



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Is Sign Language?
2. Cookbook of Creation
3. "Naar-ish"
4. A Little Nosy
5. Prayer for the Payer
6. Son of the Short Swords
7. Yiddle Riddle
6. Public Domain



Is SIGN LANGUAGE?

< Drc@flash.net > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I recently ate a Shabbat meal at a home with a deaf child. After washing our hands but before the "hamotzie" blessing, the child began "talking" to his mother in sign language. Is this violating the prohibition of "speaking?"

Dear Drc,

Sign language is not considered actual speech in this context. However, it is not encouraged between washing and saying hamotzie.

As you know, it's a mitzvah to wash your hands before eating bread. After washing, you shouldn't speak until eating. But if you do, no new washing is required.

- Source: Mishna Berura 166:1:5

COOKBOOK OF CREATION

Ofer Gamliel < ofer647@aol.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
What do you know about Sefer Yetzira? Can this book be at home? Thank you.

Dear Ofer Gamliel,

Sefer Yetzira — "The Book of Creation" — is a work of deep Kabbalah. As its name implies, it deals with the secrets of Creation, including powerful Hebrew letter combinations of mystical creative energy. By studying Sefer Yetzira, the Talmudic Sages learned letter combinations which enabled them to create humanoids and animals.

Sefer Yetzira is attributed to Avraham. According to a Midrash, it was written by G-d and given to Avraham who studied it with Shem and Ever.

Yes, you can have this book at home. But don't keep it with your cookbooks. It can only be studied by someone versed in Kabbalah.

Source:

- Tractate Sanhedrin 65b

"NAAR-ISH"

Peter Persoff < Peter_Persoff@macmail.lbl.gov > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
You wrote that Isaac was 37 at the time of the akeida (binding of Isaac). I have heard that, but I always imagined Isaac to be age 13 at the akeida. I think the angel said "Do not lay a hand on the lad (na'ar)." How do we know Isaac's age, and why did the angel refer to him as a na'ar? Thank you for your email.

Michael Zidile from New York, New York
< zidile@ymail.yu.edu > wrote:

Hi. My name is Michael, and I am researching a topic: In Bereshet, the word na'ar (youth) and ish (man) are interchanged a lot, and I was wondering the possible reasons behind this. One example is when the Torah discusses Yaakov and Esav and uses the terms na'ar and ish.

Dear Peter Persoff and Michael Zidile,

Literally, *na'ar* means "a youth." It can also mean a servant or attendant.

The commentaries explain that *na'ar* generally indicates behavior rather than age. A *na'ar* is a person who shows youth in his actions. This is sometimes negative, as with Joseph, who was described as acting like an immature youth. Sometimes it is positive, as when describing Joshua who — at age 42 — is called a *na'ar* in reference to his serving and learning from Moses like a young student.

The Torah says that Yitzchak was born when Sarah was 90. Sarah died at age 127 when she heard about the akeida. Yitzchak was therefore 37 at that time.

Nachmanides points out that a child may be called *na'ar* from the moment he is born. He also points out that when *na'ar* is used in contrast to *ish*, the meaning is a subordinate (*na'ar*) in contrast to a superior (*ish*).

Sources:

- Genesis 17:25, Exodus 33
- Rashi, Genesis 23:2, 22:3 & Exodus 2:6, Chronicles I 22:5
- Nachmanides, Genesis 21:9, 37:2, Exodus 2:6, 33:11
- Ibn Ezra, Genesis 37:21

If you have E-Mail and a question, you can submit it to Ask The Rabbi for possible inclusion in a future edition. Just write your question using your E-Mail program, set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi" and send it to info@ohr.org.il. Or use our form at <http://www.ohr.org.il/ask/page/ask.htm>. We can't include all questions submitted, but we do try to respond to everyone.

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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A LITTLE NOSY

Rebner from Mainz, Germany <rebnerch@dit.de> wrote:

How come that people have two ears but only one nose?

Dear Rebner,

Excellent question! Every aspect of Creation contains Divine wisdom. It's our job to discover the wisdom in everything.

The two ears are designed to give a person directional and stereo hearing, hence they are placed on each side of the head. The nose also has a similar design with two nostrils, but they are close together as there is no real need for "stereo smell."

Just as the army places a guard at the gate of a munitions factory, so too G-d has strategically positioned a 24 hour guard at the "gate" of the human body: No food can enter your mouth without passing under your nose's scrutinizing security scan. Food dangerously spoiled is automatically identified and denied admission.

PRAYER FOR THE PAYER

<email@withheld> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Hi. I am an observant student living in a dorm. I have a question regarding my situation. In the section in bircat hamazon (grace after meals) when we ask for a blessing on the head of the household (or for ourselves, or for the place where we are eating), do I say it for myself or for my parents — since they are paying for my tuition (though it is not their table really)? I thank you in advance, and I think your Ask the Rabbi service is a great idea.

Dear <email@withheld> ,

The blessing for the "head of this house" included in the *bircat hamazon* can refer to the one who *provides* the meal, even though that person is not the "owner of the house" where the meal is taking place. Therefore, in the appropriate place during the *bircat hamazon* you can bless your parents as the "heads of the house" because they paid for the meal.

Sources:

- Mishnah Berurah 193:27

SON OF THE SHORT SWORDS

Eli Zeldovich <elileela@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My question is genealogical. In tracing my family name Zeldovich, son of Zel, I have come to Josephus' coining of the word Zealot to describe the defenders of Masada. What is the root of this word zealot? Were the women and children survivors of Masada taken to Rome as "zealots?" Thank you for your time. Shalom.

Dear Eli Zeldovich,

According to Josephus, the only survivors of Masada were a woman and two children.

It's unlikely that there's any connection between your name and the zealots. Zeldovich is a Russian name. Josephus refers to the zealots by the Greek word "*sicarii*" which means "the short swords," because they carried with them short swords.

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we wrote:

Shira Phillips <philfam@erols.com> wrote with the following riddle:

Dear Yiddle Riddle people: The following is a story I read about Rashi in a child's Hebrew biography in perhaps fourth grade. Nobody I know has been able to solve the question without help. Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak) once went on a journey to a foreign city. On his trip, he wanted to visit a wealthy man to collect money for poor people. When he visited, the man was not at home, but his servant was. The servant said that he recognized the great Rashi as a thief who had previously run off with a set of his master's clothing and forced Rashi to pay for the clothing! Rashi wrote the following Hebrew word on the door five times in a row: The word was spelled "*Shin Lamed Mem Hey*." What did the message mean?

PS Rashi definitely got the hoped-for reaction from the home owner: He contributed charity and was from then on always a follower of Rashi.

Answer: Why (*she'lama*) did Shlomo pay for (*shilmah Shlomo*) an entire suit of clothing (*salma sheleima*)? (Note: *Salma* in modern Hebrew means a *dress* but in the Chumash it means a garment. *Shilmah* is a contraction of *shilaim otah* — "paid (for) it.")

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

I enjoy Ohrnet every week when my husband or son brings it home from shul. However, this week I noticed a sentence that might be interpreted by some in the wrong way. As you know, all kinds of people read your publication. You wrote: "If you face an evil opponent, a Stalin or a Hitler, you shoot him in the back." There may be those among us who will take it upon himself to decide, "Hmm, so-and-so falls into that category" and decide he is justified in "shooting him in the back." I think it might be advisable to print some kind of clarification in your next issue.

Eta Kushner <etawrite@netmedia.net.il>

Re: "Watching the Detectives" (Ask the Rabbi #170) concerning the New York police detective who feels guilty about extracting confessions from violent criminals by feigning friendship:

It would seem from the brothers deceiving Chamor, Shechem and the rest of the city in order to punish them for their crimes that the officer has nothing to feel guilty about. Not exactly parallel, but possibly one can say that by Avraham and Yitzchak representing themselves to Pharaoh and Avimelech to avoid being killed and their wives enslaved, that deception is allowed if it will prevent crimes from being committed. Keep up the good work!

Daneal Weiner <daneal@actcom.co.il>

Re: Verse beginning and ending with same three words (Ask the Rabbi #172):

I forwarded your last riddle to a friend of mine, Avinoam Friendman, who told me that there were other verses like "U'vnei Dan Chushim" that also begin and end with the same three words. I don't know if this counts or not. Have a good Shabbos.

Aron M. Mandl, North Miami Beach, FL <Aronio@aol.com>

Rabbi's Response: Clever! But we don't say this verse twice a day, as stated in the riddle. How about "*I'yeshuascha kivisi Hashem*" which some people repeat three times in the bedtime *Shema*?

Correction: Current Candles (Ask the Rabbi #173) should read "A Chanukah menorah must contain enough fuel at the time of lighting to burn for at least half an hour after *nightfall*" and not "half an hour after *sunset*."