



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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LIGHTEN UP

Leora from South Africa <613@netactive.co.za> wrote:

Dear Rabbi

I have 2 questions: I have a non-observant guest who comes to me every Friday night and sleeps here. She will switch off the light if it's on when she goes to sleep, and if the light is off when she comes into the room, she will switch it on. Is it better for me to leave it on, knowing she will switch it off (one Shabbat violation), or is it better for me to leave it off knowing she will switch it on and off (thus doing two Shabbat violations)? I know that even if I try explain to her not to do anything with the light, she won't listen.

My second question is, what is the purpose of writing "beit, samech, daled" at the top of the page? And when is it necessary? Thank you.

Dear Leora,

If those were your only choices, then it would be better to leave the light on. That way she will only do one prohibited act instead of two.

But there are other options. (Don't worry, I won't suggest removing the light bulb. I assume you've thought of that and decided it wasn't an option!) Get a "Shabbat clock" (a timer) which turns the lights on and off automatically. Any hardware store has them. Till then, how about lighting a candle in a safe place before Shabbat? Candles are the original Shabbat clocks, shutting themselves off automatically! Get the proper length candle, timed to extinguish approximately when she usually goes to sleep.

Or, how about a small fluorescent desk lamp which she can cover with an upside down waste basket? (Caution must be taken against fire, even with a fluorescent bulb.)

Regarding your second question, "beit, samech, daled" stands for *b'siyata d'Shmaya*, Aramaic for "with G-d's help." It's a custom to write it on top of the page as a prayer for success in what we are about to write, but it's not an absolute requirement. I've never noticed anyone writing it when they write a check. Before an exam, I used to make sure to write it right on top of the form.

MAKE ME AN OFIR

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am asking this question for a friend at work. His wife is expecting a baby boy and he asked me whether the name Ofir (Bereishet 10:29) is OK to use. He and his wife are both Jewish, anti-religious and want a name from the Bible. However, they do not want any names that sound too religious. For example he does not want the name Yeshayahu, etc. Ofir is the name of one of Yoktan's sons. They are asking for a rabbi's opinion because I told them sometimes people mistakenly choose names of wicked people or unclean animals. (He did say that the name Nimrod sounds nice and is becoming popular in Israel.) Ofir's lineage does not apparently lead to any righteous people mentioned in the Torah. Someone said that it is not good to use a name that is not of a righteous person. Can you shed light on what names should be used from the Tanach?

Dear Name@Withheld,

According to the Chida in the name of our Sages, one should avoid using names of people from before the time of Avraham. Ofir was before Avraham. However, many people are named Noach, which is apparently an exception.

Regarding names in general, the verse states "zecher tzadik livracha, v'shem reshaim yirkav." The

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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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Talmud sees this verse as a support for our custom not to use names of wicked people. Thus it's wrong to name a person Nimrod, especially since Nimrod tried to murder Avraham, the founder of the Jewish nation. It would be like naming a child Haman or Adolf.

How about Efraim?

Sources:

- Mishlei 1:7
- Tractate Yoma 38b

LUZ-ERS ARE WINNERS

Dr. Aharon Altabe from Paris, France <aharon@club-internet.fr> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

The Sefer Ta'amei Haminhagim states in the name of Eliyahu Rabba and Zohar that there is a bone in the brain which never vanishes. You can't burn it, break it or mill it. I believe it b'emuna shelemah — with utmost faith — but I would like to know if someone could tell me more about it: Did you see it or read about it or hear a Rav ... or a physician who could give the name of such a bone? Thanks to you.

Dear Dr. Aharon Altabe,

Yes, according to tradition there is a kind of bone or organ no bigger than a barley corn called the *luz* or *neskvi*; its shape is almost cubic and apparently it lies at the top of the spine, inside the skull underneath the brain. It is described as having within it many intertwined spider-like blood vessels.

It has curious properties: It receives nourishment only from food eaten Saturday night at the *melave Malka* meal. And, yes, it is indestructible and doesn't decay in the grave. The Midrash says that the Roman Hadrian once took a *luz* and tried to grind it, burn it, and dissolve it in water, to no avail. When he hammered it against an anvil, the hammer and anvil broke!

The future resurrection of the dead will be from this bone; that is, a person will be resurrected from his *luz* bone.

The idea behind it is this: The *luz* symbolizes the point where physical and spiritual meet. Thus, it is nourished only from *melave Malka*, the meal eaten between the spiritual Shabbat and the physical weekday. It's like the Western Wall: Just as the Western Wall will never be destroyed, and from it the Third Temple will be built, so too the *luz* is never destroyed, and from it the person will be re-built during the future resurrection.

Regarding the precise identity of the bone, I advise asking Dr. Eli Temstet from Paris. I am sure he can be of help.

Sources

- Sefer Ta'amei Haminhagim 425
- Bereishet Rabba 25
- Mishna Berurah 300:2

JACOB'S RIGHT

Jeff <JRKatz@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

In last week's Parsha summary (Toldot) you wrote: "Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of soup, clearly demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of the firstborn." Why didn't Yaakov simply give his brother something to eat? Wouldn't that be the brotherly (not to mention humanly decent) thing to do? I do, however, understand how selling the birthright for food demonstrated his unworthiness.

Dear Jeff,

You're asking a good question. Interestingly enough, there's no clear indication from the text that Yaakov withheld food from Esav.

On the contrary, the verses indicate that Yaakov actually *did* give Esav the food immediately. The verse says: "He sold his birthright to Yaakov, and Yaakov *had* (*already*) given Esav bread and lentils..." According to the rules of Hebrew grammar, "*had given*" is past perfect: When Esav sold the birthright for money, Yaakov had *already* given him free food!

But assuming that Yaakov withheld the food, why would he do that? The Talmud states: "Said Rabbi Yochanan: Five sins that wicked one (Esav) transgressed on that day — adultery, murder, heresy, denial of the future resurrection and despising of the birthright."

Yaakov knew who his brother was. Esav was totally unworthy to serve G-d. He would desecrate that service. Esav was a fraud. The very fact that Esav sold the birthright showed just how unworthy of it he was. Therefore, Yaakov saw this opportunity as an obligation to relieve Esav of the birthright.

Sources:

- *Haktav V'hakaballa* 25:31
- *Tractate Bava Batra* 15b

Yiddle Riddle

The Year 2000 will, G-d willing, be very special; so much so that we will not fast on *Asara b'Tevet* (the Tenth of Tevet) that year. Why not? (Ohrnet's note: The Tenth of Tevet commemorates the beginning stage of the destruction of the Temple. It never occurs on Shabbat).

Answer next week...

Submitted by Zvi Freund < miltonf@villagenet.com >

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Non-Jewish Spouse (Ohrnet Vayera):

A recent Torah Weekly article titled "Body and Soul" refers to "saving souls" and to the intermarriage rate in the US (it is probably similar in Canada). My comment/question is, could we not consider this situation an opportunity as well? That is, if we are judicious and caring in our efforts to bring these people back to Yiddishkeit (or for the non-Jewish spouse, to convert them), could we not strengthen our People, both in numbers and vitality? I recognize the difficulties associated with this course of action, and the need to attempt it with sensitivity and understanding. I hardly advocate seeking converts for the purpose of increasing our numbers. However, since we are presented with the situation, would it not be right to try and "win" two "strong" Jews as opposed to "losing" one "weak" one?

Name@Withheld from Thornhill, Ontario, Canada

Ohrnet responds:

Each situation is unique and halachic guidance *must* be sought in each individual case.

Re: Moon Worship (Ohrnet Vayera):

Regarding kiddush levanah being mistaken for moon worship, it is interesting that the ArtScroll Siddur notes that many congregations recite aleinu following kiddush levanah to publicly refute this idea, since a basic statement in aleinu is "it is only to G-d that we pray."

Stanley Nachamie, JLE Israel Summer '88

< STNBH@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU >

Re: Ask the Rabbi's Interactive Email:

Thank you, Ask the Rabbi, for your kind and sensitive (and speedy) response to my questions. What a wonderful service! Truly Heaven sent!

Maddi Yaacobi, Hollywood, Florida

< zohary@icanect.net >

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