



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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Parshat Vayishlach

LETTING GO

Eric Steinberg from New York <esteinb173@aol.com>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am having a lot of trouble within myself dealing with a question. If you and I are fathers and we see our children in danger we scoop them up and carry them to safety. We would even give up our lives for them. If this is so then why does G-d not do the same for His children; after all, He is "our Father..." I have asked a few rabbis about this, but the response was not helpful. I am not trying to turn away from G-d but I do need this answered so that I may be closer to Him...

Dear Eric Steinberg,

Have you ever taught a child to ride a bike? If you have you will realize that at some point you have to let go of the seat or the handlebars and let him ride himself, and fall himself. If you do not let go at some point, he will never learn to ride the bike.

The ultimate purpose of this world is for the human to develop the capacity to be G-dlike, similar and compatible with G-d. However, G-d is not controlled, influenced or "scooped up" by some outside force. He is completely independent — in order for us to really be good (or evil for that matter) it requires that our actions be from within ourselves as a result of free will. Free will requires that we are not unduly influenced in our decisions. If every time I make the right choice morally, I succeed in this world, and every time I make the wrong choice morally, I fail in this world, then I no longer have free will, I am merely a rat in a Skinner maze being conditioned to press the correct lever. This means that even if I am righteous I may suffer, and I may suffer at the hands of the evildoers. It is only in this system that humanity can become great — a system with minimum Divine intervention, with no apparent connection between moral and physical success. G-d wants us to be able to "ride the bike," and that is why He lets go.

HOLES IN ONE

Alan Mangurten from Morton Grove, Illinois
<manguala@concentric.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My 13 year old daughter, Eve (Chaya Dorit bat Gittel v'Avraham haKohen) is in the hospital with a blood clot in her leg. This made me think about the prayer "asher yatzar et ha'adam b'chochma... rofeh kol basar umafli la'asot — G-d created Man with wisdom...Healer of all flesh and Doer of wonders." Can you tell me any details about the prayer; who wrote it, when was it written, are there commentaries on it? Todah rabbah!

Dear Alan Mangurten,

First let me wish your daughter a complete recovery.

We say the "asher yatzar" blessing every time after using the bathroom. This blessing praises G-d for administering our body functions and maintaining our health. It relates to the Divine intelligence we see in the wonders of the human body, stressing the function of the "innumerable apertures, the innumerable orifices" which open and close in turn with precision, like the valves of the heart, the respiratory system and the digestive system. "If but one were ruptured, or but one were blocked, it would be impossible to remain alive and stand before You, Hashem."

This blessing is mentioned in the Talmud as one of the blessings compiled by the sages of the Great Assembly (circa 300-500 BCE).

Sources:

- Berachot 60b
- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 6:1

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

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WHAT'S MY SIGN?

Sharon from NY < Sharon_Schonberg@ccmail.prusec.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

A while ago I met with a mekubal (kabbalist) who had a reputation for helping many people. After giving him information about myself and talking with him for a while he told me that my nature/personality is "water water water." Can you please tell me what that means, what water represents in Kabbala?

Dear Sharon,

There are four origins of *neshamot*, souls, parallel to the four origins of matter: Fire, wind, water, and earth. Most people fall within one category while some are a mixture of two or more. Water as the origin of your soul means fruitfulness, purity and health. It means you don't get angry quickly, or at least you calm down quickly. You probably enjoy swimming! Any negative issues related to water can be mended by observance of the Torah, which is compared to water.

This is a highly complicated subject, which can't be conveyed properly via this media.

KISS OF HONOR

Louis Orzech < lumiray@sympatico.ca > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the best way to honor the Torah as it is carried in the synagogue? This question applies to both when we are "touching-distance" from the Torah as well as when we are too far away.

Dear Louis Orzech,

One should stand. If the Torah is carried past you, it is a mitzvah to follow behind it until it is brought to rest. It is also customary to kiss the Torah, or to touch the Torah and kiss your hand. If you are too far away, you should stand and face the Torah as it is taken to and placed on the *bima* (table upon which the Torah is placed and read). Likewise, when the Torah is being carried back to the holy ark.

Rabbi Yehuda Segal, *zatzal*, the late Rosh Yeshiva in Manchester, used to point out that although it is a beautiful custom to kiss the Torah, very often people surge forward and push or elbow others out of the way! Rabbi Segal cautioned his students that it's better not to kiss the Torah than to push others in order to kiss the Torah.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 149
- Mishna Berurah *ibid.* 7

DATE BASE

Sharon Cohen from Edmonton, Alberta < sharoncohen@compusmart.ab.ca > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have been asked by a colleague at work what event marks the beginning of the Jewish calendar? I have always understood that we date our years from the Creation. Am I correct? Can you quote any sources I can use to back up my theory?

Dear Sharon Cohen,

You're right. We are now in the year 5759 from the creation of Adam. We have an unbroken tradition that this is so; we've been writing this in our marriage documents for thousands of years.

For textual sources, look at the chronologies from Adam down through Avraham (*Genesis, Chapters 5,11*). This shows that Avraham was born in the year 1948 (!) from Creation. The Exodus from Egypt was 500 years later (*Genesis 21:5, 15:13*), bringing us to the year 2448. Add 480 years from the Exodus until the First Temple (*Kings I, 6:1*) and you have 2928. Add 410 years that the First Temple stood, 70 years of Babylonian exile, 420 years that the Second Temple stood, and 1931 years since its destruction. This gives you exactly 5759.

WHY ESAV LOST HIS HEAD

Sharon Stakofsky-Davis < Yenta71@aol.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

In our Torah study group we were discussing the midrash where Yaakov's deaf grandson takes a club and lops off Esav's head and his head goes rolling into Jacob's burial place. Is there any commentary that talks about why specifically a deaf person is the one who kills Esav and what this means? We have seven people waiting for this answer.

Dear Sharon Stakofsky-Davis and the Study-Group Seven,

At first, people are shocked by bad news, but then they get used to it little by little. When Esav first came to stop Yaakov's burial, no one knew exactly what he was up to and how far he would actually take his argument. Finally, when Esav demanded that Yaakov's sons produce the deed of sale of the burial site, they had already begun to "accept" the bad situation little by little. But Chushim, Yaakov's deaf grandson, didn't figure out what was happening until the argument was at its peak, and was therefore "shocked" into action.

Sources:

- Maharal, *Chidushei Aggadot* II 53

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked:

The Year 2000 will, G-d willing, be very special; so much so that we will not observe the fast of *Asara b'Tevet* (the Tenth of Tevet) that year. Why not?

Answer:

Because the Jewish date "10 Tevet" will not occur in the civil calendar year 2000.

The Tenth of Tevet this year, 1999, will occur on December 19. The next Tenth of Tevet will be 13 months later, on January 5, 2001. This long interval is due to 5760 being a Jewish leap year, in which a month is added to the year. Thus, there will be no Tenth of Tevet in the year 2000.

Submitted by Zvi Freund, Kew Garden, NY < miltonf@villagenet.com >

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Hooray for Ohrnet:

I would just like to let you know that Ohrnet is a big hit in Midreshet Moriah and many girls are interested in it. Thank you, Ohrnet staff, for bringing more inspirational words of Torah into our lives each week.

Miriam Weiss, Jerusalem < yeshiva5@netvision.net.il >

Re: Hurricane Mitch:

Due to the natural disaster caused by "Hurricane Mitch" in all Honduras, our synagogue bought last year by our community, the Tegucigalpa Kehilla, was destroyed by the river. We are very sad due to it. One Sefer Torah was saved but all the rest, prayer and holy books were lost. There was no chance to save them. Today we have a meeting and will talk about the rebuild. And, im yirtze Hashem, it will be ready to celebrate our next Rosh Hashana.

*Berl Bernardo Gorgun, Honduras
< gorgun@david.intertel.hn >*

Re: The Missing Years (Ohrnet Lech Lecha):

Rabbi Shimon Schwab, zatzal, discusses our calendar count at length in his sefer "Selected Speeches." He writes that Daniel stopped the Jewish Calendar for 168 years and that the Greek dating

system is actually correct. This was Hashem's instruction to Daniel to "hide the date of Mashiach."

REB < reb95@juno.com >

In Chapter 21 of "Selected Speeches" Rav Shimon Schwab, zatzal, cites a great deal of evidence for both sides of this question. I'd like to offer one quote: "It is because of all these gnawing doubts that I have decided to put a big question mark after the words 'Jewish Chronology.' Let somebody with greater knowledge come and pick up the threads where I left off. Our traditional, universally accepted Jewish way of counting the years to the Creation of the World is sacred territory which only fools do not fear to tread upon....On the other hand I muster the courage to belong to those who would rather wish to be honest to themselves than to be 'right.' I would rather leave a good question open than risk giving a wrong answer. (pp. 284-285)"

Akiva Miller < kennethgmiller@juno.com >

Re: Where is Hashem (Ohrnet Vayera):

You wrote: The word Hashem appears in the Torah, as in "Fear the great and awesome Hashem (Name) — the L-rd your G-d. (Deuteronomy 22:28)." Your source, Deuteronomy 22:28, must be a mistake could you tell me where it is instead?

• PFS from Holland < sant@tref.nl >

Ohrnet Responds:

The correct source should be Deuteronomy 28:58. Sorry for the mistake.

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