



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Gifts.doc
2. Sum-buddies
3. Black and White Fire
4. Si, Si, Senior
5. "And Let Us Say..."
6. Yiddle Riddle
7. Public Domain



GIFTS.DOC

Michael Reuben from Manchester, UK
< Michael.M.Reuben@stud.man.ac.uk > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is it permissible for a doctor to accept free gifts from a drug company? As a little background, many drug companies offer gifts — pens, diaries, clocks, etc.— to doctors in order to advertise their products. This obviously influences (to some extent) the choice of prescription and I would like to know whether or not this constitutes a bribe. Would it be different for a medical student (who receives gifts but cannot prescribe medication)?

Dear Michael Reuben,

I asked your question to Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Auerbach, *shlita*. He cited the Talmud (*Bava Batra 21b*) which states that a store owner may hand out sweets and nuts to drum up business. He said that this applies to the drug companies as well.

The reason that these gifts are not considered bribes, Rabbi Auerbach explained, is that the pharmaceutical companies do not intend the doctors to prescribe medicine that is inappropriate or unnecessary. They are merely trying to influence doctors to prescribe their products as opposed to similar products manufactured by competing pharmaceutical companies.

SUM-BUDDIES

Avi Ziskind from South Africa < az@uctvms.uct.ac.za > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

When the Torah records the counting of the Jewish People, it rounds off the numbers to the nearest 50. I find this hard to understand. If one of the purposes of the counting is for Hashem to show His love for each individual Jew, like a king who counts and recounts his precious jewels, how can the Torah round off the numbers just for "neatness" as it seems to be doing, seemingly disregarding the exact number of people, and rather giving us a general idea?

Mel Friedman from San Antonio, Texas
< melf@txdirect.net > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

There is a census taken at the beginning and end of Bamidbar. The confusing part for me is why are all the numbers apparently rounded to the nearest hundred?

Dear Avi Ziskind and Mel Friedman,

When the Torah lists the number of people in each of the 12 tribes in Parshat Bamidbar, each number is a multiple of either 50 or 100. There are differing views regarding whether or not these numbers are exact. One view is that the Torah rounded off the numbers. This isn't surprising considering that the Torah does this in other places as well. For example, the Torah says to "Count 50 days" between Pesach and Shavuot, when in reality there are only 49.

Counting the nation benefited the community and the individual. When the individual passed before Moshe and Aharon, Moshe and Aharon would bless the person and pray for him. This itself was a tremendous benefit for the person. Furthermore, each person was counted via his own half-shekel donation, and this served as an atonement for him. These individual benefits were in no way diminished by the fact that the Torah reports rounded numbers.

The communal benefit of the counting was similar to the benefit of any census, which helps the leaders decide how to best serve the needs of the community and tells how many people are available for military service. This was important for the Jewish People who were preparing to war against the Canaanites, and therefore needed to know their own military might. In this sense, round numbers suffice.

Sources:

- Sefer HaParshiot, Eliyahu KiTov Bamidbar p. 33
- Ramban 1:45

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Ask The Rabbi is written by Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom

General Editor: **Rabbi Moshe Newman**

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

Production Design: **Eli Ballon**

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☎ 22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

☎ 972-2-581-0315

fax: 972-2-581-2890

☒ info@ohr.org.il

☎ 38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

☎ 1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

☒ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@aol.com

☎ 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

☎ 1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

☒ Somayach@MSN.com

BLACK AND WHITE FIRE

Ron Cohen <capnrcg@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

We are preparing a tour of Jewish artists for the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This is a world class museum with very little on Jewish art or artists. One artist mentions "black fire white fire" as the inspiration for one of his paintings. He says it is from the Zohar. Can you please give me some references or some other information on this? I can not find it. Thank You.

Dear Ron Cohen,

In the Zohar we find a statement that the Torah was written with "black fire upon white fire." One explanation of "black fire and white fire" is that black fire denotes Divine Mercy while white fire is Divine Justice. The Maharsha explains that to appreciate G-d one must recognize the fact that both mercy and judgment are Divine attributes.

Interestingly, the concept of colored fire recurs in Midrashic literature. According to the Midrash, G-d showed Moshe the menorah made out of white, green, red and black fire.

Sources:

- Zohar 3 Parshat Naso page 132a
- Devarim Rabbah Parsha 3
- Tanchuma, Parshat Shemini 10
- Maharsha, Tractate Berachot 33a

SI, SI, SENIOR

George Wiley from Baldwin City, Kansas
gbwiley@idir.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I read in the paper that when Edgar Bronfman, Sr., named his son Edgar Bronfman, Jr., he violated a Jewish belief against naming a son after his father. Assuming that the newspaper report was correct in this regard, what is the basis for this prohibition?

Dear George Wiley,

There's no prohibition against naming a son after a living father. However, it is the custom of Jews of European descent not to name children after living relatives. If they name the child after a relative, their custom is to name the child after a deceased relative, as if to say that this child will carry on their tradition.

The Jews of the Middle East, North Africa and Asia do name children after living relatives, and they consider it a great honor to have a child named for them. However, they too generally refrain from naming a child after a living parent. Usually grandparents are the first ones honored by having a child named for them.

"AND LET US SAY..."

Leetal Rivlin from Katzrin, Golan Heights, Israel
< rivlin@canaan.co.il > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What are the origins of the word amen? When does it first appear in the Torah? When does it first appear in other religious practices? Thank you.

Dear Leetal Rivlin,

"Amen" first appears in the Torah in Bamidbar, Numbers, in chapter 5, verse 22: "And the woman shall say 'amen, amen'." The context there is that a woman is being administered an oath. Saying amen is her acceptance of the oath as true, and that she accepts the consequences of the oath if she is lying. In this sense, the word amen means "true."

The letters of amen, "alef mem nun," are also seen by our Sages as an acrostic hinting to the phrase "(K)el Melech Ne'eman" — "G-d, the faithful King."

Perhaps the first place it can be seen as said in a "religious" ritual is at the end of Psalm 41, which ends the first of the five books of Psalms. There, King David says, "Blessed is the L-rd, G-d of Israel, for ever and ever; amen and amen." This verse is very similar to what we call a "blessing," and it ends with "amen."

Sources indicate that amen was said after blessings at least as early as the beginning of the Second Temple period. There's no evidence that this was when it was first introduced, and it very likely goes back much farther.

Sources:

- Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 119b, Ta'anit 16b

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked: When is the only time one would say "Av Harachamim" two days in a row? (Av Harachamim is the prayer which, according to the Askenazic custom, is generally said on Shabbat before musaf).

Riddle submitted by Dr. Joel Luber, Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem

Answer :

In Eretz Yisrael, when Erev Shavuot falls on Shabbat, Av Harachamim is said on Shabbat, and again on Sunday — Shavuot — as part of Yizkor (Ashkenazic custom).

Though Av Harachamim is usually omitted on a Shabbat falling on a day when Tachanun would be omitted were it a weekday, it is nonetheless recited the Shabbat before Shavuot, even if it is Erev Yom Tom. This is because the massacres of Rhineland Jewry during the First Crusade reached their peak in the beginning of Sivan.

Originally, Av Harachamim was recited on only one or two Shabbatot during the year, the Shabbatot before Shavuot and before Tisha B'Av. This is still the custom of many German Jewish communities and the United Synagogues of Great Britain. As persecutions and martyrdom continued throughout the centuries, its recital was extended to most Shabbatot.

Source:

- Bein Pesach L'Shavuot by Rabbi Zvi Cohen, ch. 3, paragraphs 6,13,14

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Yiddle Riddle (Ohrnet Tzav):

Regarding names in Megillat Esther also appearing as names in the Chumash, I found two more that you omitted: Shimi (Exodus 6:17 & Esther 2:5), and Avichayil (Numbers 3:35 & Esther 2:15).

Chaim, Levin, Jerusalem

Re: Mosquitoes (Ohrnet Tzav):

I heard from Rav Moshe Aharon Stern, zatzal, a pshat that he learned from Rav Shraga Feivel Mendelowitz, zatzal. The students were sitting outdoors on a hot summer evening studying with Rav Mendelowitz and the boys were being constantly pestered by "thousands of mosquitoes." Rav Shraga Feivel couldn't

understand why the boys couldn't sit still since he couldn't see the bugs in the dark and for some reason he wasn't being affected by them. The next day they were again sitting with the Rav learning Sefer Mishlei. They came to the verse (16:7) "When a man's ways please the L-rd, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." Rav Shraga Feivel quoted a Midrash that "even his enemies" refers to mosquitoes and other insects. The students realized that this was a Heavenly message which explained the events of the previous evening while simultaneously revealing to them at least one aspect of their Rabbi's true greatness.

Shaul Gutstein, Har Nof, Jerusalem

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