



# Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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### LETTER IMPERFECT

Leon Sossen from Melbourne, Australia  
< leonsoss@iaccess.com.au > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
In Megillat Esther, the word v'sasson (and joy) in the sentence "The Jews had light and happiness and joy and honor" is spelled "vav sin sin nun." Every other time I have seen the word sasson it is spelled "sin sin vav nun." In the Megillah, the letter vav is missing! All editions of the Megillat Esther leave it out! Now this sentence is also part of the Havdalah prayer. The ArtScroll Siddur unlike any other siddur that I have ever seen also omits the vav in the same sentence. I wonder if you could comment on this? I have a particular interest in the Hebrew/Yiddish spelling of this word...

Dear Leon Sossen,

In many places the Torah omits "silent" letters. This is called *ketiv chaseir*, incomplete spelling. It doesn't change the sound or meaning of the word.

Some words are normally spelled this way. The name *Yaakov* for example is almost always spelled without a *vav*.

When letters are left out of a word, it hints to some *lack* in the concept being projected. In the verse you asked about, the *sasson* (joy) may lack some element. Our Sages identify the "joy" in this verse as the joy of performing the *mitzvah* of circumcision. A possible explanation of the missing letter is that it refers to the pain of circumcision which detracts from the joy of the occasion.

#### Sources:

- Talmud Megillah 16b

### HIGH, HOW ARE YOU?

Ron Shaul from Tofino, British Columbia  
< mama@island.net > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Do you know anything about the reference in Exodus 30:23 to one of the ingredients of the anointing oil. The

English is translated as Sweet Calamus. However there seems to be a controversy as to its real name. In Hebrew it is *Q'ana bos*. Which sounds a lot like *Cannabis* or *marijuana*. My Hebrew dictionary defines *Q'ana bos* as *hemp*. Please let me know if you find anything as it would certainly create quite a stir if it could be proven that *Moishe* was pouring *marijuana* oil over the heads of *Aaron* & the High priests.

Dear Ron Shaul,

See Aryeh Kaplan's translation of the Chumash called "The Living Torah." The Septuagint, Nachmanides, Saadya Gaon and Ibn Janach all identify it as sweet calamus, *Acorus calamus*. Maimonides identifies it as the Indian plant *Cympopogan martini* (which also sounds intoxicating). Others do indeed identify it as the hemp plant, or marijuana, although this is a minority opinion.

Even if it was hemp, it was mixed with many other ingredients, mostly oil, and therefore not potent enough to "get high."

### WHO IS AMALEK?

Fabian < perkal@adinet.com.uy > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Who is Amalek?

Dear Fabian,

Amalek was the illegitimate son of Elifaz, and the grandson of Esav. (Amalek's mother was the illegitimate daughter of Amalek's father).

The progeny of Amalek are the archetypal enemy of the Jewish People. Their very existence is diametrically opposed to the Torah. The Sages describe the people of Amalek as being the essence of all the evil in the world.

Today, we don't know who is descended from Amalek. Around the year 600 BCE, the Assyrian conqueror

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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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Sancheriv exiled most of the world's inhabitants from their homelands and scattered them around the world. Since then, the true national identity of any people (except for the Jews) has become obscure.

The concept of "Amalek" goes a long way in helping us understand the baffling phenomenon of *anti-Semitism*. Anti-Semitism has no sociological parallel. Even the word is unique: "Anti-Semitism" is the only English word describing hate towards a distinct group of people. There's no English word for French-hatred, Irish-hatred, or German hatred, even though England fought bitter wars against all these nations.

We are the only people in the world towards whom there exists a unique, distinct hatred. This bears out the Torah's prediction that until the Mashiach's days, there will exist a nation, Amalek, with an unexplainable, inborn hatred towards us.

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#### FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, AND OTHER DRINKS

In honor of Purim, here's a bunch of questions about kosher alcohol. L'Chaim!

Jeff Sokolow < sokoloj@towers.com > wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,  
In your view, would a hechsher (kashrut certification) be required for sake (Japanese rice wine)? It is my understanding that sake is distilled from fermented rice in much the same way vodka is distilled from potatoes. I would assume the answer is therefore no, unless some non-kosher ingredient were to be added in the distilling process. Thank you and best wishes.*

RGalert < rgalert@aol.com > wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,  
Is Tequila Kosher? How can I get a list of kosher alcoholic beverages?*

Aharon Goldman from Jerusalem  
< goldman@schtools.co.il > wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,  
Is there any way to get information on kashruth of various alcoholic drinks? In particular I'm interested in Southern Comfort, Khalua, Drambuie, Cointreau.*

Richard Eden < richard.eden@tao.j-sainsbury.co.uk >  
wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,  
What is it that makes wine kosher? Do similar rules apply to other alcoholic beverages? Are beer and spirits either kosher or non-kosher?*

Dear Jeff Sokolow, Rgalert, Aharon Goldman and Richard Eden,

The London Beth Din publishes a list of kosher foods, including liqueurs and alcoholic drinks. I checked the list and found the following:

The only sake they list as kosher is *Hatsukuru sake*. They certify the following types of Tequila Souza as kosher: Conmenerativa, Gold, Hornitos, Silver and Tres Generacione. According to their list, Cointreau is kosher only if produced in France. Southern Comfort is kosher only if produced in Ireland. All Drambuie and Khalua are kosher.

Wine has a uniquely strict status due to its use in religious ceremonies. All wines without kashrut certification are non-kosher.

Regarding kosher beer, the following is adapted from an article written by Rabbi Tzvi Rosen for *Kashrus Kurrents*:

Most U.S., Norwegian, English and German beers are acceptable. Stouts, flavored beers and "Barley wine" require certification, as do European, Asian, and other beers about which there is insufficient information regarding their contents.

Beer is normally made from all kosher ingredients: Water, barley, yeast, and hops. Isinglass finning (made from ground tropical fish), gelatin, and other ingredients are sometimes added to remove dark particles from the beer. Caramel color is sometimes added for coloring. In all, United States law allows over fifty-nine chemicals or additives to be used in beer.

Gelatin and isinglass clarifiers are not used in domestic beer in the United States. Isinglass finnings have been used as a beer clarifier in the UK for centuries. Over two hundred years ago the great Halachic authority Rabbi Yechezkel Landau in his work *Nodah B'Yehudah* permitted isinglass clarifier (Yorah Deah, Siman 26). A clarifier only filters unwanted particles and is not present in the final beverage.

Fruit flavorings and spices are used to make flavored beers. By U.S. law, these beers must be labeled "Flavored Beer." Flavored beer definitely requires kosher certification.

"Barley wine" is a specialty beer which definitely needs kosher certification, because it is sometimes fermented with non-kosher wine or champagne yeast.

Obviously, the kashrut status of a product changes with changes in production methods or kashrut supervision.

Jeff Sokolow < sokoloj@towers.com > responds:

*I appreciate your taking the time to check. One question: Does the fact that this one brand of sake is the only one the London Beth Din lists mean the other brands are not kosher, or just that this is the only one they have checked out? In broader terms, is there a reason why it would be necessary to investigate or certify the production of sake when there is apparently no need to do the same for whiskey or vodka?*

Dear Jeff Sokolow,

I don't know the London Beth Din's criteria. They do, in fact also list vodkas and whiskeys. On the surface, there seems no reason to suspect *sake* of being non-kosher, but food technology has become complicated. I suggest you write to the OU <kosherq@ou.org>. They are the largest kashrut organization in the world. They also have a web site listing kosher products.

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**A PACKAGE DEAL**

M.B. Epstein <epsteinmb@worldnet.att.net> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,  
What should a mishloach manot package include, and why?*

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Dear M.B. Epstein,

It's a mitzvah to send portions of food, *mishloach manot*, to one another on Purim. Minimally, send one person two portions of different types of food, like meat and cake or cake and wine. The food should be ready to eat so it can be served at the festive Purim meal.

Sending presents engenders friendship and love for one another, and shows our joy for our miraculous rescue from the evil Haman.

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**JEWISH HUMOR LISTS**

Rachel <orbart@tezcat.com> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,  
Do you know Jewish humor email lists? Looking.  
Shalom*

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Dear Rachel:

Ohr Somayach has a few pieces of Jewish humor:

- Top Ten Lists  
<http://www.ohr.org.il/judaism/humor/top10/topten.htm>
- Chopped Liver cartoons:  
<http://www.ohr.org.il/judaism/cartoons/cartoons.htm>
- Yossi & Co. Comic strip:  
<http://www.ohr.org.il/yossi>

In the meantime, here's one:

An Israeli official, desperate to buy a new fighter jet costing \$50 million, comes up with an idea. He will seek out one thousand donors and ask them for \$50,000 a piece. His friend, listening to him pitch this idea, says "But the jet will never get off the ground!"

"Why not?"

"Do have any idea how much a thousand plaques weigh?"

# Megillah A&Q

We give you the answers! You give us the questions!

**READ THIS:** You have to ask questions from Megillas Esther which aptly fit the following answers.

(For example, if we tell you the answer is "127," you must tell us that the question is "How many countries did Achashverosh rule over?" Got it? Good.)

1. Woe!
2. 180 degrees
3. Arzei Habira
4. Remove both of his shins
5. "Here's mud in your eye!"
6. Vashti Dishes
7. Shushan Buoy
8. Quiche
9. Esther
10. Dodo
11. Lots of Luck
12. History is Boring
13. Dangling Modifiers
14. Doll Phone
15. Hummin'
16. Because
17. How do Yemenite Jews pronounce the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet (which happens to be the first letter in the Megillah)?
18. What would you get if every single day of Achashverosh's feast you graduated college? (1:4)
19. From where did they get the cedar trees (*arzei*) to build Shushan Habira?
20. How could you make Achashverosh be called Achavayro?
21. Which "toast" did the Medians say to one another before drinking which eventually became the source for the name of their country "Mud-Eye"? (1:3)
22. What did the Persian queen serve at her party? What didn't she do after the party?
23. What Persian flotation device causes lots of confusion when you ask someone at the airport where you can find one?
24. What egg-based luncheon pie sounds like Mordechai's great-grandfather?
25. Who's the only person in the Megillah with an English name?
26. What word defines Esther's father's relationship to Mordechai? (2:7)
27. What objects did Haman use to determine a date for his plan?
28. When he couldn't sleep, why did Achashverosh ask for the Book of Remembrances?
29. What kind of adjectives best describe Haman and sons?
30. What toy did Haman buy to go with his second son's Barbie collection? (9:7)
31. What joyous vocal expression is appropriate when our idolatrous enemies hang?
32. Why aren't there 20 questions this week?

## Bittle Riddle

When are your Shabbat Candles like a United States President?

*riddle submitted by Binyamin Franklin  
< continental.congress@timberteeth.gov >*

**Answer:** When they're A'blinkin'!

## MISS UNDERSTANDING

Richard Fader from Ft. Lee, NJ

< Motzeishabbos@nite.live.com.ic > wrote:

*Dear Jack,*

*With all due respect, I have a complaint: Often as one of your sources you mention the "Bad Baloney and Talmud." What is this "Bad Baloney and Talmud?" Whatever it is, how you can expect to be taken seriously when citing such a source? Are you referring to the rock group "Bad Baloney" (which happens to be an excellent band) or to actual decayed cold cuts (if so, your spel cheker is broken). How can "Jack's the Rabbi" refer to something even Oscar Meyer would turn up his nose at? Your very reputation is at stake (no pun intended)! If you're smart you'll take my advice and never again refer to this so called "Bad Baloney and Talmud."*

Dear Richard Fader,

Thanks for your comments. Actually, we refer only to the "Babylonian Talmud" — the Oral Law as compiled in **Babylon** in the 5th century CE. We never refer to the source you mentioned.

Richard Fader from Ft. Lee, NJ responds:

*Never mind.*