



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. To Tell the Truth
2. A Lot of Salt
3. How to Help
4. Hand Wave
5. Falling Leaves
6. Yiddle Riddle
7. Public Domain



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Parshat Ki Sisa

TO TELL THE TRUTH

Michael Cavette <mcavette@yahoo.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why should we tell the truth? I realize this sounds like a ridiculous question; we have all accepted that we should not lie. I can find instructions to tell the truth, but I cannot find an explanation of why. Thank you for your time. I look forward to your answer.

Dear Michael Cavette,

Obviously you are talking about a lie that does not hurt anyone, where the only immorality is that it is not true. Before we answer why you should tell the truth, let me ask another question. Why are we here? Why is there a world?

This question is asked by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto in *The Way of G-d*, and is also addressed by Rabbi Yosef Karo in *Maggid Mesharim*. The gist of what they say is the following: The purpose of Creation is kindness. G-d wants to bestow the greatest possible good upon us. The ultimate and greatest good is G-d Himself, and therefore, the ultimate good is closeness to G-d. Closeness to G-d requires compatibility and similarity to G-d. Therefore beings must have free will and not be created already similar, as this would be dissimilar to G-d (i.e., G-d acts because He chooses to do so, not because He is coerced).

Therefore, we must be in a world in which there is choice so that we can try to be as "G-dlike" as possible. The good has to be internal, not external, just as G-d is intrinsically good. The only way to internalize and be intrinsically good is to do it through challenge and free will, and therefore this world was created.

Now, G-d is perfect, which means He is the ultimate reality, i.e., True. Lies, on the other hand, do not parallel reality; therefore, they distance us from the reality of G-d, make us incompatible and negate our relationship with Him.

Michael Cavette replies:

Thank you so much for your answer. I have asked this same question of Jesuit priests, theologians, Buddhist teachers, and ethicists, and you are the only one who was able or willing to answer it. Kind regards.

A LOT OF SALT

Joseph from Athens, Greece <jori@athens.mbn.gr> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the symbolism of Edith, Lot's wife, becoming a pillar of salt?

Dear Joseph,

The previous night Lot's wife revealed to the inhabitants of Sodom that they had guests by asking one of the neighbors for salt to flavor the food that she prepared them. In Sodom it was forbidden to invite guests into one's house, and Lot's wife was perfectly aware that by asking for salt she was placing the lives of the guests in extreme danger. After she looked back, even though she had been instructed not to, she received the punishment of being turned into a pillar of salt.

Sources:

- Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 51:5

HOW TO HELP

Jeff Nelson from Lenexa, KS <Mandella97@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Recently a close friend of mine died in a car accident. He was married only six months ago. My friend was only 20 and his wife 19. Neither is Jewish, and my friend was cremated. This is the first time someone has died that not only did I know, but felt very close to. Though neither he nor his family is Jewish, what is my duty as a Jew to do for them, and myself?

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.

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Dear Jeff Nelson,

The death of a loved one is always very traumatic. One is often confronted with a sense of helplessness and uselessness in the face of tragedy. Our Torah requires us to offer kindness to any person, and comforting friends at a time of loss is a great mitzvah. The best comfort you can offer to people at such a time is to be there for them. If they want to talk, be there to listen. If they want to be silent, be silent with them so that they are not alone.

Don't just ask "what can I do to help?" See what needs to be done and do it. Perhaps they need food; perhaps there are errands that need to be run or other ways in which you can be useful.

Often, after a few weeks have passed people forget about the mourners and go on with their lives. The mourners still need to know that someone cares. Be there for your friends when all the fuss is over and everyone has gone home. May you and your friends know no more sorrow.

HAND WAVE

Email@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have noticed the custom that when ladies light candles Friday afternoon they wave their hands in front of their eyes (3 times I think) before they cover their eyes. What is the reason and source of this custom to wave before making the blessing? Thanking the Rabbi....

Dear Email@Withheld,

The basic idea is that one shouldn't benefit from the Shabbat candles until after saying the proper blessing. Thus, those who say the blessing after lighting should hold their hands up to block the light until after saying the blessing. If you light many candles and can't block all the flames by simply holding up your hands, you should cover your eyes.

The "*Noheg Katzon Yosef*" (first printed in 1718) mentions the custom to make a circle around the candles with the hands before reciting the blessing; however, the reasons for this circling are unclear.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 263:5 — Rema
- Aruch Hashulchan (ibid.)

FALLING LEAVES

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I would appreciate any help which the Rabbi can give as regards to the following point: When a specific leaf falls off a tree or a specific animal is killed by another animal, is there a specific reason or decree why that specific leaf fell? Or is there such a thing as natural occurrences which are random and uncontrolled? I would appreciate any information and sources that discuss and explain this philosophical point which touches on "bechira" (free choice), etc., and thank you in advance. Best regards.

Dear Name@Withheld,

The view that certain events are not individually guided is a view that is accepted by Maimonides in the Guide for the Perplexed, and also by Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno in his commentary on Chumash. They maintain that the degree of individual Divine Providence is directly proportional to the spirituality and G-dliness of the being. Hence, animals and plants have Providence only on a species level.

The exception would be when the animal or plant interacts with a human being, then there is guidance. For example, the apple falling near Sir Isaac Newton is Divine Providence, whereas an apple falling off a tree in Cortland NY with no human around is a result of the laws of nature that G-d created.

Others, principally the Kabbalists and the Chassidic thinkers, maintain that absolutely everything is a matter of individual Divine Providence.

This argument may not be as extreme as it sounds: Perhaps the Kabbalists agree in principle with Maimonides' concept, however they disagree in that they maintain that everything interacts with humanity on some level, and that even a very subtle and low level interaction with humans requires Divine Providence.

Regarding how there could be an argument in this area: Just as in any area of Torah, different minds see things differently, and as long as they use Torah sources and methodology they are both "the words of the living G-d."

Yiddle Riddle

Rabbi R.Y. Eisenman from Passaic NJ <RYE613@aol.com> wrote:

I would like to submit a Yiddle Riddle: What letter from the *Aleph Beis* is missing from the *Bircas Hamazon* and why? Thank you for your wonderful work for the *klal* (community).

Answer next week...

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Five Shema Yiddle Riddle (Ohrnet Bo):

In a recent Yiddle Riddle (Ohrnet Bo), we asked: "One Friday evening recently, I said the first paragraph of shema five times, and each time it was for a different reason. How did this occur?" Here are some readers' responses that differed from our answer:

You can read the first verse of *shema* again in another case: On the night of *Simchat Torah*, before we take out the *sefer Torah* we say the first verse of *shema*.

Zvi Shavit < zvi@hadassah.org.il >

Someone came knocking at the door that the *sefer Torah* needed to be checked, so he read through the *Parsha* again.

Y. Benyowitz < Yahud@juno.com >

Your *Yiddle Riddle* regarding the recitation of *shema* five times for five different reasons had a whole corner of our shul in a debate after *shacharis* on a recent *Shabbos*. The conversation went something like this: "No, it says a 'recent' Friday eve;" "No, no, it says 'eve', not afternoon;" "This isn't a *Rashba*, you can't be *m'dayik* (be so exacting in) every word!" Anyway, we came up with another reason one might say *shema* at night. If there was a bris the next day, the custom is to say *shema* the night before, for extra *shmira* and protection.

Yasher cochacha. My family gets great enjoyment from Ohrnet every week.

Gershon Minkow < minkow@alpha.netvision.net.il >

The Talmud (Megillah 3a) says: "If one is frightened, but does not know why, then his "*maza*" saw something [frightening]. What should he do? He should read the *shema*." And if someone's "*yetzer hara*" (evil inclination) is overpowering him, then he should say the *shema*. Also, if he thought that he was about to die, he would read the *shema*.

A Jew in Richmond < richseed@juno.com >

Wow for Ohrnet:

Thank you Ohrnet for your prompt reply to my question. Wow. I thoroughly enjoy your teachings and lessons. Often the "typed" word loses something; however, you have a way that explains things in such a nice way. Thank you again.

Veronica < norske@webtv.net >

Tu B'Shvat Special:

Thank you for your *Tu B'shvat* special. You're right, as usual. It was special.

Pesia Bernstein < sidney@netvision.net.il >

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