



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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ALL TRIBES CREATED EQUAL

Gabriella from Tampa, FL wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

For the first time in my life, I went to Synagogue on Friday night! It was such an interesting experience. I found the people there to be so open, honest and nice. What I liked the most was the singing and the chanting of the man (I forget what you call him.) Anyway, I met this really nice girl there who is the Rabbi's daughter. Her name is Shira Chana and she showed me around and explained some things to me. I must say I felt very much at home there.

I'm very interested in the 12 tribes. Someone there told me that you can determine which tribe you are from by your last name. My real mom's last name was Levin. What tribe would I be from? I would also like to know the ranks and orders of the tribes. Like who was the best tribe and which tribe wasn't so good.

These past few weeks have been so interesting for me. I have had an opportunity to really learn a lot about who I am and I'm really proud and happy to call myself a Jew. Thank you so much for your friendship and your kindness. I know one Hebrew word besides "shalom" which is "mitzvah," and that is what you do for me. Shalom, Gabriella.

Dear Gabriella,

It's wonderful to hear about someone returning to Judaism and to their heritage. May G-d help you on your path.

The tribes are: Reuben, Shimon, Levi (from whom come *kohanim* or Priests), Judah (the Royal line, from whom King David and *mashiach* are descended), Issachar, Zevulun, Benjamin, Dan, Naftali, Gad, Asher and Efraim and Menashe. There are actually 13 tribes, but since Efraim

and Menashe are Joseph's sons, they are sometimes counted as one tribe, the tribe of Yosef.

The name Levin commonly indicates that a person is from the tribe of Levi, but it's not conclusive proof. Unfortunately, it's impossible in most cases to determine the tribe you are from just from your surname, as family names are a relatively recent addition to Jewish names and may be based on other factors. Most Jews don't know what tribe they are from.

Regarding which tribes are "better," we believe they all have unique qualities and are all of equal value in the eyes of G-d. Here is what one of the great sages, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, says: "The nation is to represent agriculture as well as commerce, militarism as well as culture and learning. The Jewish people will be a nation of farmers, a nation of businessman, a nation of soldiers and a nation of science. Thereby, as a model nation, to establish the truth that the one great personal and national calling which G-d revealed in His Torah, is not dependent on any particular kind of calling or trait, but that the whole of mankind in all its shades of diversity can equally find its calling in the one common spiritual and moral mission and outlook in life."

By the way, "the man singing" is called the *chazan*.

Sources:

- Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary on Genesis 48:3-4

OHR-DESSA

Name@Withheld from Atlanta, GA wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

As part of my son's bar mitzvah celebration, we want to make a donation to a Jewish charity that is concerned with children's welfare. Can you make a suggestion?

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

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Dear Name@Withheld,

Ohr Somayach International runs a boys and girls orphanage in Odessa in the Ukraine, and a free Jewish day school there as well. These organizations are totally dependent on private donations and they make good use of the money. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to:

Ohr Somayach International
38 East 29th Street, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10016 USA

ACCOUNTING FOR THE PROPHETS

Phil < BondmanP@aol.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Who were the seven female prophetesses (nevi'ot)?

Stanley Turteltaub < doctorkf@gte.net > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Someone asked me if Rachel and Leah were prophetesses like Sara and Rivka. I answered yes. For Leah, I responded that she foresaw that she was to marry Esav and cried and pleaded with Hashem until her lot was changed. But how do we see that Rachel was a prophetess?

Dear Stanley Turteltaub and Phil,

The Talmud states: "48 prophets and 7 prophetesses prophesied to the People of Israel." The prophetesses are identified as Sara, Miriam, Devora, Chana, Avigail, Chulda and Esther.

The Talmud goes on to explain that, although there were actually thousands of other prophets, these were the ones whose prophecy was written down to teach repentance and give direction to future generations.

Both Rachel and Leah were prophetesses. For example, Leah foretold that Reuven would lose his birthright to Yosef, and that Reuven would try to save Yosef's life. Rachel knew prophetically that Yaakov would only have twelve sons; thus when she bore Yosef, Yaakov's 11th son, she prayed only for "another son" and not for "more sons."

Sources:

- Tractate Megillah 14a, Rashi ibid.
- Bereishet 29:32, 30:24
- Siftei Chachamim, Bereishet 29:32

THREE PARTS OF SOUL

Eliezer Shifrin from Capetown SA < shifrin@mweb.co.za > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the difference between spirit, soul, and neshama, according to the kabbala, and how long does the spirit or soul linger after death? Thank you for your help.

Dear Eliezer Shifrin,

A soul is like a chain with one end linked into the brain and the other to a certain spiritual source. There are five levels of the soul like the five links in a chain, each one parallel to the spiritual sphere where it exists. However, we only relate to the three bottom links as we have no understanding about the two top ones. The three are 1) *Nefesh* 2) *Ruach* 3) *Neshama*. The *nefesh* is the spiritual existence which resides in the body and keeps the physical metabolism working and the person alive. The *ruach* is a connection between the *neshama* and the *nefesh*. It is the cause of feelings and personal qualities. The *neshama* is the spiritual existence which pulls the man towards G-d, to the performance of good deeds, to be pious and humble and to seek knowledge and achievement in spiritual fields. It resides around the head.

When a person dies, it takes seven days before the parts of the soul understand that it's all over and leave the body. Until then they hover around the grave and travel to and fro between the grave and the house of the deceased, waiting for the body to start functioning again. The *nefesh* does not completely leave until the body is decomposed.

PAN HANDLING

Bob Kaplan < bailymaker@hotmail.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

We were told that in order to open a kosher bakery all of our pans would have to go to the mikveh. Do the new disposable pans that can be used for baking and selling require that treatment also? Thank you.

Dear Bob Kaplan,

Although some stringent opinions say one should immerse them, in general we rely on the other opinions which hold there is no need to do so, and some of the best kashrut supervisions do not require this to be done. What does your kashrut supervisory board say? Good luck in all your endeavors.

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked: "The long, the short, the black, the white, the his, the hers, and the theirs. What seven similar days — i.e., days which are observed with similar types of observances — in the Jewish calendar do these describe?"

Answer: The *long* — 17 Tammuz (longest daytime fast); the *short* — 10 Tevet (shortest fast); the *black* — 9 Av (day of mourning, when we sit in the dark); the *white* — Yom Kippur (we wear white *kittle* frocks and cover the Torah with white); the *his* — 3 Tishrei (Fast of Gedalia); the *hers* — 13 Adar (Fast of Esther); the *theirs* — 14 Nissan (Fast of the Firstborn).

Dons Hool, Kollel Ponevez, as heard from his mother

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

RE: Ohrnet:

Since the day I started reading your publication, my family and I always, but always, have a nice chat about the Parashat Hashavua at our Shabbat table, and my kids wait days for the questions. Yashar Koach.

Tzvi Szajnbrum and Family <rina@inter.net.il>

Re: The Luz Bone (Ohrnet Vayetztei):

In Parshas Vayetztei, we read that Beis El (Jerusalem) was originally called Luz. Just like we will be reconstituted from the luz bone, so too the world will be reconstituted from the city Luz at the time of mashiach (heard from Rabbi Moshe Schechter). Also: Death was brought into the world when Adam ate from the eitz hada'as. This potential for death entered every part of his body except the luz bone, since it receives its sustenance only at melave malke (the post-Shabbat meal). This is why it is indestructible (heard from Rabbi Shmuel Shmeltzer).

Phillip Rosen <feivel@mindspring.com>

Re: Top 10 Lists (Top Ten Jewish Books Not Yet Published) (www.ohr.org.il/judaism/humor/top10/books.htm):

Thank G-d it's OK to be Jewish and also laugh.

Barbara <barbarag17@aol.com>

Re: Medical Circumcision (Ohrnet Vayeshev):

Regarding circumcision by a doctor versus a mohel: Some mohels are doctors. All mohels are trained carefully and use aseptic (sterile) technique and are highly experienced. I am a doctor who gets the New England Journal of Medicine, one of the most prestigious medical journals. It recently had an article which should give anyone pause before subjecting a son to a standard "medical" circumcision. The article states that the average time for a medical circumcision is in the range of one4 hour! The point of the article was whether to inject local anesthetic first to spare the infant pain. Of course, the anesthetic shot takes a few seconds and causes pain. As anyone knows who has witnessed a bris, the mohel performs it in, at most, a few seconds. In the typical cases I have seen, the baby doesn't even cry. So, even if a Jew does not understand the need for the mitzvah of a kosher (valid) bris, which would a loving parent prefer for his baby — an instant or an hour of pain?

*Rochelle Pudlowski Eissenstat,
M.D. <eissenstat@aol.com>*

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