



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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4 April 1998
Issue #187
Parashat Tzav

MIGHTY MOSQUITO

<Chayayita@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
The Ohr Somayach publication on the Daf Yomi [Weekly Daf (#209)] stated that harmful creatures sometimes serve the purpose of punishing the wicked. The example given was the Roman Emperor Titus who destroyed the Beis Hamikdash. Hashem punished him, causing a mosquito to enter his nose and creep into his brain. It tortured him for seven years until he died.

But why do good people need the mosquito around? Why does the mosquito harm me, when I haven't harmed anyone? When my daughter was in Israel this past summer, she spent one night sleeping outdoors in the desert; the mosquitoes practically ate her up.

Dear <Chayayita@aol.com>,

It's dangerous to sleep unprotected in the desert. Creatures deadlier than mosquitoes live there: Snakes and scorpions, for example. The temperature, too, can drop drastically in the desert at night. With no cloud cover, nothing to block high winds, etc., a person can go to sleep comfortably and wake up dead from hypothermia.

The mosquito incident will probably discourage your daughter from sleeping unprotected in the desert on a continual basis, and thus protect her against these dangers. Looked at this way, mosquitoes can be seen as squadrons of "health police" who save people's lives with their vigilant patrol. In moister climates, mosquitoes keep people from sleeping outside in the summer on the wet grass, hence protecting them against potentially fatal sicknesses such as pneumonia.

When Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he caused an almost irreversible mixture of Good and Evil. Since then, you can always find something good and something bad in anything you look at. The Torah believes

that an underlying good pervades everything, and it's up to us to seek the good, do the good, and look for the good in everything. [For more on this subject, see Public Domain below]

Sources:

- Rabbi Avigdor Miller
- Rabbi Zev Leff

GUESS WHO'S EATING WITH KATZ?

Anna from NY, NY,

Dear Rabbi,

What is the status of a dairy dish if a cat, known for eating roaches and other bugs, licks up the leftover milk from cereal? Is there a difference if the cat sneaks up on the table, or if the human allows the cat to lick the milk? Can animals and humans share a dish?

Dear Anna,

The dish would remain Kosher and dairy. Other than hygiene, there are no *kashrut* concerns if your cat licks leftovers from your plate. However, I wonder whether your cat wouldn't prefer his/her own dish.

AGE OLD QUESTION

Bob Mogel from Omaha, Nebraska <Rmogel@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

In the Hebrew Bible it states that in Biblical times people lived to be hundreds of years old. How is this possible given the fact that people don't live nearly as long today even with the advances in medical technology?

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 Laufer, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom Lefkowitz, Rabbi Mordechai Becher and other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

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Dear Bob Mogel,

Until the Great Flood, there were no seasons; the weather was always temperate. After the Flood, G-d tells Noah that there will be constant seasonal changes (Genesis 9:22).

Rabbi Meir Leibush (Malbim) explains this as follows: Until the Flood, the earth's axis had no tilt relative to the sun. As a result of the flood, the earth's axis tilted in relation to the sun. Thus, the earth's climate changed drastically, resulting in a weakening of the human constitution and ability to withstand these constant changes in weather.

Thus, as a prelude to the Flood, G-d says "I won't constantly contend concerning Man ... his life-span shall be 120 years (Genesis 6:3). The Ibn Ezra explain this to mean that lifetimes would gradually decrease, until the maximum will be around 120.

I hope that answers your question about why people don't live as long today as they once did.

As for technology's inability to slow the aging process, that's more a problem with technology than with the Bible. "The scientific study of aging is a young discipline" (National Geographic Nov. '97). Compared to many areas of science, relatively little is known about aging. Richard A. Knox refers to the "black box of aging," and calls it a "mystery" (The Boston Globe 1997).

By way of example, take the case of Jeanne Calment who died in France last year at the age of 122. Why did she live so long? No one knows. Why did she stop living? "Officials gave no specific cause of death" (Houston Chronicle News Services 8/5/97). If she had lived another ten — or 100 — years, it wouldn't have contradicted any law of science.

SORRY SOURCE

Monika Muggli from Bad Aibling, Germany <monika.muggli@t-online.de> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Shalom! I'm looking for the exact source of a verse allegedly from the Torah that the German President Roman Herzog quoted in a speech held at the former Bergen Belsen concentration camp. It reads: "Our fathers have sinned, they are no more. We carry their sins." Can you help me?

Dear Monika Muggli,

The quotation comes from Lamentations 5:7. In Lamentations — in Hebrew, *Megillat Eicha* — the Jewish Prophet Jeremiah predicts the destruction of the first Temple and the aftermath. He calls attention to the sins for which

the Temple would be destroyed. The children are held accountable if they "carry" and continue the transgressions, and fail to learn from the mistakes of the previous generation.

PAST TENTHS

Saul Behr <Sbeh@mckq.co.za> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

If someone returns to Torah observance at, say, age 40, and he wants to start keeping mitzvot, how can he approach giving ma'aser (a tithe for charity)? I would imagine there's a mitzvah to return what he "stole" — i.e., the ma'aser he didn't give all the previous years. If, for example, he had been working for 20 years at the same salary, he would be indebted for two years of his salary! Could he start a clean account, or would he have to start making up the difference by giving, say, 20% instead of 10%, and coming clean by the time he was 60?

Dear Saul Behr,

In the situation you wrote about, it's not necessary for the person to "repay" the ma'aser that he had not given during all the previous years. The *Shulchan Aruch* says that the first year, a person should give ma'aser from his principle, and each ensuing year he should give ma'aser from his profit.

Sources:

- Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Auerbach
- Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 249:1

Yiddle Riddle

Purim so recently passed, I thought you might be interested in this riddle: Which four people's names from the Chumash also appear (as names) in Megillat Esther?

Elozor Barclay from Neve Yaakov, Jerusalem

Answer:

1. Kush (Bereishet 10:6, Esther 1:1)
2. Madai (Bereishet 10:2, Esther 1:3)
3. Yair (Bamidbar 32:41) (Esther 2:5)
4. Yehuda (Bereishet 29:35) (Esther 2:6)

(The trick was to think about names of places as well as names of people.)

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Moshe's age as source for saying "May you live to 120"
(Ask the Rabbi #182):

I recently made the same remark, that the blessing to live "until 120" was based on Moshe. A lawyer, Lawrence Glick, told me the source is a verse in Bereishet. He's referring to where, according to Rashi, the Torah says the flood will be in 120 more years. But some commentators understand the verse to mean that human lifespans would begin to decrease until they reach 120.

Rabbi Yehuda Albin, Ohr Somayach Chicago
<OrSomayach@aol.com>

Re: Son's guilt feelings at encouraging father's medical procedure which indirectly led to father's death; Son's dilemma whether to sue the hospital. (Ask the Rabbi #180)

As a lawyer experienced in both insurance defense and representing malpractice claims, I must say that permitting a potentially valid claim to be thrown away to "honor" the mother, is inappropriate. Insurance companies just love people who are so innocent as to feel timid or guilty about presenting a claim. Insurers do a great deal of advertising to lead people to believe that it is inappropriate to present even a valid claim.

Bernie Shapiro <SSDSSI@aol.com>

Your answer was very sensitive. However, I'm not sure you made explicit enough the fact that people are not omniscient. The praiseworthiness of a person's actions are based on how responsible they were in making and carrying out the decision, not in the result, which is up to G-d.

Haim (Howard) Roman <roman@mail.jct.ac.il>
Jerusalem College of Technology

Re: Why we have two ears and only one nose (Ask the Rabbi #179):

And remember: We have two ears and one mouth [i.e., we should listen at least twice as much as we talk].

Edward Simon <esimon@bilbo.bio.purdue.edu>

Hurrah for Ask the Rabbi:

I recently sent you a couple of questions regarding the naming of a child. Your answers were most helpful, and I wanted to send off this letter of appreciation. This service is wonderful and is helping educate many about the wonderful and exciting life we can live for G-d! Please keep up this much needed Ask The Rabbi and know that you are encouraged by many of us who read with anticipation the questions and answers!

Richard Porter Paxton Illinois
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