



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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LOCAL OPERATION

Mark from Chuckey, Tennessee <solomon@usit.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My first son is expected to be born during the 9th week of 1999. I live in a remote area of Tennessee and we do not have a synagogue nearby. We are making plans to have him circumcised by a doctor. Can you please give me specific instructions so that all is done properly? Shalom

Dear Mark,

First of all, may Hashem bless you with much joy and happiness! Circumcision is, as you know, an extremely central milestone in the life of a Jew. Aside from the fact that it is a commandment (the first given to a Jew!) it is also the entry of the child into the covenant of Abraham and into the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people. There are many legal and medical requirements in Jewish law for a correct circumcision, and it would be impossible to explain them all over the email. I suggest you contact Rabbi Nutta Greenblatt (see below). Rabbi Greenblatt has years of experience as a *mohel* (circumciser), and he travels all over Tennessee to perform circumcisions. If you have trouble contacting him, then contact Mr. Bart Ehrenkranz of the Jewish Renaissance Center whom I spoke with today on the phone. He said he would be happy to help you with the arrangements.

(We supplied Mark with phone numbers and addresses. If anyone is in a similar situation, please contact us.)

DOES THE END JUSTIFY THE MEANS?

Bernard Berkeley from Glenview, IL <berlen@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Machievelli believed, "The end justifies the means." What does the Torah offer as a counter-argument?

Dear Bernard Berkeley,

In life, nothing is as simple as a mere five word statement. Let us analyze the statement. Supposing you could save the life of an innocent child ("the end") and you could do it by lying ("the means") about his whereabouts to the murderer. In such a case Judaism would definitely say that the end justifies the means. However, supposing I could convince someone of the truth of the Torah ("the end") by lying ("the means") about what Torah is, then the Torah would say that it is *not* justified. Because here the means are a direct contradiction to the end, which is truth. We believe that one should examine each case separately, and indeed Judaism has legal guidelines to teach us how to act in cases of end versus means.

ONE SMALL STEP

Daniel <plaatjer@netvision.net.il> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Just recently, I started learning with a friend of mine. While learning we came up with the following problem. He claims that if you live in Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel) you do a mitzvah with every step you take. I learned it once before but do not recall where. Maybe you could help us find where this is and explain this important issue.

Dear Daniel,

What the Talmud actually says is: "One who walks a distance of four cubits (approximately 6 - 8 feet) in the Land of Israel is assured of being a *ben olam haba* —

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heir to the World to Come.” Because of the *intrinsic* Holiness of the Land of Israel, a person gains spiritual merit by merely walking here.

So, each step is a step towards “walking four cubits” in the Land of Israel, but unless you have a really big stride, you can’t do it all in one step.

Sources:

- Ketuvot 111a
- Maharal Chidushei Aggadot 1:168

R.I.P.

Jeremy Schulman, University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa
<schul003@bama.ua.edu> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Could somebody please tell me what the Hebrew letters “peh nun” mean on a tombstone?

Peace, Jeremy Schulman (JLE 98)

Dear Jeremy Schulman,

The letters peh nun are the first two letters of “poh nitman” (or “poh nikbar”) which means “here is the grave site of...” It is normally found at the top of the tombstone.

Michael <Ferenstein@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

In America there is a kashrut symbol “D-E” which stands for “dairy equipment.” What is the purpose of this? Can you eat something made on dairy equipment after meat? If not, why bother with the symbol? In other words, how does it differ from the regular “D” symbol which stands for dairy?

Dear Michael,

“Pareve” food — i.e., food that is neither dairy nor meat — cooked in dairy equipment may not be eaten *together* with meat, but it may be eaten immediately *after* eating meat. Hence, some kashrut supervisory organizations use the D-E designation.

Sources:

- See Yoreh Deah 95:2 Rema

Yiddle Riddle

Dovid Solomon< dsolomon@actcom.co.il> wrote:

This riddle is attributed to the Ibn Ezra. Two characters in Tanach: One’s name makes him sound as though he’s his own uncle, and the other’s name would have him appear to be his own grandfather. Who are they?

Answer Next week...

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Hebron (Ohrnet Chayei Sara):

The article “Hebron” in “Love of the Land” (Chayei Sara) states “Hebron is today under Palestinian rule, but there is a Jewish settlement in the city and in adjoining Kiryat Arba.”

This statement is misleading. While 80% of Hebron is indeed under Palestinian rule, 20% is under Israeli rule. The area under Israeli rule includes all the Jewish neighborhoods, the Cave of the Patriarchs, the grave sites of Avner, Yishai and Rut and the ancient Jewish cemetery (in which are buried Torah giants including the Baal Reishit Chochma, the Baal S’de Chemed, the victims of the pogrom of 1929 as well as recent victims of

Palestinian terrorism). From the wording of the sentence quoted above, readers might receive the impression that in order to visit the Cave of the Patriarchs, other Jewish holy sites or the Jewish neighborhoods in Hebron, one must pass into Palestinian-ruled areas. Fortunately, this is not so. The only Jewish holy site in Hebron located under the jurisdiction of the PA is the tomb of Otniel Ben Kenaz (situated a few hundred meters down the road from Beit Hadassah). It can be visited but usually only by prior arrangement with the security forces.

Our compliments to Ohrnet. We look forward to reading it each week. It is a regular part of our Shabbat table divrei Torah, especially the Parsha Q&A! With Torah greetings,

Name withheld by request

Re: Forward, Forward:

I have been trying to get my cousin interested in Judaism for years, and nothing ever worked! She always had an excuse for not coming to lectures with me, not spending Shabbos in my home (she does let her kids stay over for Shabbos often), and not reading any good books on Yiddishkeit that I bought for her.

She and I grew up together so close (like sisters) in Russia, and when my (immediate) family had discovered Yiddishkeit and started observing many Torah laws, whose existence we never even suspected for years, it became very important to me that my cousin discover the same beauty and joy that we have found.

The best I have gotten to so far is that after a three-year long effort, she finally agreed to send her now 11-year old daughter to a Jewish day school. Our whole family, including my cousin's mom (my aunt) and our grandma can't say enough wonderful things about the magical changes they see in my little cousin since she has started going to this school.

A few weeks ago my cousin got a computer and access to the Internet, and she started forwarding to me all kinds of mail, jokes you find on the net, chain letters, etc. That's when I thought to myself, if she can forward me these messages, then I can forward her all the Jewish mail I get via the Internet. I had sent her various very good letters on the weekly Torah Portion, discussions on Jewish topics, etc. I never got any reaction for any of those, not even a reply. Last week however I forwarded her your "Ask The Rabbi" for Chayei Sarah, and a miracle happened! Here's her exact reply:

"I really enjoyed this particular page 'Ask The Rabbi.' If you subscribe it, forward it to me, please. Email me tomorrow regarding my kids visiting you guys this Shabbos..."

This is fantastic!

PS Her kids just spent last Shabbos with me. I took her daughter to a friend's Bas Mitzvah nearby, her five-year old son wore tzitzis for the first time. It's so exciting! The kids really like Yiddishkeit! I just wanted to thank you and tell you that with your great insight and kind words you have touched someone in a way that no one has been able to before.

< E-Mail@Withheld >

Re: Origins of Chopped Liver (Ohrnet Chayei Sara):

William Safire of the NY Times recently wrote on this very question, the origins of the phrase, "What am I, chopped liver?" Here's an excerpt:

"According to the Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang, the earliest use of this phrase was by Jimmy Durante on his 1954 CBS-TV show: "Now that ain't chopped liver."

"In a 1980 monologue about the Reagan-Carter presidential debate, Johnny Carson noted Ronald Reagan's statement that if all the unemployed were lined up, they would stretch from New York to Los Angeles. 'He came up with another one today,' said Carson. 'If everyone on welfare were chopped liver, you could spread them on a line of Ritz crackers from here to Bulgaria.' "

David Brotsky, Elizabeth, NJ < DaveTrek@aol.com >

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