as King David said "Let all my bones exclaim 'Hashem, who is like You!'"
- When we stand before Hashem in prayer, we tremble in awe of the King of Kings.
- The book of the Kuzari gives a historical explanation for 'shuckling.' He explains that shuckling originated during a period when there was a book shortage, and several people needed to study from the same book at the same time. To allow as many people as possible to study from one book, they would sway alternately back and forth. This allowed each person to look into the book and read a little bit, and when he swayed back, another person could sway forward and look into the book.

A valid alternative to shuckling is to stand completely still, like a soldier standing at attention in front of the king.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, *zatzal*, one of the foremost halachic authorities of our generation, was known to stand stock still during the silent prayer. He explained that, while living in Russia, he was once arrested for teaching Torah. One form of torture he experienced during his imprisonment was being forced to stand completely still facing a wall. The threat was that if he were to move he would be shot. It was on one of these occasions that Rabbi Feinstein was struck with the realization that if he could stand with such intense concentration for the sake of his captors, then he should afford at least the same respect when standing in front of Hashem.

Deciding whether to 'shuckle' or stand still depends on which one helps you concentrate better. In any case, a person shouldn't move his body or contort his face in any way that will make him look weird.

Sources:

- Mishna Berurah 95:5,7

Dear Father Gant,

I agree with your disbelief. We have traditions going back 3,500 years regarding the meaning of Hebrew words in the Bible. The Mishnah and many post-Biblical Jewish works are written in Hebrew, it has been used in our prayers for more than 2,000 years and is now used in everyday life in Israel. We have 99.44% knowledge of Biblical Hebrew words, extensive literature and a rich oral tradition on the subject.

## Yiddle Riddle

The name of which Parsha has the same *gematria* — numerical value — as the number of its verses?

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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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