



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Back of My Hand
2. To Be, or to Don't Be?
3. Answer to Yiddle Riddle



Ben-Judah < pwgtn@aol.com > from Georgia wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is there a custom of the kissing of the hand? If so, what is it? Is it in the Holy Book, and what does it mean? Thank you very much. BE BLESSED!

Dear Ben-Judah,

Rabbi Akiva said: "There are three things I really like about the Medeans: When they cut meat, they do so only upon a table; when they kiss, they do so only upon the hand; and when they speak privately, they do so only out in a field."

These three things can be explained as follows: Cutting meat on a table is safe, as opposed to holding the meat in your hand while you cut it. Kissing the hand is more respectable than kissing the lips because of the saliva emitted. Private matters are best discussed in a field because — as Rashi wrote 900 years ago — 'walls have ears.' Or, as a verse teaches: "A little birdie told me." Kissing on the hand can also be seen as more modest than kissing the lips.

Today, it is mostly the practice of Sephardic Jews to kiss the hand upon meeting a Rabbi or Torah scholar, and it is considered a sign of great respect. Chassidic Jews sometimes kiss the hand of their Grand Rabbi.

Many years ago, a friend of mine was studying and came across the above-mentioned statement of Rabbi Akiva. My friend asked: "Why does the Talmud have to point out the danger of cutting meat while holding it in your hand? Isn't that pretty obvious?"

Well, last year someone sent me an article from the Detroit Jewish News. According to the article, hospitals across the country have identified a new malady which they call Sunday-Morning Bagelitis. (Seriously, this is not a joke!) Every Sunday morning, emergency rooms in major Jewish population centers report an increase of people with serious hand wounds. To what do they attribute this increase? To Jewish people who cut their hands while slicing bagels — especially frozen bagels, which are hard, slippery and quite a danger!

Sources:

- Tractate Berachot 8b
- Ibid., Rashi, Maharsha & Chochmat Shlomo
- Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 10:20, Bava Batra 4a

Mike Fulstone < decatur@swbell.net >

Dear Rabbi,

I have long felt that when G-d commanded light into existence that it was a direct command to light as in "Light, be!" rather than saying "Let there be light." In other words as in the sentence "John, stop!"

Saying "Let there be light" or "Let light be" doesn't seem to ring true to me. I am not very familiar with the Hebrew language so please let me know if I am all wet here.

Dear Mike Fulstone,

Since light did not exist yet, G-d could not address it and tell it to be. He did, however, say "Let light be." By saying that, G-d was addressing the space/time reality that He had already created, telling it to bring forth light. A more correct translation of the original Hebrew is "There shall be light."

Yiddle Riddle:

Last week we asked: What blessing can't you say when you're on the moon?

Answer: Meyer Beck < mbeck@tsegw.tse.com > of The Toronto Stock Exchange correctly wrote:

Kiddush Levana - the blessing on seeing the New Moon.

The blessing said when sighting the New Moon can be recited only at night when you can benefit from the moon's light. Even at night, if it's cloudy and you see only a vague image of the moon you don't say the blessing, since you don't benefit from its rays. So too, if you were actually standing on the moon you wouldn't be able to say the blessing of **Kiddush Levana**, because you wouldn't be deriving benefit from the moon's rays!

Source:

- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 426:1 Rema
- Ibid. Magen Avraham 1

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Ask The Rabbi is written by Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom Lefkowitz, Rabbi Mordechai Becher and other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

General Editor: **Rabbi Moshe Newman**

Production Design: **Lev Seltzer**

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22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

972-2-581-0315

972-2-581-2890

ohr@virtual.co.il

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

1-212-213-3100

1-212-213-8717

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

1-905-886-5730

1-905-886-6065

Somayach@MSN.com

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