



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK

Don Thompson from Medicine Hat, Alberta <godlvs@telusplanet.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is the Ark of the Covenant buried under the Dome of the Rock? Will the Temple have to be built on the location of the Dome of the Rock, or can it be located somewhere else? How can one best pray for Israel? Are these too many questions?

Dear Don Thompson,

There are two traditions regarding the place of the Ark. One opinion is that it is indeed buried and hidden under the Temple Mount. Another opinion maintains that it was taken by the Babylonians at the time of the destruction of the first Temple and from there to Carthage, and from there no one knows. The Third Temple can only be on the Temple Mount and nowhere else. Pray sincerely to the One G-d, Creator of heaven and earth, that He bring the redemption speedily. No, these are not too many questions!

STARRY STARRY NIGHT

Ian Pamensky <IanP@awi.com.au> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why does Shabbat end plus or minus 1 hour after sunset? Can you rely on the 3 stars? Many thanks in advance.

Dear Ian Pamensky,

The Talmud says that three medium-sized stars together in the sky signify nightfall. Halachic opinions about when this is range from 20 minutes to 72 minutes after sunset.

Ideally, you shouldn't rely on "three stars." Cloudy skies can make it hard to know exactly when this is. And even on a clear night, it's difficult to determine exactly which stars are considered "medium" and which are considered "large." Furthermore, the *Chafetz Chaim* writes that "three medium stars" was a reference for people in Babylon (Middle East). But people who live far to the north (Europe

and America) where the sky takes much longer to darken should wait for three small stars. Ideally, you should go by the clock and a reliable Jewish calendar.

Did you hear about the ship's captain who, one foggy night, perceived a glowing light out in the distance? He watched it intently, but couldn't figure out why it grew no closer to his advancing ship. Finally, after staring at it for 20 minutes, he realized that the light was coming from the bowl of his pipe!

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 261
- Ibid. Mishna Berura 23

NEW TWIST ON LICORICE

[Name & email withheld] wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the correct blessing for licorice? Since it contains flour we always said "mezonot." However I saw recently in the Artsroll book on brachot that it is "shehakol" because the flour is only to give it body. So what? It certainly adds to the flavor!

Dear [Name & email withheld],

As you know, the blessing over a food is determined by the type of the food it is. In a mixture, the "main" ingredient determines the blessing. What is the main ingredient in licorice?

Flour, because of its importance as a dietary staple, is usually considered the main ingredient in any mixture, even if there is only a little bit of flour in the mixture. However, if the purpose of the flour is only to bind the other ingredients, then the flour is considered secondary and doesn't determine the blessing. So regarding licorice, if it's eaten mainly for the sugar content and the flour acts mainly as a binder, the blessing would be *shehakol*.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch 208,2
- Sefer VeZot HaBracha (Mendelbaum) Chap. 12 p. 110
- Sefer Pitchei Halacha (Forst) Appendix 2 (Letters) Ch 24

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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.

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WAS MARK TWAIN JEWISH?

Naranda Davina from Ontario <dflett@sympatico.ca> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
Is Mark Twain Jewish?

Dear Naranda Davina,

Mark Twain, whose real name was Samuel Clemens, was not Jewish. However he had this to say about the Jews:

"The Jews constitute but 1% of the human race ... It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of... His contributions to the world's list of great names are away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvellous fight in the world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose... the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone...The Jew saw them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no dulling of his alert mind. All things are mortal but the Jew... What is the secret of his immortality?"

Source:

- Mark Twain (1835-1910) excerpt from An Essay Concerning the Jews

ATONEMENT W/O THE TEMPLE

Iva Petrickova from Prague, Czech Republic <xpeti03@st.vse.cz> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
Since there is no more the Temple in Jerusalem to make sacrifices in, how can a person be purified from his/her sin? Is there any way for a person to make sure his/her sins were forgiven and are not counted to him/her any more?

Dear Iva Petrickova,

Sacrifices are not necessary to gain atonement. First, the person must repent properly. That includes discontinuing the sin, regretting having done it and confessing the sin before G-d. Then the person should pray for forgiveness and purification, and trust in Hashem's mercy. If a repentant person finds himself in the same scenario in which he previously sinned, but this time he withstands the test, that's an indication that his repentance is complete and his sin has been forgiven. (But you shouldn't put yourself in a "sin situation" in order to test yourself.)

Yiddle Riddle

I've been carrying this Yiddle Riddle around with me for years. I've discussed it with Rabbanim and scholars and have yet to find the flaw in it. It's not a simple riddle to explain. But that's what you do so well. If you find a hole in my logic I'd really love to hear it. Here goes. "Who was the first person to die after the Great Flood (mabul)?"

Eli & Zahava Gross <ezgross@netvision.net.il>
Answer next week.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles, and reactions concerning previous "Ask-the-Rabbi" features.

Re: *Lulav* after Succot (Ohrnet Parshat Toldot):

My son's father-in-law showed me that he saves the lulav each year to be used for schach [succah roofing] on the next Succah. It's also possible to grind the dried out hadass [myrtle] leaves and use for a Havdalah spice.

Zev Kossin <koss1950@green.co.il>

Re: That's What Western Walls Are Made Of (Ohrnet Parshat Vayeshev):

You wrote that "The Western Wall is made of sandstone...." Your answer is incorrect. I worked as a geologist at the Geological Survey of Israel, and later, Negev Phosphates Ltd. in the early 1980s. I seem to recall that the "Jerusalem Stone," was made of limestone or dolomite. I posed the question to a geologist friend at the GSI, and another geologist friend who used to work there but now works for the Geological Survey of Victoria in Australia, and received confirmation for my answer from both. Here is the text of what my friend at the GSI sent me:

Shalom Yaakov,

The Wall is made mainly of "Meleke" (means royal in Arabic, the term was coined and used by the Arab masons in Jerusalem) limestone. This is a pure white limestone, thickly bedded and coarsely crystalline. It is of upper Turonian age belonging to the Bina (Baana) formation. It retains its white color for years, or may be insolated to a light golden yellow. When quarried it is remarkably soft and workable, but upon exposure it hardens, with clear surface. It takes a high, resplendent polish, and it provides a high-quality building stone, as well as commercial marble.

Jacob Pinsky, University Hospital Dept. of Radiation Oncology, SUNY, Stony Brook, NY
<jpinsky@radonc.som.sunysb.edu>

Re "Forty Something" (Ohrnet Parshat Vayeitzei):

If I remember correctly, the soul does not enter the body of the new born until the 40th day.

Nathan Frenkel <frenkel@multicom.net>