



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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SON FEELS GUILTY

< name@withheld > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My father died in February. He believed in G-d, went to shul and led a both modern and religious life; he was 87 years young. He was active, stressed physical well-being to my brother and I and was physically and mentally in great shape. I loved my father very much. I am a man in his late forties and have the following problem. My Dad went to the hospital for a "minor surgery" that the doctor said would take 15 minutes. The surgery was OK but my father was almost totally disorientated when they told me to take him home the next day. I took him home and he fell down the stairs. I rushed him back to the hospital where he died. The doctor said he would be given a local anesthetic to freeze him below the waist only. My mom and I encouraged my dad to get the procedure done. It was a minor thing on his bladder. Rabbi, in this country-to sue a doctor is a terrible financial burden to bear. My mother said to drop the subject and my brother has a family and other responsibilities. I am burdened with tremendous guilt for encouraging my Dad to do the 15-minute procedure that killed him, I am not financially secure enough to embark with lawyers and my mother won't sign to get his file released from the hospital records. My wife died eight years ago, my dog died soon after. Please help me understand what a caring individual can do and what would my father think of me now (I'm crying at this terminal, in a library).

Dear < name@withheld > ,

First, let me offer sincere condolences at the loss of your father. I'm moved by the depth of anguish so apparent in your letter. There's no easy answer to your question. I can only try to put things into a perspective which might be helpful.

Judaism maintains that our bodies and souls are not our possessions with which we can do whatever we want. Rather, they are on loan from Hashem. We must care for them in the way commanded by the Torah. According to

the Torah we have an *obligation* to engage in healing and medicine. Therefore, you were right and obligated to encourage your father to undergo the procedure.

As for suing the hospital, keep in mind that there is a Torah commandment to honor your mother. Since your mother seems to be against suing, I think you should listen and bow to her wishes.

Sources:

- Bava Kama 85a
- Shmot 21:19

IDLE IDOL

Louis Orzech from Toronto, Ontario
< lumiray@sympatico.ca > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

In Parshat Vayeitzei, Rachel had at least 3 days to destroy the idols she took from her father. Why didn't she?

Dear Louis Orzech,

The verse says: "Yaakov didn't know that Rachel had stolen them." Nobody, not even Yaakov, knew that Rachel had taken her father's idols. Obviously, Rachel was trying to conceal her action from everybody. Consequently, she could only get rid of the idols when she was out of sight of the others. For the first three days after leaving Lavan's house, Jacob's camp was on the move in order to put as much distance between themselves and Lavan as possible. Therefore, Rachel had no opportunity to rid herself of the idols.

Sources:

- Bereshit 31:32

Dear Ask The Rabbi Reader,

Starting this issue, *Ask The Rabbi* expands to 3 US-Letter size pages. We hope you enjoy this new format. If you have any comments or suggestions for *Ask The Rabbi* that would make it easier for you to use in your work, please feel free to forward them to levs@virtual.co.il. We would be most interested to hear from you!

The Editors

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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READING THE SCRIPT

Larry Korn < lakornola@aol.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Are you allowed to analyze someone's handwriting without their permission? Is that considered an invasion of their privacy? Thanks.

Dear Larry Korn,

In some cases, "privacy" is protected by halacha. For example, someone who causes a loss of privacy by knocking down a wall or constructing a building such that it overlooks another property may be liable for damages. It's prohibited to read someone's mail without their permission. Taking someone's notebook without their permission and reading it could be considered stealing.

But when you're *allowed* to read the writing — if someone sends you a letter, for example — there's no prohibition against picking up clues about the person's personality contained in the writing. It's not essentially different than making judgments about a person based on the way he acts, speaks or dresses. For example, if a person speaks very quickly and nervously, you are not "invading his privacy" by thinking "he seems nervous."

You should be wary, however, of indiscriminate use of your skill to pigeonhole others. We are commanded to judge others favorably and give them the benefit of the doubt.

A SMASHING ENGAGEMENT

< Name@withheld > from New York wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My son is marrying, G-d willing, in June and we have heard of a pre-marriage ceremony called "The Breaking of the Plate." Would you be so kind as to share the significance of this ceremony as well as the actual performance (ritual). Thank you.

Dear < Name@withheld > from New York,

Firstly, Mazal Tov!

When a couple decides to marry, they announce the occasion with an engagement party. In Yiddish this event is called a *vort*, which means a "word." At the *vort* the man and woman traditionally give their "word" and formally commit to marry.

There is a custom to break a ceramic plate at the *vort*. This symbolizes the seriousness of their commitment to each other: Just as breaking the plate is final, so too the engagement is final and not easily terminated.

Breaking the plate also tempers the intense joy of the occasion, similar to the glass which is broken under the *chupah*. It reminds us that the Temple is not yet rebuilt.

Customarily, the couple's mothers are the ones who break the plate. They hold the plate together and drop it onto a hard surface. It's important to wrap the plate well to ensure that no one gets hurt from the broken pieces. I once attended a *vort* where a flying splinter from a not well-wrapped plate went into the leg of one of the mothers.

Some have the custom to make a necklace for the bride from the broken pieces. Others give the broken pieces to eligible "singles" as if to say "may a plate soon be broken for you." Some break the plate at the wedding just before the *chuppa*.

SUPREME LOVE

Laurie Zimmet from Los Angeles, California
< zimattpp@aol.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I know in the Torah G-d specifically commands us to love Him, the stranger, and our neighbor. In the Torah (not the Tanach, apocrypha or oral law) does G-d specifically state that He loves us?

Dear Laurie Zimmet,

If the existence of chocolate isn't proof enough that G-d loves us, here's a verse from the Torah:

"You are a holy people to Hashem, your G-d. Hashem chose you to be His treasured people among all the peoples on the face of the earth.... Because of Hashem's love for you, and because He keeps the oath He swore to your ancestors, Hashem took you out with a strong hand and redeemed you from enslavement to Pharaoh, King of Egypt."

Why doesn't the Written Torah talk *more* about Hashem's special love for the Jewish People? Perhaps emphasizing this love would arouse jealousy among the nations, who have access to the Written Torah but not to the Oral Torah.

Source:

- Devarim 7:6-8
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RABBENU BACHYA

Aviva Yocheved Krems < krems@netmedia.net.il > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I'm studying Chovot Halevavot (Duties of the Heart) with a group of women and we were wondering what the author's background was. He refers to religious and secular life and we were wondering if he lived in a "Jewish ghetto" or amongst religious and non-religious Jews and/or non-Jews? What else can you tell us about him?

Dear Aviva Yocheved Krems,

Chovot Halevavot was written by Rabbeinu Bachya Ibn Pakudah. Rabbeinu Bachya lived in Sargasso, Spain in the eleventh century. As a leading Talmud scholar, he was an expert in ethics and philosophy. He also composed many poems that were introduced into the liturgy. He wrote *Chovot Halevavot* in Arabic so that it could reach out to the largest possible audience. Aside from the fact that Rabbeinu Bachya served as the Rabbinical Judge of the Jewish community in Sargasso, very little is known of his personal life.

Yiddle Riddle

A neighbor asked me the following riddle: *Shemoneh Esrei* consists of 19 blessings. Who, when, where and in what situation does a person say 21 blessings during the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei*?

Avraham Rosenthal <rosentha@netmedia.net.il>

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Wine Fermentation (Ohrnet Parshat Vayeshev):

You wrote that grapes react with oxygen and naturally produce wine. Actually, it is the yeast that naturally occurs on the skins of the grapes that eats the sugar (I think fructose) of the grape, and along with the water contained in the grape produce carbon dioxide and alcohol. The same process produces beer from various grains, although I believe that the only fruit or grain that has naturally occurring yeast is the grape. To make beer (which is actually what is then distilled to make whiskey, vodka, etc.) one has to add yeast. I have brewed beer as a hobby so I happen to know this and wanted to share it. It presents an opportunity for me to give back a little for the wonderful work that you do.
ssdssi <ssdssi@aol.com>

Re: Immunity in the Jewish Community (Ohrnet Parshat Vayigash) which stated: "On the other hand, some vaccinations are of highly questionable value. Find a doctor whom you trust to help select the proper immunizations for your child."

Some corrections: Smallpox has been eradicated due to vaccination. This deadly scourge is gone, and not "extremely rare" as you wrote. (Polio is nearly eradicated due to vaccination. This crippling scourge is almost gone.) All vaccinations are approved by the FDA. Their benefit to risk ratio is greatly in favor of benefit. Just as one should not shop around and decide which mitzvot to obey, one should not shop around for which approved vaccine to administer. It is a public health issue and a personal one. You state some vaccinations are of "highly questionable value." You do a great mis-service with this statement. Exactly which ones are you questioning and on what basis?
Seth Corey, MD, Division of Hematology-Oncology
Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh <scorey+@pitt.edu>

Ohrnet's Clarification:

All approved vaccines are effective; we did not mean to imply otherwise. Rather, we meant that not all vaccines are needed by all individuals. We wrote that individuals should seek a doctor

with sufficient expertise in the subject such that his/her opinion may be relied upon. (See following comment.)

All approved vaccines are considered safe and effective by the vast majority of knowledgeable doctors. The only question is who shall take them; i.e., some are recommended only for the sick, debilitated and elderly. While a few others should NOT be taken by those who are immunosuppressed. The famous dangerous vaccine was for pertussis (whooping cough) but far more people died or became dangerously ill because they failed to take the vaccine than would have had they taken it. A much safer version is now available.

Edward Simon, Professor of Biology Purdue University
<esimon@bilbo.bio.purdue.edu>

Re: Immunity in the Jewish Community (Ohrnet Parshat Vayigash)

As a student of immunology, I would like to let you know that vaccines are extensively tested before being used on humans and with very few exceptions are safe and save lives. In spite of the hype over the "cocktail" treatments, probably the best hope we have for an end to the AIDS epidemic is a vaccine (which, incidentally, they are beginning to test). While no one should be required to immunize his children, it would be doing them an immense disservice by withholding such an established, effective medical treatment.

Lori Sheiman <ls335@is8.nyu.edu>

Re: "Where does the word 'Chanukah' appear in Parshat Mikeitz? (That is, all the letters of the word 'Chanukah' written together, although out of order.)" (Ohrnet Parshat Miketz):

I really enjoy your Ask the Rabbi column and Yiddle Riddle. My son found another occurrence of the word "Chanuka" in Parshat Miketz. In Chapter 43, verse 8 the chaf and hey of "v'nailaicha" and the vav, nun, and ches of "v'nichye."

Avraham Rosenthal <rosentha@netmedia.net.il>