



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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OHR SOMAYACH אוהר שומאך
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Parshat Chayei Sarah

**THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF BILLIE SCHIFFRES ROSEN, SARAH BAS DAVID HA-KOHN,
ON THE OCCASION OF HER 5TH YAHRZEIT,
BY HER GRANDSON, STANLEY NACHAMIE, JLE ISRAEL SUMMER '88.
MAY HER MEMORY BE FOR A BLESSING.**

A MAN IN THE MAKING

Rina Wolfson from Israel <swolfson@netvision.net.il>

wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My name is Rina and I am five years old. On Parshas Bereishis, my father asked a question at the table: "Why did Hashem say 'Let us make man?' (The Hebrew term is 'na'aseh adam.'). Why did Hashem need to use the term 'na'aseh' — 'let us make' (as opposed to 'nivrah' — 'let us create')." I answered that the purpose of the creation is to follow the Torah, and that Hashem was teaching the Jewish Nation to use the term "na'aseh v'nishma" ("we will do and we will hear") when they received the Torah on Mount Sinai. Is this an incorrect answer or is there some basis in the midrash to my idea? (email submitted by Rina's mother)

Dear Rina Wolfson,

Rina, you may only be five years old, but your ideas are thousands of years old! Your 'original' thought appears in the Zohar! The Zohar writes that when creating humans, Hashem used the word *na'aseh* to parallel the *na'aseh v'nishma* that the Jewish People declared at Sinai. The connection is *exactly* as you explained, the world was created on the condition that the Jewish People would stand at Mount Sinai and receive the Torah.

And don't forget, Rina, the Sages also tell us that the world continues to exist only because of the words of Torah spoken by little children. So keep up the good work, and keep the world working!

Sources:

- Zohar's Intro. to the Torah, pp. 1:1 and 1:2.
- Rashi, Bereishet 1:31.
- Tractate Shabbat 119b

JEWISH-LITE

Email@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am Jewish, but not Orthodox. I do not follow all 613 commandments all the time, I do not say all the prayers, I don't keep completely kosher, and I occasionally speak improper words and think improper thoughts.

As a first born male, I was redeemed from a kohen by my father. I did have a bris and pidyon haben (redemption of the first-born), and I was bar-mitzvah at 13. I try to attend synagogue regularly for Shabbos on Friday nights, and all Jewish holidays. I fast for most of Yom Kippur and the day of erev Pesach. I do not celebrate Xmas or Easter with my non-Jewish friends, and would not ever consider changing to a different religion.

At synagogue, we do not say all the traditional prayers, and we add a few "new" English prayers. I avoid pork, eating meat with milk, and other such kosher rules, but I don't necessarily eat kosher food. I rarely say a blessing over the food I eat, mainly because it's rarely kosher, and I don't know all the appropriate blessings.

My question is this: Am I doing any good at all? Do abbreviated prayers, selective mitzvos, and acknowledged Jewish identity reap any reward at all? Or by being "Jewish Lite" am I no better than someone who is completely non-observant?

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

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I just need to feel that somehow I am contributing the greater good of Judaism by being somewhat observant instead of non-observant. Please let me know if I am making any difference by doing the little I do. Thank you.

Dear Email@Withheld,

You and I have a lot in common. I am also Jewish. I also had a *bris*, (but not a *pidyon haben* — redemption of the first born — my parents only did that for my older brother). I was also bar-mitzvah at age 13.

Like you, I also don't think of myself as "Orthodox" (although most people would call me that); rather, I think of myself as a Jew who tries to observe the Torah which G-d gave us. But, like you, I often succumb to the inexorable onslaught of human failings — laziness, desire, convenience, etc.

You wrote that you occasionally speak improper words. Did you know that more than one-third of the Yom Kippur penitential prayers are devoted to asking G-d to forgive us for sins committed through speech? Regarding proper thoughts, King David prayed: "Create within me a pure heart, G-d."

The bottom line: Everyone fails. Nobody is perfect.

So, I think my answer to your question should be evident by now. Any *mitzvot* which you perform are certainly praiseworthy and should be encouraged. (Obviously, a *mitzvah* shouldn't be done at the expense of a transgression. Examples: Friday night after sunset, lighting Shabbat candles is no longer a *mitzvah* but rather a transgression. The same goes for driving to synagogue. In such a case, the way to express your Jewish identity is to stay home!) Furthermore, your deeds can influence others, without you even knowing it; for example a Jewish friend may stop eating pork because of your example. Or, he may simply tell another person "I have a friend who doesn't eat pork," and that third party, who you may never even meet, may decide to re-think his own level of observance.

There is a danger of being "Jewish Lite," however: It could furnish you with a feeling of being "comfortable" with your observance level. That should never happen to anyone. We all need to continually strive to grow, study and learn more and more about the Torah. Therefore, you should feel happy about the Jewish things that you do, but you shouldn't think of yourself as being at a *fixed* level of observance. Realize that you can add, if even just one *mitzvah* a year. Example: Get a *tzeddaka*

(charity) box in your house and put in a coin (even a small one) every day (except Shabbat and Holidays). Perhaps the most important thing for you now is to study Torah on a daily, or at least weekly, basis. If you tell me where you live I can try to suggest some possible study partners for you.

WHAT AM I, CHOPPED LIVER?

Tom Birchmire from Needham, MA
<cogito@world.std.com> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Perhaps you can settle a discussion (argument) between my mother-in-law and me. She has used the expression "What am I, chopped liver?" sprinkled here and there in conversation. When I asked her what was the beginning of the joke, she replied that there isn't any — the phrase stands alone. Are you aware of the origins of the phrase? Any help will be appreciated.*

Dear Tom Birchmire,

As far as I know, the origins of the phrase are not Yiddish; I believe the phrase was originally coined in America. Being that chopped liver was always considered a side dish and not a main course, the phrase is used to express hurt and amazement when a person feels he has been overlooked and treated just like a "side dish."

HUMAN HAPPINESS

Peter from Slovak Republic, Bratislava
<luciak@ganga.gjh.schools.sk> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
What is the ultimate human happiness?*

Dear Peter,

The ultimate human happiness is closeness to G-d. This is achieved by being similar to, and compatible with, G-d.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch points out that the Hebrew words *simcha* (happiness) and *tsmicha* (growth) are related. Thus, happiness comes as a result of a person growing towards his spiritual potential.

The Baal Shem Tov points out that the letters of the Hebrew word *b'simcha* (happy) can be rearranged to spell *machshava* (thought), emphasizing that happiness depends not on your situation, but upon your view of it.

Yiddle Riddle

Twin brothers are born from the same mother on the very same morning. Both are perfectly healthy. Yet, the proper day for one's *brit mila* is 8 days later, while the proper day for the other one's *brit mila* is not until the 9th day. Why?

Answer next week...

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Kosher Hospitals (Ohrnet Noach):

Bikur Cholim Hospital is also run according to Jewish Law.

Chavivah van der Plaats <plaatjer@netvision.net.il>

mitzvah or wedding, is, I believe, unhealthy. And it is unfortunate, because the mere mention of the father's name serves as a reminder of an immutable reality and may create a spark that results in a re-establishment of relations.

Name@Withheld

Re: "Using Step-Father's Name" (Ohrnet Shoftim):

In Ask the Rabbi, you indicated that the Yaavitz says that a child may be called to the Torah using his step-father's name if there is "absolutely no contact between the child and his father."

This is understandable when the father has abandoned the family, but there are circumstances where the lack of contact is not what the father wanted.

To allow the father to be erased from a child's life, particularly at critical life-moments such as a bar

Re: Hurray for Ohrnet:

I'm a graduate of Ohr Somayach's Ohr Lagolah program now living in a suburb of Chicago. I loved getting Ohrnet while in Eretz Yisrael, and would really appreciate it here, especially now that I give classes throughout the week to Jews of all backgrounds. Thank you so much. Much hatzlachah in your wonderful work.

*Sruly Koval, Buffalo Grove, Illinois
<kovalhome@juno.com>*

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